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Slag Heaps and Time Lags: Undermining Southern Solidarity in the UNESCO World Heritage Committee

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ABSTRACT
The UNESCO World Heritage Committee has continuously faced charges of Eurocentrism in distributing the coveted World Heritage title, broadening conceptions of heritage in response. Yet European countries kept being more successful and frustrated Southern nations rebelled in the 2010 Committee session to see their aspirations realised. National wishes set the course for the decisions now but Northern countries continue to win more titles and Northern bias in World Heritage expertise persists. This is because leading Southern countries prioritise their national interests over pressing for fundamental reform, just as in other global organisations' attempts to become more inclusive. Southern collusion in the reproduction of Northern hegemony must be given due attention, particularly when time lags between North and South – in terms of rewards, influence on fundamental conceptions, and historical production of the potential resource – compound as much as here.

Mining Pasts and Futures

28 June 2012: it is the fifth day of the 36th World Heritage Committee session in Saint Petersburg, Russia. As announced when the plenary session broke for lunch, busses are waiting outside the hall for the participants wishing to attend the reception of the Tanzanian delegation, and I board one of them for what is a short ride of not more than a block's distance. Inside the posh rooms of one of the aristocratic residences that past imperial glory has left to the city, Tanzanian representatives welcome everyone by handshake, and there is an abundance of canapés, salmon skewers and other snacks that, together with the drinks served, make up for the missed lunch at the main meeting venue. Only a few Europeans and Americans have bothered to come; most

of the 60 or so formally dressed guests have African or Asian countries on their session ID tags and I chat with a Thai and a Cuban delegate before a Tanzanian lady calls our attention. She introduces a Tanzanian government minister and we are treated to a 10-minute film that presents the delegation's main concern. This is receiving permission from the World Heritage Committee for cutting out a small portion of a World Heritage property, the Selous Game Reserve – a nature reserve larger than the Netherlands – so that this area can be mined for uranium. The very professionally made footage emphasises how much Tanzania needs development, and testimonials from a carefully picked array of locals – a village head, a park ranger, a 'mother', even a bishop in full ornate – express high hopes for the jobs and revenue from the future mine. A schematic map shows that only 0.7 percent on the edge of the reserve are slated for mining. When the film ends, the minister takes over, introducing several other dignitaries who line up next to him. He emphasises Tanzania's commitment to the World Heritage Convention and to conservation but his government must also pursue sustainable development, particularly when expected profits of three billion US dollars will help to manage the remaining reserve. The delegation is coming open-minded but at the same time – and here he reaches the dramatic climax of his carefully crafted sentences – he hears 'the cry of the people', and Tanzania as a sovereign nation will not have any condescending advice. Yet nothing is decided yet, he assures us, and by no means should we assume that corporate interests dictate government action (a somewhat strange remark, coming out of the blue). We are then left to finish our snacks and drinks and when boarding the busses back to the afternoon plenary session, a South African delegate cannot help shaking his head and laughing in recognition of what, he confirms to me, was a masterly PR stunt – one in which we heard next to nothing about the site proper, as a Malian delegate notices. It also is the final event of a whole series during recent Committee meetings (paid for by the foreign mining firms behind the project, as session rumour has it): on July 2nd, the World Heritage Committee approves the 'minor boundary modification' proposed by Tanzania. The German ambassador to UNESCO and other supporters have managed to convince the doubters that Tanzania will have its way in any event so that linking the excision of the mining area with protective demands for the remaining property is the best option.

On 30 June, the Committee – to the loud jubilation of French delegates in the hall – decides to inscribe the 'Nord-Pas de Calais Mining Basin' on the World Heritage List. As the representative of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) that advises the Committee on cultural sites outlines in her introductory presentation, this is a very large collection of buildings and landscape features left by 200 years of coal mining. Together, they form a 'cultural landscape', a category of World Heritage properties introduced in 1992. The included 51 slag heaps, with the tallest rising more than 140 metres, 'symbolize the landscape identity of the Mining Basin', as ICOMOS phrases it.[1] The decision is taken hurriedly, as everyone is eager to depart for the host nation's evening reception in the Peter and Paul Fortress; the French delegation delivers its short acceptance speech, however, and a local representative marvels that their mountains are made of slag.

Except for a passing remark of a French delegate, nobody in the 11-day plenary session thinks of connecting the two incidents. Yet evidently, yesterday's destruction of nature – the slag heaps that now dominate an otherwise flat landscape – qualifies as a cultural achievement of 'outstanding universal value' or 'OUV', the precondition for a World Heritage title, so that 22 years after the closure of the last pit, the northern French mining area acquires a second life as heritage. By contrast, had the Committee stayed with the original decision text, it would have denied Tanzania a mining future in Selous. If respecting the verdict, the country could then not pile up its own slag heaps and coming generations could not, at some point, re-appreciate them as a valuable testimony of a bygone age, rather than just eyesores. Converting ravaged nature into culture, this means, is the prerogative of the Global North whereas the Global South is denied the experience. Unsurprisingly, the mere attempt provokes criticism: African delegates I talk to during the following days keep returning to Selous and argue that without compensating Tanzania for the foregone profits, the international community could not insist on self-restraint.

The French landscape was agricultural before the advent of mining, not the pristine haven of wildlife and biodiversity as which Tanzania nominated Selous for World Heritage inscription in 1982, fully aware of the protective obligations. Also, delegates of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) that advises the Committee on natural sites are concerned that Tanzania's proposal circumvents the 2003 pledge of leading mining corporations not to touch World Heritage properties,[2] following up on a Chinese precedent two years earlier. In IUCN eyes, the consequences of uranium mining – massive landscape upheavals, radioactive emissions and the use and disposal of large quantities of sulphuric acid – on several hundred square kilometres of (or now, next to) a nature reserve are anything but 'minor'. Yet still, the contradiction remains: the destructive exploitation of nature in Africa is suspect of putting World Heritage at risk whereas when having occurred in the right location and age – in Europe, well before the advent of institutionalised conservation – it may have World Heritage value in its own right.

Introduction

This article seeks to explain why in an increasingly multipolar world order and against the best intentions, the material and symbolic hegemony of the Global North continues to be reproduced. Political and economic key players in global governance have multiplied, with key countries from the South throwing around their weight in much more assertive ways. Yet an urge to catch up quickly makes the late arrivals prioritise their national interests when the opportunity arises, rather than forming a united front and tackling the fundamentals of Northern dominance. As I will show in the following, in the studied case – the UNESCO World Heritage arena – there have been ambitious reform efforts aimed at overcoming initial Eurocentrism. When these failed to produce the desired results, Southern countries successfully pushed for a different mode of decision-making that has sidelined Northern-dominated expert organisations. Yet even now, Northern bias persists in subtle ways and the World Heritage List continues

to be filled disproportionately with Northern sites. Similar observations have been made for reform efforts in other, more powerful global organisations within the same time period, suggesting a general pattern. I argue, however, that when it comes to heritage, multiple time lags – such as that between European and African mining ventures – make it even more tempting for Southern countries to go for immediate benefits. Attempts to realise a flatter world from which the Northern heaps of material and symbolic accumulation do not rise quite so high are well advised not to take Southern solidarity as a given.

Juxtaposing 'Global North' and 'Global South' may feel antiquated in the post-Cold War world order, and Kalb and Steur (2015) have usefully summarised the empirical and political deficiencies of this conceptual pair. As I will show, however, the division of the world into the two halves of North and South (or Western vs. non-Western, formerly colonising vs. postcolonial, rich vs. poor etc.) is very much taken for granted by most World Heritage Committee participants, both in formal session interventions and informal conversations and quite irrespective of their own provenance. Where exactly, for example, Japan, the postsocialist EU countries, Turkey, the Gulf states or the BRICS powers are to be placed is often left implicit but dividing the world in this way is expected practice in intergovernmental settings and continues to be a structuring principle, such as when the World Bank formally distinguishes 'Part I' and 'Part II' (i.e. borrowing) countries (cf. Wade 2011). However simplified, it also reflects the vastly uneven distribution of political and economic resources in the contemporary world and the fact that a number of countries are quite successful in sustaining their long-standing political and economic privileges. I, therefore, adopt the divide as a shorthand in the following, both because of its acceptance and discursive weight in the studied field and its routine use in the scholarly literature (e.g. Comaroff & Comaroff 2012; Greenough & Tsing 2003; Hart & Sharp 2015).

Awareness of global imbalances is one of the hallmarks of anthropological perspectives on world processes (e.g. Appadurai 1996; 2013; Hannerz 1996; Trouillot 2003; Tsing 2000; Wolf 1982) and has been carried into the study of UN bodies and other intergovernmental organisations (e.g. Abélès 2011; Bellier 2013; Bortolotto 2010; Foyer 2015; Hafstein 2009; Merry 2006; Muehlebach 2001; Müller 2013a; Nielsen 2011; Niezen & Sapignoli 2017; Riles 2000) where it is often more present than in conventional international-relations perspectives. Following this trajectory, I wish to demonstrate that the normalisation of Eurocentrism and the intellectual rule of the Global North does not only occur at the local level where anthropologists most commonly encounter it but also on the global stage of presumably egalitarian UN bodies working on a 'one state, one vote' principle. I choose World Heritage because it touches on anthropological core concerns: four fifths of the World Heritage properties are cultural heritage so that this is one of the most prominent arenas for public debate of a much-contested disciplinary key term (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1991; Brumann 1999). Cultural self-fashioning and 'cultural editing' (Volkman 1990: 91) across the globe orientate themselves towards the assumed requirements of the World Heritage arena. Unfunded and symbolic as the UNESCO-administered designation is, the heightened attention, increased tourism, and new conservation regimes it engenders can transform the

livelihoods and agencies of the communities living within, near or from the sites, bringing benefits and empowerment in some cases but dividing them in others (Brumann & Berliner 2016: 22–26). World Heritage has thus become a crucial factor in contemporary 'world-making' (Brumann 2014), marking out places of significance on people's mental maps of the globe and anchoring people's imagined and actual movements – indeed, 'spatialising' the world in a similar way as Ferguson and Gupta describe it for the nation state (2002). World Heritage is also the biggest single driver of the ongoing global boom of heritage, including the formation of heritage studies.

Precisely because UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee have a lesser political weight than bodies such as the Security Council, however, they should offer favourable conditions for superseding Northern hegemony and 'provincialising Europe' (Chakrabarty 2000). And indeed, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the administrative home of the Convention, is often concerned with redress for past Northern wrongs (Hauser-Schäublin 2013), has been an active promoter of non-Western perspectives (Brisson 2015: 545), and has estranged the Northern leaders US and UK to the point of withdrawal, both in the past (Scher 2010) and more recently through the admission of Palestine as a full state member in 2011. Countless times in World Heritage Committee debates, I have heard both Northern and Southern delegates decry global inequalities. Yet still, these persist, and understanding the reasons will help to unravel 'the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of postcoloniality' that, as Kelly (2015: 658) emphasises, have received less scrutiny than postcolonial identity and experience.[3]

The Rise of World Heritage and Its North-South Aspects

While often berated as a 'Western' endeavour, the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972 did have the cultural and natural wonders of the Global South in mind right from the start: the much-publicised 1960s UNESCO safeguarding campaign for the Nubian monuments of Abu Simbel and Philae (Betts 2015) and an initiative by IUCN and the US National Park Service for a UN-backed conservation regime for nature reserves (mainly eyeing those in the South) were important forerunners. When the World Heritage Committee – the intergovernmental governing body of the convention, formally independent from UNESCO bodies and composed of the representatives of 21 elected treaty states – opened the World Heritage List in 1978, three sites in sub-Saharan Africa were among the first 12 inscriptions. Into the early 1990s, India – not Italy as today – was the country with most World Heritage properties.[4] This was facilitated by the recognition of both cultural and natural heritage and the inclusion of not just 'monuments' and 'groups of buildings' but also the rather indeterminate category of 'sites' among the cultural properties (http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext, articles 1 and 2; for the early history, see Batisse & Bolla 2005; Cameron & Rössler 2013; Stott 2011; Titchen 1995).

No large-scale pooling of resources for conservation arose so that the budget of the Convention has remained rudimentary,[5] however, and monitoring and reporting

procedures for the World Heritage properties took decades to solidify (cf. Cameron & Rössler 2013: 109, 114, 124, 130, 133, 151). Instead, the lustre of the World Heritage title has been relied on to raise awareness, encourage national responsibility and vigilance and mobilise donors and investors by itself. Therefore, filling the World Heritage List with properties deemed to have 'OUV' year after year developed into the Committee's most anticipated activity. Yet here, the European countries and their established conservation apparatuses were quickest in appropriating a powerful global brand in the making.[6] Soon enough, half of the List inscriptions came from a single continent with not more than one seventh of the world's population and one fifteenth of the land mass, and most of these were for cultural properties.

To the emerging complaints of bias, the World Heritage institutions responded with broadening the scope of cultural heritage during the 1990s. 'Cultural landscapes' were introduced for celebrating unique human interaction with the environment (Gfeller 2013), with two sacred mountains in indigenous Oceania as the first applications, and authenticity standards were widened so as to no longer privilege stone and steel monuments (UNESCO 1994b). The 'Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced and Credible World Heritage List' adopted in 1994 called for including the vestiges of ordinary people and everyday life, encouraging an anthropological viewpoint (UNESCO 1994a), and examining progress in its implementation became a fixed session agenda item. While the main drivers of these initiatives were not from the Global South themselves, they were not the European art and architectural historians of old either (Gfeller 2013, 2015, 2017) and clearly sought a better representation of the Global South and such aspects as indigenous peoples (Brumann 2014: 2180–2183). As a consequence, Papua wetland gardens, the landing place of Indian indentured labourers in Mauritius or mountain railways in the Himalayas and Nilgiris joined the Roman ruins, Gothic cathedrals and Baroque palaces on the List, and the 1073 properties were distributed over no less than 167 countries in 2017.

Yet while perspectives thus diversified, World Heritage procedures remained largely untouched. The Committee could have given priority to specific heritage categories and world regions while postponing or even closing others but no such measures were ever seriously considered, and compulsory or voluntary moratoriums on well-represented countries were fought down by European list leaders such as Italy or Spain. Instead, the nomination right remained fully with the treaty states to the Convention, and the states currently serving on the Committee were never barred from bringing their own bids either. Thus, the states continue to submit candidate sites of their own choice according to their own, entirely uncoordinated schedules, and after an evaluation process, each such nomination must be decided by the Committee in the following year. Therefore, the most common World Heritage cultural landscape is the European wine region by now, not sacred groves or mountains.[7] Instead of non-European wooden and earthen architecture, the widened standards of authenticity were cited in favour of previously dismissed nineteenth-century Romantic restorations of medieval European architecture (Brumann 2013: 13–18; 2017a: 279–281). And it is again European countries that most skilfully package their candidate sites as single 'transboundary

properties' straddling national borders, thus outwitting the nomination quota against which these sites of international friendship are not fully counted.

Another factor that kept the World Heritage List predominantly Northern was procedural complexity: when Committee sessions grew into global events from the mid-1990s, demands for 'transparency' familiar from other UN-system contexts (cf. Billaud 2014; Cowan 2013: 125–126, 128; Müller 2013b: 12) made the World Heritage Centre – the secretariat of the convention within the Parisian UNESCO headquarters – and the 'Advisory Bodies' ICOMOS and IUCN elaborate and systematise their requirements. Yet in response, the nomination documents that describe the candidate property, its special features and its conservation arrangements have grown from a handful of pages to hundreds or even thousands. For conservation purposes, it makes good sense to insist on well-prepared nominations of well-managed candidate sites. Yet this still meant that countries short of finances and specialised personnel were more likely to miss the mark, with their candidates rejected and site management criticised. As a consequence, the European share of the World Heritage properties did not shrink but actually increased.

The relevance of such comparative statistics can be – and has been – questioned: is Switzerland with its 12 World Heritage sites 'better represented' than Tanzania when the Selous Game Reserve alone is larger than Switzerland? Nevertheless in the 2000s, no other concern was raised as frequently in Committee debates as the lack of global balance and representativeness, and property numbers were taken to substantiate the latter. My conversations with delegates from the Global South revealed profound disaffection: however justified in the individual case, a Kenyan delegate told me, it was still shameful for the African participants to see so few of their World Heritage candidates pass and so many of their sites appear on the 'List of World Heritage in Danger' year after year.[8] An Egyptian heritage conservationist was convinced that when Northern delegates cited the credibility of World Heritage to slow down new inscriptions, they were protecting the World Heritage 'brand' and the value of their own earlier listings. Instead, he argued, 'we need a second Abu Simbel', and credibility should be established through the international pooling of resources, not by closing the doors on Southern candidate sites. A Brazilian diplomat compared what he saw as a lack of transparency to the Free Masons:

> Since I've started to follow the Committee, I have been shocked by the black box … created in the World Heritage system in which the vocabulary, the concepts and the procedures are understood only by a few. There are some experts who have been in this for many years, 20 years, 25 years and who find themselves to be the owners of the World Heritage system. … only initiated people can follow.

Earlier arrival, this implies, has given certain (Northern) experts a head start in controlling the system. And the same feeling made an Indian civil servant dismiss criticism of his and other state delegates' assertive behaviour in the most recent Committee sessions:

> They use a word that is amazingly retrograde. 'Oh, it's becoming politicised!' All these years when you sat around with a bottle of wine and decided nominations, it was not political? Really! Don't hide behind this, this sounds like some Soviet era relic.

The ICOMOS experts, he claimed, had been conducting affairs like a 'club', not engaging in dialogue the way they should.

Instrumental as these pointed comments are, they still reveal a widespread sentiment that World Heritage is a venture of and for the benefit of the North in which the South has been withheld its due, not least so because of delayed arrival on the scene. They do not do justice to the fact that the experts drafting the decisions – the ICOMOS 'World Heritage Advisors' and the IUCN 'World Heritage Unit' – have very cosmopolitan educational backgrounds and interests and are committed to a global viewpoint. Yet until the 2010s, most of them and the other ICOMOS and IUCN speakers in the sessions were indeed Europeans and North Americans. Moreover, both organisations have their headquarters in Europe, and their 'World Heritage Panels' – the internal bodies that ultimately adopt the recommendations going to the Committee – retain a European and North American majority of voting members even now.[9]

Turning the Tables in Brasilia

Things changed greatly with the 2010 Committee session in Brasilia. Starting with the debate over the Galapagos Islands that Ecuador – against IUCN advice – wished to see removed from the 'List of World Heritage in Danger', state representatives began to support each other and other treaty states present as observers in fulfilling national desires. Conservation demands for threatened sites were softened and in addition to putting the 9 recommended candidate sites on the World Heritage List, the Committee inscribed a further 12 sites without an expert blessing. Such 'upgrading' of Advisory Body recommendations was not new, often as the result of the concerned delegations' lobbying with Committee member states, but now, it became routine practice, sometimes facilitated by the clandestine collection of signed pledges from Committee delegations. As 'OUV' is believed to be an absolute quality so that all nominated sites can, in theory, have it (see Brumann 2017b), quid-pro-quo support between states suggests itself. Yet ICOMOS and IUCN steadfastly defended their recommendations and a determined Committee minority supported them, leading to heated exchanges and a very large number of votes instead of the usual consensus decisions. Participants found this unprecedented and many were either amused or appalled by the many session interventions that barely managed to conceal their instrumental purpose.

While the rebellion was ostensibly about the sovereignty of the intergovernmental Committee from its expert advisors, the subtext of the session pitted the Global South against the North (see also Brumann forthcoming). A year earlier in the Seville session of 2009, the Northern Committee members had taken the lead in upholding many decisions recommended by the experts against national resistance, including the deletion of the Dresden Elbe valley from the World Heritage List. In Brasilia, however, the terms of the US, Canada and Israel had ended and Australia held back, most likely for fear of retaliation by its Committee peers against an own, unrecommended candidate it wished to see listed. New member France likewise kept its quiet,

having no less than two candidates up for decision. This left the delegations of Sweden and newcomers Switzerland and Estonia as the staunch supporters of expert advice. But on almost all items, the three were fought down by the host nation Brazil, China, Mexico, Egypt, Russia and the somewhat less active Nigeria, Ethiopia and South Africa. This formidable front of BRICS states, G20 members outside the original G7 and/or regionally dominant countries represented 30 percent of the world's population, a hundred times more than the three European resisters.[10]

The rebellion was not just led by the Global South, it also benefitted it: only 4 of the 9 recommended World Heritage listings were located outside Europe and North America whereas 11 of the 12 additional inscriptions concerned Southern properties and one the Australian site. In a long parade of hundreds of disconnected decisions, the North-South confrontation was never openly expressed and probably not even apparent to the inattentive participant. Also, the delegates of the three European states appeared sincere in their concerns: Southern delegates admired their competency and relied on them for special tasks, such as by proposing them for ad-hoc drafting groups. But in the same breath, Southerners emphasised how these countries' large teams of experts, careful preparation and cultivation of political neutrality (Sweden and Switzerland) rested on their superior resources so that the same could not be expected of others.

The pattern of national self-serving consolidated over the next sessions. The terms of the resisters ended and of the new Committee members joining in 2012, India immediately became a mouthpiece for anti-North rhetoric and broadsides against ICOMOS and IUCN, facilitated by its UNESCO ambassador's wit and sharp tongue that many participants relished. Yet incoming Northern members Germany and Japan went with the flow too, given that they had particularly long 'Tentative Lists' of future candidates.[11] This meant that the Advisory Bodies were left alone and when state delegates' complaints reached a climax in the 2014 session in Doha (cf. also Meskell 2015b: 11), the Committee introduced feedback opportunities: would the states only receive the expert recommendations six weeks ahead of the sessions previously, they were now given early warnings and the opportunity to sort out remaining obstacles in direct communication with ICOMOS and IUCN staff. ICOMOS officials assured me that such personal contact would not colour their judgment, yet still, for the next session in Bonn, 2015, the percentage of candidate sites they recommended for inscription rose to 58.6, the highest since 2004.[12] Committee interaction too became less contentious in Bonn, with all decisions except the single vote on the Old City of Jerusalem (subject to its own political dynamic) taken by consensus and Committee delegations contributing much more evenly to the session debates. All eyes were on the diplomatic battle about a nomination of early Japanese industrial sites that had hushed up a past of Korean forced labour, antagonising Committee members Japan and South Korea (Brumann 2016), whereas ICOMOS and IUCN were largely left in peace. The World Heritage Committee, rather than being in 'gridlock' (*pace* Meskell 2015a), had finally become a friendly and dependable place for the masters of the Convention, the treaty states.

Sustaining Northern Hegemony

All the more astonishing then that the Bonn session revived familiar patterns: half of the 24 new World Heritage listings were European or North American, making for the largest share in 14 years.[13] In the generally permissive climate, this largely reflected who had bothered to nominate candidates. But Southern candidates also continued to be disadvantaged: as described in more detail elsewhere (Brumann forthcoming), ICOMOS found very similar deficiencies in three nominations of cultural landscapes by Denmark, Kenya and Uganda and, according to an insider, had slated all three for a 'deferral' (i.e. future reconsideration only after a substantial revision of the bid). But the Danes made use of the new feedback process, receiving substantial help with re-conceptualising the bid and a final recommendation for immediate inscription by the ICOMOS internal panel, despite persisting deficiencies. The Kenyans and the Ugandans, however, did not use the option, and Uganda did not even send a delegation to Bonn. Here, ICOMOS did not adapt its verdicts. When I pointed out the discrepancy to a Southern contributor to the evaluation process, they cited the Danes' superior experience and resources that would make them address remaining issues in ways that the two African countries could not guarantee. This amounts to a justification rather than a denial of double standards, however. In the session debate, a Senegalese and an Algerian delegate protested but did not insist when their Committee peers followed the recommendation, listing the Danish site while postponing the two African ones. Thus, the peaceful free-for-all Bonn session was the first in a decade not to award a single World Heritage title to the 48 Least Developed Countries (LDC)[14] and the first since 2010 to pass over one of UNESCO's five world regions (sub-Saharan Africa) entirely, despite the fact – ceaselessly reiterated in each session – that the List is short of African sites.[15]

Instead, the Bonn meeting saw major Southern countries align forces with interested Northerners for their own advantage. Two working groups convening in the session breaks came up with the proposal to limit World Heritage nominations to one candidate per state and 25 overall for each annual cycle, down from the current 2 and 45, to save work time and costs in the midst of a UNESCO budget crisis. After all, since the option to present two candidates within the same year was introduced in 2005, only 11 of the 193 treaty states have used it more than once – the Northerners France (6 double nominations), Germany (3), Italy (3), Israel (6) and Japan (2); Russia (2) and Turkey (3) too and the Southerners Iran (5), India (4), China (8) and Mexico (3).[16] Except for Israel, all these countries had at least 15 World Heritage sites already before Bonn, placing them in the top 10 percent of treaty states.[17] '25/1', as it was referred to, would thus have hurt only a well-endowed minority, shifting attention and resources to the less weighty states of the South. In the working group sessions, the proposal enjoyed broad support. But when it was finally brought to the plenary, a non-Western North-South trio of Committee members India, Turkey and Japan – all of them with long Tentative Lists[18] – forcefully argued for more deliberation next year rather than a hasty decision. Other delegates grumbled but in the generally non-conflictive mood, '25/1' was postponed.

The composition of the Bonn Committee would have lent itself to a different outcome: no permanent Security Council member was on board, Germany and Japan were the only G7 members, and neither these two economic rather than military giants nor EU members Finland, Portugal and Croatia or post-Balkan War Serbia are known for a very assertive stance in contemporary world politics. The 11 Southern members of the Committee and the 4 ambiguous cases – oil state Qatar and G20 members India, South Korea and Turkey (a NATO member not in the EU) – might have found little resistance, had they pushed for a more principled Southern/anti-Eurocentric agenda. But they did not, focusing on their national interests instead. Thus, the poorest World Heritage title recipient of the session, Jamaica, was still ahead of almost 80 other countries in per capita GDP (world no. 113 in 2015), and while Jordan (no. 95), Mongolia (no. 94) and China (no. 87) each had a site listed, the other non-Western inscriptions went to the significantly richer Uruguay, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Japan, Singapore and (two each) to Iran and Turkey.[19] Delegates did talk North versus South or Europe/the West versus the rest when it served their specific purposes, just like in previous sessions, but solidarity along this fault line and rooting for the likes of Kenya (no. 153) or Uganda (no. 167) was a different matter.[20]

Northern Hegemony and Southern Complicity in Global Governance

All this coincides with 'the return over the past decade of more Hobbesian or Westphalian tendencies' (Hurrell & Sengupta 2012: 465) in international relations. In a world where the US and European share of world GNP is expected to drop by one half between 2010 and 2030 (Laïdi 2014: 356–357), global governance has seen rising multipolarity in recent years, such as with the 2008 upgrade of the G20 financial meetings to heads-of-government summits (now on a par with the older G7/G8 format); the 'voice reforms' of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) meant to give the Global South more influence; or the emergence of the BRICS alliance and its perceived challenge to North Atlantic dominance. Political and media comments usually agree that the world has become more complex and that domination by a small circle of Western nations is over.

Yet a number of recent assessments reveal a surprising amount of business as usual. The hegemony of the US and other G7 states over the G20 agenda continued (Wade 2011: 354–359). The actual shift of voting shares to the Global South in the World Bank and the IMF fell short of the stated goals, largely because leading non-Western countries such as China, India, Brazil, Turkey, Mexico, South Korea and Saudi Arabia were busy increasing their own entitlements (Vestergaard & Wade 2013: 153–159; Wade 2011: 359–365; 2013: 20–23). In global climate politics too, the initial Southern unity of the 1992 Rio summit dissipated over the next two decades and while a number of emerging Southern countries have acquired de facto veto power, Hurrell and Sengupta have seen overall Northern dominance as persisting (2012). The trend of the rising Southern countries serving themselves, at the cost of a collective challenge to Northern hegemony, is epitomised by the election of the new World Bank president in 2012. G20 leaders had agreed that the customary

arrangement of filling that office with a US American and the IMF presidency with a European should end, in favour of the most qualified candidate of whichever nationality. Therefore at one point, the 11 out of 24 voting executive directors hailing from the Global South had managed to settle on a joint candidate, a Nigerian female. Yet then, their alliance crumbled one by one, in Wade's assessment through bilateral deals with the Americans so that in the months following on the election of president Obama's candidate – US citizen Jim Yong Kim – a string of second-tier World Bank appointments went to nationals of big Southern countries such as China and India (Wade 2013: 24–29). On the basis of all these observations, Wade concludes that many of the emerging states 'wish to be *at* the top table, *in* global governance, but are wary of *more* global governance (which would curb their sovereignty) and wary of proposing initiatives that would put more responsibilities on their shoulders' (2011: 366, original emphasis).

The transformation of the World Heritage Committee from a site of Southern rebellion in 2010 to a haven of global peace in 2015 is a striking parallel, down to the timing. Respecting national interests and national sovereignty has become the agreed mode of operation in the Committee and the expert bodies have learned to play along. Yet both the right of the Northern states to fill the World Heritage List with their sites and the Eurocentric residues of the Advisory Bodies remain unchallenged, as long as a small circle of powerful and specially interested Southern countries see their immediate objectives met. Politeness and ostensible unity have returned to Committee debates but nobody stands up for Uganda when it is not in the hall. What arises instead is an informal 'G11' of Northern and Southern List leaders teaming up for their right to clinch even more World Heritage titles, irrespective of the effect on the system's capacities and the deplored geographical imbalance. Other things equal, countries from the Global South should prefer a stronger Southern presence and more Southern perspectives in the World Heritage system, just as they should welcome the openness of the World Bank presidency to Southern nationals. These long-term benefits are only shared, however, and lose out against the immediate returns of using the status quo for national objectives.

Time Lags

The tendency of major Southern countries to go for proximate benefits would be less pronounced, however, were it not exacerbated by a number of time lags. The Southern nations are not only late in asserting their influence and receiving their fair share of the pie – latecomers they also are in other global bodies, such as for example when insisting on equal historical totals of carbon dioxide emissions in the climate negotiations (Hurrell & Sengupta 2012: 470). In the Committee, however, they are also late in setting the terms of trade, so to speak, given that World Heritage was initially shaped around European conceptions with their monumental and elite bias – Gothic cathedrals, not mining sites – and by European-based expert organisations that continue to be dominated by Northerners. The Southern countries are late in bringing in their candidates sites too, at a time when inscription requirements have substantially risen.

And then, Southern countries are historically late in *producing* the things that, after requiring the necessary patina, most easily win a World Heritage title – both cathedrals *and* mining sites. So in many Southern participants' eyes, the Global North, after having had its full share of development in the past, now cleverly turns the remnants – such as those left by mining – into World Heritage. At the same time, it 'kicks away the ladder' (Chang 2002) for Southern candidate sites by raising the requirements, and it preaches restraint to Southern countries wishing to develop – such as through mining. With so many time lags compiling, a sense of being withheld proper recognition has spread, and this makes it difficult for Southern delegations to not go for the fulfilment of the most burning national wishes once they see a chance.

And indeed, the time lag in the accumulation of World Heritage rewards is crucial for understanding the state delegations' positions: in their quest for expert guidance and proper procedure, the three resisters of the Brasilia session, Sweden, Switzerland and Estonia, appeared sincere to their peers. Yet they came to the session without own nominations, had rather short Tentative Lists of between two and four future candidate sites[21] and – as a surprise to everyone with whom I shared this observation – exceeded all their 18 Committee peers in terms of sites per population by far: with Sweden having 14, Switzerland 10 and Estonia 2 inscriptions at the time, an equally successful China would have boasted 1400 World Heritage titles, not just 38.[22] 'They're protecting their investment', a former Committee chairperson from the South mused when hearing this. Previous Northern proponents of restraint and proper procedure such as the US, Canada and Australia, too, are among the List leaders. Very evidently, these Northern countries have drunk their wine, and with the domestic pressure for more inscriptions nowhere near that of some of their Southern peers, such as China (Yan 2018), preaching water to everyone else must be easier.

Conclusion

For those hoping for more equality in global governance – a flatter world – the story told here will be sobering. In the World Heritage Committee, a body less indispensable to Northern powers as other global fora, reforms meant to strengthen the Global South nonetheless failed to undo Northern hegemony. Northern countries were not stopped from serving themselves, new World Heritage listings – the only substantial benefit – continued to be dominated by European sites, and Southern frustration with presumably biased advisory organisations and procedures mounted. In 2010, Southern countries banded together to overrule the experts and realise desired outcomes, leading to the generally more open pursuit of national interests. Yet the resulting free-for-all for everyone with some basic knowledge of the diplomatic lobbying game continues to disproportionately reward the North. Stronger Southern countries team up with the leading Northerners to keep their pieces of the World Heritage pie large while the poorer and weaker Southern countries are left to fend for themselves. As a consequence, fundamental reform expunging Northern bias is postponed, and heritage 'theory from the South' (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012) – new perspectives from, or inspired by heritage in, the non-Western world – does not arise.

This closely parallels recent developments in more consequential global bodies such as the G20, the World Bank or the IMF where despite all talk of increasing multipolarity, leading Southern countries contribute their share to sustaining Northern hegemony (Wade 2011: 349). These are relatively open struggles over power and resources, however, whereas the World Heritage Committee – with its UNESCO tradition of consensus decisions and sympathies for the South – has returned to ostensible peace, never addressing how the confrontations pitted North against South. Yet while fragmented decision-making and the absorption of state delegates with their own national concerns distract attention from the cumulative outcomes, these do not stray any less from the proclaimed targets than the IMF and World Bank reforms. This speaks strongly against the autonomy of heritage diplomacy (*pace* Winter 2015) and calls for examining the role of (certain) Southern countries which the dominant 'Eurocentric conception of world politics' (Hobson 2012) tends to neglect.

Time lags, however, exacerbate this tendency. They are constitutive for heritage: things are so labelled after presumably having ceased to evolve so that they can be made to stand for the past rather than the present, moving from history time (subject to change) to heritage time (subject to arrested change). No wonder that in the World Heritage Committee, multiple time lags – in terms of rewards, influence on concepts and decisions, *and* contemporary production of the things that might be singled out as heritage in the future – increase Southern participants' sense of not receiving their due. Heritage research has amply reflected about the underlying temporalities, with such conceptions as monumental versus social time (Herzfeld 1991: 6–14) or reflective versus affective 'past presencing' (Macdonald 2013: 233), but the temporalities of global heritage recognition need to be included.

As for explaining global governance, we should not be too modest in our ambitions. Anthropologists studying the UN and international organisations have often focused on what the dominant disciplines such as international relations tend to overlook – the generative power of textual form (Billaud 2014: 64–65; Riles 1998), the language of negotiations (Groth 2012), the ritualistic nature of public sessions (Cowan 2014), the role of boredom (Billaud 2014: 68–69; Fresia 2013: 53–54; Kelly 2011: 733, 740) or the appropriation of our key terms (Eriksen 2001; Nielsen 2011). Yet ethnographic observation of the seemingly marginal, such as participants' informal views, discourses and strategies, combined with a sensitivity to (post-)colonial global power relations and the view from the South – constitutive elements of a critical and reflective anthropology, that is – also qualify us to contribute to the 'great game' of explaining the power shifts within these bodies.

The reproduction of Northern hegemony in the contemporary world has occupied anthropologists for a long time. We have been attentive to its covert intellectual and symbolic dimensions, such as by reflecting on the politics of the ethnographic encounter (Abu-Lughod 1991), Anglo-American dominance of the discipline (Lins Ribeiro 2014), constructions of 'the West' by those outside it (Carrier 1995), and countless ethnographic studies of how local communities across the world naturalise, or are made to naturalise, Northern supremacy. The world-making of global organisations, however, plays its part in maintaining a skewed planet too, even when they profess a commitment

to universalism and anthropological viewpoints. It should, therefore, concern us accordingly.

Notes

1. http://whc.unesco.org/document/116681 (210). All URLs given were last accessed on 17 April 2018.
2. http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=14151&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.
3. My analysis rests on participant observation of five of the 11-day World Heritage Committee sessions (2009–2012 and 2015), two of the 3-day World Heritage General Assemblies (2011 and 2013) and other statutory meetings and conferences to which I was admitted as an academic observer; countless informal conversations with other participants; several dozen formal interviews with a large number of contributing actors, conducted in English, German, Japanese, Spanish and French, often on separate trips; and a study of the archived web streams of the 2013 and 2014 Committee sessions and the vast documentary record, much of which is online at the World Heritage Centre website (http://whc.unesco.org; for further details see Brumann 2012). As in more conventional field situations, receiving such insights was facilitated by my becoming an expected and, to varying degrees, trusted presence for many of my interlocutors whose intermittent but very intense, round-the-clock style of participation matched my own.
4. India acquired its 19th World Heritage property in 1989 (cf. http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/in), a figure that current leaders Italy, China, Spain, France and Germany and also the following states (cf. http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/stat#s2) only reached in the 1990s or later (cf. http://whc.unesco.org/en/list where clicking on country names opens national lists of World Heritage properties with their dates of inscription).
5. Cf. e.g. http://whc.unesco.org/document/142183 (2).
6. Whether the World Heritage title is a boon or a bane and for what exactly – conservation; the welfare of the concerned communities, regions and nations; tourism; world peace etc. – is beyond the scope of this article. Without doubt, however, the title is perceived as highly desirable the world over, including in the Global South, so the question of access to it is significant.
7. Cf. http://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape.
8. Details of the mentioned individuals must remain vague since anything else would make them easily identifiable to World Heritage insiders.
9. Cf. http://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/World_Heritage/ICOMOS_World_Heritage_Panel_2014.pdf (3), https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/content/documents/iucn_panel_members_2016-2017_cycle.pdf and the information about the listed individuals on the public internet and in the LinkedIn professional social network (https://www.linkedin.com). For more detail, see Brumann (2017b: 257–259).
10. I cannot confirm the picture of elaborate pacts and alliances painted by Meskell and collaborators (Bertacchini, Liuzza & Meskell 2017; Meskell 2014; 2015b). The rebellion of Brasilia did not look carefully orchestrated; instead, Committee states switched to a new mode of behaviour when realising that they could get away with it. Contrary to Bertacchini, Liuzza and Meskell (2017), the four BRICS states (all except India) on the Committee did not dominate the session, just as BRIC cooperation for the entire 2002–2010 period was 'inconsistent and weak' (Claudi 2011: 67; her omission of South Africa alone does not account for the discrepancy). Aside from the three European resisters, everyone supported everyone else in Brasilia, given that this did not entail any costs, and in the absence of an opponent to speak of, there was simply no need for elaborate strategising, as there also was not in the following sessions. Bertacchini, Liuzza and Meskell lump the 2003–2013 period, thus overlooking how much the Brasilia session reshuffled the game – the actual break is evident in Meskell's own statistics (cf. Meskell 2014: 226–227, figures 1 and 2).

11. Cf. http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/de, http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/jp.
12. In the 2016 session in Istanbul, the ICOMOS approval rate dropped to 41.7 percent (including nominations withdrawn before the session because of ICOMOS rejection) but this is still higher than for most of the preceding decade (except 2013 and 2008; cf. the synoptic table on the first pages of document 8B for each of the Committee sessions 2004–2016 accessible from http://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions). I excluded nominations for mere extensions of already listed World Heritage properties from my count. IUCN played a minor role in the Bonn session of 2015 since there were only three natural candidate sites and one mixed cultural and natural site (shared with ICOMOS).
13. Cf. http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/stat#d6.
14. Cf. http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/stat#s8.
15. There are clear parallels with the development of the (procedurally independent) 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage – specifically designed for the benefit of the Global South and, in particular, Africa – whose honors lists are now dominated by East Asian countries.
16. Cf. the synoptic tables on the first pages of documents 8B for the Committee sessions 2005–2015 (accessible from http://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions). Since transboundary nominations are exempt from the national quotas of all except one of the participating countries, I exclude them from the count, as also the nominations for mere extensions of listed properties that are almost always approved. 4 of the 6 Israeli 'double nominations' concerned the same site, the Triple Arch of Dan that – standing on contested territory – was withdrawn or postponed each time.
17. Cf. http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/stat#s2.
18. Cf. http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/in, http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/jp, http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/tr.
19. Cf. http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2017/01/weodata/weoselgr.aspx with the options 'All countries' and 'Gross domestic product based on purchasing-power-parity (PPP) per capita GDP' for 2015.
20. Of the 42 properties inscribed in the 2016 and 2017 sessions as well, only 4 were in LDC countries and 4 in sub-Saharan Africa whereas 15 fell on Europe and North America (cf. http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/stat#d6 and http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/stat#s8).
21. Cf. http://whc.unesco.org/document/103437.
22. Cf. http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/ee, http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/se, http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/ch, http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/cn.

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