

SECTION 2

INTRODUCTION: THE POLITICS OF TOXIC HERITAGE

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This section considers the issues of policy, stakeholders, politics, and the fields of power in which the toxic heritage operates. Heritage is always entangled with notions of value, often involving conflicting and contested frameworks of meaning. For toxic heritage, this arena of contestation and meaning-making is particularly fraught because of the implications of culpability and accountability for past polluters, as well as the opportunities for resistance, advocacy, and other political actions in which extractivism is named and challenged. The evidence presented in this section challenges traditional heritage narratives that often sidestep accountability through othering. Political readings probe the entanglements of heritage and toxicity in cases such as Stamatopoulou-Robbins' study of waste wielded as an instrument of oppression in occupied Palestine and May's study of heritage-led regeneration wielded as a tool to stimulate economic and social development in Swansea's post-industrial landscapes. Papoli-Yazdi's garbage study in Tehran demonstrates the ways in which heritage practices of designation and valorisation can intersect with inequality to both increase the disproportional impacts of the toxicity of waste and minimize the benefits of historic preservation policies in marginalized communities.

This section also highlights the flows of toxic heritage along global political contours. Naming toxic heritage as a global phenomenon locates it as a set of political acts reaching across borders. For example, the toxic heritage of war and military activities is inextricable from its geopolitical contexts, and its residues are similarly complicated, whether from former training grounds in Indigenous territories (Rankin et al.) or underwater shipwrecks (Carter et al.). "Biopolitical heritage" visited upon marginalized communities and remote locations can be implicated in the politics of memory (Little and Akese) and the strategic invisibility akin to forgetting (Weinberg and Figueroa). These cases offer counterpoints to the valorised industrial heritage of northern European nations that typically disavows connections with toxicity experienced elsewhere.