

## World Archaeological Congress 4

University of Cape Town

10th - 14th January 1999



### Symposium: Contested Landscapes and Landscapes of Movement and Exile

#### *Hunting Down Home*

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Hunting Down Home, the title of my paper, is taken from a semi-autobiographical novel by a Canadian writer, Jean McNeil. It is a novel about journeys—some imagined, some painfully real—in which the quest for one kind home is often the flight from another. Its narrative crosses worlds: from Kodachrome coloured slides of southern Africa—in which occasionally appear glimpses of a mother never known and always dreamed of—to an inescapable cultural memory of an emigration that was also an exile, one which saw the forced eviction of McNeil’s ancestors from one homeland, and their founding of another: in this case a Nova Scotia, a new Scotland.

Evoking one particular Nova Scotian December, McNeil writes:

“The night was impenetrable, transfigured by the vicissitudes of our latitude. The dark and the minus twenty cold gave the combined effect of walking through an abattoir freezer swathed in felt. The dog and I stood still, our breath hovering in front of us in great gauzy clumps. Across the gut of the Bras d’or lakes the lights of Big Harbour reflected the calm winter-black water of the lake, unruffled by waves, a giant oily slick. It would be seven hours before the weak dawn light, freed from the black mercury snake of the nightmap at school, would advance on the snow, its purple light creeping into crevices between the snowdrifts like the sun-shadows of stones. It must be nearly dawn for her, I thought. What would it be to wake on Christmas morning in Africa?” (1997: 74-5)

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She continues...

“The last thing he sang that Christmas Eve was Sweeney’s Gaelic ‘*Salm an Fhiarainn*’, the Psalm of the Land. He was the soloist; the company the chorus. He sang as if he were a priest leading a congregation on Barra, South Uist, Eriskay, Benbecula; one of those tripping-syllable places from which we had come.

It was a reedy, piped sound, tribal, minor-keyed, and Middle-Eastern in its wailing. It spoke of a bone-chilling devotion come galloping out of the desert, drifting across the velvet skin of Asia, carrying the historical migration of the Celts on its back.” (1997: 77)

Morag, McNeil’s protagonist in the novel, escapes from the disintegration of her foster-home and from the cold weight of history into a fantasy of an exotic Africa and a reunion with the mother that deserted her. The image goes beyond the personal and becomes a metaphor for the migrant’s ambivalent search for the motherland which once cast its children adrift.

Jean McNeil’s story seems especially appropriate in the context of this symposium on landscapes of migration and diaspora. Not only because she is writing from within a diaspora—and part of that Celtic migration—but because of the way she characterizes the landscapes of her narrative. The bitter “winter-black” reality of Canada; the vivid though insubstantial dream of Africa; the musicality of the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Such qualities seem to be embodied in these landscapes, but of course it is McNeil who animates them in this way, projecting essences of an interior or psychological landscape onto the exterior, material world.

McNeil’s novel is, above all, concerned with connections between people and places, territories from which one might either escape or be forced to leave physically, but perhaps not emotionally. Places of the imagination then, but places which may also be visited and revisited, reviewed and revised. Places of the past which may yet be places of the future.

At the discursive juncture of globalization and landscape is to be found a powerful trope in the notion of diaspora and homeland. These are relational terms like ‘the global’ and ‘the local’, each constituted in the other so that there can be no diaspora

without homeland—imagined or otherwise. Anthony Smith has written on the poetic spaces of the nation in which community and territory are fused in a landscape sanctified by immemorial associations of dwelling and possession (1986, 1991). In an era of transnationalism, rather than losing their potency, it can be argued that such territories have become even more powerfully symbolic. Robin Cohen, for instance, describes homelands lost through exile, expansion or emigration, but found again in a collective consciousness. Without denying the impact of global economics or the influence of nation-states, he writes that “transnational bonds no longer have to be cemented by migration or by exclusive territorial claims. In the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artefacts and through a shared imagination” (1997: 26).

Against such a setting, I would like to introduce my own research which is concerned with the ‘cultural flows’ that exist within the Scottish Highland diaspora, particularly focusing on journeys made by people of Scottish descent from the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, even England, to their putative homelands pursuing genealogical research, establishing or reinforcing ancestral connections, visiting what may be described as ‘sites of memory’, ‘sources of identity’ and ‘shrines of self’. Such journeys may be seen as homecoming pilgrimages: quests to find the self among the ruins and battlefields—the sacred places—of a national heritage landscape.

“I am deeply interested in my origins and roots,” says one informant. “Without this interest I would consider myself an eternal refugee.”

“Family history is a great help to orientate oneself in the world,” says another.

“I am the product of all my ancestors. Knowing about them helps me understand myself.”

The research is concerned with the way such diasporan Scots image and imagine their ‘old country’, and it examines what happens when such imaginaries are brought into contact with the ‘old country’ itself.

Finding oneself, one’s place in the world, one’s home, can be seen as a process of emplotment. We find our personal stories in the extra-personal histories of families,

communities, nations and diasporas. Madan Sarup wrote that, “it is in the construction of a narrative, the making and telling of a story, that we produce the self. The past does not exist except in the sense that we have to interpret past events and, in so doing, create history, identity and ourselves” (1996: 46).

The heritage landscape is one such context of interpretation. A system of place-stories among which we tourists perambulate. Some stories are explicitly narrated in explanatory plaques, signposts and memorials [slides]; others are less explicit in those sites left unmarked and unexplained, but which are nevertheless embedded in more complex systems of representation: perhaps inscribed on maps, recorded in archives, evoked in novels and films, recalled by ‘keepers of tradition’ [slides].

“When a story becomes sedimented into the landscape,” writes Chris Tilley, “the story and the place dialectically help to construct and reproduce each other. Places help recall stories that are associated with them, and places exist (as named locales) by virtue of their employment in a narrative.” He continues, “It can be argued that stories acquire part of their mythic value and historical relevance if they are rooted in the concrete details of locales in the landscape, acquiring material reference points that can be visited, seen and touched” (1994: 33).

A fascinating inversion takes place in such ‘sites of memory’ in which the past—the *narrativized* past of memory, history and myth—becomes externalized in the landscape, endowing the battlefield of Culloden, for example, or the ruins of abandoned villages, with a powerful aura. “The deserted place ‘remembers’ and grows lonely,” writes Kathleen Stewart (1996: 156). It is as if the landscape itself ‘holds’ the memory of the past and tells its own story separate from the subject who seems only to perceive it. Thus the ‘sense of place’ may be experienced as if it is emitted from or dwells in place itself, an *animus loci*, but such a sense derives from the experiencing subject, or rather from a juxtaposition of subject, place and the specific circumstances of encounter.

But there is also another dialectic at work, for just as the past may be objectified or externalized in the landscape, so the ‘sites of memory’—and thus the past they seem to embody—becomes internalized through individual engagement and encounter. This has the effect of personalizing history, of turning a culture’s ‘sites of memory’

into personal ‘sources of identity’. I contend that the search for self-identity may also be considered a quasi-sacred act—a quest as it were—suggesting a third epithet: that these places may be considered ‘shrines of self’ and their visitors, pilgrims.

“Ancestor hunting has been very much a growth industry in recent years,” writes Donaldson in the foreword to one Scottish genealogical ‘how-to’ guide, “‘part of the package’ for visitors from overseas” (Cory 1997: ix-x). Indeed some travel agencies specialize in organizing personalized ‘heritage tours’ for their clients. An example of one such initiative is the ‘Orkney Homecoming’, a ‘millennium project’ offering Canadians of Orcadian descent a chance to visit their ancestral homeland and including excursions to historical sites, a folk festival, genealogical research facilities and a gala evening “at which Orcadians and Canadians can celebrate their shared heritage.” A promotional web site dedicated to the event introduces it in the following way [slide]:

The histories of Canada, Orkney and the Hudson’s Bay Company are intertwined. That historical connection is a source of great pride among Orcadians, and the family and emotional bonds are strong. There are the well known figures of Governor Tomison and the explorer John Rae. But there are also many lesser known individuals, the hardy, self-sufficient Orcadians who left their homeland to link their fortunes with those of the Hudson’s Bay Company.

Resonances of the Orkney connection abound in Canada: in place names and family histories; in museums and archive collections; and in the buildings and artifacts of northern Canada—Lower Fort Garry in Winnipeg, for instance, built by Orcadian masons. Or York boats, distribution network for the traders, based on the design of the traditional Orkney yole and crewed by Orcadian sailors. For an Orcadian visitor to Canada today, the journey is as much about understanding his [sic] own past as understanding Canada’s.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, as many as 90% of the Canadian-based employees of the Hudson’s Bay Company were of Orcadian descent, and it is our intention to celebrate this unique heritage with a major Millennium project, The Orkney Homecoming.

Beginning in 1995...the Orkney Tourist Board and...the Great Canadian Travel Company have developed a project designed to provide those Canadians of Orcadian ancestry an opportunity to come home.

But the local—in this case Orcadian or Scottish—heritage landscape cannot be divorced from its representation in the global mediascape. The internet in particular—with its spatial and navigational metaphors—is playing an increasingly significant role in connecting otherwise dispersed communities to each other and to the places which become their emblems: localizing the global, as it were, and globalizing the local. I'd like to concentrate on this somewhat diffuse, somewhat difficult-to-place technology in the remainder of this paper.

Despite its global pretensions, the internet is clearly not a worldwide web: open to all. As Appadurai suggests, its users form a virtual community, “not bounded by territory, passports, taxes, elections, and other political diacritics, but by access to...the software and hardware that are required to connect to these large international computer networks.” Internet users are not a homogenous group, however, but are fragmented by their ever more precise niche interests.

Discussing the international body of participants in an Indian internet newsgroup, Ananda Mitra invokes Anderson's familiar statement that communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity or genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. Mitra writes, “The national newsgroups become particularly important in this respect since the electronic community is produced in the same way that Anderson's imagined community becomes a nation. The “imagination” that binds these members of the electronic group is the common memory of the same putative place of origin from which most of the posters came. The sense of community is based on an original home where everyone belonged, as well as a sense of a new space where the question of belonging is always problematized. Since the original home is now inaccessible, the Internet space is coopted to find the same companionship that was available in that original place of residence” (1997: 70).

It is interesting to note, however, that the invocation and evocation of lost homelands is not restricted to first generation immigrants, or to subaltern minority groups striving for a nostalgic sense of communality. Mitra's assertion of a dichotomy between place

of origin and space of current residence is complicated, for instance, in relation to long-established diasporas, particularly those of now dominant groups, where one might question the validity of this ‘problematic belonging’ and instead examine the articulation, in different contexts, of different facets of plural identities.

The diasporic Scots community has a huge web presence, reflecting not only its relatively high standard of living—and hence the financial and leisure-time resources to access and exploit the medium—but also a deep concern for the maintenance of Scottishness—almost invariably Highland Scottishness—through the telling and retelling of dominant cultural narratives: the clan system with its tartans and genealogies [slide]; conflicts with the English, climaxing, but not concluding, with the defeat at Culloden [slide]; the clearance or eviction of a people from their ancestral lands [slide]; the rupture of emigration and a cultural renaissance in a ‘New—to them—World’ [slide]. There are literally thousands of Scots-related sites, ranging in content and quality from well-financed schemes such as the Scottish Tourist Board’s ‘Project Ossian’, to the ‘home-made’ sites of individual enthusiasts. For this latter group, the internet seems to fulfil a latent desire to ‘publish’ oneself to the world, to have a place in cyberspace to call one’s own: to assert one’s interests and identity in a few electronic pages and a scanned image or two that someone, somewhere, someday might just stumble upon while ‘browsing’.

To help the interested web surfer negotiate this glut of material, there are a number of Scottish ‘gateway’ sites which index and promote related locations, sometimes offering other services such as on-line ‘chat rooms’ and e-mail news cuttings. One fascinating feature some such sites offer is a ‘guestbook’ facility, where, in a few lines, visitors are invited to leave some comment about the site or themselves. I would suggest something rather profound is being expressed between the banal and the intensely personal of these messages to the world. Here are a few examples from the United States and Canada:

“Hi. What did we do before internet and web pages? I love being able to find information about Scotland. While I am now an American, my soul belongs to my native country. I am looking forward to visiting this summer and plan to spend as many days as is possible on Skye.” [Delaware, USA]

“My ancestors came from the Isle of Skye. John Buchanan, born in 1748, came out with Lord Selkirk to Prince Edward Island. Any Buchanans still there? Love to hear from you.” [Prince Edward Island, Canada]

“I always enjoy learning about the land of my ancestors, and hope to travel there someday. I would love to see a chat room for gael-o-philes like myself to chat with folks in the old country.” [Tennessee, USA]

“How can I, a USA national, get a passport and/or some form of citizenship with the homeland of my heritage? I shall never feel like a whole being until I can feel and be part of Scotland. Please Scotland give to me some form of simple citizenship, for then I may no longer have to suffer the slings and arrows of mental and physical separation from my true homeland.” [Louisiana, USA]

“Although I love Canada (born and bred) I yearn to throw caution to the wind, hop on the next plane outta here and spend the rest of my days "at home" in Scotland. Spent part of our honeymoon in Inverness and plan to go back with our son. My grandfather was from Bridge of Allen (near Stirling) so I would love to chat with anyone from there.” [Toronto, Canada]

“My husband and I had always hoped to visit Scotland one day, but events here at home prevented that. He has since passed away and the possibility that I will be able to do so is very small. I was so pleased to be able to visit this way. I will revisit often to see what changes will be made. I love the photographs and hope to see more bagpipes and kilts and tartans. My mother was a Robertson and I’m digging away to find all I can about our roots. I always feel like I’m searching for home when I read and explore about Scotland. Thank you so much, Scotland, for coming to visit me.” [Texas, USA]

One important question that needs to be asked is whether this kind of nostalgic expression is restricted to the Scottish Highland diaspora or whether it is part of a wider cultural trend, not even restricted to transnational communities. Perhaps the search for home is a much more pervasive preoccupation in the late twentieth century. It wouldn’t be too inappropriate to see in these guestbook entries some analogy with the lonely hearts columns of newspapers and magazines. “Desperately Seeking Something” is the lonely-hearts inspired title of a UK television series which

examines New Age yearning for meaning in alternative, supposedly more authentic, life styles and philosophies. May we not see in these electronic “letters from America” a similar craving for something more real, more lasting, more meaningful. Somewhere to be grounded. Some place to call home. That some people find home in lost homelands—in searching for the names of their ancestors, their dates of birth, marriage and death, their abandoned villages—is perhaps simply a matter of Lévi-Straussian *bricolage*, these practices merely reflecting the cultural resources to hand: a surname, a clan tartan, a fragment of family lore.

But what has this to do with archaeology or heritage management, or with the themes of this symposium?

Well, if a state of metaphoric homelessness is indeed intrinsic to the postmodern condition, it goes a long way to explaining the current academic preoccupation with spatial tropes. This is not to deny the material reality of migrancy, of territorial conflicts, and so on, but it recognizes that such phenomena are hardly new, whereas the escalation of academic and lay interest in them arguably is. However, there is no denying that the sense of homelessness is a reality too, and in this respect, I hope I have demonstrated something of the interconnectedness of material landscapes and imagined landscapes. The archaeologist and heritage manager cannot afford to prioritize one at the expense of the other.

It is not simply that many physical journeys to the Scottish Highlands are prefaced by virtual journeys, for instance via history books, tourist brochures, novels, films, and, not least, web sites; but that these virtual journeys may to some degree determine what is expected from and experienced in the actual journey. Given that much historical and cultural material on the internet is generated in the diaspora and often subject to this somewhat nostalgic romanticism, this presents a dilemma for those organizations concerned with the interpretation, promotion and management of Scotland’s heritage landscape. Are they to pander to the popular demand for depoliticized fantasy homelands of castles and kilts, highland games and quaint fishing villages. Or, at the risk of alienating tourists—and tourism is one of the region’s largest industries after all—are they to present a more complex, politically-charged, more ‘authentically authentic’ image that challenges preconceptions rather than reinforces stereotypes?

The story of the Scottish diaspora is itself illustrative of this 'ironing-out' of contention, where a complex and ambivalent history of emigration has generally been dominated by a moral rhetoric of involuntary exile. Thus the image of a 'victim' diaspora is often invoked, while complicity in the colonial project, as part of the British 'imperial' diaspora, is overlooked. It should not be forgotten that the displaced of one homeland were, of course, perpetrators of displacement in the homelands of others.

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