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To cite this article: Claudia Liuzza & Lynn Meskell (2023) Power, persuasion and preservation: exacting times in the World Heritage Committee, *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 11:7, 1265-1280, DOI: [10.1080/21622671.2021.1924851](https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2021.1924851)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2021.1924851>



Published online: 28 May 2021.



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Power, persuasion and preservation: exacting times in the World Heritage Committee

Claudia Liuzza ^a and Lynn Meskell ^b

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the modes of persuasion deployed throughout the decision-making processes of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. Through long-term ethnographic, archival and quantitative research, we reveal how the lofty goals of global conservation are elided by national interests and alliance-building. What unfolds in annual meetings is a range of state-to-state threats and exactions, often masquerading as consensus, that guarantees certain heritage sites are inscribed on the World Heritage List or, alternatively, rescued from the List of World Heritage in Danger – all of which remain indifferent to conservation status. We begin by providing the background to the political landscape of UNESCO's flagship World Heritage programme and then describe various modes of coercive diplomacy. We demonstrate how different pathways to persuasion further the goals of specific nations to secure the World Heritage brand by employing international political pressure and policy substitution, often undermining the very tenets of preservation. Such tactics effectively undercut the implementation of expert advice and conservation measures, thereby 'gaming the system' to new levels.


KEYWORDS

UNESCO; World Heritage; coercive diplomacy; heritage politics; international organizations; ethnography


INTRODUCTION

In 1972, the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. It established a new provision for the international and collective protection of heritage with 'outstanding universal value' (Labadi, 2013). While only a small number of nations signed on at the time of ratification, today there are 194 signatories. The Convention created a set of obligations to protect the past for future generations, an aspiration for a shared sense of belonging and global solidarity (Anatole-Gabriel, 2016; Betts & Ross, 2015; Choay, 2001, p. 140). The World Heritage Centre was established in 1992 to act as the Secretariat and coordinator within UNESCO for all matters related to the Convention. The Centre organizes the annual sessions of the World Heritage Committee ('the Committee') along with the Advisory Bodies. The Advisory Bodies are comprised of independent international experts selected from the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International

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Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM).

As an intergovernmental agency and part of the United Nations (UN) family, States Parties that are signatories to the Convention are in fact the most powerful decision-makers within World Heritage (Askew, 2010; Meskell, 2013), particularly those with a seat on the Committee. The Committee is made up of 21 States Parties, elected at a General Assembly, that serve a four-year term. Their mandate is to develop policies for the implementation of the Convention, decide on annual nominations to the World Heritage List, oversee monitoring and managing of sites already on that List, and consider special measures regarding endangered sites (Bertacchini et al., 2017). The Committee has the final say on whether a property is inscribed on the prestigious World Heritage List (in 2021 $n = 1121$), or if the property's integrity and conservation is compromised, placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger (in 2021 $n = 53$). Unlike with other UN specialized agencies, the World Heritage Convention does not rely on voting for nominations to the List, but rather arrives at decisions through negotiated consensus (Payton, 2010), making the current examination of persuasion critical. Voting occurs very infrequently, in only the most contentious cases where consensus cannot be reached and, as such, the organization considers that requiring a vote represents diplomatic failure.

In what follows we outline the various modes of coercive diplomacy and political manipulation in World Heritage decision-making along a scale of intensification. Vreeland (2019, p. 218) rightly advocates that researchers 'understand why and how governments use their international organizations for shady purposes. Indeed, we can put reformers in a stronger position with more information on where institutions might go wrong'. Further, he notes that research on the misuse of international organizations has tended to be data driven, focusing solely on macro-level correlations. Some of our previous work on the political economy of UNESCO World Heritage practice would be illustrative here (Bertacchini et al., 2016, 2017; Meskell et al., 2015b). Vreeland (2019, p. 218) suggests that in addition to this type of analysis, 'systematic research at the micro level is needed to map out the paths by which international organizations are corrupted' since the 'arrangements that governments make when trading favors are executed through circuitous paths'. This aligns with the aims of the current paper: to trace the pathways by which powerful governments pressure other nations to support their heritage nominations for the prestigious World Heritage label.

Nominating World Heritage sites and securing their successful inscription represents the most politically charged process. Each State Party to the Convention may submit new nominations to be evaluated at the annual session of the World Heritage Committee. The dossiers are evaluated by the Advisory Bodies based on the criteria defined in the Operational Guidelines of the Convention.¹ The Advisory Bodies then propose one of four recommendations: Inscription, Referral, Deferral and Not to Inscribed. Based on those recommendations, the Committee evaluates each nomination and makes the final decision. According to the Rules of Procedure of the World Heritage Committee, 'members of the Committee shall choose as their representatives persons qualified in the field of cultural or natural heritage' (UNESCO, 2015). However, in recent years those members have increasingly shifted from primarily archaeological and environmental experts toward being state-appointed ambassadors and politicians. While this process of replacement is not entirely new, a more recent and dramatic impact can be seen in the shift from decisions adopted based on conservation priorities toward relying less on expert evaluations, reflecting more political considerations (Meskell, 2018, p. 79; see also Hølleland et al., 2019). Our previous studies have documented how this shift in expertise has resulted in greater discordance between Advisory Body recommendations and the final decisions taken by the World Heritage Committee (Meskell et al., 2015a). *The Economist* (2010) also denounced the Committee's bending of the rules to the pressure of Member States and support based on regional,

economic alliances and political pressures. Economic and regional networks have ensured that powerful, wealthy nations secure site inscription and stave off censure or danger listing.

Our multistranded research employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse the patterns and politics of decision-making processes concerning the 1972 Convention. We integrate evidence from a number of sources coupled with multiple disciplinary perspectives. Qualitatively, our role as official observers in the World Heritage Committee meetings (2011–19) has enabled us to undertake hundreds of in-depth interviews with senior officials conducted at UNESCO's Paris headquarters, with members of the Advisory Bodies and with representatives of national delegations worldwide.² Additionally, we have analysed Committee transcripts from over a decade of UNESCO meetings, and examined official documents and unpublished archival material from 1945 to the present. Yet, as studies of international bureaucracy increasingly reveal, political issues can be masked through seemingly neutral discourse and predatory states can take refuge in technocratic procedure. We suggest that researchers examine the intermediate phases of debate and negotiation before decisions are formalized. In addition, 'being there' offers ethnographic insight into the micro-processes of negotiation and further nuances the representation of global governance (see also Abélès, 2017; Niezen & Sapignoli, 2017; Riles, 2010).

UNESCO remains a comparatively under-studied UN agency, and few studies have adopted a systematic approach to investigate patterns in the selection of properties on the World Heritage List (Bertacchini et al., 2011; Bertacchini & Saccone, 2012; Frey et al., 2013; Frey & Steiner, 2011; Reyes, 2014; Steiner & Frey, 2012). On the quantitative side, we analysed statistically information from the Summary Records and other World Heritage Committee official documents from 2003 to 2019. Research for this paper extends our previous collaboration with cultural economists, where we have tracked the politics of inscription, lobbying and coalitions, cross-sectoral exchanges, global imbalances, and corruption (Bertacchini et al., 2016, 2017; Brown et al., 2019; Meskell et al., 2015a, 2015b). In this paper we identify the level of concordance between Advisory Bodies' recommendations and the Committee's final decisions concerning the World Heritage List. Significantly, increasing disagreement is likely to signal a departure from the global conservation mission of the World Heritage Convention.

PERSUASION AND PRESERVATION

During our ethnographic research we have observed many forms of persuasion and political manipulation that constitute what Carnegie (2015) calls coercive diplomacy. This particular form of diplomacy entails the combined use of threats and assurances to influence another states' behaviour. Such measures might reinforce the benefits and dangers of cooperating with certain states in the international system and predatory states may hold others hostage at a later date to extract concessions from them (p. 2). Political actors do things: 'they engage in influential speech, they offer incentives, they mislead other actors, they disrupt the expected functioning of decision-making mechanisms' (Whitfield, 2020, p. 1). While Whitfield (2020) was describing the actions of individuals such as politicians in their aims to alter the beliefs of citizens, we adapt his formulation to illustrate the persuasive iterations of national delegates to convince their peers, experts and other officials during World Heritage Committee deliberations. This taxonomy of political manipulation accurately maps onto our decade-long participation in, and observations from, annual meetings and the kinds of individual lobbying and international political pacting that we have documented and extensively analysed (Bertacchini et al., 2016, 2017; Meskell, 2015; Meskell et al., 2015b). Indeed, we would argue that the patterns we have discerned result from the cumulative, fine-grained modes of negotiation, persuasion and coercion, outlined below.

Figure 1 demonstrates that the level of agreement between Advisory Body recommendations (Referral, Deferral and Not to Inscribe) and Committee decisions regarding new inscriptions to

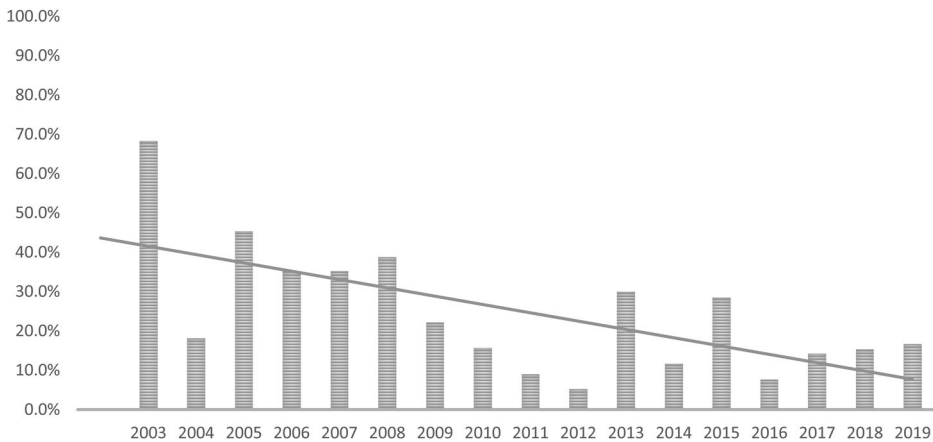


Figure 1. Committee agreement with Advisory Body recommendations for the World Heritage List (other than inscription).

the World Heritage List. We exclude recommendations to Inscribe, since that is the optimum goal for nominating states and, hence, both groups agree. As clearly shown, when experts make determinations other than inscription, concordance decreases dramatically, especially over the last decade. Since the stakes for inscription have escalated, the concordance with UNESCO's experts has plummeted to 10% or lower in 2011, 2012 and 2016, averaging 24% for the period 2004–19. This entails overturning the vast majority of expert decisions, potentially delimiting global conservation efforts. The Committee is not bound by the recommendations of its Advisory Bodies and its members reasonably criticize the lack of cultural and geographical diversity in their evaluators and transparency in their working methods. Tensions over the cost of evaluation services, skyrocketing to 75% of the World Heritage Fund budget (UNESCO, 2017b, pp. 3, 10), prompted the Committee to request an official reassessment. The resulting study noted 'that States Parties prize the inscription of heritage properties more for its capillary transactional potentials than its conservation values' (UNESCO, 2017b, p. 10; see also Meskell, 2015, p. 3).

Political concerns now routinely trump preservationist ones because of the escalating national costs of nominating sites to the World Heritage List. Dossiers typically take many years of preparation, often require international consultants, may cost millions of dollars and, if successful, the UNESCO imprimatur affords multiple benefits in social, economic and political terms. In 1979, the Egyptian pyramids were listed on the basis of a single page, whereas by 2019 some 4000 pages were submitted to inscribe a Chinese archaeological site.³ Given that expenditure, decision-making cannot rest solely with UNESCO's Advisory Bodies, in the view of many States Parties, but instead must be engineered to return positive results through peer-to-peer negotiations with Committee members and other back-door channels. Multilateral interdependencies extend beyond the support of one or two neighbours, and now include a diverse array of nations evincing a wide range of economic regime types, religions and cultures (Hale & Held, 2011, p. 30).

In trying to capture the various modalities of persuasion, interference, incentivization, coercion, exaction or even threats we have witnessed in both UNESCO's plenary sessions and the corridors, literally and figuratively, we agree with Whitfield that such actions share characteristics of political manipulation. Put simply, an act of manipulation by one state representative toward another can be understood as any intentional attempt by an agent (A) to cause another agent (B) to will/prefer/intend/act otherwise than what A takes B's preference or intention to be, where A does so employing methods that obscure and render deniable A's intentions toward B (Whitfield,

2020, p. 11). There are ample instances in World Heritage decision-making that demonstrate such manipulation. In the following sections we outline these diplomatic tactics in order of increasing intensification, beginning with persuasion and ending with more egregious escalations such as intimidation.

Influence

Influence in the World Heritage arena is actively forged through alliances and agreements between States Parties in the lead-up to annual Committee meetings where the most crucial decisions are taken. States Parties petition each other aggressively for support before and during these meetings, especially in their efforts to have their national sites inscribed on the List. They routinely ask Committee Members to speak persuasively on their behalf in support of site inscription or potentially to vote in their favour, if called upon to do so. Such practices were not necessary in the early years of the Convention when the Athenian Acropolis or Pyramids of Giza were inscribed without debate. However, as the List today exceeds more than 1100 properties, sites are invariably nominated with less agreed-upon 'universal' recognition and inadequate conservation status, are increasingly politically and geographically contentious, and generally fail to meet the legal criteria for inscription. International alliances have thus become more instrumental and need to be cemented prior to properties being presented for evaluation and debate. One mechanism to exert influence on the proceedings is through the practice of circulating signature sheets for countries to pledge their support in writing for inscribing a property. Garnering signed amendments before the opening of the debate was officially prohibited in 2010, but nonetheless has continued. Similarly, states develop alliances and strategies to evade criticism of their activities so as to excuse poor site conservation and prevent their sites being placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Lobbying and pacting are now commonplace forms of interference and influence that are often called 'cultural diplomacy' to add a veneer of respectability (Meskell, 2018, p. 116). The World Heritage system now rests on a complex scaffolding of informal politics and lobbying, aptly described as a 'hustle', in which each State Party must seek to construct coalitions with others in order to secure their objectives (Fairbrass & Warleigh, 2004, p. 3). Through these processes of negotiation and manipulation, leading to even greater interdependence and connectivity, World Heritage sites have been effectively transformed into transactional commodities with exchange values that transcend their materialities, wresting them from those contexts to serve other international interests.

If we take the most basic mode of persuasion, that of influential speech, this is the staple of State Party tactics to sway decision-making within the Committee. Persuasion can function as a channel for broader power relations, a process of coalition-building, and an effort to define or challenge operational guidelines. For example, states routinely support nominations of their (or others') cultural and natural sites to the World Heritage List through impassioned speeches, especially when they encounter critique in the evaluation process. This entails the 'communication of information, analysis and/or reasons meant to produce assent to some proposition' (Whitfield, 2020, p. 4). Most often, these argumentative practices link routine politics to essentially contentious judgements in an attempt to either reinforce, contest or disrupt official procedure. In such a professional diplomatic setting all players could be said to be familiar with the Convention's rules of procedure and institutional relationships, or the 'rules of the game'. Yet as Martin (2013, p. 6) cautions, 'there is always a trace of violence (whether real or implied) that surrounds political rhetoric because "matters of principle" invoke the limits of what is thinkable and do-able'. This particular exercise of influence through persuasion accords well with our years of ethnographic observation in the annual meetings, interview data and analysis.

Committee members increasingly construct elaborate arguments, including presenting alternative and additional expert opinions to counteract the decisions taken by UNESCO's official Advisory Bodies, ICOMOS and IUCN. When France failed to get the Chaîne des Puy

inscribed in 2014, they argued against the expertise of the Advisory Bodies, claiming to have the backing of the president of the International Union of Geo Sciences and experts from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. France pleaded its case to the Committee, insisting that ‘the opinions of these 30 experts were not taken into account by the IUCN’. France argued for overturning the original recommendation on the grounds that there had been serious omissions, scientific errors and methodological flaws (UNESCO, 2014, p. 197). In attempting to persuade the Committee to inscribe the site, France resorted to rhetorical strategies, including questions, assertions and promises (O’Neill, 2018, p. 529). One year earlier, in 2013, India argued to change the rules of procedure, thus enabling nominating states to take the floor and advocate for their own properties. This controversial development, itself a conflict of interest, was, furthermore, a powerful example of influence within the 21-member Committee. What this new practice encouraged, as evidenced in the French example, was the ability to undermine the authority of conservation experts, to appeal to external bodies, and to claim new forms of knowledge and power that supersede existing norms (Petrova, 2016, p. 390). Analysing such rhetorical performances invites us not simply to grasp the deeper political dimensions of a particular case; rather, it lifts the veil on increasingly ingrained practices that are more than just a set of communication techniques (Martin, 2013, p. 14).

In their efforts to persuade, nominating states enlist members of the Committee to become personal guarantors for the value of a site by the sole fact of visitation. In 2011, Sudan nominated the Island of Meroe; however, ICOMOS experts were not in favour of inscription given significant problems with site boundaries and buffer zones, the management plan, and monitoring mechanisms. Each of these factors indicated that the site did not meet the Convention’s standard for inscription. The Egyptian delegate expressed surprise that Meroe was not *already* inscribed on the List because it would represent an ‘honor’ for UNESCO. He spoke authoritatively about his own visit to Meroe, bitterly criticized the work of ICOMOS, and offered to substitute for those independent evaluators his own choice of experts. Lastly, he extended his personal guarantee to the Committee that site management and protection were sound. As the speakers from France and Egypt reveal, delegates use persuasive rhetoric to minimize the need for compliance with Convention guidelines and undermine the credibility of expert decisions. Egypt rebuked ICOMOS that ‘the Committee is called to inscribe properties and not files’ (UNESCO, 2011, p. 228). This influential speech did in fact succeed in circumventing official procedure and bypassing legal criteria in order to inscribe the Sudanese site on the World Heritage List. We suggest that such acts of persuasion extend beyond rhetoric or mere differing opinion and can instead impinge upon the legal operations of the 1972 Convention, consistently eliding the standards for conservation and independent oversight in favour of nation-state aspirations for brand acquisition.

Finally, at the micro-level, attempts to ‘game the system’ are reflected in the frequency of specific words selected by States Parties in their interventions. For example, they increasingly call for ‘consistency’ and ‘coherence’ and semantically related words ($n = 15$ in 2010 to $n = 150$ in 2018). Similarly, reference to ‘dialogue’ ($n = 38$ in 2010 to $n = 232$ in 2018), accompanied by the adjectives ‘constructive’, ‘productive’, ‘open’ and ‘transparent’, is advanced as a corrective to ‘enhance the overall transparency and decision-making’ and ‘the evaluation process’ (UNESCO, 2018, p. 15). While this might appear to be a call for consensus, ‘dialogue’ is deployed when speakers are garnering support to overturn negative Advisory Body determinations. In doing so they frequently advocate ‘encouragement’ and semantically related words ($n = 94$ in 2010 to $n = 204$ in 2018) to positively influence decision-making. These developments underline that the 1972 Convention is deeply entrenched in multilateral diplomacy, characterized by the use of liberal language and avoidance of negative statements, in an effort to promote dialogue.

Incentivization

We consider incentivization here to be the use of external influence to incite a particular action or decision, such as rewards within World Heritage arena other in more expansive social, economic or political domains. A good example of incentivization is the coalition of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), which has actively worked together on the Committee to ensure that their sites are inscribed and to prevent any censure on the basis of poor preservation (Claudi, 2011). Over four sessions (2010–13), the BRICS group successfully overturned negative decisions made by the UNESCO Advisory Bodies to have numerous sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, including the Rio de Janeiro Carioca Landscape (Brazil), Rani-ki-vav Stepwell (India) and Bolgar Archaeological Complex (Russia). Quite overtly, the Russian Federation offered to fly each of the 21 Committee members to Kazan for free to persuade them to support Bolgar, and many accepted the invitation. Similarly, BRICS nations managed to prevent their sites being placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in the case of Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape (South Africa) with an adjacent coal mine, Virgin Komi Forests (Russia) with goldmining inside the property, and the Monuments at Hampi (India) with a collapsed bridge and demolition of homes (Meskell, 2014). The incentive to support other BRICS nations in the cultural sphere mirrors the allegiances and brings additional benefits in other political and economic arenas (Ferdinand, 2012; Roberts et al., 2018). One concrete example is the New Development Bank established by BRICS nations in 2014. These new powers have economies that are likely to rival and then surpass those of Japan, European countries and even the United States in the medium term (Bertacchini et al., 2017). The rising multi-polarity now observed across UN agencies, according to Hale and Held (2011, pp. 30–1), ‘is a powerful driver of interdependence, because it increases the number of powerful countries whose consent is required for cooperation, while simultaneously decreasing the leverage of any one country – even the most powerful – to compel a certain outcome’.

An example of a more unlikely incentivization is the alliance between UNESCO, African States Parties and China, with new partnerships ranging from Education to World Heritage (UNESCO, 2019b).⁴ This novel arrangement came only after the US withdrawal from UNESCO in 2019 and withholding of payments since 2011, following the recognition of Palestine as a Member State (Hüfner, 2017; Kersel & Luke, 2012). By 2021 this not only left the organization US\$600 million in arrears, but made China the largest contributor to UNESCO’s regular budget.⁵ Throughout World Heritage meetings, the ramifications of this new arrangement have further incentivized African Member States backing for Chinese nominations with the concomitant support by China to overturn any negative decision associated with African properties. The incentives here are primarily economic but also political, bringing substantial benefits to both parties (Besada & O’Bright, 2017; Vreeland, 2019, p. 213). Moreover, since 2011, the US Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs also conceded that America was losing ground and ceding investment and trade opportunities in Africa to China (Mlambo et al., 2016).

Alternatively, African nations cannot hope to exact the same kinds of rent-seeking behaviours as their more powerful counterparts, and hence cannot be sufficiently persuasive in attaining their goals. Coercive diplomacy is ‘most prevalent between asymmetric pairs of states that differ in terms of capabilities and political views’ (Carnegie, 2015, p. 6). We suggest that powerful nations continue to implement rent-seeking activities and lobbying for the inscription of their properties (Bertacchini et al., 2011; Meskell et al., 2015a) even when not serving on the Committee by using a combination of persuasion and manipulative strategies that fits within the spectrum of coercive diplomacy. Less powerful nations on the Committee often sublimate their own goals and agendas under international political pressure and policy substitution. As Zimbabwe lamented in 2010, World Heritage had become ‘increasingly a political field’ and their nation did ‘not

have the critical mass to challenge what is going on' (UNESCO, 2010, p. 808). These dynamics are not limited to China but extend to UNESCO's former biggest contributor: the United States. In 2016, when the United States was lobbying for inscription of architectural sites by Frank Lloyd Wright, we observed a senior American delegate handing a prepared text to an African Committee member to read out in favour of the inscription: the Committee member did indeed go on to read the text in support of the United States, going against a majority of other members. As Carter and Stone (2015) have documented, in correlating American aid with multilateral support in UN fora, States Parties that adopt positions counter to powerful countries will likely face serious consequences. They examined vote-buying in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as a case study, arguing that it is (much like UNESCO) 'among the most democratic of international institutions, and the low stakes involved in its nonbinding resolutions have made it a relatively polite diplomatic forum' (p. 2). They found that the United States disproportionately deploys aid disbursements to manipulate the voting behaviour of poor democracies. Here the distribution of foreign aid differs from need-based allocations and is instead strongly tethered to geopolitical interests and foreign policy preferences. If we apply their findings more generally, this suggests that less powerful nations, and here we are reflecting particularly on African states where the United States is often the largest aid contributor, are vulnerable to such pressures and thus support initiatives that go against their own priorities.

Comparatively speaking, UNESCO might seem to be a low-profile agency within the UN, largely serving the cultural sector. Indeed, such a perception might render UNESCO a more valuable target for exacting strategies, precisely because its perceived profile may make such practices easier to obscure and harder to detect. Relatedly, it has not attracted the same scholarly interrogation regarding coercive diplomacy as other UN agencies. However, securing a seat on the 21-member World Heritage Committee is seen by many States Parties as one way to effectively raise their profiles across the UN more generally. Influence in matters of global patrimony offers a supposedly soft option in the realm of international influence underpinned by the workings of cultural diplomacy (Luke & Kersel, 2013). One high-level diplomat, whose delegation had just been elected to the World Heritage Committee, described to us that it ranked among the five most sought-after intergovernmental committees within the UN, the first being the UN Security Council (UNSC). In that interview, he explained that the appeal of membership rested upon its 'exclusivity', since it is composed of only 21 of the 194 States Parties to the Convention. Furthermore, the heightened global interest in nominations gave Committee members an advantage in the wider network of UN multilateral diplomacy. Several other diplomats shared with us stories of receiving tempting proposals: if not openly in exchange for their support of nominations, then as a 'gesture' for their backing in contentious cases.

Manipulation and disruption

But there are also examples of more overt and exacting attempts at manipulation in the World Heritage arena that aim to disrupt State Party autonomy. In the case of the Meiji industrial sites nominated by Japan, the nomination was contested by South Korea and China because Japan failed to acknowledge that the former's nationals were used as forced labour and prisoners-of-war at seven of the sites during the Second World War. Many other Asian States Parties were pressured, lobbied and placed in the impossible position of offending either China and Korea, on one hand, or Japan, on the other. The stakes are not insignificant for Asian nations such as Vietnam and the Philippines, which were serving members on the Committee (Meskell et al., 2015a). Backstage transactions and diplomatic exchanges increasingly involve webs of coercion, threats and retaliation. While UNESCO was established with a mission to foster world peace (Betts, 2015; Droit, 2005; Pavone, 2008), what we have witnessed in the World Heritage Committee is in fact the ramping up of conflictual heritage, whereby contentious sites are knowingly proposed and pushed for purposes other than conservation (Meskell, 2018). This suggests

that World Heritage designation is being mobilized as a proxy for international conflict. Given culture's soft power potential (Akagawa, 2014; Kersel & Luke, 2015), UNESCO recognition can easily mask the hostile political intent of states through the pretence of gesturing toward monumental, artistic and conservation concerns. This public performance in support of global heritage belies the dense network of transactions, exchanges and consequences that occur offstage.

Our examples, following Whitfield (2020, p. 3), reveal how manipulation sits on a spectrum of social interaction during the meetings, bounded, on one hand, by persuasion, which treats others as reasonable and, on the other, by coercion, which goes beyond manipulation into threats and exaction. Manipulation, he argues, carries a strongly negative moral valence for good reason. We suggest that the stakes have been raised for nations to attain World Heritage status as not only a marker of cultural achievement and good conservation, but also as an international recognition that is further equated with good governance, transparency, civility and modernity. This also may explain why the possibility of international governance, oversight and interference in sovereign matters is so unwelcome. UNESCO, like other international organizations, has seen an increased politicization around decision-making, and we have suggested that the cultural sphere now mirrors heated debates regarding everything from climate change and human rights to nuclear proliferation and security (Bertacchini et al., 2016). These are the same activities, tactics and strategies that national delegations employ when they attempt to influence decisions, recommendations and policy. They range from lobbying and the exchange of information to alliance-building, formal and informal contact, and planned and unplanned relationships. This is what has rather benignly been called 'interest representation' (Fairbrass & Warleigh, 2004, p. 2).

In recent years there have been a number of incidents where several national delegations have physically approached the Committee and the Secretariat seated at the podium. In 2018, during the plenary session in Manama (Bahrain), both French and Italian representatives approached Committee members during discussion of their nominations, angry at the seemingly negative positions adopted by certain States Parties and the Advisory Bodies. In clear defiance of UN protocol, some delegates continued to lobby aggressively while 'turning their back to the podium', a situation that impelled chairperson Shaikha Haya Al Khalifa to give a warning that she would stop the meeting and ask those delegates to leave the room (UNESCO, 2018, p. 172). Not only a breach of protocol, this physical act is considered disrespectful and potentially hostile. Even more egregious has been the recent behaviour of the Israeli delegation in approaching the podium, harassing members of the Secretariat and generally disrupting the proceedings (UNESCO, 2017a, pp. 220–221). During the 2017 meetings in Krakow, Poland, security officials were called to the podium after Israel's envoy, Carmel Shama-Hacohen, caused disruption, becoming hostile towards members of the Committee and Secretariat. Cuba claimed the Israeli delegate 'was turning the meeting into a politicized circus' (p. 97). Some national delegates and UNESCO staff who we interviewed later believed that the envoy had staged the incident, hoping to be physically escorted from the room, all of which would then be filmed and broadcast. Another tactic employed by Israel was to humiliate the German Ambassador Stefan Krawielicki in the highly charged context of Krakow, making several references to the 'Nazi German camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau', and asking him directly 'how [Germany] could have shown such contempt of the memory of the Holocaust' (p. 223). Shama-Hacohen ended his speech by performatively answering his mobile phone, shouting that it was the 'plumber in my apartment in Paris ... there is a problem in my toilet and it is much more important than the decision you just adopted' (UNESCO, 2017c), whereupon the Israeli delegation exited the auditorium.

Resorting to emotional diplomacy is a common strategy in international politics. For instance, the 'diplomacy of anger' can be employed to achieve political goals through the use of 'derogatory or hyperbolic speech', sometimes coupled with 'symbolic gestures like walking out of a meeting' (Hall, 2015, pp. 49–50). Hyperbolic speech, such as that described above, typically aims at undermining Committee members when their stated position fails to align with the

interests of another Member State. Another example, aimed at Germany, was the remark by Philippe Lalliot, the French Ambassador, indignant at Germany's lack of support for France's nomination of the Chaîne des Puy: 'when we have friends like that, we don't need enemies' (UNESCO, 2014, p. 197). Here the French delegate was reminding his German counterpart that he had undercut any alliance between two European nations. Comments such as these signal the wider ramifications and political implications of decisions related to World Heritage sites. A more dramatic episode was the walkout staged by the Thai delegation during the 2011 session of the World Heritage Committee in Paris. The purpose was to publicly denounce a 2008 Committee decision taken to inscribe Preah Vihear (located in a disputed border zone), which favoured Cambodia over Thailand (Meskell, 2016). Thailand further declared it would withdraw from the World Heritage Convention; yet insiders knew that any such decision would not take effect immediately, and indeed never did. What makes anger different from other coercive tactics, according to Hall (2015, p. 40), is '(1) the overt messages state actors communicate; (2) their particular sequencing of aggressive substantive actions; (3) the perceptions and responses of the state's targets; and (4) the subsequent effects of an interaction'.

Another instance where disruption was strategically used followed from incidents at the 2016 Committee meetings held in Paris. Committee members had been invited to formally vote, by secret ballot, on a draft decision regarding the state of conservation in Jerusalem. Committee members including Kazakhstan, Cuba, Lebanon, Indonesia, Tunisia and Kuwait took the floor to affirm that they would not be 'held hostage to politics', but would 'uphold the spirit of the Convention' with regards the long-term preservation of Jerusalem. Tanzania intervened to call for a secret ballot, going against the official African Union position on Israel/Palestine (African Union, 2019; Johansson-Nogués, 2020). A prominent European ambassador later confided to one of us during an interview that 'they had been paid'; he had personally witnessed 'money changing hands'. Predictably, the vote immediately sparked a set of hostile responses and gestures. 'This is yet another absurd resolution against the State of Israel, the Jewish people and historical truth,' Shama-Hacohen stated. UNESCO's resolution on Jerusalem, he said, belonged in the 'garbage bin of history'. Reflecting back on the day in 1975 when Israel's Chaim Herzog physically tore up another such resolution at the United Nations, he said, 'I have no intention of doing this today – not because of your dignity, or the dignity of this organization, but because it is not even worthy of the energy needed for tearing it apart.' And with that he lifted up a black bin for all to see, with the word 'History' attached to it, and dropped the text inside (Meskell, 2018, p. 167).

Intimidation and coercion

At the 2013 Phnom Penh meetings there was once again an issue over Jerusalem, where several young men from the Israeli delegation roamed around the room during another vote. They attempted to intimidate the Estonian delegation, as well as the Germans: they sought to identify delegates, performatively writing down their names and recording their votes; they approached the podium, the legal adviser and members of the Secretariat. After the vote they took the floor, stating that the decision would 'undermine core values of this organization, leading to its final destruction'. Other veiled threats included reminding delegates in the room that they were 'close friends of the United States'. In our interviews numerous participants spoke about intimidation: an American delegate recalled how her Chinese counterpart grabbed her arm, attempting to coerce her into showing visible US support for their nomination. A European diplomat explained how an African ambassador had threatened that he would never again get a visa. Members of the Advisory Bodies routinely complained to us of coercion and harassment; two recent cases involved the Turkish nomination of Ani and the American nomination of Frank Lloyd Wright. In such politicized contexts there are not only varieties of manipulation, but

also techniques that involve things other than deception, including beliefs, desires or emotions (Whitfield, 2020, p. 5).

Another example of coercion, previously described, involves the Russian Federation's nomination of the Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex, which strategically coincided with their hosting of the World Heritage Committee meetings in St Petersburg (World Heritage Center, n.d.). ICOMOS had not recommended that Bolgar be inscribed on the List because massive reconstructions had impacted its historic structures. Russia offered to fly delegates to the nearby city of Kazan, where it hosted UNESCO's Youth Day, attempting to secure multi-lateral support for Bolgar's inscription and revealing the inducements and modalities of political pressure (Meskell et al., 2015b; Plets, 2015). Then an explosive French documentary filmed during the 2013 meetings exposed the full force of pressure exacted upon Committee members in Cambodia (Bentura, 2014). The special investigation captured, among others, the Russian ambassador's relentless pressuring of other diplomats to support Bolgar. One of us personally witnessed the same ambassador physically intimidating another diplomat in the corridors. Indeed, coercive diplomacy paid off, and in the 2014 meetings held in Qatar, Russia strategically reframed Bolgar as a Muslim pilgrimage site to ensure the support of the many Islamic nations on the World Heritage Committee: Iraq, Qatar, Algeria, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)-backed Russia, and the site was inscribed (Bertacchini et al., 2017).

While participating in international organization benefits states through enhanced cooperation, Carnegie (2013, p. 2) suggests that the unintended consequences create 'ripple effects across policy arenas, bolstering cooperation in some areas, while politicizing others'. States are emboldened to manipulate policies that are not regulated by international institutions in order to pursue their political objectives, enabling 'policy substitution' and thereby increasing political manoeuvring in other, less constrained policy domains. A key factor shown to influence foreign policy substitution is cost. And states choose between economic, military and diplomatic levers of influence as a function of the costs of the policies available to them. We suggest that the imputed soft power arena of UNESCO offers a pliant platform for political substitutions. Given the increasing prestige of the World Heritage List, nations spend vast financial resources to prepare site nominations for inclusion and will no longer accept negative decisions from the Advisory Bodies. Thus, they have recourse to various forms of policy substitution and can either entice or threaten members of the World Heritage Committee to support their ambitions.

For example, in the controversial Cambodian nomination of Preah Vihear Temple, we mined Wikileaks cables to reveal the web of international economic, legal, military and political interests. The cables make explicit the ways in which American support for the inscription hinged upon broader issues of US foreign policy and increased investor interest in Cambodia from major corporations, including Boeing, Nike, McDonald's, Pizza Hut and Marlboro (Meskell, 2016, p. 80). The issue of Cambodia's debt to the United States was also being considered. Additionally, Cambodia's deputy prime minister was eager for the implementation of promised USAID programmes for his country. In a single paragraph, American assistance with the inscription of Preah Vihear and the possibility of excluding Thailand on the International Criminal Court (ICC) were followed by discussion of Chevron concessions and potential compromises on oil revenue taxation (Meskell, 2016, p. 81; see also Peycam et al., 2020). After the inscription in 2008, hostilities broke out between Cambodia and Thailand, with significant loss of life on both sides, destruction and damage to the temple. In such an expansive ecology of exchange, these cross-sectoral alliances and policy substitutions have been observed across the UN, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Evidence for bribery and vote-swapping across these agencies (Carter & Stone, 2015; Dreher et al., 2009; Dreher et al., 2018; Kuziemko & Werker, 2006; Vreeland & Dreher, 2014), including UNESCO with the issue of Committee membership or site inscription, has become a familiar and well-attested practice.

Several diplomats we interviewed explained how support for inscriptions would then be exchanged by States Parties for support in other UN fora, right up to the UNSC.

As the foregoing suggests, governments exploit international organizations such as UNESCO in myriad ways to further strategic goals (Vreeland, 2019). Incentives, disruption, coercion and threats are all examples of hijacking the World Heritage system, pursuing singular or collective goals that benefit a few but also undermine other Member State, the 1972 Convention and ultimately heritage conservation. As with other international organizations, UNESCO and its World Heritage programme show signs of strain, and transnational governance of global patrimony is increasingly in flux, leading to questions around institutional legitimacy and accountability (Hale, 2020). Culture and heritage are assumed to constitute a benign forum for multilateral negotiations, but in fact are intimately sutured to identity, religion, sovereignty, territory and history-making, with ever more fraught and fatal consequences. As such they might be viewed as constituting certain enshrined categories that are placed on a level higher than money or physical convenience, and thus nation-states increasingly reject the thought of compromising them or even putting them at risk (O'Neill, 2018, p. 529).

CONCLUSIONS

Persuasion might appear to be a very ambiguous form of power. Yet as Talal Asad cautions, 'our celebration of the idea of "persuasion" is because we think of it as the result of reason as opposed to coercion' (Bardawil, 2016, p. 168). This collapses any sharp dichotomy between what we think of as the exercise of power and coercion, on the one hand, and free reason, argument and being persuaded, on the other. In this paper we have analysed different strategies of persuasion that characterize decision-making processes in the World Heritage Committee and suggest that those instances of political manipulation have negative consequences for the conservation goals of the 1972 Convention. Our observations and analysis have implications that are instructive for the progress of multilateral institutions in general (Carter & Stone, 2015, p. 30) and UNESCO in particular, since it has received relatively little study compared with other UN agencies. Since 2010 the Committee has been characterized by a generalized pattern of hostility addressed to the Secretariat and Advisory Bodies, disregard for the rules of procedure, and continued infractions that have only intensified in recent years. World Heritage Committee members are elected to advocate for the conservation of global patrimony, not to extract rents and bully weaker nations into supporting their interests, all of which contravene UNESCO's founding mission.

Strategic manipulation is increasingly rife within intergovernmental organizations: bribery and corruption have been shown to be commonplace in the IMF, the World Bank and at the level of the UNSC. It should come as no surprise then that Member State employ dynamic and adaptive strategies in their efforts to influence policy and policymakers. Yet, while states pursue their national interests through international organizations, a concern arises when those strategies result in processes that counter the very mandate of an organization, as we have demonstrated with UNESCO and the politics of preservation. These developments should not deter researchers from trying to understand why and how states manipulate international organizations for 'shady purposes' (Vreeland, 2019, p. 218). Rather, such analysis may potentially assist UNESCO reformers in determining how and why institutions are derailed. Indeed, in our fieldwork we found, following Vreeland (2019, p. 218), that:

although casual observers are not typically surprised to learn that strategic politics corrupt the stated purposes of international organizations, insiders who work at these institutions do genuinely react with disbelief at some of the correlations the literature has documented ... because the arrangements that governments make when trading favours are executed through circuitous paths.

The complex multilateral backstage negotiations we have observed further demonstrate that the results of political manipulation might indeed be mixed: disempowering the actors concerned in some areas, while empowering them in others (Ferdinand, 2012; Roberts et al., 2018). Those developments are another example of the blessing and curse deriving from the global success of the World Heritage programme, and further explain the appeal of membership on its intergovernmental committee. What makes World Heritage so distinctive is that the success of its List, propelled by economic gains from tourism and nationalistic aspirations, has increased the political stakes far beyond the mandate of preservation. UNESCO's bureaucratic complexity and the mounting costs of nomination dossiers have transformed site inscription into an investment no nation wants to see fail, least of all on the international stage. Additionally, the material dimension of heritage, linked as it is to territory, has had a major impact on the fate of the programme and its politicization. While UNESCO remains under-studied, we argue that the tentacular reach of its programmes extends well beyond the confines of cultural soft power. Future studies should focus more closely on the effects of exchanges of political favours within the multilateral sphere in order to capture the variegated and opposing interests of the multiplicity of actors involved in World Heritage processes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank our colleagues at the World Heritage Center, ICOMOS, ICCROM and the IUCN, as well as the many national delegations that have taken the time to meet with us over the years. We also acknowledge the support of our long-term colleagues Enrico Bertacchini and Nick Brown. We are grateful to those scholars who read and commented on the paper, including Annalisa Bolin, Enrico Bertacchini, Alison Carnegie, Witold Henisz, Gregory Whitfield and the journal's anonymous reviewers for their considerable insights. Klaus Dodds was also instrumental in seeing this paper to fruition and we acknowledge his support.

NOTES

1. To be included on the World Heritage List, a site must meet at least one of the 10 criteria for inscription. Sites must also fulfil the conditions of authenticity and/or integrity and ensure that proper management structures are in place. Decisions Not to Inscribe imply that a site does not fulfil any of the criteria and therefore the state party may not present the property again. Conversely, intermediate evaluations, such as Referral and Deferral, allow state parties to resubmit the nomination at future Committee sessions, as long as they respectively provide additional information or substantially revise the nomination dossier. Referral is a more positive evaluation than Deferral, as the former implies a less substantial revision than the latter.
2. According to our institutions' ethical and professional requirements and IRB regulations, the names and identities of the interviewees were kept confidential and speakers are identified only if their identity is publicly known from other sources.
3. See <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1592>.
4. See also World Heritage Center, June 3–4, 2019. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/events/1472/>.
5. See http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BFM/BFM152_EN.pdf; and <https://pax.unesco.org/Docs/MemberStates-Status-of-Contributions.pdf>.

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