

**MEDITERRANEANITY AS CULTURAL HERITAGE.
POLITICS WITH THE PAST.**

To some extent each of us feels a part of a historical, philosophical and economic process which began in the dawn of civilization and has come down to us via an infinite sequence of links. Those who live in the lands bounded by the Mediterranean feel in the depths of their being a strong sense of belonging to that unending chain of events and ideas and partakes in that culture, whatever region they may come from. Each of us in our small way, whether we come from Palestine or Catalonia, from the myriad islands of Dalmatia or the coasts of Northern Africa, feels that we are a short stretch of road on that endless journey marked on the map of culture and progress. Feels a child of the earth—the mother of all civilizations—and perceives a sense of history, which carries us forward, and at the same time urges us to carry forward a given trade or idea or scheme bequeathed to us by our fathers.

(Betelli, 2003: 5)

The first “proclamation of a masterpiece of the oral and intangible cultural heritage of mankind” took place on May 18th 2001 at the seat of UNESCO in Paris. That is almost thirty years after the Convention of the Cultural and Natural Patrimony of Mankind (1972), but only four years after the 29th Session of the General Conference in November 1997, where this concept was formulated and accepted. As the present general director of the UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura, states, the special emphasis given to the oral and intangible cultural patrimony of humanity was the consequence of the recognition of the “threat, traditional cultures are exposed to” and, therefore, the necessity to preserve cultural diversity in the world.¹

The particular aim of the efforts to be made on this account consists, he concludes, in the correction of the present asymmetrical situation which favours the countries of the “North” and the protection of their material patrimony² at the expense of the countries of the “South”

¹*Première proclamation*, p. 2.

² Between 1972 and 2002, 690 objects were included in the UNESCO list of material patrimony.

which suffer the exclusion of their non-material cultural heritage although it is basic for their cultural diversity. The proposal made by Matsuura is not at all surprising, and should be taken as a challenge, especially with respect to future initiatives made by the "South," including that of Europe itself.

There is probably no other region on the planet where the history of *homo sapiens* has developed in such a concentrated and intensive way as in that of the Mediterranean, including all aspects of human life. For this reason it seems admissible and useful to speak of "mediterraneanity" as a concept which expresses the integral character of many of the central aspects of a common lifestyle and way of thinking which emerged as a consequence of a commonly shared, although very ambiguous history since the early dawn of civilization. This proposal is merely provisional, heuristic, as there is a certain danger of exaggeration or even ideological arrogance due to the vagueness of the concept. In no way is it introduced as an ethnocentric approach, as an attempt to subordinate the affected cultural artefacts to the clutch of postindustrial and postmodern societies with their demand for "exotic" material in order to mend their lacerated cultural identities. "Mediterraneanity" does not refer to the part which Europe plays in the cultural concert but rather to its own cultural composition. Indeed, as Greek mythology tells us, Europe appeared as the product of a rapacious Zeus who, fascinated by the charm of the daughter of Agenor, a king of the shores of Minor Asia, turned himself into a gentle bull, and abducted her across the Sea to Crete. Following this metaphor, Europe was born as the consequence of both an act of amorousness and a crime, of attraction and subordination, by which Orient and Occident came together, became fused, hybrids, something new, independent and self-reliant. And, there is no doubt, that the same mythological bull continued his ambiguous tour towards the sunset to settle on the banks of ancient Gades (the Spanish Cádiz). As we can see, the myth has its own, deeper, although hidden meaning as it refers to the mythical origin of what today has become a growing preoccupation with the destructiveness of progress and globalization: the organic relation between Mediterranean nature (space) and culture.³ I will briefly explore this concept in order to respond to

³With respect to this aspect, I would like to mention only three initiatives: that of the Centro de Cooperación del Mediterráneo UICN (Center of Cooperation in the Mediterranean) and its multinational program, developed in cooperation with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, which aims at the declaration of zones of protection in the Mediterranean area; the Socrates-Program "Influence of the situation as an island and the Mediterranean Sea in culture and environment," realized by Italy, France and the Balearic Islands; and the project of the Southern-France

the question of the validity or non-validity of a genuine "Mediterranean cultural patrimony" or "heritage."

The European "South," whenever we have a more precise look at the map, comprises a region where Occident and Orient have met for thousands of years, which is influenced and characterized by the Maghreb in such a way that it has attracted people and cultures from all over Europe since antiquity and up until contemporary tourism, still conserving much of the exotic flair that romantic travellers of the 19th century were so fascinated by. The reason seems to be quite simple. It is the existence of a geographic concept that induces or provokes multiple social and cultural contacts, either peaceful or warlike ones: the Mediterranean Sea. As a line of communication it soon became the centre of attraction for the three continents its waters touch, a network of economic and cultural exchange, as well as the basis of a common shared history and destiny for its people. For that reason the geographic concept reveals constantly its cultural dimension, not only in the material sense of it, but also with respect to the "spirit" that probably confirms one of the most essential differences between the European and the (North-) American mentality and philosophy. It is this peculiar "medium," created in space and time by the endless throng of people and cultures that set foot in this region, which we understand as "Mediterraneanity." It is due to these circumstances that almost everything that happens in this place and its hinterland becomes an object of cultural exchange and therefore the reason for the overwhelming cultural diversity. As a space of encounter and of contrasts, the Mediter-raneanity acts as the medium, where the cultural heritage is indefatigably reproduced, passed from one generation to the other, at the same time becoming adapted to their more or less collective necessities, desires and interests. In view of its function as a historically developed catalyst of social and cultural transformation, the concept cannot hide its connection with processes like acculturation, transculturation and hybridization; it rather reveals how far from reality was the 19th century idea(l) of national culture, and to what extent that idea still is a dangerous obstacle for the peaceful cohabitation of people. In the concept of "Mediterraneanity" we can find a synthesis of the Jewish-Christian and Moslem cultures that led into a kind of shared civilization, with both profane and religious emphasis. Well, there is no doubt that the religious factor repeatedly served, and still serves, as an ideological instrument of division and hate, but there is also no doubt that cultural diver-

Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme on "Réseau thématique des centres européens de recherche en sciences humaines sur l'ensemble euro-méditerranéen" (REMSH), with the participation of 12 institutions from seven European countries.

sity is almost a spontaneous consequence of social life that is destroyed mainly by economic egoism and political uniformity and stupidity. For that reason, we have no illusion that our concept still is much like an ideal to be realized, as it refers to a cultural dynamic based on the existence of class societies. Our focus is mainly a cultural one, and as we are not willing to identify culture simply with the superstructure of class society, we are dealing with its own dynamic or capacity to express the knowledge and experience of peoples' everyday-life as it becomes reflected in their languages and in a widespread web of kinship and social relations, with their particular and very different traditions. We refer to a mental, spiritual and intellectual medium, which includes—at least—the possibility for mutual comprehension and tolerance, merged into the cultural heritage of a significant segment of humanity, with a very singular complexity and diversity.

However, the Mediterranean, seen as a “*synonyme d'équilibre humain, de naturel et d'aise*”, as writes Marc Loopuyt (Loopuyt, w.y.: 81), is quite an abstract, fictitious concept. Its real condition is characterised by two grand axes which combine diversity with difference, as Gille Léothaud and Bernard Lortat-Jacob emphasize: “*l'un septentrional, l'autre méridional, induisant des différences bien marquées*” (Léothaud/Lortat-Jacob, w.y.: 9). Indeed, it is not only the socio-economic inequality which explains the material differences and cultural diversity from Turkey to Spain and from Lybia to Norway; there is also the fact, that “*les langues et les peuples méditerranéens ne présentent pas une grande unité*” (ibid.). The cultural dimension of Mediterraneanity is, for that reason, also full of contrasts and conflictivity, which make it difficult to speak of a “*Mediterranean identity*” in terms of validity and without further restrictions. There is no wonder that Léothaud and Lortat-Jacob stress especially the case of music as a intangible cultural medium where comparisons are fruitful and demonstrate to what extent the acculturation processes may serve as the basis for a common cultural Mediterranean tradition in spite of the threatening, technically induced trends toward cultural standardisation.

It is the explicit intention of UNESCO to bring out those cultural spaces and forms of expression included in this intangible heritage of mankind. For that reason it established a series of legal and administrative prerequisites expressed in the key-notions of the “*oral and intangible patrimony*” (*patrimoine oral et immatériel*) and the “*cultural masterpiece*” (*chef-d'œuvre*). In this context arise some questions. The first refers to the sense it makes to speak of a particular Mediterranean cultural heritage or patrimony considering the fact that it deals with highly demarcated practices and meanings narrowly related to very particular, mostly local communities. Does it make sense, in order to give some examples, to comprehend the Turkish dance of the Dervishes, the

Greek Rebetika or the Andalusian Flamenco as phenomena of Mediterraneanity without corrupting the criteria introduced and maintained by UNESCO, i.e. to select only those cultural masterpieces based on tradition and popular expression that demonstrate an extraordinary value with respect to human creativity? Consequently, a second question points at the criteria of "exclusivity" the UNESCO claims for the admission of such cultural masterpieces, as it seems to be quite hair-splitting to define them in this sense in view of the fact that the Mediterranean is a region mainly characterized by exchange, fusion and hybridization. That is to say, the real basis for the exclusivity of most of the cultural sites and forms consists of the cultural network in which they are embedded. A third question focuses on the reliability and validity of concepts like "patrimony" and "cultural heritage" in view of the social and cultural change this region has been exposed to for a very long time. Is it not rather a social construction of "patrimony" in order to satisfy certain needs for collective identity that prevails in the UNESCO program? To what extent does the declaration of a masterpiece really refer to a traditional and popular cultural practice and not to the intention of "inventing" tradition?

Referring to the first question, we could distinguish two levels of patrimony in accordance with the ideas of Robertson and others with respect to "glocalization."⁴ there is no "pure" Mediterraneanity, but there are many local manifestations of it and for that reason it seems to be admissible to analyze them from the point of view of their communicative power and "spiritual" relationship with the surrounding space as its historical and cultural background and basis. If we refer to Mediterraneanity, we do not deny this concrete, local aspect: on the contrary, we consider these multiple cultural manifestations as the generator of the common symbolic background Mediterraneanity means to us. It is not a mysterious force that pushes local communities in this direction, but the endless chain of historical experience and social relations they share together with others in this region. For that reason, UNESCO does well if it insists on the importance of the contribution to mankind as a criterion of selection. Not all cultural elements really work in this way: some of them are quite the opposite—at least under certain circumstances—of what cultural communication, peace and dignity signi-

⁴Robertson refers to the fact that the "so-called local is being fashioned to a large extent on a trans- or super-local level," it is the product of an intervention from "outside" or "above." But, at the same time, it is a necessary basic element of globalization that the local is reflected at the same time as adapted to other necessities. Consequently, he proposes the concept of "global localization" referring to the "adaption of a global perspective to local circumstances" (Robertson, 1998: 193, 197).

fy as universal values. A good example of this is the case of the Balkans during the 1990s, when religion and ethnicity as central elements for cultural diversity apparently became the reason for violence and all kinds of crimes. There is no doubt, that this horrific landscape was a well-calculated attempt to mask the real economic and political aims and interests at work in the struggle for partition and redistribution of the former Federal Yugoslavian Republic and the implantation of a new hegemony.

A first answer to the second question might emphasize that the politics of patrimony of UNESCO is rather pragmatic and based on a phenomenology of cultural affairs easily definable, while a more theoretical concept of Mediterraneanity requires the analysis of socio-cultural dynamics which produced singular masterpieces that international attention is focused on.

The third question is quite polemical as it refers to the relationship between patrimony and political power. First of all it should be taken into account that the trend towards patrimonialization is principally unlimited: any cultural manifestation can be considered or not as "exclusive" and as a "masterpiece." It only depends on how rigorously the criteria are applied, although there might exist certain impediments in international law and generally shared ethical and moral standards by which "exclusive" socio-cultural practices like, for example, female circumcision, are definitely excluded. Others like cock-fights or bull-fights, although they are deeply rooted in cultural history, social life and the identity of certain communities, and even as objects of human creativity, may be unacceptable in other cultures. Well, the term "patrimonialization" reveals the patrimony as a social construction, and as such, as the result of political influence and power. Following some of the basic sociological concepts of Max Weber, patrimonialization refers to the process of substitution of the former power of disposition carried out directly (personally) by the head of the "family," i. e. community (*pater familias*), in favour of political power established as an abstract entity that includes—especially—protagonists from outside the community. Patrimony is not only the recognition and the protection of a defined cultural site or cultural forms of expression, but a well-intended intervention into the dynamics of a culture and the communities, that they belong to (Steingress, 2002).

It is not at all surprising, when we observe that this kind of rational interference into social and cultural life was born exactly with the Enlightenment, when the individual became recognized as the basic unit of social and political organization of society. It was then that, when culture became of particular value in human life, as it was considered the manifestation of the human genius, of man's creativity and the centrality of the community. As Ariño points out, patrimonialization refers to

“una pratica storica figlia della modernidad,”⁵ to the reflection of Modernity induced by itself, i.e. reflexive Modernity (Beck), and for that reason the function of protection that substantiates the politics of patrimonialization is quite questionable. Not particularly because it is, as the practices of UNESCO itself demonstrates, a reaction to the de-traditionalization of the everyday-life and cultural standardization as the consequences of the increasing network of globalization, but rather because it seems to be based on an idea of cultural dynamics that opposes tradition to modernity, that comprehends cultural diversity preferably in terms of tradition and less in those tendencies oriented in the intellectual and spiritual concepts mankind develops with a view to the future. In contrast, our concept of Mediterraneanity is defined as a kind of superstructure developing as the consequence of social and cultural change, as a synthesis expressed in the broad diversity of lifestyles and ways of thought we are dealing with in this context. As a consequence, Europeans perceive their common history and define themselves rather in terms of difference than uniformity, although they necessarily construct their way of life in accordance with the cultural medium that they share with the “others,” because they live in the same space, under the auspices of a common past and exposed to the same problems. So, the conservation of cultural heritage has to be understood as an intentional act realized under the socio-economic conditions of contrary interests and tendencies. This aspect becomes clearly reflected, for example, in the above mentioned project of the *Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l’Homme*, where we read:

“Cette proposition s’inscrit dans le cadre d’une réflexion globale sur l’ensemble euro-méditerranéen...Une telle réflexion part du constant que la Méditerranée est une zone de tension fortement influencée par le processus d’intégration européenne, notamment à l’heure de l’élargissement vers l’Est. Elle est une scène où s’articulent processus de mondialisation, spécificités régionales et poids de l’histoire. Enfin, la question des relations de l’Europe avec l’ensemble méditerranéen n’est pas seulement une question extérieure, elle relève tout autant de réalités intérieures avec l’installation durable en Europe de populations venant du Sud et de l’Est méditerranéen qui confèrent aux sociétés européennes un caractère multiculturel accentué.”⁶

As we can see, Europe continues under construction and by no means was it finished with the stratagem of Zeus. Its current situation,

⁵Ariño, 2000: 10.

⁶*Les programmes européennes*, p. 1-2.

characterized—on the one hand—by a long historical, socio-economical, political and cultural entanglement with the space bordering with the Mediterranean Sea, and—on the other hand—by its almost permanent and conflictive hegemony, and now by globalization, transforms the whole region into a dynamic milieu where traditions not only are kept alive but are also embossed with new patterns. Hence, the cultural heritage worthy to be preserved can only be protected whenever it stands the test as a meaningful reference for future human behaviour.

The ideological dimension of patrimony

The present conservationist trend and postmodern traditionalism are facts that have to be taken into account when analyzing the politics of patrimonialization. They are narrowly related with some of the consequences of modernization itself. Within the idiosyncrasy of postmodern thought and aesthetics, these tendencies are the subject not only of the commercialization of transculturally dislocated traditions but also of the construction of fragmented identities within the framework of a tessellated culture. The conservation of their cultural heritage has become a general necessity for those who feel themselves exposed to a counterproductive individualism and the uncertainty of a supposed pluralistic society. The regression to tradition is, consequently, intended to stabilize social relations and cultural significance by means of historical consciousness, and patrimony turns out to be the most reliable point of reference. There is nothing completely new in this behavior, it rather can be revealed as the unwanted child of Modernity itself, as its anti-enlightening, restorative variant, which tries to convince us that everything that demonstrates a certain capacity of persistency in time and space is, therefore, good and reasonable. Today, in view of the destructive consequences of capitalist globalization, as it is reflected particularly in the socially produced lack of substance of identity, the regression to tradition means the recovery of the pre-modern cultural heritage, its patrimonialization. This identification of identity with the past means the exclusion of the traditions of Modernity, based on critical reason and the values derived from it such as liberty, individualism, rationalism, criticism, self-reliance, responsibility, autonomy, etc. This makes clear to what degree the definition of cultural heritage is embedded in and, consequently, influenced by the ideology of the dominant type of society. As Ariño emphasizes with respect to the history of the concept of patrimony, its concrete meaning is submitted to the determination of the human spirit as it is determined by the place and time. But there is no doubt that “the linkage between culture and identity has become more problematic,” or even more: “that there have never been national cultures” (Featherstone/Lash, 1999: 1). There is only one logical con-

clusion: *cultural heritage is a social construction of something that never existed as such, although it is based on real human experience, transformed into a myth in order to sustain collective and individual identity; it is not the reflection of the past in the present, but it reflects the relationship of mankind to its past and the significance of its creativity as well as the priorities it establishes in accordance with the relations of inequality and power.*

From “monument” to “cultural value”

Originally, during the 18th century, cultural heritage was exclusively identified with material objects or goods (the fine arts), with the monuments that demonstrated the glory of the ruling classes and their elites, their social status. It was towards the end of the 19th century, when the concept became substantially enlarged. This conceptual revision was the consequence of at least two facts: first, the growing interest and dedication of romanticists with respect to the significance of popular culture; second, the observations, made by an emerging anthropology, of the importance of ethnicity for cultural diversity and the universal value of all cultures independent of their “degree” of historical evolution. Thence, culture was not anymore defined exclusively in terms of the privileged social elites and classes, but rather as the manifestation of the lifestyle of the people themselves. For this reason it is understandable that studies of cultural phenomena began to focus especially on the cultural heritage or cultural value of other people and ethnic communities. In the sense of “popular culture”, the new reference framework of social perception of cultural values brought about the attitude change to represent the whole cultural heritage (with all its difference and diversity) as a subject of importance for museums and encyclopedic description. In accordance with this change in the social perception of cultural reality, the former cultural “monument” of early Modernity now became an object of relative value in view of the growing amount of significant cultural values that reflected all that was considered as a meaningful expression or testimony of the life of any human community. Since then, any effort made in order to preserve the cultural heritage of mankind as the manifestation of its diversity includes both the concept of the “monument” and of culture as empowerment. This fact became evident for the first time after the end of the Second World War in the Convention of The Hague of May 14th 1954, which aimed to protect cultural property in case of armed conflicts and which became rapidly ratified and applied by a series of European States under the impact of the Cold War.⁷ Effectively, this protection

⁷Remember the thin, flat tablets of metal which were fixed to most of the significant buildings and monuments, with the description in German, English,

bore in mind exclusively selected objects of material culture,⁸ especially buildings of outstanding cultural value as well as historical monuments. In the following decades it became widely recognized that these material objects include a non-material, symbolic dimension, in whose concrete manifestation they remain. From that moment on the non-material aspect of human culture became a central subject in the definition of what “cultural value” really means. As far as it reflected the fact that the diversity of culture is based essentially on the intellectual and spiritual interaction of men with nature and society, “material culture” became comprehended as its material manifestation. The idea of creation, taken as the significant, essential point of reference for the designation of the intangible dimension of cultural heritage, burst forth, as Ariño comments: “the act of creation itself is not physical. Interpretation and the creative act are untouchable: they are implicit in the skill or the technique of those who realize them.”⁹ This reorientation became manifest in a series of political initiatives: in 1950 Japan decided to develop a program dedicated to the registration of all its “living national treasures,” especially those based on the artistry of certain persons which was reflected in specific material cultural values. Also well-known are the numerous projects on sonic landscapes in order to identify and record the broad spectrum of naturally and culturally produced sounds. But it was only in 1989, when the UNESCO took the decisive step of adopting the “Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore,”¹⁰ and in 1997 when Marrakesh saw the international meeting of experts on the preservation of sites of popular culture, (also an initiative of UNESCO), based on the proposal made by the Spanish writer Luis Goytisolo.¹¹ It was there that the concept of “oral patrimony of humanity” was definitively born as an instrument to be used by the different member-states against the

French and Russian: “Kulturdenkmal. Cultural Property. Bien culturel (...). Protected by the Convention of The Hague, dated 14 may 1954, for the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflicts.”

⁸When US-American physician Edward Teller—at the beginning of the 1980s, during the Reagan administration—defended the superiority of the neutron-bomb with the argument that this “clean” weapon only destroys organic life, but not inorganic objects, the Convention of The Hague had lost its former, quite utopian character.

⁹“el acto mismo de la creación no tiene forma física. La interpretación y el acto creador son intangibles: están encarnados en la destreza o la técnica de quienes lo realizan” (Ariño, 2002: 135).

¹⁰General Conference, 25th session, Paris, 15 November 1989.

¹¹UNESCO, Ececutive Board, 154th session, Paris, March 19th 1998: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/ima ges/0011/001111/111165s.pdf>

increasing commercialization and folklorization of traditional popular culture.

The UNESCO “Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible heritage of Humanity”¹²

The priority of UNESCO concerning the protection and revitalization of the intangible cultural patrimony of mankind rests on a double strategy: a first, short-term one refers to the proclamation of corresponding masterpieces; a second, long-term one aims at the establishment of the necessary general legal prerequisites (as in the previous case of the material patrimony) in order to motivate and support national governments and local communities to follow the established guidelines of safeguarding. As a first, practical step the Proclamation provides for the development of a list which includes such intangible cultural values. Due to this, on May 18th 2001 a total of 19 cultural sites or cultural manifestations proposed by a 18 member-jury became incorporated in the first list of cultural patrimony to be protected. This proceeding was guided by the idea of giving preference to those values characterized by two conditions: they must be a manifestation of cultural “vitality” at the same time as being in a situation where immediate preventive measures had to be taken. Priority was given to cultural manifestations and sites like languages, music, epopee, rituals and traditional knowledge.¹³ Its reasons are quite comprehensible in view of the present world-wide social and cultural dynamics: “Nous avons constaté que les menaces sont également innombrables, qu’ils s’agisse des aspects négatifs de la mondialisation, du déplacement des peuples à la suite d’une instabilité politique et socio-économique, de la détérioration de l’environnement, du développement incontrôlé du tourisme, ou de la folklorisation.”¹⁴ With respect to the member-states which propose a motion, three steps are to be made in accordance with the Proclamation: first, the preparation of an inventory of those sites or manifestations to be protected because of their exceptional cultural value; second, the presentation of an accurate plan for safeguarding them; third, their incor-

¹²In the following, we make reference to two main documents of the UNESCO in French: the first one is the “Première Proclamation des chefs-d’œuvres du patrimoine oral et immatériel de l’humanité”, cited as “*Première Proclamation*”; the second one, with the same main-title, was published in 2001 with the subtitle “Guide pour la présentation des dossiers de candidature” and will be cited as “*Guide pour la présentation*”.

¹³*Première Proclamation*, p. 3.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

poration in UNESCO list is considered a necessary measure by part of the proposing State to initiate tangible measures for safeguarding them.¹⁵ In the course of the realization of these aims the different member-states of UNESCO were invited by its General Director by letter from October 15 of 2001 to establish the necessary national institutions with respect to the protection of its intangible and oral patrimony.¹⁶

Strategic significance, objectives and objects of the “Proclamation”

Now, the notion “patrimony” has replaced—on an international level—terms such as “cultural value” or “heritage” and will be used therefore in a synonymous way.

The **significance** of the proceedings offered by the UNESCO with respect to their safeguarding is sustained basically on the recognition of its “exceptional value” in view of the intention to maintain cultural diversity on a global level. The concept “oral and intangible heritage,” as it was defined by the Executive Board in November 1998¹⁷ in accordance with the recommendations made nine years before,¹⁸ comprises

l’ensemble des créations émanant d’une communauté culturelle fondées sur la tradition, exprimées par un groupe ou par des individus et reconnues comme répondant aux attents de la communauté en tant qu’expressions de l’identité culturelle et sociale de celle-ci, les normes et les valeurs se transmettant oralement, par imitation ou d’autres façons. Ses formes comprennent, entre autres, la langue, la littérature, la musique, la danse, les jeux, la mythologie, les rites, les coutumes et le savoir-faire de l’artisanat, l’architecture et d’autres arts.¹⁹

A similar definition was made in 2001 by a group of experts during a meeting in Turin and adopted a few months later by the Executive Board and the General Conference. Accordingly, the patrimony we are referring to includes

les processus acquis par les peuples ainsi que les savoirs, les compétences et la créativité dont ils sont les héritiers et qu’ils développent,

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶ “Annexe II. Création d’organismes nationaux pour la protection du patrimoine culturel immatériel”, in: *Guide pour la présentation*, pp. 32-33.

¹⁷ “Annexe I. Règlement relatif à la proclamation par l’UNESCO des chefs-d’oeuvre du patrimoine oral et immatériel de l’humanité”, in: *Guide pour la présentation*, pp. 26-30

¹⁸ “Annexe III. Recommandation sur la sauvegarde de la culture traditionnelle et populaire adoptée par la Conférence Général à sa vingt-cinquième session, Paris, 15 novembre 1989”, in: *Guide pour la présentation*, pp. 34-39.

¹⁹ “Annexe I. Règlement relatif...”, in: *Guide pour la présentation*, p. 26.

les produits qu'ils créent et les ressources, espaces et autres dimensions du cadre social et naturel nécessaires à leur durabilité; ces processus inspirent aux communautés vivantes un sentiment de continuité par rapport aux générations qui les ont précédées et revêtent une importance cruciale pour l'identité culturelle ainsi que la sauvegarde de la diversité culturelle et de la créativité de l'humanité.²⁰

Well, although both definitions are perfectly congruent, the second one puts special emphasis on the process of the production of the cultural heritage, its consequences and its particular significance for the construction of collective identities, whilst the first one focuses mainly on the cultural manifestation itself. Another difference consists in the fact that the experts which met in Turin laid a special—more sociological—emphasis on the *social and natural framework*, in which these processes are embedded.

Another important aspect of the significance of the concept refers to the *reasons* for safeguarding. The intangible and oral patrimony is considered a “vital factor” for the following three reasons: first, it sustains cultural identity; second, it promotes creativity; third, it helps to preserve cultural diversity. But, it is a “vital factor” exposed to danger because of a series of counteracting factors such as cultural uniformity, armed conflicts, tourism, industrialization, migration from the rural areas to urban sites and from/to other countries, as well as the degradation of the environment.²¹ And the Declaration of Masterpieces finally emphasizes the protection of the oral and intangible patrimony as an important contribution to tolerance and harmonic relations between the different cultures.²²

As to which **objects** of the initiative UNESCO refers to, a clear distinction between “popular and traditional forms of expression” and “cultural sites” is established.²³ The first category includes cultural manifestations like languages, orally transmitted literature, music, dance, games, myths, rituals, costumes, artistry and architecture; the second one aims at those places where popular cultural activities are traditionally sited and periodically executed, for example processions, market-places, festivals or public rituals. The selection of the objects follows the criteria and practices established by UNESCO in its extensive guidelines.²⁴

²⁰*Guide pour la présentation*, p. 5.

²¹*Première Proclamation*, p. 5.

²²*Guide pour la présentation*, p. 3.

²³*Première Proclamation*, p. 5.

²⁴“IV. Soumissions des dossiers de candidature”, in: *Guide pour la présentation*, pp. 6-23.

The **objectives** of the Proclamation are the logical consequence of its strategy and are summarized in the “First Declaration” of UNESCO on the oral and intangible patrimony and consist in:

- alerting public opinion, in reference to the value and the necessity of the safeguarding and revitalization of this kind of patrimony;
- its localization and evaluation on a global level;
- mobilization of all countries in order to create stock-lists of their oral and intangible cultural heritage as well as to develop legal and administrative proceedings in this direction;
- promotion and support of traditional artistry, artists and local initiatives in order to identify and restore the intangible patrimony. At the same time this request also is directed to governments and non-governmental organizations as well as local communities; it invites persons, groups, institutions and organizations to participate in its administration, preservation, protection and promotion.²⁵

Classified objects of the intangible cultural heritage

Until the end of 2002 a total of 19 manifestations of cultural expression or cultural sites have been incorporated into the UNESCO list, namely: 1) Language, dance and music of the Garifuna (Belize); 2) the oral genre Gelede (music, songs, dances and masks of the Yoruba-nago and the Fon et Mahi in Benin); 3) the carnival of Oruro (Bolivia); 4) the opera Kunqu (China); 5) the trumpets of Gbofe from Afounkaha (the musical and cultural site of the Tagbana in Ivory Coast); 6) the cultural site (music, dance, national festival) of the brotherhood Saint-Esprit des Congos from Villa Mella (Dominican Republic); 7) the oral heritage and the cultural expressions of the Zapara people (Ecuador and Peru); 8) the Georgian polyphonic chant (Georgia); 9) the cultural site of the Sossobala instrument of the Mandingue community (Guinea); 10) the Sanskrit theater Kutiyattam from Kerala (India); 11) the Sicilian puppet-theater Opera dei Pupi (Italy); 12) the Nôgaku theater (Japan); 13) the creation and the symbolism of the crucifix (Lithuania, with the support of Latvia); 14) the cultural site of the Jemaa el-Fnaa square in Marrakesh (Morocco); 15) the *hudhud* recital of the Ifugao community (Philippines); 16) the ancestral royal ritual and the ritual music of the sanctuary of Jongmyo (Corean Republic); 17) the cultural site and the oral culture of the Semeiskie community (Russian Federation); 18) the Mystery of

²⁵*Première Proclamation*, p. 5. See also the decision adopted by the Executive Board during its 155th session in order to find public or private patronage designated to the support of an award or measures of safeguarding, protection and revitalization of cultural sites and forms of cultural expression.

Elche (Spain) and¹⁹ the cultural space of the Boysun district (Uzbekistan).

Final conclusions

As we can see, the UNESCO initiative was aimed exclusively at safeguarding delimited cultural spaces and practices. It could be qualified as the attempt at global reconstruction of the local and cultural identities based on traditional popular culture. Hence, the concept of "Mediterraneanity" does not fit this conception as it refers rather to the geographical and historical entity that is reflected in the cultural sites and manifestations of popular culture developed and maintained in this region. It is an entity that synthesizes traditions, at the same time that it stimulates cultural change as it is involved in the socio-economical and political development of the region. Although as an entity it cannot be defined in terms of particularity, it becomes evident as a particular quality that is represented in a great number of those cultural sites and manifestations, which are active elements in the construction of the Mediterranean and European societies. In view of the danger, inherent in the UNESCO project, of establishing a cultural piecemeal-technology to safeguard some sites and manifestations and to exclude others, we have to take into account that the best way to maintain these consists in developing the social and cultural network in which the sites and manifestations of traditional culture are embedded and from which they are challenged to develop an adequate answer to the problems of the human future in this region. That is, what "living tradition" really is: more than being a mere representation of the past, it is very important that it takes part in cultural communication, to apply its inherent knowledge and its values in the solution of present problems. In accordance with this objection, the narrow relation established between cultural heritage and cultural identity becomes a quite brittle argument in patrimonialization politics: as Douglas Kellner points out, "rather than identity disappearing in a postmodern society, it is subject to new determinations and new forces while offering new possibilities, styles, models and forms."²⁶ Regarding this, the concept of "Mediterraneanity" is more relevant and complex as it is a political one that refers not only to the safeguarding of a determined class of cultural artefacts, but also to the way in which policy-making should be evaluated and oriented in accordance with developing the Mediterranean region as a space of peace, tolerance, cultural diversity, based on social and economic progress. I think that there is no other way to safeguard human culture

²⁶Kellner, 1992: 174.

as a medium of self-sufficiency and happiness, to the extent that human beings generally are willing to accept the efforts they necessarily have to make in their struggle for a better life. I also think, that this often despised "old" Europe is the heir of a precious and powerful treasure that consists of its sublime, universal contribution to human culture that emerged in the ideas and values of the Enlightenment. This treasure still preserves the struggle for freedom, equality and solidarity, for human and civil rights, social and economic justice and democracy as the means by which power can become controlled by the people. In view of the upcoming "clash of civilizations" provoked by blindfolded neoliberalism we should remember that the real basis for the disappearance of precious cultural values is to be found in the mechanism of capitalism itself and its social consequences. French writer Michel Houellebecq's last novel, *Platform*, is an impressive and even sensual testimony of how local cultures are submitted to the destructive power of the capitalist market. And as fiction and reality merge in many ways, his novel became a visionary anticipation of what actually happened shortly after. Cultural politics cannot be a substitute for the social confrontation caused by economic exploitation and political oppression, but it can educate the people and their governments to prevail over them by finding some human solution.

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