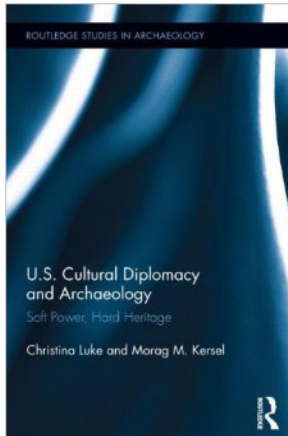


REVIEWS



Ignacio RODRÍGUEZ TEMIÑO

US Cultural Diplomacy and Archaeology Soft Power, Hard Heritage

[Christina Luke and Morag Kersel (Eds.)]

Routledge

ISBN: 978-0-415-64549-2

170 pages, 2012

The book by Christina Luke and Moreg Kersel is in line with the U.S. Department of State's new interest in promoting cultural diplomacy to replace the narrow lens focused on the Global War on Terrorism, and to overcome the negative images of the Iraq and Afghanistan invasions. Cultural diplomacy had been relegated to the margins of international relations because it was regarded as a lesser tool of foreign policy, but now it forms the core of 'smart power'.

If power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get a desired outcome, hard power (military and economic strength combined) enables countries to wield carrots and sticks to get what they want, and soft power is the ability to attract people to one's side without coercion; smart power is neither hard nor soft power, but the skillful combination of both. Soft power involves culture, political values, and foreign policies. Given that the military alone cannot defend America's interests around the world, the authors' assertion is that the U.S. Department of State's cultural diplomacy should take center stage, alongside defense and economics, to preserve the American preeminence.

The book is devoted to explaining how archaeology and the care of archaeological heritage both have a role to play in a soft power strategy, which leads towards giving the U.S. the smarter power it needs to tackle a tough global challenge over the next few years.

After offering useful definitions in the first chapter, chapters two to six are dedicated to explaining the main means through which hard and soft powers are developed. The first of these means is composed of those legal and political means which target short-term goals in support of the protection and security of other countries' archaeological heritage in danger, while the second one is composed of human and material resources aimed at maintaining long-term policies focused on demonstrating the U.S. concern with cultural relations, the exchange of ideas, and preservation initiatives.

The book discusses the usefulness of the American institutions abroad as an important element of cultural diplomacy. The authors highlight the contribution of these institutions during the last century to foster mutual understanding between local communities and archaeologists, as an example of a small but vital diplomacy. Another major initiative is the 1983 Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act, and the Memoranda of Understanding, to supply the disassociation of the U.S. from UNESCO. The strategic use of funding programs in archaeological heritage by the U.S. Department of State is also discussed, regardless of their specific content (e.g. the Iraq Cultural Heritage Project and the Cultural Antiquities Task Force—related to 'hard power'—and the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation as the main example of those named as 'soft power'). However, the important issue is that these policies work better when they do not endorse political agendas, according to the authors' opinion.

This is not a naïve or self-eulogistic book; the authors know that the cultural policies have never been independent from the realm of diplomacy, because the U.S. has used economic power to serve strategic political objectives, and still does so. In spite of the real situation, Luke and Kersel's book defends that a much larger and more fluid cultural policy is needed: "one that moves beyond current political agendas to support a mosaic of U.S. citizens, working and researching on a global scale in various cultural settings, with the common outcome of demonstrating that

the United States is committed to cultural relations, the exchange of ideas, and preservation initiatives" (130).

Luke and Kersel are critical of the current situation of cultural affairs in relation to political agendas, and I think they are especially sharp in questioning the usefulness of the Large Grant Ambassador Funds for Cultural Preservation Projects as they went directly to specific national governments, instead of local communities and NGOs, but one misses a bit more criticism about important issues. For example, the authors say that the period between 1984 and 2003, when the U.S. withdrew from UNESCO, were not years of complete disassociation from the UNESCO principles and its global mission. They highlight this statement especially in relation to the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. The U.S. passed the 1983 Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act that allows certain import restrictions of cultural goods, if the country they came from has negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding with the United States of America. But the geography of these bilateral agreements not only shows their political use and the destination of funding projects (especially in Latin America), under the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act, but also that they have not stopped the traffic of illicit antiquities laundered in auction houses (for example from Italy).

The U.S. did not rejoin UNESCO until 2003, when the Bush Administration wished to clean up the international image of the U.S., which was seriously damaged after the invasion of Iraq. The U.S. also used UNESCO as a political tool again in 2011 to show its protest against the recognition of the Palestinian Authority by the agency.

The book is full of smart reflections that do not leave the reader indifferent, whether one is for or against them, although it is not explained why archaeology is more important than other fields of cultural activities abroad, such as English language teaching, for American diplomacy. The book is also underpinned by the assumption that America must lead the world, and I would prefer a book clearly rethinking the place of American leadership.

