

## Comentaris/ Commentaries

# Reflections and comments on: 'Constructing, Deconstructing, and Reconstructing Heritage Values Amidst Conflicts' by Bijan Rouhani and Bill Finlayson

## *Reflexions i comentaris sobre: «Construir, desconstruir i reconstruir els valors del patrimoni enmig dels conflictes» de Bijan Rouhani i Bill Finlayson*

**José Antonio González Zarandona**

Rouhani and Finlayson's article contains seven sections where they developed a thought-provoking and succinct argument about the heritage values in conflict, which in these days, is rather hard to come by. In my opinion, the first two sections of their article are the most interesting of the article as they are very clear and they articulate very well the trajectory of the concept of heritage, and how its appreciation of value has been changing in the last decades. In my opinion, these sections are so remarkable that they should become obligatory reading in any course on Heritage Studies.

I have a few problems, though, with the latter sections of the article given that the authors

make certain claims that are a reductionist and problematic.

To start with, based on Rico's claim, the authors state that there are no heritage sites registered in the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL) that represent negative heritage and commemorate conflict and trauma. At the top of my head I can think of at least four registrations in the WHL. To start with, the Australian convict sites which consist of eleven penal sites that were built and used by the British to jail the convicts that were transported from England and other parts of the British empire to Australia (see UNESCO 2024a). These convict sites were registered in the UNESCO WHL in 2010, and some of them are a very popular tourism destination in Australia; in fact, in one of these sites (Cockatoo Island located in the Sydney Harbour), an Arts festival takes place, and the Sydney Biennale use it for exhibiting artworks. However, perhaps the most notorious site of them all is the Port Arthur Historic Site, located in Tasmania, which also witnessed the greatest massacre in the history of contemporary Australia, when in April 1996, a young man killed 35 people and wounded many others. The incident left such a wake of trauma in Australian society to the point that the then Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, banned the sale of firearms in the country, to prevent similar attacks in the future.

Not only the convict sites are witness of the dreadful journey that unfortunate humans had to endure for months only for then to be jailed in terrible conditions far away from their families (Hughes 1986), but they are also an important aspect of human history, especially in terms of Australia's past as a penal colony. The convict sites thus represent the conflict and trauma that are present in contemporary Australia in regard to their colonial past and the conflict in celebrating that difficult past, and the postcolonial system still in place to the detriment of Indigenous people in Australia. Likewise, the inclusion of Port Arthur was deliberate as it is a site of trauma and conflict (Tumarkin 2001; Mason *et al.* 2003). Therefore, I am surprised that these convict sites were not mentioned when the authors claimed that there is a "lack of sites that represent negative heritage, such as those commemorating conflict and trauma" (13), in the UNESCO WHL.

While the convict sites in Australia are an obvious choice, the other site listed in the UNESCO WHL that came to my mind may be less obvious, however, it also speaks about conflict and trauma. I am referring to the historic centre of Mexico City, listed in 1987. The construction and foundation of Mexico City entailed the destruction of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Mexica empire, when Hernán Cortes and his army, composed by

his Spanish countrymen and their Indigenous allies, sieged and razed the city in 1521. The historic centre, or *zócalo*, is perhaps one of the best sites in the world where a visitor can witness the destruction and foundation of a city at the same time, in the same place. Next to the cathedral and the national palace (places and symbols of power), where the president (currently) lives in, lies the ruins (and rubble) of the Mexica main temple. How the Mexica ruins and the colonial Spanish buildings are sided next to each other, makes Mexico City's historic centre perhaps one of the few sites in the whole world where trauma and conflict can be experienced first-hand. Likewise, the ruins are strategically and visibly exposed to visitors and those who pass by on a daily basis, to remind them of the past within the present for the future. The past, present, and future are all circulating within the same space, reminding Mexicans about their traumatic past, and their conflicting present (see López Luján 2010; 2013; 2015).

Another site that could have been mentioned is the Island of Gorée, located in Senegal (incidentally, the first African site to be listed on the WHL in 1978). According to the UNESCO website, "from the 15th to the 19th century", the island "was the largest slave-trading centre of the African coast" (UNESCO 2024b). However, more surprisingly for me was the omission of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp which was listed on the UNESCO WHL in 1979. This is a major oblivion, given that perhaps, Auschwitz-Birkenau is the most notorious heritage site that it is associated with trauma and conflict.

These are only four sites selected from the current UNESCO WHL. I am sure there are many others registered that can relate to trauma and conflict, therefore I remain skeptical about the authors' claim that this so-called gap in the UNESCO WHL "points to a broader misunderstanding of cultural heritage" (13). In my opinion, there is no so-called absence in the UNESCO WHL about sites that commemorate trauma and conflict. With this comment, I am not claiming that UNESCO understands cultural heritage. On the contrary, I agree with the authors that the organization must rethink its conventions and its approach towards heritage values. I also think that although these sites that I mentioned are listed on the UNESCO WHL, the reason for their inclusion is not exclusively linked to trauma and conflict, but other factors were also considered. UNESCO is a political organization and therefore its actions have to reflect the political reality in which we live in (Meskell 2018). But still, four sites that do commemorate trauma and conflict were disregarded,

and therefore, I do not agree with the following statement: "We typically view cultural heritage as inherently positive and worthy of protection from external threats, embracing universally accepted values" (13). As someone who researches heritage destruction (see González Zarandona *et al.* 2024), I am convinced that professionals and academics working in the field of Heritage Studies would not accept the previous statement as true. The evidence is out there, and therefore, we always tell our students that heritage, is, always, political, and therefore, contested (your heritage is my idol). Heritage is, never, "inherently positive" and much less "worthy of protection from external threats".

Perhaps before we ask UNESCO to rethink its system, we should look within our ramparts. Asking UNESCO to change the way it has authorized the management of heritage is not the best step towards deconstructing heritage in conflict. I propose a different approach. While reading the article I could not help thinking that in academia, we have fallen into a never-ending rabbit-hole where as academics working in Heritage Studies, we are constantly re-inventing the wheel. This is perhaps a reaction to what the authors of a recent volume on methods and methodologies in Heritage Studies, call a "crisis of identity in the field" (Rico and King 2024: 1). Talking to Heritage Studies colleagues, and reviewing the current literature, I feel that in conferences and articles we are repeating the same mantras over and over again, setting a boring trend, where a main formula is repeated *ad infinitum*, mainly, that heritage is important because: 1) it defines our identity, and 2) it is part of the social fabric. However, 3) communities are often overlooked and their social meanings regarding heritage are neglected, because 4) heritage is a fluid concept as well as its significance. Finally, 5) UNESCO and similar heritage organisations are oversimplifying these nuances by applying the problematic concept of "outstanding universal value" with the consequence that 6) heritage in conflict is more complex than we think. If heritage is, indeed, a fluid concept, then as scholars we are missing our chance to work on that basis.

For this reason, I find that we academics and scholars consistently keep insisting that "[h]eritage values are not static" (13), yet we have developed, established and consolidated a static framework around heritage theory that is not free from the same mantras over and over again. In other words, we are exclusively depending on the work of scholars who mainly publish in English, and a whole world of scholarship outside is waiting out for us, but as scholars we are actively neglecting it. If our topic of study thrives on conflict, as

scholars we should not shy away from conflict in our work.

Anyone working in the field can attest that most handbooks and readers on Heritage Studies published in the last decades are edited and written by scholars based in the UK, USA or Australia (I myself am guilty of the charge). While the work done on Heritage Studies in these contexts is remarkably significant, I feel that the neglect towards colleagues and scholars working in other countries outside those mentioned cannot be justified anymore. Therefore, as a first step to overcome this trend, I advocate to start looking into other languages rather than English to rediscover the work of anthropologists, philosophers, architects and many other scholars who started to critique the work of UNESCO and authorities, and focused on the implications of heritage within Indigenous communities in a broader scope, before the advent of the Critical Heritage Studies. For example, the work done by Néstor García Canclini, which has been translated into English, has been widely overlooked in the Anglophone sphere even though he has been publishing and working on the problem of heritage since the early 1990s (his Google Scholar profile states that his work has been cited over 90,000 times). García Canclini, an Argentinian philosopher by training, who is based in Mexico City, has used the concept of heritage to analyze contemporary art (see for example García Canclini 2014), among other endeavors.

But perhaps the most overlooked scholar is Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, a Mexican anthropologist, who in 1987 published a highly influential article in an anthropological newsletter in Mexico, in Spanish, titled “Nuestro patrimonio cultural: un laberinto de significados” (Our cultural heritage: a maze of meanings). When I say that the article is highly influential is not because is highly cited, especially in Anglophone publications, but because this article is one of the first essays that critiqued the concept of cultural heritage and its definition shaped by authorities, in this case, the government of Mexico, that oversees the management of Mexican heritage. As far as I am concerned, Critical Heritage Studies has not discussed this article as part of their young history, and yet, the article provides a wonderful and timely critique (in 1987) about the same topics that we are still discussing today. This is another example that in Heritage Studies we have reached an impasse because the re-invention of the wheel keeps being discussed while scholars working and publishing in other languages are neglected. If, as scholars, we are really committed to the mantra that heritage is a fluid concept and its values are never static, then we need to consid-

er other views that have challenged the concept of cultural heritage as proposed by UNESCO, and similar organizations. Most importantly, we need to incorporate early work produced outside the main centres of heritage scholarship in the English language.

In his article, Bonfil Batalla produced one of the earliest critiques of the concept of cultural heritage at a time when the concept appropriated by UNESCO was trying to override local and communal definitions of cultural heritage, in favour of a global concept, as Rouhani and Finlayson claim. Bonfil Batalla clearly understood how the trajectory of the concept of cultural heritage as directed by UNESCO was undermining the local meanings of cultural heritage in Mexico, and thus in his article, he critiqued a particular case of authorized discourse of heritage. Although he focused on the case of Mexico, his critique questioned the universality of heritage values in that particular context, but it can also be applied in other contexts. Bonfil Batalla worked with Indigenous communities in Mexico and his work was highly influenced by his observations on how the heritage of Indigenous communities in Mexico preceded and exists outside the Mexican authorized discourse of heritage.

I am aware that on the one hand, only people who can read Spanish would know the existence of this brief article as it was published in a somewhat obscure newsletter from a governmental organization in Mexico. On the other hand, similar articles critiquing the concept of cultural heritage may have been published in other languages rather than in English, and even before Bonfil Batalla's. In bringing this publication to the fore, my aim is to highlight that as scholars working in Heritage Studies, we are unaware of the work that is published in other languages than English, and that this should change. Unless we start incorporating the work of our colleagues published in other languages rather than English, we remain complicit in perpetuating a single-sided critical concept of heritage that has been cited *ad infinitum* during the last two decades, and has failed to integrate other views and paradigms to understand heritage.

This is not the time or space to translate Bonfil Batalla's full article, but two paragraphs are worth quoting:

### **“Instructions to enter the maze”**

The discussion regarding cultural heritage is increasingly gaining amplitude and reaches a wider audience. There is a growing number of national and international reunions where the topics relative to cultural heritage are central; specialists

from diverse disciplines intervene in a debate that only a few decades ago seemed foreign to their professional activities; it is legislated for the purpose of protecting cultural heritage, and propaganda campaigns are created to raise awareness about this problem and encourage attitudes of revalorization, appreciation and custodianship of the good that integrate our heritage. However, there is still no consensus about two fundamental questions; what does consist of the cultural heritage of a country, that is, what are the tangible or intangible goods that constitute its cultural heritage, and where does its significance reside, not only for the specialist or the connoisseur, but also for the inhabitants in general.” (Bonfil Batalla 1987: 3)

Furthermore: “The plot of cultural heritage which with we identify ourselves because we feel it and we have lived it as “ours” can be widen due to diverse circumstances; in fact, it is never the same, just because, as we have seen, culture is always in constant transformation. For example, imagine a huichol [Indigenous group who lives in many states in central Mexico] who only speaks his language and learned how to speak Spanish: without doubt, with this new linguistic tool – that new cultural objects – the huichol is in better conditions to incorporate to his heritage many elements that in a previous situation were denied. And the same applies to the opposite situation: if as Spanish-speaking Mexicans we would learn huichol, we would have access to a culture that was previously to us foreign, that of “the Others”, the huicholes. “Ours”, in terms of cultural heritage, implies that “us” share the meanings that we attribute to a set of cultural goods, either material or immaterial. In other words: a cultural object is part of our cultural heritage because we consider it ours and because it has a similar meaning for all of us” (Bonfil Batalla 1987: 7-8).”

While this sounds very familiar today, in 1987 it was the start of the critique that Critical Heritage Studies put forward back in the 2010s. Bonfil Batalla’s text is only the tip of the iceberg. Works written originally in Arabic, Mandarin, Russian and other languages may have produced similar critiques of heritage, and presented arguments about the heritage regimes present in different countries from a critical perspective, but unfortunately, they have not been translated into English (perhaps the work of Françoise Choay is an exception). As scholars we need to bring them forward so a real scholarship of Heritage Studies is formed.

Even UNESCO operates on the basis that there are six official languages within the organization. As a scholar from Mexico, who studied in Mexico, Spain and Australia and now works in the United

Kingdom, I am also aware of the fact that most universities in the Anglophone sphere only consider research published in the lingua franca of academy as worthy, while publishing in other languages do not to carry the same weight in terms of scholarship. We ask for diversity but we also punish it. It is indeed a sad state of affairs. However, as long as we continue to rely on one language to produce scholarship, we are not going to surpass the identity crisis in Heritage Studies, because we are perpetuating the same intellectual underpinning that international heritage organizations have been pushing forward. We are, in short, part of the problem. Perhaps a first step is to follow Bonfil Batalla’s emphasis on how our heritage widens when we acquire new cultural goods. Perhaps we also need to employ more translators so the global community of scholars are aware of what it is published in different languages. UNESCO publishes all its reports it produces in the six official languages, but when it comes to the academic literature on Heritage Studies, most of it is published in English. So, let’s start working within our ramparts first, before we ask UNESCO to change. I know that I am proposing a most likely improbably scenario, but it does not hurt to start trying.

So where does this discussion leave us? What are our options? In the past, as scholars, we had one ultimatum: “publish or perish”. Today, we should ask ourselves: publish where? I welcome the fact that the authors of this article have decided to publish it in a Catalan journal, because it widens the audience (alas in English). To sum up, I do not think that publishing in English is a particularly bad strategy. What I question is the fact that many authors who do not publish in English have also important things to say regarding the debate about heritage values, and the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of these amidst conflict, and we are missing out on those voices.

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# The infrastructure of humanity

## *La infraestructura de la humanitat*

Faisal Devji

In the international conventions that define it, heritage is both conceptualised as an extension of humanity and its condition of possibility or habitation. This view humanizes material and intangible culture while at the same time dehumanizing humanity. As what I am calling the infrastructure of humanity, heritage is treated in the same universalistic and therefore anti-political terms as humanity. But this effort at depoliticization is both false to history and unworkable because it routinely gives rise to violence. Might it be preferable to think of humanity in internal and particular rather than universal and so external terms as figures like Gandhi did? How might this change our understanding of heritage as something that is neither isomorphic with humanity nor apolitical?

What immediately becomes clear in Rouhani and Finlayson's essay is that taken together, the 1954 Hague Convention, the 1972 World Heritage Convention, and the 2003 Intangible Convention represent what I am calling the infrastructure of humanity. This in the sense that the heritage protected by these conventions becomes, on the one hand, a non-living or metaphorical extension of humanity. And yet, on the other hand, it also provides humanity's condition of possibility or habitation. Heritage is thus a contradictory object, one that dehumanizes humanity by extrapolating from it while humanizing the artefacts of humanity as its extension. It represents an expansion of the idea of humanity to non-human objects as well as its contraction as a life form within this larger context in which it becomes object-like.

This contradictory or perhaps paradoxical situation results from what Rouhani and Finlayson describe as the will of international organizations and the states which are their members to conceive of humanity in universal and so allegedly all-inclusive terms. But this makes it a purely external and literally inhuman subject with very little connection to the varied and historically changing ways in which humanity

has actually been conceptualised by people and societies. Such a vision is an eminently modern one, however ancient its references, because its universality is meant to rise above politics as Rouhani and Finlayson point out. The burden of their argument is that such an understanding is not only unreal but can only disguise rather than escape politics and its violence.

A good example of this is provided by humanitarianism and its deployment by colonial states, which often justified their conquest and rule over distant peoples and lands by claiming to protect their women and minorities, abolish slavery, and bring civilization. As an imperative, indeed, humanitarianism is defined by the loss of a political relationship between its agents and the victims whom they want to save. The latter, after all, must be saved precisely because they are unable speak or act for themselves, while the former are meant to answer a moral dictate which often has nothing to do with the desires of these victims. This logic is imposed on heritage as the property and habitation of humanity. It, too, must be saved often without regard to those who live within or around it.

As an abstract universality, of course, humanity itself has no political identity, since it cannot represent itself but must be represented by international organizations, states, and the conventions they ratify. In this sense humanity only exists as a victim in its own right, one that must be spoken for externally. But by trying to avoid the particularity and so politics that characterises both humanity and its heritage in actual social life, the universal idea only encourages violence. We see this the Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and the Islamic State's attack on Palmyra, both arguably efforts to push back against the externally-defined universality of humanity and its infrastructure by reclaiming their particularity and so politics. Heritage here is seen as a form of idolatry because its defence seems more important than that of actual human beings.

Islamic militancy is not the only or even the chief culprit where attacks on heritage are concerned. Nation states are likely the most important agents of destruction, whether in the name of development or to deliberately erase vestiges of a past they find distasteful because it may be associated with former conquerors, ethnic minorities, etc. In this sense heritage is always political and subject to multiple claims of ownership. Citizens are also involved, as in the UK and US, where statues have recently become sites of intense contestation. It may be Confederate statues in the American south criticised during the Black Lives Matter movement, or those of the

slaver Edward Colston in Bristol, Churchill in London, and Cecil Rhodes in Oxford criticised and sometimes defaced or demolished by anti-colonial movements like Rhodes Must Fall.

One might say with Hannah Arendt that the rights of humanity as universal category depend on the far more particular rights of citizenship without which they are meaningless (Arendt 1973: 267-302). But perhaps the more sophisticated critic of such a conception of humanity was Gandhi, who not only realised the work it did in justifying colonial rule in the form of humanitarianism but also deplored its universality as hubristic and intrinsically imperial. He also noted that defined primarily in biological terms, the universal idea of humanity deployed the same logic as racism even as it claimed to be all-inclusive. For Gandhi it was not our shared biological relations, premised as they were on excluding non-human life, but moral ideals that might be quite rare which defined humanity. In particular the duty to sacrifice rather than the right to life.

It was through sacrifice, of course, that non-violence manifested itself and in doing so made truth visible. When the Second World War broke out, Gandhi unusually wrote about his pain at the thought of London's famous buildings, such as Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament, being destroyed by the Germans. In an open letter "To Every Briton" in 1940, he argued that the only way in which the British might defeat the Nazis was by excelling them in violence. He then went on to write, "I would like you to lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity. You will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possessions. Let them take possession of your beautiful island, with your many beautiful buildings. You will give all these but neither your souls, nor your minds." (Gandhi 1999: 367).

German methods of war, he pointed out, were only an improvement of Britain's in her colonies. And since the latter could never free humanity by bettering Nazi violence, they should practice non-violence in acts of sacrifice that would prevent the Germans from ruling and cause the collapse of their unity in the process. It was a typically Gandhian claim, and what interests me about it is his invocation of what we would today call heritage. The beautiful buildings Gandhi mentioned, of course, were themselves mired in histories of violence as he well knew. But the point was to redeem them by truly human acts of non-violence. Heritage here served neither as an extension of humanity nor its habitation. It represented a world of externality which could

only be saved by humanity manifested in non-violence as a purely internal ideal.

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# Heritage values in the era of diversity: a response to 'Constructing, Deconstructing, and Reconstructing Heritage Values Amidst Conflicts' by Bijan Rouhani and Bill Finlayson

## *Els valors del patrimoni en l'era de la diversitat: una resposta a «Construir, desconstruir, i reconstruir els valors del patrimoni en mig dels conflictes» de Bijan Rouhani i Bill Finlayson*

Trinidad Rico

"Questioning the universality of heritage values is essential in an increasingly pluralistic world," concludes the article "Constructing, Deconstructing, and Reconstructing Heritage Values Amidst Conflicts". As the authors summarize this core tenet of a critical turn in heritage studies, they present some of the analytical and historiographical ways in which the idea of heritage value was transformed—or, forced to transform—over the last thirty to forty years. The examination of values in the context of conflict as a force of fragmentation and decentralization has been the zeitgeist of critical heritage studies. However, the critical examination of the specific ways in which

the field of heritage preservation has supported plurality is relatively new. What is evident is that the days of agreeing upon precisely which sets of values are to be used to define heritage, whether those proposed by Alois Riegl (1982) or the standards articulated by the Getty Conservation Institute (Avrami *et al.* 2000), are now further complicated by the project of questioning the relevance of having any kind of standards altogether.

The historiographical background in this article captures multiple strands of a post-colonial and post-modern turn that has comprised a 'critical heritage' turn. Paying particular attention to the context of conflict to deploy the different ways in which the idea of value has been challenged, the authors offer as one of their main discussion points the notion of 'negative heritage'- a conflictual site that becomes the repository of negative memory in the collective imaginary (Meskell 2002). Put simply, a heritage value challenged by different stakeholders can only indicate that the value is not universally accepted. This is not exclusively a factor of iconoclasm, as different interest groups may categorically disagree with the validity of one or all heritage values on account of particular experiences, histories, and politics. It has been over 20 years since debates about the operation of a negative heritage were explored and circulated as a disruptive analytical concept for the relatively monolithic notion of values, with significant success- Lynn Meskell's seminal article has over 800 citations at the time of writing (2002). The reliance on this analytical concept to disarm or denaturalize the hegemonic influence of a global heritage regime was not the first or only intervention of its kind but it was one of the pillars of a new tradition in the field that set itself to re-examine the channels of authority and expertise acting in the study of heritage and preservation, its institutions, and instruments.

Looking back on the ways in which heritage studies has developed over the last two decades, I would argue that addressing negative heritage was an important window into the fragmentation of the foundations of the field. And yet, identifying the inadequacies of the World Heritage framework for recognizing the complexities of heritage value was the easiest of the tasks. A values-based approach promised the ability to mediate among different interpretations, a promise that has been difficult to fulfill in the face of severe dissonance and, moreover, a promise that has put undue authority on heritage managers and experts to mediate one or more interpretations. The real challenge in contemporary heritage studies, following a crisis of value systems, resides not on recognizing the existence of conflict within values, but on filling in the gaps and rebuilding the foundations

of heritage once these ruptures are identified in order to support the study and management of heritage in sustainable and ethical ways.

With this goal in mind, the analytical framework and discourse used throughout this article are in and of themselves in a state of dissonance, representing opposing goals and orientations in the study of heritage and preservation. While the authors propose that heritage values are not static, "they are dynamic and constructed by *various actors*," (my emphasis) this article is written predominantly and even exclusively on the assumption that the professional, disciplinary, and non-expert voice in the study of heritage is a monolith. The prolific use of 'we' and 'our' to refer to all readers, experts, and arbiters of contemporary heritage is a problematic practice that requires careful examination for various reasons. First, the use of 'we' to assume compliance and acquiescence is one of the rhetorical devices through which a hegemonic global heritage discourse has been able to operate so freely. Second, the use of 'we' as an assumption of positionality is also responsible for overriding the voices of others and, as such, remains a powerful arm of universalization and homogenization in heritage. An argument presented in such terms suggests that its proponents are not aware of the ways in which universalism is concretized in theory and practice through the coordination of different instruments, not least through language and text. This is precisely how a *patrimonial regime* as a force of making meaning (and subjects) becomes so successful (Hafstein 2018; Hafstein and Skrydstrup 2020).

Calls for identifying the mechanisms that enabled universalization, including languages and the associated categories that they create, signaled the emergence of a unique set of concerns distinct from the main goals of pure conservationist or preservationist orientations. The emergence of heritage studies as distinct from these standards-oriented practices was not a project relegated to identifying its roots in Eurocentric voices and instruments (Byrne 1991), but also a field that armed itself over time with the tools needed to identify and disarm what was coined as the Authorized Heritage Discourse (usually referred to as the AHD) that empowers a global heritage regime at the expense of other actual and potential ontologies and epistemologies (Smith 2006). As Rouhani and Finlayson partly address in their article, this precipitated a process of disentanglement of local heritage debates from global networks of production of knowledge that had exercised power to reduce situated experiences to pre-determined sets of values. Equally important and intertwined with this redirection in the study



of heritage and preservation is a denaturalization of an expert voice that includes, in no small measure, efforts to de-privilege academic discourse and debates that can encode and decode value systems.

As the field moved away from the centrality of expert practitioners (with claims to objectivity by connoisseurs and conservators) to a public-facing and public-serving field (an embrace of subjectivity through post-colonial orientations), the concept of the stakeholder brought complexity to the designation of stewardship beyond the expectations of universality. In practice, the shift towards increasing inclusivity in heritage preservation through the space created for the stakeholder has proved to be challenging, raising more refined ethical questions. As the influential Getty Conservation Institute's guidelines propose (Mason 2002), local and non-expert voices can be included in the work of heritage preservation through the process of stakeholder consultation that accompanies the standardization and ranking of often conflicting values. A distinction between *inside* and *outside* stakeholders in this proposed approach stems from the awareness that some stakeholders are already 'at the table' where values were identified, assessed and ranked, while other legitimate stakeholders are not present, joining the value-based assessment project only after values have already been defined. Anticipating absent stakeholders and their willingness to agree to predetermined values is an unresolved obstacle for stakeholder consultation.

I have already argued that a strong loyalty to expert authority in this model may be the reason why many of these institutional methodologies are not recognized as being particularly post-colonial in their approach to alternative and marginalized values and voices (Rico 2017). When the operational languages and the platforms for the use of this approach are set up by an expert elite, the approach remains expert-driven. Furthermore, I have argued that recognizing a 'local expert' or 'non-disciplinary expert' as a stakeholder who blurs these distinctions opens the study and practice of heritage preservation to include new values, new languages, and new agendas beyond the institutional and disciplinary impositions of a standard. More recently, this has been an important part of defining heritage methods in ethical and sustainable ways, including concerns with rhetoric, discourses, and dominant languages (Smith and Waterton 2012; Lafrenz-Samuels and Rico 2015; King 2024). On the latter, under-represented scholars are now pushing back on the dominance of English and other European languages in the linguistic and definitional landscape of heritage that influence value typologies. How a

language is spoken and the assumptions that it generates in academia and heritage management are practices entangled with patriarchal ways of caring for heritage (Vargas-Downing 2024).

There are various battlefronts where the use of language in heritage needs to be reassessed in order to fall in line with a commitment to diversity. Some of these are long-term projects aimed at changing paradigms in heritage management in more dramatic ways and have logistical and financial challenges (for example, the dominance of English language in the workings of global heritage organizations (Rico and Baird 2024), or even in the fact that I am writing this article in English in order to respond to the authors instead of using my native Spanish). However, an immediate and relatively simple shift begins 'at home' in every day academic discourse with the project of dismantling the assumption that 'we' are a coordinated and cohesive group of writers, practitioners, and advocates that, in some way, speak for the interests of an even more diverse non-disciplinary expert circle. Access to policy, texts, and institutional platforms gives access to powerful decision-making tools, therefore, the power to weaponize heritage exists within scholars and scholarship as much as it does within the realm of the perpetrators, terrorists and iconoclasts. In fact, as Mirjam Brusius and I have argued recently for the specific use of documentation instruments and archives, academics and the legacies that they empower may be even more problematic than the perpetrators (Brusius and Rico 2023) due to their ability to dominate the languages, instruments, and institutions that give credence to subjective heritage assessments. It is urgent for scholars in this field who adhere to the critical examination of global heritage to revisit the ways in which their privileged access to heritage knowledge presents an ethical dilemma.

To conclude, many if not all scholars would agree that ideas of heritage have morphed over the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, shifting a field initially concerned with the interests of the few, then co-opted to be put in the service of the nation and, finally, a field more attentive to the work of advocating and reflecting the concerns of broader and, often, under-represented groups. But despite its evident historical trajectory, these shifts do not reflect a sequential or evolutionary progression. Rather, these three foci co-exist and operate concurrently in the study, management, and mobilization of heritage value today. Against this backdrop, debates and initiatives concerned with diversifying the field have been on the rise. Some scholars and practitioners seek to find the best approaches to support this reform, integrating diversity, equity, inclusion, and access to heritage resources within

the existing structures of heritage management at various scales. A smaller number of scholars and practitioners seeks to reveal the *mechanisms* through which these very structures and resources relate to the exclusion of diverse views, voices, and knowledge, which includes in no small part challenging the dominant forms of expertise, methodology, and training that have shaped the field this far. I react in this response, among other things, to Rouhani and Finlayson's opening claim that "the value of protecting cultural heritage is a basic assumption of our modern time..." a statement that stands in direct opposition to the goals of questioning the relevance of universality, and a reminder to resist the trappings of a heritage rhetoric already inherited.

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