

The Unintended Consequences of UNESCO's Documentary Heritage Program: Shaming without Naming

Ryoko Nakano

School of International Studies, Faculty of Law, Kanazawa University, Japan

Corresponding author. E-mail: rnakano@staff.kanazawa-u.ac.jp

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ABSTRACT

UNESCO operates the documentary heritage program, Memory of the World, in accordance with its mission of promoting international peace and cooperation. However, the creation of 'world significant' documentary heritage can sow the seed of international conflicts. This article examines how UNESCO is trapped in a pitfall whereby documentary heritage functions to shame its member states without naming. While 'naming and shaming' is a popular tactic to condemn the unethical conduct of states, shaming can occur without naming. This article highlights the political aspect of UNESCO's heritage listing by focusing on the domestic processes in which the actors outside heritage construction perceive and react to the heritage promotion. In particular, the case of Japan helps to showcase this problem. At the end, this article argues that UNESCO's documentary heritage program is under severe criticism and vigorous scrutiny because heritage has a socio-political dimension that the organization cannot control.

Keywords: UNESCO, Naming and shaming, Documentary heritage, Japan, Memory

INTRODUCTION

Raped while dying

And still no arrests?

How come, Chief Willoughby?

(Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri, 2017)