

# Reviews

## *Many Voices, One Vision: The Early Years of the World Heritage Convention*

Christina Cameron and Mechtild Rössler,  
Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, ISBN: 1138248088,  
309 pp., Hb \$149.95.

Reviewed by Paolo Bocci

This book examines the first three decades of the World Heritage Convention, arguably 'the most visible activity of UNESCO' in the past fifty years (244). The book focuses on the tensions and debates that have informed the conceptualisation and implementation of the treaty. The authors draw on UNESCO archive research and interviews with forty UNESCO representatives who directly participated in this enterprise. Both authors have professional familiarity with UNESCO's World Heritage: Cameron was the Head of the Canadian delegation for almost two decades (1990–2008) and Chairperson in 1990 and 2008, while Rössler is the Director of the World Heritage Center. The book is at its best when the authors detail with precision the controversies arising from the mandate to protect biodiversity and cultural heritage, which acquires a relevance beyond the management of UNESCO sites in the current time of global ecological crisis.

The World Heritage Convention was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 16 November 1972. Its mission has been to identify and protect sites of natural and cultural heritage 'that are absolutely superb, unique and irreplaceable' (28). To narrate the evolution of this treaty until the year 2000, when 'a major reform agenda [was] adopted by the World Heritage Committee' (xiv), the first two chapters offer an in-depth rendition of behind-the-scenes political manoeuvring among UNESCO delegates. Chapters Three to Five provide case studies in several continents (from Angkor in Cambodia, Kahuzi-Biega National Park in DRC, to the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador) to examine the competing criteria and rationales justifying the inscription of a new site. The final

chapter offers an overall view of the relevance of this treaty at the turn of the century. While many of the discussions described in the book are motivated by the perceived imperative to preserve, it is interesting to note that the genesis for this book is itself the result of this concern. The foreword explains how at the 2005 Paris symposium the then Director-General of UNESCO and Assistant Director-General for Culture 'encouraged the academic community to document the history of UNESCO [...] and the voices of the past [...] before they fade and disappear' (xiii).

A preoccupation with the vanishing past, which informed disciplines such as anthropology and folklore, and continues in the latter, is but one of the foundational tropes of Western colonialism that the book, though exposing it in some of its fundamental contradictions, never explicitly addresses. Here lies its greatest contribution and limitation: it provides a wealth of material about Western intellectual and political imperial arrogance but seems reluctant to acknowledge the comprehensive anthropological work done on this very topic (e.g. Haraway 1990).

The authors proceed with rigor and clarity when they narrate the delicate negotiations of key concepts underpinning the treaty. There are many fascinating moments that expose the tension between the categories of nature and culture – interrogating how 'cultural' a 'natural site' can be, or the divergence between the criteria of humanised landscape versus wilderness for defining a 'natural site'. The book shows how UNESCO delegates' attempts to define and use concepts in the Treaty such as 'authenticity', 'universality', 'mankind' and 'man' have resulted in making these notions more problematic. It is worth noting that the latter two concepts might not purely be anachronistic expressions of what social scientists now refer to with 'humankind' and 'humans', but rather manifestations of a gendered, Eurocentric privilege. This is apparent in the appendix and in-group photographs throughout the book showing that the vast majority of UNESCO delegates in the studied period were white males.



Through the abundance of information about the inner working of UNESCO, this book responds to recent calls for ‘historical veracity and [...] lay historicities’ away from what Brumann (2014, 180) described as ‘purely deconstructive approach’ in heritage studies (181). When read with contemporary anthropological work in heritage studies (Labadi 2013; Meskell 2014), *Many Voices, One Vision* provides a powerful reminder of the always contested political mobilisation of ideas about nature and culture in the contexts of heritage, conservation and social life writ large.

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### ***Haunting Images: A Cultural Account of Selective Reproduction in Vietnam***

Tine M. Gammeltoft, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014, ISBN: 978-0-5202-7843-1, 336pp., Pb £27.95.

Reviewed by Katharine Dow

*Haunting Images* is a quietly powerful study of the use of ultrasound as a prenatal screening technology in Vietnam. It is also a major contribution to the study of selective reproductive technologies, which Tine Gammeltoft has recently been developing with Ayo Wahlberg. The book is the product of a three-

year collaborative project that Gammeltoft carried out with Vietnamese colleagues and it centres on thirty ‘case studies’ of women they met during the project. In this deftly wrought ethnography, which is rich in poignant detail, Gammeltoft argues against the Western assumption that selective reproductive technologies are primarily about individual choice. Instead, she maintains that, in Vietnam, people’s reproductive choices are shaped more by a striving for belonging than for autonomy. Importantly, the proliferation of ultrasound monitoring in Vietnam places those who use it in a position of having to work out not only how to act on the information it provides but also who they are. As she puts it, ‘Existentially extreme predicaments conjure questions of ethical subjectivity’ (9).

This ethnography provides a compelling illustration of the uncertainty that knowledge can create. The logic of having multiple ultrasounds during a pregnancy is at first glance obvious – prospective parents will want to know as much as possible about the health of their future child. Yet, the information that ultrasound can provide is not always conclusive. As in many other countries, it is commonly assumed in Vietnam that if any foetal anomalies are detected then the mother will undergo a termination of the pregnancy. As Gammeltoft explains, although screening and abortion present profound moral dilemmas for Vietnamese people, there is a strong sense that it is best to avoid bringing a disabled child into the world. The women she and her colleagues spoke to characterised the life of a mother with a disabled child as one of constant frustration. In this context, abortion becomes a moral choice that protects both the unborn child and the family from a life of constant struggle, marginalisation and dependency. Further, ultrasound is promoted by the state as a means for Vietnamese women to demonstrate that they are modern mothers and good citizens.

This search for knowledge takes place against the tragic backdrop of the continuing aftermath of the Second Indochina War. One of the key questions that pregnant women and their families have is why they have ended up conceiving a child with foetal anomalies, which of course medicine cannot answer. This is an urgent question given Vietnamese citizens’ awareness of the continuing effects of Agent Orange on the population’s health, including, many believe, their reproductive health. *Haunting Images* provides a stark reminder of the long-term effects of both conflict and environmental degradation on reproductive futures. It also picks up on a rich thread in the analysis of prenatal screening technologies that was

pioneered by Rosalind Petchesky (1987) and Rayna Rapp (2000), by giving a sense of the complex interactions between local knowledge, medical authority, individual hopes and collective needs, as well as the national aspirations and environmental conditions that shape those moral dilemmas. It therefore has relevance beyond anthropology, as it could inform medical and bioethical practice concerning selective reproductive technologies and activism around patient choice and disability rights in Vietnam and elsewhere.

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