Heritage, Heirs and Performative Competence

By

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Abstract

Cultural heritage is traces from the past that are ascribed meaning in the present. This basic tenet of current heritage theory is often followed by a call for more democratic heritage processes and the inclusion of more diverse values. The article points to the ensuing paradox: what is left to define heritage when it is neither inherent qualities, nor a set of general values? To explore some issues raised by this paradox, the article focusses on the relation between heritage and its owners or heirs, seeing them both as actants, mutually constituted (Greimas). Consequently, heritage cannot exist without heirs.

The article argues that to be socially acknowledged, the role as heir must be claimed in specific ways. The heirs must be able to demonstrate a specific performative competence, i.e. master the metacultural level that defines heritage. These discourse and practices will be closely related to the dominant values already defining the heritage field, often representative of the hegemonic classes and leading cultural groups. The article investigates three cases in which the values and ideas of the "heirs presumptive" were at odds with the authorised heritage discourse, based on the habitus and values of other social groups.

Introduction

Current heritage theory is largely non-essentialist, based on the premise that heritage is created by contemporary discourses and practices. Objects and items from the past – material or immaterial – are singled out and selected for care and preservation, making them valuable and cherished in the present (cf. e.g. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Ronström 2007; Bendix and Hafstein 2009; Kuutma 2009; Harrison 2012). Building on much previous research, Laurajane Smith has summed up this understanding in the term 'authorised heritage discourse' (AHD), strongly emphasizing the power and hierarchical relations that are involved in heritage work (Smith 2006). According to Smith and her followers in the very influential field of critical heritage studies, AHD most often will imply a canonisation of generalised elite values and of elite culture, with a corresponding exclusion or marginalisation of minorities or socially under-privileged groups. Exploring these power relations and making heritage more inclusive, more pluralistic and more democratic has consequently become an important issue in this brand of research (e.g. Lähdesmäki et al. 2019; Brattli and Brendalsmo 2016).

At first sight, the non-essentialist perspective of critical heritage studies corresponds well with such a call for more inclusive and pluralist heritage. The claim that heritage is created in the present and not constituted by timeless essential values invites an open approach. Asking *whose* values and world view this construction really represents is also highly appropriate. But simultaneously denouncing the intrinsic value of heritage and exposing the 'authorised' values that constitute it in the present creates something of a paradox: what is left to define heritage if it is neither allowed to be inherent qualities passed down from the past, nor a set of generalised values and ideals in the present? How can heritage then be recognised and acknowledged? This position is obviously hypothetical. Democratic, inclusive and pluralist perspectives do not mean that the idea of heritage is reinvented on the basis of totally new values or ideals. Rather, disputes, negotiations and reorientations will gradually shape and reshape what is known and accepted as heritage (Carter et al 2020). The paradox is nonetheless sufficiently real to be of interest for theoretical investigation.

The aim of the present article is to explore this conundrum by going into some aspects of the relation between heritage and its owners, both seen as agents in and of the present. The approach to the field is largely conceptual. I will start from the notion of heritage itself and then move on to investigate some implications for heritage as a socio-cultural phenomenon, particularly focussing on the issue of performative heritage competence. To elucidate, I will relate the theoretical argument to a discussion of three specific cases. The discussion and my argument tie up with a recent call to apply perspectives from conceptual history to heritage studies (Koselleck 1985; Berger et al 2020: 326). This turn towards words and

concepts has created a new awareness of linguistic differences in heritage work, particularly related to projects of nation building (Swenson 2013: 320-331). It has also given birth to discussions of key terms in contemporary heritage studies, such as 'community' (Berger 2020; Higgins and Douglas 2020) and 'property' (Hafstein and Skrydstrup 2020). Nonetheless, the term heritage itself tends to remain a generic and often ahistorical concept in heritage studies, used rather indiscriminately to designate interest in the past and its remains, independent of place or historical period (cf. Swenson 2013). With some exceptions (e.g. Morriset 2010; Dormaels 2013; Eriksen 2014) and despite a generally non-essentialist approach, as presented above, the conceptual implications of this key term have attracted relatively little attention.

Heritage (or cultural heritage) is a new term. Though sporadically occurring in older texts, its present international success started with the UN World Heritage Convention of 1972. From there the term spread internationally 'like wildfire' during the 1990s (Jensen 2008) and became the umbrella term for a wide range of objects and phenomena formerly known as e.g. traditions, customs, historical monuments, masterpieces vestiges or antiquities (Harrison 2012; Hafstein 2024). However, as this article will argue, heritage is more than a handy generic term, able to subsume great amounts of diverse material. As a contemporary concept it brings with it ideas and values that are distinctive to our time (Hafstein and Skrydstrup 2020: 40–42). Heritage represents a historically specific way of relating to the past, based on particular connections between the past and the present, and between the cultural goods that are being passed down and its present-day owners (Hartog 2003). It is a key tenet of conceptual history that concepts both reflect ideas and understandings, and also have a social and political agency of their own. They shape and form practices, discourses and institutions (Koselleck 2002). In the present context, this means that the term heritage not only denotes a certain relation to the past, but that it also actively contributes to shape this relation, bringing with it ways of thinking that form social practices and discourses.

The first section of this article will seek to spell out some of these conceptual features. Rather than exploring how heritage is produced, the article will examine the role of the heirs, i.e. the claimants to this heritage. Who are they, how do people become (cultural) heirs and what is required of them? It will be my argument that the structural relationship between heritage and its heirs, which is implied by the term heritage itself, is fundamental for a deeper understanding of the processes through which heritage may change and become more democratic – or how its own rationality may actually impede such a development. Building on this discussion of heritage and heirs as mutually constitutive, the article's middle section will go on to look at the specific performative competence that is expected of the heirs. This means going into the practical and social implications of the

heritage / heir-relations, looking at the skills and values that come with the role of the heir. The final section of the article will present three concrete cases where the performative competence of the heirs was considered faulty or 'wrong'. The point here again is not to show how heritage is being produced, but to go into the paradox that can emerge when the non-essentialist understanding of heritage meets the call for the inclusion of more diverse values.

Cases are not examples of general rules, however, but rather sites for the exploration of dilemmas and predicaments (Lyons 1985; Passeron and Revel 2005). In the present article, the cases have consequently not been chosen for their exemplary or clear illustrative value, but rather for their messiness and for what was not said but rather emerged as implications from the encounters that took place between inclusiveness and normativity. Likewise, the point is not how 'it all ended' or how these cases were solved, but the exploration of some of the tensions and paradoxes that they represent.

Non-essentialist approaches to studies have generally resonated well with contemporary heritage politics and management. Rather than defending the presumably intrinsic and self-evident value of the heritage objects, monuments and sites in their care, politicians and professionals have joined the call for inclusiveness and for more plural approaches. In this way, denouncing essentialism and proclaiming the constructed and discursive nature of heritage has in itself become an integral part of contemporary 'authorised discourse'. A significant example is the Faro convention on cultural heritage, adopted by the Council of Europe in 2005 and at present ratified by 25 states. Its web presentation highlights the relation between heritage and human rights and democracy, saying that:

> The Convention encourages us to recognise that objects and places are not, in themselves, what is important about cultural heritage. They are important because of the meanings and uses that people attach to them and the values they represent (https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention).

As a social reality created by discourses and practices in the present, heritage will inevitably reflect contemporary values and priorities, and among them are pluralism, democracy and human rights. Despite the ubiquitous call for democratic and inclusive heritage politics that these perspectives encourage, it is nonetheless far from clear what 'democratic heritage' more practically means. As pointed out by cultural policies researcher Nanna Løkka, three different meanings can be distinguished. Firstly, democratic heritage may refer to issues of general *accessibility* to heritage sites and monuments, museums and other heritage institutions. Secondly, it may also mean that heritage is supposed to represent

the lives, histories and identities of all groups in society – rich and poor, men and women, all ethnic groups, and so on. This implies a large and, in principle, infinite extension of the *heritage field*. Thirdly, it may refer to heritage created through broad bottom-up processes in the present, which in turn expands the number of *agents*. These three meanings may coincide and conjoin, but they may also well exist separately, and even with some tension between them (Løkka 2014: 241). In different combinations, all these meanings can be found in for instance policy documents, plans and charters from the local to the international level. The variety of meanings, as well as their potential entanglements, creates a complexity of content, motivation and ambition, as well as of roles of identities. Correspondingly, the call for 'democratic heritage' runs the risk of overlooking social and cultural tensions, conflicting interests and a range of quite different understandings. Some of these tensions will be explored here.

Heritage and Heirs

Heritage implies ownership – 'at least metaphorically but usually actual property relations – and as such instantiates whosoever's heritage it is said to be' (Macdonald 2013: 18). Owners, or more precisely heirs, consequently, are constitutive to heritage. Without them, remains and traces from the past would hardly be more than just that. At the same time, this relation is mutual. The heirs are also defined through their heritage. This is not least important from a non-essentialist understanding of heritage. Approaching heritage as something that is constructed through practices and discourses in the present invites a focus on agents, be they individuals, groups or institutions (Smith 2006: 2). *Their* work, *their* activities, are what carve out heritage and ascribe it value. To grasp this profoundly relational quality of heritage agency on a conceptual level, the term 'actant' can be useful. Originating in narratology, it was coined in 1966 by the linguist A. Greimas, referring to structural elements that are necessary for a story to evolve. Actants are not identical with specific characters in a story but work on a functional level. In a full-fledged, complex narrative, one character may correspond to more than one actant by having more than one function. The opposite can also be the case when more characters have the same function in the development of the story. The actants, moreover, are relational, and often seen as constituting binary opposites. Greimas' classical overview consists of three such pairs: subject/object; helper/opponent and sender/receiver (Greimas 1974). The term actant and the perspectives it represents have contributed significantly to the development of structuralist theory, and more recently to the elaboration of actor-network theory (Latour 2005). As pointed out by cultural historian Åmund Resløkken, its particular asset in this later connection has been that the agency of

the actant does not originate from the intention of the agent, but 'from the effect, the trace that it leaves in the process' (Resløkken 2018: 30). Consequently, even artefacts and material objects can be seen as actants.

The point in the present context is not to advocate structuralist or ANT approaches in heritage studies, but to make use of Greimas' concept to better understand the dynamics of heritage. In the heritage field, a major actant is heritage itself: a structural element that makes things happen according to the specific logic of this field. Heritage studies often focus on the production or creation of heritage in specific contexts. From a greimasian perspective this implies exploring how artefacts, monuments and sites are constituted as a major actant, filling more or less the same function and appearing as the valuable and cherished object that organises the surrounding activity. This position, however, is fundamentally relational. Actants do not function on their own, and neither does heritage. The functional position *as* heritage can only be filled if and when the object in question actually is desired by somebody, when it is reckoned as valuable, important and attractive. In other words: heritage cannot exist without heirs. They may be identified as the specific agents of the different processes that serve to create and maintain heritage. Most importantly, however, the heirs are the persons or groups to whom heritage 'belongs' and of whose culture it is reckoned an important part. The heirs will be more or less resourceful, have more or less power, and it is possible to explore how they behave in more or less strategic ways. What most fundamentally defines them, however, is the relation that they enter into, i.e. the link that connects heritage and heirs.

Heritage, as all inheritance, is a special kind of property (Renfrew 2000; Cuno 2010; Skrydstrup 2010). Inherited goods can only be acquired by being passed on between heirs, most often from one generation to the next. Despite the values it may represent, and its potentiality to be transformed into regular commercial goods, heritage in itself is not commercial (Morisset 2010: 54). If it is bought or sold, it is no longer heritage, but has been transformed into merchandise and lost its defining qualities and exclusive value (Macdonald 2013: 149). To remain heritage and to maintain this distinctive value, it can only be transferred to the next heir in line. Hence, heritage is the exclusive property of the heir(s), a lawfully recognised privilege (Brown 2004). As such, it is a mark of distinction, representing symbolic capital as well as material resources. It marks the heir as a subject with a special kind of relation to the past as well as with exclusive access to the values in question (Eriksen 2014). This relationship is fundamentally organic, depending on the life and death of successive generations of owners. Being an heir means being one link in a long chain, spanning time and creating bonds.

One might think that this logic demands that the inherited goods exist first, enabling the heirs to take possession and claim their exclusive rights to them.

In the world of heritage, however, things can also work the other way around. What turns things from the past into heritage are 'the present-day cultural processes and activities that are undertaken at and around them, and of which they become part', according to Smith (2006: 3). As Valdimar Hafstein elegantly puts it, heritage is a particular kind of practice: 'pointing beyond itself to a culture it claims to represent, heritage is a culture of culture – it is culture squared' (Hafstein 2008: 11, cf. also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). On the same note, Kristin Kuutma states that heritage is a mode of cultural production that 'emanates from a metacultural relationship – heritage is created through metacultural operations' (Kuutma 2009: 7). This corresponds well with the idea that heritage basically is anchored in the present-day activity of the heirs, not in the past lives of the inherited objects. The heirs create the heritage by claiming it. Even if other factors also may enter into the picture, the value of an object as heritage is fundamentally defined by someone's willingness to inherit it, i.e. to enter into this special kind of relationship with the object in question. The two actants are contemporaneous and reciprocally constitutive. Heir and heritage create each other.

Despite this present-day nature of heritage, the special status and authority that it lends to the heirs stem from its roots in the past, from the very nature of heritage as something said to have been *handed down* (Bendix 2000; Meyer and van de Port 2018). This is also part of the reason why heritage often plays such an important role in identity politics (Macdonald 2013, 36–37; Albert et al 2013). Claiming a heritage from the past means demanding recognition in the present, for heritage makes its heirs appear as powerful social agents, furnished with the resources of their exclusive property. In the same way as the elaboration of national history has been a successful strategy in nation building during the last two hundred years or so of Western history, emphasising one's cultural heritage today is an effective and oft-used way of gaining social recognition for ethnic and religious groups or other minorities (Harrison 2010). The claim to possess a heritage will define the group as something more than a random accumulation of people. Being handed down from the past, heritage signals that the group is no mere whim of the present. As an imagined community (Anderson 1983), held together by a common heritage, it will even include past members of the group and thus appear larger. Furthermore, claiming a heritage indicates stronger and more obliging bonds between the living members than mere shared interest would do. Heritage confirms the social reality of the group both by reference to its age and by the distinctive character of the property that is passed on to it (Susemihl 2023). By the same token, it serves to situate any individual that can claim a heritage in a position of continuity and binding obligations, stretching from the past and into the future. Hafstein has pointed out that heritage is transformative, saying that 'it transforms people's relationship with their own practices, the ways in which they

perceive themselves and the things around them – it "squares" them' (Hafstein 2008: 11). More precisely, this 'squaring' consists exactly of taking possession of the role as heirs. Claiming – or creating – heritage is a way of authorising the self, individually or collectively, by gaining a position as an acknowledged proprietor and guardian of exclusive resources.

Performative Heritage Competence

From these perspectives it becomes clear that democratic plurality and inclusiveness will very quickly mean more than just general access to (someone else's) heritage. The second and third of the meanings identified by Løkka (above) soon become the issue: heritage should represent the life and experiences of 'everybody', who likewise should take active part in the recognition and shaping of it. This is because democracy in heritage most fundamentally means the general and equal right to be an heir, i.e. to enter into the special kind of relation that heritage is, claiming the rights and social agency that come with this distinctive type of property.

However, to be socially valid and effective, this role has to be claimed in specific ways. To be acknowledged as an heir, you have to behave like one. The heirs must have some knowledge of the 'activities and processes that are undertaken at and around' the heritage that they claim (Smith, above). They have to be 'squared', to enter into the metacultural practices that heritage is (Hafstein 2015). Most basically, this implies some knowledge about the heritage itself. In some cases, practical or artistic skills may be involved, for instance as a musician or crafter. But equally and far more generally important is what can be called performative heritage competence. It is not enough, say, to be able to play your fiddle in a traditional way or to cook the meals that are the heritage of your ethnic group. Heritage performance competence is about mastering the metacultural level that is distinctive to heritage as a specific kind of cultural practice.

In heritage studies, performance perspectives most often have been used to examine the work of heritage professionals, as they for instance are engaged in educational programs, museum theatre, stagings of 'living tradition', demonstration of crafts and so on (Haldrup and Bærenholdt 2015; Jackson and Kidd 2012; Aronsson and Gradén 2013). While this, doubtlessly, is an important aspect of contemporary heritage work, a wider and more comprehensive approach to performance is intended here. Transformed into heritage, activities, objects, places and skills are carved out from everyday life and from their original contexts, bound off and made into objects of a special kind. What constitute these new boundaries often are issues of right and wrong, authentic or inauthentic, original or fake. In turn, these newly created objects – be they material or immaterial – are set

on display (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995; Brædder 2018). This is the metacultural level. The successful heirs will not only have to be aware of this dimension that is added to things when they become 'heritage', but are also required to perform according to it, in the sense of entering into a special, situated and most often marked mode of communicative practice (Bauman 2019: 99; Hafstein 2015). What this more precisely means will vary according to the case or the heritage in question (Knudsen 2021). It nonetheless will always imply some of the same normative elements as those constituting heritage itself. The issues of right and wrong, of correct and authentic versus faulty and inauthentic performance always will enter into the picture. For this reason, heritage performance must be learnt. The performative metacultural competence represents a kind of education, a special training to be acquired by the heirs.

Regina Bendix and Valdimar Hafstein have argued that heritage can be seen as a technology of governmentality. It does not only have to be learnt, according to them, it must also be internalised as a second nature. Moreover, it has to be taught by someone who is already an expert and usually external to the group and heritage in question:

> Teaching people to have a heritage, to value it, and keep it safe, requires the intervention of outside experts and training of local ones to reform the practices of local populations and reframe their relationships to habitat and habitus in terms of heritage (Bendix and Hafstein 2009: 6f).

The curriculum that meets the local 'heirs presumptive' in their training, then, can be seen as closely related to the 'authorised heritage discourse' described by Smith. This means that the teaching will bring with it the same canonisation of generalised elite values and of elite culture as the discourse that she has identified, and that the values and habitus to be internalised are those of the hegemonic classes and leading cultural groups.

These perspectives, with the recognition that a certain performative competence is needed to gain credibility as an heir, and that this competence has to be learnt from an external expertise, have a great bearing on the issue of democratic heritage. In many cases the equal rights of all groups to shape and maintain their own heritage will be at odds with the competence that is required to perform convincingly as heirs, as this competence is based on the habitus and values of other groups.

Despite differences in vocabulary and historical context, the situation that is emerging from the benevolent call for democratic heritage in contemporary society consequently is not totally unlike that of the early public museums. During

the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, access to museums and collections gradually became a public good and was no longer a privilege of the few. Parallel to this democratic development, however, was the worry about whether the 'masses' or the 'working classes' would know how to behave when admitted to the galleries and museum halls. Would they know not to run wildly about in the rooms, but proceed slowly and piously through the exhibition? Could they be trusted to refrain from touching the exhibits or start handling them? Were they likely to speak only in a low voice and a respectful tone, concentrating on the elevating view of art or historical objects? In short, would they be able to discipline their bodies and minds in the required way? The new public museums developed devices and strategies to prevent the dreaded excesses, to protect the exhibits and to educate – or discipline – the public. The influential museologist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has stated that the new public museums from the very start had two, contradictory, functions: 'that of the elite temple of the arts, and that of a utilitarian instrument for democratic education' (Hooper-Greenhill 1989: 63). In his analysis of what he calls 'the exhibitionary complex', museologist Tony Bennett later has elaborated on this, making use of Foucault's concept of power. Museums and exhibitions, he argues, represented a power 'made manifest not in its ability to inflict pain, but in its ability to organise and co-ordinate an order of things and to produce a place for people in relation to that order' (Bennett 1995: 67). He also points out that this power 'placed the people behind it, inveigled into complicity with it rather than cowed into submission before it' (Bennett 1995: 67). Strictly regulated paths through the exhibitions, glass cases and cordons, together with admonishing 'do not touch' signposts, all served to separate visitors and exhibits from each other and to tell the former what their place and role was supposed to be. In this way, the framing of the objects and the education of the visitors went hand in hand, as it does with heritage and heirs today. The successful educational work that has already been carried out within 'the exhibitionary complex' is one reason why the situation today is different from that of the early public museums on several important points. The structures nonetheless remain: the heirs must be educated if they are to claim and keep their heritage in culturally valid ways.

Fruitful as these, largely Foucauldian, approaches have proved to be in museum and heritage studies, they nonetheless hold some potential flaws. Most notably, there is a risk of considering the groups that are exposed to the 'education' or 'discipline' as far too internally coherent. They implicitly appear as uniformly undisciplined, often reluctant and by default ignorant of the matter at stake. This, of course, is a simplification of quite complex processes of interaction and negotiation. To explore some such complexities, the final section of this article will present three specific cases. The aim is not to generalise but rather to uncover and elaborate on some of the tensions, negotiations and dilemmas that may

occur. Moreover, the aim is also to argue that giving attention to heirs and their performative competence represents a rewarding approach to understanding the role and position of heritage in democratic societies. What is common to the three cases is that the performance of the heirs in some way is considered faulty. For various reasons their performance and, in consequence, their claim to heritage have been censured as invalid by external expertise and authorities.

Eager Heirs and World Heritage

In his study of the industrial Rjukan-Notodden landscape in southern Norway, on the World Heritage List (WHL) from 2015, social anthropologist Steffen Johannessen underscores that local involvement contributed significantly to gain this inscription (Johannessen 2019). Rjukan is the main site of Norsk Hydro, a company established in the early twentieth century to exploit the energy from the huge waterfalls in the production of artificial fertilizer. 'From poverty to prosperity in one hundred years' is the popular phrase used to describe the successful industrial development and the local communities to which it gave birth. The locals identify strongly with this narrative and its message of development, modernisation and growth, and according to Johannessen, this local enthusiasm was a key element in the work to secure the inscription. Connections to 'living traditions' are among the values included in the WHL criteria for inscription. However, Johannessen also points out the tensions and conflicts of interest among the locals, which adds important nuances to the understanding of local democracy and bottom-up processes.

A significant debate occurred over a small sculpture donated by an artist who herself had spent her childhood at Rjukan. The original title of the work was 'self-portrait at the age of four', but the figurine was soon renamed 'the flower girl'. The artist wanted it to be placed by the pond in the park of the company's main building, a rather showy white mansion which today is the centre of the heritage area. The Rjukan local authority suggested a less prominent place, but this was not accepted by the artist who had childhood memories of playing by the pond. The county authorities were even more negative, and the issue developed into a struggle over the power to make decisions and to define what Rjukan should be. Johannessen interprets the ensuing argument, in which local people took a very active part, as a struggle for autonomy. The sculpture became a stand-in for other pressing political concerns, most notably the closing down of the local hospital and the train service, he argues. The tiny girl who was excluded from the park came to represent the way 'ordinary people' felt excluded from political decisions concerning their own community (Johannessen 2019: 68–70). After long discussions, fiery debates and appeals to national heritage authorities, the

figurine was at last unveiled in the park, though at some distance from the central position that was first proposed.

Focusing on heritage performance can add to this analysis. The locals at Rjukan had enthusiastically entered into their position as heirs, earned by the inscription on the WHL and thus sanctioned by a prestigious international institution. Many of them also were quite knowledgeable about the history of the community. As Johannessen points out, several had childhood memories of their own from the pond and the park. The heirs in this case, then, were neither ignorant nor reluctant, but performed competently and with great enthusiasm, and with the self-assurance gained from their position as heirs, they did not agree to the sculpture being wrong or in the wrong place. Where did they err? Why did the heirs and the authorities not see eye to eye in this matter? This is not obvious from the material quoted by Johannessen, but some assumptions can be made.

The heritage narrative that was established at Rjukan was democratic and inclusive. As workers and officials at the plant, and as citizens in the industrial town that grew up around it, the locals at Rjukan were ascribed important roles: they worked, organised themselves, struggled for their rights, built their homes, contributed to the community's growth and earned their share in it. They were energetic, active, entrepreneurial, brave, and often, but not always, male. They were certainly not presented as cute little girls with flowers, nor as innocent children playing happily in the park belonging to the grand house. Nobody said explicitly that the sculpture did not fit in with the dominant heritage message and the story about industrial achievement, class consciousness, and economic growth. Neither did anybody say that the sculpture was sentimental and kitschy, a mere garden ornament. And finally, nobody said that the figurine lacked the metacultural level distinctive to heritage as 'a culture of culture'. Nonetheless, all these elements seem to have been in play.

What appears to have happened is that the newly acknowledged heirs, the local people at Rjukan, embraced their own heritage rather too enthusiastically and started performing according to the role they had gained. In doing so, however, they included elements that did not fit well with the narrative that also had been established. The element in question – the girl with flowers – was not in any way rebellious, subversive or critical. The challenge it represented was rather that it reduced the daring industrial enterprise, the human harnessing of large waterfalls, and the development of advanced chemical technology into a smiling idyll of flowers, happy children and garden ornaments. Furthermore, the performance of the heirs was in no way undisciplined or ignorant of local history. They knew well that children – themselves among them – often played in the park. But such memories, being too happy, too harmonious and too much about continuity rather than change, rupture and development, could be seen as undermining the

narrative about the wondrous journey from poverty to prosperity. The locals were not contesting the history about Rjukan but entered actively into a project of filling it out. Their engagement in support of the sculpture did not stem from ignorance, reluctance or lack of discipline. Quite to the contrary: what produced the tension and ensuing conflict was largely the great enthusiasm and the self-confident performance of the heirs.

Guardians of the Nation's Cradle

The next two cases both come from the heritage site at Borre in southern Norway. The country's largest field of monumental iron age burial mounds can be found here, and when one of the mounds was opened in 1851, the remains of a large ship were discovered. Until then, Viking ships had only been known from written sources, and in modern times the finding represented the first material proof that these mighty vessels had actually existed. In *Heimskringla*, the sagas of the ancient Norwegian kings, Snorre Sturlasson moreover names Borre as the burial place of the kings of the half mythical Ynglinge dynasty, who descended from Odin himself. These powerful chieftains, in turn, were the ancestors of Harald Fairhair, the first Norwegian king. All these elements contributed to giving Borre an important position as 'cradle of the nation' (Myhre 2003). In the presence of royalty, the site was solemnly inaugurated as a park in 1932, literally squared by a low stone wall. It has since been protected by the Heritage Act. In his opening speech professor A.W. Brøgger, archaeologist and a driving force behind the initiative, named the area both a 'national park' and the 'garden of the realm' (*Rikshagen*). The former term went into regular use, and the burial field at Borre has been known as a national park up until present times. It has also become a very popular recreational area and a local meeting point, an often-used area for walks and rambles, picnics and outings. The park ends at a public beach by the Oslo fiord, much sought after for bathing and boating activities. Moreover, a large plain among the mounds within the park is used for rallies, meetings and for the annual Constitution Day celebrations, 17 May (Eriksen 2024). As was the case at Rjukan, the locals at Borre have entered into the positions of heirs with pride and enthusiasm, and eagerly embraced the heritage field as their own property. Different from Rjukan, however, is that they have been performing successfully as heirs for nearly a century.

This local identification with national heritage was challenged in 2006, when drafts for a new management plan for the park were tabled (Helhetsplan 2008). Its proposals triggered considerable resistance and wrath among the local heirs. The plan called for a number of tall trees in the park to be cut down. The archaeological argument was that the monumental field originally had been constructed so the

mounds would be visible from the fiord, signalling a powerful presence. The trees blocked such a vista. The plan also pointed out that the term 'national park' had no formal meaning in 1932, it was just a rhetorical phrase used by Brøgger in his speech. Not until the 1970s did it become a legal category in Norwegian state administration, then used solely for *natural* preservation areas. Consequently, Borre was not a national park, and the plan recommended changing its name to the plain 'the park at Borre'. National heritage authorities had concurrently started an initiative to gain WHL inscription for Borre and other major Viking sites (Balto 2011; Hølleland 2018). The criteria of the UNESCO system, 'outstanding universal value', had to be emphasised, which in its turn led to a downplaying of national history. Such contemporary and cosmopolitan values as 'expansion, exploration, long-distance trade and overseas settlement' were instead presented as the main qualities of Viking society, together with their advanced maritime technology (https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5577/).

This approach corresponded well with the new name for the park, but far less with the understanding of the local heirs. Letters to the editor of the local newspaper, broadcasted news stories, and direct action in the park, all expressed the anger of the local heirs confronted with these encroachments. They were vehement that the park was their very own national heritage, and that the interventions proposed by external experts, politicians or authorities were not at all welcome. Two of the leaders of the initiative to save the trees argued:

> We are very much aware of the great historical importance of the mounds at Borre, also in a European context. This is why we sincerely wish the area to be taken care of and attended to for the best for the site itself and for living people in the present. The park is our stately meeting hall [storstue], our identity and our pride (Gjengangeren 10.11. 2007).

An elderly man defended the name of the park in an interview printed in the same paper, saying:

> The national park at Borre is the first national park in Norway. The national park is its name, and this cannot be changed in retrospect. For those of us who have grown up with the national park, this will always be the name (Gjengangeren 24.05 2006).

Once again, the reaction of the heirs does not stem from reluctance or subversiveness towards heritage. Quite to the contrary, the locals at Borre saw themselves both as the defenders of a heritage that was their special property, and

as the guardians of national, even European, historical values. They may not have followed the developments in archaeological theory and legal categories since the park was inaugurated, but still cannot be accused of any gross ignorance. For nearly 75 years, the park had been officially sanctioned as a 'national' place and been used and spoken of as an important national site. The performance of the heirs had long been competent, relevant and generally applauded. What they suddenly experienced was that the metacultural level, transforming the physical location into a heritage site, was changed. New theories about the history of mounds caused dislocations and disturbances, shifting the monuments from being 'the burial site of the Ynglinge dynasty' to 'mounds meant to be seen from the sea'. The category 'national park' for its part had been transferred from culture to nature. The result was that the competence of the long-time heirs no longer was adequate. The established discourse was not fully valid, and the usual performance lost its relevance. Insisting on the old terminology and emphasising their 'sincere wish' to safeguard the values that they had long internalised, the locals tried to resist the changes by demonstrating their own performative heritage competence. Their protests were a defence of the trees and the name of the park, but also of their own role as the special owners and guardians. They were protesting for heritage and heirs alike.

Even other groups of heirs have stated their heritage claims at Borre. From 1933 until 1943, the Nazi party of Vidkun Quisling held annual summer rallies in the park. The party never became a significant political force in its own right, but during the German occupation (1940–45), Quisling and his men formed a puppet government in Norway. The site and the scenery at Borre fit well with the party's emphasis on Viking and old Norse heritage, and speeches held at the rallies generally underlined the proclaimed ties between the ancient Norwegian kings and the present party (Winther 2019). Today, a low row of concrete blocks in the ground show traces of this activity. They are the vestiges of the platform where speeches were delivered, situated well inside the low stone walls of the park, in front of the largest mound. As historical remains, they are now protected by the Heritage Act. At the nearby experience centre, the exhibition 'Dark Clouds at Borre' opened in 2020 to tell the story about the Nazi 'abuse of history'. Some years earlier, however, this aspect of heritage at Borre had received more unwelcome attention. A neo-Nazi group was reported to have held 'ceremonies' by the mounds, initiating young people into the group and its political message (Gjengangeren 07.08.2012). This caused considerable consternation. The municipal authorities reacted, the county parliament protested, and the police were summoned to throw the group out of the park when it showed up. The aversion was unanimous (Gjengangeren 21.08. 2012).

The leader of the group, well known in the Norwegian public sphere for his extreme right-wing sympathies, defended his cause by vehemently claiming that he and his followers were the only legitimate heirs of the old Nazi party, which in its turn had set itself up as the true heir of the old Norse kings, supposedly buried at Borre (*ABC news* Norway 07.08.2012). This role as Quisling's legitimate heir was not contested by anyone. Neither was the fact that the older party had made use of the park and related its own political message to the ancient kings. Bearing these premises in mind, the heritage performance competence of the neo-Nazi group was fully adequate. What was *not* recognised was the legitimacy of Nazi ideology and activities in contemporary society. The group was unwanted because of its political message and ideology (Eriksen 2023).

This is not primarily a matter of handling 'dark' or difficult heritage, for instance as it was discussed in the exhibition at the experience centre. If the neo-Nazi group had been recognised as heirs, it would by default be the legitimate and exclusive owner of a political tradition reaching back in time. The reason for denying this is not related to doubts or a struggle over the proclaimed ownership, but the fact that any group of heirs, evoking a heritage from the past, always will appear as far more powerful and important in the present than just any random contemporary group of people with a political message. It was the situation in the present, not the connection to the past, that resulted in the refusal to acknowledge the group in this position. Democratic society defined the right-wing group as others rather than as heirs, at the same time demonstrating clearly the presentist character of the heritage discourse.

Summing up

In presenting three cases, this article has sought to illuminate some issues relating to the current appeal for democracy, inclusiveness and bottom-up processes in heritage work, focusing on the performative competence that is required from groups or individuals that enter into the role as heirs. The cases are not meant to be paradigmatic, but they do bring forth some discords, conflicts or perhaps simple misunderstandings that may occur when new heritage is produced, and new heirs enter the stage. A main point of the argument is that such incidents do not have to stem from an ignorant or critical public, unwillingly transformed into heirs, nor from any conscious wish to critically alter the rules of the game. The defenders of the national park at Borre did not seek to create change, but rather to refute changes that had already taken place and to maintain the original metacultural level from when the park was established. To them, the shift from 'national park' to simply 'park' meant a devaluation of their property and of their own status as heirs. When experts and authorities insisted on new legal terms and

on an international orientation that corresponded better with the contemporary heritage discourse, the heirs did not want to adjust their performance accordingly. At Rjukan, the locals enthusiastically entered into their new role as heirs but seem to have been far too inclusive in their performance. Incorporating happy, but quite ordinary childhood memories threatened the 'squaring' of Rjukan as industrial heritage and subvert the metacultural level that had been established. Even if both authentic and local, the happy childhood memories tended to conflate heritage with regular everyday life, consequently cancelling the borderline between them and the 'squaring' required for heritage to come into being. Even the neo-Nazi group at Borre represents heirs of a too enthusiastic kind. In this case, however, it was not only the cultural contents of the heritage – the political message – that was unwanted, but the group itself. Their performance, setting themselves up as heirs, was rather too competent.

The respective heirs in all the three cases are eager, enthusiastic and well informed. What creates the friction is the structural tensions that are intrinsic to the rationality of heritage, and which may grow into real incompatibilities when more people are included, and the heritage field extended. As actants, heritage and heirs are reciprocally constitutive. An implication of this basic structural relation is that there are no real limits to what can become heritage or to the number of heirs. While such an understanding fits well with the wish for inclusiveness and democratic heritage, it goes considerably less well with the unspoken premise that heirs must perform in more or less predefined ways to be acknowledged as relevant at all, and that this competence has to be learnt. Furthermore, the required 'lesson' must be based on norms and values that already exist in the heritage field. If not, it will miss the target, and the heirs will not qualify for the task. This paradox – the intrinsic tension between inclusiveness and normativity – implies that if no radical measures are taken, inclusiveness will largely result in a reproduction of the norms and values that already define heritage, or, in other words, pass on the 'authorised heritage discourse'. If measures *are* taken, on the other hand, and a much larger diversity of norms and values is accepted, the heritage field will be transformed, perhaps beyond recognition. To escape from this conundrum, the appeal for democratic and more inclusive heritage needs to be accompanied by serious theoretical considerations concerning structural relations that exist at the very core of heritage discourse itself.

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