

The US's Return to Unesco: Relaxation or Hardening Before the Ghost of MacBride?

Divina Frau-Meigs

Abstract

Asking why the US returned to Unesco in 2003 involves also considering the reasons for its withdrawal in 1984, i.e., twenty years before. This article analyses one of the biggest cultural crises of the Cold War and the new approach after this period. It breaks the crisis down into its structural, personal and socio-political dimensions and stresses its continuities and mutations. It considers the interval and different types of mobilisations (diplomatic, economic, cultural) that have characterised the organisation, as well as intermediate crises (particularly those related to cultural diversity). It also takes into account the important problems that have returned following the terrorists attacks of 11 September 2001, which have given full legitimacy to the interventionist arguments of America's New Right.

The author examines the conditions of a falsely paradoxical return, which marks less of a rupture than a radicalisation of previous positions, and in which a hardening rather than a relaxation of US foreign policy should be appreciated; a hardening of the modifications the Bush doctrine has contributed to the type of parent-company system of government adopted and polished by its predecessors after World War II. Unesco runs the risk of becoming a supplementary weapon in the arsenal of the war on terror if it allows the US to continue with its educational and cultural plans in the Middle East, aimed at securing the safety of its democracy. However, in the face of this exceptionality, Unesco also continues to be an agency of intercultural dialogue, which could see the rebirth in the US,

in the medium term, of multilateral sentiments and a greater spirit of understanding.

The US's withdrawal from Unesco in 1984 caused astonishment: had not the Americans had made a huge contribution to the implementation of all the major post-war international agencies, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization?¹ Their creation spoke to America's diplomatic genius in the 20th century, with its universalist and utilitarian views (in the Anglo-Saxon sense of 'self-interest'²). It marked the success of a paradoxical hegemonic power that could promote its own interests while at the same time offer them to the world as generous and democratic ones. And it did so with the aid of two tools: making basic products available at a low cost, and managing conflicts via contractual law and international regulations to build a favourable environment without territorial occupation³.

The United States thus successfully projected an image of non-interference that awarded it true moral and political authority, shored up by military force, particularly after World War II. However, with decolonisation and the recovery of the Soviet block, the balance of stable alliances had to be reconsidered with the desire for emancipation of the Third World states, suspicious of Western influence. Invited to fill the ranks of the United Nations, they forced the hegemonic American power to change its foreign policy into an instrument of the fight against communism throughout the whole of the Cold War.

Internally, this period saw the collapse of the post-war consensus and the start-up of the big changes of the 1980s, which anticipated the return of the basic values of the Republican Party (market liberalisation, economic deregulation, reduction of social advantages, etc.). The New Right's rise to power has again called into question all the

Divina Frau-Meigs

Professor and Media Sociologist at University of Paris 3-Sorbonne. (France)

identity policies (support for minorities, solidarity with the disadvantaged, etc.) that have been replaced by morality policies (individual responsibility, local government, etc.). Externally, this has translated into a major offensive to open up international markets, the negotiation cycles of the GATT agreements and State indifference about development aid.

These are the key factors in understanding the US's position with respect to the UN and even more with respect to Unesco, because it was with the arrival of a president promoted by the New Right, i.e., Ronald Reagan, that the US left the organisation, and it has been under another president of the New Right, George W. Bush, that it has returned. In both cases, i.e., by the empty-chair and filled-chair policies, this Conservative continuity is a paradox that has to try to be explained in the light of American interests and the push for the equality and diversity of communication.

I. The Crisis of 1983-84: One of the Biggest Confrontations of the Cold War

On 31 December 1984, the United States put its threat to leave into effect. A statement from the White House gave the official reasons as being the continual external politicisation and the "endemic hostility towards the basic institutions of a free society; in particular, a free press, free markets and, above all, the rights of the individual"⁴.

As well as a personal criticism of Unesco director-general, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow (Senegalese, Muslim, and from the Third World, he was perceived as the embodiment of the organisation's lack of transparency and patronage system) there was many points of confrontation of a structural and political nature that explain the ferocity of the confrontation between the US and the leading Unesco agencies, supported by the Third World countries and the USSR. The forces that squared off were thus considerable and included the countries that made the biggest contributions (22% in the case of the US and 12% in the case of the USSR).

I.1. A Structural Criticism

The US lamented the bureaucratic weight of Unesco. It felt the organisation had too strong a hierarchical load, and denounced people being elected to important positions on

the basis of the patronage system rather than ability. It said that 80% of the budget was absorbed by the Paris headquarters instead of going towards actions on the ground. It said that the honorary and sumptuary expenses that went to management was inappropriate and believed there was too much repetition of programmes already in place from other UN agencies. In short, it denounced the system of diplomatic alliances as a factor of corruption and said it damaged the principles of managerial transparency.

These criticisms, as justified and widely held by various nations (including the European ones) as they may have been, emanated from a markedly classic and recurrent American position. The US is very distrustful of centralising authorities; it prefers to delocalise to avoid bureaucracy, which in its eyes generates slowness and unsuccessful performance. Its impatience with an agency like Unesco, where this phenomenon is multiplied by the 180 countries that develop their diplomacy there, cannot but be emphasised. These criticisms, which the Americans furthermore led in directing against the whole of the UN system, were not aimed at Unesco by chance: of all the UN agencies, the United States has always had the biggest bone to pick with Unesco, since it began. It does not correspond to the American utilitarian model, which hates to separate the cultural and educational sphere from the private and commercial one. From this perspective, there can be no space reserved on the market and there should be no interference from the states in the controls that concern the commercial sphere and individual management⁵.

Controversies have long been part of Unesco's relationship with the United States. During the McCarthy era, just before the USSR joined, the US denounced the organisation as a hotbed of communism. In 1974, the American Congress, in accordance with Republican President Henry Ford, suspended America's contribution because Unesco recognised the Palestine Liberation Organisation and condemned the State of Israel. In 1983, Unesco made its case worse with a new condemnation of Israel: cultural aid was suspended as punishment for its education policy in the occupied territories, perceived as an attempt at the cultural assimilation of Arabs. For its part, the PLO received 7% of the study scholarships handed out between 1981 and 1983. Israel was also given a tongue-

lashing for excavation work in Jerusalem that had modified a number of the city's world-heritage sites. The sliding between structural and political criticism operated by the affirmation that the activities carried out contravened the Unesco charter, with a communist politicisation that President Reagan could not endorse.

Consequently, the Americans asked for Unesco to hand its financial administration over to the main donors, adopt new voting procedures, abandon a number of overly politicised programmes and apply strict budgetary restrictions. The US believed the results obtained showed a lack of transparency that was endemic in the organisation and that both this and the majority of the texts produced by Unesco and approved by its leaders were offensive in their anti-American rhetoric.

Unesco then tried to respond to certain US expectations with the creation of ad hoc commissions and by cooperating in an audit of the agency's management, led by the General Accounting Office. Some suspect programmes were placed on an assessment list. The leaders also proposed freezing the budget for two years. They suspended some programmes, as well as a conference scheduled on 'the protection of journalists', which America considered a trial of media control on the part of non-democratic governments. But it could not, on its own initiative, respond to America's demands: they had to be approved at the General Conference of Member States, where America was just one more voice in the crowd.

I. 2 A Political and Cultural Criticism

The most difficult obstacle was the nature of Unesco's activities, which appeared to be dominated by a block of Soviet countries in alliance with a Third World coalition (the Non-Aligned countries). These countries sought a 'new world order' for the economy and communication which did not satisfy either the US or its conservative allies, in particular Mrs Thatcher, the British prime minister who had developed a 'special relationship' with President Reagan. Unesco was blasted for sharing the economic points of view of the Soviet block and the Third World, with a form of State control that was intolerable to the defenders of the liberal economy.

These fears were summed up in the proposals of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) that had appeared as a result of the MacBride Report. The

Report had identified problems in international communication structures, particularly an imbalance in the flow of information, its access and control⁶. After preparing a list with the positions of the different media groups from around the world, the Report examined the changes it deemed necessary for a redefinition of the 'common good' at the international scale. The countries that supported the NWICO wanted to find an alternative to what they saw as the Western domination of information and a biased view in the Western media. Its detractors, with the Americans and British at the fore, believed it involved governments establishing control over the press and freedom of expression, in a way that reflected Soviet views and restricted the freedom of individuals.

Independently of the bases for the criticisms against the NWICO, American management was also explained by commercial interests. So too was the United Kingdom's, although to a lesser extent, as the Anglo-American axis dominated access to world information through two practically monopolistic news agencies (Associated Press and Reuters). Contrary to what it said, the US was one of the most interventionist countries in the areas of information and communication. The State had granted enormous financial aid (to the Pentagon and NASA) for research and development in this field, for both military and commercial purposes. Joseph S. Nye, an advisor close to President Bill Clinton, was thus able to say that the US was situated in the world hegemony of the 21st century, because it controlled hard and soft information resources⁷. This control has historically included telecommunications and new information technologies in its utilitarian structures of domination and vigilance, regardless of the political tendencies of its leaders. Thus, the 1996 Telecommunications Bill was voted in under Clinton. The bill facilitated the convergence of multimedia companies for reasons of international competition. It was also Clinton who turned down the invitation for the US to return to Unesco in 1997, when the UK rejoined (after having left in 1985).

America's other concern was related to the new world economic order, a formula that the American Conservatives translated as a password for world opposition to trade liberalisation, which found its exponent in President Reagan. The economic argument in this regard was outlined in terms of America's trade deficit. To avoid

financing by taxes (always unpopular with the electorate) the solution of developing foreign trade was less politically and financially onerous for the US. It was a question of conserving the country's standing of living (and funding its defence plans). This time the framework exceeded Unesco, with multilateral negotiation cycles that concerned the WTO and each member of the new sectors having to raise international customs barriers. The US wanted to introduce information and information services, as well as questions of intellectual property, into the process, something that it had already done in the 1990s in the Uruguay Round.⁸

In its unilateral wish to withdraw, the American government ignored the consideration of the beneficial aspects of its presence in some projects, particularly scientific programmes, something which education experts, researchers and entrepreneurs alike lamented. Some politicians, including Republicans, recommended continuing to press for internal structural reform, as the 'empty-chair' policy could only give the US's adversaries "an extraordinary ability for influence" in the heart of the world's biggest international agency, to use the words of Jim Leach (Republican, Iowa). It was the Conservatives of the New Right installed close to Reagan who exercised it, especially in terms of guiding the pressure from think tanks like the influential Heritage Foundation, which considered that Unesco had "for a long time given priority to anti-American and anti-Western policies and stopped being very interested in the world's needs in terms of education, science and culture"⁹.

America's goals in withdrawing were threefold: to become a credible threat to communist countries and their allies; to intimidate countries that were tempted to align themselves with Third World positions; and to win over the Europeans so they would follow suit and withdraw, too (which the UK did). For the radicalisation of the positions, it wanted to act with its hands free but at the same time hold onto the position of the offended power that diplomatically awarded it a certain advantage. It screamed blue murder about freedoms of trade and expression and appointed scapegoats and enemies it said made it impossible to reach agreements with. In this way, it hoped to show that, without it, Unesco could not survive.

However, America found itself facing true isolation: the communist and Non-Aligned countries dug in their heels

while its traditional European allies tried to temporise and convince it to reform Unesco from within. The ten European countries also wrote to President Reagan asking him to reconsider the withdrawal. The difficulty for the Europe of the time (it was discussing the terms of upcoming governance, the entry of new members, the details of the single currency, etc.) resided in the need to present a common front and to position itself as non-American without being anti-American. Without a doubt, its situation of dependency with respect to the US and its own caprices of independence in relation to the two blocks inhibited its reactions, to the extent that market liberalisation could be premature for sorting out its cultural industries.

II. 1983-2003: The Interval between the Cold War and the War on Terror

II. 1. Diplomatic Mobilisation: The Maintenance of the Observers

The 'empty-chair' policy, however, was only half-applied. The US created a group of observers, with the mission of controlling Unesco's activities at its headquarters in Paris. The interventionism of these observers became increasingly obvious whenever some debates or American commercial interests were at stake. This observation mission was maintained throughout the whole of the period of withdrawal and voluntary US contributions represented close to \$2 million per year. Also, America upheld its participation selectively, in the discussions about the Universal Copyright Convention, the International Oceanographic Commission, the World Heritage Committee and the Man and the Biosphere programme, as well as a number of changes in the sphere of education.

The US also got some NGOs to play a real role as lobbyists and guard dogs: although the Foundation for Education, the International Foundation for Science, the World Heritage Centre and the WWF acted with discretion, this was not the case of the World Free Press Committee, which mobilised in relation to all the matters relating to information and communication, or the World Intellectual Property Organisation, which did so for copyright and intellectual property. The exploitation of some NGOs does not mean they were suspicious in the eyes of the Third

World, which saw them as a tool of the American panoply of utilitarianism.

The US also turned out to be very active in the creation of a supplementary subdivision in the heart of Unesco, despite its recommendations about economy. This was a subdivision devoted specifically to 'freedom of expression, peace and democracy', which coexisted together with the subdivisions on information and communication.

II.2. Economic and Cultural Mobilisation

On the other hand, the US supported science, education, culture and communication from the perspective of other UN agencies linked to Unesco, particularly UNICEF, the International Bureau of Education (IBU), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). However, part of the funds granted to these agencies were reserved for US federal agencies, like the US Information Agency or the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The other beneficiaries were the Foreign Agricultural Service, the Bureau of International Organization Affairs, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Science Foundation, the Peace Corps and the US Trade and Development Agency. The missions of these agencies are similar to those of Unesco, and sometimes even directly compete with them.

The United States created a great array of development aid. Its strategy consisted of dealing bilaterally with applicant countries, discriminating 'rogue states' from the others¹⁰. Its actions were aimed at including some types of countries and distancing others. With the end of the Cold War, it was better able to pressure or dissuade different countries, particularly those that wanted to be accepted into the WTO, such as the countries of Eastern Europe and Asia (particularly China), two market areas of interest to the US, without national cultural industries capable of competing with American multinationals.

II.3. The Intermediate Crises

However, the debate did not end once the US had withdrawn and the factors that had made the conflict tense persisted, even after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

The cultural policies undertaken by nation states both in Europe and the Third World tightened up and world trade liberalisation only exacerbated the problems.

A certain amount of alarm was produced when people became aware that globalisation was advancing in the market but that it should also include a view of society that could not just hand over a blank cheque to the American hegemony. Two camps with withdrawal propositions that referred to challenges of civilisation squared off: a discourse of diversity against one of prosperity, and an opposition to standardisation against an opposition to nationalist protectionism. The arguments settled around a common object, i.e., culture, and were espoused in the name of freedom, the basic value shared and claimed by both camps.

III.3.1. The Cultural Exception

Although the fall of the Berlin Wall confirmed the victory of the American positions and forced the former Soviet countries to reorganise, including within Unesco, there were also changes within the US ally countries. Positions intensified around the expression 'cultural exception', provoked by the GATT negotiations in 1994. This expression underlined the idea that cultural policies and industries extended beyond economic questions and were intrinsically associated with linguistic questions and issues of identity. The free traders predicted the complete abandonment of protection measures, with America being their main defender, while the exceptionists wanted to uphold national industries without hermetically sealing their borders. Their defender was the European Union, promoted by France and supported by Canada.

The GATT agreements left the door open to interpretations by each side and upheld a certain status quo among national protection measures. The Multilateral Investment Agreement (MIA) produced new confrontations within the OECD, which, unlike GATT, anticipated financial sanctions for reluctant states and for the new round of the WTO, i.e., the Doha Round, which confirmed the emergence of a renewed Third Worldist approach known as 'alterglobalisation'.

III.3.2. The Debates about InfoEthics and Cultural Diversity

As the leading intellectual and cultural entity of the inter-

national community, Unesco records international debates as a sounding box. However, as a UN agency, it can only reflect existing tensions and make opposing voices heard. Paradoxically, this puts it in the firing range of criticisms, as it is easier to 'shoot the messenger' than the message.

In the 1990s, various very sensitive reports emerged in the agency's debates, referring in general to questions of information, intellectual property and cultural diversity. They were exasperated by the preparation of the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva 2003, with a continuation scheduled for Tunisia in 2005) and by the result of the debates about the draft recommendation on multilingualism and universal access to cyberspace. These debates left ample room for multiple entities, both states and NGOs and the lobby groups of the industrial sectors involved. In them we can hear demands from civil society about abuses of the dominant position and mutations in the balance between the rights of creators, disseminators and users. The debates are tinged with the evolution of alterglobalisation and what could be called the 'NGO effect', to explain the paradox of a Western middle class that defends the interests of the Third World, so long as they are in line with its interests, particularly in matters of global concern such as the environment, the digital divide, users' rights, etc.

Unesco thus works as a reflection of the old debate, relaunched by the new technologies, and as a reflection of the general interest against private freedom. It reports the necessary renegotiation of the different juridical and legal balances that have become obsolete because of the customs of civil society and multimedia convergences. It is the tip of the new ideas in the area, in their search for universal guiding principles, even if they have to rest on the difficult balance of the respect for diversity and the free circulation of ideas. The situation recalls that of the MacBride Report, which worries the United States.

Indeed, the big private-sector lobby groups consider that the agency's position goes beyond that of its missions. Their analysis reproduces the old confusion between the points of view of the individual nations of some NGOs that represent the interests of civil society with the activities of the agency itself. This confusion helped remobilise the US; its group of observers was frustrated by not being able to vote on changing the meaning and scope of

various recommendations and conventions.

A number of controversies broke out within the agency. With regard to infoethics, the definitions of the 'global public domain' were the object of successive refinements because they were perceived as an attack on authors' rights, which mobilised the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and the whole of the publishing lobby. With regard to cultural diversity and its repercussion on cyberspace, the question of its funding and the controversial role of market forces were the object of complaints by the World Free Press Committee which saw in them a return to control over freedom of expression and the press.

However, the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was unanimously approved by all the member states at the general conference of 2001, shortly after the attacks of 11 September. It was received as a new ethic for peace and development, involving increased attention to the public sphere of information and the public service of the media, not with a mission of state control, but as a guarantee for the state of the diversity and the plurality of points of view¹¹. The US saw it as a show of resistance to the global evolutions it had recommended and a threat to its trade interests, which led it to reconsider its reintegration in Unesco.

II.3.3. 11 September 2001: Terrorism and its Repercussions on Public Security

US mobilisation increased after the changes in domestic policy following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The New Right conservatives, who had been unable to reap the fruit of their anti-communist policy after the fall of the Berlin Wall (they lost power to the socially liberal Democrats), recovered lost ground. Their warrior-like, militaristic and patriotic discourse that preached messianic American specificity suddenly swung into favour with the majority of countries. For the Americans, it was crucial to establish a system of global cybersecurity, as its different interventions in the conferences leading up to the World Summit on the Information Society suggested (particularly the ones made in Bucharest in 2002).

The New Right also focused on the moralisation of the international public space; the purpose of its crusade was to stamp out Islamic terrorism on the basis of a vague idea of a 'clash of civilisations' that would allow it, as in the times of

the Cold War, to find a foreign enemy. The polarization was effectuated on defence, but using the school and culture as socialisation tools that had to be reinvested. The message was very simple: social liberalism was the cause of society's evils; national defence was the best prevention against communism and terrorism. The solutions were made clear: the market was the best regulator of society; the defence budget and security should be increased. Thus, the extraterritorial view was coherent with the internal gaze a; it could only be unilateral because it was messianic.

Therefore, what the states proposed was a paradoxical view of globalisation, as it coexisted with a great deal of protectionism. George W. Bush's international policy was characterised by the systematic rejection of any foreign interference in American economic interests or policies: the rejection of the environmental protection treaties (Tokyo), the rejection of an international court of justice (The Hague), the rejection of the UN's opinion (Iraq). The investment in Unesco, in this context, can only be seen as an attempt at recovery in the hands of the agency.

This protectionism is characterised by an iron-fist unilateralism in relations with allies and enemies alike, so that the lessons learned after 9-11 are not ones of alliance but rather distrust. The blame was once again put on the foreign enemy, which changed from Bin Laden to Saddam Hussein; the slightest doubt on the part of allies put them on the list of traitors in whom one should not trust. This was the case of France, which was at the forefront of American attacks both because of its position on cultural diversity in the world public sphere and because it opposed the war on Iraq, in which it sought the protection of the UN.

France found herself in a complicated position before the global government anticipated by the United States. The French tradition of centralism and state leadership meant she was poorly positioned with regard to globalisation, sustained as it is by the private sector and individualism¹². This explains why France tries to establish herself as the spokesperson of disadvantaged countries, although her universalist vision leads her to defend the general interest against private interest. Within Europe, however, France preaches negotiated alliances with the US, but the latter now responds to the rhetoric of alliances with the rhetoric of its own interests. In a curious twist, the US has become unilateralist when the French and Europeans are becoming

multilateralists and preach a model of government that respects differences. Wherever the latter play the game of stable alliances, the US now promotes the destabilisation of alliances, constantly endangering their model of flexible control, which tends to avoid territorial occupation and prefer conflict management by the use of international regulations.

III. The Falsely Paradoxical Conditions of Return

These internal and external conditions give a poor image of American hegemony. Its return to Unesco has been applauded as a positive initiative, presented as one of the ways to establish lasting peace for the maintenance of development and education. The agency seems to be one of the strategic places for fighting intolerance and Islamic terrorism. This is the opinion of some members of the government, including the former secretary of state, George Shultz, who favoured the original withdrawal. It obtained funding to the tune of \$60 million for the reintegration (\$53 million/year and \$5.3 million for reintegration, i.e., close to 11.5% of participation), voted on by Congress in 2001.

The conservative think tanks have, for them, stayed fairly quiet, particularly the Heritage Foundation, which does not understand what interest the US could have in becoming just another voice among the 188 of the general conference, or in making a noticeable contribution to the Unesco budget for programmes that are either useless or that contravene human rights. They feel the government has ceded to external pressure and the need to not appear to be too unilateral in its foreign policy.

The official reasons for the return are set out in a document from the Department of State. As well as the homage paid to the new, pro-American, Japanese director-general, Koïchiro Matsuura (elected in 1999) for his successful restructuring of the agency, the Americans say that Unesco programmes will from now on promote civic responsibility and tolerance, i.e., tools for fighting terrorism. They admit the repetition between UN and American programmes, such as "Education for All", which is similar to "No Child Left Behind", which is presented as an advance of American ideas in the world. Other American ideas have also been confirmed, such as the adoption of solid scientific

regulations and the promotion of freedom of the press. The document also mentions future orientations with regard to bioethics and cultural diversity. Instead of the empty-chair policy, the US now uses that of occupation in all fronts: "The US intends to participate actively and fully in these debates"¹³.

III.1. A Structural Reason

The return is, above all, presented as something natural, as Unesco is shown to have restructured in line with America's demands. In the speech announcing its reintegration that Bush gave before the UN, he emphasised that the institution had made changes in the areas the US tried to reform after its withdrawal, which meant there was now a healthier management, a refinement of activities and an adaptation to its missions, in particular freedom of the press¹⁴.

The US recently announced its participation plan aimed at the UN overall and the 'elimination of waste and the anti-liberty ideology of Unesco'. It is characterised by its will for interventionism, the rejection of countries and leaders that violate UN regulations, the search for restructured and low-security finances and a continual evaluation of programmes with an obligation on results, in its desire to 'eliminate inefficient or unsuccessful agencies, departments and programmes'¹⁵. It also involves human resources and, in particular, management positions for its members, in line with its contribution, in all Unesco agencies, particularly in the key sectors of information and education. It thus immediately got a position on the Executive Council, to which members are usually elected (forcing some European countries, including Greece and Portugal, to withdraw their candidacies).

The US policy has presented the active participation plan towards developing countries that President Bush set out in 2002 with the formula of the Plan for the Millennium Challenge Account¹⁶, put to Congress in February 2003 and presented as a new version of aid for the Third World. It involves increased funding (50% more in three years) for 'projects in nations governed with justice, which invest in their people and promote economic freedom'. It is thus a very directed action, which aims to respond to the critics who said the US was, of all the developed countries, that which gave the least development aid. This selective programme is based on support for the private sector. It

involves collaboration with Unesco, so long as "Unesco programmes reflect and promote US interests".

III.2. Political and Cultural Reasons

The Declaration on Cultural Diversity was, without a doubt, one of the most powerful reasons behind the US's return, because it was seen as an attack on the rules of international trade established by the WTO and a protectionist attempt against American products. On the other hand, there are people who see examples of American protectionism, e.g., for the interests of Hollywood studios. Instead of defending pluralism as a way of defending freedom of expression, it offers the concept of free expression understood as freedom of consumption. In the face of a public authority's duty to rebalance market extremes, it rejects any type of competition.

It is therefore a return to square one in relation to the motives for the withdrawal. Also, in both cases the US was facing similar conditions of isolation. The NWICO and cultural diversity express the attempt by many countries to oppose the American hegemony, both with respect to world trade and the dissemination of information and cultural products. Both problems persist, and those of the amalgam of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and the fight against Islamic terrorism should also be added. The ghost of MacBride continues to roam questions about the equity and diversity of world communication.

So, despite the relaxation of the debate and the displacement of alliances and disputes, the American decision is only contradictory in appearance. America's motives have not changed, only the method is different. The return should not be interpreted as a relaxation or febleness in relation to the UN or Unesco, nor as a humanitarian turnaround, which could be explained as failed behaviour, without excuses, in which the moralist message were along the lines of "Serves you right!" It is also an affirmation of the power of the New Right and a chance for the world to know its ambitions and the actions that have to take place. The choice of Unesco by means of all the UN agencies is not exactly innocent and cannot be considered friendly. The New Right is not in favour of internationalism but patriotism; it is concerned with education in its religious aspect and humanitarianism in its charitable aspect, which is far removed from the approaches of Unesco.

Beyond Unesco, it is aimed without a doubt at the UN as an intimidation tactic against the international community which reveals the same procedure as that of its re-entry onto the Security Council. It involves a recovery of power in connection with the US's reaffirmed hegemonic project, which in reality is one of the many results of the end of the Cold War. Unesco's multilateralism contributes to the needs of this international company, because of its legitimacy and collective working. The country needs a legitimisation of its presence in Iraq and of its offensive (or crusade) against the Arab world. Unesco, a supplementary weapon in the arsenal of the war on terror, allows it to advance its educational and cultural projects in the Middle East, in order to guarantee the safety of its democracy.

This policy, promoted by Bush's doctrine¹⁷, is thus not the symptom of a rise but rather a radicalisation of America's international policy, according to the principle that what is good for the United States is good for the whole world: exceptionalism then justifies the preventive war; isolationism justifies unilateralism. This principle exists in inverse proportion to how the country is perceived in the international reality, which makes it vulnerable. Indeed, there are some risks, as well as flagrant anti-Americanism and growing isolation, on the part of other democratic nations, too. The United States is thus vulnerable in the contradiction between its exceptionalism and the need to force the world to be like it. It also runs the risk of believing that only with military might can long-term safety be reinforced. Another risk is that it tends towards the dangers of self-satisfaction and an exaggerated perception of its sacred right to ignore the reality of the repositioning of alliances.

The return is not the proof of a relaxation but rather a hardening, as shown by two immediate measures: the implementation of Microsoft and the emptying of the Convention on Cultural Diversity. Unesco usually tends to establish collaborations with the private sector, in particular non-profit foundations, such as the Hewlett-Packard Foundation. To that end, it consults with member states,

who give their opinion on the nature and scope of the contract. In the case of Microsoft, the commercial organisation has been imposed by direct negotiation with Matsuura, without consultation with the member states. The American multinational also contributes not just its material and programs, but also its logistics and model of organising and training users. The emptying of the Convention on Cultural Diversity translates into a rhetorical and legal strategy. Semantic discussions about the text question the presence of a number of terms, such as 'protection', 'cultural industries' and even 'contents and expressions'. Discussions about the fund tend to cancel out the creation of a right that would compensate the other existing instruments, particularly those of intellectual and industrial property, both protected by the WIPO. The US questions Unesco's role as a reference organisation for regulating consultations and differences and supports removing the sanctions and appendices that list the different cultural industries involved. If its text is ratified at the General Assembly of 2005, the Convention will have been stripped of its legitimacy as an international legal instrument.

Although optimism about the return should be tempered, neither should it be viewed entirely pessimistically. The United States is still a major democratic power that includes forces of civil disobedience, multilateralism and tolerance that far exceed the current political situation. Also, if some American demands are approved at Unesco, it is also because other powers want them to be, particularly the European countries (the biggest donors), who also seek transparency and clarity in management. The question in the future is not to isolate the US, although it knows very well how to do so itself, but rather show it that if it has found a virtue in its exceptionalism, it cannot reproach others for claiming respect for theirs. A universal culture cannot be forged without dialogue among the specific cultures, but the battle over positions of equality and liberty will be long and hard. The ghost of MacBride threatens to hover for a long time still to come.

Notes

- 1 This article is a reviewed and updated version of the chapter entitled "Unesco: le retour des États-Unis" ("Unesco: The Return of the United States") published in the *Annuaire Français de Relations Internationales* vol. 5, Paris and Brussels: La documentation française et Bruylant, 2004, pp. 860-877.
- 2 FRAU-MEIGSS, D. *Médiomorphoses américaines dans un espace privé unique au monde*, Paris: Edicions Econòmica, 2001, chapter. 1, pp. 7-10.
- 3 JOFFE, J. "Who is Afraid of Mister Big?". *The National Interest*, summer 2001.
- 4 "U.S. Affirms Plan to Leave Unesco at End of Month". In: *The New York Times*, 20 December 1984, p.1.
- 5 FRAU-MEIGS, *ibid.*, chapter 1.
- 6 MACBRIDE, S. (dir.). *Voix multiples, un seul monde. Communication et société, aujourd'hui et demain*, Paris: Unesco-La documentation française, 1980.
- 7 NYE, J.S. *Born to Lead. The Changing Nature of American Power*, Basic Books, New York, 1990.
- 8 FRAU-MEIGS, D. "The Cultural Exception". In: *Quaderns del CAC*, no. 14, September-December 2002, pp. 3-18, consultable online at www.audiovisualcat.net, in French, English, Spanish and Catalan.
- 9 "U.S. Affirms Plan to Leave UNESCO at End of Month", *The New York Times*, 20 December 1984, p.1.
- 10 P. MÉLANDRI AND J. VAÏSSE. *L'empire du milieu*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 2001.
- 11 FRAU-MEIGS, D. "La diversité culturelle est-elle l'avenir du service public?", *Médiomorphoses*, January 2005, pp. 173-181.
- 12 S. Meunier, "The French Exception", *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2000, pp. 104-114.
- 13 U.S. Department of State's Office of International Information Program, "The United States Rejoins UNESCO", official statement of 2 September 2003, <http://www.usinfo.state.gov>.
- 14 President George W. Bush, 57th UN General Assembly, 12 September 2002, <http://www.usinfo.state.gov>.
- 15 President George W. Bush, *ibid.*
- 16 President George W. Bush, Inter-American Development Bank, 14 March 2002.
- 17 LAFEBER, W. "The Bush Doctrine". In: *Diplomatic History*