

Heritage and Borders

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ABSTRACT

Borders now seem to be everywhere, just like it is often said in heritage studies that the past is everywhere. In this edited volume a multidisciplinary group of scholars explore what happens, philosophically and in practice, when these two concepts and phenomena, heritage and borders, are combined. The findings show that heritage, as well as borders, exist just as much in the mind as on the ground. Heritage and borders can be understood both in terms of roots and routes. They are matters of administration, but they are also matters of consideration, matters of competition, and matters of contention. They are defended in the name of security and protection, longing for belonging, and good will. And they are contested in the name of philosophical critique, or political and artistic activism. In six articles and a joint conversation, the volume addresses key issues and entangled complexities in discussions on heritage and borders that take place in and across academic disciplines today.

Keywords: Heritage, border, in-between, roots, routes, law, time, memory, buffer zone, conflict

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Contents

ANNA KÄLLÉN: Heritage and borders: <i>An introduction</i>	7
PÉTER BALOGH: The revival of cultural heritage and borders: <i>A literature review with some explanatory remarks</i>	13
DACIA VIEJO-ROSE: The ecotones and edge effects of heritage borders	37
IDA HUGHES TIDLUND: Märket: <i>The makings and meanings of a border in the Baltic Sea</i>	61
MIKAEL BAAZ AND MONA LILJA: Borders in the mind and on the ground: <i>(Re)categorization as “peace-building resistance” in the Preah Vihear Temple conflict</i>	83
ELISABETH NIKLASSON: Borders of belonging in the European Heritage Label	105
CECILIA PARSBERG: We are losers and you have to learn from us	127
Conversation	143
The Contributors	173

ANNA KÄLLÉN

Heritage and borders

An introduction

Heritage and borders are inextricably connected. Ever since the passing of the first national heritage laws in the 17th century, and the establishment of museums for the collection of artefacts and public communication of national history in the 19th century, heritage has been defined by national borders – legally and in common sense. Over the last decades, alternatives to the traditional understanding of borders, as enclosing and defining stable national identities, have been developed by critical theorists like Homi K. Bhabha and Trinh T. Minh-ha. In their writings,¹ the border is a productive zone where identities are articulated, meanings negotiated, and the border itself is upheld by means of cultural practice.

We see now, in many parts of the world, an intense political interest in borders. Border controls are intensified. There are calls for increased protection of borders and new walls to be built. At the same time, there are political, capitalist, and academic movements talking of global connections in terms of networks and transnational flows that ought to make political borders redundant. On closer inspection, however, such emphasis on flows and connectedness seem to have created a new interest in borders, rather than having erased them. Just as David Lowenthal once opened our eyes to that “the past is everywhere”, borders are everywhere.² Both heritage and borders are now highly visible phenomena and objects of heavy political investment. And just like the border, the concept of heritage both demands and defies definition. It is at once rigid and slippery.³ So what happens, philosophically and in practice, when two such slippery yet rigid phenomena are combined?

1 E.g. Bhabha 2004, Trinh 2011.

2 Lowenthal 1985, xv.

3 Péter Balogh in the Conversation, this volume.

This volume is a result of the two-day *Heritage and Borders* symposium in Stockholm, held on 21–22 September 2017. The articles in the first part of the volume represent papers presented on the first open day of the symposium,⁴ which was hosted by the Department of Culture and Aesthetics at Stockholm University. The second part – the Conversation – is a transcribed version of a round-table conversation hosted by the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities on the second day of the symposium.

In the six articles and the following Conversation, borders are discussed in the concrete forms of walls and buffer zones, and in the more abstract sense of boundaries or demarcations. There are material remains of former political borders that have become heritage objects, such as the Berlin Wall, Hadrian's Wall, and the Great Wall of China. There is the heritage dimension of existing borders, in Jerusalem, on the island of Märket, and between North and South Korea, where material and narrative manifestations and the formalization of body movements all depend on the history of that particular border, at the same time as they are heritage in the making. Ida Hughes Tidlund writes that the “categorization of land and understandings of the past become conjoined through borders. When borders define land as ‘ours’, it also outlines a certain past as ‘our history’”.⁵ On a related note, there is much value invested in heritage across borders – relating to “our history”, but “over there” – often as a result of migration and other forms of displacement. We have many well-known examples of diaspora communities and descendants of migrants who, sometimes centuries after the first migration took place, maintain and create anew heritage which relates to the assumed place of origin.⁶

There is also an important conceptual relation between heritage and borders. In the discussions in this volume it is maintained that heritage is essentially about constructing borders.⁷ The concept of heritage creates material, mental, and monumental borders – and must do so – between past and present, between us and them, between what is worth preserving and what is not. If it did not come with such boundaries, it would not be heritage. Borders, in turn – political, physical, and conceptual – will influence the understanding and creation of heritage. Demarcations around heritage sites define what is heritage protected by law and what is not – sometimes two apparently identical pieces of turf a metre apart.⁸ And borders define categorizations of

4 With the later addition of articles by Mikael Baaz & Mona Lilja, and Ida Hughes Tidlund.

5 Hughes Tidlund, this volume.

6 Siri Schwabe in the Conversation, this volume.

7 Balogh, this volume, and Fredrik Krohn Andersson in the Conversation, this volume.

8 Niklasson, this volume; Ian Lilley in the Conversation, this volume.

heritage on national, regional, and local level. Is the Preah Vihear Temple a Thai or a Cambodian World Heritage Site? That question has led to serious political conflict on national, regional, and local level over the past decades.⁹

On a very basic level, heritage and borders are both means by which modern society is organized.¹⁰ Both concern space and time, and can be regarded as attempts to control and command, by means of definition, people's possibilities to engage in space and time. The potential is essentially Janus-faced. Both heritage and borders can be restricting and subordinating, needing activist interventions. And they can also be soothing and comforting, satisfying a longing for belonging that appears to be a symptom of our time – like a skin protecting our integrity.¹¹ To be in-between, of heritage and at a border, is a profoundly difficult experience.¹²

Essentially, both heritage and borders define and demarcate an identity, culture, or experience against an Other. As such they must be regarded as active creations that need maintenance, that need to be recreated again and again, in order to continue to exist. Yet, once created, they become involved in new discourses and cultural experiences, by which they gain resilience and eventually appear to be normal and real. As discussed in several of the articles and in the Conversation, the tradition of mending a wall, or the annual check of national borders, soon becomes a form of heritage in itself.¹³ And it is somewhere here, in the tension between rigid reality and the need for constant recreation, that we find the articles and discussions of this volume. From them we learn that heritage, as well as borders, exist in the mind just as much as on the ground. They can be understood both in terms of roots and routes. They are matters of administration, but they are also matters of consideration, matters of competition, and matters of contention.¹⁴ They are defended in the name of security and protection, longing for belonging, and good will. They are contested in the name of philosophical critique, or political and artistic activism.

These are profoundly complicated issues, and the purpose of this volume is not to simplify, or come up with solid new definitions of heritage and borders. Rather, it is an attempt to catch some of the entangled complexities of the discussions on heritage and borders that take place in and across academic disciplines today. There are overlaps in concepts used, and possibilities to borrow or learn from empirical data

9 Baaz & Lilja, this volume.

10 Mattias Frihammar in the Conversation, this volume.

11 Cecilia Parsberg in the Conversation, this volume.

12 Trinh T. Minh-ha in the Conversation, this volume.

13 Hughes Tidlund and Viejo-Rose, this volume.

14 Elisabeth Niklasson in the Conversation, this volume.

and analyses of academic fields other than one's own. But there are also significant differences in the practical approach to both heritage and borders, for instance between common-law and civil-law countries,¹⁵ as well as between academic discourses. Both similarities and differences are worth noticing, for the development of a richer and more nuanced understanding of these two concepts that are of monumental importance in culture and politics in the 21st century.

*

The first section of the volume is introduced with the article *The revival of cultural heritage and borders* by Péter Balogh. It is a literature overview featuring the cross-fertilization between research in Heritage Studies and Border Studies from the 1990s onwards, and includes a discussion of key concepts and definitions, and examples that illustrate common areas of interest in the two research fields. Focus is here on questions of power, territory, ownership, and diversity.

In the second article, *Heritage ecotones*, Dacia Viejo-Rose sets out to explore heritage borders as physical entities, rhetorical tropes, and practices. With concrete examples, such as the Mostar Bridge and the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea, and ecosystem concepts such as ecotones and edge effects, she focuses on the in-between spaces and interdependencies created by such heritage borders, and investigates what happens in these "zones of encounter".

In the article *Märket: The makings and meanings of a border in the Baltic Sea*, Ida Hughes Tidlund writes about the border between Finland-Åland and Sweden, on a small island in the Baltic Sea. From her own ethnographic observations and archive research, she writes the winding biography of that small but important piece of border, and demonstrates how it is literally formed by, at the same time as it profoundly informs, the activities and movements of people living with and around it.

Mikael Baaz and Mona Lilja write in their article *Borders in the mind and on the ground* about the Preah Vihear Temple on the border between Cambodia and Thailand. The temple, which was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008, has been a site of conflict and contestation for decades. They show how various aspects of international law have been at play at Preah Vihear, and how they appear to have fuelled rather than solved the conflicts. With an alternative discursive-materialistic

approach, they call for attention to the peace-building potential of initiatives and organizations in local civil society.

Elisabeth Niklasson's article *Borders of belonging in the European Heritage Label* departs from the examples of two heritage sites: the Sagres Fortress in Portugal, and the Krapina Neanderthal Museum in Croatia. With a threefold analytical focus – inward on the EU heritage bureaucracy in Brussels, backward on the historical times represented by such heritage sites, and outward beyond the European continent – she investigates the symbolic, historical, and cultural boundaries of the EU's new European Heritage Label.

Cecilia Parsberg's article *We are losers and you have to learn from us*, begins in a conversation with the Palestinian poet Kefah Fanni on the West Bank in 2005, and moves to Sweden, where she a decade later set up an artwork in the form of a chorus dialogue: *The Chorus of Begging and The Chorus of Giving*.¹⁶ Featuring the conversations with Kefah, and the work with the chorus dialogue, she explores through artistic practice the social potential of engaging in the actual border space between losers and winners in contemporary society.

The six articles are followed by the Conversation. Compared with the articles, the Conversation has more of a raw and unfinished character. As such, it invites a wider circle of readers to a situation where different academic perspectives and research experiences meet and are negotiated. This situation is mundane in university research seminars, but rarely reaches a wider audience. The intention is to catch some of the dialogical, situated character of the conversations – moments where positions are not fully assumed and knowledge is ambivalent, hence still productive. Speaking with Homi Bhabha: "If you seek simply the sententious or the exegetical, you will not grasp the hybrid moment outside the sentence – not quite experience, not yet concept; part dream, part analysis; neither signifier nor signified".¹⁷ To help structure the reading, some key themes or strands that run through the conversations and connect them with the articles have been highlighted in the margin. The themes are: law – whose law? – conflict – creation – destruction – scales – negotiation – cleansing – the in-between – buffer zones – inside/outside – difference – security – practice – nationalism – roots/routes – flow – essentialization – walking – strategy – memory – the spiral – and, time. But the themes and strands are open at both ends, emerg-

16 Parts of Cecilia Parsberg's work *The Chorus of Begging and The Chorus of Giving* was featured as a film projection with a commentary at the *Heritage and Borders* symposium, in the Metro station at Stockholm University on 21 September 2017. It can be viewed in its entirety at <http://beggingandgiving.se>

17 Bhabha 2004, 260.

ing and disappearing, connecting and disconnecting with other strands and themes without sentential (or sententious) ambition. The combined subject of heritage and borders is, and must be, complicated and ambiguous. Hence the Conversation is intended to allow for the complexity and ambivalence to stay complex and ambivalent, forming a productive space to inspire new forms of knowledge around these two related concepts.

*

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