

# **Geo-political complexities of governmentality and Balkanism: Deconstructing UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage discourses**

## **Abstract**

This study critically discusses the entanglements between World Heritage and geo-politics. It deconstructs the geo-political gaze which, it is argued, characterises the articulation of the UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) programme in the Republic of Croatia. The study of ICH specific to the case of Croatia is significant in political geography because it entails how cultural heritage is instrumentally used to promote nation-building while seeking to overcome past suppression of its culture. The article takes the Foucauldian concept of governmentality and Todorova's notion of Balkanism as epistemological frameworks. The aim is to understand what discourses are in play for Croatia as an independent nation to self-reflexively represent itself in the UNESCO international community and establish its geo-political positioning among other European nations through the transactional device of ICH. We argue that UNESCO acts as a supranational body which interacts with Croatia in the matter of ICH safeguarding. It therefore contributes to an emphasis on a governmentality discourse; at the same time, Balkanism can be regarded as a backdrop against which Croatia has constructed its own identity and legitimised its European aspirations.

**Keywords:** World Heritage; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Geo-Political Positioning; Governmentality; Balkanism; Croatia

## **Introduction**

Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996), and later Naef and Ploner (2016), argue that heritage management is symbolically contested – which causes semantic battles to be fought over meaning, representations and logic. Far from being sites of political neutrality, these battlefields are unavoidably selective in terms of whose and which aspects of the past authorise continuity (Naef & Ploner, 2016). Drawing on collective memory, heritage deploys a range of powerful devices for constructing meanings through stories, practices and performances, which, together, become signifiers of a nation's identity (Goulding & Domic, 2009) and attempts at nation-building (Harrison, 2013). In addition, the inclusion of cultural heritage forms on UNESCO's representative lists can elevate a perceived (and believed) status – which can be internally and externally based on political or ideological points of significance (Bianchi & Boniface, 2002).

This paper critically situates entanglements of heritage and geo-politics, building on recent studies (Aykan, 2016; Eichler, 2021; Stefano et al., 2014). While the existing literature mainly focuses on safeguarding rituals, practices and sites, this paper contributes insight into how geo-politics is involved in Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereafter ICH), as promulgated by UNESCO through its 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Within UNESCO's narrative, ICH is often considered 'invisible heritage' (Melis, 2018). ICH has since then, gained international and academic attention. This paper transcends heritage studies of specific sites and expressions by acknowledging the interconnectedness of the processes of defining heritage, those involved in creating the discourse, and politics (Larsen & Buckley, 2018). Deconstructing how a nation represents, and disseminates ICH is inherently geo-political, and requires more attention and further consideration. This paper considers the case of Croatia and the discourses informing its interpretation of the 2003 Convention. We adopt the Foucauldian idea of governmentality as an epistemological lens to situate contemporary debates and representations. Balkanism also emerges as a useful framework to look at Croatia's representation of ICH as it surfaces from the documents created in fulfilment of the ratification of the ICH Convention. Deconstructing the geo-political gaze in ICH research challenges scholars to position political and cultural motivations behind the utilisation of heritage to define a nation.

Croatia is a unique case when it comes to ICH. This small nation, whose independence was achieved only in 1991, has, at the time of writing, the third highest number of ICH elements (17) inscribed on the representative list. This attempt to define the nation through ICH is embedded in the nation's history. Croatia has long sought to be distinct and separate during its course of history: starting by losing its independence by contracting personal union with Hungary and then continuing with the first Yugoslav state created at the end of World War I

(see MacMillan, 2002). The common state with Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as ‘constituent tribes’ saw a Serb king with supportive Serbian politicians embedding their direction and concepts in the establishment of the common Yugoslav state (Klemenčič & Žagar, 2004). Past tensions with the Serbs refer to how Croatia today deploys ICH as a medium for constructing its nationhood and has been very active in the implementation of the 2003 Convention. One way for a young nation to gain acknowledgement is through heritage, and to Croatia attempts at nation-building are framed around ICH as a way of overcoming what they regard as past suppressions of their culture (Harrison, 2013). By applying multiple points of theory to the case of Croatia, this paper will deconstruct the geo-political gaze as conceptualised by O’Tuathail (1996) as enmeshed within the UNESCO ICH discourse.

Accordingly, to build the conceptual argument in this paper, the Foucauldian notion of governmentality is used as an epistemological approach to understand to what extent the ICH discourse is entangled with the discourse of Croatia as a nation. More specifically, the qualitative study reported below explores what discourses are in play for Croatia, based on how the nation presents itself in the UNESCO international community and establishes its geo-political positioning among other European nations through the transactional device of ICH (Naef & Ploner, 2016). Moreover, Balkanism is considered as a framework against which Croatia has attempted to construct and legitimise its national own identity both within Europe and within the wider international community of the UNESCO heritage programme (Razsa & Lindstrom, 2004; Hirschfeld, 2011). Before our analysis is presented below, the paper first acknowledges the contextual background on geo-politics, the 2003 Convention, governmentality and Balkanism to inform the reader on how this points relate to our analysis..

### **Critical geo-Politics**

A critical geo-political perspective aligns with social and cultural geographies. Critical geo-politics is an approach that emerged in the early 1980s as an attempt to move beyond the underpinnings of classical geo-politics. The end of the Cold War questioned geo-political attitude regarding global space with statist neutrality (Squire, 2015). Haverluk et al. (2014) view this tendency as inherently imperialist, in that it serves states' geo-political goals – leading many scholars dealing with geo-politics to pursue anti-geo-political approaches. While classical geo-politics conceptualizes the nation-state as a single, fixed, unified, entity, critical geo-politics sees the state as a form of geography and politics that has contextuality and that is involved in the social reproduction of power (Squire, 2015). Richardson and Jensen (2003) add that the influence of discourse and its imprint within a territory are central to critical geo-political analysis.

Drawing on post-modern thinkers (e.g. Foucault, Derrida and Baudrillard, O'Tuathail) this paper conceptualises the geopolitical gaze as an understanding that would “enforce the vision of space and power of a certain metropolitan spatial and political order over those marginalised groups who would contest that order” (O'Tuathail, 1996: 144). Inspired by Foucault, O'Tuathail and Toal (1994: 261) argue the geo-political gaze is a form of panopticism, in other words: a form of institutional, strategic surveillance, that “seeks to render the dynamics of states increasingly visible”. Here, visibility required a new way of shaping perspective and power, and is where heritage discourses could be used to define a nation and identity, and also be used to designate separation and/or *othering*.

Heritage discourses are malleable, with power shaping/constructing (place/national) identities, especially when considering nationalism and the construction of imagined communities (Anderson, 1983). In this paper we argue that geopolitical power is attained through a form of

governmentality (Bratich et al., 2003; Foucault, 1991) that manipulates ICH to exert its effects. Specifically, we will look at how the geopolitical gaze informs a dominant representation of ICH in Croatia that does not seem to fully account for the heritage of minority groups living in the same territory. At the same time, such a dominant representation deployed through ICH conceals attempts to affirm specific geopolitical visions of Croatia in the context of UNESCO's international arena. An increasing number of scholars (e.g. Bratich et al., 2003; Legg, 2016; Pyykkönen, 2012) now ground critical interpretations of the nation-state on Foucauldian understandings of power, dominance and governmentality, as discussed below.

### **The 2003 Convention: Between Place, Nation and Geo-Politics**

The criteria used to define 'heritage' in the 2003 Convention are very different from those used in UNESCO's 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage: the former refer not to geographical position (topographic criteria) but to the community of bearers (ethnographic criteria) (Bortolotto, 2007). Because there is no longer a fixed nexus between heritage-identity-community and place (Relph, 1976), the 2003 Convention is opened up to multinational and transnational expressions of ICH, including heritage of diasporic and nomadic populations. Scholars, however, do observe discrepancies between the aims of the Convention and its actual implementation (Aykan, 2013, 2015; Bortolotto, 2007, 2010, 2015; Melis & Chambers, 2021).

With the 1972 Convention, despite the obvious global ethos of World Heritage, nation-states were the basis of UNESCO's structure (Meskell, 2014, 2018), and the same appears to be true with the 2003 Convention (Aykan, 2015; Bortolotto, 2015; Sargent, 2020). A formal reason for this is that inclusion of ICH expression on the representative list is subject to a state's nomination (Meskell, 2018; Larsen & Buckley, 2018). Another reason, one not fully

acknowledged by UNESCO, relates to the scope left by the Convention for states to pursue the political and economic interests of the nation (Bertacchini et al., 2016). This is also widely acknowledged in relation to the 1972 Convention (Meskell, 2014). In particular, Bertacchini et al. (2016) conducted a quantitative study of the procedure for inscription of cultural expressions on the World Heritage List under the 1972 Convention. They concluded that political and economic interests play a key role, even though UNESCO's mission is not expressly economic nor political.

As far as UNESCO is concerned, World Heritage status has become politicised (similar to the work of other UN agencies). Brumann (2014) observes the increasing influence of political lobbying over national delegates with technical expertise, and this has given nations that are able to join geo-political alliances greater negotiating power. Meskell (2014) believes this translates into international political-pacting, with voting blocs that foster national economic interests at the expense of the declared global conservation mission. Moreover, as a geo-political logic is applied more widely, safeguarding visions and financial resources dedicated to the (actual) protection of inscribed sites will decline (Meskell, 2014). Brumann (2014) agrees that the initial aim of the Convention and the rationale for its introduction are now overlooked.

This paper regards the distinction of tangible and intangible cultural heritage not as an ontological dichotomy, but as a political discursive construction (Melis & Chambers, 2021). Taking this into account, we argue that similar tensions inform the implementation of the 2003 Convention. Because ICH is discursively conceptualised in the 2003 Convention as immaterial, evanescent, deterritorialised, it emerges as a malleable category and therefore more likely to cause geo-political dissonance not only between communities of practice but also between state parties.

Aykan (2015) contests the participatory nature of the Convention, and argues that UNESCO's ICH programme leaves scope for affirmation of the dominant culture of the nation at the expense of the cultures of minority groups. Sargent (2020), moreover, notes that sometimes tensions over multi-state inscriptions arise because states prefer a single-state inscription, especially where geo-political tensions exist due to problematic histories. Tensions might also arise within different regions of the same state, where multiple inscriptions of expressions identified as celebrations of big processional structures take on a different meaning in different towns. More broadly, there are instances in which the principles of the Convention have been distorted locally to embrace national ideologies. For instance, Bodolec (2012) found that ICH had been used in China to promote 'social harmony' and the ideas of a harmonious society introduced in 2005 by President Hu Jintao, because considered able to link people through a shared and common heritage.

It is evident that UNESCO cultural heritage programs are now serving different political interests, instrumental for asserting sovereign power (James & Winter, 2017). Naef and Ploner (2016) argue that heritage value has become secondary to more complex geo-political interests. What arguably emerges is that UNESCO cultural heritage is often treated as an expedient in the pursuit of cultural and political aims. Heritage outlives present politics, however, and, as such, calls for its safeguarding transcend present cultural, religious and political tensions (Meskell, 2014). This reflects an authorised heritage discourse (Smith, 2006), whereby the need for safeguarding is taken for granted and supersedes other uses of heritage. Cultural heritage that receives a UNESCO accolade therefore emerges as a vantage spot or nodal point, within a complex constellation of local and global instances, making it possible to look at the emergence of global heritage. Thus 'heritage' is not only a matter of the nation (Meskell & Cristoph, 2015),

but a domain of history intertwined with issues of national sovereignty, local (instances of) memory and grievance, as well as diplomatic concerns.

It becomes evident that heritage studies must exceed the investigation of particular places and heritage expressions, as they are increasingly encompassing the study of “interconnected processes, people and politics” (Larsen & Buckley, 2018: 86). Having acknowledged that the management of the past is not only a matter of the nation but increasingly “an international and economic affair” (Rivera, 2008: 631), we now introduce the Foucauldian idea of governmentality to show how nation states are progressively extending their sphere of interest to a previously private dimension, with the aim not only of promoting national cohesion but also of pursuing wider geo-political interests.

### **Governmentality**

Foucault introduced the notion of governmentality in the late 1970s to refer to a method of administering, regulating and organising society (Foucault, 2008; Legg, 2016), or, more specifically, to Early Modern processes that eventually led to the birth of modern Western states across the 18th and 19th centuries (Pyykkönen, 2012). As a reaction to the disintegration of feudalism, the expanding colonialism and the widespread emergence of reformist/counter-reformist movements, states began to broaden their functions by increasing their pastoral power – a power previously held by other societal institutions (the family, ecclesiastical and civic institutions). Thus, according to Foucault, those states acquired a caring and salvific role comparable to a shepherd with a flock (Bröckling et al., 2010; Pyykkönen, 2012).

Reflecting on the genealogy of the modern administrative state, Foucault observes a progressive shift in the nature of power during the 17th century, when sovereignty and coercion



were gradually substituted by a novel form of power (which he calls biopower) that instead “exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (Foucault, 1976: 136). Moreover, that power is exercised over free subjects ‘and only insofar as they are free’ (Foucault, 1982). The main function of biopolitics is therefore to take care of life using knowledge instead of coercion as a central instrument. Functional to this form of influence is the agency of individuals, who are themselves vehicles of micropower (Merquior, 1991). Foucault contests that biopower is exerted over as well as propelled and diffused by human subjects, and that there is a monolithic centre from which that power emanates, namely the state.

Foucault emphasises that human activity is organised on the basis of the creation of problems, knowledge and programmes to address them. Accordingly, knowledge is intimately tied to power. Governmentality, then, is possible thanks to the adoption of specific “types of rationality, regimes of representation, and interpretive models” that govern all aspects of human life (Bröckling et al, 2010: 2). The state’s role in governmentality is de-centralised and deterritorialised (Oksala, 2013). Its effectiveness relies on its ability both to dispose of subjects and objects (Bratich et al., 2003) and to determine (at a distance) their field of action (Rose, 1999). The state alone, interpreted as a monolithic centre, is not effective enough to exercise this form of power, however. Power is much more diffused and articulated in a myriad of technologies, rationalities, programmes and practices (O’Farrel, 2005), which collectively inform individuals’ day-to-day lives (Bratich et al., 2003).

Governmentality can be portrayed as a mosaic of decentralised and somewhat deterritorialised parties. These parties not only encompass state agencies, but transcend them to include other

articulations (national and transnational) that interact with the state (i.e. intergovernmental organisations, NGOs, activist associations). Different arenas contribute to governmentality and governmentality can thus be used as a framing to understand localised practices, including ICH safeguarding and protection. What interests Foucault, though, is understanding how such dispersed parties and activities are (actually) oriented towards specific objectives (Bröckling, et al., 2010).

Governmentality is more than a theory of the state, in that it offers a framework of interpretation (Caride, 2014), an epistemological political field which investigates competing discourses, claims of truth, and technologies of knowledge that produce and consolidate power relations. The concept of governmentality is not about discussing the state vs society dichotomy, nor to establish the conducts of institutions. Addressing governmentality allows us to understand how the power and reach of the state reverberates beyond its bureaucratic and regulatory institutions. In line with this, we argue that the 2003 Convention can be regarded as a programmatic body of knowledge and standards through which a realm that was previously embedded in the life and practices of other societal institutions (families, religious/cultural groups) becomes a domain of government regulation.

Aligning these conceptualisations to the case of Croatia, we consider governmentality as an epistemological approach to understanding the extent to which UNESCO ICH discourses are entangled with discourses of Croatia as a nation. More specifically, the lens of governmentality is useful to understand what discourses are in play for Croatia, as a nation, both to self-reflexively represent itself and to present itself to the UNESCO international community in order to establish its geo-political position among other European nations through the transactional device of ICH.

## **Balkanism**

In *Imagining the Balkans*, Todorova (2009: 7) discursively reconstructs a centuries-old discourse through which the Balkans, together with its Ottoman heritage, emerged as “a symbol located outside historical time” both within but also as something *other* than Europe (see also Bryce & Causevic, 2019). More specifically, Todorova (2009) sought to first to identify what kind of statements are commonly made about the Balkans and then to understand what is meant by them, as well as how the peninsula became imbued with stereotypes of backwardness, primitiveness and barbarianism. The term ‘Balkan’ has been disassociated from its geographical connotation, to identify a discursive space in which Byzantine and Ottoman legacies are commonly invoked.

Some authors have observed that Balkanism is merely a variation on Orientalism (e.g. Bakić-Hayden, 1995). Said’s (1978) seminal work on Orientalism illustrates the way the ‘East’ has been constructed as the ‘non-West’, as something *other*, to the extent that it is not possible to understand the East without taking the West into consideration. By extension, without examining power relations it is not possible to detect why a place has been constructed and represented in a certain way. This applies to the Balkans. Bakić-Hayden (1995) talks about ‘nesting Orientalism’, that is, the gradation of the deployment ‘Orientalism’ from West to East. Within Europe, the Balkans are perceived as the ‘most Eastern’. Moreover, within the Balkans region itself the same gradation is reproduced. More narrowly still, even among the former Republic of Yugoslavian countries, similar hierarchical tendencies are observed.

While conceding that Balkanism has similarities to Orientalism in terms of underlying discourse logic, Todorova refuses to regard Balkanism as an articulation of Orientalism, and

claims that it is a discourse in its own right. Discourses are characterisations of patterns, which may be overlapping and/or complementary to what is being studied. While several discourses (such as racism and modernisation) can have a similar underlying rhetoric, nonetheless each discourse should be regarded as a distinct phenomenon especially when specific discourses are brought into light to emphasise power-relations involving a specific category of subjects. One reason to look at Balkanism as a separate discourse from Orientalism is that the Balkans and the East (including the Middle East) have been regarded as distinct geo-political entities since the Crusades – noting the Balkans were predominantly Christian as opposed to Islamic (Todorova, 1994). Balkanism therefore identifies not a discourse of difference between two opposites, but rather one that is able to detect the differences within the same entity: in this instance, Europe.

Although the Balkans are a defined geographical area, its actual borders are unclear. While geographically part of Europe, after the First World War the Balkans gradually started emerging as a cultural *other*, a neglected part of Europe. The Balkans became associated with stereotypes of “atavistic and irrational hatred, its peoples represented as constantly on the verge of political instability, criminality and chaos” (Arnaud, 2015: 171). This representation was exacerbated during the 1990s with the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the ensuing wars for independence.

According to Razsa and Lindstrom (2004), the discourse of Balkanism was exerted to reject Croatia’s European aspirations. That discourse was projected by Western journalists and local and non-local leaders. Franjo Tuđman made use of an openly Balkanic narrative to distinguish Croatia’s identity from that of Serbia by pushing the country to adopt western behaviours and focus on openness (Bellamy et al., 2003). However, this push to align the Croatia with the

‘European West’ faced criticism due to Tuđman’s authoritarian politics, which led to a crisis for Croatia in relation to its past international reputation associations (further addressed below). Croatia also used the same Balkanic discourse to position itself in opposition to other adjacent countries. This narrative exceeded the political discourse and came to inform other discourses, such as the country’s tourism narrative, and was used to promote an identity that would promote Croatia’s independence claims, as well as its emancipation from Balkan stereotypes.

Rivera (2008) examines promotional tourism material and discusses the politics of the Croatian government in the aftermath of the wars of independence. Moreover, Rivera (2008) concludes that Croatia attempted to manage its difficult past through practices of covering and cultural reframing, and strategically sought to characterise Croatia as a tourist destination neighbouring more established European countries such as Italy. This suggests ‘nesting Balkanism’ (Žižek, 1997), similar to nesting Orientalism (Bakić-Hayden, 1995) – the deployment of a pejorative Balkan image for eastern neighbours. Arguably, nesting Balkanism is reproduced by Croatia in relation to Serbia, regarded as the closest representation of the Balkan *other*. One might argue that it is not only Serbia pictured as the “other” or stereotyped. Research conducted in 2001 confirmed the Serbs as the stereotypical representation of the ‘evil other’ and Balkan itself. Šakaja (2001: 37) divided Balkan countries into imaginative zones, with Serbia (and Bosnia and Herzegovina) belonging to zone 1 due to “direct relations and the closest cultural/linguistic contacts” and conducted survey among young residents of Croatian capital about their perceptions of neighbouring nations through stereotypical adjectives. It further gave way to emotional relationships resulting in stereotyping and especially pejorative stereotypes towards Serbs as “dirty”, “megalomaniacs”, “aggressive”, etc. However, another research conducted in Bosnia shows Bosnians Muslims, for example, were perceived much better (in a scale of stereotypical adjectives that was offered to respondents) than Serbian residents of

Bosnia (Puhalo, 2009). This is not unique to Croatia. Similarly, Kotor, a province in Montenegro, attempted to distance itself from Serbian-Orthodox associations to promote its own destination image, one different from the rest of the country, to which end it used its ICH in the form of its Venetian and Catholic origins.

Baillie (2016) and Derkovich (2010) note the attempted erasure of the Balkan ‘other’ through material destruction of symbolic heritage during the war. This author highlights how religious symbols in Vukovar (a Croatian city located close to the border with Serbia), such as churches and other sacred monuments, were deployed to gain national support and endorse military action. To this end, Vukovar’s Catholic and Orthodox churches were used to distinguish Croat from Serb heritage. Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, cultural heritage became a target because it symbolised a multinational Bosnian-Herzegovinian identity (Derkovich, 2010). Before the 1990s, three ethno-national identities shared the same territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Croats, Muslims and Serbs. Historic monuments were the visual embodiment of this heterogeneity and were therefore taken as targets during the wars of independence.

In this paper, we discuss how ICH expressions have been taken, since the war, as symbolic targets of the geo-political aspirations of Croatia and how these have been informed by narratives that involve the notion of Balkanism. We argue that Balkanism can be regarded as a framework against which Croatia has constructed its own identity and legitimised its European aspirations (Razsa & Lindstrom, 2004; Hirschfeld, 2011). More specifically, Balkanism is used as a framework for analysis to investigate whether such a discourse is used by Croatia to represent itself within the international community of UNESCO’s ICH programme.

### **Methodology: Discourse analysis**

The significance of ICH and the geo-politics of Croatia aligns with the ratification of the 2003 Convention, which offers a critical lens on governmentality and Balkanism. To show how this understanding is embedded, this paper draws from textual materials and deploys discourse analysis. Researchers acknowledge that discourse analysis lacks a step-by-step prescriptive method. For instance, Waitt (2005) and Nicholls (2008) agree that it was not Foucault's intention to leave a method through his theories. Shiner (1982) emphasises that Foucault's aim was simply to offer tools for analysis. The aim of discourse analysis is to interrogate possible devices through which certain utterances become natural by assuming the form of truth (Waitt, 2005). The discourse analysis conducted in this paper aims to understand what discourses are in play through which Croatia represents itself within the international community of UNESCO's ICH programme.

Discourse analysis first involves the selection of relevant sources, or "surfaces of emergence" (Foucault, 2002: 45). The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the analysis privilege richness of detail in the data over quantity of data (Tonkiss, 1998). This research considers documents created by Croatia for its implementation of the 2003 Convention. The final sample included 17 Nomination documents for inscription on the Representative List, 17 Decision documents for inscription by the Intergovernmental Committee and two periodic reports for the implementation of the Convention. The Act on the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Property (1999), through which Croatia formally recognised the forms of cultural heritage (including ICH) 'of interest to the Republic of Croatia', was also included. Documents in this study are interpreted as *discursive instantiations*, or surfaces for discourse inscription (Stavrakakis, 2005).

Texts were examined without pre-existing categorisations (Waitt, 2005), in other words not taking for granted any insight about specific subjects/objects<sup>1</sup>. A crucial point of discourse analysis is to look for mechanisms that silence. Silences, through the erasure of elements such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality and physical ability, contribute to the construction of social differences and reinforce a particular discourse. Not only silences, but also presupposed knowledge is important to understand the working of discourse. Presuppositional silence should not be overlooked (Huckin, 2002). In fact, inferred meanings are unproblematically understood by readers. Hall (1997: 347-348) states “meaning is relational within an ideological system of presences and absences”, and therefore utterances also have to be evaluated in relation to what is absent.

### **Data analysis**

The analysis is organised in two sections. To deconstruct the ICH discourses, we draw from the conceptual lenses of *governmentality* and *Balkanism*. This not only demonstrates how engaging with UNESCO heritage program contributes to the construction of the identity of a nation, but also highlights the underlying geo-politics.

In the years 2013-2016 Croatia was part of the Inter-governmental Committee, which is responsible, among other functions, for the examination of requests submitted by States Parties for the inscription of intangible heritage. From an examination of the Intergovernmental

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding researcher positionality, the first and second authors (respectively Italian and American backgrounds) and are not based in Croatia but in the United Kingdom and Arizona (USA), Both scholars are trained in discourse and textual analysis and employ a geographical perspective to research, they have also spent time and have conducted research on and in Croatia. The third author, lived most of their life in Croatia and is currently there. The third author contributed to mediate meanings and interpretations from the text . The different perspectives of the authors allowed them to unpack textual materials from different perspectives as well as positionalities.



Committee reports, it emerges that Croatia was unsurprisingly very active with nominations in the time frame 2013-2016—with most of the representatives being ambassadors and other diplomats figures. Given the politicized delegation, performers and experts of ICH in Croatia are underrepresented within the inter-governmental Committee, thus confirming the highly politicised nature of the decisions related to the implementation of the 2003 Convention (Bertacchini, 2016; Brumann, 2014; Meskell, 2014). Two documents appear as particularly significant in our analysis: the 2012 and 2018 reports on the implementation of the 2003 Convention. The 2012 document has more of an international focus. The 2018 document put a new emphasis on safeguarding: ‘the intangible cultural heritage of Croatia has been safeguarded continually due to the efforts of its bearers, various associations, NGSs and the state, scientific and professional institutions’ (UNESCO, 2018, p. 2) . The matter of ‘safeguarding’ here can be seen as a marker for identity construction, for protection against encroachment. The use of the word ‘continually’ immediately after ‘safeguarded’ emphasises ‘continuity’ in narratives of the nation but now framed around governance and overcoming past representations as the *other* – caught between identities of European and Balkan.

In 2012 the international focus shows Croatia is abiding by international standards. The newly sovereign country arguably needed to define itself, and the report uses conservative language with regard to geographical positioning and neighbouring Balkan nations. Croatia became part of the European Union in July 2013 (joining neighbours Hungary and Slovenia), and accession was the political recognition the country needed. Securing this allowed for a more radical attempt to define a new imagined community and safeguard what Croatia sees as its ICH, despite the shared associations with neighbours (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Montenegro and Slovenia).

From a geo-political standpoint, it is interesting to observe what is considered continuous heritage, especially considering how elements inscribed before independence in 1991 are embedded in the current state of Croatia. According to the 2012 report, 1999 was a critical turning point for Croatia, ‘when the Act on the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Property was passed’, as the country ‘has inscribed elements of intangible heritage in its national Register of Cultural Property’(Croatian Parliament, 1999). Here, according to this act, Croatia puts emphasis on creativity ‘transferred from one generation to another’(Croatian Parliament, 1999) This is a matter of Croatia maintaining a distinct heritage, which reinforces the point noted about continuity. Croatia is attempting to frame a new narrative that overcomes the discontinuity caused by the temporary existence of the Yugoslav state (1918 to 1991) and the associated conflict over territories and borders—as these frame negative associations, fear and hardship. Thus, culture is claimed to be constant and ICH a continuity of place, presence and (national) identity.

To contribute insight on heritage and geo-politics in this paper, the first section, on governmentality, as understood by Foucault, regards governments not as monolithic sources of power, but rather as a range of parties involved in regulating individual lives to legitimise a government’s presence and power. Then, turning attention to Balkanism, Croatia is seen to use (indeed rely on) a ‘Balkanist discourse’ to emphasise difference, in moving both towards and away from Europe, to define its presence as a nation within and between Europe and the Balkans.

### ***Governmentality***

In 1999 Croatia formally (and legally) acknowledged ICH by passing the Act on the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Property. Here, ICH was referred to as ‘non-material cultural objects’, defined in terms of property:

Intangible cultural property may be a variety of forms and manifestation of spiritual creation passed down by tradition or in some other way, and in particular:

- languages, dialects, speeches, and toponyms, and oral literature of all kinds;
- folk creation in the area of music, dance, tradition, games, ceremonies, customs and other traditional folk values;
- traditional skills and crafts.

(Act on the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Property, -Croatian Parliament 1999, Art.9)

By legally acknowledging ICH as a collection of objects of national ownership, the newly formed Republic of Croatia in the 1990s reaffirmed itself as a national subject. In 1991, Croatia declared independence; the ensuing war led to one-third of Croatia’s territory being under Serbian control. In 1992, Tuđman was elected president. In the same year, the UN established four protected areas to lessen the scope for conflict between Serbs and Croats. Not until 1998 was the fourth of these areas returned to Croat control. The acknowledgement of ICH in 1999 through the Act is significant because it adds an important element to the emerging ‘mosaic’ of Croatian nationhood. Governmentality here is not a monolithic source of power but incorporates Croatia’s recent history and how the nation defines objects and property.

There are contrasts between the ontological status ascribed to immaterial cultural property in the 1999 Act ('forms and manifestation of spiritual creation') and the concrete and capillary bureaucratic articulation of the safeguarding of ICH in Croatia, as described in the 2012 Report on the implementation of the Convention:

The central national body responsible for the safeguarding of cultural heritage, including intangible cultural heritage, is the Ministry of Culture and its Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, with 19 local safeguarding departments throughout Croatia. A dedicated Service for Movable and Intangible Cultural Heritage was established within the Directorate in 2004 (UNESCO, 2012, p. 3).

By acknowledging the bodies responsible for the safeguarding of cultural heritage (the Ministry of Culture, its Directorate for the Protection of Cultural heritage and 19 local safeguarding departments) arguably, the newly formed government is gradually widening its administrative dominion by incorporating functions that were originally the prerogative of a range of societal institutions (church, family, professional associations, as mentioned in the various documents for the nomination and inscription of ICH within the UNESCO representative list). By uncritically embracing the 2003 Convention, the government was able to present itself as the authorised ICH caretaker; this is unquestioned and regarded as natural. Foucault urges us to carefully scrutinise such taken-for-granted exercises of power. In this context, the ratification of the 2003 Convention is justified by the safeguarding discourse.

Within the documents, it can be observed that the *need to safeguard* responds to a perceived danger of commercialisation of cultural heritage, as clearly stated in this passage from the document nominating of the Bell Ringers Carnival in Kastav:

There is a potential danger of commercialization of this custom, especially in the two or three groups whose villages became the city suburbs. For now, the imperative of performing the custom primarily in their own community supersedes the need of the mass media for emanating magical beliefs from the ‘ancient past’. Then again, local cultural authorities often do not see traditional culture and especially its intangible forms as something representative and do not put enough effort into its preservation. (UNESCO, 2009, File No. 00243, p.4)

While the notion of authenticity does not inform the 2003 Convention to the same extent as it did the 1972 Convention (Bortolotto, 2010), commercialisation and loss of ICH authenticity are regarded as dangerous here, especially as ICH possesses a role in society. Here, the Croatian documents seem to fully embrace UNESCO’s ICH discourse, and assigns ICH a role in providing communities with a sense of identity and continuity. This is clearly expressed as a criterion for inclusion in the Croatian ICH inventory. Therefore, the salvific mission of the government, following Foucault (1991), is safeguarding – seen as a functional means of preserving a collective sense of identity through continuity. This is the case not only for Croatia: in fact, an uncritical transposition of the 2003 Convention can be observed in other states as well (Melis & Chambers, 2021). In the documents from Croatia there seems to be an apparent contradiction when talking about the promotion of the functions of ICH in society, as the implementation of the 2003 Convention in 2018 affirms:

Intangible heritage has been increasingly included in various local and state strategic programmes and plans (culture and tourism, craftsmanship support, encouraging creativity and new ideas on traditional values and skills). (UNESCO, 2018, p.3)

Here, ‘spiritual creation’ ICH is moved to the dominion of the state’s strategic programmes and plans. As outlined above, governmentality is made possible through the creation of problems and then programmes to address them (Bröckling et al., 2010). Such programmes necessitate knowing the objects and the targets of their application, and making them visible. As a result, the immaterial and invisible is constructed and emerges in Croatia as something visible through conjoined community and state efforts. The Croatian Minister of Culture and UNESCO add: ‘these inscriptions in the Register and on UNESCO Lists have significantly contributed to the visibility of ICH and the development of various safeguarding projects’ (UNESCO, 2018 p.1).

Enhanced ICH visibility as an effect of the implementation of UNESCO heritage policies must be problematised. Foucault and Gordon (1980: 152) regarded enhanced visibility as being “organised around a dominating, overseeing gaze [... which] affects the project of a universal visibility which exists to serve a rigorous, meticulous power [... or] an ‘all-seeing’ power”. Such enhanced visibility, according to Foucault, responds to a will to know, which in turn fulfils a will to govern. In the context of Croatia, then, ICH is conceptually an object of safeguarding with specific criteria. In the documents, words relating to visibility are frequent, including ‘exhibition’, ‘presentation’ and ‘contribution to visibility’.

Our interpretation thus suggests that UNESCO heritage discourses are mechanisms to encourage increased awareness (and therefore ICH visibility). Indeed, some mechanisms for materially enhanced visibility and acknowledgement of ICH are highlighted in the documents.

For example:

Measures undertaken by the communities and bearers of ICH elements inscribed on the Lists involve a wide range of activities, from ensuring direct transmission of knowledge (through workshops, lectures and individual work), through the presentation (local events, exhibitions, participation in fairs, etc.) and documentation of practices (videos, photos), to publishing various materials (leaflets, books and creating Internet pages). (UNESCO, 2018, p.3)

Here, knowledge produced through visibility mechanisms (such as workshop, lecturers, local events, exhibitions and documentation practices) serves wider objectives, specifically to administer, regulate and organise society. The government extends its functions above and beyond its bureaucratic apparatuses in order to extend, legitimise and consolidate its influence. Power expresses itself locally (at the micro-level of the subject's body), especially as norms and practices determined by the action of discourses shape the way subjects understand and behave. This explains why ICH bearers have embodied the need to safeguard ICH – and are therefore willing to cooperate in its achievement. Such interpretations align with Foucault's notion of the government as a means to “structure the possible field of action of others” (Foucault, 1982: 221).

To Foucault, governmentality not only encompasses state agencies but exceeds them, including all related interacting parties. In this case, UNESCO acts as a supranational body which interacts with Croatia in the matter of ICH safeguarding. It therefore reinforces a governmentality discourse and the will to govern Croatia, while at the same time legitimising the country's presence and power as a nation within the international community.

### ***Balkanism***

Continuity with selected narratives of the past characterises nation-building processes. When collective history is presented positively, threats to social identity decrease. ICH has been defined as ontologically evanescent, reliant on the will of bearers and practitioners to be performed. Its temporary and provisional nature makes it highly reliant on its representation and the process of selection (Melis & Chambers, 2021). It is therefore necessary to detect what narratives Croatia selects to present itself as an independent nation within a UNESCO ICH heritage discourse.

Croatia's reputation within the international community has been variable, and reinforced through times of tension: from the creation of the first Yugoslav state to the Independent State of Croatia between 1941-1945 with ties to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, then later as a victim of Serbian offensives, to a perpetrator by endorsing the Croat-Bosnian cause during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Klemenčič & Žagar, 2004). Razsa and Lindstrom (2004) note discourses of Balkanism were projected by Western journalists and political leaders in the aftermath of the Bosnian conflict to reject Croatia's European aspirations. This, together with criticism of Tuđman's authoritarian politics, led to a crisis for Croatia's international reputation. Croatia itself, however, used the same Balkanist discourse to locate itself in opposition to adjacent countries (Razsa & Lindstrom, 2004), to promote an identity that would



legitimise Croatia's independence as well as its emancipation from Balkan stereotypes. Arguably, therefore, Croatian national identity is constructed around a Balkanist discourse (Zambelli, 2012), largely in relation to Serbia.

Croatia was one of the first states to ratify the 2003 Convention: it did so in 2005. In March the same year, Croatia was due to start EU accession talks while a Hague tribunal was prosecuting earlier Croatian leaders for war crimes. This threatened Croatia's EU accession. Croatia had to regain its reputation and detach itself once again from its Balkan past. The World ICH narrative was ideal for achieving that purpose. In particular, the ethos of acknowledging and safeguarding ICH is seen by UNESCO as a mean to promote intercultural dialogue and mutual respect for other ways of life. UNESCO was in fact established after the Second World War in the hope that through education, culture and science, nations would develop mutual understandings and promote long-lasting peace. While this is more a figment of the first UNESCO ambitions (Meskell, 2018), the 2003 Convention draws to a great extent on this narrative. The emphasis of the function of ICH in Croatia today transcends this, however, to serve wider national and geo-political purposes.

The dynamics of peace and mutual understanding identify civilisational discourses that oppose the image of the Balkans as unsafe, chaotic and politically unstable (Arnaud, 2015). In the attempt to 'de-Balkanise' itself from its former Yugoslav identity, and remove related connections with Serbia, Croatia needed to overcome past associations and to construct an image that placed the nation as a dominant World ICH player – by focusing solely on Croatia's own inherited culture and identity. The latter are constructed by distinguishing Serbia as the *other*, in a Balkan discourse that, at least before independence, was formerly used to position Croatia.

While the 2003 Convention has the objective of uniting people through heritage, Croatia can be seen either to want to exclude Serbia from this discourse altogether or to use that discourse to distance itself from its neighbour. This can be observed in the passages below, on bilateral, sub-regional, regional and international cooperation undertaken in the process of implementing the Convention:

In terms of bi-lateral cooperation (communication, academic activities, exhibitions and performances) Croatia has hosted working visits by intangible cultural heritage experts from the Ministries of Culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo and an elected institution from the Republic of Slovenia. [...] Regional cooperation has also occurred through the participation of representatives from the Croatian Ministry of Culture in South-East European Experts' Seminars on Intangible Cultural Heritage and active involvement in the category 2 centre for the South-East Europe region in Bulgaria. (UNESCO, 2012, p.26)

These inscriptions in the Register and on UNESCO Lists have significantly contributed to the visibility of ICH and the development of various safeguarding projects, not only in Croatia but also in neighbouring countries, with which Croatia has been freely sharing experiences. (Unesco, 2018,p.2)

On the first passage, Kosovo is explicitly recognised as a neighbouring nation with a ministry of culture. This intentionally creates a geo-political tension with Serbia, as Kosovo, as a nation, is not recognised by the Republic of Serbia (Serbia claims Kosovo as its own territory despite having no formal control) (International Crisis Group, 2021). The 2018 implementation document is vague in terms of which neighbouring countries Croatia has been freely sharing experience with, but the point is that distinctions are implicitly made between the states that once comprised Yugoslavia.

Tensions in bilateral agreements on the protection of ICH are also apparent. The reluctance to mention Serbia (let alone to reach an agreement with Serbia) also suggests there are tensions regarding the full acknowledgement of Serbian ICH in Croatia, which can be viewed as an attempt to erase this past given the strong Serbian presence to their attempts to destruct/erase symbolic Croatian border territories during wartime. Tensions are also noticeable in the documents for the nominations of the specific ICH expressions. For example, in the nomination document for inscription of Bećarac music from eastern Croatia, it is affirmed that ‘The closest existing genre is in Vojvodina, northern Serbia, bearing the same name’ (UNESCO, 2011, File No. 358, p.5). While the document does note that there is a similar tradition in Vojvodina, which bears the same name, it is not made clear whether this tradition is also performed by Serbs in Croatia. Such omissions are significant and must be problematised within discourse analysis.

What emerges is an attempt to differentiate the practice of the same cultural expression in Croatia and Serbia – suggesting attempts at distancing even within the same geographical locale, or what Johnson and Coleman (2012) refer to as the ‘internal other’. This is evident in the text describing the spring procession of Ljelje/Kraljice in Gorjani (hereafter ‘Kraljice’):

Since the tradition of kraljice processions is familiar to Croats and Serbs in Croatia and abroad, in Serbia and Hungary, and other Slavic and non-Slavic European nations also have similar customs, it can be expected that the inscription of kraljice from Gorjani on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage would have a positive effect on the awareness of other inheritors of related traditions. It would probably point to common features of all kraljice, as well as their local varieties and encourage efforts of other local communities to safeguard kraljice and cooperate more intensively at international level. (UNESCO, 2008, File 00235, p.3)

By positing such a narrative of the positive effect of local customs in Croatia's still disputed eastern border region with Serbia, such text emphasises how inscriptions of particular expressions from Gorjani might help to create awareness of similar Kraljice expressions locally and elsewhere (Harrison, 2013). Moreover, Harrison (2013) argues Croatia saw their traditions threatened and by preserving Kraljice ICH they are giving way to a monocultural programme aimed to nation-building that makes them distinct from other Slavic nations (in particular, Serbia). Therefore, while the inscription of this ICH expression seems to point in the direction of an increasing representation of Serbs within Croatia, the designation actually situates this ICH expression around a distinctly Croatian narrative.

What emerges instead is hesitation and reluctance to establish peace narratives, dialogue building and community integration in disputed parts of the country. In addition, it is observed that this is a potentially contested heritage, crystallised under 'the official recognition of

Kraljice as Croatian intangible cultural heritage’ (UNESCO, 2008, File No.00235). It is argued that this reliance of the 2003 Convention on the modern territorial concept of the nation can be dangerous – especially in cases where international relations and physical borderlands are still tense (and even disputed at local, regional and national levels). In addition, the document fails to state that Gorjani is located within a former UN protectorate zones, the last one reclaimed in 1999 – suggesting subtle geo-political entanglements with UNESCO’s global heritage discourse.

While most of Croatia’s ICH expressions are of Catholic background, others emphasise the syncretism of Oriental and Occidental religious influences, such as the Sinjska Alka knights’ tournament:

This syncretism is a typical result of the historical co-existence of two different civilisations spanning the borders of Catholicism and Islam. It is also mirrored in the terminology used in the tournament and the etymology of its name (the term ‘alka’ comes from the Turkish ‘halka’ meaning a ring or door-knocker). (UNESCO, 2010, File 00357, p.3)

Regardless of the nominal emphasis on the co-existence of Catholicism and Islam, Vukušić (2005) emphasises that ‘Sinjska Alka’ is a celebration of the ‘glorious victory’ in 1715 of the defenders of Sinj against Turkish occupiers, with annual events held on 14 August to celebrate the occasion. Regardless of etymological oriental traces, Alka is about glorifying ‘national’ (Croatian, Catholic) heroes who defeated the Turkish enemy.

Croatia can be viewed as a crossroads between West and East in terms of ICH, as highlighted by the nomination of the festival of Saint Blaise (the patron of Dubrovnik) and the Procession Za Krizen ('following the Cross') on the island of Hvar:

The Saint has been in Dubrovnik the emporium between the East and West and vice versa, and the important promoter of mediation, establishing the relations with the most prominent European centres. Fruitful international relations were evident in all fields: diplomatic, political, economical, cultural, fostering the values and qualities of cosmopolitanism, openness and tolerance. The Saint has been creating the atmosphere of cosmopolitanism and ecumenism, but at the same time he remained local, protecting the identity of the people of Dubrovnik and its surrounding area, which has been mirrored in every pore of the past and present Dubrovnik reality. (UNESCO, 2009, File00232, p.5)

For pilgrims, 'Following the Cross' is a pilgrimage of faith, pious meditation on God but also their own attitude towards people, thus inciting respect between communities, groups and individuals in the sincerest way of all. The registration of 'Following the Cross' procession on the UNESCO list shall contribute to dialogue and cultural diversity. (UNESCO, 2008, File 00242, p.4)

Other expressions of pre-modern pre-Catholic origin, such as the Bell Ringers Carnival in Kastav mentioned above, are able to promote the integration of newcomers within the villages where the tradition is held:

it is not only the bonds between villagers that are strengthened, but also between different villages of the region. This is very important, considering that in some instances it is a case of heterogeneous domicile population (different ethnic, i.e. language groups such as those from Brgud and Žejane) with a certain number of new settlers. In this way, better integration of the above mentioned categories of population is achieved. (UNESCO, 2009, File 00243, p.4)

By emphasising, the ethos of dialogue and integration promoted by the ICH expressions in these passages it is evident that Croatia is attempting to portray its ICH as favourable to integration and as contributing to cultural diversity by drawing on selected shared associations (yet excluding any overlaps with Orthodox celebrations – Serbia's dominant religion). Croatia's world heritage representation seems to be located between attempts at *othering* its Yugoslavian past. Croatia appears to use a UNESCO ICH narrative as a device to promote mutual understanding between communities and thereby reproduce a civilisational discourse that regards the West (European) and the East (Balkan) as opposites – reflecting tensions and political chasms that still reflect Croatia's ambivalent position towards Europe and the Balkans (Bartlett, 2003).

## **Discussion**

In this paper we adopt a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality. This epistemological standpoint helps construct a perspective on how (apparently) dispersed parties, technologies, discourses and localised practices related to ICH converge (Bröckling et al., 2010). We argue that with the case of Croatia a governmental rationality towards ICH is exerted; it also transcends the declared heritage safeguarding matters and delineate a geo-political gaze (O'Tuathail, 1996). It is significant that the main legal instrument for the protection of cultural heritage in Croatia, which includes (echoing the language of UNESCO) both tangible and intangible expressions of culture, refers to such items as 'properties'. The subject to whom these properties are ascribed is the newly formed Republic of Croatia.

The acknowledgement of ICH in Croatia is not only conceptualised, but a whole apparatus of bureaucratic departments (19 in total) is set in motion so that more power can be assigned to existing institutions (such as the Ministry of Culture). At the dawn of its newly achieved independent status, in 1991, Croatia was left with the scars of war, with monuments and sites destroyed. The damage to the nation's tangible heritage meant that the purposeful reconstruction of a national image and heritage focused on ICH. The people of Croatia themselves embodied a resource, a totem to mark the borders of a (Croatian) imagined community (Anderson, 1983). In the documents, an invisibility is assigned to ICH (a manifestation of 'spiritual creation') but it goes on to acquire at least a degree of visibility as a result of being included within UNESCO documents and then translated into localised bureaucratic practices. In turn, Croatia, represented by the transactional device of ICH, acquired an enhanced visibility in the international arena.

In Croatia, the realm of ICH is now governed by a constellation of new national bureaucratic institutions, responsibilities and practices and is authorised by international bodies (UNESCO



institutions). By uncritically incorporating the safeguarding ethos of the 2003 Convention, the state is now intruding into a sphere that was previously governed by a range of other social institutions at the grassroots level (both lay and religious organisations). This novel influence is authorised by a will to know (Foucault and Gordon, 1980) that translates into documenting practices around ICH expressions in the territory of Croatia and is further authorised by other states' safeguarding know-how and best practices (Melis & Chambers, 2021). A programmatic knowledge in this case is used to govern an intimate sphere of life, one that involves memories related to the dimension of the family and of belonging to a community, one that is embodied and involves the use of the body. Foucault (1976) would argue this governmental attempt therefore translates into a biopolitical attempt to govern the life of individuals.

Through the data analysis it becomes apparent that Croatia's administration of ICH conceals a geo-political gaze. It seems in fact that ICH is deployed as a symbolic device in order both to acquire an enhanced visibility in the international arena (with ICH regulatory bodies helping to consolidate and affirm the presence and power of a newly created central state) and to represent Croatia as an independent state, one that is very different from its neighbouring countries. Such a construction of difference plays on a Balkanist narrative. The attempt of Croatia to distance itself from Serbia and other countries is evident within the documents but assumes different contours. Overall, Croatia can be seen to be reluctant to establish cooperation with Serbia on matters regarding ICH. In other words, it emerges a dominant representation of ICH that does not seem to fully account for the heritage of minority groups living in Croatia, in particular the Serbian community. At the same time such a dominant representation deployed through ICH, conceals an attempt to affirm a specific geopolitical vision for Croatia in the context of UNESCO's international arena. This, according to Aykan (2016), represents an ideological and conceptual challenge to the 2003 Convention's purpose: to safeguard ICH.

When the 2003 Convention functions to allow nationalism or nation-building to emerge, this arguably contradicts the celebration of multiculturalism linked to many forms of ICH.

This is significant not only because Serbians form a significant minority in Croatia but also because several ICH expressions currently performed in Croatia share similarities with expressions performed in Serbia. From a geo-political standpoint, another noticeable aspect, part of the governmental bureaucratic apparatus gravitating around ICH, is Croatia's cooperation with Kosovo (International Crisis Group, 2021) given they share sentiments of past suppression from Serbia. As a further attempt to distance itself from Serbia, this is part of Croatia's attempt to de-Balkanise itself; however, by doing so, Croatia is further authorising a Balkanist discourse, in that the Balkans are regarded as the opposite of the European West. At the same time, the UNESCO narrative is used here to push an image of Croatia in between civilisations, which further reinforces Balkanism as a discourse of two opposing civilisations, East and West.

### **Concluding remarks**

This paper discusses how the notion of ICH, as conceptualised by the 2003 Convention, has been embraced in Croatia and used as a marker of identity to draw a line of continuity with pre-war Yugoslavian pasts. While the main objective of the 2003 Convention is safeguarding, the discursive fields, aligned with the time in which the Convention was ratified and implemented, suggest that the decision of Croatia to ratify and implement it goes beyond safeguarding concerns. Croatia has sought to identify a geo-political gaze, as conceptualised by O'Tuathail (1996), to geo-politically define itself and to present itself to the international

audience, which includes attempts to move away from the Balkan association and focus on nation-building that is distinctly Croatian.

The discourse around the implementation by Croatia of the 2003 Convention suggests an attempt to imprint within the recently formed territory of Croatia a dominant ICH discourse. Such a discourse also reflects governmental rationality which helps to define the symbolic borders of the post-war imagined community of Croatia (Anderson, 1983), and attempts to assimilate shared ICH expressions as purely Croatian. That is, Croatia appears reluctant to fully represent the ICH of minorities, and in particular that of the Serbian community living in Croatia. In line with O'Tuathail (1996), a dominant order emerges that is seeking to impose its vision using ICH as a transactional device, in spite of the presence on the same territory of marginalised groups that would contest that vision. There is in fact more focus on geo-political motives and less focus on community and localities, which contradicts the objectives of the 2003 Convention.

Going forward, it is important to problematize and interpret underlying geo-political tensions aligned with ICH expressions inscribed within the representative list. This is important because nations are encouraged to nominate representations to define their unique culture, heritage and identity. In so doing, however, and given the entanglements of UNESCO cultural heritage and geo-political affairs, the dynamics of dominance and subalternity can also emerge, as suggested by Aykan (2016). Nations will define their own cultural identity, and this will translate into how cultural policy is produced and disseminated at different geographical scales. Geographies of a place and culture are easily commodified, so while we see safeguarding unfold to reinforce governmentality, industries like tourism will invoke UNESCO as a way to attract and sell culture, whether tangible or intangible. This can have an impact on social and sustainable

development in terms of how ICH is safeguarded, maintained and ultimately commercialised, especially given that Croatia is heavily dependent on tourism. These are critical insights and directions to explore in future research.

A country cannot simply change its geography, territory and neighbours. In the case of Croatia, however, the use of ICH directs attention to how culture is positioned and leveraged as a way of controlling and developing community and nation building narratives. The significance and importance of this work to political geography is based around how a relatively new nation can control their narrative by “perusing a monocultural nation-building programme” based on how they situate their nationhood and identity, whilst disassociating from a particular geo-political construct that they relate to past suppression of their own culture and identity (Harrison, 2013, p. 151). Further studies should look at the indexical representation of ICH of minorities in Croatia and other countries facing political transition or that are recovering from war. Such representations could destabilise the geo-political gaze (O’Tuathail, 1996) and create a more pluralistic society. For instance, how Serbia defines ICH could be a point of individual analysis and interpretation as well as of comparative analysis with Croatia, given the claims of those countries to unique and a separate heritage and identity (despite their history together as part of the Republic of Yugoslavia). Other states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union may also represent unique cases for analysis, as many of these countries have also been subject to outside rule by different powers in the past century.

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