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Author Meets Critics: Elif Kalaycioglu's "Politics of World Heritage"

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In Politics of World Heritage, Elif Kalaycioglu analyzes UNESCO's flagship regime, which seeks to curate a cultural-history of humanity, attached to a rarified "universal value" and tethered to goals of peace and solidarity. Kalaycioglu shows that the regime generates and structures desirous pursuits of subjectivity, such as civilizational grandeur, technological acumen, world-historical agency. This raises the question of whether these subjectivities, valorized by the regime's configuration and coveted by states, are conducive to peace and solidarity. Following that question, Kalaycioglu shows that participants link diverse visions of peace and solidarity to humanity, from nuclear disarmament to cooperation under multipolarity modeled after a stylized Silk Roads history. Three key lessons follow. First, humanity is not a self-evidently normative subject. How humanity is represented matters for resulting social orders and political visions. Second, while cultural and historical resources facilitate political visions, such facilitation can be multiply forged. Finally, a synecdoche for the liberal international, world heritage asks us to contend with difficult questions of the universal and the particular, and the enduring and emergent hierarchies of global politics. To address these claims, the roundtable brings Kalaycioglu into conversation with scholars whose work engage with themes of subjectivity, heritage, and humanity, among others.

Track Classification: Critical Alternatives for World Politics