The Department of Medieval Studies of Central European University cordially invites you to the public lecture of the Faculty Research Seminar

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From ‘culture’ to ‘heritage,’ from protest to politics: UNESCO between two eras of cultural governance

17:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 5, 2014
CEU–Faculty Tower #409
Budapest, V. Nádor u. 9.
Reception to follow!

Acting on an application from the Palestinian Authority, UNESCO recently designated the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem a World Heritage site, a move that amounts to a de facto recognition of the Authority as a sovereign state. In response, the United States, which has traditional withheld such recognition pending a peace deal, withdrew from UNESCO for the second time in the agency’s history and, also for the second time, withheld its funding, which accounts for a quarter of UNESCO’s income. The paper compares this episode with the first time the organization saw itself defunded by its wealthiest contributor. That occurred in 1984 after State members had collectively denounced what they described as US hegemony. While the two events are similar and illustrate UNESCO’s recurrent function as an alternative political platform for relatively powerless nations, their comparison reveals important shifts in the organization’s operational mode, its political role, its economic function, as well as in the global context, which has seen sweeping changes in the meaning and economy of culture itself.

Alexandra Kowalski teaches social theory, political sociology and cultural sociology at the Central European University. Her work deals with the modern history of cultural institutions, especially "heritage". She has also published about the comparative study of sexuality and subjectivity and key theoretical concepts in the social sciences such as culture, practice, and power. Alexandra's work was published in Comparative Studies in Society and History, the Sociological Review, and Sociological Theory, as well as in various edited volumes. She is currently working on the manuscript of a book titled The Birth of Heritage: History and the Politics of Space in Postwar France and will be a Global Fellow at the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies in 2014-15.

Nativity Church, Bethlehem