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# Imaginaries and rhetorics of “globality” in UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage

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**ABSTRACT.** — This paper analyses how cultural practices that are sometimes said to be globalized – yoga, falconry, tango, flamenco, and mountaineering – were promoted and later inscribed on the UNESCO representative List for intangible cultural heritage. It studies the rhetorics and scalar strategies adopted in each application, and more precisely the way the notion of “globality” or “worldwideness” has been claimed or qualified for promoting the inscription arguing the merits of an inscription. It explains why some nominations have been guided by a regionalist or nationalist concern refocus (flamenco, tango, yoga), while some others emphasized the transnational character of the practice and interstate partnerships (mountaineering, falconry). Finally, the article explains how the application

process in such cases wields several imaginaries of globality, and the fact that their combination plays a decisive role in the success of an application.

GLOBALITY, HERITAGE-MAKING, IMAGINARIES, SCALE, UNESCO, WORLDWIDENESS

**RÉSUMÉ.** — Imaginaires et rhétoriques de la mondialité au patrimoine culturel immatériel de l’UNESCO. — Le présent article se propose d’analyser comment des pratiques culturelles parfois dites mondialisées – le yoga, la fauconnerie, le tango, le flamenco et l’alpinisme – ont été promues, puis inscrites, au patrimoine culturel immatériel de l’UNESCO. Il étudie la rhétorique et les stratégies scalaires adoptées par les protagonistes de chacune des propositions, en s’arrêtant tout

spécialement sur la mise en scène d’une forme de mondialité, revendiquée ou nuancée, pour arguer du bien-fondé de leur inscription. Il montre dans quelle mesure certaines ont été guidées par un souci de recentrage national ou régional (le flamenco, le tango, le yoga) quand d’autres ont cherché à souligner la dimension transnationale de la pratique et de la coopération interétatique (l’alpinisme, la fauconnerie). Il montre enfin comment la procédure d’inscription en pareil cas mobilise plusieurs imaginaires de la mondialité et que leur articulation joue un rôle décisif dans le succès d’une candidature.

ÉCHELLE, IMAGINAIRE, MONDIALITÉ, PATRIMOINE, UNESCO

Of the 584 cultural practices inscribed, as of January 1, 2021, on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Representative List,<sup>1</sup> the vast majority are portrayed as either local, such as the "Basel Carnival," regional or transnational, such as the "Mediterranean Diet," or national, such as "Irish harping," to name a few European examples. Just a handful of the inscribed cultural practices claim some form of globality, among which tango, falconry, alpinism, flamenco, and yoga particularly stand out. In their respective presentation and nomination documents submitted to the ICH Committee, they all state, in one way or another, that the practice exists in a great many contexts, sometimes on several continents.

In this article, I analyze the inscription processes of these five cultural practices to this ICH List. In doing so, I examine the descriptions and rhetorics adopted by the stakeholders of each, with a particular focus on the ways they express the globality of the practice. Depending on whether a single State or a group of States provides institutional support, globality is either claimed or nuanced. More generally, I distinguish different ways of conceiving globality at work in the process of inscription on the ICH Lists.

## Imaginaries of globality at work in the UNESCO heritage arena

The notion of "globality" as it is used herein is not intended as an expression of its academic or theoretical meanings.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it is meant to articulate, as closely as possible, the ways the various stakeholders involved in the ICH inscription procedure frame the related proposals and actions at the global level. I am particularly interested in the ontological characterization of this level; in the meaning that social scientists have given to ontology over the last two decades. Paraphrasing one of these scholars, Pierre Livet (2000), the research question underlying this article asks: how and why do the protagonists of the ICH mechanism invoke the entity "World" in their contribution to this mechanism and what does this invocation allow them to do in this context?

The lens of globality, formulated this way, allows to diverge from an analysis of the process leading to the deployment of something on a global scale or to a widespread interaction of places and actors (that lies at the very core of the idea of globalization). Here, the focus is on another process, namely, the positioning of actors and institutions relative to the postulated or advocated globality of heritage in general, and of heritagized cultural practices in particular. This perspective also allows to avoid any temptation to propose an objective measure or analysis of the reality of this globality. The attention is thus exclusively on globality as the ICH stakeholders imagine it. In other words, on the place and role they attach to this space—the World—and to this level—in relation to other levels in a single scalar system—in their understanding of a given cultural practice and the functioning of the UNESCO bodies in charge of determining its inscription to the ICH Representative List. It furthermore allows for particular consideration of that which the invocation of the global allows these various stakeholders to do. Here, globality can prove to be instituting for certain organizations and collectives, in the sense given by certain scholars to the instituting nature of social imaginaries (Castoriadis 1987; Taylor, 2004; Debarbieux 2019); but it can also emerge as a counterpoint to a justification rhetoric seeking to legitimize collectives framed at other scale levels. Concretely, the identification of these differentiated forms of globality relies on the ways in which the stakeholders of ICH inscriptions to the Representative List invoke the global level—thus in emic mode—, as observed in the descriptions, narratives, and

1. A general description of the UNESCO ICH mechanism is provided in the introduction to this dossier.

2. Which are numerous indeed. In the French academic literature, the original language of this paper, the term *mondialité* has various meanings, not least that attributed by philosophers such as Henri Lefebvre (1976-1978) and Edouard Glissant (2000). Authors quoting Lefebvre's work in English sometimes translate this term as "worldwideness." Meanwhile Glissant's *mondialité* has often been expressed in English as "wordliness," according to a common phenomenological usage. French geographers (notably Dollfus et al., 1999 and Arrault, 2007), in indicating an organization, a practice, a system or an idea as being constitutive of a certain, global, level of spatial organization use "*le Monde*," retaining its capital letter. In this English version, I too capitalize the World, and translate *mondialité* according to the various meanings (worldliness, worldwideness, internationality) that social actors associate with it.

arguments provided in a wide range of documents (including those produced by UNESCO bodies and the nomination files submitted to the ICH Committee), in numerous interviews and, finally, in materials already analyzed in the relevant literature.

### *The instituting globality of the ICH bodies*

UNESCO's policy on heritage in general, and on intangible cultural heritage in particular, constitutes the broad context in which ICH inscription procedures are conducted. Its conception and realization are fed by several conceptions of globality. In their combination, emerges an imaginary of globality specific to the organization.

A first form — let's call it “worldliness” — refers to the World that gives UNESCO its *raison d'être*. This agency, like other intergovernmental organizations (as well as some non-governmental organizations, notably the environmentalist, humanitarian or anti-globalization movements), subordinates its existence and actions to a global framework. Within the UN system, UNESCO does this by having set itself the specific objective of contributing “to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and culture.”<sup>3</sup> While the organization took up the question of heritage in the 1960s (Cameron, Rössler, 2013; Bruman, 2021), it was not until the 2000s that issues relating to the cultural diversity of humanity became central, its Director-General underlining the objective to “raise cultural diversity to the level of the ‘common heritage of humanity’ ” (Matsuura, 2002, p. 2). Thus, the first form of globality of the UNESCO cultural heritage policy is cognitive, based on a vision of humanity taken as a whole — that which is said to have a “common heritage” — and of its cultural components (groups, areas, etc.).

A second form of globality — let's call it “internationality” — refers to the collective of UNESCO States members that, together with the organization's central offices, shape the organs and produce the rules of its functioning. The globality lies in the gathering and the networking of representatives of these States. In 2001, this collective of States members adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001), among which 175 of them, known as States Parties, have signed the ICH Convention (UNESCO, 2003). This second form of UNESCO globality is organizational, based on a vision of multilateralism that relies on the willingness of States members and parties to bear a shared understanding of the common interest.

With specific regard to intangible cultural heritage, the Convention states that “the international community should contribute, together with the States Parties to this Convention, to the safeguarding of such heritage in a spirit of cooperation and mutual assistance” (UNESCO, 2003). Such a statement links globality-internationality with globality-worldliness — this connection having an axiological character. The UNESCO vision for its heritage policies rests on the idea that the organization is tasked with identifying and caring for the “common heritage of humanity” at the global level. In this context, the 2001 Declaration and the 2003 Convention are nourished by a cosmopolitan ideal; together, they aim to promote the recognition and respect of different forms of cultural practices. This praise of the cultural diversity of humanity comes as a counterpoint to two images of present-day globalization, understood as so many threats. One consists of the standardization of cultural practices under the various effects of the media, mass consumption, and generalized commodification. The text of the 2003 Convention is explicit on this subject, pointing out both the threat and that which the Convention would allow to counter: “the processes of globalization and social

3. Constitution, adopted in 1945.  
[http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=15244&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15244&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

transformation, alongside the conditions they create for renewed dialogue between communities, also give rise [...] to grave threats of deterioration, disappearance and destruction of the intangible cultural heritage” (UNESCO, 2003). The other image concerns the reactions often qualified as identity-based—in particular, a return to favoring nationalism and, in the words of the Director-General in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, “inward-looking fundamentalism” (Matsuura in UNESCO, 2001, p. 2)—that this tendency towards uniformity has arguably produced.

The imaginary that feeds UNESCO’s heritage policy—in its cognitive, organizational and axiological modalities—thus as much characterizes its global *raison d’être* as its global way of being. Though, this also requires the involvement of other levels of social life along with their preferred geographical scale levels. In particular, the States Parties and their territories on the one hand, and the groups of practitioners of given cultural expressions with their places and areas of practice and collective identification on the other. States Parties and groups of practitioners, while contributing to this policy, thus have their own scalar frameworks whose articulation with those of UNESCO constitutes a major challenge.

### The often-ambiguous position of States Parties

As is often the case in intergovernmental organizations and conventions, the States Parties are the backbone of the ICH mechanism. Each State Party, as the only competent authority to submit nominations, is expected to endorse the global and cosmopolitan objectives of the 2003 Convention at several different levels:

That of its territory: each State Party commits to taking “the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory” (UNESCO, 2003, art.11) and to “draw up [...] one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory” (art. 12). Nominations for the ICH List must be taken from this inventory. A State Party furthermore commits to ensuring “the safeguarding, development and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory” (art. 13).

That of the region to which it belongs: UNESCO encourages “multinational nominations,” i.e., nominations submitted by several States, meant to both reflect transnational or cross-border cultural practices and to make inter-State cooperation a concrete expression of the spirit of the Convention (for an analysis of this instrument, see Debarbieux et al. 2021 and Bortolotto in this dossier). In this respect, the ICH Committee has encouraged the constitution of regional working groups to identify and promote the inscription of shared cultural practices.

That of the whole world: each State Party, as a signatory of the Convention, commits to sharing a global responsibility for safeguarding the cultural practices inscribed on the ICH Lists, regardless of their location.

The organizational globality of the UNESCO ICH mechanism is thus expressed through a system of rules and norms that the States Parties endorse by ratifying the 2003 Convention. This ratification implies various actions on their part at different

levels, always with the objective of bringing about the emergence of an intangible cultural heritage that is coherent at the global level. Yet, in reality, States often prioritize domestic policy objectives (at the level of their territory) and geopolitical considerations (often relating to neighbor relations) in their own submissions or in the negotiations in which they take part. This prioritization has taken various forms: (a) nominations that contribute first and foremost to the exaltation of the nation (see, notably, the “gastronomic meal of the French” studied by Jean-Louis Tornatore, 2012 and Julia Csergo, 2016); (b) individual nominations of a practice also considered important by a neighboring State (see e.g. Chong, 2012; Aykan, 2015) and this despite the Convention bodies’ warnings against any attempt by one State alone to “appropriate” cultural practices deemed to be present across the territories of several States; (c) objections made to a nomination of a neighboring State, where political tensions or sovereignty disputes are notorious<sup>4</sup>; etc. There are, in addition to these instances, other domestic political concerns that fall outside the objectives of the Convention bodies without always compromising them. These can include, for example, a State’s wish to provide assurances to its constituent entities (such as Switzerland, Belgium or Spain, who have tried to ensure that the practices listed reflect the diversity of the country’s major cultural areas and its federated or quasi-federated entities), or to indigenous communities (such as China or Brazil, who have willingly sought, on occasion, to register cultural practices as a symbolic concession—understood as “recognition lures” by some (Hertz, Chappaz-Wirthner, 2012)—to cultural minorities that otherwise suffer from discrimination and social injustice). Put differently, State imaginaries of space in terms of heritage, in accordance with the instituting role that their territory plays, do not always align easily with those of a global organization and the policies it promotes. Therefore, while States Parties are indeed the decision-makers within the main ICH bodies,<sup>5</sup> and while they often assume the responsibility expected of them with regard to ICH as a whole, they also have the capacity to prioritize in their actions the scalar levels that constitute their *raison d’être*, provided they manage to build the necessary coalitions within the ICH Committee.

## The uncertain nature of communities

The 2003 Convention places the “communities” of practitioners and enthusiasts at the heart of its mission. The aim is to help them acquire instruments to safeguard their practice, which will guarantee its continuity and thus a certain cultural diversity at the scale of humanity as a whole.

But how are communities identified in the context of an ICH inscription procedure? How is their spatial configuration and, where applicable, scalar organization defined? In the documentation provided to guide the putting together of their nomination file, the bearers of a proposal are free to shape the discourse relative to the submitted practice and the corresponding group of practitioners and enthusiasts. While they often mobilize the specialized academic literature to this end, this is frequently done in a selective way. Each proposal is also subject to prior examination by the national commission responsible for inventorying intangible cultural practices at the State scale, though in this, an anthropological expertise is not always prioritized, far from it. Moreover, once the nomination has been submitted to the Secretariat of the 2003 Convention, no further expertise—not even on the part of the Evaluation Body responsible for advising on the

4. For instance, in the 2019 ICH Committee session, the Chinese delegation blocked India’s submission of a Himalayan traditional medicines nomination that mentioned areas that China considered to be under its sovereignty.

5. The final decision on an inscription is made by the ICH Committee, which is composed of 24 States Parties elected for a period of four years by the General Assembly, with the terms of half the members expiring every two years.



nominations<sup>6</sup>—is conducted specifically on the practice itself, nor on its spatial qualification. The applicants are therefore free to characterize the practice in their own way, notably as this regards its spatial and scalar dimensions. This freedom can lie in the hands of the community representatives if the submitting State(s) provide them such leeway, though this is more often assumed by the State(s) when, as is frequently the case, they encourage the candidacy or strongly influence the discourse associated with the practice. In the absence of ad hoc expertise, and because it may result from very different processes, the community associated with the cultural practice to be inscribed is often of a rather uncertain nature.

The cultural practices studied here share the fact that they are regularly qualified as globalized. In this context, globality means worldwideness. That is, these practices are referred to in a generic way—yoga, alpinism, etc.—and are said to be found in a great many places around the world. In this respect, they can be contrasted with practices such as carnivals: while similarly globalized, the related nomination files and later ICH inscriptions never refer to a generic category, but rather always to a specific place: Basel, Granville, Imst, Barranquilla, Oruro, etc. Returning to the research question guiding this article, one might ask how and why nomination stakeholders evoke the World entity in their argumentation and what exactly this evocation allows them to do in this context. Put differently, what place does the World occupy in the “imagined geography” (Gregory, 1994; Debarbieux, 2019) of the various protagonists involved? The second part of this article differentiates these five inscriptions according to the principle that prevailed in the inscription procedure. That is, (a) a territorial principle, to the main benefit of a region, a State or a nation, notwithstanding the globality claimed by certain practitioners; or (b) a transnational principle, sometimes justified by the declared concern to be as close as possible to the imagined geography of the communities, other times by diplomatic or cosmopolitan considerations.

## The territorial principle in the inscription of yoga, tango, and flamenco

The term “territorial principle” is used here to designate the primacy given by a State Party to domestic policy elements in their nomination of a given cultural practice. As seen above, this principle prevails in many nominations of practices that are local or regional in scope. Yet, the territorial principle can also predominate where the globality-worldwideness of a given practice is acknowledged, as we will see for yoga (registered in the name of India in 2016), tango (registered in the name of Argentina and Uruguay in 2009), and flamenco (registered in the name of Spain in 2010).

### *Ambivalent qualifications of the practice's globality and praise for idiosyncrasy*

Each of these three practices is present, with the corresponding name, in various countries around the world. In some cases, the practice is extremely popular in places other than those of the countries proposing the inscription: notably, tango in Finland, the Netherlands, and North America (Savigliano, 1992; Goertzen, Azzi, 1999; Dorier-Apprill, 2000; Kukkonen, 2000; Pelinski, 2000); flamenco in France, Japan, and the United States (Steingress, 2007; Raziano, 2020; Canova, 2021); yoga in many Western countries (Hoyez, 2005; Kock, 2019). Their nomination by only one or two States might therefore have required justification.

6. The ICH Committee has refused to entrust this body, created in 2015, with this task. Although the Convention's bodies regularly recall that inscriptions on the Lists should reflect the spatial and territorial, or transnational, characteristics of the corresponding cultural practices, the assessment conducted by the Evaluation Body does not specifically address this point. It may, at best, comment to this regard. See also the introduction to this dossier.



Yet the Indian application is almost silent on this. The section called “geographical location and scope of the element” insists on the national and pervasive nature of the practice: “Yoga is a pan-Indian holistic physical and mental wellness system that is practiced throughout India... The yoga element has permeated every aspect of Indian life.”<sup>7</sup> Later in the application, the territorial qualification of the practice is related to a series of ordinary places, emphasizing its ubiquity at this scale: “Whether in community centers or public gardens, in housing estates and homes, institutions, corporate headquarters, villages and rural communities, even in the high Himalayas, yoga is taught and its knowledge transmitted.” The only mention of the practice outside of India is a reference to the “international day of yoga, to be celebrated hereafter across the world” (see discussion below). The opportunity is then taken to say that the inscription of yoga “caters to and [...] is applicable to entire humanity.”

In contrast, the nomination files for tango and flamenco proceed somewhat differently. Tango is presented as the product of multiple and distant influences, and of an idiosyncratic process specific to the region of the Rio de la Plata: “[Tango] originated in the fusion of elements from Argentine and Uruguayan’s African culture, authentic criollos and European immigrants. [It is] the artistic and cultural result of hybridization processes.”<sup>8</sup> Flamenco is similarly introduced: “It reflects all the cultures and civilizations which have made southern Spain their home over the course of the centuries: Greece, Rome, Islam, Christianity, etc. It is the product of the convergence of diverse but interlinked musical traditions, Arab and Jewish music, the Byzantine liturgy and Castilian balladry and, beyond the Mediterranean basin, Indian and Afro-American styles, along with the contributions of Andalusia’s ethnic Gypsy settlers.”<sup>9</sup>

In both cases, the convergence of multiple original influences is said to have given rise to a unique practice, source of regional identity. The nomination file says that tango “expresses a way of conceiving the world and life, and it nourishes the cultural imagery of the inhabitants of the capital cities of the Rio de la Plata.” The flamenco file employs a similar register: “Andalusia is the heartland of flamenco. The vast majority of names behind the art form’s creations and interpretations, the highest standards and quality of contributions to the worlds of flamenco song, music and dance, are Andalusian.”

The explanation of the spread of flamenco outside its claimed original milieu is sometimes factual, sometimes more value-laden. On a factual level, flamenco is said to “have roots in other bordering regions of Spain (for example Extremadura [...] and Murcia [...]) and to have expanded into the central and northern regions of the country, such as Madrid and Catalonia, partly as a result of the emigration of people from Andalusian, Extremadura and Murcia.” A little further on, the file reads: “Flamenco has carved out a substantial space for itself in countries including France (with long-standing festivals in Mont-de-Marsans, Nîmes and Paris, for example), the United States and the United Kingdom [...], Italy [...], Argentina [...], Japan and many countries of Central Europe, Latin America and North Africa.” But a depreciative judgment soon follows: “Although flamenco is quite well-known worldwide, this knowledge is subject to prejudices and stereotypes which have distorted its importance and profundity [...], through a superficial reading and an inappropriate showiness which have prevented its true meaning and cultural stamp from being understood.”

7. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/yoga-01163?RL=01163>  
In the rest of this text, the non-referenced quotations relating to the elements studied here are all taken from the English versions of the corresponding sheets. When these have been translated to English from a different language, the translation is the responsibility of the authorities submitting the nomination.

8. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/tango-00258?RL=00258>

9. <https://ich.unesco.org/fr/RL/le-flamenco-00363>.

Tango, for its part, is said to be “well known all over the world,” but the quality of this knowledge and the authenticity of localized practices elsewhere are then immediately questioned: “The knowledge about it tends to be superficial and mostly it is seen as extravagant and exotic.” In Europe, for example, where tango is said to be “a synonym of luxury,” “the man leads the woman in a series of exaggerated movements, twisting her torso in a way uncommon in our cities.” Later in the file, it is written that “the great cultural industries” have contributed to making tango “a certain kind of international folklore.” It is, in fact, precisely “this distorted image” of tango outside of its place of origin that has made its protection with an inscription on the Representative List of the ICH “vital,” “in order to secure its visibility as an essential expression and an authentic product” (note that references to the “authenticity” of a cultural practice would later be prohibited by the ICH Committee, deemed as contrary to the spirit of the ICH Convention).

### *Official rhetoric versus scientific expertise*

Strikingly, the vast majority of scholars specialized in these practices give a rather different interpretation of their global diffusion and its effects. Certainly, forms encountered elsewhere in the world are recognized as different than those observed in their claimed homeland. It is thus common to distinguish between “nomadic tango” and “tango porteño” (Pelinski, 2000; Morel, 2011; Davis, 2015), or to speak of a “globalized flamenco” (Steingress, 2007, p. 53), which differs from the practices observed in southern Spain. But these scholars also insist on the creativity at work in the places where these practices are adopted, sometimes speaking of a true “territorialization” (Pelinski, 2000, p. 27-29) or “indigenization,” as in the case of Amsterdam (Davis, 2015), Japan (Savigliano, 1992), or Finland (Kukkonen, 2000).

Even more importantly, these scholars underline the influence that variants born of this indigenization have had on the practice in its place of origin. They point, in particular, to the role of large global gatherings and the circulation of professionals and trainers around the world, where innovations observed elsewhere have sometimes been rapidly introduced in southern Spain, or on the banks of the Rio de la Plata. To this regard, Kathy Davis writes that “the transnational interactions that tango engenders provide insights into the ways cultural practices travel, the processes by which they are rearticulated and transformed” (2015, p. 12). The tango nomination file half-heartedly acknowledges this, but is then quick to say<sup>10</sup> that these contributions “belong to its origin and [are] critical in its search for its essence and roots.”

Yoga scholars likewise observe the symmetrical effects of a long interaction between India and the West: “The arrival of yoga in the West, starting in the mid- to late nineteenth century, was the combined product of the retrospective reconstruction of a so-called classical yogic tradition by modern Indian pioneers, along with key dialogical exchanges between Indian and Western interlocutors” (Godrej, 2017, p.774 ); yoga was thus “deconstructed and reconstructed both within and beyond South Asia, leading to the emergence of a new transnational tradition” (Jain, 2015, p. 21).

In short, the yoga, tango, and flamenco ICH nominations files share the characteristic of having combined historical narratives and imagined geographies meant to put the spotlight respectively on India, the Rio de la Plata region, and Southern Spain. The latter are presented as the regions of origin of practices sometimes born of diverse influences. While admitting that these practices are now all globalized, the aim is to underline the

10. Though only in the English version of the nomination file.

characteristics specific to their respective homelands, or even to protect them in the name of their “authenticity.”

***Behind the scenes, an underlying mixture of nationalist exaltation, cultural diplomacy, and economic promotion***

Studies of the motivations that guided the inscription of these three practices highlight a number of similarities as well as certain specificities. In all three cases, political institutionalization was of clear importance, to which end the corresponding authorities went to great lengths. The Indian government, for instance, created a specifically dedicated ministry in 2014. Its acronym—the AYUSH ministry—indicates the 5 practices considered emblematic of Indian identity: ayurveda, yoga, unnani, siddha and homeopathy. Among other objectives, the ministry sought to promote yoga as a brand and claim it as distinctly Indian (McCartney, 2017). For its part, the Andalusia regional government created an Andalusian Flamenco center, primarily for documentary purposes, as well as an Andalusian agency for the development of flamenco. Meanwhile, the three participating Spanish regions—Andalusia, Murcia, and Extremadura—each took legal protection measures (Raziano, 2020). The cultural department of the city of Montevideo set up a program to promote tango, called *Tango en Obra*; the Argentine and Uruguayan parliaments created their own *National Tango Day*; and the city of Buenos Aires passed a law establishing tango as cultural heritage.

These inscriptions were used in the service of three different political objectives. The first concerned a certain form of identity exaltation, especially perceptible in Andalusia. The regional government promoted flamenco as a major referent of Andalusian identity and as a cultural autonomy matter in decentralized Spain. This strategy was particularly expressed in the Regional Government’s “*Flamenco Soy*” (I am Flamenco) communication campaign. Notably, this was launched on February 28, 2010, the officially proclaimed *Día de Andalucía* (Day of Andalusia), commemorating the 1980 referendum that granted Andalusia autonomous status (Raziano, 2020). Such exaltation was even more significant in the promotion of yoga, which also stood out for the affirmation of its religious dimension. Though the Indian constitution affirms the principle of secularism, and despite the reservations of many scholars about the scientific merits of this association, yoga started to be promoted—beginning in the 2000s (Nanda, 2009), and even more so after Narendra Modi came to power in 2014—as a central element of Hindu religion. The Prime Minister’s personal involvement in this process aligned with his policy of nationalistic exacerbation of religious tensions in India, met with vigorous protests from Muslim and Christian communities (Gautam, Droogan, 2018, p.29). These communities were, in turn, sometimes accused of being “yogaphobic” (Jain, 2014).

A second aim of these ICH inscriptions was to employ them in support of tourism and economic development policies. Although cultural tourism associated with yoga has long existed, researchers (e.g. Luker, 2007) have shown that the resurrection of tango in Argentina and the emergence of a tourism oriented towards its practice in the 2000s went hand in hand with the implementation of policies meant to enhance the “cultural economy” (Marchini, 2007; Morel, 2011) and remedy the deep economic crisis of 2001. This strategy, also used in Andalusia, led to the identification of practitioners scattered around the world as potential tourists. The large gatherings organized in the 2000s and 2010s were meant to appeal precisely to this profile:

11. This decision, supported by representatives of 17 States, followed an impassioned speech given in September of 2014 in Hindi by the Prime Minister before the United Nations General Assembly. <https://undocs.org/A/RES/69/131>.

12. <http://mea.gov.in/images/pdf/common-yoga-protocol-english.pdf>. In some ways, the inscription of yoga was a bit of a walkover. In the 2016 ICH Committee session, the Evaluation Body had recommended deferring inscription in light of insufficient information (or rather, information deemed too exclusively “internal”) in the section explaining how yoga “will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness at local, national and international levels, of the significance of intangible cultural heritage and to encouraging dialogue.” Yet, a large majority of the States sitting on the Committee asked for the floor to challenge the Evaluation Body, arguing that the practice is extremely well known. The intervention of the Hungarian delegate on the respective notoriety of ICH and yoga — “it is really the List that needs yoga and not the other way around” (recording of the session available on <https://ich.unesco.org/en/d%C3%A9cisions/11.COM/10.B.17>) — put the nail in the coffin. See also the article by Chiara Bortolotto in this dossier.

13. [https://ich.unesco.org/en/d%C3%A9cisions/11.COM/10?dec=decisions&ref\\_decision=11.COM](https://ich.unesco.org/en/d%C3%A9cisions/11.COM/10?dec=decisions&ref_decision=11.COM)

the annual Buenos Aires World *Mundial de Tango* starting in 2003, the *Feria Mundial del Flamenco* from 2001 on, and those related to the *International Yoga Day* beginning in 2016. Practitioners were also the target market for the training centers and “touristified” areas of Seville, Jerez and Buenos Aires.

The third political objective of these ICH inscriptions was diplomatic, especially so for yoga. Indeed, the inscription project was also guided by a strategic desire to contribute to the development of India’s soft power, also seen in its diasporic policies. The UN’s establishment of the *International Day of Yoga* in June of 2015, following Modi’s personal engagement,<sup>11</sup> was a highlight in this regard. Modi later boasted of having participated in a gathering of nearly 36,000 people from 84 countries held in New Delhi for the first 2015 edition. In a preface to a document promoting Yoga Day, he stated, with an evident desire to recall the ambitions of the 2003 Convention: “Yoga is one of the most precious gifts given by the ancient Indian sages to humankind.”<sup>12</sup>

The three examples examined above thus illustrate a use of the inscription to primarily domestic ends, where the (bi)national dimension of the cultural practice is emphasized. This usage creates a significant discrepancy between, on the one hand, the globality-worldwideness of the practice as attested by the academic literature, and the national(ist) rhetoric of the inscription on the other. What do the practitioners themselves have to say about this regionalization or nationalization of the practice? Notably, they were not at the origin of any of these three nominations, and only local and regional associations were involved by the administrations. In fact, all three practices lacked transnational institutions that might have promoted the inscription on a different scale. It should furthermore be borne in mind that enthusiasts of these practices located outside the foci claimed by the project bearers, even if a significant source of creativity, themselves willingly referred to these foci to demonstrate their appetite for a certain form of “exoticism” (Savigliano, 1992; Davis, 2015). If not perceived as legitimate members of the community as constructed by the inscription process, they were, as we have seen, gladly considered as tourists and consumers.

This claiming of a transnational cultural practice for the sole benefit of one or two States does not align with the ambitions of the 2003 Convention, nor with the repeated recommendations of the Evaluation Body, or even the Committee itself. To this regard, the “Decision” the latter produced at the end of the 2016 session provided an occasion to express “its concern towards nominations emphasizing nation-building or even nationalistic purposes and reminds States Parties that nominations shall remain consistent in accordance with the objectives of the Convention and contribute to mutual respect among communities.”<sup>13</sup> Yet, the organizational globality—internationality—that is at the heart of UNESCO in fact makes such appropriations possible.

## The transnational ambition of the falconry and alpinism inscriptions

Among the inscriptions to the ICH list, falconry and alpinism illustrate a different way of conceiving references to globality and the scales qualifying the practice. The bearers of these projects, States and communities, wished to promote a multi-national nomination and take advantage of this procedural instrument.

### *Falconry: “an outstanding example of cooperation between States”*

In the case of falconry, a nationalist lure characterized the very early stages of the inscription project. Shortly after the adoption of the 2003 Convention, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi expressed its desire to pursue an inscription that would give international visibility to a practice it sought to make an emblematic part of “the national history of the Emirates” (Wakefield, 2012, p. 280). The practice was to have an important place in the planned Zayed National Museum. Though falconry at the time was primarily the province of the wealthiest families, adept at spectacular, heavily equipped displays, and of hunting parties in regions better stocked with game than the United Arab Emirates (UAE) territory—Morocco, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, among others—the museum and inscription project sought to celebrate a tradition said to be popular and millennia old, as well as to be characteristic of Arab-Bedouin culture anchored in its natural environment (Koch, 2015).

To achieve its goals, the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH) called upon the International Association of Falconry (IAF) to provide the necessary expertise for putting together the nomination file (Khalaf, 2009). The IAF was created in 1968 by European falconers concerned with defending the practice, at the time contested by animal rights activists and, as such, by the European Parliament. The association then expanded to other regions of the world,<sup>14</sup> with a greater focus on the celebration of the practice itself. When, however, the IAF learned that the inscription project was to be carried by the UAE alone, it distanced itself; one official spoke of a “kidnapping” of the project.<sup>15</sup> Shortly afterwards, ICH experts informed the Emirates’ representatives that their project had little chance of satisfying the inscription criteria.<sup>16</sup> The ADACH consequently reshaped the project into a multi-national nomination, and henceforward worked in close collaboration with the IAF. The proposal involved 11 States and was completed in 2010. Seven more States later joined, some in 2012, others in 2016, making it the ICH element supported by the largest number of States Parties. The Evaluation Body praised the proposal as “an outstanding example of cooperation between States,”<sup>17</sup> aptly reflecting the spirit of the ICH Convention.

The nomination file sent to the UNESCO secretariat is remarkable in its presentation of the practice’s (almost) worldwide nature. It states that “falconry is found in more than sixty countries [...]. It probably evolved in the steppes of Asia, and spread via cultural and trade links to other countries, first to Europe, North Africa and East Asia, and later in the 16th century to the rest of the world.”<sup>18</sup> The 11, then 18, States comprised the signatories of the Convention that the UAE had managed to mobilize through the IAF, by contributing significantly to the latter’s budget and its geographical expansion.<sup>19</sup> The file furthermore highlights variations of the practice in different contexts: “the habitat dictates the practicality of falconry and shapes its particular local variations of traditional styles.” This is followed by a comparison of these environmental conditions between “the deserts of Arabia,” “the steppes of Asia” and “the forested areas and mixed farmland” of Europe, Japan, and China, among others.<sup>20</sup> However, the file also states that “while falconers come from different backgrounds, they share universal values, traditions and practices,” invoking a notion—universality—absent in the text of the 2003 Convention (unlike in the World Heritage Convention). The file thus combines the three forms of globality distinguished here: that of inter-State cooperation within UNESCO, the United Nations agency with the most members; that associated with the cosmopolitanism that permeates ICH policy, of which falconry

14. In 1988, the IAF had members in 18 countries, including 4 non-European: South Africa, Japan, Tunisia and the United States. In 1999, 31 countries were represented, including 9 non-European countries.

15. Interview conducted in July 2019.

16. Interview conducted in September 2018 with a member of the Evaluation body, at the time of the relevant events.

17. ITH/10/5.COM/CONF202/INF6.

18. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/la-cetrera-un-patrimonio-humano-vivo-01209?RL=01209>

19. In 2020, the IAF had 75,000 members, among which 110 associations from 87 different countries.

20. This did not prevent European falconers from confiding, during interviews conducted in the summer of 2019, that they consider the practice of falconry by the Emirates to be too elitist and artificial.



is said to be exemplary; and that of a collective of practitioners, a veritable community of communities, concerned with blending common attributes and regional or national specificities. The discourse also excels in the combination of scales (the legal and political; the cultural and associative) and their respective levels: institutional (States and UNESCO) and at that of collectives of practitioners (the great worldwide family of falconers and the local groups with their own specificities).

### *Alpinism: a cross-border, tri-national, and global framing*

The bearers of the alpinism nomination project also made sure to emphasize the worldwide nature of their practice (Debarbieux, Munz, 2019; Debarbieux, 2020). In the nomination file, alpinism is said to have originated in the late 18th century in the Western Alps, between Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa; its development being presented as a deployment, between the mid-19th and end of the 20th century, on all the high mountains of the world. This well-documented history (though the most recent synthesis on a global scale dates back to Engel, 1950), is also punctuated by countless expeditions, initially marked by colonialism and nationalism (not mentioned in the file), then with increasing frequency led by multinational teams, with an progressive openness to the participation of climbers from the host countries and to the development of clubs and training structures in the countries of the South, often in collaboration with a counterpart in the North.

However, since not all the potentially concerned States were signatories of the Convention (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand), and others had only recently signed and thus preferred to initially focus on their own files (Germany and Austria in particular), the nomination only involved Italy, France, and Switzerland. This grouping was also explained by the fact that the initiators of the nomination mainly engaged with the Mont Blanc massif, at the crossroads of the three States' territories. Moreover, their respective heritage administrations had a history of collaborating on joint projects. That said, State support for the nomination was conditional on the alpine clubs and guide societies of these three countries, all national in scope,<sup>21</sup> being the official bearers of the project. These clubs and societies then obtained the backing of the two corresponding global associations: the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (of which clubs in 68 countries are members) and the International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations (which federates 26 national associations). While the perimeter of the nomination (3 States) is thus limited, mainly for practical reasons, it is meant to be expanded; the protagonists have all affirmed an openness to the "aggregation"<sup>22</sup> of other States and other communities of practitioners in the near future.<sup>23</sup> Regularly asked about this at various stages of the proposal's evaluation, such an expansion seemed obvious to the project bearers, who see the core of the practice—associated with technical mastery, knowledge of the high mountain environment, and a set of values (mutual assistance, surpassing oneself, "*l'esprit de cordée*"<sup>24</sup>)—as common to mountaineers in all regions of the world. During a working session, an Italian mountaineer expressed this sentiment in a simple way: "In the beginning, mountaineering was reserved to the Alps. Today, the practice has spread to the whole world. Even in the Himalayas, where local people also climb mountains, the practice's values are the same as those that shape alpinism here."<sup>25</sup> Regardless of whether this analysis is justified, it forms part of a common way that climbers have of qualifying their practice.

21. With the exception of the Italian Alpine Club, which does not cover Alto Adige / South Tyrol where an autonomous club exists.

22. Term used by the ICH Committee to extend an inscription to a greater number of States, at the cost of producing a new argumentation.

23. During the ICH Committee session that validated the mountaineering inscription, several States delegations expressed the desire for their clubs and administrations be involved in a future aggregation.

24. Literally "rope spirit," a French term indicating a sense of team spirit among climbers. See also <https://ich.unesco.org/en/R/L/alpinism-01471>.

25. Notes taken during the meeting.

The ICH Committee examined and inscribed this practice on the Representative List of the ICH in December 2019, underlining, in this case as well, the nomination's particularly apt reflection of the ambitions of the 2003 Convention.

### *States simply supporting bearer communities*

The success of the inscriptions of falconry and alpinism and their emblematic character in the eyes of the ICH Convention bodies was thus largely due to the fact that, beyond the interest expressed for the two corresponding practices, their nomination was vigorously supported or borne by organizations of practitioners, notably transnational ones, able to highlight both the common attributes of each and their regional and national specificities. In other words, the inscription of these multinational nominations resulted not only from the practice being declared as worldwide, but also from the fact that it is organized at the global level.

Does this mean that the more national-related motives identified for yoga, flamenco, and tango were absent from these applications? Not quite. The economic motive was not present in the alpinism inscription project; it is already actively practiced in the three countries concerned, and even considered excessive on several mountain summits. No measures have been recommended to intensify it, except perhaps relative to young people, who the project bearers would like to see introduced to its fundamental values. It was secondary in the falconry project: in promoting tourism at the national scale, the UAE has welcomed large gatherings of falconers since 1976 and at a more sustained rate beginning in the 2000s. Though, for the falconers of the other partner countries, here again this has mainly been a question of cultivating the values associated with the practice and of having its cultural heritage nature recognized at the world scale and that of the respective States. The initially very present nationalist impetus among Emirati officials had become secondary, even if reference to falconry remained central in the national narrative promoted by the authorities (Krawietz, 2014). Meanwhile, the States that inscribed alpinism never expressed any such concern, rather insisting that they were making a disinterested contribution to UNESCO's heritage policy.

In contrast, a diplomatic motivation was decisive in the falconry inscription. In addition to the tactical reasons already described, the early reframing of the nomination from a specifically UAE application to a multi-national one owed much to the Emirate's engagement in this area. The decade of the 2000s saw a notable effort on the part of the UAE to acquire greater international visibility, both within the Arab-Muslim world and beyond. This engagement was particularly expressed within UNESCO itself: the UAE obtained a seat on the ICH Committee between 2006 and 2009, then a vice-presidency in 2006, and the presidency in 2008; Abu Dhabi hosted the Committee for its 2009 session; and the UAE strongly lobbied, albeit in vain, for an Arab UNESCO director general in the 2017 election. This rise in power has been closely documented by the UAE National Media Council, an agency charged with promoting the visibility of the Emirates on the international media scene (Grenet, 2018). Unsurprising then that some described this as the "geopolitics of falconry" (Koch, 2015). For alpinism, the diplomatic stakes, if less salient, were not absent: the Italian, Swiss, and French cultural heritage administrations valued a joint elaboration of European know-how in line with the objectives of the Convention, willingly presented as exemplary in this domain.



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## Conclusion

The combined analysis of, on the one hand, institutional modalities of identifying the intangible cultural heritage of humanity and, on the other, the processes having led to the inscription of five worldwide cultural practices on the UNESCO Representative List of the ICH of Humanity reveals different ways of conceiving globality and the use of the latter in official discourses. Indeed, the various protagonists of this particular form of heritage-making differ in their institutional status (international organization, States, associations, expert bodies, collectives of practitioners, etc.); but they also vary in the ontological status they attribute to the World and the global level. For the ICH Committee, UNESCO's guiding body in this field, the global level is truly instituting; it is the constitutive framing level of the project, giving its *raison d'être*. This is similarly the case for the international associations of falconers and alpinists who, though mobilized in different ways in the inscription of their respective practices, give consistency to specific groups of practitioners. If these two inscriptions have been lauded as exemplary by the ICH Committee, it is as much due to the way they have been (well-) documented and qualified throughout the process, as to the fact that the corresponding communities and the ICH Committee both confer this same organizational and instituting character to globality. Put differently, and expressed in terms of the concepts used in this analysis, the globality of cultural practices is all the more valued in the inscription process since the globality of UNESCO (cognitive, organizational, and axiological) and that of the collectives of practitioners (transnational and identity-based) align with a desire on the part of certain States to make the ideal of building a heritage of humanity their own.

In contrast, the globality of yoga, tango, and flamenco as invoked in the inscription process refers to their simple spatial deployment (worldwideness), which, at best, makes these practices familiar to a considerable number of people. Yet, the communities put forward are instead said to be local, regional, or national and it is these levels that give them their *raison d'être*. Their inscription is the result of the will of political institutions — i.e., the Regional Government of Andalusia, the Indian State, the cities of Buenos Aires and Montevideo — to claim their intrinsic territoriality through the heritage-making of an emblematic cultural practice, said to be constitutive of the social body of which they are the expression. The reference, always ambivalent, to the presence elsewhere in the World of large groups of practitioners is at best a way of exalting the importance and influence of these so-called original centers.

Taken together, these globalized cultural practices thus strongly stand out for the scalar framework that presided over their heritage-making and the status conferred to their globality. The fact that they are now all inscribed on the ICH Representative List shows that UNESCO's policy in favor of safeguarding these types of practices and its implementation by the Committee can be put at the service of very heterogeneous projects, where very different scale levels are privileged.

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