The map is not the territory: global ordering in heritage governance

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Abstract
This paper considers how an important instrument of global heritage governance, the World Heritage Convention, became just that—globalised and governing—through an analysis of a material artefact: the UNESCO World Heritage map. The map names only those States Parties that have signed the Convention. Thus, like other ordering technologies such as lists and registers, the map introduces yet another scheme of classification through which global heritage governance is effected. With only four states missing, it now also uncannily resembles an ordinary map of the world. UNESCO represents this near-universal membership of the Convention as a triumph. Scrutiny of the map’s absences, however, evokes more ambivalent precedents: of states’ maps that deliberately omit other states they do not recognise, or the spaces in colonial cartography left provisionally blank for territory yet to be acquired. By foregrounding a topographic rather than political representation of the world, the map suggests the possibility of alternative configurations of global heritage, yet ultimately reproduces the notion of coherent nation-states bounded by borders. The World Heritage map thus allows us to explore the tension between the practical logic that drives agents of heritage globalisation, and the geopolitical and historical specificities of states and regions.

Introduction
In that Empire, the craft of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a Single Province covered the space of an entire City, and the Map of the Empire itself an entire Province. In the course of Time, these Extensive maps were found somehow wanting, and so the College of Cartographers evolved a Map of the Empire that was of the same Scale as the Empire and that coincided with it point for point. (Borges cited in Latour & Weibel 2002, p. 671)

A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness. (Korzybski [1958] 1994, p. 58)

While there has been much critical attention paid to States’ ‘rush to inscribe’ sites on the World Heritage List (Meskell 2012), there has been less attention to UNESCO’s own continuous drive for states to enter the Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 1972) (hereafter Convention) itself. The diplomatic, economic and technical resources devoted to inscription attest to States’ perception of World Heritage inscription as a—rare—internationally recognised cultural attribute of their international status (Lake 2014, p. 250). This in turn highlights the remarkable success of the World Heritage List itself as a valorising device (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006; Kowalski 2011, p. 87). Yet while UNESCO and the World Heritage secretariat appear
concerned about the ever-increasing size of the World Heritage List (Bokova 2012; Rao 2010), they have clearly expressed their wish for the Convention to become ‘truly universal’. Despite the deployment of the World Heritage Convention in recent discourses of sustainable development, international cooperation and peace-building (Rudolff & Buckley 2016; James & Winter 2017), it appears to be as much the institutional logics of heritage globalisation and the durable concept of ‘universality’ that drive these processes.

The UNESCO World Heritage map (Figure 1) has been produced annually by UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre since at least 2002. Aside from a few geographical labels (oceans, the equator, and the tropics), the map indexes only the names of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention and coloured, numbered dots representing the 1052 World Heritage sites. Designed by National Geographic Maps and reproducing their familiar aesthetic, its combination of topographical detail and very light border delineation foregrounds a sense of World Heritage sites as part of a global rather than international geography. The map is fringed by photographs of particular World Heritage sites, with a larger photograph forming the backdrop of the title. This title image features a World Heritage site associated with the location of the forthcoming World Heritage Committee meeting. Its reverse contains text combining the World Heritage List, the List of World Heritage in danger and the list of States Parties, and also serves as a key to the coloured dots on the map.

As such, the World Heritage map is in one sense simply a cartographic representation of the lists maintained by the World Heritage Centre. Yet the fact that it has come to resemble an ordinary physical map of the world draws attention to how the territory subject to World Heritage governance has come to cover almost the entire earth. This apparent verisimilitude obscures the fact that in its current edition the names of four UNESCO Member States—Nauru; Somalia; Timor-Leste1 and Tuvalu—are missing.

In this paper, I look at how the World Heritage map both represents and contributes to how a global heritage regime—the UNESCO World Heritage regime—exercises its governing and ordering effects. Maps have significant potential as governance instruments because they not only represent but shape worldviews and norms (Branch 2013). Yet studies of global governance have to date neglected consideration of maps as governance technologies, while the emerging field of ‘critical cartography’ has yet to consider maps produced for global governance. While maps are also familiar to heritage practice—delineating boundaries of sites and therefore
management and governance regimes—they have seldom if ever been approached critically in heritage studies. In particular, I consider how the absences and presences represented in the map reflect the universalising tendencies of global heritage governance, and struggles for social justice between and within states.

I first consider the role of maps in imagining the World Heritage regime. I then consider how maps such as the World Heritage map contribute to global ordering, and in particular how they achieve global governance effects. I finally consider how the production of the map reveals the practical logics of heritage globalisation, and use particular examples to illustrate how the map’s absences and presences can provide insight into the interaction between international heritage governance and states’ and communitie’s historical and social conditions.

**Mapping world heritage**

Maps are part of both World Heritage representations and practice. World Heritage sites are in part created through the maps included in their nomination dossier that define site boundaries and buffer zones, and set in place management hierarchies. Maps are also indispensable practical tools for the daily management of sites, used to identify and define site features, to manage and orient visitors, and to guide management actions. Yet while the World Heritage map has no such apparent practical function, it is part of the suite of devices used to represent the World Heritage regime and thus to make an abstract global governance system more concrete and knowable. In this sense it serves an important function in helping secure the global recognition that is an important dimension to World Heritage governance: in other words, the recognition sought by states as they seek to have sites nominated to the World Heritage List, and thus to take or commit prospectively to conservation actions (Askew 2010; Isar 2011).

The Convention is silent on maps, rather establishing the World Heritage List as its main ordering principle. Lists figure both in global ordering processes and in representing the global (Staeheli 2012). There has been recent interest in the World Heritage List—among other heritage lists and registers—as a governance technology (Schuster 2002; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006; Hafstein 2009; Askew 2010; Harrison 2016; Severo 2017). Yet as it has grown, the World Heritage list itself is increasingly being imagined as a map, both via the printed World Heritage map and the use of interactive maps on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre’s website. One effect of such maps is to draw attention to imbalances and gaps in a way that lists do not. While a list of geographically located items can form a self-contained context for all that it contains (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006)—and thus drawing attention away from what it doesn’t contain—a map can display those same items, yet foreground spaces, absences and patterns of distribution as significant additional features in themselves.

**Maps as (post)colonial technologies**

Maps have been implicated as part of colonial, post-colonial and decolonisation projects; and indeed, so has World Heritage governance. At the height of the colonial period in the nineteenth century, cartographers intentionally left unexplored regions blank (Branch 2013, p. 85), both reflecting and fuelling the mindset that enabled colonial invasion and dispossession. Writing in 1988—and recalling that at that point states such as Japan, Austria, and Indonesia were yet to enter the Convention—Parent (1988, p. 32) likened ‘the blank spaces which appear on the maps’ that represented states yet to have signed the Convention to ‘the gaps which indicated terra incognito in early atlases’. Despite the concern with conservation that underpinned it, this perspective evokes Byrne’s (2008) claim that World Heritage is a colonising activity. Yet the appearance of different ‘blank spaces’ led to the development of the Global Strategy for a Balanced and Representative List in 1994 and initiatives such as the Pacific World Heritage Action Plan 2010-2015, which have drawn attention to geographic ‘gaps’ and ‘imbalances’ in a post-colonial sense, seeking to redress Eurocentric outcomes in the distribution of World Heritage sites. Here too Turtinen (2000, n.p.) argues that ‘World Heritage has thus become an activity of global mapping, where gaps and blanks should be filled in’.
Mapping global governance

It is becoming increasingly important to consider how global governance regimes exercise their effects, both as agents of and attenuating factors to globalisation. There is increasing recognition in international relations that multilateral institutions have norm-making power independent of their constituent state members, including the power to set the agenda, and to identify and define issues of concern. Barnett and Finnemore (2004, pp. 6-7) argue that many international organisations’ hold classificatory power to define both problems and solutions, and to suggest what and who may be involved in arriving at those solutions. Carpenter (2010, p. 205) adopts the term ‘gatekeepers’ to suggest that ‘major international organisations have the power either to lend credibility, brand value, and resources to an emergent “issue,” or to block its entry into a transnational issue pool’ and that this ‘constitutes a powerful form of global governance’.

Maps produced for global governance have played a prominent yet hitherto critically unremarked role in these processes, helping to define, elevate and imply global governance responses to particular issue areas. Such maps can order global spaces according to topic areas in such a way as to suggest certain actions or to justify institutional legitimacy and relevance. Prominent examples include climate change (for example, maps showing coastal impacts of projected future sea level rise) and health (for example, mapping the global distribution of malaria: See Figure 2).

![Figure 2: Map showing global distribution of malaria (Source: Wikimedia Commons <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/d5/Malaria_map.PNG/800px-Malaria_map.PNG>)](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/d5/Malaria_map.PNG/800px-Malaria_map.PNG)

Part of the efficacy of maps in doing so comes through their universalising and naturalising capacity (Wood & Krygier 2009). Yet, as Branch argues, the ‘capability of maps to construct, reflect, and reify particular worldviews shapes social and political interaction’ (Branch 2013, p. 39). Harrison (2016, p. 198) draws on Bowker and Star (1999) to argue that lists are modes of ordering. I do so similarly in regard to how the World Heritage map is an ordering technology within global governance, displaying the states and places within its ambit and concurrently implying those not represented as somehow ‘missing’ or blank.

Mapping absence

The role of maps in world making and ordering is considered both in histories of cartography and in the emergence of ‘critical cartography’. Cartography is both a way of knowing the world (Crampton & Krygier 2006) and of making the world. Branch (2013) argues that mapping was vitally important to the emergence of the post-Westphalian state system. Historicising the emergence of mapping, he traces how the maps of Europe recognised the concept of territorial sovereignty a century before it became part of the political reality (Branch 2013, p.
87); a remarkable instance of the empirical world coming to resemble the map, rather than the other way around.

What is absent and present on maps can affect what actions are thinkable. Above I referred to the colonial associations evoked by blank spaces in maps. Intentional absences on maps may otherwise speak to states’ position on other states’ claims to territory, or even of their fundamental legitimacy. A clear example here are maps produced by and for Arab states that do not label Israel, and vice versa (Klinghoffer 2006, p. 36; Leuenberger 2012; Wallach 2011). In this context, erasure of such a symbol of sovereignty and statehood can be seen as a form of symbolic denigration. In its extreme form, this shares roots with the tendencies that lead to the targeting of cultural heritage during conflict (Isakhan & González Zarandona 2017).

**Universalism**

The World Heritage map demonstrates how the globalisation of heritage governance is governed by practical institutional logics. The Convention is one of most successful multilateral treaties by number of states’ parties. Despite this, in its annual report of activities to the Committee, increasing the membership of the Convention remains the number one metric by which the UNESCO secretariat, the World Heritage Centre, is measured (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2016b). Presenting to the 40th World Heritage Committee meeting in Istanbul, the Director of the World Heritage Centre warmly welcomed and congratulated South Sudan’s then-recent ratification, but nevertheless noted of the African states, ‘There’s one missing, which is Somalia … I encourage Somalia to ratify and I’m also calling on all the remaining countries to ratify this Convention to make it fully universal’ (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2016c).

The reference to universalism here needs to be understood in the context of the history of this central, yet loaded, concept in World Heritage. It is embedded in the foundational ordering principle for the Convention, the concept of ‘outstanding universal value’. Yet it has been heavily critiqued as a notion that reveals how the Convention reflects a particular 20th century modernity. From charges of Eurocentrism veiled as universality levelled at the League of Nations structures for intellectual cooperation (Titchen 1995) to more recent claims that ‘the discourse of universality is itself a legitimising strategy for the [predominantly Western] values and nature of heritage’ (Smith 2006, pp. 98-9), universalism has had an awkward legacy in a field increasingly influenced by the anthropological championing of cultural relativism (Brumann 2016, p. 246). Participants in World Heritage have long noted the conceptual conflict between the impulses of universalism and representivity or diversity (Musitelli 2002). Even where universalism was deployed unproblematically, it was seen as threatened by a lack of balance in the World Heritage List (Strasser 2002, p. 225). Yet the results of ongoing attempts to rectify this imbalance—most notably the 1994 Global Strategy—have yielded little progress (Steiner & Frey 2011).

Here perhaps lies part of the drive to seek ‘universal ratification’ of the Convention: to redefine universality on the basis of states rather than sites, and thus as an international rather than truly global metric. There is also the possibility of achieving a multilateral first: universal ratification of a treaty by all possible states. While other multilateral treaties currently have more adherents—the Vienna Convention for the protection of the ozone layer (2017) has 197 states, for example—the Convention already includes Palestine and the Holy See (Vatican) as members, often the stumbling blocks to the universal ratification of other treaties. In addition, no states yet to sign are indisposed toward the Convention, unlike, for example, the United States in relation to the otherwise universally ratified UN Convention on the rights of the child (Attiah 2014). Universalism is not the only driver toward recruiting additional states to join the Convention. States’ membership is also a basic form of ‘input legitimacy’ (Kjaer 2004, p. 12) for multilateral organisations, while a more prosaic but important consideration are the increased membership dues and other sources of funding that members bring to intergovernmental organisations.²
The practical logics of heritage globalisation

It should not be surprising therefore to find that a focus on increasing the number of member states structures the working priorities of multilateral organisations’ officials. UNESCO was recently involved in World Heritage events in each of the remaining UNESCO member states yet to sign the Convention—Tuvalu, Nauru, and Somalia. In 2015, UNESCO held a ‘World Heritage awareness workshops’ in Nauru and Tuvalu, specifically noting that each was ‘one of only [then] 4 UNESCO Member States remaining that has not ratified the World Heritage Convention’ (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2015b; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2015c). It is interesting to consider how not being a signatory to the Convention is framed here not so much as a sovereign decision but rather, teleologically, as a stage in a state’s development. Thus the workshop aims not only at ‘consultation’ but ‘building capacity of the Nauru authorities and various stakeholders in topics including the process and procedures of the 1972 World Heritage Convention’ (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2015b, my emphasis). Here we see ‘how states have been “taught” to have World Heritage’ (Turtinen 2000, n.p.). Such events can seemingly elicit states’ declaration of intent to join the Convention. A workshop held in Mogadishu, Somalia in June 2016, sought to highlight benefits of the Convention in the context of peace-building and sustainable development. At the workshop, Somali officials announced the government’s intention to ratify the Convention, and including this in the government’s two year development plan. A presidential adviser recommended forming a ‘task force’ to accelerate the ratification process, with which UNESCO is working closely ‘to provide the information and guidance necessary’ for ratification (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2016a).

‘No opinion whatsoever...’?

In light of these considerations, the World Heritage map might be viewed as an innocent artefact, merely a record of processes that themselves ought to be the focus of any critique. Yet critical cartography asserts that maps are inherently political (Crampton & Krygier 2006). UNESCO’s World Heritage map reveals anxieties that acknowledge this, with the following fine print disclaimer:

The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever ... concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Here it is useful to consider the implicit and unintended political work of the World Heritage map. By leaving blank the names of states yet to have joined the Convention, the World Heritage map is suggesting incompleteness, and thus a need for action. Indeed, its near-completeness impels action even more fervently, constructing missing states as outliers. This was the clear implication of the World Heritage Centre Director’s singling out of Somalia in Africa as ‘missing’.

As noted above, absence and presence on maps is a symbol of statehood or its disputation and denial. By ordering the globe according to states’ Convention membership status, the map implicitly equates membership with a familiar trapping of sovereignty. For this reason, the absence of a number of states may evoke unfortunate—though obviously unintended—parallels. Where one might expect to find Timor-Leste, the map closely resembles the period of Indonesian invasion and occupation (1975-2002), with the border of the tiny half-island state barely discernible, as Indonesia continues as an unbroken archipelago from Java to West Papua as it did under Suharto’s brutal dictatorship. Similarly, South Sudan, the world’s newest state, had been visually re-subsumed into Sudan to its north until it was labelled in the most recent World Heritage map following its March 2016 ratification of the Convention, its light border indistinct against the map’s representation of its sandy topography. Despite the push to improve World Heritage representation from Pacific Island Countries and Small Island Developing States, on the World Heritage map Nauru and Tuvalu remain unlabelled specks in the Pacific Ocean.
In a sense, by depicting non-signatory states in this way, the World Heritage map contributes to these states being symbolically victimised. The Convention is based on the principle that by joining, states gain practical access to a multilateral system of technical and financial support, as well as avenues of international cooperation and peace-building, this latter point being emphasised by recent studies of heritage diplomacy (Winter 2015). Yet, as UNESCO itself acknowledges, these states’ obstacles to joining the Convention are connected with low state capacity, itself a legacy of their difficult histories or isolation. In the case of Timor-Leste and South Sudan, clear presence on an international map is a symbol of statehood won through bloody independence struggles, which is only now being recognised on the World Heritage map. Somalia, whose capacity to self-govern has been continuously threatened by conflict, remains an unlabelled expanse on the Horn of Africa. Perhaps most poignantly, Tuvalu may yet be the first state to be removed from all maps—physical and political—due to rising sea levels caused by climate change.

**Topographies and borders of world heritage**

Focusing entirely on absences however risks neglecting the significance of how the presence of States Parties is represented on the World Heritage map. States Parties are clearly labelled, the list of sites on the reverse side is organised by State Party, and while states’ borders are often indistinct, they are—with two acknowledged exceptions—presented unproblematically. By reproducing the notion of coherent nation states, the map obscures representations of culture, particularly indigenous, minority and migrant forms, that exist in multiplicity and flow within and across states’ borders (Lafrenz Samuels 2016, p. 361; Byrne 2016). This, of course, is a criticism not of the map per se, so much as its role as a continuing representation of the state-centred nature of the Convention’s practices (Askew 2010, p. 20; Logan 2013, p. 154).

Yet, above I noted how the map’s aesthetic foregrounds a global rather than international geography, visually linking World Heritage sites to each other and the earth more prominently as a global, rather than international, assemblage. The colouring and shading of space on the map topographically rather than by political dominion further attenuates the international nature of the map. In some cases, such as Italy, India and of course island states, this highlights how some borders are strongly associated with natural features such as mountains and seas. Yet it also suggests the arbitrariness of other borders, particularly via the distribution and arrangement of conglomerations of natural World Heritage sites that share geographic proximity or similarity. The World Heritage regime incorporates a mechanism and classification to recognise this formally: transnational sites which may be contiguous or non-contiguous (transboundary or serial properties, in the language of the Operational Guidelines (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2015 paragraph 134-9)). In other cases, such as in relation to natural heritage sites in sub-Saharan Africa, the topographic map highlights linkages between sites and spaces not formally recognised as ‘transnational sites’ by drawing attention to their proximity and shared topography in a way that a list could not. Indeed, these linkages play out in recent Committee decisions such as those relating to Lake Turkana National Parks in Kenya, threatened by hydroelectric and agricultural development in neighbouring Ethiopia. In this sense, the map can subtly challenge borders and the primacy of states by drawing spaces and sites into alternative arrangements suggested by riparian, geological and ecological linkages.

**Conclusion**

Winter has noted that ‘in their most strident form, critical approaches to heritage can even be anti-heritage’ (Winter 2013, p. 533). The UNESCO World Heritage map might seem an unfair target of critique: it is a document that could have looked very different had the World Heritage concept not gained traction. Ultimately it records the remarkable global spread of a valuable global conservation instrument. Yet this in itself should invite consideration of how global heritage governance came into being and how it continues to exercise its effects. Here I have demonstrated that the map is both a representation of and agent in this process. Like the
World Heritage List, the World Heritage map operates as yet another scheme of classification in global heritage governance. By withholding a fundamental symbolic attribute of a state’s existence prior to ratification, the World Heritage map implicitly motivates states to join the Convention to literally put them on the map. In this way, the map’s global ordering performs a governance function while also revealing an institutional logic of expansionism in global heritage. In doing so, it unintentionally echoes earlier maps, both the blank spaces of colonial-era maps and maps that preceded some of the bloodiest independence struggles in the late-twentieth-century. The map reinforces the notion of a coherent, territorial nation-state, and thus obscures cultural forms that do not align so neatly with states’ territories. Yet its use of topographic detail highlights distributions and arrangements of natural World Heritage sites that suggest the arbitrariness of some states’ borders. The Convention may indeed soon be ‘fully universal’, yet to claim this is also to mistake the map for the territory.

Bibliography


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Endnotes

1 On 31 January 2017 Timor-Leste became the 193rd State Party to the World Heritage Convention, however this status had not yet been reflected in the 2016/17 World Heritage map.

2 It is doubtful however as to whether many recent States Parties and the remaining states yet to sign the Convention would be net financial contributors, once the cost of pre-ratification workshops and likely assistance requests is taken into account. This foregrounds the other motivations for seeking their membership.

3 The key in the 2015-16 map notes the indeterminate status of borders between India and Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir, and between Sudan and South Sudan.