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**Title**

Archaeology, Memory and Oral Tradition: an introduction

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## Abstract

This paper serves as an introduction to this special edition of the *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* on the theme of archaeology, memory and oral history. Recent approaches to oral history and memory destabilise existing grand narratives and confront some of the epistemological assumptions underpinning scientific archaeology. Here we discuss these approaches to memory and explore their impact on historical archaeology, including the challenges that forms of oral and social memory present to a field traditionally defined by the relationship between material culture and text. We then review a number of themes addressed by the articles in this volume.

**Keywords:** memory, oral history, belonging, narrative, place, heritage

Archaeology has a lengthy tradition of using oral history and as a form of historical enquiry it has long contributed to the production of public memory. Yet, recent approaches to oral and social memory undermine existing master narratives and confront some of the epistemological assumptions underpinning scientific archaeology. The active selection and construction of memory in the present has been emphasised, along with memory's capacity to disturb dominant ways of understanding the past. In archaeology these developments have been prominent in post-colonial contexts and Indigenous archaeology. Yet there are also parallel trends in Europe, where oral history and social memory are seen as a means to access vernacular culture and subaltern understandings of the past.

It was against this intellectual background that we decided to organize a theme titled *Memory, Archaeology, and Oral Traditions* at the Sixth World Archaeological Congress in Dublin in July 2008. Under this theme, as in this volume, we included oral history in the traditional sense of oral narratives based on first-hand experience, along with broader forms of transgenerational oral tradition, folklore, and social memory. These different forms of oral memory are frequently the focus of distinct bodies of research and publication. Nevertheless, these different kinds of oral memory intersect with one another in complex ways and all are socially and materially mediated to a greater or lesser degree. Their juxtaposition thus raises interesting and productive avenues of enquiry.

We asked participants to consider the following questions, which we consider important in the future development of archaeological research on memory. How should we conceive of oral tradition and social memory? In recognizing their significance, how do we avoid objectifying and romanticizing them? Does a dichotomy between memory and history still prevail and if so what are its effects on our understandings of the past? How do we deal with the intersection of written and oral history? To what extent is social memory disparate, located and fragmented and how do authoritative narratives emerge and persist? What roles do archaeological remains play in the production of social memory and what of other 'memory props', such as, texts, images, folktales, myths, and places? How are oral traditions and social memory involved in the production of a sense of place? What are the processes involved in the materialization of memory? And finally, how has a concern with oral tradition impacted on archaeological enquiry and what role does memory play in the discipline and in the making of its histories?

The result was a series of fascinating papers, leading to exciting and vibrant discussion. The articles in this volume build on a group of those papers, which have been substantially developed and reworked. We will return to these articles at later points in this introductory

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overview. First, however, it is important to discuss recent approaches to oral history and social memory, as well as their impact on historical archaeology.

## The ‘memory boom’

In the last two decades a concern with memory has become prolific in most academic disciplines within the humanities, as well as in the public sphere, to the extent that reviewers identify a memory ‘boom’ or ‘industry’ (for overviews see Connerton, 2006; Klein, 2000; Misztal, 2003; Roediger and Wertsch, 2008; Rowlands and Tilley, 2006; Taithe, 1999; Wertsch, 2002). Once thought to be the refuge of the individual, there is now much talk of collective or social memory (e.g. Olick and Robbins, 1998). Most commentators trace an intellectual genealogy for theories of social memory originating with the work of Maurice Halbwachs between the 1920s and 1940s, through to late twentieth century scholars, such as Pierre Nora, Paul Connerton, David Lowenthal, and Raphael Samuel (e.g. Misztal, 2003, pp. 50-55; Rowlands and Tilley, 2006, p. 501; Wertsch, 2002, p. 54). Halbwachs, a student of Durkheim, pioneered the idea that memory is a fundamentally social phenomenon, linked to the social group (see especially Halbwachs, 1992). Every group, he argued, develops a memory that highlights its own past and its unique identity. The social frameworks of collective memory, in Halbwachs’ thesis, mediate individual memories, and there is a strong ‘presentist’ dimension in that social groups determine what is memorable and how it will be remembered (Misztal, 2003, pp. 50-55).

Recent theorists, resurrecting Halbwachs as a founding figure, have taken up these aspects of his theory of social memory. The link between social memory and identity, as well as his emphasis on the active selection and construction of memory in the present, has had particular appeal in the context of a postmodern disillusionment with the idea of an objective, distanced historical enquiry. In the ‘invention of tradition’ literature social memory is regarded as central to ethnic or national identity. Actively constructed by political and cultural elites, it is seen as something that is inculcated within the social group through monuments, memorials, museums, galleries, and the public rituals of the state. All of these things, it is argued, represent attempts to fix history, and provide a sense of stability and permanence, particularly with respect to identity (see e.g. Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Lowenthal, 1985; Nora, 1989). From a somewhat different angle there are those who see social memory, or more specifically ‘popular memory’, as an authentic and democratizing discourse, a form of counter history that challenges the elitist grand narratives of national and universalizing histories. Examples of these ‘bottom up’ approaches to social memory include Raphael Samuel’s (1994) study of what he sees as the late twentieth century left-wing reclamation of vernacular culture and memory, and the *Popular Memory Group*’s re-working of Foucault’s notion of memory as a form of resistance to dominant ideologies (Misztal, 2003, p. 63). Here an opposition between memory and history can be seen where the former is positively associated with the ‘personal’ and the ‘subjective’ and the latter with the ‘public’ and the ‘objective’. As Radstone and Hodgkin (2003, p. 10) point out, the focus in this area of research has been on memory’s capacity to subvert the authority of grand narratives, and the concept has been used by scholars to ‘retrieve that which runs against, disrupts or disturbs dominant ways of understanding the past’. Klein (2000, p. 145) even suggests that memory has taken on a quasi-religious role in an age of historiographical crisis where it figures as a therapeutic alternative to historical discourse.

Yet there are pitfalls associated with this new turn to oral and social memory. The ‘invention of tradition’ literature risks implying that the dominant narratives produced through elite monuments and institutions largely determine personal memories. The idea of memory as a site of subaltern resistance is equally prone to losing sight of the intersection between personal and social memory, whilst at the same time romanticizing and naturalizing popular memory (see Lambek, 2003, p. 211). Indeed, collective memory can become associated with traditional romanticist notions about the ‘spirit’ or ‘inner character’ of a social group, whether the group is a dominant or subordinate one (see also Wright and Davies, 2010, pp. 197-199). Thus, Lambek (2003, p. 211) asks how do we acknowledge the salience of memory without contributing to its naturalization, objectification, or romanticization? Scholars have responded to this dilemma in a number of ways, as do the contributors to this volume.

To start with, an important strand of recent memory studies focuses on the practical and relational aspects of memory (e.g. Lambek, 2003; Smith, 2006; Wertsch, 2002). From this perspective memory is not something we have or possess. Processes of remembering and forgetting are associated with particular practices and particular inter-subjective relationships. Through these practices and relationships people engage in cultural processes of memory work through which the past is continually interpreted and negotiated in a dialectical relationship with the present. Memory then is a transient product of the activities of remembering and reminiscing, which take place in the context of social interaction, and interactions between people and their environments. In this volume the practices involved in production of social memory are explored by most of the authors, but in particular Casella and Jones dissect the social relationships and forms of interaction involved, whereas Cooper and Yarrow explore the limits of the social nature of memory when it comes to individual narratives and challenge the more extreme presentist emphasis in recent theories.

Another related thread in recent research focuses on the cultural forms that mediate personal and social forms of oral memory (Feuchtwang, 2003). Many have focused on how social memory is ‘text-mediated’, but a far more diverse range of ‘memory props’ mediates social memory including images, objects, oral histories, stories, folklore, myths, events, and places (Wertsch, 2002). Of course the extent to which social memory is mediated by these mnemonic devices depends to some extent on how far removed people are from direct experience of the events, people and places concerned. Though the chronological distance is by no means a simple matter of arithmetic with memories being subject to a kind of time induced decay. Social memory may be based on first hand testimony, or the experiences of others with whom there is a sense of intimacy, whether based on direct transgenerational family ties, broader ties of kinship and community affiliation, or even an extensive imagined community, such as a nation. The notion of ‘postmemory’ developed by Marianne Hirsch (1997) to describe the relationship of second and later generations to powerful, often traumatic, events that preceded their births has proved useful here. In this context memory props such as photographs and literature can become the primary medium for the transgenerational transmission of social memory (Gilbert, 2006; Hirsch, 2008).

In this volume, the subject matter ranges from first-hand oral history based on personal experiences within people’s lifetimes (e.g. Casella, Cooper and Yarrow), to forms of postmemory transcending several generations (Jones, Russell, Wesson), to oral tradition and folklore that subverts the linear chronological schemes of archaeologists and historians and embodies a sense of time immemorial (David, et al., Ní Cheallaigh, Norder). The contributors illustrate the complex ways in which material and visual culture can act as mnemonic devices

and the kinds of tropes or symbolic imagery they evoke (see especially Casella, David, et al., Jones, Ní Cheallaigh, Norder, Russell). Landscapes, ruins, monuments, rock art, personal possessions, photographs, and even archaeological deposits are all shown to resonate with forms of social memory. But in addition to the material world, it is clear that immaterial, or imaginary, landscapes and objects also play an important role in the transmission of social memory (see Russell).

The relationship between orality and writing in the context of social memory is of course particularly important in respect to historical archaeology, a field that has long been preoccupied with the relationship between material culture and texts. Thus many of our contributors engage with the role of texts in mediating social memory, particularly Wesson and Cooper and Yarrow. As Portelli (1998, p. 69) points out, there is no simple dichotomy between written history and oral memory; 'if many written sources are based on orality, modern orality itself is saturated with writing'. Historical narratives based on textual sources can enter social memory through television, heritage and museum displays, theatre productions, popular history books and so forth. Likewise social memory can enter written history in a variety of forms; through local history books and pamphlets, and through research into oral history, folklore and other forms of social memory.

Overall, it is now widely recognised that social memory is a form of relational practice, which is located, disparate, and often dissonant in nature. Social memories are composed of the fragmented stories that surround specific places and events; that are passed around within and between generations. They are not homogeneous, nor are they uncontested. As Taithe (1999, p. 125) points out social memory is 'a multi-layered terrain of sedimentary deposits of historical artefacts, witness accounts, oral histories, and forgotten and invented landscapes'. It is a realm of controversy, where people actively engage with the past in the present, mobilising memory to interpret present events and relationships and to inform the production of identity and place. As such it has a powerful hold on people's conception of themselves and their place in the world.

### **Oral history, memory and archaeology**

During the early history of archaeology there was a keen interest amongst antiquarians and archaeologists in oral memory, ranging from European folklore to Indigenous oral traditions in the new world (Gazin-Schwartz and Holtorf, 1999; Trigger, 1989). Oral traditions were routinely collected and used to attribute chronology, function and/or cultural affiliation. Indeed, initially the prominence of oral tradition was more extensive in prehistoric or pre-contact archaeology than it was for recent historic periods where textual sources took precedence (see Purser, 1992). Yet as a result, oral traditions became appropriated into the developing scientific epistemology of the nascent discipline, which sought to produce totalizing narratives, frequently framed by the idea of a national community. Ní Cheallaigh dissects this process in depth in this volume, revealing the complex ways in which archaeological and folk narratives about Irish ring forts interacted with, challenged, and reinforced each other in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the process she shows that oral perceptions had a significant if generally unacknowledged role in determining supposedly scientific archaeological perceptions of these monuments. However, ultimately, despite forms of resistance by tradition bearers, 'the rationalist narratives of science, which were being progressively touted as the quintessential markers of 'modernity'' triumphed over folk narratives.

With the firm establishment of scientific archaeology, archaeologists became more sceptical about the value of oral traditions in their work (Burström, 1999; Gazin-Schwartz and Holtorf, 1999). The trustworthiness of oral tradition was questioned due to its reliance on memory and intergenerational transmission (e.g. Lowie, 1915, 1917; or more recently, Murray, 1988). Archaeologists became increasingly aware that oral traditions rarely conform to the linear chronological, evidence-based frameworks of scientific archaeology. Furthermore, like European folklore, non-western oral traditions are frequently imbued with symbolic and metaphorical elements, as well as ‘populated by fabulous beings involved in fantastical happenings’ (Mason, 2000, p. 261). Archaeologists became preoccupied with stripping away the layers of subjectivity and supernatural agency that oral traditions embody, to locate fragments of knowledge deemed to be of real (objective) historical value. Mason (ibid., p. 264) epitomizes the more sceptical end of the spectrum in his evaluation of the use of oral tradition in archaeology concluding that, ‘oral traditions are more often than not road blocks than bridges to archaeologists aspiring to know ‘what happened in history’’ (see also Murray, 2010; cf. Schuyler, 1977). The search for fossilized information regarding the ancient functions and original forms of monuments led to a narrow perspective concerned with concordance or verification of oral tradition based on archaeological evidence and, for more recent periods, historical sources (e.g. Scott, 2003). African archaeology has been a notable exception in this respect, placing much greater emphasis on the value of oral traditions, particularly in the post-colonial era (see Schmidt, 2006 for an overview; examples include Andah and Okpoko, 1979; Posnansky, 1969; Schmidt, 1978).

Generally, it is only in the last two decades or so that a limited and sceptical position on oral memory, constrained by the demands of a universalizing scientific archaeology, has been challenged. Advocating the use of oral history in historical archaeology Purser (1992) traces a growing interest from the 1970s in the work of Adams (1976), Brown (1973), Schuyler (1977) and Schmidt (1978). Yet even in the early 1990s, such research was still in a minority and it is only in the last ten years that it has become widespread. In part this is a product of broad shifts within the discipline, most notably the impact of post-structuralist and postmodern thought on post-processual and interpretive archaeology. This resulted in a critique of the idea of a neutral, objective archaeological science, and numerous studies demonstrating that archaeological understandings of the past could be just as much a product of the subjectivities, interests and power relations of the present as oral traditions. In this respect, studies of the role of archaeological enquiry in the invention of national traditions and associated forms of public memory had a particularly powerful impact (e.g. see contributions to Graves-Brown, Jones and Gamble, 1996; Kohl and Fawcett, 1995; Kohl, et al., 2007; Meskell, 1998). In response, social memory and oral history became the means to explore the histories of communities that had been subsumed or marginalised by these grand, national narratives.

As discussed in the previous section, the authority of grand narratives has been challenged more generally and, like linear chronologies, shown to be the product of western modernity. This opened up space for more pluralistic approaches to the past based on diverse ways of understanding the world. Furthermore, in the spheres of heritage conservation and public archaeology, greater emphasis was placed on the meanings and values attached to the past and this also led to revived interest in oral traditions (see Purser, 1992, p. 26). Similarly urban archaeology is an important area where oral testimony played a crucial role (see Schuyler, 1977; Staski, 1982; Karskens, 2006; Karskens and Lawrence, 2003). In this context the public often expressed their own interpretive frameworks, which were frequently contrary

to those developed by professional archaeologists demonstrating the power differential between the two groups. However, the past few decades have also seen a shift in the power relations between archaeologists and their various publics, particularly Indigenous peoples in settler nations. New legal frameworks concerning cultural patrimony, the repatriation and treatment of human remains and land tenure have all played a role, requiring archaeologists to re-engage with oral traditions particularly over issues of cultural affiliation (see Echo-Hawk, 2000).

It is a reflection of how big a shift has taken place that, in his overview of twenty-first century historical archaeology, Orser (2010) identifies heritage and memory as one of the four key areas in current research. Much work, he argues, has focused on the role of memory in constructing and sustaining heritage as well as the role of heritage institutions in mediating public and especially national forms of memory. It has been shown that many of the most venerated places are those associated with elite members of society and historical archaeology has been used to both reveal and critique how dominant forms of memory are constructed and legitimated. One of the leading figures in this area in American post-Columbian historical archaeology is Paul Shackel whose important work at Harper Ferry and elsewhere led him to look closely at the relationships between elite and subordinate forms of memory (2000, 2001, 2003). As a result of this work, Shackel identified a number of ways in which memory takes shape in the American landscape and how it is influenced by race, class, and power. Memory he argues can be about forgetting or excluding an alternative past, creating and reinforcing patriotism, and creating a nostalgic heritage (Shackel, 2001, p. 657).

Historical archaeology has been employed as a means to challenge dominant forms of social memory, to provide more inclusive histories and to foreground those forms of memory associated with marginalised groups. Areas of concern reflect in part the cultural contexts in which historical archaeologists are working. Slavery and race are a significant focus for historical archaeologists dealing with memory in the Americas (e.g. Shackel, 2003; Funari, 2003). Labour relations and working class groups have also been prominent (e.g. McGuire and Reckner, 2003; Shackel, 2000; Walker, 2003), as in the UK and Ireland where class divisions are one of the main sites for the production of conflicting forms of memory (e.g. Casella and Croucher, 2010; Cooper, 2005; Smith, 2006). Indigenous oral traditions and forms of memory have also been a focus of research (e.g. Beck and Sommerville, 2005; *cf.* Brady, et al., 2003; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson, 2006; Zimmerman, 2007). And, in settler nations, including Australia, the U.S.A. and Canada, historical archaeologists have focused on culture contact sites, reserves, mission sites and residential schools (Colwell-Chanthaphonh, 2005; Lindauer, 1997; and see papers in Lydon and Ash, 2010). Other marginalised forms of memory have also been a focus of research, such as those of economically disadvantaged rural communities (e.g. Jones, 2010), protest camps (e.g. Marshall, et al., 2009), and sex-workers (e.g. Schofield and Morrissey, 2005). There is also a growing body of research exploring the production of memory in relation to specific forms of experience, in particular, displacement, war, internment, political oppression and trauma (e.g. Hall, 2006; Meskell and Scheermeyer, 2008; Moshenska, 2009; Schmidt, 2010; Shepherd, 2007).

The role of oral traditions and social memory in the interpretation of the past is, however, still a contentious area in historical archaeology. A serious re-engagement with oral traditions and social memory requires reflection on the nature of oral narratives, which are highly varied within and between cultures. Sophisticated forms of source criticism and contextualisation are necessary, just as with textual and material sources. As Purser (1992, p.

26) has stressed oral narratives are ‘purposeful texts that are constantly being created, revised, contested, and validated in complex living communities’ and these processes need careful consideration. Moreover, the absence of a linear chronological structure in most forms of oral memory challenges us to rethink deep-rooted categories in archaeological thought. As Schmidt (2006, p. 18) points out:

We continue to dichotomize our archaeological world as prehistoric/historic, literate/non-literate, and industrial/preindustrial – separations in historical archaeology that have alienated Indigenous peoples over much of the globe from Western historical archaeology.

Whether historical archaeology is defined by the existence of texts, the rise of global capitalism, or the post-Columbian modern era, oral narratives with their tendency to collapse temporal frameworks and attach meaning to ‘prehistoric’ sites in ‘historic’ times present a fundamental challenge. As Schmidt asks, when oral traditions and archaeology converge to create new interpretive narratives are we not engaged in historical archaeology whether or not texts are available and whether or not the societies we are studying are part of a modern global system? In this volume some of the authors consider subject matter that is at the margins of what might conventionally be regarded as historical archaeology: First Nations rock art; Irish ring forts; a village in Papua New Guinea dating to around 600 years ago; an early medieval Pictish symbol bearing cross-slab; oral histories of excavations; and tourist ventures involving imaginary landscapes. Each of these cases, however, extends the concepts of historical archaeology and oral memory in useful ways.

Above all, the use of oral memory in archaeological research offers us rich potential. It provides a means to understand how people in the past and the present experienced historical landscapes, and to see how meaning is created and negotiated (Gazin-Schwartz and Holtorf, 1999, p. 15; Myrberg, 2004). Furthermore, ‘oral narratives allow us to see through the intricate mechanisms of social reproduction, and expose contradictions and disjunctions within the symbolic and material world’ (Symonds, 1999, p. 113; see also Purser, 1992). For this potential to be explored it is important that the subjectivities, dynamism, and creativity of oral memory is seen as valuable in its own right. For as Schmidt and Walz (2007, p. 142) put it: ‘the contradictions arising from different oral texts and the congruence between the materialities and dissonant testimonies are at the crux of history making’.

### **This collection**

The articles in this volume explore the rich potential of oral tradition and social memory in relation to archaeology. Each has an individual abstract so we will refrain from offering our own versions. However, we do wish to introduce each paper and highlight a number of overlapping themes. As we noted above, these papers engage with historical archaeology in a very broad sense, including the challenges that forms of oral and social memory present to a field traditionally defined by the relationship between material culture and text (Casella, Wesson, Norder, Russell). In doing so some of them also engage with the history of archaeology and its epistemology (Cooper and Yarrow, David, et al., Ní Cheallaigh), whilst others bridge the divide between history and prehistory, literate and non-literate (Jones, Norder, Russell, Wesson). We have tried to maintain the worldwide scope of the WAC conference, with papers focusing on Australia, Papua New Guinea, North America, Ireland and the UK. The subject matter is also wide-ranging, including: Indigenous archaeology and oral tradition (Cameron, Norder, Russell); the role of social memory in producing community and national identities (Casella, Jones, Ní Cheallaigh, Russell, Wesson); the social memory

of labour (Casella, Cooper and Yarrow); relationships between dispossession and landscape (Jones, Norder, Russell); landscape mythologies (David, et al., Russell, Wesson); narrative construction and storytelling (David, et al., Norder); the interaction between the performance of archaeology and memory (Casella, Cooper and Yarrow, Jones); and oral narratives and the history of archaeology (Cooper and Yarrow, Ní Cheallaigh). Out of these distinctive yet interconnected subject areas we have identified five major themes that structure the papers. These are: Memory, identity, and belonging; Place and displacement; Storytelling and epistemologies; Archaeology as a medium for the production of memory; and Dissonant memories.

### *Memory, identity, and belonging*

Several papers are concerned with the intersections and tensions between belonging (to a social or cultural group or place), identity and memory. Within this collection the concept of belonging is evoked as a means for describing relationships between people, and between people and places. It expresses the human desire or need for a sense of home or homeland. Sites, specifically archaeological sites, can play an important role in terms of providing the material dimension of the past to which people express their affiliation, sense of belonging and social identity. In this context it is useful to keep in mind, Penny Summerfield's analysis of the complex interplay between memory and interpretation. She observes that:

People do not simply remember what happened to them ... they recall by interpreting it (2004, p. 67).

As many of the papers in this collection show, the relationship between memory, belonging and expressing identity depends also on tacit and sometimes explicit agreement about what should be recalled (and entered into collective memory) and what should be rejected. Across generations it becomes increasingly clear that what is forgotten is as central to group identity and belonging as what is remembered (e.g. see Radstone, 2010; Ricoeur, 2003; Attwood, 2008; Attwood and Magowan, 2001). As Schackel (2001, p. 657) notes 'elements of the past remembered in common, as well as elements of the past forgotten in common, are essential for group cohesion' (see also Ricoeur, 1999).

As discussed in the previous section, forgetting or deliberate misremembering can, and often does, disenfranchise subaltern or colonised groups. As a result there is a growing movement amongst these groups to reclaim memories and assert them into national and public historical and archaeological discourses. As might be expected such movements can create significant tensions, as Paul Schackel (2001, p. 666) drawing on the foundational work of Lowenthal and others reminds us:

[T]here is always a strong movement to remove subordinate memories from our national collective memory, minority groups continually struggle to have their histories remembered. ... [T]he meaning of the ... landscape is continually being contested, constructed, and reconstructed.

Several papers in this volume consider memories and oral traditions of the dispossessed, disempowered or disenfranchised. Although location specific, these case studies offer much to the developing fields of memory-archaeology.

The contested nature of memories associated with landscapes and in particular how this might relate to colonised or Indigenous groups is explored in Russell's paper. This essay attempts to understand attachments to landscapes and the role that memory might play in this, through an examination of imagined and imaginary places. The locations concerned are the

diasporic ancestral homelands of settler communities; the traditional homelands of Australian Aboriginal people and the invented or constructed heritage landscapes of contemporary Celtic-settlers which themselves are dependent on the removal of Indigenous people. Against this backdrop there is also discussion of the imaginary landscapes offered for consumption in tourist ventures, such as the Aotearoa/New Zealand *Lord of the Rings Tours* and the *Lost* tours of Hawaii. These ventures are compared with battlefield tours in order to develop an appreciation for the emotional memory work required to engage with landscapes with which people otherwise have little empirical evidence for attachment.

Reflections of the power and importance of attachment, group dynamics and the tensions and intersections between identity, memory and archaeology, also play out in the paper by Eleanor Casella, who undertook a detailed oral history and archaeological study of Hagg Cottages in Alderley Edge, Cheshire. Casella's integrated study was designed to examine the ways that industrialisation and then subsequent de-industrialisation affected the rural working class. Many of the previous occupants of the cottages attended the archaeological excavation and provided oral testimony relating to individual artefacts, the remains of the buildings, and the ways in which belonging to Hagg Cottages shaped their personal and group identity. The oral narratives helped to elicit the complex meanings and power relations in which the excavated objects had been entangled in the past, facilitating a more intimate archaeology. In the process it also became clear that the Hagg Cottagers' identity and sense of belonging was further developed and maintained via the sharing of social memories, interlaced with material objects. In an interesting turn, the excavation itself became a focus of these memories where the theatre and performative nature of archaeology enabled the oral histories to flourish and the memories to find voice (*cf.* Purser, 1992).

The shifting senses of belonging and identity produced through interaction with archaeological sites also emerge in the paper by John Norder, who explores Native Canadian rock art sites in northwestern Ontario. Norder contextualizes the rock art sites against the palimpsest of history within the framework of oral histories. His research demonstrates that these sites and their meanings are far from fixed. On the contrary, they are changed, re-established, invented and reinvented by the people who live in the area. Archaeology traditionally focuses on the production of art, in particular examining production techniques, methods and meaning. Norder shifts the rock art out of the context of its creation and instead places it within the context of a user and caretaker framework. As a result of this contextual shift, notions of applied cultural affiliation and traditional ownership are contested resulting in a perspective that reveals a remarkable memory phenomenon, which allows these sites to endure in transgenerational and transcultural terms.

Importantly out of this theme it becomes clear that the relationship between belonging, identity and memory often focuses on particular time periods as authentic. However as the work of Nanouschka Myrberg (2004, p. 158) notes this can be entirely arbitrary and subjective. Resonances of this are found in the papers of Cameron Wesson and Siân Jones. In Wesson's case he explores the conflicting views of the European occupation of Childersburg in Alabama, Southeastern North America, and the popular memories that are attached to a very particular time. While in another paper Jones reveals how social memory collapses temporal frameworks (Filippucci, 2010). In her research amongst coastal communities in the northeast of Scotland, two seemingly disparate and distant time frames, the relatively recent memory of the Scottish Highland Clearances and the more distant history associated with a medieval church, are in fact united as people draw on the past in the construction of identity, belonging and place.

### *Place and displacement*

Out of any discussion of identity, place, and belonging there must also be an acknowledgment of the role of displacement or dispossession. As noted in the previous two sections, displacement has become a prominent area in memory studies in archaeology as well as other disciplines. Indeed, displacement is one element in a broader field of memory studies that focus on traumatic memory (e.g. Hall, 2006; Meskell and Scheermeyer, 2008; Moshenska, 2009; Schmidt, 2010; Shepherd, 2007). Memory provides a means to negotiate such traumatic experiences, whether they are of a recent first-hand nature, or a product of the experiences of previous generations embedded in forms of 'postmemory'. Displacement and exile of course bring the issue of home and homeland into sharp focus, as highlighted by the Australian settler communities of Celtic descent discussed by Russell. Furthermore, as Jones' paper illustrates, displacement can become a powerful focus of social memory offering an archetypal narrative that frames the perception and interpretation of subsequent situations.

The essays by Wesson, Norder, Russell and Jones all attest that it is, in a sense, impossible to have emplacement and belonging without a kind of displacement. As a result there emerges an appreciation for the complex ways that in some contexts, in order for diasporic, colonisers or 'newcomers' to feel 'at home' they must first (dis)possess the land and (re)inherit it for themselves. Of course this is then at odds with the connections that the original, native, colonised or dispossessed, people have with those same sites or landscape. In appreciating displacement and the role memory might play, these papers support the contention of Walter Benjamin who argued that memory is ultimately vastly more powerful than imagination. Furthermore, dispossessed or colonised peoples are invariably moved to political or social action 'by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren' (Benjamin, 1968, p. 253). Such is the power of narratives of dispossession and victimhood that those whose predecessors have engaged in dispossession through colonisation and settlement often focus on some preceding traumatic experience of their own as a means to mobilise social memory as a basis for identity and belonging. In this sense, as implied by Benjamin, memory becomes a profoundly moral practice moved by commitments and loyalties to previous generations and the desire to seek some kind of justice for the hardships and loss they experienced (Feuchtwang, 2003; Filippucci, 2010; Lambek, 1996). Furthermore, as Malkki (1992) has shown, the concepts of home, soil, native, settler, and so forth, which lie at the heart of this moral practice, are also a product of the genealogical, roots-based thinking that is characteristic of a modernist order focused on the nation and nationalist ideals of self-determination.

### *Storytelling and epistemologies*

Telling stories, creating narratives, and the epistemological frameworks that these imply is a key theme in the papers offered by David, et al. and Ní Cheallaigh. The enmeshed, entangled and at times tense relationships between social identity, memory and materiality are revealed in Máirín Ní Cheallaigh's study of Irish ringfort sites. Ringforts, a common archaeological feature in the Irish landscape, are described in the archaeological literature as locales of early medieval habitation while they are also popularly thought of as portals into the supernatural 'fairy Otherworld'. Understanding the ways that these sites are perceived is more than a mere exercise in nomenclature, but rather a crucially important aspect of appreciating how people engage with, utilise and ultimately conserve and or preserve them. Despite elisions between folklore and scientific archaeology, the two are still predicated on divergent epistemological frameworks, different ways of knowing the world. Ní Cheallaigh's research implies

contemporary legal heritage-frameworks entailing the risk of prosecution may be ineffective in preventing site destruction. In fact, site survival may be dependent on their metaphorical value, as people are less likely to destroy a fairy ring than a ringfort. Ní Cheallaigh demonstrates that the continued presence of these sites (and indeed their absence) in the Irish landscape demonstrates the tension between oral tradition, folklore and ‘scientific’ archaeology and by extension between notions of tradition and modernity. Across the Irish landscape these different ways of knowing are played out in the interface between memory and archaeology.

The way that Irish fairy rings are remembered and memorialised is a fascinating example of the tensions between scientific epistemologies and those that might be regarded as folkloric. A similar connection is evident in the essay by David, et al., which explores, yet does not attempt to reconcile, different ways of ‘knowing’ about an archaeological or cultural site, known as the village of Poromoi Tamu, in Papua New Guinea. In what might be thought of as irreconcilable ontologies, the western, scientific and the local Rumu ways of understanding the site, its sedimentary matrix and the depositional processes that created it, are presented not in competition with each other but rather as simply different ways of explaining the same phenomena. David, et al. show how story telling is integral to memory production, but equally to understanding one’s place in the world. Drawing on Gadamer they argue that we come to understand history in places by way of ‘preunderstanding’ (the subliminal cultural, prejudicial notions that embed our actions and understandings), and that by framing and reframing the context ‘what we see is ... what we make of what we see’ (David, et al.). Thus, in a sense these papers show as Penny Summerfield (2004, p. 67) has that:

memory ... like any other knowledge, ... is constructed from the language and concepts available to the person remembering. The challenge ... is to understand the cultural ingredients that go into accounts of a remembered and interpreted past.

The papers by Cooper and Yarrow, Norder, Casella, and Russell also attempt to negotiate this challenge, to understand and appreciate story telling and narrative creation. In all of these, two or more ways of knowing about and remembering sites (and landscapes) are in opposition to and occasionally complimentary (but different) to each other. Like David, et al., Norder also engages directly with issues of ontology and epistemology drawing on the concept of preunderstanding. Cooper and Yarrow adopt a rather different angle exploring the nature of personal narratives in contrast with mainstream written histories. In doing so they draw out the specific kinds of ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’ that are co-produced in relation to particular social and historical conditions.

#### *Archaeology as a medium for the production of memory*

Archaeology is performative; there is, an undeniable theatricality about its practice that relies on an embodied physical activity, increasingly with an associated audience (Schofield, 2009, p. 190; see also Pearson and Shanks, 2001). It is perhaps for this reason that so many successful television series and documentaries are based on or around the archaeological discipline. Two papers in this volume (Cooper and Yarrow, Jones) are centrally concerned with the theatre of archaeology and the ways this interacts with memory and remembering. While another two (Casella, David, et al.) also show that memories are often given form in response to the practice of archaeology and especially its performative aspects.

In their paper Anwen Cooper and Tom Yarrow offer an alternative view to the development of British archaeology in the 1960s examining and interviewing those involved in the so-called 'digging circuit'. Through a subtle and nuanced use of oral testimony, memory and historical records, the authors do not simply present subjective situated perspectives, but rather challenge conventional accounts of 1960-1970s British archaeological practice. Importantly oral testimony and memory is not here used to merely confirm or contradict previous studies, it is used to explore motivations for joining the circuit and the interplay between socio-economic and class statuses demonstrates the connections between the type of archaeology that developed and the social milieu. Thus providing a very clear example of the relationship between archaeology and memory work.

In her paper, Siân Jones explores the intriguing connection between social memories of relatively recent events, in particular the Scottish Highland Clearances, and the more distant history associated with a medieval chapel and an early Christian cross-slab. These associations play out through the 'theatre' of excavation provided by the excavation of the ruined chapel associated with the village of Hilton of Cadboll in Easter Ross, Scotland. Detailed ethnographic and oral history work reveals how the excavated objects had a symbolic and metaphorical resonance, which served to collapse past and present in complex ways. Rather than being a process that retrieves information from the past to fill in the gaps in a fragmented body of oral memory, excavation is shown to provide an arena for an indissolubly social and material process. Here narrative coherence is created as people engage in complex processes of memory work involving a kind of 'shuttling' between past and present.

#### *Dissonant memories*

Conflicting or dissonant memories feature in each of the papers in this volume to some degree. By dissonance however, we are not suggesting that all papers show a general lack of agreement or inconsistency, rather the dissonance identified in these essays reflects degrees of tension and lack of harmony from outright contradiction to subtle shifts in interpretive emphasis. In several of the papers dissonance is at the heart of the discussion. David, et al., for example, probe the way in which Rumu understandings of the village site of Poromoi Tamu shift and change as the archaeologists conduct their excavation. Norder and Russell both show that for native or Indigenous people the dissonance can be a crucial aspect of interacting with and understanding the archaeology.

Dissonance and conflicting forms of memory are the main focus of Cameron Wesson's essay, which explores views of the European occupation of Childersburg, Alabama, Southeastern North America. Childersburg is popularly described as the oldest continually occupied European community in the present United States. This claim erases the Indigenous or native past of the area, even though the accounts of Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto (A.D. 1539-1543) have been used extensively by archaeologists and historians as ethnohistorical sources to reconstruct native pre-European occupation, social structure and political geography. The dissonance that Wesson identifies is in the local (white) oral tradition where claims are upheld in clear disregard for contradictory archaeological evidence. His calls for a novel approach to integrating archaeology and 'memory' rests on seeing the past in non-essentialised terms and allowing dissonant 'memories' a vocal presence, not only as a correction to popular views of the region's heritage, but as a means to enrich it.

This point, highlighting the tensions produced through dissonant memories and their potential to enrich archaeological enquiry is a good point to bring this introduction to a conclusion. We suggest that the contradictory conversations that arise out of research at the interface of archaeology and memory, often regarded as failures by past researchers, are particularly productive in terms of gaining a rich understanding of place (*cf.* Beck and Summerville, 2005) and of the past. As guest editors of this special volume of the *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* we are delighted to be able to offer up these papers and the range of topics and themes they cover. We believe that it is evidence of the healthy state of Historical Archaeology that we can extend the definition of what might belong in such a journal and what topics might be considered part of the discourse.

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