

1

Heritage and Democracy

Crisis, Critique, and Collaboration

KATHRYN LAFRENZ SAMUELS AND JON D. DAEHNKE

Perhaps, then, democracy should be about forms rather than *a* form or constitution; and, instead of an institutionalized process, it should be conceived as a moment of experience, a crystallized response to deeply felt grievances or needs . . . Its moment is not just a measure of fleeting time but an action that protests actualities and reveals possibilities.

—Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (2004: 603)

Democratic values and approaches have become foundational to heritage practice in the last few decades. A democratic ethos infuses calls for more participatory and collaborative forms of heritage practice, and heritage resources are called forth and mobilized for pursuing social justice. Yet, at the same time, the limits of democracy for heritage practice have been insufficiently interrogated, and its potential for reinscribing social harm often dismissed. What are the democratic motives of heritage practice? This is of course a broad question, but it frames the challenges our contributors grapple with and variously consider, including both the strengths and weaknesses of democratic framings for heritage practice. Cultural heritage also plays important roles in how democracy functions as a political system, and contributes to democratic practices, and these facets of democracy have been inadequately explored by scholarship on democracy.

One important factor is the way in which heritage studies positions itself in relation to other fields, such as history that bases expertise within textual and authoritative academic channels and accounts. However, historical anthropologists, especially Trouillot (1995), emphasize the *production* of history

instead, to foreground the broad range of popular and everyday contexts in which history is produced. The concept of cultural heritage borrows much from this perspective, and heritage studies in many respects is seen as the great leveler of historically oriented academic approaches, seeking to democratize where historical authority is placed. This is because it aims to honor and highlight the sheer diversity of ways in which humans around the globe connect with their historic endowments, transform past conditions to serve present circumstances and inspire visions for the future, and enact the intergenerational transfer of resources, knowledge, and skills. That, at least, is an impetus for the field of heritage studies, which as an interdisciplinary “large umbrella” field, and one which distributes expertise across all sources of production, we argue provides better accounts and accountability of heritage at work in the world.

Compared to other historically oriented disciplines, heritage studies sits more comfortably within a feminist theory of science that embraces the limited and fractured perspectives of “situated knowledges” (Haraway 1988). Such an approach stakes objectivity in its capacity for accountability—situated knowledges produce *accountable* objectivity, and as such offer better *accounts* of the world, ones that are “more aware of the social world in which they arise and which they in turn participate in forming” (Stephens 1994: 71). But regardless of one’s stake in theories of knowledge and the interdisciplinary value of heritage studies, it is these accounts that we are especially interested in for understanding the democratic motives of heritage practice, and how, as fields of human experience, heritage and democracy intersect with or disrupt one another. The reach of democracy across so many nations and sectors of politics and society—what has been paraphrased as “democratization”—begs for accountability, and any consideration of heritage in orbit of this behemoth ought to pursue the same.

Heritage and Democracy: Approaches and Considerations

Democracy and heritage come together in at least three interwoven strands that are worth separating out for a discussion of the different interventions and considerations that arise. Given the historically close relationship of heritage management and archaeology to the nation-state, as tools for the project of nationalism, to speak of democracy would typically evoke the practice of heritage under a democratic state. A second way to understand democracy is not as a political system, but as a practice. The incorporation of democratic practices into heritage practice is a vigorous area of growth for contemporary heritage work, the significance and implications of which we discuss below.

The third strand is of less immediate interest to the project of this volume, given the constraints of space, but would consider the historical embeddedness of democracy itself, both as a political system and as a practice (Bourke and Skinner 2016). For example, the ancient precedent of democracy has often been pointed to, with roots stretching back to Athens in the fifth century BCE, and which has been vigorously compared and contrasted to modern liberal democracies as they operate under vastly different social conditions (Morris and Raaflaub 1997; Ober 2005; Ober and Hedrick 1996). At the same time, critiques of western-centric origin stories of democracy, tinged with the discredited assumptions of social evolutionism, have also pointed to the many global roots of democratic practices (Graeber and Wengrow 2021; Stasavage 2020). This volume deals primarily with the first two strands, but the historical roots of democracy and their invocation in the present is clearly relevant, especially for raising in sharp relief the historical contingencies and conditions of the cases analyzed by each of the contributors.

Heritage under Democratic States

Understanding heritage in the context of a democratic state brings several important issues to the fore. The foundational importance of nationalism to cultural heritage and archaeology has long been demonstrated (Díaz-Andreu and Champion 1996; Handler 1988; Kohl and Fawcett 1995; Labadi 2007; MacDonald 2009; Meskell 1998). Research on heritage under a democratic nation-state also feeds directly into work on “heritage regimes” (Bendix et al. 2012; Geismar 2015; Hafstein and Skrydstrup 2017). This area of research builds from Foucault’s concept of governmentality (Foucault 1991), to lay bare the “conduct of conduct” in heritage practice and the hegemonic top-down influence of the state on defining what heritage is, how it should be related to, and who are its interlocutors. Such research might be interested in how democratic political institutions support the control and appropriation of heritage, especially heritage as “resources,” and further as “public resources” given the sovereign basis of democracy in “the people.” Overall, the examination of heritage under the democratic state will typically emphasize the power of the state, with democracy an accomplice or facade in the service of this power. As Seyla Benhabib (1996a: 7) describes, “The developments of the modern state in Western industrial societies created a specific kind of politics; a politics of domestication, containment, and boundary drawing. Advanced industrial democracies are heirs to this tremendous controlling power of the state.”

Democracy is not a single concept or approach to governance. The architecture and institutionalization of democracy within the nation-state varies, and

anthropologists and others have studied democratic states as “actually existing democracies,” examining the complex promises and limits of individual democratic state systems while eschewing “failed states” assessments measured against an ideal type (Greenhouse and Kheshti 1998; Holston 2008; Paley 2002, 2008; Samet 2019; Witsoe 2013). Political theorists meanwhile have looked at the diversity of forms and schools of thought on democracy and identified several prevailing philosophies. Amy Gutmann (2012) details several of the key formulations, including Schumpeterian democracy, populist democracy, liberal democracy, social democracy, participatory democracy, and deliberative democracy. *Schumpeterian democracy* takes a thin, minimalist definition of democracy that focuses on its procedural qualities: as a means for making decisions through an agonistic contest for votes. *Populist democracy* builds on democracy as a procedure by arguing democracy also has inherent value, in supporting popular rather than unpopular rule, and “people ruling themselves as free and equal beings rather than being ruled by an external power or by a self-selected minority amongst themselves” (2012: 523). Further, populist democracy recognizes certain constraints need to be built into the political system to ensure that the popular will is expressed, and that it is sustainable, that it will continue to represent popular will over time. These include free speech, the rule of law, voting equality, and inclusive citizenship.

Liberal democracy disagrees that popular rule is the ultimate value of democracy, and instead values the recognition of basic liberties, including “freedoms of thought, speech, press, association and religion, the right to hold personal property, the freedom to vote and hold public office, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure as defined by the concept of the rule of law” (2012: 524). As a result, in liberal democracies there is more of an emphasis on judicial review, checks and balances, and the separation of powers. In essence, liberal democracy prioritizes personal freedom since populist decisions could potentially curb those fundamental rights and takes as a starting point that an individual is able to retain more power by holding on to their liberties, than compared to exercising one vote among a multitude (under populist democracy). *Social democracy* extends the tenets of liberal democracy to areas of life previously considered outside the political system, such as to business and the family. This extension serves to better distribute democratic power, seeking to reduce social inequalities that could lead to the concentration of power, for example, from gender inequality or economic disparities. *Participatory democracy* and *deliberative democracy* we discuss further below, as approaches that see democracy as moving beyond the state, and that place more emphasis on democracy as a practice. Additionally, scholarship on democracy has also elu-

culated the specific challenges of *multicultural democracies* (Benhabib 1996b; Jagger 1999; Kymlicka 2000) and *postcolonial democracies* (Chatterjee 2011; Young 2000), where the forms of democracy mentioned above must be fitted to the instantiation of their complex realities: adapting to work across difference, finding mechanisms to incorporate robust and even intractable disagreement on key matters, and recognizing and addressing the continuing legacies of historical injustices.

From this brief review of different approaches to democracy, the point is that any consideration of the democratic contexts and projects of heritage must attend to this diversity of forms, both theoretical and as “actually existing” on the ground and avoid simplistic or superficial analyses of what democracy “is” or “does.” Several chapters in this volume examine the specific cases and issues of heritage under individual democratic nation-states, where the institutional structures, bureaucracies, and historical legacies of state violence shape different relationships between heritage and democracy, and different outcomes from these relationships. The first two chapters offer studies on heritage under neighboring settler-colonial democratic states, the United States and Canada. Jon Daehnke examines the case of Indigenous heritage under the democratic agencies and bureaucracies of the United States, where democratic values are not always compatible with Indigenous heritage, and therefore becomes sources of contention and dispossession. These include “democratic ideas of equal and communal ownership, policies that promote multiple use of heritage places, falsely equivalent views of duration and heritage expertise, and a view that promotes heritage as a right rather than a responsibility” (Chapter 2). Meanwhile, the chapter by Erin Hogg, Chelsea Meloche, George Nicholas, and John Welch (Chapter 3) addresses the democratic state of Canada, where Indigenous heritage comes under the purview of more decentralized jurisdictions and institutional settings, both bureaucratic and legal. Their study is particularly interested in how institutional change is mobilized and effected under this decentralized context, from the actions of individuals, First Nations organizations, grassroots movements, legal actions, and changes to professional practices and ethical codes. Moving to the case of South Africa as another example of a settler-colonial democratic state, Jasmine Reid (Chapter 6) provides a richly detailed account of a small heritage museum, the Fietas Museum, that memorializes the apartheid-era forced removals in a Johannesburg suburb. Reid analyzes the distinctive set of challenges for the country’s post-apartheid democracy, including the neoliberal individualization of historical trauma, shallow state appeals to multiculturalism and human rights that continue to reinscribe rather than question apartheid’s racial and ethnic