

The Market for Ethics:  
Culture and the Neoliberal Turn at UNESCO

by

Michelle Fawcett

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of the requirements for the degree of

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Anna McCarthy

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PREVIEW

Ethics is the market of the twenty-first century.  
–UNESCO Official, Paris, June 2001

PREVIEW

## **DEDICATION**

To the two people I admire most in the world: my parents.

Jim, a flamenco guitarist extraordinaire (and one of the first North Americans known to have mastered and recorded the art form), and Yasuko, a ballet-turned-flamenco dancer and artist who emigrated from Japan, both worked day jobs to support their family and their arts. They personally know the tensions between culture/s and economics that animate this project.

PREVIEW

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And to Arun: rock, muse, partner in crime. Where there's a will, and you, there's a way.



This dissertation will examine how culture is mobilized as a promising new resource in the market for ethics. Chapter One traces the historical battle over uses of cultural discourse at UNESCO, which eventually led to a role for the private sector at the organization; Chapter Two illustrates how the practice of corporate culture at UNESCO helps to embed the partnership agenda; Chapters Three and Four show how corporations use the discourses of cultural diversity and cultural universalism to expand market share through partnership with UNESCO. Each newly forged connection between culture and the market remains inherently contradictory, however, producing discursive openings for the creation of alternatives to the neoliberal paradigm.







The History of Cultural Diversity Discourse at UNESCO	409
Cultural Diversity and the Expansion of Capital	415
The Motion Picture Association of the Universe: Protector of Cultural Diversity	419
Conclusion	442
CONCLUSION	446
WORKS CITED	460

PREVIEW







scientific and cultural exchange. Since then, it has produced thousands of publications, programs and policies in these fields, such as increasing literacy rates, setting global scientific standards and identifying and attempting to protect the diversity of the world's cultures. Perhaps more importantly, it has served as an international setting for reflection and debate, albeit among the world's elite, about the ethical "construction of humanity."<sup>4</sup> UNESCO describes itself as "a laboratory of ideas and a standard-setter to forge universal agreements on emerging ethical issues."<sup>5</sup>

Despite these notable achievements and grand purposes, UNESCO is perhaps best known in this country for the dramatic story of U.S. withdrawal from membership in the 1980s. At that time, it was regarded by the U.S. government as a dangerously politicized Third Worldist organization bent on challenging American hegemony. Significant mainstream press coverage, fueled by the arch-conservative Heritage Foundation, condemned UNESCO's alleged history of anti-Americanism: from the organization's purported insufficient backing for the state of Israel and U.S. anti-communism efforts overseas to its supposed attack on the freedom of the press and embrace of pro-censorship policies due to its support for the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), which sought more balanced global information flows between First and Third Worlds in the postcolonial period.

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<sup>4</sup> Ancient Romans considered *humanitas* a unity of all members of society, possessing equal status and the same fundamental rights. Droit. *Intellectual History of UNESCO*; 21.

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO. *UNESCO: What Is It? What Does It Do?* Paris: UNESCO, 2006; 1.













