Whose Heritage—Whose Narrative? Disrupting Place-Based Narratives To Re(claim) Heritage Sites in Political Agendas

Sandra Engels

Sandra.Engels@gcsc.uni-giessen.de

Sandra Engels is a doctoral researcher and research assistant at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at Justus Liebig University Giessen. Her research focus lies in the politics of heritage and memory, visual and material culture, historical consciousness, and cultural mediation. In her research project she works on the dynamics of heritage making at sites/spaces related to democratic heritage and democracy. Inspired by the methodology of 'emotion networking' she examines the emotional/affective side of heritage making processes and the ways in which pluralistic and multidimensional accounts of the past are beneficial for mediating and doing heritage.

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_Abstract

The question 'Whose heritage?' is a central denominator when it comes to cultural heritage and the representation of the past in the present. It invites us to rethink who shapes heritage for whom, while simultaneously opening spaces for diverse actors to (re)-appropriate heritage and to disrupt its discourses and performances on different scales and scopes. Unsettled and governed by dissonances and controversies, the heritage pluriverse is a hugely diverse as well as competitive arena, that affects and is itself affected by disruptions and the positioning of alternative (counter-)narratives. This _Article argues that disruptions can hint at crucial issues in heritage spaces, such as the plurality of vested interests, as well as multivocality and individual affective responses. Through the example of St Paul's Church in Frankfurt and the discourse surrounding sites of democratic history in Germany, it examines how different stakeholders in the heritage pluriverse put forward very different positionalities and argumentative patterns in order to narrate their version of a heritage site and draw associations with particular memories and identities. The _Article traces how counter-narratives form a substantial part of the heritage process and demonstrates how disruptions can become a productive lens for mediating and doing heritage in a diverse and complex world.

1_Introduction

Whose heritage? No question could be more central when dealing with cultural heritage. For Cultural Studies pioneer Stuart Hall, it provided a point of departure to discuss how to unsettle "the heritage" as a national tale that proved increasingly incompatible with the diversity of (post)modern society.[1] It is a question that has shaped the critical discourse on heritage for decades, becoming a—if not the—major denominator when it comes to (cultural) heritage and the representation of the past in the present. It demands considering not only who the heritage is for, as Hall indicates, but also who it is from, with respect to both who heritage 'belongs' to and who is granted the authority to define, interpret, and delimit its meanings and values. *Whose heritage*, in this sense, presents an invitation to rethink who shapes heritage for whom. At the same time, it attests to the affective and competitive arena that processes of heritage-making establish through divergent and often antagonistic uses of the past. It opens spaces for diverse actors to (re-)appropriate heritage and disrupt its discourses and performances on different scales and scopes.

The question posed by Hall more than 20 years ago has not yet lost momentum. As we witness an increasing pluralization of stakeholders involved in the process of

heritage-making and the diversification of ways in which heritage and heritagization are used towards social and political ends, questioning *whose heritage* is becoming even more central to understanding the increasing complexity of heritage spaces and their representation. Although calls for 'multidirectional memory'[2]have increased, alongside awareness and even encouragement of the inherent dissonance of heritage[3], the divergent uses of the past nonetheless continue to fuel recurring *Erinnerungskämpfe* or 'memory struggles'[4] about who represents whose heritage for whom. At the same time, heritage discourses and practices have only vaguely shifted away from their restrictive mentality and authorized practices. As illustrated by the German Foundation for Sites of Democratic History, initiatives to foster more inclusive and democratic heritage agendas have increased in recent years. However, the politics and practices of heritage-making have not lost their tendency to overshadow, neglect, or avoid values and memories that deviate from certain norms or intents. Despite, or perhaps because of this, social and political actors engage with authorized discourses and narratives and intervene in the cultural representation and use of those heritage items on which they are based, appropriating and disrupting the meanings, values, and identities associated with them.

This predicament is the central concern of the present _Article. It argues that disruptions can hint at crucial issues in heritage spaces, including the plurality of vested interests, as well as their multivocality and individual affective responses. Following a theoretical outline of critical heritage theory, the _Article draws on the case of St Paul's Church in Frankfurt—a prominent site in German memory culture and a flagship project in the current discourse on the history of democracy in Germany—to discuss how different actors disrupt, or counteract, the officially sanctioned heritage discourse of the church as a site of democratic history. It does so by reflecting upon the diverging interpretations of two, effectively antagonizing actors engaged in the discourse surrounding St Paul's Church's (democratic) heritage: a decolonial alliance and the political Right. By discussing how disruptions to heritage spaces interact with the authorized heritage discourse, the _Article puts forward a more multidirectional and dynamic understanding of heritage spaces. This entails acknowledging not only how counter-narratives form a substantial part of the heritage process, but also recognizing how disruptions become a productive lens for mediating and doing heritage in a diverse and complex world.

2_Disruptions in the Heritage Pluriverse

This _Article focuses on disruptions to heritage, understood as acts of active positioning towards or against a heritage item. This understanding expands on what Hale et al., in an article reflecting on a collaborative counter-archaeology project, framed as "disrupting the heritage of place," referring to a process of "foregrounding aspects of its [a site's] heritage that are usually marginalised or invisible."[5] Disruption, in this sense, is a social practice that positions diverse, potentially diverging narratives to what is commonly produced as a collectively shared value and meaning of a heritage item. In the following, I thus approach disruption as an act where individuals or collectives expand or even counter authorized claims. Disruption is consequently a key term of analysis in negotiating the complexity of heritage items on a broader scale, mapping out different positionalities and—following the 'affective turn'[6] in the humanities and social sciences—affects.

Heritage and memory studies are increasingly engaged with phenomena whereby individual or collective actors "strategically commemorate the past in order to publicly address the dominant perception of it."[7] Concepts of 'counter-mapping' have been developed in heritage studies as a way of "recording alternate, 'hidden' or non-mainstream social geographies."[8] Counter-mapping gives voice to marginal understandings of the past and present—often tied to specific heritage items—and thus "shed[s] light on a form of counter heritage" that may be experienced, practiced, and shared by a certain group.[9] In this way, counter-mapping also aligns with concepts of 'memory activism' as defined by Gutman and Wüstenberg, in its call to attend to uses of the past aimed at transforming not only historical narratives but also the broader social, cultural, and political arena.[10] Such counterpoints to mainstream understandings of heritage bear out two important theoretical assumptions in critical heritage studies: heritage being a 'social action' that is continuously done and re-done in Harvey's sense;[11] and heritage being defined by an authorized discourse that delineates how it is managed and perceived and to which alternative perspectives can be developed and positioned in the first place.

Since its foundation in the 1980s, (critical) heritage studies has advanced a constructivist definition of heritage, suggesting that heritage does not exist as a given but is constructed through social action and agency. Heritage, in this sense, is a process where people create the past, a fabrication determined and defined by experiences and

needs of societies in the present.[12] Sharon Macdonald calls this the "heritage effect," whereby objects, places, and practices are turned into material that should be preserved because of their significance to a particular group.[13] The process of heritagization is, of course, not only a practice of passing on a legacy of the past. Rather, it is what Laurajane Smith calls a "multilayered performance" that engages with acts of remembering as well as identifying, interpreting, and valuing meanings in the present.[14] Heritage, therefore, provides a "mentality and discourse" to construct and negotiate issues of memory, place, identity, and belonging.[15] It is a process in which the present and the future are brokered through recourse to the past.

Crucially, heritage is not only done but also used. It affects and is simultaneously affected by two things: discursive power and inherent dissonance. Doing heritage has a discursive power insofar as it determines what is being said, heard, and passed on. It consequently shapes what is represented and made visible in the public space. In her groundbreaking study on the *Uses of Heritage*, Laurajane Smith introduced the issue of power relations in the "discursive construction" of heritage and its material consequences.[16] She coined the phrase "authorized heritage discourse" (AHD) to describe a self-referential discursive practice that expresses hegemonic power over the definition of heritage. The AHD (i) privileges expert values and knowledge, (ii) naturalizes certain narratives and experiences, and (iii) is often linked to ideas of nation and nationhood.[17] Simply put, authorized heritage is a canonical master narrative that sanctions a collective assumption about a shared (national) past.

The issues of authorization and power relations in the process of how heritage is created and sustained bring us back to the initial question '*whose heritage?*' As Hall put it, heritage "reflects the governing assumptions of its time and context" but is also "always inflected by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past, whose versions of history matter."[18] Those excluded from the authorized discourse or who do not identify with it can only establish and position their view in contrast to it, disrupting its context and meaning so to speak. The very fact that the AHD promotes "a consensus version of history […] to regulate cultural and social tensions in the present"[19] implies that for all constructions of heritage there are positions that disagree, perhaps even contradicting and rejecting the dominant narrative—and which the gatekeepers of the AHD tend to conceal or omit. As Hall suggests, the "chosen high points and memorable achievements" unfolding in the 'national story' of the AHD—

or what he calls 'the heritage'—also "foreshortens, silences, disavows, forgets and elides many episodes which—from another perspective—could be the start of a different narrative."[20] While some groups may disagree with how authorized discourses represent heritage, others may have very different opinions as to which elements from the past are important to identify, interpret, and represent in the present—and which not. The process of heritage-making is then not only about legitimizing certain positions but also challenging them in different respects and on different levels. Doing heritage, consequently, is not only shaped by power relations but also results in dissonant and possibly conflicting outcomes.

Indeed, critical heritage studies have long argued that heritage is inherently dissonant and that perspectives on the past are diverse and multidirectional.[21] This is partly because the dynamics of heritage are ambiguous in themselves. Firstly, heritage is easily appropriated for particular ends. It is subject to ever changing memory politics in which several voices aim to take charge of its (material) substance and hence its symbolic references.[22] While different political groups may focus on erasing one or the other element of heritage, they also deliberately accentuate other or generate new constructions.[23] Secondly, the gradual expansion of the tangible and intangible heritage considered worthy of preservation has in recent years made way for a transformative shift in the process of defining and managing heritage. General moves towards endorsing more democratic, participatory, and inclusive agendas in the heritage arena are evidenced by the pluralization of communities and stakeholders involved, as well as the diversification of heritage practices, performances, and functions.[24] While such attempts often bring their own problems in terms of authority and control over certain practices and narratives, they also likely bring about 'disruptions' regarding recognition.[25] When Hall identified "a rise of the excluded of a 'politics of recognition'" he also diagnosed their growing "demand to re-appropriate control over the 'writing of one's own story'."[26]

It is this kind of appropriation of narrative control in the (re)claiming of heritage sites that I approach in the following analysis as disruptions to the authorized heritage discourse. In so doing, this _Article draws on the idea of place-based narratives—which highlights the connection between the heritage discourse and the physical space—to examine different positionalities and attitudes towards the site in question in a more nuanced way. This approach also considers that different heritage narratives encompass

not only diverging viewpoints and interpretations of cultural heritage assets, but also different motivations as to how and why they should be foregrounded. Writing one's own story—in Hall's sense—as a means to generate visibility and recognition for one's group or narrative can consequently have various objectives and implications.

With respect to St Paul's Church in Frankfurt, I will therefore show that disruptions to the AHD can take different forms and functions, depending on the actors and their intentions. The analysis is premised on written statements by two political actors who refer to St Paul's Church as a heritage site in attempts to influence the AHD: the Decolonize Alliance and the Alternative for Germany (AfD). In asking how these different actors disrupt the heritage discourse of St Paul's Church as a site of democracy, the analysis takes the political dimension of heritage agendas seriously. In line with definitions of memory activism, this foregrounds, on the one hand, *strategic action* whereby actors explicitly target public memory to disrupt and ultimately change prevailing perceptions of the past, regardless of their political orientation. On the other hand, it considers the *relational roles* of these actions that are situated in shifting constellations of actors, environments, and symbolic meanings about the past.[27] By placing the disruptive elements in the heritage pluriverse in relation to the authorized narrative on the history of democracy, the analysis specifically addresses questions of belonging and identity in the politics of heritage.

3_St Paul's Church and its Place-Based Narrative: A Democratic Heritage?

St Paul's Church (*Paulskirche*) in Frankfurt is a plain and modest, almost inconspicuous red sandstone church building in the heart of the larger Rhine-Main metropolitan region, used as an exhibition space, memorial, and meeting place. The building comprises the rebuilt edifice of the city's main protestant church in the early 19th-century, which in turn was built on the site of a former monastery of the discalced religious order (*Barfüßerkirche*). During the revolution of 1848–1849, the church building was temporarily secularized and became home to the first national assembly (from hereon the *Paulskirche* parliament) in which bourgeoise representatives discussed the shape and characteristics of a unified German nation state and a democratic constitution. After the *Paulskirche* parliament was dissolved, St Paul's Church was once again used as a place of worship until it was destroyed in air raids in 1944. Since its post-war reconstruction, the site has been used as public venue,

particularly for award ceremonies (e.g. the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade) and commemorative acts (e.g. on the National Day of Mourning (*Volkstrauertag*)).

These historical chapters lie at the center of the 'authorized heritage discourse' surrounding the site. This discourse is realized through practices of preservation and presentation by heritage managers (cultural and political), consumption by visitors, and designation or labelling by both. Heritage interpretations of St Paul's Church focus on the site as a historical landmark and a prevalent location in narratives of democratic history. Frankfurt's city marketing campaigns as well as those involved in historical-political education have long emphasized the *Paulskirche* parliament and its relevance for the history of democracy, enhancing a historical memory of 1848 and the principles of the national assembly. Though this "invented tradition" (Eric Hobsbawm)[28] of St Paul's Church's 'democratic' heritage had gained momentum over time, it was only when a culture of memory was established in the Federal Republic that it was properly empowered.[29] The idea of St Paul's Church as 'cradle of German democracy'—as famously stated by US-president John F. Kennedy during his visit to Frankfurt in 1963—has become part of the vocabulary of the site in and beyond the city. In the post-war discourse of the Federal Republic (and well into and beyond Germany's division and reunification), it formed a backdrop for commemorating the birth of German democracy in order to serve a broader historical-political agenda.

Accordingly, the site is attributed an important role in national heritage—the main reason why different actors in the site's management have taken care of its preservation. This became particularly evident through the reconstruction of the war-damaged building between 1946 and 1948. With the centenary of the 1848 parliament approaching, the municipality of Frankfurt undertook considerable efforts to rebuild the venue of the first national assembly, making it one of the first public buildings in the country to be restored. Despite the general hardship and destruction in the wake of the war, this symbolic gesture was intended to signal a democratic new beginning grounded on the historical roots of Germany's struggle for democracy. The edifice in its reconstructed (though significantly modified) form has, however, repeatedly provided rationale for discussing the necessity of renovations. Refurbishment debates in the 1960s, 1980s, and 2010s have, at times quite heatedly, addressed the representativeness of the site as a site of democracy and the historical importance of the *Paulskirche* parliament. Persistently, cultural and political stakeholders have

underscored the building's historical meaning in representing Germany's struggle for democracy as part of a longer cycle. Significantly, they position the idea of a double cycle in the history of democracy around the site, in which the historical narrative of 1948 complements the one of 1848.[30] The issue of (re)presentation has consequently informed the (postwar) discourse about St Paul's Church as a historical and heritage site.

However, the site's place-based narrative is also subject to cycles and shifting dynamics in the politics of memory. While local strategies in Frankfurt to sustain St Paul's Church as a symbol of democracy were not widely acknowledged for some time, the recent interest in highlighting a history of democracy has recentered St Paul's Church as a site to narrate and perform new approaches to political memory of democracy. This development was tied in particular to the establishment of the Foundation for Sites of German Democratic History (*Stiftung Orte der Deutschen Demokratiegeschichte*) in 2018, a federally funded public body established to promote social debate on the history of democracy in Germany. As part of its agenda to deepen public understanding of democracy, the foundation has used St Paul's Church as a pioneering model in its federal project that maps 'sites of German democratic history' across the country.[31] Particularly in preparation for the 175th anniversary of the *Paulskirche* assembly in 2023, political actors from the municipal to the federal level reinforced the place-based narrative of St Paul's Church as a national 'site of memory and learning,' and 'a democratic heritage' that had to be kept alive.[32] In response to the federal attention to St Paul's Church as a site of democracy, the city of Frankfurt itself launched a project to enhance the historic site with the announcement of a new open space for political education. This so-called 'House of Democracy' aims to promote civic engagement and strengthen democratic values in society.[33] It broadly expands upon St Paul's Church's place-based narrative and sustains the site's value for heritage management purposes.

As a historic site, St Paul's Church has already become an attractive tourist destination. Since its reconstruction, the site is open to the public and serves as a reference point for city tours and individual visitors (local and international). Moreover, the foyer of the building houses a permanent exhibition dealing with the church's construction history as well as the historic event of the *Paulskirche* assembly. Since its recent redesign, the permanent exhibition (now also accessible online) extends beyond

the site's 19th century parliamentary status to include a narrative of democracy in the 20th and 21st century.[34] This also relates to the role of the site for above-mentioned ceremonial activities, a concept of the church as a 'speaking point to the public' and as a future platform for democratic discourse. Recent developments could now prove beneficial not only in securing additional funding from federal bodies, but also in attracting more visitors, which could in turn stimulate regional tourism. Either way, concomitant with the heightened public awareness and the further development of the commemorative space, St Paul's Church and its place-based narrative of a democratic heritage have already gained in prominence within political discourse.

4_Disrupting St Paul's Church's Democratic Heritage: A Post-heritage Critical Perspective

In recent years, we have witnessed an "unprecedented period of activism in memory politics," in which struggles over contentious 'politics of the past' have stimulated a mobilization boom over heritage and memory.[35] As a pioneering case in the 'Sites of Democratic History' project, St Paul's Church has received attention from groups who do not fully endorse the interpretation of the history of democracy advanced by the Foundation for Sites of German Democratic History. In 2021, the Decolonize Alliance, including the local association *frankfurt postkolonial*, published an open letter to the then minister of culture Monika Grütters (from the conservative CDU) and the working group 'Sites of Democratic History,' criticizing their "unreflected representation" and their historical amnesia of more uncomfortable heritage aspects like colonial histories.[36]

The letter posits that the project conveyed an exclusive and marginalizing tenor, especially for communities already largely absent from public discourse. The Decolonize Alliance particularly disapproved of the way the project's place-based narratives, through their unreservedly positive account of democratic traditions and developments, omitted that the history of democracy in Germany was always linked to colonial history. This, too, was alleged in relation to St Paul's Church, to which the project attached a prominent role and high symbolic value for democratic traditions in Germany. Reflecting on the historical event of the *Paulskirche* parliament, the signatories claim that this democratic tradition was always interwoven with an "emerging expansionist and pro-colonialist political consensus" as part of nationalist ideals of the time. Given that in the national assembly "an overwhelming and cross-

party majority voted in favor of the establishment of a German naval fleet and the promotion of German emigration to overseas colonies" the alliance claims that the *Paulskirche* "must be understood as both the founding place and moment of German colonial history."[37] The 'Sites of Democratic History' project, however, fell short in addressing this colonial history while also failing to incorporate POC (people of color) histories into its framework of national memory. The Decolonize Alliance therefore criticized the project as a one-dimensional, positivist historiography, limited to national borders and insufficiently attentive to historical contradictions, as well as diversity and inclusivity.

The decolonial critique of St Paul's Church and its restricted representation advanced by the Decolonize Alliance represents a disruption to the site's heritage discourse that can be understood as a post-heritage critical perspective. In media and literary studies, the concept of post-heritage is understood as an intervention (i.e. disruption) to a consensus version of national heritage. By evoking and contesting representations of national heritage, it forms a counterpoint to the heritage discourse and illustrates its fetishization of the national story.[38] Post-heritage, in this sense, unsettles 'the heritage' defined in Smith's terms as a "self-referential discourse" that naturalizes certain narratives and experiences of nationhood.[39] Media scholar Will Abbiss has introduced guiding elements for a post-heritage framework whose deployment would "provide a sustained challenge to heritage tenets."[40] These elements largely relate to attempts to subvert prevailing narratives, to challenge existing power asymmetries, or to overcome disparities in the presentation and representation of heritage.

To begin with, the decolonial critique demonstrates how an interrogative and subversive tone towards heritage narratives deploys a discursive repertoire to criticize what Abbiss identifies as prevailing ethos and value systems.[41] This, for one thing, questions the social hierarchies of the past, i.e. identifying whose history is written, whose narrative is heard, and from which perspective it is evaluated. St Paul's Church's place-based narrative has, so far, been predominantly authored and conveyed from a national, white, middle-class, and male perspective (the latter has only in the last decade been cautiously challenged by highlighting female participation in the 1848/49 revolution, e.g. in an exhibition on female revolutionaries curated by the Women's Department of the city of Frankfurt). As such, the authorized narrative has advanced a

story of national success. The Decolonize Alliance, in contrast, aims to force the acknowledgement of some dark heritage at the site, thereby challenging tendencies in heritage-making towards nostalgia—or at least pointing them out and disrupting them with critical review. By addressing how the official place-based narrative omitted the colonial ambitions of the 19th century national assembly, they, moreover, address the limits and perils of the authorized discourse and the way it naturalizes a positive representation and narration of the site's 'democratic heritage.'

In so doing, the Decolonize Alliance identifies what Abbiss describes as the ambivalences between an imagined past and a version of the present, showing that heritage can hold very different affective meanings depending on who identifies it and imbues it with meaning.[42] Criticizing how the official place-based narrative omitted more undesirable heritage aspects, the Decolonize Alliance not only pinpoints blind spots in historiographical accounts. They also suggest that heritage spaces encompass more than one (hi)story and identity, thereby creating a space to share and consider alternative affective responses to the heritage site. This underscores the need for a multidirectional understanding of heritage spaces in Rothberg's sense, whereby diverse perspectives and historical experiences can coexist and be negotiated alongside each other. This illustrates vividly how the Alliance performed decisive *memory activism* in line with Gutman's definition as "the commemoration of a contested past in order to influence public debate, primarily [though not exclusively] towards greater equality, plurality, and reconciliation."[43] He also suggests that memory activists, in their strategic use of and reference to the past, deploy forms of oppositional knowledge-production as defined by Coy et al.[44] Such interventions aim at reframing public debates and discourse, and disseminating alternative understandings and visions of the past. With this intention, the Alliance indeed produces a 'counter-memory' towards the authorized place-based narrative on the history of democracy that not only questions existing knowledge on a moral or social basis and introduces new information on 'untold stories,' but which also offers an alternative frame for addressing the (contentious) past. Deploying counter-memory thus functions as a "knowledge-based strategy for political change."[45]

Indeed, the decolonial critique produces meaning for socio-cultural realities in the present, as suggested by Abbiss,[46] thereby targeting a transformation of the commemorative landscape as well as its socio-political conditions. The open letter

identifies how colonial attitudes and mentalities within the *Paulskirche* parliament continue to exist through the heritage discourse as they are concealed rather than critically addressed. Condemning a "(post)colonial amnesia" in a "German-centered politics and culture of memory," the letter demands the inclusion not only of additional sites and spaces of migrant (hi)stories to the canon but also sets out a need to "develop an intercultural framing of St Paul's Church as a memorial site."[47] The Alliance, effectively, brings in its members' own sentiments with regards to the continuous marginalization of POC in the social and cultural arena, including but not limited to the construction of heritage discourses. In doing so, they try to make experiences of exclusion and discrimination visible in historical perspective. With an affective or subjective tone, the Decolonize Alliance renders individual perceptions about more inclusive and nuanced heritage agendas collectively, quasi universally relevant. They make a political statement for equal participation and representation in the discursive arena of heritage making.

With their memory activism and post-heritage agenda, the Decolonize Alliance not only criticizes the heritage discourse and performance around St Paul's Church but uses both to pursue a politics of recognition. In the politics of recognition, recognition is a bilateral process. It is sought by one social or cultural group and conferred by another. Smith points out how this process requires "an ability to understand and historically situate your own social and cultural identity," e.g., recognizing oneself as an inheritor of a particular colonial de-privileging legacy.[48] By positioning themselves within the de-privileging legacy of colonial history, the Decolonize Alliance used St Paul's Church as what Smith identifies as a barometer to measure "the extent to which the […] site—and its role [in] representing wider societal debate—is offering or not offering recognition."[49] The heritage site became a political resource to reveal the act of misrecognition performed via the non-consideration and exclusion of postcolonial sentiments. This use of heritage goes beyond positioning diverse interpretations of the past. It emphatically demands recognition of diverse historical experiences and hence diverse social and cultural identities to be included in heritage-making around the site. In line with Smith's argument, this does not demand the German population as the hegemonic group in the postcolonial constellation to take responsibility for the past wrongs (in this case the actions of the *Paulskirche* parliament). Instead, it only advocates for the representation of the 'contemporary legacies of those wrongs,' that is

the narration of the site's colonial shadow. Granting recognition to postcolonial legacies and the decolonial perspective on (national) heritage in this sense requires the hegemonic group to recognize itself as "inheritor of particular historically situated privileges."[50] Against this backdrop, the politics of recognition are also about negotiating identity, both one's own and that of others. Following Smith, emotive or affective dimensions at the crossroad of heritage-making and the politics of recognition thus work to re-make social relations and interactions. Disruptions such as that presented by the Decolonize Alliance, in that sense, also offer what Smith identified as a powerful resource in struggles over recognition and redistribution.[51] And the heritage arena is used to stage these struggles, as well as to legitimize them in the first place.

However, the Decolonize Alliance not only refers to historical voids and issues of misrecognition in the heritage discourse. It also addresses questions of material representation and the 'authentic' shape of the building, reflecting upon arguments related to monument preservation and the adequate handling of a site's structural substance. Agreeing to academic criticism of an 'architecture of reconstruction' that would attempt to "portray the national past in a positive light and dispose of its historical contradictions," the letter criticizes ideas to restore the 'original' (pre-1948) state of St Paul's Church, including the dome and spectator gallery that are absent in the post-war reconstruction. A return to the 19th century state would not only recreate an architecture of gender inequality since, in the *Paulskirche* parliament, women had to stand in the wooden gallery and were physically separated from the male-dominated national assembly (in which they had no voting rights). Moreover, such a reconstruction would overwrite the post-fascist monument and thereby cater to the impulses of far-right nationalist forces to embed a certain social consensus in the (urban) "heritagescape."[52] The Alliance's consciousness of dissonances and contradictions existing (and largely materialized) in heritage spaces shows what Abbiss calls 'a (post-)heritage self-consciousness.' This not only attests to a constructivist understanding of (human made) heritage. It also acknowledges 'the impossibility of complete authenticity' and recognizes (and condemns) how one-sided narratives are lopsided and hold considerable dangers in the politics of memory and history.

All in all, those who feel marginalized by the AHD try disrupting it mainly to claim visibility, recognition, and participation in a pluralistic culture of memory. This usually also means that they feel someone or something (most likely themselves and their own

positions) are misrecognized and misrepresented. As shown by the example of the decolonial critique of the 'Sites of Democratic History' project, actors who understand themselves as members of a mis- or unrepresented minority can adopt a post-heritage critical perspective and deploy strategic forms of *memory activism* in which they use disruptions as a resource to reveal the constrains and limitations of the governing discourse and suggest alternative frames or *oppositional knowledge* for addressing the past. As they consider certain narratives or actors missing in official representations, they not only reveal blind spots in the national agenda of heritage-making, but also emotional implications and affective nuances to apparently confined interpretations. Reflecting upon individual or group-specific sentiments towards a heritage item, they provide new offers for identity construction and historical imagination. With their claim for recognition in the heritage discourse—with which they do not identify in its present form—they also assert a kind of belonging to the heritage in question. Ultimately, challenging certain visual or narrative pleasures typically represented and mediated in and through heritage sites, post-heritage perspectives undermine the idea that heritage can be perceived and represented by a universal, uncontroversial politics of memory, what Hall simply calls 'the heritage.'

5_Disrupting Heritage of Place: Ultra-Heritage in the Guise of Democracy?

St Paul's Church and its place-based narrative of the history of democracy have not only been disrupted by critical-inclusive memory perspectives, but also by more bigoted and exalting activism. The broader rise of what is called 'illiberal democracy' in Europe and beyond has brought about an increase in what ca be termed 'illiberal memory.' As outlined by Rosenfeld, illiberal memory is a reaction against the global 'memory boom' and liberally oriented politics of the past.[53] In contrast to post-heritage critical objections, populist forces disrupt the heritage discourse in an attempt to position revisionist and nationalistic accounts of history. Indeed, disruptions to and appropriations of heritage discourses can work in different directions. Just as they can be used to position more inclusive and diverse perspectives, they can be leveraged to restrain and narrow the discourse. At the same time, offers of participation and debate about heritage assets can be misused and exploited against their original objectives. In the same way, populist right-wing forces including the Alternative for Germany (AfD) prominently use heritage sites like St Paul's Church to advance their political agenda,

demanding the portrayal of a more glorious version of national history, or what I call evoking an ultra-heritage.

In recent years, circles around the AfD have appropriated St Paul's Church and its heritage discourse on mainly two levels, foregrounding positions towards the preservation and designation of the site respectively. The first level concerns very practical questions of material representation and the adequate, i.e. 'authentic,' shape of the building in reference to its post-war reconstruction, to which the Decolonize Alliance also referred to in their open letter. In 2018/19, when the municipality of Frankfurt discussed a necessary technical overhaul of St Paul's Church, some members of civil society and politicians wanted to use the opportunity to intervene and correct what they considered as a failed attempt at rebuilding. Calling for a broad discussion about the outer form of St Paul's Church, social-democratic Lord Mayor Peter Feldmann consciously or accidentally nurtured populist hopes for a historical reconstruction. [54] In the city council, the right-wing populist opposition consisting of the AfD and the 'Citizens for Frankfurt' (*Bürger für Frankfurt*) voiced objections to the city hall's preservation plans. Triggered by an article by *Zeit* reporter Benedikt Erenz, which strongly condemned the "dreary building" whose "architecture of penance" suffered "cold neglect," they called for the restoration of the church in line with its historical appearance in 1848, particularly referring to the steep roof and the galleries that had been omitted in the modified postwar reconstruction.[55]

This historicist reconstruction campaign for St Paul's Church was, however, not completely new. Nor were the arguments. In fact, the populist and far-right echoed and appropriated a critique of the site's edifice which had been voiced basically since its reconstruction in the early aftermath of the Second World War. Over decades, conservative stakeholders have repeatedly contested and deprecated the modified post-war form, demanding a return to the 19th century edifice to provide a more genuine, and in their understanding more esteemed, representation of the historical site.[56] In their perspective, St Paul's Church is defined primarily by the memory of the national assembly of 1848, for which the building should provide the adequate framework. These claims have so far been overridden by architectural-historical arguments considering St Paul's Church to represent a 'double monument' in which the symbolic reference to 1848 and the national assembly is complemented by a material reference

to 1948 as a moment of democratic rebirth in the form of the Federal Republic, as touched upon above.[57]

Populist forces, however, continue to erase the second trajectory in this history of democracy from their heritage agenda, focusing solely on 1848 as what Liesner and Sturm refer to as a "German myth."[58] The issue with myth-making in general and here in particular is yet again a tendency towards one-sided and above all selective interpretation. In reducing the symbolic meaning of St Paul's Church as a heritage site solely to the national assembly of 1848, the populist interpretation not only falls short on historical complexity but also sustains a dangerous historical narrative: it erases the historical context of National Socialism which led to the demolition of St Paul's Church in the first place, and the acknowledgement of which, in turn, provided the planning committee of that time with the rationale for a sober and judicious reconstruction. Oversimplifying the site's historical complexities, far-right engagement with the built heritage of St Paul's Church sets out to reduce its heritage meaning to just those elements that make it useful to the populist front.[59]

Generally, the AfD's account of a national history of democracy is highly selective and disrupts the heritage discourse around St Paul's Church to augment a kind of nationalist ultra-heritage. The party's approach to history and memory is all about creating a positive national identity through history—thereby functioning as some kind of "protectionist reaction against the globalization of liberal remembrance."[60] Rosenfeld points out how the populist right uses a twofold strategy in their mnemonic agenda: *mnemonic negationism* rejects any forms of national self-critique (such as that leveraged by post-heritage positions), while *mnemonic affirmation* seeks to 'naturalize' the past by rejecting guilt, embracing victimhood, revising commemoration and falsifying history.[61] It is, indeed, nothing new for the AfD to exclude the Nazi era from its account of national history, a practice exemplified by the parliamentary group leader Alexander Gauland who once ambiguously described the period as a "bird's shit in our more than 1,000 years of history."[62] Already in their basic program, the party called for the "current restriction of the German culture of memory to the time of National Socialism" to be dismantled by "an expanded view on history" that also includes the positive aspects of German history.[63] While this nostalgic longing for a positive national memory breaks with the postwar consensus of anti-fascist, yet selective remembering,[64] it clearly conceals parts of the historical record and, as Schmalenberger

observed, adds new blind spots in the heritage discourse in order to (re-)interpret the past.[65] Seeking normality and rejecting (historical) guilt, it disrupts the hegemonic politics of memory by publicly articulating fascist memory.

In relation to St Paul's Church, however, this disruption and negation of Germany's culture of memory as a progressive approach to the past facilitating the advance of liberal-democratic values is additionally aimed at a concrete and ever-present material manifestation in public space. It thus also attests to Blokker's argument that the AfD exploits "the authority of architectural conservation with its power to determine what does and does not represent German or European culture and identity."[66] In this way, the AfD's instrumentalization of St Paul's Church demonstrates vividly how built heritage serves "to naturalize and therefore to legitimize and authorize populist positions by anchoring them in time but also in space and at [sic] places."[67] A historical reconstruction of St Paul's Church would put their demand into practice and materially attest to the falsification of the past as the "most extreme byproduct of illiberal mnemonic revisionism."[68] What is more, legitimizing such reconstruction in the guise of democratic history, would testify to a glorious and proud account of national dignity.

Indeed, the AfD was quick to join the rediscovery of a German history of democracy, thereby distorting the initial political-historical stimulus and intent. The party uses heritage to support its "claim to democratic legitimacy," using the guise and concept of 'democracy' to enter discourses well beyond the far right and deep within the mainstream of German society, as argued by Blokker.[69] This strategy was also implemented in the German federal parliament, albeit in a symbolic, mythmaking way: In 2018, the AfD parliamentary group decided to call its meeting room in the German Bundestag 'St Paul's Church Hall' (*Saal Paulskirche*). The meeting room was redecorated in 2019 with a series of pictures of German history. Titled "The German People's Striving for Unity, Justice and Freedom," seven large-format, partly colored graphite pencil drawings show mass gatherings on the path to Germany's democratization roughly between the Napoleonic wars in 1813–1815 and German Reunification in 1990.[70] One large-scale drawing of the cycle also illustrates a session of the *Paulskirche* parliament, prominently decorated with black, red and golden flags and garlands. The utilization of the German 'national colors' within the black and white graphics saliently narrates the purported foundation of the nation and state within a

linear history of democracy, while also subliminally implying, and thus legitimizing, the party's role in preserving this history.

Crucially, this act of appropriating St Paul's Church and its historical significance for the history of democracy also transforms the site's meaning as a heritage item. Whilst in the picture cycle, the Nazi era (as well as the socialist dictatorship in the GDR) is excluded and German history is told through only positive events, the focus of the design is on the crowds of people who are presented as the driving force behind historical developments.[71] The populist canon instrumentalizes the idea of the people to legitimize their own actions and beliefs. In this context, Erenz's argument that "this is where the people sat," used as an impetus to restore the missing galleries in St Paul's Church, becomes a political gambit. By imbuing St Paul's Church with what Blokker describes as a nationalist-civilizational ideology, it is "transformed from a symbol of a supranational democratic ideal into a marker of a specifically German and Western tradition."[72] Then again, the AfD not only positions a nationalist narrative towards the heritage site but also uses its heritage discourse to appropriate history before 1933 for its nationalist and revisionist historical agenda. While AfD representatives generally focus on the national rather than emancipatory element in the 1848/49 revolution and *Paulskirche* parliament, they equally historicize their own understanding of democracy which is based on an 'illiberal concept of democracy' and the idea of a biologically defined people. According to Volker Weiß, this allows them to integrate the *Paulskirche* into their narrative and to stylize themselves as the 'true democrats,' defending, as outlined by Rosenfeld, the needs of 'the people' defined "in partisan fashion by means of 'negative integration'—in opposition to an array of dangerous 'others'."[73]

Ultimately, the use of St Paul's Church within an ultra-heritage agenda also serves to consolidate the party in the wider political discourse and legitimize its status. In both the refurbishment debate as well as the parliamentary meeting room, the reference to St Paul's Church or the *Paulskirche* parliament provides a convenient pretext for right-wing actors to present themselves not only as the guardians of national history and identity but also as defenders of democracy. In a press statement regarding the naming of the parliamentary room, the chairman of the 'Working Group History' Götz Frömming, who conceptualized the '*Saal Paulskirche*' with its paintings, explained that this decision represented the party's commitment "to the democratic idea of unity

and justice and freedom."[74] But he also states that the reference to St Paul's Church was "an expression of our will to defend what the fathers [in the national assembly] fought for: for the democratically structured, sovereign nation-state of the German people."[75] In their self-image, they are national revolutionaries who fight against the establishment and for the preservation of national values.[76] This, however, does not address that their interpretation of democracy describes a "dictatorship of the majority over the minority," as argued by Weiß, and thus posits an exclusionary, racially motivated policy concealed under the guise of democratic legitimacy.[77] In the process of lending democratic legitimacy to their own historical-political program, the AfD positions two power-political allusions already examined by Blokker. On the one hand, they seek "to give the historical weight and authority of built heritage to the notion […] that the party is the immediate heir to the revolutionary 'spirit of 1848' and as such has legitimacy and standing as a member in today's Bundestag."[78] On the other hand, the AfD delegitimizes the other parties of the federal parliament, "suggesting that it alone remains genuinely committed to the history associated with the church and to the democratic principles and grass-roots popular will for which it stands."[79] Disrupting the way heritage is talked about at St Paul's Church and in the scope of the established German culture of memory, populist accounts not only add blind spots to the heritage discourse or conceal parts of it to (re-)interpret the past. In keeping with their 'post-truth' approach to manipulating the historical record to suit their political agenda, as outlined by Rosenfeld,[80] they also try to reinterpret the present and position themselves in terms of power politics and societal significance, molding real political engagement.

By and large, disruptions of the heritage discourse may not only entail an activist performance that exposes and tries to adjust the constraints and limitations of authorized narratives. Activist performances of disruptions can also counteract a discursive opening and attempt to reinforce its boundaries and restraints, thus also disrupting historical or mnemonic complexities. As demonstrated by the actions of the AfD regarding St Paul's Church, populist actors can seek to appropriate and disrupt heritage sites and discourses to promote a nationalist account on history and memory. Although they most likely feel misrepresented in the discourse, they want to reduce its complexities and dissonances rather than add additional layers to it. They hereby oversimplify 'the heritage' as a one-dimensional, easily grasped and uncritical legacy of the past. Populists, too, are concerned with the recognition of their positions and the

redistribution of discursive power, and ultimately work (even if unintendedly) towards a multidirectional memory. However, their primary objective is to contain and control the discourse through which they seek to promote a form of ultra-heritage imbued with nationalist and revisionist sentiments. By means of heritage items, the political Right appropriates a form of national history that they claim as their own, belonging to them alone, and portraying the only (historical) truth.

To counter right-wing attempts to claim St Paul's Church for a nationalist ultra-heritage agenda, Germany's political establishment (or advocates of a pluralist approach to the past) have to (re-)reappropriate the site and its heritage significance for a more open and inclusive understanding of democracy and its history. Levi and Rothberg argued that there was a pressing need for memory studies to engage with populist and far-right memory. This need applies just as urgently to heritage studies and politics. As a "site of contestation among political imaginaries,"[81] the heritage discourse of the far-right requires "continuing to recognize memory, in all its diverse, heterogeneous strands, as a vital resource for political critique that orients our expectations and might guide our actions."[82] This way, appropriations and re-appropriations become part of all political agendas in the heritage pluriverse, just as disruptions and re-disruptions govern the dissonances and controversies inherently present in it.

6_Conclusion

Heritage sites are disrupted by diverse and often antagonistic actors in both the discursive and performative spheres. Their meanings are neither stable nor permanent, and they certainly have no universal value. What Stuart Hall called 'the heritage' is becoming increasingly difficult to represent and sustain in a diverse society characterized by fluid mentalities and shifting identity constructs. The question *whose heritage* therefore deserves greater attention to reflect upon who shapes heritage for whom. When the politics and practices of heritage factor out the essentially dissonant and multidimensional nature of perspectives on the past, they also hinder—intentionally or unintentionally—a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of heritage processes. What leaves ruptures and latencies of heritagescapes untold, too, excludes perspectives that challenge or reject the dominant narrative—while giving room for (opposing) actors to position theirs. Unsettled and governed by dissonances

and controversies, the heritage pluriverse is thus a hugely diverse as well as competitive arena, that affects and is itself affected by disruptions and the positioning of alternative narratives.

Such developments are also evident in recent initiatives on behalf of a democratic heritage agenda and new processes in labelling and promoting a heritage of democracy. Current events in Germany—including but not exclusively around the rediscovery of St Paul's Church as a site of memory for the history of democracy—have illustrated that heritage discourses are in a state of constant flux, being shaped and reshaped by a multiplicity of users, perceptions, and interests. This _Article has illustrated—with St Paul's Church serving as a case in point—how different stakeholders put forward very different positionalities and argumentative patterns to narrate their version of a heritage site and the memories and identities associated with it. In the process they challenge its image as an eminent site of German democratic history, its physical and symbolic nature, and its (one-sided) mnemonic agenda, thereby appropriating and disrupting the place-based narrative advanced in the AHD.

Disruptions to heritage discourses can thereby take different forms, depending on which motivations or objectives those performing and positioning the disruption pursue. On balance, they circulate around claims of recognition and redistribution of discursive power, as well as the acceptance or intolerance of plurality and diversity in and beyond the heritage arena. It is, however, important to realize that the politics of heritage which these disruptions leverage—irrespective of their social or political stripe—is deployed to assert one position while ignoring and rejecting others. Each group of actors is concerned with the writing of their own story and, making this story heard, with appropriating and performing narrative control over the social, cultural, and political arena. No matter if these actors appear as 'warriors' who regard their own interpretation of history as the only truth, or 'pluralists' who believe that there is room for multiple approaches to the past,[83] those who interact with heritage assets on a political agenda or activist scene claim legitimacy for their narrative or cause.

Overall, it is not always straight forward whom heritage agendas serve and whose values and positions they prepare the ground for. In making heritage processes more explicit, inclusive, and ultimately open to intervention and re-interpretation, there is also a broader scope for systematic uses and abuses. Seeing that heritage discourses and narratives can be just as easily (if not more so) appropriated and instrumentalized

as sites and objects, those working in the heritage field or politically intervening in it should be alert to the political charge of heritage-making. We must be more sensitive to attempts that instrumentalize heritage for political agendas, and make our own practices and politics more attentive to the diverse interests and needs in today's society while not losing sight of the risks that open discourses bring with them. Recommitting ourselves to the complexities and contradictions of history and memory, we should be prepared to respond adequately when others point out our missteps in narrating and representing heritage assets. But we should also have mechanisms in place to prevent deliberate approaches to flattening and oversimplifying perspectives on heritage. The present rise in more illiberal forms of remembrance in Europe and beyond are an alarming sign of the need to address attempts towards twisted representations of historical (in)justices and the falsification of the past. As moves to solidify constrained and revisionist heritage and memory agendas through legislation spread, mandates for a 'patriotic' teaching of national history gain ground, and narratives of the past become blurred between real and fake history, the dangers for heritage politics to serve hostile real politics have increased.

Notwithstanding the motives and effects of disruptive agency, disruptions—in whatever dialectical form they may appear towards authorized or other existing narratives—are and will always be an inherent part of heritage processes and discourses. We have to address them more firmly, and understand their origins, goals, and tactics if we are to seriously and adequately engage with the complex dynamics of a gradually diversifying (post)migrant society. The same is true if we want to truly and seriously encourage a more nuanced, inclusive, and ultimately democratic understanding of heritage processes. At the same time, we must be aware that all mnemonic agendas fabricate and potentially manipulate a past that serves certain political ends—be they pluralistic or exclusionary, open to alternative versions of the past or ingested by a single truth. And that heritage, just as memory, does not evolve linearly but multidirectionally, fluctuating between different interests and values. It is therefore imperative to ask: whose heritage are we narrating, representing, and affecting—and what for?

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