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# Heritage of Violence: Editor's Introduction

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# Heritage of Violence: Editor's Introduction

**Keywords**

heritage, violence, dark tourism

## **Heritage of Violence: Editor's Introduction**

This issue of *Landscapes of Violence* is focused on the heritage of violence, or ways in which past violence has a lingering presence in the modern world. Sometimes this presence is through intentionally created memorials, museums, or other sites; other times evidence of past violence permeates daily life in an unstructured but no less impactful manner.

Traditionally the term “heritage” has invoked a need for preservation, such as efforts to identify and protect sites through UNESCO’s World Heritage List or the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. Recently, however, heritage professionals and others have moved away from framing heritage as “authentic preservation,” as such efforts result in a rather fixed and uncomplicated presentation of the past (Lowenthal 1985; Smith 2006). Instead, heritage is often thought of as a dynamic process through which present communities engage with tangible and intangible aspects of the past. As such, heritage in the modern world inspires more diverse understandings of the past as expressed by a plurality of voices. The heritage of violence involves individual and community-wide engagement with material, social, or political dimensions of past violence, ideally with concomitant consideration of what that violence meant in the past and continues to mean in the present.

The authors in this issue theorize violence broadly to include actions that result in physical or emotional harm to individuals. A heritage of violence, then, can include large-scale events such as slavery, genocide, acts of terrorism, or the Holocaust, interpersonal violence such as lynching, or structural violence such as oppression or persecution. Humans have a long history of fascination with violence, which can cause remembrances of past violence to feel simultaneously voyeuristic, captivating, and exploitative (Ashworth 2008; Clark 2006; Robb 2009). Indeed, some heritage activities, such as a visit to the London Dungeon, cater to our fascination with violence while obfuscating emotional or educational motivations to remember violent pasts. Other forms of heritage, such as International Holocaust Remembrance Day or what is akin to a pilgrimage to Ground Zero, may forefront memorialization yet are not devoid of the effects of human curiosity, particularly in the age of social media and its selfies and tweets about user experiences.

These factors lend an inherent tension to a heritage of violence, most acutely in its form of dark tourism. A term introduced by Lennon and Foley (2000) dark tourism is commonly defined as travel to places of violence, suffering and death. Since the early 2000s scholarship on the heritage of violence and dark tourism has exploded, demonstrating how such heritage draws attention to violent histories that

may have been marginalized or ignored. This literature has provided useful frameworks for considering different types of violence, forms of heritage, or types of sites (Stone 2006). Scholars have also identified multiple overlapping needs and demands driving the heritage of violence, including memorialization, “truth-telling,” although there is often the lingering question of whose truth is being told, warning, as in the association of the idea “never again” with many sites, or entertainment.

The articles and essays in this issue represent a “second wave” of sorts within literature on the heritage of violence. Authors are young professionals; the research articles and Notes from the Field were produced by graduate students or individuals who recently received their degrees. Collectively, these pieces demonstrate the dynamic and expansive nature of the heritage of violence. Each piece offers timely investigation or documentation of various ways modern communities engage with past violence.

Emma Sheppard-Simms examines the devastating impact of the historical use of cemetery islands, a form of structural violence that marginalizes certain categories of individuals through isolated and often inaccessible burial sites. In death, these individuals are effectively erased from the modern landscape. Sheppard-Simms focuses on Hart Island, a cemetery island in New York where over 1 million poor, unidentified, or unclaimed individuals are buried in mass graves. This has been subject of considerable recent attention in the popular press (see for example Bernstein 2016), with an increasing pressure to identify individuals who are buried there and open up the cemetery to those who wish to visit the graves.

Jill Dwiggin traces contentious efforts to preserve Long Kesh/Maze Prison, best known for its use during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. While the violence that characterized the Troubles has essentially ended, the memory of that violence is still acutely felt decades later. Efforts to tell the story of the Troubles through Long Kesh/Maze prison therefore become a political act—if the site is preserved as a museum, what events or people are commemorated and who is left out of this narrative?

Braden Paynter et al. offer insight from the perspective of museum practitioners. The authors illustrate how three sites, all affiliated with the global Sites of Conscience network, utilize “witnessing” as powerful testimony to both the scope of large-scale past violence as well as the devastating impact(s) such violence has on individuals. By engaging present communities in dialogue about past violence and its contemporary legacies, the three case studies presented here exemplify the best of what heritage can offer.

In Notes from the Field, Sanne Weber shares a glimpse of heritage-based

research in action. Focusing on two villages overtaken by paramilitary groups during Colombia's internal armed conflict, Weber captures the experiences of villagers seeking to reclaim their land, homes, and identities now that the paramilitary forces have left. Heritage, in this instance, refers not to a site or act, but the lingering evidence of violence surrounding villagers. There is no need for a memorial, museum, or day of remembrance when the community cannot separate itself from the legacies of past violence long enough to "forget."

Finally, Andrew Adamek picks up this thread in his photo essay capturing how legacies of past violence permeate everyday life in Belgrade. Many buildings damaged by the NATO bombings in 1999 remain damaged today. Citizens of Belgrade have lived with these constantly visible reminders of that violence for decades—children play among the ruins and employees go to work in the same damaged building where some of their co-workers were killed. In spite of this inescapable evidence of the bombings, the community has created memorial sites or other forms of heritage to ensure that individual victims are not forgotten. Adamek takes us on a visual tour through these comingled heritages of violence—one that is all but forgotten, blending into the background of everyday life, the other calling attention to victims of violence to ensure that they do not simply blend in or fade away.

By illustrating the heritage of violence from a variety of perspectives, focusing on sites across the globe, this issue demonstrates both the ubiquity of violence in the human experience and the unique cultural, historical, or political circumstances shaping each site. Furthermore, these pieces raise critical questions about the heritage of violence: For whose benefit—and at whose expense—are violent pasts memorialized? How do individuals and communities live among constant reminders of past violence? When sites of violence are opened to tourists, what are the ethical implications of commodifying violence? While memorialization is important, it is not enough to simply tell a story about the past; the articles and essays in this issue encourage scholars and practitioners to direct critical attention to how and why stories about the past are told, and what is lost if we ignore or no longer acknowledge those stories.

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Heidi Bauer-Clapp, PhD  
Guest Editor

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