

1

Community, Politics, and Heritage-Scapes

An Introduction

Landscapes are inscribed with the preoccupations, varied meanings, and narratives that have been passed on, reworked, taken for granted, openly challenged, and subtly resisted over generations. The stories people tell in and about landscapes convey the qualities and meanings attached to them. Landscapes anchor our senses of place, history, time, memory, and meaning (Smith 2006:168; Taylor and Lennon 2012:1–2). When places are marked by identification with particular communities and cultural diversity, they form “heritage-scapes” (Di Giovine 2009; Gillot et al. 2013), in which locales, things, and bodies are used to construct narratives of familiarity and difference. New England’s heritage-scapes tell us not only about “what happened” in the past but about politics and community relations in the present.

Take, for instance, the “vanished/vanishing Indian” narrative, an enduring storyline of local and regional histories that emerged in the 19th century as European-descended New Englanders struggled to create a cohesive origin story for the region and nation. Historian Jean O’Brien (1997:2) characterizes these histories as describing landscapes in minute detail, recounting the “glorious acts” of Euro-American residents, describing the establishment of Euro-American institutions, and lamenting the disappearance of Indian people. Resting largely on “hardening notions of race” (Mandell 2008:193), the narrative was attached to particular places that were sites of the “last of” different Indian groups or sites of battles and defeats. It was disseminated publicly in tangible ways, as monuments, museum displays, and such, and in intangible acts such as ceremonies, pageants, and performances (O’Brien 1997). O’Brien (2010:xiii) argues that

“the collective story these texts told insisted that non-Indians held exclusive sway over modernity, denied modernity to Indians, and in the process created a narrative of Indian extinction that has stubbornly remained in the consciousness and unconsciousness of Americans.” Since then, it has been assumed that colonization resulted in the assimilation and/or social extinction of Native Americans. A lack of attentiveness to Native American community persistence and popular expectations of Indianness based on racial stereotypes have contributed to the staying power of this problematic notion long after scholars rejected the overt racism that was its foundation.

New England is an ideal place to explore colonialism, master narratives, and decolonization efforts, given its distinctive colonial history. Settler colonialism began in the early 17th century. Efforts to extinguish Indian communities have taken place over three and a half centuries, but so too has Indian resistance.

Much is being done to vanquish the “vanished/vanishing Indian” plot line from the landscape to produce more just relations among Native and non-Native communities. In this book I examine four contemporary responses to New England’s vanishing Indian myth that were crafted collaboratively by Native and non-Native scholars and institutions and Native American communities. These efforts attempt to replace disappearance narratives with stories of “survivance.” Survivance is a concept in critical Indigenous studies offered by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor (1994, 2008) to convey the self-representation of Indigenous people against the subjugations, distortions, and erasures through white colonization and hegemony. The term signals the assertion of political power by Indigenous people, acknowledging that they are more than merely existing or surviving. The efforts I consider here engage the technologies of heritage—museums, exhibits, archaeology, landscape interpretation—to publicly challenge and create alternatives to existing narratives of social extinction that deny modern Indianness. Offered in public settings and aimed at largely but not exclusively non-Native audiences, they serve as interventions in popular conceptions of Native histories, identities, and modernities. They interrupt ideas about cultural distinctiveness, land and property rights, and race held by non-Indians.

With this book I join a growing cadre of scholars offering new analytical frameworks to study colonial and postcolonial contexts (e.g., Gosden 2004;

Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002; Oland et al. 2012; Scheiber and Mitchell 2010; Silliman 2005; Stein 2005). However, rather than focusing on the past, I am most interested in the links between colonialism and heritage issues in the present (e.g., Shackel and Chambers 2004; Smith 2006). In other words, I am concerned with how the processes set in motion in 17th-century New England shape heritage work today. As Sillitoe (2015) and others show, the collaborative turn in the social sciences has done much to address the colonial biases and power imbalances of heritage disciplines such as archaeology and history. Heritage work is shifting from an elite endeavor to a more inclusive effort, but collaboration is no cure-all. Its power to effect change beyond participant collaborators lies in the products and narratives that circulate more widely in society: the things, places, and experiences of heritage landscapes that people encounter, usually intentionally through visitation but sometimes unintentionally in their everyday lives. That is where I focus my inquiry.

Here I consider the processes and products of collaborative heritage work that ground historical narratives and contemporary community identities to shed light on the politics and community recognition issues that underpin them. I want to understand the way that two colonial consequences—political relations and community status—shape what is identified as important about the past in the present. I ask whether the narratives told by and about Native American communities through the things, places, and experiences of heritage sites address and/or reproduce social, economic, or political inequalities. If so, in what ways? These questions take me through the Native New England heritage-scape, to museums and cultural centers where articulations of community, identity, and heritage are overt and stated directly, and to the landscapes that museums refer to and abstract from because they too are the products of politics and colonial/postcolonial relations. Ultimately, I seek to understand how the past is referenced by present-day people to counter the vanished/vanishing Indian myth but also how the consequences of colonialism undermine efforts to democratize heritage.

I begin this introductory chapter with a consideration of historical narrative production in New England to provide broader context for the case studies that follow in chapters 2–5. I then entwine the concepts of “heritage” and “landscape” to build a framework for my analysis of collaborative efforts to change dominant narratives about Native Americans in

coastal and interior New England. The politics of these heritage places are my concern, so I turn to a discussion of inclusion, engagement, and status inequalities, particularly with respect to federal recognition and land, to point out the ways that politics inflect community-based heritage work in colonial and postcolonial contexts. I conclude by introducing Aquinnah, Pocumtuck, Mashantucket, and Plimoth Plantation, the four heritage-scapes I use to explore the entanglements of community, politics, and heritage in the context of postcolonial/neocolonial collaborative frameworks.

Making History and Heritage in New England

The erasures of New England's Native peoples flow from the making of history in the present: the process of historical production. During the late 19th century, Native Americans were erased from the present and fossilized in collective memory as people of the past. Narratives of Native cultural loss and dispossession became prominent in New England town histories written by amateur historians who pored over colonial documents while also amassing collections of Native objects by excavating Indian burials and sites (Bruchac 2007). O'Brien (2010) notes that Native Americans were often referred to as "remnants" or "last of" in these written histories (e.g., Hoyt 1824; Judd 1863; Sheldon 1983[1895]; Temple and Sheldon 1973[1875]) and memorialized in texts, monuments, plaques, museum displays, stories, performances, and commemorative events.

Anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995:2) describes this as the process through which "what happened" becomes "that which is said to have happened." Trouillot (1995:26–27) sees historical narratives as "particular bundles of silences" accumulated at different moments in their creation and reproduction. Archaeologist Neil Silberman (2013:213) captures the power of historical narrative production: "To tell an unfolding story—rather than merely recite a collection of facts or statistics—is to cultivate a potentially powerful subjective emotional engagement, while simultaneously offering a subtle meta-narrative about the inevitability of certain kinds of cause and effect." Silences are not neutral absences; rather, they reflect an active process of erasure that disrupts historical continuity and memory in the present and for the future (Trouillot 1995:48). The differential control of historical production—who has the power to construct narratives—is reflected in the presences and absences in sources such as

artifacts, documents, archives, institutions, and heritage sites (Trouillot 1995:48–49).

The process of historical erasure is not only the result of the pen, the voice, and popular memory. It finds legitimacy and validation in heritage disciplines such as archaeology and history, which elevate some things, places, values, and pasts as significant at the expense of others. In New England, white elites and elite institutions have maintained control of historical production since the 19th century. The dominant narratives of disappearance and loss about Native Americans perpetuated by non-Indians are paralleled in local, regional, and national historical narratives anchored elsewhere in the United States (McGuire 1992; Wilcox 2009).

Today, Native Americans are appropriating the sources, forms, and processes of historical production in their efforts to adapt to and resist the lasting effects of colonialism—dispossession, relocation, and social reorganization, among others—and to affirm their own enduring cultural, social, and spiritual relations to their ancestral homelands. The post-civil rights era has seen the resurgence of Native American autonomy and power in New England, with Indian communities asserting claims to land, cultural property, and political rights and actively engaging in historical narrative production for public consumption. These efforts are taking place in the carefully planned and managed domains of museums and heritage sites and through less proscribed forms of engagement with landscapes.

Historical production is situated in and references particular culturally constructed landscapes. Anthropologist Tim Ingold (1993:152) says a landscape “tells—or rather is—a story. It enfolds the lives and times of predecessors who, over generations, have moved around in it and played their part in its formation. To perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance.” There are features of the landscape that are widely recognizable—shoreline, hill, grove of trees, pile of bricks—but the meanings and remembrances of those features are culturally and contextually specific. The concept of landscape can be used to emphasize the centrality of dwelling in place to Native American and other non-Western perspectives in discussions of heritage in postcolonial contexts (e.g., Basso 1996; Brooks 2008; Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2008; Ingold 2000; Rubertone 2008). For New England Indians, relations to land and places changed over time, before and after the European incursion, but homelands and ancestral landscapes allowed people to reaffirm or rebuild kin relations

and community even in the face of dispossession. This point is clearly demonstrated in O'Brien's (1997) account of the colonial Indian town of Natick in the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the erasure of Indian people from history and land. O'Brien (1997:10) describes the collision of Native and English landscape sensibilities, characterizing the Indian concept of homeland as "the place where kin and community are sustained, [which] remained at the center of their identity despite the transformation of many of the traits that are usually interrogated as the building-blocks of identity, such as language, religion, political organization and economic systems."

Such relations to land and place were not understood by 17th-century Europeans and Euro-Americans and are absent from concepts of land as individual or collective property that were rooted in European legal systems. While the concept of "property" implies ownership and boundaries, landscapes are infinite and relational, requiring engagements among people and places. Engagements with place produce knowledge, emotions, and relations with others (Staiff et al. 2013:2). They also are political. In New England, their political dimensions stem from the tension between landscape and property that emerged from English notions of enclosure and John Locke's argument that private property would facilitate the productive and efficient use of land in America, an idea that provided an ideological justification for colonization. These perspectives account in large part for the politicization of New England's heritage-scape, where the idea of land as private property has been inscribed for more than three centuries. They also set the course for the erosion of Native autonomy over the 18th and 19th centuries as Native populations were increasingly pushed into enclaves in reserved territory (Mandell 1996:3). In addition, the notion of Native communal land has been oversimplified (Brooks 2008). Ethnohistorian Kathleen Bragdon (1996:43) argues that "the adjective communal does not adequately characterize practices of land tenure there [in New England]. Instead, the documentary and archaeological data support an argument for a kind of 'ownership' linked to notions of personal identity, descent, and intimate use, a constellation of factors distinct from European notions of the same period." The political tensions and misconceptions about Indian land makes landscape a powerful tool in narrative production because it forces a rethinking of land and the things grounded in it as bounded property and capital.

Land is also central to decolonization, as land is what is most valued