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Described, Inscribed, Written Off: Heritagisation as (Dis)connection

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Preamble

In 2011, UNESCO inscribed the fourteenth-century Citadel of the Hồ Dynasty in Vietnam's Thanh Hòa Province on the World Heritage List, thereby both recognising and rewarding Vietnam's efforts in conserving the archaeological site, as well as obliging it to meet UNESCO's official conservation standards. In an article titled 'Hồ Citadel the Site of a Modern Conflict' in the English-language newspaper *Việt Nam News* of 8 June 2014, Deputy Director of the Centre for Conservation of the Hồ Dynasty Citadel World Heritage, Nguyễn Xuân Toán, lamented that local people continued to 'build houses and other civil works' in the area, in violation of conservation regulations, and in spite of awareness-raising meetings. The district authorities do not wish to forbid construction of houses within certain limits, but have a plan for the gradual removal of cultivation fields from the site, and according to journalist Hồng Thúy, local people would be happy to move if they receive adequate compensation. The conflict referred to in the title is, therefore, not just a conflict between the Conservation Centre and local people, but between the centre and the district authorities, with Mr Toán complaining that 'the Centre for Conservation of the Hồ Dynasty Citadel World Heritage does not have the authority to mete out punishments on violators when

they detect infringement of the site'. Mr Toán is supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Hanoi: 'Management and preservation at the site will not improve unless the centre's power is enhanced, said Deputy Director of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism's Cutural Heritage Department, Nguyễn Quốc Hùng'.[1] The news report construes this as a conflict between two government agencies — district authorities and heritage management authorities — but the conflict is over the power to evict local inhabitants whose livelihood practices are, since 2011, branded 'an infringement of the site'; local people are enemies of conservation.

Introduction

The 'heritage conflict' reported above suggests that the proclamation of heritage affects people living with or close to that heritage in various ways; it might result in their dispossession of land, objects, or the product of their labour. Since the 1993 inscription of the former imperial capital of Huế on the World Heritage List, Vietnam has made great efforts to have its cultural heritage recognised by UNESCO as world heritage. Belatedly, beginning with its monumental heritage (Huế town, Hội An town, Mỹ Sơn temple complex, the Imperial Citadel of Thăng Long, Citadel of the Hồ Dynasty), natural heritage (Hạ Long Bay, and Phong Nha Kẻ Bàng National Park), and mixed heritage (Tràng An Landscape Complex), Vietnam has more recently focused on its 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' (abbreviated by UNESCO as 'ICH'). In 1994, Vietnam hosted UNESCO's first ICH 'expert meeting', on the cultures of ethnic minorities and of Huế. Even before the ICH lists were formalised, in 2003, the year of the ICH Convention, *nhã nhạc* court music from Huế was recognised as a cultural treasure, and in 2005 the gong music (*không gian văn hóa cồng chiêng*) of ethnic minorities in Vietnam's Central Highlands. In addition, since 2009, Quan họ, Ca trù, Xoan and Đơn ca tài tử, Ví and Giặm singing, and the Gióng Festival of Phù Đổng and Sóc temples, and the Worship of the Hùng Kings in Phú Thọ have been inscribed.

1 vietnamnews.vn/in-bai/255933/ho-citadel-the-site-of-a-modern-conflict.htm, accessed 16 November 2014.

In this chapter, I propose to look at Vietnam's rapid heritagisation since 1993 in terms of connection and disconnection with reference to the inspirational ideas about spectacularisation in Guy Debord's pamphlet *The Society of the Spectacle* (1994). For Debord: 'The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images' (Debord 1994:4).[2] For Debord, modern industrial society is 'fundamentally spectaclist' in the sense that the spectacle has become autonomous in two senses. On the one hand, spectacularisation is based on the separation between spheres of production and consumption, which is akin to Marx's alienation of workers from the product of their labour, leading Debord to argue that the spectacle is a visual reflection of the social order. On the other hand, spectacle refers to the separation between reality and image, between thing and sign, where the image becomes the end-product of the 'dominant system of production', and where the spectacle is 'the visual reflection of the ruling economic order', and 'aims at nothing other than itself' (Debord 2002:§14). But at the same time the separation gets blurred, because 'when the real world is transformed into mere images, mere images become real beings', and 'wherever *representation* becomes independent, the spectacle regenerates itself' (Debord 2002:§18, original italics) as the visualisation, self-indulgence and enjoyment of power.

For Debord:

> *Separation* is the alpha and omega of the spectacle. The institutionalization of the social division of labor in the form of class divisions had given rise to an earlier, religious form of contemplation: the mythical order with which every power has always camouflaged itself. Religion justified the cosmic and ontological order that corresponded to the interests of the masters, expounding and embellishing everything their societies *could not deliver*. In this sense, all separate power has been spectacular … The general separation of worker and product tends to eliminate any direct personal communication between the producers and any comprehensive sense of what they are producing. With the increasing accumulation of separate products and the increasing concentration of the productive

2 Debord's book contains 221 numbered paragraphs of varying length — from one sentence to half a page — and it is to these paragraphs that I refer. There exist many different English translations of this book, which is notoriously difficult to translate. I use two different translations (Debord 1994, 2002).

> process, communication and comprehension are monopolized by the managers of the system. The triumph of this separation-based economic system proletarianizes the whole world … In the spectacle, a part of the world presents itself to the world and is superior to it. The spectacle is simply the common language of this separation [which] is experienced by the producers as an *abundance of dispossession* (Debord 2002: §25, 26, 29, 31).

Heritage is arguably a Debordian spectacle, in the sense that something that was an object to use, a place to live, a place of worship or an object to worship, or a ritualised event, becomes an image of such cultural sites, objects or practices representing the past. Temporally speaking, part of the attraction of heritage lies in its claim to represent the past and to point the way towards the future. In a recent essay, I suggested that heritagisation constitutes an appropriation of the past and thus an attempt to control the future by certain elites that alienate other groups in the process, as well as an attempt to control the economic value of the commoditised heritage, in the world's biggest economic industry, tourism (Salemink 2014). Thus, heritagisation does not only involve a connection with the nation, but simultaneously instigates a twin movement of separation, namely between the cultural sites, objects and/or practices, and their spectacular image; and between the sites, objects or practices, and their producers, makers, authors and/or performers. Thus, heritagisation as a formally ritualised connection with the nation paradoxically comes at a price of local disconnection from the cultural site, object, or practice that is officially labelled cultural heritage. In this chapter, I argue that the heritagisation of cultural sites, objects, and practices effectively disenfranchises the cultural communities involved from the legacy that they formed over years of cultural and ritual labour, as other players — cultural experts and scientists, state agencies, tourist companies — effectively take over the management and organisation of the heritage for their own benefit. In other words, as particular cultural sites, objects and practices are connected nationally and internationally through a process of heritagisation, their constituencies paradoxically become disconnected from that part of their legacy as outsiders take over. Thus, movements of connection and disconnection operate simultaneously or consecutively at different levels. In other words, the description and inscription of heritage sites, objects and practices result in the writing off of the constituent communities as viable and reliable cultural agents.

I unfold my argument about simultaneous and subsequent connection and disconnection through heritagisation in the following sections. The next section discusses the concept of heritagisation as it emerged during the global heritage 'boom'. The subsequent section, 'Intangible Cultural Heritage in Vietnam', briefly describes the history of UNESCO-certified heritage in Vietnam. This will be followed by three sections looking more closely into one specific intangible cultural heritage, namely the 'Space of Gong Culture' and its cultural subjects situated in the still contentious Central Highlands as well as their role in the 'Worship of the Hùng Kings' in Phú Thọ Province. In a final section, I offer some reflections on heritagisation in Vietnam in terms of connection and disconnection, of incorporation and separation, of instrumentalisation and dispossession.

Heritagisation as a Global Process

In 1996, David Lowenthal published his influential book, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, in which he tried to come to terms with the overnight ascendancy of heritage, and offered partial answers to the question of why heritage labels, claims, and practices had become so pervasive, so ubiquitous — how all sorts of different *legacies* have become heritage; how heritage is connected up with a particular understanding and use of the past through history; and how it generates rivalry, competition, and conflict. Lowenthal placed emphasis on the partisan use of heritage claims for presentist purposes, and on what I would probably call aspects of faith in and sacralisation of specific historical narratives about the past.

In his recent *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, Rodney Harrison (2013) also speaks of the ubiquity of heritage and of the heritage boom in 'late modernity', but rather than as a fixation on the past, Harrison interprets this heritage boom 'as a creative engagement with the past in the present' which helps us shape our future (Harrison 2013:4). Heritage, then, is a 'relationship between people, objects, places and practices', and 'is concerned with the various ways in which humans and non-humans are linked by chains of *connectivity* and work together to keep the past alive in the present for the future' Harrison (2013:4–5, original italics). In a chapter on 'Late-Modernity and the Heritage Boom', Harrison points to globalisation, migration, and demographic

changes; deindustrialisation in the West and the rise of the 'knowledge economy'; the emergence of travel, leisure, and 'experience' as marketable commodities; and the commercialisation of the past as factors in the emergence of a 'heritage boom' after the Second World War, but especially since 1970. This heritage boom went hand in hand with a pervasive process of heritagisation, by which 'objects and places are transformed from functional "things" into objects of display and exhibition' (Harrison 2013:69). Although Harrison seeks to contextualise the 'heritage boom' in a particular condition of 'late modernity', he fails to draw attention to the simultaneity of the global heritagisation process with the neoliberalisation of the global economy, starting in the United States under Reagan and the United Kingdom under Thatcher. I will return to this connection later.

The concept of heritagisation was coined by Robert Hewison in his book *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (1987), in which he refers to the heritagisation of certain sites. This spatial meaning was picked up by Nikki Macleod (2006), Melanie Smith (2009), and since then a host of other scholars, who use the concept of heritagisation with reference to certain sites and places — i.e. tangible cultural heritage — usually in Europe. But in a 2007 article in *Current Anthropology*, Breidenbach and Nyíri draw attention to the differential effects of the process of 'global heritagisation' of certain heritage sites (Breidenbach and Nyíri 2007:322) in terms of affecting the 'consumption' of nature and heritage in post-socialist Russia and China. They assert that the globalising narrative of World Heritage must be read in the context of distinctive national contexts — a valid observation for Vietnam as well. But heritage is not just about pedagogy (about how to preserve, how to be a proper citizen) and consumption (of heritage sites and practices).

Beyond the notions of instrumentality that the notion of heritagisation calls forth, Yaniv Poria (2010) draws attention to the effect heritagisation produces among visitors, who may or may not have a (tenuous) link with the community linked to, or owning, the heritage site. He does so while analysing visual displays of heritage sites, and the 'stories behind the picture' that are conveyed through such visual displays. A different meaning of heritagisation was suggested by Kevin Walsh (1992) in his *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Postmodern World*, in which he speaks not only of a transformation of certain spaces (in terms of aestheticisation), but also of the past.

Heritagisation involves an ahistoric aestheticisation of the past, which as a result has only 'few local associations or affiliations'. Still referring to heritagisation in spatial terms, he also includes temporal ('past'), representational ('aesthetics'), and constituency ('community') dimensions in his discussion.

To my knowledge, the spatial connotation of heritagisation in terms of heritage sites remained dominant — if poorly elaborated — until Regina Bendix published 'Heritage Between Economy and Politics: An Assessment from the Perspective of Cultural Anthropology' (Bendix 2009). Although refraining from a strict definition, Bendix offered the most comprehensive treatment of heritagisation to date, based on the intuitive notion that it refers to the elevation of particular objects (art, monuments, landscapes, memorial sites) and practices (performances, music, rituals, and related cultural practices and memories) to the status of heritage as something to be consciously preserved for present and future generations. This process is necessarily selective, as not all cultural memory will gain this status. Her work is not only interesting in that she explicitly includes intangible cultural heritage in her discussion, but also because she points to some of the necessary transformations brought about by the canonisation of certain places and practices as heritage: the strategic invocation of tradition and authenticity; the projection of identity and cultivation of symbolic capital; the contestation of heritage values; and the symbolic work of marketing. Bendix also notes that the temporal and social axes of heritagisation move closer together. Along the temporal axis, whereas in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries only historical sites referring to a distant past were seen as heritage, these days contemporary phenomena such as industrial heritage, digital archives, and, indeed, intangible cultural heritage are seen as worthy of heritage recognition. Along the social axis, whereas past heritage practice focused on elite structures (temples, royal compounds), now labour class and ethnic minority cultural practices could officially be labelled heritage. As cultural heritage becomes an object inviting or requiring action from society, the economy and politics, heritagisation involves not only a process of canonisation (or 'ennobling') of cultural practice, but also of its instrumentalisation. Bendix specifically mentions competition and quality control through evaluation (Bendix 2009).

In this connection I would like to mention two other recent essays that are relevant for this topic. In 'World Heritage and Cultural Economics', Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006) discusses some of the paradoxes underlying the global 'world heritage' programme, in the sense that especially intangible cultural heritage is on the one hand unique — and uniquely tied to a particular group or community of people — and on the other hand universal — in the sense of a heritage for humanity, to be mediated and managed by the nation. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett does not use the term heritagisation, but rather the term metacultural operation, which similarly involves codification practices and the development of 'universal standards [that] obscure the historically and culturally specific character of heritage policy and practices' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006:19). Distinguishing between tangible cultural heritage dealing with objects, and intangible cultural heritage dealing with living subjects, often ethnic minorities, she then asserts that such cultural subjects — the 'culture carriers' of UNESCO — are bearers of cultural rights, as a subset of the universal human rights. But where culture becomes evaluated, valued and valuable, these rights are in jeopardy, as their valuation — the value that these people attach to their heritage — becomes entangled with the cultural, historical or artistic valorisation by outside experts and, ultimately, the (potential) economic value in terms of cultural economics, especially tourism.

In 'Indigenous Cultural Heritage in Development and Trade: Perspectives from the Dynamics of Cultural Heritage Law and Policy', Rosemary Coombe and Joseph Turcotte discuss the ICH regime from the vantage point of international law, trade and property. They assert that:

> The new emphasis on inventorising ICH, reifying it, assigning appropriate caretakers for it, and investing in capacity-building to develop local expertise, arguably constitutes a new regime of power which poses both promise and peril for the local communities and indigenous peoples deemed to bear the distinctive culture that these new regimes seek to value. (Coombe and Turcotte 2012:304)

In other words, because of the entanglement of different systems of valuation — by practitioners, cultural experts, state officials, and markets — at different levels (local, national, transnational, and international), ICH recognition can be a mixed blessing for those communities that are 'bearers' — but perhaps no longer 'owners' —

of the cultural practice deemed intangible heritage. These connections between culture — including cultural heritage — and possessive (individual, collective and/or indigenous) subjects who claim rights over or property of cultural 'objects' have been studied critically and comprehensively by Rosemary Coombe in a series of books and articles (Coombe 1998, 2005, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2013). The combined effect of these studies is to denaturalise both (cultural) subject and (cultural) object by treating these as constituted by their mutual connection; the discursive, practical and performative aspects of these connections — as claims, rights, identifications, etc. — allow Coombe to persistently question and politicise such relations.

Summing up, we can see that during the last decade the concept of heritagisation made headway, amongst others in critical heritage studies (for example, Smith 2006) and in the burgeoning anthropology of heritage (for example, Bendix 2009). In French scholarship, the notion of patrimonialisation is more common than heritagisation in English (Isnart 2012; Mauz 2012), which in its most bare-bones meaning refers to the making of heritage where such claims have been absent in the past, with reference to natural or cultural landscapes, objects like monuments, or particular practices and forms of knowledge. Such places, objects, practices, and knowledge may have been considered as part of a particular legacy by a group of people, carried over from one generation to the other, but the label of heritage does something different. Heritage involves claims by others for recognition of such legacy having extraordinary value which may be local, national or global — or, more often, all at the same time. In other words, the label of heritage assigns certain value to places, things, and practices. In the contemporary world, heritage claims invariably bring in cultural experts outside and beyond the local population to assess and evaluate the heritage values of the places, things, or practices under consideration. And heritage claims invariably bring in the state as the arbiter, guarantor, and protector of heritage. The global model for heritage practices is given by UNESCO, which assigns special responsibilities to the state, even though such heritage is often not always seen as representative of that state, but of particular localised 'communities'. As pointed out in countless studies, heritagisation brings in not just the state, but also the market, as the label of heritage — especially, but not exclusively, World Heritage — functions as a certification label and hence as a brand name in domestic and international tourist markets.

In fact, states — both national governments and local authorities — are often motivated by ideas of prestige but also of economic gain by capitalising on the heritage label. In other words, the value of heritage is not simply cultural or intangible, but financial as well, suggesting a process of commoditisation in spite of all professions of disinterestedness (cf. Coombe 2005, 2009, 2013). In the next section, I investigate the emergence of the concept, discourse, and practice of intangible cultural heritage in Vietnam.

Intangible Cultural Heritage in Vietnam

The term 'Intangible Cultural Heritage'[3] was introduced in Vietnam by UNESCO, which in 1994 sponsored two back-to-back 'expert meetings' in Vietnam on the intangible cultural heritage of ethnic minorities and the culture of the imperial city of Huế. I was invited to participate in an 'International Expert Meeting for the Safeguarding and Promotion of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Minority Groups in Việt Nam' (Hà Nội, March 1994), and became the *rapporteur* for the meeting and editor of the resulting volume (Salemink 2001).[4] ICH was then a new concept within UNESCO, and was very much in line with the Lévi-Straussian concept of culture long dominant within UNESCO (Eriksen 2001; see also Arizpe 1998).[5] A new subdivision for

3 According to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the intangible cultural heritage — or living heritage — is the mainspring of our cultural diversity and its maintenance a guarantee for continuing creativity. The convention states that the ICH is manifested, among others, in the following domains: oral traditions and expressions (including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage); performing arts (such as traditional music, dance and theatre); social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship. The 2003 convention defines ICH as the practices, representations and expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage (see www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002, accessed 11 August 2008).

4 Subsequently, I was involved in cultural heritage work as editor of a UNESCO volume on Vietnam's minorities; as grantmaker on behalf of the Ford Foundation; as participant in international workshops on the 'Gong cultural space' intangible heritage in Pleiku (2009) and on the Hung Kings in Phú Thọ (2011); and as advisor for the UNESCO-sponsored research project on 'Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage and Development in Vietnam' carried out by GS Lê Hồng Lý, TS Nguyễn Thị Hiền, TS Đào Thế Đức, and TS Hoàng Cầm under the auspices of GS Nguyễn Chí Bền of VICAS (2012).

5 Claude Lévi-Strauss (b. 1908) was a very influential French anthropologist whose work on cultural diversity formed the philosophical basis for much subsequent 'urgent' or 'salvage' anthropology which aimed to record and, if possible, save 'cultures' before they became 'extinct' (i.e. changed), a practice for which the concept of intangible cultural heritage was intended to give legitimacy.

intangible cultural heritage was established in Paris, largely funded by Japan and staffed by Japanese officials (Ms Noriko Aikawa was the Director of the Intangible Cultural Heritage section of UNESCO during those years). At the time, the (linguistic/anthropological) notion of intangible cultural heritage constituted an experimental departure from the established (historical/archaeological) practice of heritage conservation focusing on material objects.[6]

The interest in ICH in Vietnam only caught on, however, after the official UNESCO recognition of a growing number of world heritage sites resulted in a phenomenal boost in tourist visits and in national pride.[7] From 2003 onward, nine 'elements' — in the terms of UNESCO — from Vietnam were inscribed on the Intangible Cultural Heritage List. I have argued elsewhere that the process of claiming and recognising heritage status in Vietnam is a political process at various overlapping and interacting 'levels', involving local political ambitions within a national context, as well as national political and cultural interests in an international arena. This process invokes the artistic and academic authority of national and transnational 'experts', and results in the appropriation and the uses of 'intangible cultural heritage' in the Vietnamese context, with reference to local, national-level, regional, and international political discourses (Salemink 2007 and 2013a; see also Smith 2006; Thaveeporn 2003). Locally, heritage claims can be interpreted as a way to respond to certain political demands or — alternatively — to seek the promotion of a region. Nationally, the politics of heritage help establish political legitimacy for Vietnam's capitalist orientation under a Communist Party. Internationally, UNESCO recognition puts Vietnam on the global radar screen as an old civilisation and venerable culture. In this policy process, the Vietnamese state does not act as a monolithic entity but rather constitutes an arena of contestation in which conflicting interests are played out and resolved; still, the outcome of these contestations inevitably integrates perceived national interests into one discursive frame, namely that of an 'authorised heritage discourse' (cf. Smith 2006; see below) which frames (local) heritage as national.

6 I do not discuss natural heritage in this chapter, because the effects of nature conservation on local populations (relegated to 'bufferzones') have been analysed abundantly (see, for example, Büscher 2013).

7 In 2010, the Imperial Citadel of Thăng Long was added to the list, and in 2011 the Hồ Dynasty Citadel. In 2014, the Tràng An karst landscape was inscribed.

A recent report commissioned by UNESCO Vietnam suggested that the label of heritage is a double-edged sword; based on field research in four heritage sites in Vietnam, the authors speak about selective preservation, invention of tradition (with reference to the saying '*bỏ cũ, xây mới*' ('abandon the old, build new')), and theatricalisation of cultural practice — something that is connected to the spectacular quality of heritage. Sometimes heritage status does bring good results in terms of preservation, ownership, management, and benefit sharing — as reported for Hội An — but often it leads to the disenfranchisement of local communities. And the concept of heritagisation shows that this latter aspect is perhaps inevitable, as the label of heritage — certainly of UNESCO World Heritage — turns what was once simply a local cultural practice into a site of outside intervention and policing: once their cultural practice is canonised as heritage, local people are no longer in exclusive control of that cultural practice which they largely organised and managed on their own in the past. Instead, local and national authorities, UNESCO officials, cultural experts, tourism developers, and larger, outside publics become 'stakeholders' in the process of evaluation, validation, and valorisation (Lê Hồng Lý et al. 2012; see also Lê Hồng Lý and Nguyễn Thị Phương Châm 2014). In the next sections I will focus on the 'Space of Gong Culture' in the Central Highlands as ICH.

The 'Space of Gong Culture'

In 2005, the 'Space of Gong Culture' (*không gian văn hóa cồng chiêng*) of ethnic minorities of Vietnam's Central Highlands was proclaimed a 'Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity', and after the ratification of the International Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2008 it was transferred to the new ICH List of 'Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding'. The gong music that accompanies ritual events such as funerals and other life cycle rituals, as well as agricultural rituals and feasts among the ethnic minority groups in Vietnam's Central Highlands (and among similar ethnic groups across Vietnam's borders and ethnic groups in mountainous parts of coastal provinces), is undeniably special. The clear ringing sounds of the gongs, the beautiful melodies, and the intricate shifting rhythms act to mesmerise, bringing the listener or dancer into a state of trance. The comparison with Indonesia's rich

local — both folk and court — traditions of gamelan music has often been made, but in Vietnam each gong in the carefully tuned set is held up and struck by a separate person, in tune and in rhythm with each other.

Although beautiful and entrancing, this ritual music is deemed to be under threat. It is slowly disappearing from everyday ritual life in Vietnam's Central Highlands. The older generation does not always pass on the skill to the younger generation, who may have lost their interest in the music, turning to modern music instead. Children go to school and learn to read, write and calculate in a future-oriented expectation to become modern citizens rather than peasants living by the rhythm of the passing seasons, attuned to the spirits surrounding them, and following in the footsteps of their ancestors before them. Children might no longer pass their evenings sitting around the hearth and listening to the old folks telling their stories — perhaps one of the famous epics of their group — but they might be sitting around the television, looking at Korean soap operas and Vietnamese or Western pop music. The rapid disappearance of gong ritual music from everyday life in the Central Highlands constituted the motivation for UNESCO to adopt this practice as one of the first projects in its intangible cultural heritage campaign (cf. Salemink 2001).

But gong music is also on the way out because the precious gong sets are disappearing, like so many other cultural or artistic objects that were once prized and used in the Central Highlands — and among highland minorities and Kinh people too. Since the first time I came to the Central Highlands in 1991, I have been offered gong sets for sale, as well as antique jars or other prize items. I have never taken up these offers, but I do know that many collectors, traders, and tourists — both Vietnamese and foreign — are eager to buy such items at low prices. I have noticed that upon returning to the Highlands after an absence of years, people no longer had possession of such items, even if these were family heirlooms. Sometimes sold, sometimes extorted during times of hardship in return for some money or rice, sometimes even stolen: outside various Highlands villages I have been shown graveyards from where famous grave statues had been stolen, to end up in boutiques in Hà Nội or Hồ Chí Minh City and eventually in overseas 'exotic art' and ethnographica shops and collections. Here, the UNESCO validation of the cultural or artistic value of gong music for humankind translates ironically into enhanced commercial

value of the cultural objects (musical instruments, statues, traditional woven fabrics) connected with the gong culture and a consequent dispossession of these artefacts.

In other words, gong ritual music — or more broadly, 'gong culture', in UNESCO jargon — does not exist in a vacuum. There is always a wider ecological, economic, social, political, cultural and religious context in which such music is being practiced, performed, and passed on to younger generations, and in which this music obtains its meaning for players and audiences. This broader context is captured in the word 'space' in the 'Space of Gong Culture' which UNESCO aims to safeguard through its inscription in the World Intangible Cultural Heritage List. Thus, with the UNESCO proclamation of the Space of Gong Culture as part of the world's intangible cultural heritage, two wide-ranging and diffuse concepts are combined to be safeguarded: 'space' and 'culture'. Both these terms, however, are not self-evident, not immediately clear, and highly contested in artistic, academic, and public debates. Moreover, depending on how it is defined, safeguarding the Space of Gong Culture seems like a formidable, perhaps impossible task, amid the rapid change enveloping Vietnam, especially the Central Highlands. In the following paragraphs, I seek to unpack both terms, 'culture' and 'space'.

When investigating the Space of Gong Culture, it is necessary to have a clear concept of what we mean by 'culture'. The work of 'safeguarding' implies keeping things — objects, spaces, practices, meanings, environments – as they are, for use, display or performance in the future. The backdrop to this endeavour is the assumption that the work of time changes these 'things', and this change threatens to make these things disappear, or at least to reduce or dilute them. Thus, the work of safeguarding presupposes an opposition between tradition and modernity, whereby the traditional cultures of ethnic groups are thought to be replaced by a modern, more or less global culture. According to this analysis, traditional culture is gradually or rapidly disappearing, and the responsibility of scientists such as professional anthropologists and other scholars would be to describe and create a record of what belongs to this culture and what is characteristic of this culture. But once a 'traditional culture' has been described and authenticated through this kind of ethnographic research, any social and cultural change can only be conceived of as a

dilution of this authentic, traditional culture. Thus, safeguarding the threatened cultural heritage of minority groups becomes an essentially conservative operation of trying to stop the work of time.

The problem with this view of culture is that it reifies and essentialises culture. Culture is seen as a collection of 'things' or attributes containing essential characteristics of a particular ethnic group. The classic definitions of culture by early anthropologists, such as Edward Tylor (1871), describe culture as a sum of things that pertain to a particular group of people — a 'tribe', nation, or ethnic group. This view of culture corresponds with the style of the 'holistic' ethnographic monograph that was predominant for a long time. Usually, such monographs contained chapters on environment, livelihood and material culture, on kinship, on religion and rituals, and on leadership and (non-state) politics, in an attempt to speak exhaustively and authoritatively about the 'whole' culture. Based on research in one or a few villages of a 'whole' group, the author would claim the authority to speak not just of the culture of village 'X' but of the culture of group (tribe, clan, *ethnie*) 'Y'. In the past, such an author would exclude references to the incorporation of such groups into wider networks of state and market which emerged in the colonial and postcolonial contexts, and which made such anthropological research possible and imperative at the same time. And although the field research would usually be limited to one or two years, the style of ethnographic description would cut out the work of time by employing the 'ethnographic present', as if the practices observed and described were unchanging and timeless. Hence, safeguarding 'culture' would almost imply the stopping of time, or at least the reification and ossification of certain cultural objects and practices as museum pieces, to be shielded from the work of time.

In other words, although research provides only a local and temporal snapshot, in his or her reports and publications the researcher would implicitly claim that the locally specific observations represented a whole group, and that the temporally specific observations stood for an unchanging tradition — both in combination denoting the culture of group 'Y'. It is this notion of culture which seems to dominate the conceptualisation of culture by UNESCO — the embodiment of global cultural politics — which since the 1980s has consistently celebrated and endeavoured to protect the world's cultural diversity. This is clearly illustrated by the debates surrounding the authoritative 1995

UNESCO report entitled 'Our Creative Diversity' which had been prepared by the World Commission on Culture and Development. This report triggered condemnation from anthropologists, who criticised the inconsistent but often essentialist definition of culture underpinning the report and its recommendations (Wright 1998; Arizpe 1998; Eriksen 2001). In contrast with UNESCO's static and essentialist view of culture, most present-day anthropologists and cultural scholars worldwide see 'culture' not as a bounded collection of 'things' connected with a clearly delineated ethnic group, but as an ever-changing process with fuzzy boundaries. Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2001) traced the Lévi-Straussian notion of cultures (plural) as isolated islands in the UNESCO Commission's discourse. Eriksen observed the tendency to link 'culture' to 'indigeneity', and emphasised the problematic tension between universal concepts of individual rights and communitarian notions of rights implied in culture as necessarily collective, localised, and hence exclusive. This tension can also be seen in the history of cultural claims and rights in Vietnam's Central Highlands — the designated space for gong culture — as I argued in 2006 (Salemink 2006).

But for gong music in the Central Highlands, the concept of 'space' was wedded to 'culture', thus making the arena of safeguarding and intervention even more fuzzy. The concept of 'space' may refer to the 'cultural space' in which ritual gong music and dance is enacted and is meaningful because it refers to the larger context from and in which gong ritual music obtains its meaning for the diverse local communities where it developed. Throughout the Central Highlands, Gong ensembles play a role in various rituals and public ceremonies that were closely linked to daily life and the cycle of the seasons. Thus the Space of Gong Culture, the variety of ethnic groups represented within that culture, and the continued participation of community members in gong ensembles is very different from, say, the more restricted contexts and audiences of Huếst *nhã nhạc* court music. The Space of Gong Culture thus encompasses a musical genre, born in the ritual life of highland communities, usually tied to seasonal (agricultural) and life cycles. Developed in a diversity of customs and ritual contexts, gong culture is congruent with the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the region. The instruments themselves, made from a mixture of bronze and silver, are not cast by highland people but purchased from long-distance traders and produced in far-away regions.

Writing about the UNESCO concept of 'cultural landscape', which combines a spatial category with the adjective 'cultural', Rosemary Coombe states:

> the addition of the category of cultural landscape to the World Heritage List in 1992 was crucial for legitimating the heritage of local communities and indigenous peoples … that later became formalised in the ICH Convention and that has arguably spread as a norm of customary international law into international heritage protection policy more generally. (Coombe 2013:377)

It may have been the intention of some UNESCO staff at the time to contextualise gong ritual music in its wider cultural and spatial settings,[8] but this worked out differently in the Central Highlands. After all, 'space' may have different meanings from 'cultural space' alone. For starters, 'space' has a clear geographic connotation, as it circumscribes the places where the cultural practices are supposed to take place. This spatial circumscription refers to the Tây Nguyên region, currently made up of the five provinces of Kontum, Gialai, Đắk Lắk, Đắk Nông, and Lâm Đồng. In that sense, it is also a political space, denoting the five administrative units now making up the Tây Nguyên region of Vietnam. It leaves out the upland districts in surrounding coastal provinces where the same or similar ethnic minorities live with similar gong musical practices, and it leaves out regions in Cambodia and Laos with ethnic groups that are equally similar or the same, but living across the Vietnamese border. The political character of the 'gong space' is also brought out by the fact that Tây Nguyên is an integral part of Vietnam's national territory, with the Vietnamese Government filing the dossier for UNESCO inscription and ultimately responsible for safeguarding this heritage.

But 'space' refers also to the ecological, economic, and social space that forms the context for gong culture, along with myriad other cultural practices, and as a subtext and context to the cultural space of gong culture, the ecological, economic, political, and social space are changing extremely quickly. In other words, the Space of Gong Culture is predicated on the changing landscape of Tây Nguyên. Rather than being bounded, both 'space' and 'culture' in the 'Space of Gong Culture' are fluid categories, reminiscent of the changing and

8 Personal communication, Dr Frank Proschan.

changeable 'scapes' (technoscape, financescape, ideoscape, ethnoscape, mediascape) by which Arjun Appadurai (1996) denoted the processes of change, interaction, migration, blurring, and hybridisation that influence lifeworlds as a consequence of global flows. In the next section, I briefly indicate — rather than describe and analyse — the social and economic changes that contextualise and influence gong culture in Tây Nguyên.

Changing the Tây Nguyên Cultural Landscape

While 'space' refers to the multifaceted landscape where gong culture is located, efforts at safeguarding are taking place against a background of displacement, loss, and dispossession that have drastically affected the lifeworlds of these communities. Cultural transmission was severely disrupted during almost four decades of intermittent warfare (1942–79), resettlement and defoliation. These disruptions continued into the period of socialist modernisation, which brought further resettlement in the name of modernity, but have accelerated as the Central Highlands have been rapidly drawn into global economic and cultural circuits. For example, Vietnam's Tây Nguyên almost overnight became a hotspot of globalisation, producing much of the world's coffee, tea, pepper, cashew, and rubber in smaller or larger commercial farms. While this changed the physical (ecological, economic, infrastructure) landscape, the demographic, social, and cultural landscape was changed almost beyond recognition. Lacking the space to venture into much ethnographic detail here, I propose an analysis of the current situation with emphasis on the post-1975 period, in particular, on the market reform period known as *đổi mới*, or 'renovation'. After a period of socialist collectivism, the market reforms have resulted in rapid capitalist development and high economic growth in much of Vietnam, including Vietnam's Central Highlands. Simultaneously, the introduction of market reforms in the late 1980s often had dire consequences for the indigenous ethnic minority groups who regard the region as their 'ancestral domain' and who embody the gong culture. In this section, then, I shall briefly indicate recent developments in Vietnam's Central Highlands in

terms of a process of multidimensional transformation of the physical environment, of the economic system, of the religious beliefs and practices, and of subjectivities.[9]

From a marginal region in 1975, with a majority of the (indigenous) population engaging in subsistence farming through clan- or village-based rotational swidden cultivation and some trade, in the first decade of the second millennium the Central Highlands became fully integrated into the world market as a major cash-crop producing region. In just 10 years it became the world's second-largest coffee producing region, saturating the global coffee market with robusta coffee and causing a temporary worldwide slump in coffee prices. Vietnam's Central Highlands are also among the world's top three producers of rubber, pepper, and cashews. These cash-crop plantations and gardens were set up mostly by ethnic Việt lowlanders who migrated *en masse* to clear land and set up coffee gardens (now being diversified to include tea, pepper, rubber, cocoa, and cashews) in tracts of forest and savannah, or in old swidden fields. At the same time, rivers valleys are used for hydropower projects, while remaining forests with economic or ecological value are designated as national parks, nature reserves, or protected forests. More recent developments promise even more sudden, incisive and disruptive transformations to the Space of Gong Culture as part of the Central Highlands are presently transformed into a 'bauxite space' of strip mining, which is highly detrimental to the local ethnic groups and hence to the 'safeguarding' of the Space of Gong Culture. In other words, from a situation of low population density and more or less environmentally balanced rotational swidden cultivation embedded in managed forests, a massive environmental transformation has changed the face of the landscape and the nature of the natural resources through deforestation, zoning and exploitation of natural resources.

This environmental transformation is linked with a complete economic transformation predicated on concepts of private land ownership, on capital inputs, on technical know-how and on market access and individual calculation which are at odds with traditional subsistence-oriented agricultural and ritual practices predicated on collective — or at least communal — arrangements among indigenous

9 The following sections are based on Salemink (1997, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004).

central highlanders. Whereas some lowlander in-migrants have become *nouveau riche* (and others went bankrupt in adverse market conditions), many indigenous communities and (extended) families have no use for the official division in forest land and agricultural land (a useless distinction for traditional swidden cultivators). Nor does the concept of private land ownership (promoted through a land allocation program backed by western donors and big development banks) hold much promise for most highlanders, because the plots are too small for subsistence farming. They often lack the capital and knowledge to invest in cash-crops with long-term return — hence the frequent sale of official land titles by highlanders who then move deeper into the forest or become economically dependent on their in-migrant neighbours (Salemink 1997).[10]

Since 1975, many highlanders have abandoned their traditional community religions (often glossed as 'animist') which were highly localised in the sense that deities and spirits often housed in specific sites (mountains, rivers, forest groves, single trees or stones) in a 'Durkheimian' sacralisation of the physical environment. With the transformation of the physical environment and its appropriation by outsiders without respect for its sacred nature, these localised religious beliefs and practices gradually lost their sacral character and significance along with the environment in which they acquired meaning. At the same time, changes in agricultural practices and in the (ethno-demographic) composition of the population rendered rituals progressively meaningless. On top of that, many rituals simply became too time- and resource-intensive, given the general environmental degradation and the economic impoverishment of the indigenous population. Faced with increasingly meaningless and burdensome rituals, many highlanders have abandoned their traditional religion and adopted a new one: Evangelical Christianity. Introduced and propagated without much success by American evangelical missionaries before 1975, Evangelical Protestantism has become the existential safe haven of a large part of the indigenous population since the capitalist market reforms in the 1990s. This massive religious transformation sets them apart from the ethnic Việt lowlanders, but sacralises a new lifestyle imposed by the exigencies of capitalist development — austerity,

10 This section is, of course, a generalisation, as the situation tends to vary according to locality and ethnic group. However, the occurrence of widespread unrest in February 2001 and April 2004 over issues of land ownership and religious freedom confirms this general analysis.

moderation, frugality, thrift, calculus, and individual responsibility — under the auspices of transnational modernity. And like the other transformations, this religious transformation cannot simply be rolled back or even stopped.

The last type of transformation, then, concerns highlander subjectivities, or sense of personhood. During the 'collectivist' period of 'socialist construction' in reunified Vietnam (1975–85), the Communist Party attempted to create 'New Socialist Person' (*Con người Xã hội chủ nghĩa Mới*), who would be different from 'Traditional Person' in that the latter's loyalties lay with the family, local group, and class, whereas 'New Socialist Man' would widen his horizon, subject his own desires to the goals of the state, and selflessly work to fulfil these goals. These attempts to create new socialist people were actively resisted, sabotaged or simply ignored in most parts of Vietnam, and certainly in the Central Highlands, where indigenous highlanders were singled out as primitive, backward, superstitious, or even reactionary. But the market reforms of the 1980s triggered the demise of 'New Socialist Man' and provoked the rise of a new type of person whom we might call 'New Capitalist Man', characterised by what Daniel Bell (1996) calls the 'cultural contradictions of capitalism'. In the realm of production, capitalism puts a premium on (Weberian) frugality, calculus, and deferral of gratification. Whereas in the realm of consumption, capitalism promises immediate gratification of social, cultural, and economic desires (Bell 1996:54–76).

In other words, capitalist culture thrives on the promise of absolute wealth and the hedonistic fulfilment of desire — the promise of finding paradise in consumption. Capitalism holds out the promise of an earthly paradise, but through consumption rather than production. Consumerism is not a concept that one would easily associate with Vietnam's Central Highlands. Yet with integration into the global market, highlanders too are confronted with the imagery of wealth and consumption through the mass media, advertisement, tourism, and conspicuous lifestyles. They are now inescapably confronted with a new vision of modernity — a capitalist modernity, held up as a paradise in the making through consumption. I have never encountered anyone in Vietnam or elsewhere who did not wish to partake in the promises of material consumption, except for explicit religious reasons (in the narrow sense). But like transcendental religions, such as Buddhism or Christianity, capitalism requires a project of personal

transformation of the 'reverse Weberian' type. On a personal level, capitalist reforms are aimed at instilling a frugal, calculating and individualistic mentality — or, in the Vietnamese Central Highlands, turning clan-based and community-oriented subsistence farmers into individualistic agricultural entrepreneurs. Whether they continue to be farmers or day-wagers, they will be dependent on the market for their survival and thus have to conform to the exigencies of the market.

Central Highlanders Facing Intangible Cultural Heritage Practices

In this situation of wide-ranging ecological, economic, religious, and subjective transformations, the basis for community-based ritual life which UNESCO calls 'gong culture' is disappearing fast. In an economy that puts a premium on competitive individual — or at least household — performance, the community solidarity that underpinned agricultural ritual is perennially under threat. With livelihoods less and less based on the subsistence swidden agriculture of 'eating the forest' (cf. Condominas 1982), the cosmological environment as the context for ritual action ceases to have meaning, and the agricultural cycle changes with the new cash crops introduced. Many people lack the resources to invest in ritual, making them feel permanently in debt *vis-à-vis* their deities and hence at risk of hazard. In this situation, many highlanders opt for a new, more individualist and scripturalist religion with completely different liturgical ritual: Christianity. With the conversion to Christianity, the performance of gong music during life cycle rituals is no longer a matter of course, and is sometimes even actively condemned as 'pagan' by followers of the new religion. The cultural transmission of knowledge of ritual and gong music skills to younger generations is becoming difficult in this context.

While Christian highlanders condemn their 'pagan' past, the Vietnamese regime condemns highlander Christianity. In January 2001 and April 2004, many highlanders demonstrated in some of the major towns in the Central Highlands such as Pleiku and Buôn Ma Thuột, as well as in some of the more remote districts such as Chu Xe in Gialai Province. Their demands concerned freedom of religion and land

rights, but were articulated overseas by the anti-communist diaspora organisation Montagnard Foundation as a call for 'Dega' autonomy — Dega being a new, politicised ethnonym for the indigenous groups of Vietnam's Central Highlands. This putative association with Dega diaspora politics triggered a strong repression of highlander political and religious articulations. One of the frequently reported political responses were attempts by security personnel to force people to recant their Christian confession and to perform specific versions of 'pagan', non-Christian rituals — indeed, the very rituals that in the times of high socialism were branded backward, superstitious, unhygienic, and wasteful. I have discussed the dynamics of rights claims, protests, and repression elsewhere (cf. Salemink 2006); here I shall focus on Vietnam's official response in terms of cultural politics. Just one month after the 'first' protest in 2001, Vietnam's government gave the largest grant for social science research in its history — the equivalent of $1 million USD — for researching, collecting, recording, translating, analysing, and publishing the long epics of the Central Highlands. The project was managed and carried out by the Institute of Folk Culture Studies of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, which over the years published well over 60 volumes of epics. The dossier for the UNESCO inscription of the Space of Gong Culture was prepared in 2004, right after the second protest during Easter 2004. Just like the forced recantations of Christianity, the sudden conservationist cultural policies were predicated on religious and ritual practices that highlanders had already abandoned or were in the process of abandoning.

In other words, what was called (intangible) cultural heritage in the 2000s, were religious concepts and cultural and ritual practices that had been condemned and suppressed by successive political regimes as backward and superstitious, and which had been rendered practically unsustainable by the disruptive ecological, economic, demographic, political, and cultural transformations in the Central Highlands. Given the deep politicisation of both Christian conversion and official cultural politics in Tây Nguyên, the label of heritage being given to largely abandoned cultural practices creates much tension within communities and between communities and state agencies. This is one of the dilemmas facing the gong practice among the Lạch group in Lâm Đồng, as noted by the UNESCO report on 'Safeguarding and Promoting Cultural Heritage against the Backdrop of Modernization'

(Lê Hồng Lý et al. 2012). Many Christians refused to play the gong, or even to possess a gong set, seeing it as an instrument of the devil. In places where an accommodation could be reached between Christian liturgy and gong music, the report found that the official predicate of 'heritage' bestowed by the state or by UNESCO incited local actors or even national agencies to make investments or 'improvements' that contradict the idea of heritage preservation;[11] that disenfranchise local communities who used to be in control of the cultural practice now dubbed heritage; and that privilege outside actors or interests (tourism, economic, political) which conceive of intangible cultural heritage as a spectacle.

This brings us back full circle to Guy Debord's analysis of the *Society of the Spectacle*. In the case of ICH, people themselves become a spectacle, just like the celebrities analysed by Debord (1994) and Rosemary Coombe (1998); but where celebrities become individual brands, central highlanders become collectively branded through the validation and certification processes undertaken or overseen by UNESCO. In the case of gong culture, it is specific ritual labour which used to acquire meaning within the setting of a restricted ritual community — and perhaps a slightly wider but vernacular ritual constituency — but which becomes a spectacle validated by outside experts and consumed by outside audiences of officials and tourists. As a spectacle — but not a ritual — such ICH becomes spectacular in the sense that aesthetic and performative aspects are privileged over substantive signification as ritual. This spectacularisation of the practice is predicated on external notions of 'improvement' that seek to make the performance shorter, louder and wilder — often in a context of artistic competition.

I witnessed examples of the latter at the 'International Conference on Economic and Social Changes and Preservation of the Gong Culture in Vietnam and the Southeast Asian Region' in Pleiku, 9–11 November 2009, which took place in the context of an international gong music festival organised by Vietnam's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to celebrate the UNESCO inscription of the Space of Gong

11 In the late 1990s, the former director of the Huế Monuments Conservation Centre, Mr Thái Công Nguyên, showed me how he shortened the *nhã nhạc* court music scores, which in their original form were too long and hence 'boring' to watch by tourists. He conceived of that as an improvement. (I could give many examples of such improvements.)

Culture one year earlier. The opening ceremony was a loud, pompous, mass-mediated performance choreographed by Vice-Minister and People's Artist Lê Tiến Thọ, in which a swirling mass of hundreds of dancers, musicians, and drummers as well as some elephants performed a mockery of the quiet ritual gong music for an audience of officials and guests, local people and — via television — the nation. But an opening ceremony is often a grandiose event, certainly in Vietnam, and hence not necessarily representative for — in this case — gong music itself. But the festival itself had the format of a competitive music meeting, in which more or less professional gong troupes from different ethnic groups, provinces, and even countries performed in a competitive atmosphere, inducing the troupes to perform in ever more spectacular fashion — often adding drums to the performance as well. In such a context, gong music becomes professionalised, meaning that it is entirely taken out of the ritual context of the village community and is performed by semi-professional artistic troupes for outside audiences. As I noticed in my paper to the conference, what was missing in this movement of cultural decontextualisation from the ritual community and recontextualisation in a tourist context was any attempt to recontextualise gong music in a different ritual context, namely of church liturgy.[12] Highlander Christians and Vietnamese state officials seemed too suspicious of each other to allow that to happen — with some Bahnar Catholic groups the proverbial exception as they incorporated gong music into church liturgy.

This can be interpreted as an instance of possessive cultural nationalism (cf. Handler 1985, 1991; Coombe 1998) in the sense that a particular cultural object — in this case practice — is seen as the property not of an individual (for example, an author or an artist), but of a collective. Whereas UNESCO seeks to ascribe ownership of ICH to specific cultural groups, in practice, the cultural practices that go under the label of heritage become the property of the state, which assumes the responsibility to protect, preserve, and manage the heritage. In this case, the heritagisation of gong culture amounts to a process of large-scale cultural dispossession. This happens first of all because of the wholesale ecological, economic, demographic, cultural, and cosmological transformation of the Tây Nguyên landscape, which works as a classic movement of enclosure in Karl Marx's sense of the

12 I made a similar observation in Salemink (2009).

term. Secondly, the state performs a mockery of highlander gong culture in which highlanders have no say and from which they are largely absent. Thirdly, to the extent that highlanders perform, they are turned into a spectacle, devoid of ritual meaning and dispossessed of the product of their ritual labour. And fourthly, highlanders are practically prevented from reintroducing gong music into their new liturgical rites and thus from recontextualising it into their own ritual communities. Although the state is not directly implicated in the loss (sale, theft) of cultural objects such as gong sets (see Van Dat 2009), this does happen with reference to other ICH in Vietnam, such as the Worship of the Hùng Kings.

When I visited the Hùng King Festival in the 1990s, it was largely a local affair, organised by ritual leaders from villages surrounding the Nghĩa Linh mountain, for a ritual constituency consisting largely of local people from Phú Thọ Province — especially young people for whom this was an occasion for courting and dating. In the 2000s, the festival had become a large-scale affair: the *ngày giỗ tổ Hùng Vương* became a national holiday in Vietnam, marking the 'origin of the nation' before the historic Chinese occupation (but, ironically, it was the first national day to be calculated by the Sino-lunar calendar (*ngày 10 tháng 3 âm lịch*)). It attracted large crowds from all over Vietnam, but especially high-level political officials from Hà Nội and the province, who assumed leading ritual roles as well. When I attended the festival on 10–12 April 2011 — in connection with a campaign for UNESCO inscription — I visited some of the temples in the surrounding villages that had been responsible for part of the rituals and had kept some of the ritual objects in those temples. Not only had the local committees been deprived of their responsibilities, but also of some of the original objects. (In another case, the cultural authorities substituted the 'old' ritual objects for new ones in the rituals themselves, which meant that the temples could keep the original items but not use them anymore in the rituals.) Dispossessed of their ritual responsibilities, local villagers were still expected to show up at the festival, but more as props in a ritual choreography directed by outsiders.

This blatant ritual dispossession found its match in another, involving dance troupes from the Central Highlands. The Hùng Dynasty coincided with the Đồng Sơn bronze drum civilisation, which is claimed by Vietnam as well other countries and regions, such as Yunnan (cf. Han Xiaorong 1998, 2004), as its national cultural property. Given

the superficial resemblance of the iconography on the bronze drums with stereotypical styles and scenes in the Central Highlands, it is assumed that contemporary central highlanders are similar to proto-Việt from the time of the Hùng Kings, and hence the contemporary ancestors of the Kinh (Salemink 2008:161–162). At any rate, such Tây Nguyên drum troupes are aesthetically convenient performers at the Hùng King Festival, but in this way they are denied coevalness with our times (cf. Fabian 1983) and locked up in an imagined past. They are robbed of their contemporaneity with us, which at once legitimises the dispossession of their distinctly un-modern cosmological landscape — characterised as irrational, unscientific and uneconomic — and legitimises the denial of their right to choose a modern religion.

Conclusion: Connection and Disconnection, Incorporation and Dispossession

Heritagisation — understood in its minimal meaning, namely as branding of sites and cultural practices as heritage — is a worldwide process, and the last two decades have witnessed an upsurge in heritage practices. Much of that was led by the efforts of UNESCO, but as an inter-governmental organisation UNESCO is little more than the sum of its parts — the member states — which all have their own reasons to be engaged in heritage. Worldwide, heritagisation emerged simultaneously with neoliberal governmentality (see also Coombe 2013); in Europe with the rise of identity politics against the backdrop of globalisation, immigration and EU expansion; and in Vietnam with its integration into the region and the global market. Paradoxically, this infatuation with the past — in the form of dead (monumental) or living (intangible) heritage — is a by-product of late modernity, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006) argues. Because the label of heritage connects localities with nationally and internationally 'authorised heritage discourses' (cf. Smith 2006), the process of heritagisation is fraught with paradoxes, especially with reference to intangible cultural heritage.

Intangible cultural heritage denotes living culture, but simultaneously reifies and objectifies it. It embraces the local communities ('culture bearers'), but leaves the evaluation and valuation process to outside experts and agencies, with reference to global rather than local

cultural standards. It instrumentalises cultural practices because it usually suits the agendas of outsiders — intellectuals and cultural experts, local authorities, national governments — to recognise certain such practices as cultural heritage. It turns cultural practices and the people involved in those into spectacles, and hence into sites of outside intervention, assessment and accountability. It creates a new, bigger — national or international — public for cultural practices that might once have been reserved for their own community, often in the form of heritage tourism. It changes the environment of heritage practices by allowing that outside public — in the guise of tourists, state officials, experts, researchers and media — to come and see (or hear, smell, feel) these heritage practices. It generates economic benefits in the world's largest economic sector — tourism, of which heritage tourism is an important part (cf. Hitchcock et al. 2010) — that are necessary to maintain the cultural practice in changing circumstances but that might not be shared with the community (even though all ritual practice requires material investment). Heritagisation — at World Heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage, and state levels — celebrates the local, the unique, the specific, and the authentic, but brings in the global, which — according to UNESCO — is the major threat to cultural diversity. In order to combat some of the perceived negative effects of globalisation, more globalisation is called forth, and local communities are subjected to outside gazes and interventions.

Heritagisation — especially of 'intangible culture' or 'living' cultural practices — turns the 'culture bearers' into spectacles, while dispossessing them of their ownership over their cultural objects and lives. First, as Guy Debord intimated, the spectacularisation of places, objects, people, and their practices (which is inherent to heritagisation) is predicated on a representational alienation — a disconnection between self and image — which is the price for connecting one image — as spectacle — to larger, state- and market-dominated arenas. Second, temporally speaking, the attraction of heritage lies in its claim to represent the past and to point the way towards the future, as I have argued elsewhere (Salemink 2014). Heritagisation, then, constitutes an appropriation of the past — often in the form of narrative monopolisation — and thus an attempt to control the future by certain elites at the expense of other (alienated) groups that become disconnected from the present and the future through the portrayal of them as the 'living past'. Third, spatial connections and disconnections

occur when state- and market-operated incorporations of heritage sites, objects, people and practices link spatially marginal people to central agents and agencies that articulate an 'authorised heritage discourse' (cf. Smith 2006) which marginalises the people living close to, or embodying, the heritage. Finally, in terms of a class analysis, heritagisation — as suggested through my reading of the work by Guy Debord — constitutes a form of separation and hence alienation of the cultural sites, objects, practices, and knowledge from the people who produced, managed, or embodied these products of their ritual labour. Paraphrasing David Harvey (2005), heritagisation can be interpreted as another form of accumulation by dispossession in a neoliberalising world that attributes financial value, commoditises and commercialises everything. While connected to a national and global cultural market, UNESCO's 'culture bearers' become disconnected from their culture turned spectacle.

Paradoxically, heritagisation comes at the price of local disconnection from the cultural site, object, or practice that is officially labelled cultural heritage. The spectacularisation of culture that is intrinsic to the label of 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' separates local communities from their cultural practices, as other players — cultural experts and scientists, state agencies, tourist companies — effectively take over the management and organisation of the heritage for their own benefit. These communities are effectively disenfranchised from the legacy that they have formed over years of ritual labour. Thus, movements of connection and disconnection operate simultaneously or consecutively at different levels. In other words, the description and inscription of heritage sites, objects and practices result in the writing off of the constituent communities as viable and reliable cultural agents.

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