Conclusion

What role did Ethiopia have in the World Heritage Programme? This was the starting point I took with my research project, a few years ago, after I had discovered the curiously high number of Ethiopian nominations offered in response to the first call for nominations to the World Heritage List in 1978. As the previous chapters have shown, the in-depth investigation of the first Ethiopian World Heritage sites brings us a good bit further in understanding more generally the relationship between developing countries and the World Heritage Programme.

Developing heritage, as became very clear, was part of developing countries in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, rather than balancing out technocratic planning exercises with cultural and social aspects, heritage-making added increased political weight to development politics, reproducing exclusive means of representation and determining an image production that was supposed to ensure developing countries would not lose their face on the international stage.

The book begins in the 1960s and follows the emergence of agendas in the arena of international heritage, that stretched from UNESCO's headquarters in Paris to nationalised heritage sites like the Ethiopian ones. In showing the driving forces behind projects and cooperation, the administrative aspect of institutionalised heritage-making, the role of different political and expert actors, and looking at heritage-making as both a discourse and practice, the analysis connected existing historiographies of the UN system, of World Heritage and African heritage, and of modern Ethiopia.

The development decade, the 1960s, shaped the concept of World Heritage. The technocratic, expert-led internationalism of the 1950s paved the way for heritage-making as a development activity in UNESCO's programme and it was through the development impetus that heritage ultimately turned from a discourse into a widespread international practice of heritage-making. Between its foundation in the 1940s and the commencement of the World Heritage Programme in the 1970s, UNESCO evolved from a more intellectual orientation into an organisation that expanded its actions into an operational dimension. The two decades between 1960 and 1980 marked the peak of UNESCO's operational action, meaning that assistance could be given to developing countries in the area of heritage-making, and this provided the international heritage and conservation discourse with an opportunity to develop a heritage practice. In this regard, World Heritage, despite its strong idealistic underpinning, was conceptualised as an active, making process and not just a passive, declaring one. Hand in hand with the different conceptual strands interwoven in the World Heritage Convention, the idea was conceived of providing assistance to certain state

 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110681017-009

parties to develop the necessary administrative prerequisites, a fact which constitutes a crucial element of heritage-making. The World Heritage List marked a culmination point of conservation activities in developing countries, and existing attempts to understand the historic genesis of World Heritage do not account enough for the institutional transformation of UNESCO in the context of decolonisation and the first UN development decade.

My work presents a critical position in the existing research on the World Heritage Programme, challenging previous works that focus on the intellectual background of the concept or the impact of World Heritage on the ground alone. It is essential to understand that heritage, in the historic genesis of the World Heritage Programme, was approached from a development angle, giving it a technocratic, resource-generating, problem-solving quality, and this focus lent heritage the function of constructing national identity in an international context. Hence, my research shows, through the Ethiopian example, that the actual heritage-making process took place largely in international and national bureaucratic spheres, and demonstrates how the role of developing countries, and the development paradigm, has to date been underestimated in the historic genesis of the World Heritage Programme.

UNESCO's heritage-making helped to materialise the global dimension of "the International" in the developing world. UNESCO's conservation activities demonstrate how much the organisation's internationalist discourse was rooted in the Western historiographic discourse. In Ethiopia and other countries, international heritage experts identified and cared for the national heritage and helped establish it on an international level. The systematising effort of defining World Heritage operationalised the universalist claim of UNESCO and was an hegemonial act of inclusion, and it follows that World Heritage is also the story of existing territories being overwritten with a unifying internationalist version of world history. By defining natural and cultural heritage sites, like in Ethiopia, in terms of familiarity and difference, heritage sites in developing countries were integrated in this world history, aestheticised and disconnected from their locally embedded context.

Long before the World Heritage Convention in 1972 and the World Heritage List in 1978 took shape, many future World Heritage sites in the developing world had surfaced as part of UNESCO's conservation activities. The cooperation between the Ethiopian government and UNESCO, in matters of heritage-making, began more than fifteen years before the World Heritage nominations were submitted and was based on research connections extending back more than a century. During the 1960s and 1970s, Ethiopian heritage served as an essential testing ground for international conservation experts for broadening the application of a specific Western concept of conservation that eventually became the global

standard through the World Heritage convention. An understanding of the historic genesis of the World Heritage Programme has to include the actual sites where UNESCO was involved in conservation projects prior to 1972.

As a matter of fact, both the internationalist project and the newly emerging nation states of the post-colonial, developing world were in acute need of historical narratives that could strengthen and fully form their respective young identities. UNESCO's role as global heritage-making authority developed further in the 1960s because it promoted the identity discourses that underwrote the construction of national narratives, a major political currency for many states in the emerging new world order. Defining the world spatially, through parcels of national heritage, was crucial for both national as well as the international authorities. In Ethiopia, heritage-making provided an opportunity to write the national project as a part of the international project and to connect it to wider frameworks, in particular to programmes where, in terms of representation, it would not specifically be singled out as a developing country, but could shine as a sovereign nation.

Constructing the image of "Greater Ethiopia" was a common interest of the Ethiopian government and international heritage experts. Ethiopian World Heritage Sites expressed a version of the international order in which the developing countries that adapted best into the Western categories for superiority were resituated as powerful, legitimate state actors. The selected Ethiopian sites for the Historic Route and the World Heritage nominations underwrote existing national and international narratives of Ethiopian supremacy over other African countries. Only through this understanding of the Ethiopian exceptionalism and supremacy was it possible in contemporary Western historical thinking to locate culture and history in Ethiopia, a necessity for UNESCO's and ICOMOS authentication of Ethiopian heritage as World Heritage. Two key narratives of the Western world could be localised in Ethiopia: the narrative of human evolution, the very source of the imagined community of humankind, localised in the Lower Valley of the Omo, and the narrative of Christianity and empire, both as gatekeepers of civilisation and localised in the other monumental Ethiopian heritage sites. The exception of natural heritage in the Simien National Park was in turn described in a language that implied a European resemblance in its geographical features, and argued for it being similar to Alpine nature and therefore readable as having outstanding value.

These two key narratives of Ethiopia were precisely what made heritage-making of interest to the Ethiopian government, which had long fostered expressions of a continuity of advanced civilisation and empire, as well as Ethiopia's unique status in Africa. In both the Ethiopian imperial state and during the subsequent military government under the socialist Derg, the use of selected historic

sites served to create an image of a country that had a right to its claims of power and relevance in the international order. This "front-end" representation of Ethiopian national identity was complemented and utilised by people working on the "back-end" of the bureaucracy, to establish material sites of heritage. UNESCO's engagement in heritage-making in Ethiopia linked to and legitimised the dominant "Greater Ethiopia" discourse from an outside perspective. The Ethiopian sites, while providing the classic markers of Western authenticity, at the same time could be affiliated with the developing world and Africa, representing UNESCO's global reach.

In this, my work contributes to the existing literatures on UNESCO, illustrating the requirement to further investigate UNESCO as a knowledge producing authority. Conservation and heritage-making efforts of UNESCO, despite their "enlightened", idealistic mission, continued to produce knowledge about Africa, and about African history and heritage, in a Western framework. The role of UNESCO and the connections between UNESCO's African decade under Director General Amadou M'Bow and the African and Ethiopian historiographical debate, and the re-writing of African and Ethiopian history during the 1960s and 1970s, should be studied more closely, along the lines of intellectual as well as organisational history. This period of historiographic effort during the 1960s and the networks and places relevant for producing new histories of Africa have become the subject of critical analysis by historians from Africa and elsewhere. Key arguments in the debate are that the new narratives were still essentially orientated along Western historiography and that these narratives, in many African states, supported nation-building in favour of the political elites and to the detriment of already marginalised groups. This book demonstrates that it is well worth to study very closely the careers of intellectuals and experts, to gain a deeper understanding of the production of history and heritage in postcolonial Africa.

The early establishment of heritage-making as a development activity is the reason for the politicised character of World Heritage. The paternalistic development-aid-for-nation-building approach of the 1960s produced many of the problems related to World Heritage that subsequently emerged in the following decades. Perhaps the most problematic consequence of this approach is that it put heritage-making as a government tool at the hands of states in the process of nation-building. In order to connect individual countries to universal heritage, the UNESCO secretariat was in favour of institutionalising heritage-making. These new institutions replaced in many cases other existing social institutions such as oral traditions or religious practices—a fact that was overwhelmingly in the interest of weak national governments in need of promoting a centralised national identity. Since heritage-related knowledge not only consisted of one-dimensional data such as statistical results or economic models, but also of histor-

ical narratives, images and maps, it carried a highly emotional value, and additionally promised a potential increase in governance through territorial control. As demonstrated in the case of Ethiopia, these aspects contributed to the uptake of conservation principles and furnished them with a politicised dimension. Through recourse to the allegedly superior Western practice of heritage-making, a build-up of bureaucratic institutions and processes could be promoted in a way that would ensure continued control and the maintenance of power. The connection between UNESCO's early activities in conservation in developing countries and the Western tradition of conservation that formed the ideological and conceptual backbone of the World Heritage Convention are, I argue, a key moment for understanding the politicised character of the World Heritage Programme. However, beyond this, my research points out that more general attention should be given to the role of developing countries when we study the implementation and impact of global policies. Contrary to the development discourse, the different institutional and personal actor perspectives in the history presented here argue against approaching the global West-development nexus only as a hierarchical structure. My research findings allow for a diversified understanding of the development and heritage discourse alike and, perhaps most importantly, elucidate the strategic perspective of so-called developing countries regarding development and international organisations.

Western experts named, classified and analysed the heritage sites and monuments in question, undertook standardising efforts, drafted policies and legal recommendations, and developed management and master plans – in short their influence was immense, especially on the institutional and administrative levels. The western hegemony, in Ethiopia, through the new state institutions for heritage, translated in turn into a national hegemony towards regional political forces and ethnic groups. Because heritage was introduced as a political and economic resource and a superimposed cultural practice, it often had a detrimental or marginalising effect on local culture. Further research might be conducted on UNESCO's development activities in the cultural sphere, either as a country-specific case study or a comparative study. Also, the role of foreign experts and advisors in the bureaucratisation and evolution of the institutional landscape in developing countries deserves a deeper investigation, as does the role of tourism and heritage as part of sectoral development planning, with the political implications of this role demanding closer examination.

The connection of heritage-making to the larger cash flows of development investment through tourism provided the deciding momentum for actualising World Heritage sites. Through the connection to tourism development, World Heritage was attached to substantial cash flows of UN development aid programmes and this transformed heritage into an economic resource for develop-

ing countries. Conservation of natural and cultural heritage, according to the international conventions created from the 1950s onwards under UNESCO's roof, was an extensive enterprise, technically as well as financially. The community of international heritage-experts was very aware of that fact, and conceived early on of the idea to generate necessary revenue through the monuments.

In Ethiopia, due to the specific decision processes already in place for international funding and assistance for tourism-linked conservation projects, by the time the World Heritage list took more concrete shape the exercise of selecting a representative ensemble of sites was a very practised one. Fundamentally, it can be seen that the dependence of international heritage-making efforts on tourism meant that the idea of World Heritage was shaped by tourist-thinking and imaginaries to a considerable extent. My work also contributes to the field of heritage studies and supports the view that heritage today can serve as an analytical frame in understanding socio-political realities and relations, in particular regarding the discursive quality of heritage linked to the question of power-relationships and representation. This same emphasis makes my work a contribution to the field of tourism studies, suggesting that questions of cultural representation and the detrimental effects of heritage sites as tourism destinations are not merely economic ones, but also highly political in nature, as they concern the production of images and controlled modes of representation.

The story of how the Ethiopian World Heritage sites were developed as an international effort shows that it is absolutely necessary to critically question conservation and safeguarding activities for cultural and natural heritage, as they continue to be connected to a hierarchy of knowledge production in a development context. The processes of heritage-making, like all knowledge production that is monopolised as a state domain, should be questioned in regards to context, motives, actors and goals. In light of the unceasing relevance of ethnic identities, political representation and land-use in contemporary Ethiopia, more detailed research regarding the geopolitics of Ethiopian heritage-making should be pursued.

My work adds to existing literatures on the development discourse, highlighting the fact that aspects of heritage, culture and identity were also influenced and transformed by development thinking, and additionally by suggesting that an examination of the academic and cultural background of international experts is crucial to the better understanding of their practical work and decision-making. The belief that proper development should extend to all areas of government duties and beyond was widespread among both politicians and experts alike during the 1960s. Development was routinely practised with attached chauvinism, driven by tenets that the population in developing countries required education in all matters of successful living. Any effort to write a history

of development needs to pay more attention to the aspects beyond economics, politics and humanitarian aid. The fact that development activities during the first UN Development Decade encompassed heritage-making demonstrates how the discourse and practice of developmental aid unfolded a pervasive potential, impacting social and political spheres for decades. In tying together different stories, like those told here of the Ethiopian World Heritage sites, historiographies revealing the deeper layers of global processes emerge at, perhaps, unexpected places.