# 15 Salvador da Bahia / Brazil
## Whose Heritage? Globalization and Local Practices in the Pelourinho District

They Don't Care About Us
*(Michael Jackson)*[1]

### From Historic Monument to Heritage

Historic buildings and places are very popular these days. The most high-profile sites, in particular, are enjoying record visitor numbers. Above all, the sites that have received UNESCO's 'World Heritage' label are proving to be absolute tourist magnets. Interest in the classic "historic monument", by contrast, seems to be declining rapidly. My colleague Marion Wohlleben reports from Switzerland that the concept of architectural monument (*Denkmal* in German) is indeed in the process of falling out of use, while the tendency today is to speak of cultural heritage (*Kulturgut*, *Patrimoine culturel*).[2] In this shift, we can perhaps see signs of a deeper transformation, whose significance cannot yet be determined. Concepts such as heritage, patrimony and "place of memory" represent the reversal of a restriction of the concept of historic monument that has obtained over the last century, particularly in the German-language debate. This restriction – which had momentous consequences – culminated in the concept of a historic monument being reduced from the symbolically charged and identity-formative *monument historique* of its origins in the French Revolution, to a mere historical document.[3] The historic building that we protect today, in accordance with a value that is legally defined and certified by experts, is above all *evidence* of a certain epoch, a particular style, a historic way of life or mode of production. The architectural monument has thus been tamed as an exemplar of a closed canon. The sum total of such monuments is imagined as a built archive of history. Wherever the productive appropriation of cultural heritage is replaced by the archivization of buildings as historical examples,

1 Michael Jackson, song title from his album *HIStory – Past, Present and Future Book I*, 1995.
2 Wohlleben, Gibt es ein neues Verständnis, 2014.
3 Euler-Rolle, Stimmungswert, 2005.

heritage conservation loses relevance and the ability to create attachment. Why we preserve certain buildings, what they mean for us, where they touch our feelings, and what the significance of all this may be for us – these are questions that a narrow concept of the historic monument is systematically incapable of answering.[4] Here the concept of heritage truly opens new prospects. Monuments represent the past, but heritage is something we have to make our own – in a certain sense, therefore, it lies ahead of us.[5] Johann Wolfgang Goethe already recognized this connection when he gave Faust the line "What from your father's heritage is lent / Earn it anew, to really possess it!"[6] Legitimate heritage is more than merely the transmission of things of value. The true heir of a rare violin, we might say, is whoever can play it. For Georg W. F. Hegel, heritage is closely associated with the concept of work.[7] The work of the mind is necessary before the inheritance received is no longer of the past: "To receive this inheritance is also to enter upon its use […] that which is received is changed [by the work of the mind], and the material worked upon is both enriched and preserved at the same time".[8] The French philosopher Jacques Derrida took this thought further. For Derrida, heritage is not about having or receiving something or being enriched by means of some bequest, rather: "the being of what we are is first of all inheritance"; heritage is never a "given"; it is always a "task".[9] Here, inheriting and heritage are inextricably interwoven with human existence – they are intimately connected with our being and our search for identity. Conceiving of inheritance as active acquisition and appropriation means, in the particular context of cultural heritage, that heritage objects not only have to be worked up and worked on by professionals and academics, but also, and above all, that their meaning must be worked out and worked through by society.

Applying scientific methods to trace the contradictions in society so as to bring them to bear fruitfully on a debate about historic monuments is a major challenge for a discipline that is traditionally less focused on processes of appropriation and conflicts over interpretation than it is on technical questions of material preservation. UNESCO, whose World Heritage Convention made a decisive contribution to popularizing the heritage concept, has only hesitantly accepted this challenge. In the text adopted in 1972, the potential for conflict and the ambivalences of heritage appropriation are covered up by incantatory formulas of 'the world's heritage' and 'for all the peoples of the world'; as usual, the vision is proclaimed of a common legacy that it is our task to preserve and pass on.[10] The World Heritage label has even led to the intensification of the conflicts between normative, Western-influenced conceptions of heritage and local processes of meaning-making; i.e. between that which the List identifies as worthy of the 'outstanding cultural value' brand and that which is locally understood and accepted

4 Vinken, Amt und Gesellschaft, 2014, 22–25.

5 Willer/Weigel/Jussen, Übertragungskonzepte, 2013, especially Willer, Kulturelles Erbe, 2013.

6 "Was Du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast, erwirb es um es zu besitzen." Originally in part 1 from 1808, 682/3, here cited after this Translation: Goethe, Faust, 1963 (1808/1832), 329–330.

7 Willer, Kulturelles Erbe, 2013, 161–162, 165–166.

8 Hegel, Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 1892 (1817), Introduction, 3.

9 Derrida, Specters of Marx, 1994 (1993), 67–68.

10 Website UNESCO, Convention Concerning the Protection.

as heritage.[11] In Salvador da Bahia, the development taken by the centre of the city since its listing as World Heritage has also been deeply ambivalent.

## Colonial City as World Heritage Site

With its three million residents, Brazil's first capital, Salvador da Bahia, or, Bahia, as the locals refer to it, is still the third-largest city in the country. The historic city centre, which was developed in the 17th and 18th centuries during the heyday of Brazil's sugar cane plantations, is considered the largest surviving colonial city in the New World and was elevated to UNESCO World Heritage status in 1985.[12] The heart of the old city, the district known as the *Pelourinho* ('the Pillory') was for a long time dilapidated and impoverished. But it has been thoroughly restored since the 1970s in a series of internationally funded campaigns (fig. 1).[13] Today, Bahia's old town is one of the most important tourist attractions in the poverty stricken northeast of Brazil and a major economic factor for the economically underdeveloped city.

*Figure 1: World Heritage as homogenisation. Pelourinho district (Photo: G. Vinken 2014)*

How one evaluates this rehabilitation and renewal programme depends on which questions one asks and which criteria one applies. Sociologists and local activists rightly complain that the rights of the local population have been systematically ignored dur-

11 Ashworth/Graham/Tunbridge, Pluralising Pasts, 2007, 1–2.

12 Website UNESCO, Historic Centre of Salvador de Bahia.

13 For a first important contribution to the topic see the sociological dissertation by Craanen, Altstadtsanierung, 1998.

ing various major restoration campaigns over the decades.[14] Before rehabilitation, the Pelourinho had suffered a fairly typical fate. The once genteel residential area gradually became a slum. By the 1930s, it was home to the city's largest red-light district. Some of the two- and three-storey townhouses were occupied by more than a hundred people, living crammed together in subdivisions separated by makeshift cardboard partitions. A spiral of poverty, exploitation and underinvestment sustained this decline. Ultimately, an increasing number of houses began to collapse.[15] The renovation and restoration measures carried out since the 1970s were largely financed by UNESCO and the World Bank and went hand in hand with a more-or-less systematic policy of resettlement. Particularly in the early stages, many residents were thrown out of their homes without appreciable compensation, while later they were often rehoused in concrete silos on the periphery. The rehabilitation transformed the Pelourinho into a commercial district with a tourist infrastructure. Ground floors these days are generally given over to business; the floors above are often empty. In 1995 around a million tourists visited the Pelourinho – in the meantime this number has likely risen.

While the project was a disgrace in terms of social policy, it might also be called an economic success story. If this is the case, why was the organization that funded it – which was after all a UN agency – unable to secure higher standards of welfare for the population? Moreover, the restoration work came nowhere close to meeting international heritage conservation standards. The aim was to return the colonial quarter to its "original state", eliminating all later additions. On top of that, only the façades were to be restored, and the new occupants were given more or less free rein to model the interiors for their own purposes. Even the façades were refurbished or sometimes completely reconstructed with a lack of concern for historical accuracy and in a generic colonial style (fig. 2).[16]

None of that can be reconciled with the standards of the authoritative Venice Charter (1964). Economic regeneration was combined with homogenizing beautification measures – a kind of synthetic cityscape grooming – of the kind that has long been practised in Europe and still has many devotees.[17] Anyone who is interested in learning about how life was lived in colonial Brazil, you will be disappointed by this stage set, which, for all its picturesque colourfulness, remains sterile. The same goes for anyone with an interest in the urban slums of the 20th century, with their complex relationship networks and precarious spaces, as described so vividly by Jorge Amado in his Bahia Novels. In many regards, the restored Pelourinho appears as a regrettable product of a globalization process in which both an architectural pearl of the colonial age and the interests of its residents were sacrificed for the profits of the tourism industry in the name of World Heritage. Is this a case of the city not so much embracing its heritage as betraying and selling it?

14 Craanen, Altstadtsanierung, 1998, 6–10, 34–41.

15 Craanen, Altstadtsanierung, 1998, 21–29.

16 Craanen, Altstadtsanierung, 1998, 34–41.

17 Vinken, Zone Heimat, 2010; see also Vinken, Patrimônio Cultural e Globalização, 2010.

*Figure 2: Facadism and gentrification. Houses in the Pelourinho district (Photo: G. Vinken 2014)*

## UNESCO World Heritage vs. Africanità

In answering this question, the criteria used by experts are barely relevant. Cologne Cathedral, more deeply anchored in the self-image of that city's residents than anything else save perhaps their annual Carnival tradition, was reviled by most art historians on its completion as a hulking fake, the desecration of a mediaeval monument. Georg Dehio, one of the spokesmen of modern conservation ideology, reacted to the neo-Gothic completion, which, he said, could not awaken "the old art" "to real life", with the words of Jesus: "Let the dead bury their dead!" (Matthew 8:22).[18] On the other hand, Cologne Cathedral, which was reconceptualized as a "national monument" following the liberation from French occupation, is a particularly vivid example of permanent processes of social reinterpretation and appropriation. Conceived by patriotic proponents of a free, united and republican Germany, the project was concluded under Prussian rule in the spirit of restoration:[19] against the will of the liberals who, as Heinrich Heine's famous *Germany: A Winter's Tale* shows, had only scorn for the completion of the cathedral, an undertaking they considered to be backward-looking.[20]

What significance, what importance does the Pelourinho district have for Bahia's self-perception? Colonial monuments, in particular, are subject to widely varying evaluations, depending on whether one's forebears can be counted on the side of the per-

18 Dehio, Geschichte der deutschen Kunst, 1930, 40–41.

19 Nipperdey, Kölner Dom als Nationaldenkmal, 1983.

20 Heine, A Winter's Tale, 1986 (1844), caput IV, 35–39, here 37–38.

petrators or the victims.[21] Salvador da Bahia was not only the first capital of the Portuguese colony from the 16th to the 18th century, the city was also the fulcrum of the slave trade in South America. Around 40 percent of all the enslaved people carried off from Africa, some four to five million in total, were disembarked at Bahia and sold at its slave market. The Pelourinho – where many former slaveowners used to live and whose name is derived from the central square where enslaved women and men were often publicly tortured and put on show for minor offences – appears at first glance to be ill suited to function as a space of memory and collective heritage; especially in a city like Bahia, where the proportion of residents of African descent is unusually high for Brazil.

However, an initial survey of opinion in Bahia, carried out by a team of cultural theorists and sociologists, shows that the historic centre is a strong point of reference in the consciousness of the city's inhabitants and a key component of even regional identities: on the mythical map of Brazil, Salvador da Bahia, more than any other city, symbolizes the African roots of Brazilian society.[22] In this connection, it is significant that Salvador da Bahia is essentially a Brazilian domestic tourist destination, with nearly 80 percent of the tourists that visit the city being Brazilian.[23] Bahia's Black heritage is manifested above all in two ubiquitous intangible phenomena: capoeira and the bajanas. Capoeira is a combination of martial art and dance whose origins have been traced to Nigeria. Bahia considers itself the home of capoeira (fig. 3).[24] As with all customs – think of Carnival or Mardi Gras – capoeira is a product of layers of reappropriation and transformation. As a martial art practised in Brazil by enslaved men since the 18th century, it plays a legendary role in the history of Black resistance. And it certainly later played a role as an urban martial art – and was banned until 1937. Capoeira's revival as a popular phenomenon is associated with the Black Power movement of the 1960s. Today, it is taught in sport clubs and dance schools throughout the city and displays can be seen on the streets of Bahia. It is important to note that, in contrast to the USA, where Black Power was a phenomenon that sought distance from the white mainstream, Brazil's Black heritage is very much accepted by the mainstream and represents a figure of consensus.[25]

21 Di Giovine, The heritage-scape, 2008; Lagae, From Patrimoine partagé, 2008.

22 Löw, Schwarzsein als kollektive Praxis, 2010.

23 Website Governo da Bahia/Secretaria da Cultura e Turismo.

24 Almeida, Capoeira, 1986.

25 Löw, Schwarzsein als kollektive Praxis, 2010, 142–144.


*Figure 3: The (martial) art of resistance. Capoeira demonstration in Bahia (Photo: A. M. Teles Zimerer 2014)*

*Figure 4: Central to identity and religion. A bajana selling acarajé (Photo: R. Pozzebom 2008*

The bajanas are also a permanent feature of Bahia's cityscape (fig. 4) – white-robed women with white turbans, offering their famous street food – acarajé. This delicacy, a kind of croquette of ground beans, shrimp and spices, also has its origins in Africa. The bajanas owe their valued position in society in part to their links to Candomblé, a polytheistic underground religion that was likewise imported from West Africa and was forbidden for many years. The bajanas were originally a kind of holy women – their "office" is still passed down from mother to daughter – while the sale of street food

was used to finance the forbidden religion. Now, of course, the bajanas are an integral part of the city's brand image, appearing as sculptures on fountains, as souvenirs, even as a special Bahia Barbie doll. In fact, the city government now insists that acarajé sellers wear traditional clothing. Yet although the religious significance of the street food vendors is in the process of declining, the buying and eating of acarajé remains a practice that is loaded with layers of symbolism: the African delicacy is still the food of the Candomblé gods, and is still prepared by women who traditionally considered themselves as the intermediaries to the divine; it is 'living heritage' in the best and most literal sense.[26]

## Processes of Purification and Homogenization

The old town of Salvador da Bahia, this much can be said, is a space of continuous re-enactment of a self-conscious and nostalgic Africanità – and Bahia in particular feels itself called to be the custodian of this heritage, which has been modernized out of existence in Africa itself.[27] Against Bahia's colonial backdrop, a mixed population secures its Black heritage, a nation celebrates itself, drawing pride from knowing that its great diversity has given rise to something new and unique. If our task in each instance is to reappropriate our heritage through active work, then the reinterpretation of the colonial quarter that grew up in the shadow of the pillory into a figure of consensus evoking an imagined Africanità must be considered a happy development. It is therefore all the more regrettable that this wealth of built heritage has been largely reduced to a scenic backdrop, its complexity and contradictions homogenized in response to a primary concern with the city's outward image. On my return to Salvador da Bahia four years later in 2014, the negative consequences of this programme of heritage conservation in the service of superficial scenic effects are unmistakable. A walk through the old town confirms the ongoing 'purification' and homogenization of the district as the backdrop for an increasingly manufactured tourism industry (fig. 5).

The immaterial Black heritage, by contrast – the music and especially the dance groups – appears to have moved to the neighbouring districts that have not yet been rehabilitated. When attending the conference "Berlim/Salvador: Reapropriação urbana entre marketing e autoafirmação"[28] I was alarmed to note – in sharp contrast to another conference held in 2010[29] – that the restoration of the old town was discussed without any mention of the Pelourinho's Black roots; now all the talk was about an open-air shopping mall and similar commercial ideas. Clearly, with the creation of a homogeneous district full of picture-postcard colonial architecture, a manifold heritage

26 Löw, Schwarzsein als kollektive Praxis, 2010, 150–152.

27 Löw points out the growth of the number of African-Americans visiting Brazil in search of their roots, many of whom fly to Salvador de Bahia, cf. Löw, Schwarzsein als kollektive Praxis, 2010 and also Pinho, African-American Roots, 2008.

28 Reappropriation of the City between Marketing and Self-Assertation (Goethe-Institute Salvador da Bahia, 3–4 April 2014).

29 *Salvador-Hamburgo - Passado e Presente da Globalização*, Salvador da Bahia (Instituto Cultural Brasil-Alemanha) 2010.

landscape has been starkly reduced. One could go so far as to say that the broad understanding of heritage has been diminished here by its architecturalization (specifically, by affixing the complex heritage-formations of the Pelourinho quarter exclusively to its colonial architecture): the colourful façades of the houses now pose as "monuments" of the colonial period, while the complex appropriations of the Black heritage that were once found in the Pelourinho have been squeezed out into other areas of the city. Not a great report card for a World Heritage Site. Processes of heritage appropriation are of vital significance for the identity of communities – locally, nationally and generally. UNESCO (and other professional actors in the field) should not seek to harmonize or streamline processes of heritage appropriation. The goal must rather be to secure the many-layered nature of this heritage, to preserve and to tolerate its complexity and inconsistency.


*Figure 5: Backdrop for a manufactured tourism industry? Pelourinho district today (Photo: G. Vinken 2014)*