Cosmopolitan Archaeologies

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Australians all let us rejoice
For we are young and free
We’ve golden soil and wealth for toil,
Our home is girt by sea:
Our land abounds in nature’s gifts
Of beauty rich and rare,
In history’s page let every stage
Advance Australia fair,
In joyful strains then let us sing
Advance Australia fair.
—“Advance Australia Fair”

The Australian national anthem continues to resonate with a popular sense of the country’s relatively recent origin, unfettered by a grim European past—Australians feel “young and free,” with a history still to write, no choice but to advance. This identity is of course defined in relation to an international community, as indeed it has always been—but in an age of increasing global interconnectedness, the importance of the nation as a framework for understanding the Australian past (and therefore its present and future), has in some respects only strengthened. However, against this powerful narrative, a well-established critique of Australian heritage has identified problems with this national framework, and especially the suppression of indigenous experience entailed in creating a solid national foundation. Calls for transnational histories that re-site the nation within more global accounts of migration and exchange (for example, Curthoys and Lake 2005) potentially de-emphasize the state and reaffirm the status of “first” peoples within longer-term trajectories of human endeavor. Heritage is now a global discourse and can also be seen as a discourse of globalization that enfold diverse cultures and attitudes toward the past into a single narrative. Internal tension between an openness to cultural difference and
simultaneously a commitment to universal values remains unresolved, yet new forms of significance that are emerging within international heritage praxis, as people become enmeshed within transnational alliances, reveal new modes of political community. Processes such as the participation of indigenous peoples in international institutions in preference to national ones do not merely challenge the legitimacy of the states’ claim to exclusive jurisdiction over territory, but in fact constitute an “emergent cosmopolitanism” (Ivison 2006a) that is compatible with universal notions of justice and yet is also rooted in particular, local ways of life.

Cosmopolitanism and Heritage

Many theories of global interconnectedness focus on the tension between different conceptions of human subjectivity and difference, often expressed as an opposition between universalism and relativism, and linked to notions of individual versus collective rights, and concomitant conceptions of culture as either fluid and contingent, or as bounded and local. International heritage discourse is similarly structured by this dual commitment—to global peace and prosperity grounded in universal human rights, but also to cultural diversity.

As formative analyses of the complexity and flux of globalization suggested (for example, Hannerz 1992; Featherstone 1990), diffusionist models (sometimes caricatured as coca colonization) are inadequate to explain processes of global interconnectedness, which are characterized not merely by homogenization and integration but also by the proliferation of diversity. The dissolution of some boundaries—most clearly, through mediatization and capital flow, travel and migration—has simultaneously acted to strengthen others and, most notably, a sense of local distinctiveness. Despite the persistence or even intensification of some normative orders within global processes, a sense of difference is constructed in relation to others in an enhanced awareness of plurality. Although cultural forms may be global, their interpretation and use are shaped by local values.

Visions of the ethical, emancipatory potential of an interconnected world, such as Kantian conceptions of cosmopolitanism, are characterized by a commitment to the equal worth and dignity of all human beings, linked to standards of justice that are intended to be applicable to all while at the same time retaining an openness to local different ways
of life (Appiah 2006a). As an intellectual ethos this stance transcends the particularistic and contingent ties of kin and country, constituting “an institutionally grounded global political consciousness” (Cheah 2006: 491). The tension between the principles of universalism and local difference is central to current analysis of global networks, linked to concepts of universal human rights and local values. As I explore further, this apparent conceptual paradox is identified as a dilemma within both human rights and heritage discourse as well as theories of political community such as cosmopolitanism; it is a problem not merely of articulation between different orders of practice, but of how to conceive human subjectivity and difference.

It is often argued that the proliferation of international human rights law over recent decades has rendered it “one of the most globalized political values of our times” (Wilson 1997: 1), giving rise to “feasible global forms of political consciousness” that may regulate the excesses of capitalist globalization (Cheah 2006: 491). One of the central issues in this area has often been expressed as a contradiction between universal human rights with their emphasis on individual equality, and local culture and group rights—sometimes termed the “universalism versus relativism” debate. Relativist critique of universalism identifies the socially and historically contingent nature of human rights discourse, which emerged in its current form in Europe in the aftermath of World War II (with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948) within a Western ideology of liberalism and the bourgeois categories of possessive individualism. Such critique points to the global diversity of legal systems and especially indigenous peoples’ claims to communal rights to land ownership or self-determination. The relativist critique relies upon a conception of culture as an entity—static, internally uniform, and historically bounded, rather than a contested and emergent process. In practical terms, the concept of “unity in diversity” becomes problematic when “culture” violates “universal rights”—or conversely, when minority cultures are objectified and penalized for changing.

The tension between universalism and cultural relativism is also apparent within international heritage discourse. Like human rights, heritage now constitutes a world network of organizations, policies, and practices, represented at a global level by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which aims “to build peace in the minds of men” and to promote prosperity around the globe. Many have noted that in its promotion of Western notions
of heritage—as material and authentic, for example—heritage can also be seen as a discourse of globalization (Ireland and Lydon 2005: 20). One of its key programs is the preservation of “culture,” deployed largely through the framework of “world heritage” and the “world heritage list,” conceived as universally owned. As UNESCO’s website declares, “What makes the concept of World Heritage exceptional is its universal application. World Heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located,” in a vision of a global cultural commons. To be listed, places must be “considered to be of outstanding value to humanity” (UNESCO 1972), yet this notion of universal value is predicated upon an understanding of humankind as irreducibly diverse.

It is also linked to a commitment to a universal right to culture, as human rights discourse is increasingly drawn upon by the international heritage movement. First articulated by UNESCO during the 1960s, in a climate of postwar decolonization, demands by the indigenous included the right to “enjoy their own culture.” By the 1990s the perceived effects of globalization in homogenizing local cultures prompted the protection of diversity as a major theme of UNESCO’s activity. The World Commission on Culture and Development’s statement of 1995 regarding culture in the contemporary world—Our Creative Diversity—articulated a new ethic of diversity that reached its fullest expression in the Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity 2001: here for the first time cultural diversity was termed “the common heritage of humanity,” the defense of which was deemed to be an ethical and practical imperative, “inseparable from respect for human dignity” (UNESCO 2001: 20). But as Thomas Eriksen’s discussion (2001) of Our Creative Diversity points out, UNESCO’s insistence upon cultural difference contradicts its promotion of a universalist view of ethics. Placing an exoticist emphasis on culture as difference—focusing on those symbolic acts that demarcate boundaries between groups, and the traditions associated with a single set of people and their heritage or “roots”—is linked to the anthropological paradigms of cultural relativism and structuralism. Yet the report simultaneously deploys a more fluid conception of culture as globalization, creolization, and “impulses”—a view linked to poststructuralist deconstructionist approaches. Hence the report simultaneously defends “group rights,” “the protection of minorities,” and the identification of claimants as living “traditional lifestyles” while also expressing a commitment to the Universal Declaration of
Human Rights, which accords rights to individuals, not groups. As I have noted, the dilemma in this dual position is the inevitable conflict between collective minority rights and individual rights.

Too often, the reification of culture has trapped minority groups between the identification of claimants (as leading “traditional lifestyles”) and their own need to change and engage with global processes to survive. By detaching heritage from the local context that gave it meaning, heritage may disenfranchise communities. For example, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006: 2, original emphasis) argues that through its metacultural application of museological methods to living people and culture, an asymmetry is produced between “the diversity of those who produce cultural assets in the first place and the humanity to which those assets come to belong as world heritage.” Others suggest that in practice local concepts of value may be incorporated into Western heritage methodology, for example through heritage tools such as Australia’s Burra Charter (Sullivan 2005).

Recent moves toward broadening the concept of culture to include intangible cultural heritage make these problems more explicit. As practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills “embodied in people rather than in inanimate objects,” such heritage highlights its vulnerability to repressive cultural practices that contravene human rights—such as in Myanmar, where the use of forced labor for monumental restoration is argued to fall within the traditional Buddhist practice of merit-making. William Logan (2008; and see the chapter by Hodder, this volume) argues for the use of human rights instruments to regulate heritage practice and the development of a hierarchy of human rights forms, with rights to cultural heritage giving precedence to rights to freedom from slavery or torture.

Notwithstanding the recurrent framing of the relationship between universalism and cultural relativism as a dilemma, it seems more productive to avoid opposing these tendencies in any absolute fashion. Dichotomization of universal and local values overlooks the effects of globalization and transnational juridical processes: many indigenous peoples, for example, are adopting human rights doctrine, and referring to themselves as “indigenous”—that is, choosing to identify with a pan-global category. Such phenomena undermine bounded, static conceptions of culture as “values,” expressing rather a dynamic, fluid conception of culture that is not necessarily at odds with human rights (for example, Merry 2003). To understand the “social life of rights” we
need to attend to the actions and intentions of social actors, within the wider constraints of institutional power; ethnography of a network considers “the way people are drawn into a more globalised existence and become enmeshed in transnational linkages” (Wilson 1997: 13). Universality becomes a matter of context. Such analysis reveals the sets of conjunctural relationships that constitute local meanings and identities (e.g., Breckenridge et al. 2002), at the same time as transnational practices and categories are resisted and appropriated according to context; meaning does not reside within culturally bounded and set values but flows through global interconnections at local, national, and global levels.

Universal or Elite Value? Reinscribing the Nation

Recent critique of the notion of “outstanding universal value,” a key concept for the World Heritage Convention, has pointed out that despite the centrality of liberal values and particularly participatory democracy to international heritage discourse, in practice such discourse reproduces elitist Western methodologies and ideals; through implementation at the level of the state, national myths continue to feature the heroic male, excluding other groups and notably women (Labadi 2005, 2006). Heritage management frameworks have overemphasized a bounded national past and underplayed the nation’s involvement in transnational histories—for example of migration and empire.

Certainly, the nation has not lost its salience as the dominant framework for understanding the Australian past—it seems that an enhanced awareness of a global context has only increased this sense of distinctiveness, as nationalist legends are retold as a way of asserting membership in an international community. As the website of the federal Department of the Environment and Heritage (2007a) declares under the banner of “Australian Heritage,” “By knowing our heritage—our past, our places and the source of our values—we can better understand our special place in the world.”

A substantial body of critique has demonstrated (e.g., Byrne 1996; L. Smith 2000; Ireland 2002) that from its inception during the 1960s Australian heritage was used to tell a unique national story that masked internal complexity while marginalizing the nation’s broader entanglement within transnational historical processes such as the spread of humans across the Pacific, indigenous settlement, and migration. As a
form of historical consciousness, a focus of social memory and shared narratives, heritage has become the primary way in which the past is invoked by cultural institutions such as museums, enfolding conflict within a consensual national past (Ireland and Lydon 2005; Young 1999: 12–13). Heritage representations, grounded in archaeological and historical narratives, continue to reinscribe the national stories of colonial discovery and settlement, “pioneer” achievement, and freedom won through heroism at war. Such stories are linked to the values of “mateship,” decency, courage, and egalitarianism that continue to structure current political arguments about issues such as immigration restriction, border defense, and the treatment of Aboriginal people. Postcolonial critique of the celebratory version of white settlement over the last two decades has shifted mainstream perceptions of the nation’s origins, as indigenous experience and injustice have challenged or been integrated into public memory. Yet while such reappraisal is hotly contested (e.g., Macintyre and Clark 2003), the centrality of the nation endures.

Changes to the Australian national heritage regime in 2005 marked a tension between new modes of practice that acknowledge shifting public interests in the past—such as “intangible cultural heritage” and an emphasis on social value—and the heritage inventory as a tool for producing a seemingly apolitical and unambiguous national story. The new National Heritage List, where places are protected by stronger commonwealth powers, has further reified the concept of “national significance” within legislation, heightening the existing tendency for a national “high culture” to be promoted and policed by the state’s normative cultural institutions. One issue here is that this method of assessing places according to their degree of national importance—whether they reach a particular “threshold” of significance—is clearly at odds with the way that Aboriginal people have valued their places, which has been inclusive rather than comparative. For Aboriginal people, representing hundreds of small linguistic and cultural entities across the continent, and excluded from citizenship until 1967, no allegiance to a national framework can be assumed. By the same token, the places held dear to these groups may not be considered important enough to qualify for listing at this level, omitting what many would consider to be a key aspect of Australian culture (Lydon and Ireland 2005).
Gallipoli: Hills, Ridges, and Gullies

Within an expanded international context, key national stories have been reanimated, as an enhanced global interconnectedness has simultaneously acted to strengthen a sense of distinctive Australian identity. The site of Gallipoli, in Turkey, has long held a sacred dimension for many Australians as the “birthplace of the nation” and as a symbol of shared core values. It marks the landing on April 25, 1915 of the seventeen thousand troops of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZACS) in support of the British in a campaign that aimed to capture Constantinople and remove Turkey from the war. After a protracted and ruinous eight-month siege, the allies were forced to withdraw with heavy losses. But the “ANZAC spirit”—courage, endurance, initiative, discipline, and the mateship born of egalitarianism and hardship—continues to be invoked by Australians. In popular parlance, the ANZAC “digger” “rejected unnecessary restrictions, possessed a sardonic sense of humour, was contemptuous of danger, and proved himself the equal of anyone on the battlefield” (Australian War Memorial 2007).

Over recent years there has been an astonishing rise in the popularity of the ANZAC legend, evident in growing attendance at ANZAC Day ceremonies around Australia, in an explosion of books, films, and museums on the subject, and especially in the emergence of a well-trodden tourist pilgrimage to “the Peninsula,” made possible by mass global travel. In 1998, two hundred people attended the Dawn Service at Anzac Cove on April 25, and this increased to ten thousand in 2000, and eighteen thousand in 2004, while organizers anticipate at least twenty thousand visitors for the one hundredth anniversary in 2015 (Parliament of Australia 2005: 27). On one level, this intensification of sentiment is testament to the privileged role of war in the national psyche. The surge in Gallipoli commemoration also coincides with the passing of the last “diggers,” suggesting that we are witnessing a process of valorization as the campaign slips out of lived experience, and bereavement turns to nostalgia. This process also seems to have changed popular assessments of the campaign’s military impact, for example, with one observer claiming: “I think it’s important that we’re now no longer saying . . . that in the First World War Australians fought other people’s wars and died in vain, which I think was historically wrong, but also a dreadful commentary on the suffering of the fallen. I think what
political leaders . . . are now saying is that the men and women who went there did a noble thing, and essentially the cause for which they fought was a noble cause” (Kirk 2000). Hence the ANZAC Day address of John Howard, the former prime minister of Australia, expressed the prevalent attitude in declaring that “today’s generations thank you for making this a free society. We thank you for the way of life that we all enjoy” (Howard 2005).

Celebration of the legend reached a climax of sorts in late 2003 when Howard pledged that “the Anzac site at Gallipoli should represent the first nomination for inclusion on the [new] National Heritage List.” But one year later it was revealed that the Turkish government had rejected this suggestion because it had concerns that the listing would compromise its sovereignty; instead the governments agreed to seek “some symbolic recognition” (Griffiths 2005). This rebuff followed a long history of commemoration and protection of the ANZAC territory: in 1923 the Treaty of Lausanne had provided for granting the land “in which are situated the graves, cemeteries, ossuaries or memorials of their soldiers and sailors” to host governments; in 1973 the Gallipoli Peninsula National Historic Park was listed in the UN’s List of National Parks and Protected Areas; in 1996 the Gallipoli Peninsula Peace Park was established, expanding the area’s extent to thirty-three thousand hectares (Cameron and Donlon 2005: 133). The Australian government’s attempt to list the peninsula reveals the enduring link between identity and bounded territory; its decision—astonishing to some—to inaugurate a category of national icons by recognizing a place on the other side of the world expresses an impossible impulse to transcend time and space by incorporating this sacred site into the national body.

The physical terrain and bodily experience of visiting the peninsula has also become an increasingly important part of the legend, as pilgrimage to the site, especially by young backpackers, combines a spiritual quest, a search for family, a post-Vietnam revival of patriotic fervor, and a desire to witness a defining moment in the national past (Scates 2002, 2003, 2006). Crucially, the expatriate’s need to reassert a unique national identity has led to the incorporation of the site into an international tourist itinerary, commemorating the importance of home for those so far away from it, and providing a sense of shared history: as one young visitor explained, the experience “gives you something to tie yourself to while you are travelling overseas” (quoted in Scates
For the global traveler, the Gallipoli pilgrimage provides the juxtaposition of a key moment in recent Australian history with the ancient, exotic world of the guidebook, enfolding them into a coherent, satisfying journey into the past.

Commemorative ceremonies such as the prime minister’s ANZAC Day speeches also celebrate the harsh terrain, a dramatic landscape that evokes the hardship and futility of the campaign. Howard (2005) said, “Ninety years ago, as dawn began to break, the first sons of a young nation assailed these shores. These young Australians, with their New Zealand comrades, had come to do their bit in a maelstrom not of their making. Over eight impossible months, they forged a legend whose grip on us grows tighter with each passing year. In the hills, ridges and gullies above us the Anzacs fought, died, dug in and hung on. Here they won a compelling place in the Australian story.” For this reason tremendous controversy surrounded roadworks carried out in 2005 in preparation for the ninetieth anniversary, causing damage to the landscape and exposing the remains of soldiers killed without burial in the conflict (Cameron and Donlon 2005). Following this scandal, further archaeological assessment of the landscape has been commissioned by the Australian government, but the scope of this proposal has been broadened to encompass the ancient archaeological remains of the peninsula, distancing the government from the recent controversy by downplaying the most recent episode of the place’s significance in heritage terms, and contextualizing it within a much longer history of conflict and reconstruction.

Gallipoli: “Victories for Our Common Humanity”

The shifting significance of Gallipoli in the Australian imagination reveals how the configurations of meaning, memory, and identity that define national heritage are reinscribed on an international stage. The legend’s importance has been enhanced by an increased popular awareness of its international context. One important aspect of this development is the perception of places such as Anzac Cove as symbols of reconciliation and international fraternity in the present (Howard 2005). These sentiments echo those of the diggers themselves, such as Harold Edwards, who in 2000 thanked the Turkish people for the friendship shown to those who invaded their land and stated, “We feel there’s a collaboration of spirit which is going to be helpful to mankind,
and if only we could all be friendly to each other, live and let live, free to do anything we like, provided it doesn’t limit or interfere with other people’s freedom or rights” (Kirk 2000).

The Turkish people also view the naval battle of Canakkale and the land battle of Gallipoli as founding national events, albeit for different reasons. The conflict at Gallipoli was Turkey’s sole victory in five campaigns of the First World War, and it is seen as the last great victory of the Ottoman Empire. More particularly, it flagged the military capability of the Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the beginning of his role in Turkey’s transition to a secular republic. Atatürk still welcomes Australians who visit Turkey and invites them to remember their lost soldiers through a monument at Anzac Cove that reads:

Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives . . .
You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country . . .
You, the mothers,
Who sent their sons from faraway countries,
wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom
and are in peace.
After having lost their lives on this land they have become
our sons as well.
Atatürk, 1934

The Turkish government’s announcement in 1997 of a proposal to nominate the military landscape to the World Heritage List received an enthusiastic Australian response, with one legislative body seeing these moves as “victories for our common humanity. . . . As a result of what happened, the Turkish community and the Australian community now feel a close affinity with one another” (N.S.W. Legislative Assembly 2003).

Today the Gallipoli legend reinscribes a core national myth, drawing upon collective values that resonate with a domestic audience while asserting the Australian nation’s global parity within a league of nations; in some forms, the legend also promotes a vision of world peace and unity. The narrative’s evolution exemplifies the process of selection and valorization involved in the national deployment of the international heritage system. However, despite the centrality of concepts of cultural diversity to the heritage system, and despite the integral importance of indigenous values and traditions to Australia’s national story, the imple-
mentation of heritage by the state denies unwelcome claims grounded in culture and history—such as the Aboriginal demand for acknowledgment and restitution for the damage inflicted by colonialism. As the cartoonist Cathy Wilcox has succinctly shown, the former Australian government’s endorsement of Gallipoli as the story of a nation forged in battle contrasts with its concurrent refusal to acknowledge more unpalatable aspects of colonial dispossession (see figure 1.1).

“Leave It in the Ground!”: Indigenous Participation in Transnational Processes

The refusal to acknowledge the negative consequences of colonialism has also characterized the development of Australian heritage in promoting a vision of indigenous culture as static, bounded, and shared, and in constructing a celebratory national story centering on progress and consensus. Yet indigenous peoples have also begun to draw upon international heritage discourse to assert their identities, protect their interests, and oppose injustice on the world stage. Some attribute this process to globalization, which has dissolved some boundaries only to strengthen others, namely the assertion of distinctive collective identities and claims to rights. Today minority societies do not simply choose

1 “Our heritage.” Courtesy of Cathy Wilcox.
between isolation or assimilation; rather, they seek self-determination “by choosing among various ideas, institutional models, and strategies, originating from dominant societies and global institutions, which hold out possibilities of protecting a distinct community’s ability to make such choices in the future” (Niezen 2004: 2–3). Indigenous peoples may now choose to participate in international institutions in preference to national ones.

Such demands do not merely challenge the legitimacy of a state’s claim to exclusive jurisdiction over territory, but in fact point toward new transnational modes of political community—what Duncan Ivison (2006a) terms an “emergent cosmopolitanism” that is compatible with universal notions of justice and yet is also rooted in particular, local ways of life. Such demands show how historical injustice can structure our moral concepts, presenting deep challenges to liberal theories of global justice. Appeals to international norms, together with their indigenous revaluation, also reveal a relationship between different levels (local, state, global), “which is pluralist but not state-centric, immanent but also universalist” (Ivison 2006a: 121). Indigenous scholars are showing that conceptions of local culture are changing, shaped by an international context and incorporating a universal notion of human rights without abandoning a sense of local meaning or distinctiveness. For example, the indigenous lawyer Larissa Behrendt (2002, 2003) argues that indigenous people have used the concept of rights to describe their political aspirations, advancing the concept of “internal self-determination” in a vision of increased indigenous autonomy within the structures of the Australian state. Some have also discerned possibilities in new categories of global identity—organizations such as the World Archaeological Congress for example, or the attempts of some indigenous groups to have their traditional countries or sites included on the World Heritage List.

The international campaign led by the Mirarr people of the Kakadu region in northern Australia exemplifies this process, to date successfully preventing uranium mining on the Jabiluka mineral lease. Uranium was widely discovered in the Northern Territory during the 1950s, and in the mid-1970s the Australian government commissioned an inquiry into the issues facing mining in the region. At the same time, legislation was passed that allowed Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory to gain legal title to their traditional land (the Aboriginal Land Rights Act [Cth], 1976). The inquiry’s Second Report
recorded the opposition of the Mirarr people to uranium mining on their land, noting that “some Aboriginals had at an earlier stage approved, or at least not disapproved, the proposed development, but it seems likely that they were not then as fully informed about it as they later became. Traditional consultations had not then taken place, and there was a general conviction that opposition was futile” (Australia Parliament 1977: 9). Nonetheless, the government proceeded against Aboriginal wishes, exempting the Ranger uranium mine at Jabiru from the traditional owner “mining veto” provisions of the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act of 1976. The Mirarr continued to express their opposition to mining, despite the agreement it was pressured to sign in 1978. (For various accounts of these events, see Mirarr 2007; Katona 1998, 2001; O’Brien 2003.)

The Jabiluka Mineral Lease is 230 kilometers east of Darwin, covers 73 square kilometers, and is owned by Energy Resources of Australia Ltd. (ERA). It abuts the northern boundary of the Ranger Mineral Lease, which has been mined since 1980. Both leases predate and are excised from Kakadu National Park, which was inscribed on the World Heritage List in three stages between 1981 and 1992. Kakadu is one of the few sites included on the list for outstanding cultural and natural universal values—including as an outstanding example of significant ongoing ecological and biological processes, of superlative natural phenomena, and for containing important and significant habitats for in situ conservation of biological diversity. Its cultural values include its status as a unique artistic achievement and its direct association with living traditions of outstanding universal significance (Department of the Environment and Heritage 2007b). The predominantly Gundjehi-speaking Mirarr (a group of twenty-seven people) have been traditional owners of this area “since time immemorial” and have always opposed mining on their land. As Jacqui Katona (2002: 29), the executive officer of the Gundjehi Aboriginal Corporation, explains, “Most important to the Mirarr in defining themselves is their status as traditional owners. This status, authority and power is derived from their land, their relationship to land and each other and has developed over thousands of years.” For Aboriginal people, their land is a “humanised landscape which is indivisible and immutable, and every natural feature has a name and meaningful mythological association. Place and person are inseparable, while past and present form a unity of ongoing creation” (John Mulvaney, quoted in Katona 2001: 196). In part, the
park derives its preeminent status from its immense archaeological significance (e.g., R. Jones 1985), containing sites such as Malakunanja II (or Madjedbebe as it is called by the Mirarr), where one of the oldest human occupation dates has been recorded (Roberts et al. 1990), and this scientific evidence has powerfully substantiated indigenous claims of cultural longevity.

Despite Aboriginal opposition the Australian government gave approval in May 1978 for Pancontinental to drill at the proposed mine site so as to complete an environmental impact statement (EIS). In 1980 the Mirarr and other Aboriginal people in the region lodged a claim for their land under the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act of 1976. In 1981, Pancontinental agreed with the Northern Land Council not to oppose the land claim if negotiations on Jabiluka proceeded. Under pressure, the Mirarr “consented” to the Jabiluka Mining Agreement entered into by the Northern Land Council and Pancontinental in July 1982. However, in 1983 the Hawke Labor government was elected to office with a policy of halting expansion of the uranium mining industry. The Jabiluka project was caught by this policy, which remained in place for the next thirteen years. In 1991 Pancontinental sold its interest in the Jabiluka mine to ERA, the owner of the Ranger mine. One condition attached to the deed of transfer was that the consent of “traditional owners” would be required before Jabiluka ore could be milled at Ranger. It is generally agreed that unless the ore is milled at the existing Ranger facilities, mining at Jabiluka would be economically unviable. In 1997 the Mirarr formally announced their opposition to this milling.

After the conservative Howard government was elected in 1996, it decided to develop uranium mining by recognizing the fourteen-year-old Jabiluka Mining Agreement. Represented by Yvonne Margarula, the senior traditional owner, and by Jacqui Katona, the Mirarr embarked upon a public campaign to prevent this, involving a speaking tour, public forums, alliances with other Aboriginal groups, and international lobbying, including a submission to the World Heritage Bureau that prompted tremendous media attention. The Mirarr deployed the heritage concept of “living tradition” in their campaign, representing their culture as an ancient survival within the modern world and explicitly contrasting the purity of living indigenous tradition with the vices of modernity. They argued that “the Mirarr communities have had a presence in the Kakadu region for up to 65,000 years. If the
mine proceeds, our survival is at risk. . . . Culturally, surviving clans are struggling to hold on to their cultural traditions and pass them on to new generations in the face of the establishment of mines in sensitive and culturally important areas . . . and in the face of alcohol and other substance abuse and the blandishments of the mass consumer culture” (Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation 1998: 34–35). In their view, the World Heritage Convention protects “one of the few remaining islands of traditional culture from the relentless forces of development [and constitutes] a legal bulwark defending the integrity of Mirarr society” (Katona 2002: 36). They pointed out that the benefits of modernity as measured in the “quality and length of life of the Aboriginal residents” have not transpired as the result of mining on their land (Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation 1998: 36; and see Katona 1998).

In August 1997 the government approved the mine pursuant to an EIS that had been prepared by Energy Resources of Australia, despite widespread public and expert opposition, including serious concerns of the government’s own conservation division, Environment Australia, about long-term damage to the environment, Aboriginal people, and World Heritage values.

Jabiluka’s “Detour Via Europe”

In mid-1998 the seemingly inexorable pressure toward mining was eased by two key events. First, because the Mirarr continued to withhold their consent for Jabiluka ore to be milled at the ERA’s Ranger uranium mine, the government announced approval of the Jabiluka Milling Alternative, whereby uranium would be milled at Jabiluka. Second, Margarula and Katona attended a meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Bureau in Paris and convinced the bureau to send a mission to investigate the dangers to the Mirarr living tradition and the environment associated with the Jabiluka uranium mine. In October 1998 the UNESCO World Heritage Committee Mission visited Kakadu and Canberra, and the following month handed down its finding that the Jabiluka mine posed serious threats to the cultural and natural values of the Kakadu World Heritage Area (UNESCO 1998). This decision, and the unprecedented threat of placing a site on the World Heritage “in danger” list without permission by the host country, caused huge embarrassment to the Australian government, which refused to comply with UNESCO’s resolution. In December the World Heritage
Committee accepted the mission’s report and resolved that construction at Jabiluka should cease until the Australian government could prove that the identified threats to Mirarr culture and country were being avoided. It was widely perceived that the Howard government had been ambushed by the globalization of environmental political power, which over the preceding decade had moved from “alternative” to mainstream within European governments. Bob Brown, a Green member of the Australian Parliament, and his colleagues, who were often ignored in national debates, were able to command “enormous entrée” among the coalition Green governments of Germany, France, and Italy, successfully securing the adoption of a Green anti-Jabiluka motion by the European Parliament in Brussels. The federal government had been outflanked by a coalition of international indigenous, social activist, and environmental groups: as one observer noted, “It didn’t even see him [Brown] coming, mainly because he detoured via Europe” (Milne 1998).

Nonetheless, following an expensive lobbying campaign mounted by the federal government, in July 1999 member nations of the World Heritage Committee voted overwhelmingly against imposing an endangered listing on Kakadu (Department of Environment and Heritage 2007b). Environmentalists were bitterly angry, but Katona’s (1999) response was measured, noting that “the World Heritage Committee has recognised very strongly that there are culture impacts to the living tradition of the Mirarr people. . . . The Australian Government has bound itself to . . . reporting back to the committee and ensuring that there is progressive opportunity back in Australia, to deal with issues of living tradition. . . . It’s been an interesting opportunity, because it’s one that we haven’t had domestically.”

The World Heritage Committee emphasized the fact that “whilst fully respecting the sovereignty of States on whose territory the cultural and natural heritage is situated . . . States Parties . . . recognise that such heritage constitutes a world heritage for whose protection it is the duty of the international community as a whole to co-operate.” The committee was also of the opinion that “confidence and trust building through dialogue are crucial for there to be any resolution of issues relating to the proposal to mine and mill uranium at Jabiluka. . . . In particular, a more substantial and continuous dialogue needs to be established between the Australian government and the traditional
owners of the Jabiluka Mineral Lease, the Mirarr Aboriginal people” (UNESCO 1999).

Throughout 2000 both sides of the dispute lobbied the World Heritage Bureau—the anti-mine coalition to strengthen its hand against the mine, and the Howard government to prevent properties being listed as “in danger” without the government’s agreement. In early 2002, Rio Tinto (which had acquired the deposits through its takeover of North Ltd. in 2000) announced that it would “mothball” the project, subsequently filling in the excavation and giving the traditional owners the right to veto future development at the site—perhaps for financial reasons as well as because of criticism for failing to act on discussions concerning sustainability and community relations (Bachelard 2003). No doubt its other, less controversial global mining interests absorbed its attention from this time onward (Heathcote 2003). Although periodic review points remain scheduled for renegotiation between the company and the traditional owners, the Mirarr remain opposed to the mine being developed.

In 2006 the Howard government took steps to increase Australia’s stake in the global nuclear energy market, reopening the issue of nuclear energy as a domestic power source, in abeyance since the 1980s. With a change of government in late 2007, it remains to be seen whether this direction will be pursued, in a context of worsening drought and hotly contested debate about a national response to climate change.

Conclusion

Gallipoli and Jabiluka demonstrate the limits, as well as the potentialities, of heritage conceived as a cosmopolitan network of ideas, practices, and policies. As I have described, world heritage discourse acknowledges diverse ways of valuing the past, such as “intangible cultural heritage,” while retaining elitist Western values, such as the application of “universal outstanding value” as a threshold of assessment. Conceptually tensioned between a commitment both to universal values and to local cultural meanings, the logical disjunction between universalism and cultural relativism is often framed as an inevitable clash between collective cultural rights and individual rights. Further, emancipatory conceptions of an interconnected world are undermined by the persistent reinscription of narratives that deny indigenous perspectives in the
pursuit of national politics. However, in its complex implementation, and the concrete ways that people are drawn into heritage networks, new alliances and practices may transcend the ambiguous dualisms of national and international or local and global. Indigenous participation in the international sphere undermines simple dichotomies of scale, showing that local indigenous culture and identities are inter-penetrated by the global community and notions of universal human rights, producing new ways of seeing the past.

As demonstrated by the privileged status of the ANZAC legend in the Australian imagination, national narratives may be given fresh power within a global context. The legend’s valorization of a particular vision of the Australian past has been promoted by the federal government, which has even attempted to lay claim to a site on the other side of the world, while at the same time refusing to address internal, Aboriginal experience. In this incarnation Australian heritage has emphasized the nation’s collective youth and innocence; the national anthem reminds us that “our home is girt by sea,” a geographic boundary that naturalizes this imagined entity, rather than seeing it as a “set of relations that are constantly being made and re-made, contested and re-figured” (Burton 2003: 6–7). But rather than being “young and free,” indigenous people are not free to choose; rather, they remain constrained by neocolonial myths and processes enshrined in national structures.

By contrast, in mounting their international campaign, the Mirarr asserted their rights as custodians of traditional land and culture through a new pan-global alliance with environmental groups and national and international NGO networks. They created and exploited new international sources of leverage, connecting with the assertion of local commons, expressed through indigenous land rights and conservation values. This multi-scaled form of resistance drew a local place and its concrete resources into a global space of social action, “both inside and outside the imperial core” (Goodman 2006: 165). Key to their campaign was their representation of their culture as ancient and pure, in a narrative of the survival of a living tradition threatened by the ills of modernity. The discourse of world heritage underpinned by a rich archaeological resource fueled demands for the protection of local rights to culture and country; the Mirarr identified themselves as members of a new category comprising “all indigenous people around the world” (Katona 2002: 29), articulating a fluid understanding of culture that accords with notions of universal rights. Despite the problems entailed
in balancing the protection of individual rights against collective values, transnational juridical and heritage processes work to undermine relativist notions of difference even as they reemphasize boundaries and strengthen a sense of local identity. In practice, the Mirarr people’s participation in transnational linkages and networks, resisting and appropriating according to their need, produced new identities and meanings that nevertheless remain Aboriginal. The Jabiluka campaign shows how the dichotomization of universalism and cultural relativism within transnational networks such as heritage fails to account for the complexity of this cosmopolitan process.

Notes

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Epigraph quote: “Advance Australia Fair” was composed by Peter Dodds McCormick in 1879; it has been Australia’s national anthem since 1984.