Witch City and Mnemonic Tourism
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Court trials and subsequent executions in 1692 of nineteen accused witches in Salem are important events in America’s history that are often studied. Today, ‘Witch City’ draws over sixty thousand visitors at Hallowe’en. While members of the Pagan/Wiccan community honour the accused, well known writers – Arthur Miller and Elie Weisel – publicly acknowledge the Salem witch trials as a lesson. ‘Agents of memory’ imagine they have individual and collective affinities with Salem, the place, its people, and the historical event. These agents develop different explanations for why these events occurred and see in them disparate meanings, thereby directing, shaping and influencing the ways in which the Salem witch trials are remembered.

Salem, witchcraft, agents of memory, mnemonic tourism, Hallowe’en.

Salem, a town in the northeastern United States, is known as the location of the infamous witch trials of 1692. At that time, Salem Village spread into what is now Danvers, Massachusetts. With the exception of a few sites, the Salem that welcomes visitors today is not the actual location where the notorious events occurred (Hill 2002). The town nevertheless capitalizes on the Salem name. Behind the name is the legacy of witchcraft that has been forgotten, realized, re-created and re-imagined throughout many generations.¹

In the twenty-first century, Salem continues to develop as a popular tourist site known as ‘Witch City’. An image of a witch riding a broomstick has replaced the official town emblem of a Chinese merchant representing the region’s China trade (Roach 2002). Salem is host to
tourists who visit attractions associated with the Salem witch trials of 1692. The expansion of the tourism infrastructure is testimony to Salem’s success as a destination.

Salem is a site for what could be called mnemonic tourism. This type of tourism means to jog our memory of, transport us to, or more generally base its products on expired places, epochs and peoples. Agents of collective memory translate the past into materially and culturally produced objects and ideas that become articulated within sociophysical mnemonic landscapes. Within these landscapes, events that existed in real physical places in the past continue to exist through mnemonic tourism in the present. While the Salem witch trials of 1692 are understood and remembered differently by different people, through the tourism industry a part of Salem has become a themed environment (Gottdeiner 1997) that generates ‘a narrative pattern, a kind of memory device that draws associations and establishes relations between images and places, resemblances and meanings’ (Boyer 1992).

This article presents preliminary observations on Witch City’s mnemonic tourism, its agents and conflicts, over Salem’s local memory. ‘Agents of memory’ possess real and imagined types of symbolic capital that serve as impetus for undertaking memory projects. Through mnemonic tourism, relationships with past legacies and biographies of individuals are formed. Collective memory is complicated by elements of spectacle and dramaturgy, for both are an integral part of mnemonic tourism that can be observed during Hallowe’en, the peak of the tourism season and Salem’s most dramatic time of year.

The growing numbers who have access to historical archives and artefacts and the rate at which public commemorative sites are being constructed prompt us to take into account those who take an active role in the practical aspects of producing and maintaining modes of remembering: the ‘agents of memory’.² How these agents of memory construct and articulate the past changes not only in the ways that historical events and peoples are recalled and revisited but also how their articulations take a material form in space (Barthel 1996; Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002). An agent of memory could be anyone involved in interpretation and dissemination of the past, from the mass media, to an employee at a visitors’ centre in a historical town, or a prominent official who supports a local museum. These agents ‘do something’ with memory.
Agents of memory are individuals or groups empowered or backed by (financial, affective, political etc.) resources with different motives to engage the past in creative ways.

**Burgeoning Salem: The Witch Tourism Industry**

The origins of Salem’s nickname are debatable, but it was probably first used late in the nineteenth century when A.C. Pettingell’s wholesale fish company sold products under the brand name *Witch City*. Both Arthur Miller’s 1952 tour of Salem and the visit during the 1970s of the cast and crew of the television series *Bewitched* contributed to the town’s transformation in the popular imagination from Salem into Witch City. Developments in the local tourism trade have made Salem an inimitable spot, a site for reverence as well as entertainment. The local historical museum, the Peabody Essex Museum, features exhibits associated with Salem’s history, focusing particularly on the period of trading with China. Peabody’s Phillips Library preserves a collection of rare books and manuscripts including some of the original documents from the Salem witch trials.

Today, Salem continues to develop as a popular tourist destination attracting visitors to cultural and historical products associated with these events. Little is known about what exactly happened during these trials. Based on some remaining documents and artefacts, scholars have confirmed that villagers of Salem accused and persecuted their neighbours for practising witchcraft. All together, twenty-four people died, including one child. Nineteen people were hanged, four died in jail, and one was tortured to death. Seventeen of the victims were women and seven were men.

The Witch Museum, the Witch History Museum, the Salem Witch Village, the Witch Dungeon Museum and the Witch House provide guided tours of recreated historical sites where costumed actors perform reenactments of the events of the seventeenth-century Salem Village. Some of these museums prefer to use *tableaux vivants* to capture the imagination of their visitors. Wax figures are posed in scenes imagined from agents’ interpretations of textual accounts; ‘afflicted girls’ crane their necks toward ‘the accused’ in a courtroom. A figure of Giles Cory – one of the accused who was ‘pressed to death’ when a wooden board was placed upon his
chest and stones were incrementally piled up on that board as the executioners sought to get a confession out of him – is presented in a ‘death-Pose’. Situated around these attractions are the accessories of a tourism trade not unlike those found in a theme park. Wooden witches stirring caldrons have cut-out holes for faces; visitors insert their own faces, and are instantly transformed into witches for family photographs. Several Salem souvenir shops play on the appeal of the witch imagery by offering ‘witch kitsch’ such as the ‘witch logo’ on magnets, bumper stickers and t-shirts. Other retail stores supply tools and neopagan paraphernalia such as magic spell books, magical herbs, cauldrons and candles for altars.

The Bedrock of Memory: Uncovering, Burying and Guarding the Past

We do not really know what the witch trials meant to the villagers in 1692, but they certainly meant something different to the families of those accused than to those related to the complainants. Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864), the prominent literary figure of the American Renaissance, was born in Salem and is a direct descendent of John Hathorne (1641–1717), one of the judges in the Salem witch trials. Hawthorne changed his name because of this relation with John Hathorne, the ‘hanging judge’.

In the Charter Street Cemetery, also known as ‘The Old Burying Point’ (established in 1637), John Hathorne’s grave marker⁴ becomes a cultural artefact that speaks of the complexity of social memory. Custom says that in remembering the dead – by marking where he is buried – Hathorne’s family obliged, but the engraver provided a minimum amount of information (i.e. his name and date of death). Also, the engraver did not spell his name correctly, and various letters are missing. Other markers in the area etched during that time, including markers made by the same engraver, are much more accurate. Some time later letters were added haphazardly, some inserted above or to the side of the words to which they should have been adjoined. Today, the original marker has been reinforced, encased in a new stone frame to protect it from erosion.

Recently, a collection of essays entitled ‘Salem: Place, Myth, and Memory’ (Morrison and Schultz 2004) has been published; the editors hope the book ‘challenges readers to resurrect the neglected pasts of a
historic site and to reflect on the many ways that a place can be imagined and reinterpreted’. Collective memory is itself a dynamic social institution that involves the piling up of complex social relationships, cultural forms and practices. With each new generation, meaning associated with historical objects is re-interpreted until the meanings given to objects by their original users are buried in the substratum of memory (Delyser 1999). In other words, Witch City is a conceptual ground inhabited by different agents of memory, including community members and transient outsiders. Not surprisingly, these people have different points of view about the local collective memory. The Salem witch trials are events buried in time but also in the rubble of collective efforts to do something with their memory.

Today Salem is rich with different ethnic neighbourhoods and groups including, but not limited to, Italians, Dominicans and French Canadians. Demographically, Salem as a community reflects its history as a mill town that attracted immigrants from Canada and Europe. With the focus on witch trials, Salem’s culture and history is largely overlooked (Chomsky 2004). Mike, a native of Salem and a key informant, is forty-eight years old and identifies himself as an Italian American and a native of Salem. Mike says that he does not feel connected to the witch trials and their contemporary representations. He attributes his sense of being disenfranchised from Salem’s culture industry, including museum, historical artefacts, and materials related to the trials, to his ethnic background.

My family was Italian. We lived there but it wasn’t really connected to that [witch] stuff except … if a relative came they may say … can we go to the Witch House? … those were the things you would do that would connect you to the history of the town. There’s a very definite separation in Salem between the ethnic groups and the sort of downtown people who kind of control the history … like the museum people. … Families from the Italian neighbourhood never go [downtown] because it was very elitist. … There was a sort of a WASPy moat around [the] records of the trials … if you feel that somebody doesn’t want you then you just don’t go to visit their house and that’s kind of what it is – it’s like their house. We did our thing and they did their thing.
Conflict situations can arise not only from contrasting perceptions of the past but also from people’s figurative as well as literal claims to ownership over historical artefacts, people and events. Even though he is able to connect to the town and its history by visiting Salem’s historical sites and thereby actively participate in acknowledging and experiencing Salem’s history, Mike feels like Salem’s history does not belong to him, his family or the Italian-American community. As he sees it, the town’s history is held in reserve for certain others. The museum people, as he calls them, have control over history itself. The records of the trials and other material artefacts were not relics sought out by the Italian Americans he knew. Education about the events was avoided because families from his neighbourhood felt that this particular history was in the hands of the WASPs, meaning white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, an expression for a politically influential social elite residing primarily in the northeastern United States, whose roots are European Protestant. This native and others from his Italian-American community did not feel comfortable visiting the town’s local historical museum.

Similar concerns are raised by Katherine, a tourist who first visited Salem in 1992. Katherine, a white female, is sixty-two years old and considers herself a regular visitor to the city. Mike and Katherine each in their own way represent a group of people who are enthusiasts of Salem’s history and eager to talk about the city. Their responses bring out issues related to the many agents involved in forming a themed environment and the various conflicts that become manifest in this process. Reading Arthur Miller’s play, The Crucible (1960), discussed in more detail below, piqued Katherine’s interest in the town and its history. Since then she has visited Salem once every year. This regular visitor reports that she feels ‘a tremendous bond, tie, connection with Salem and concern about Salem’. She expresses concerns similar to Mike’s, regarding the ownership of interpretation of history and actual historical artefacts. Both object to the way one museum in town fastidiously judges what to do with materials related to the trials. While the native attributes the monopoly over archives and artefacts to ‘the museum people’, the visitor also scrutinizes the behaviour of employees at the same museum, and attributes the handling of the events to the ‘upper classes’, ‘old money’ and those with familial links to the 1692 community.
They see it as a blot on U.S. history. There is a long history of upper-class people in Salem who lived there, whose ancestors go back [to the times of the Trials so that] anything to do with the witch trials is demeaning ... it’s ‘old money’. ... The feeling [that the trials were a blot] has been there ever since it happened. ... [Now there is] a feeling of being invaded by tourists. But Salem needs the money because there is not much industry there now. The witch trials have an incredible hold on people’s imaginations [and these people whose ancestors lived there during the trials] wish that [this] would go away.

The power of agents involved in how particular events are remembered, be it individual or collective, varies greatly. How a particular event will or will not be commemorated depends not only on the needs of the present but also on the type and level of symbolic capital different agents have at their disposal (Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002). Mike and Katherine both feel powerless in relation to history in a place where others take control of its interpretation and its material expression. Mike claims others stake their claim on actual material artefacts. Katherine surmises that some influential residents would prefer to hide from view what happened in Salem because it stains the memory of the past of their own families.

Today, more than three hundred years after these events, the tourism industry has emerged as another powerful agent in the decision-making process about how particular historical material will be handled. For Mike, Salem is where he grew up. It felt like any other town. References to witches, essentially tied to an extraordinary event, were incorporated into the mundane. The Salem Witches was the name of the local football team. Dairy Witch was the familiar spot to get ice cream. Gallows Hill Park\(^5\) was a popular place to play. For Mike, these places were not connected to some event in time past but branded by the present-day popular cultural icon. These places were nothing more than a football team, an ice cream parlour and a park. Mike was able to watch many of the present-day tourist attractions come into existence. He does remember the prevalence of witch imagery but he says he grew up without really knowing what happened in Salem in 1692:

It was kind of a fun little thing. You didn’t know what it was and there was the witch house ... you also didn’t know what that was until you
got a little older and realized it was one of the judge’s houses. We always thought that witches lived there or something.

Today, the town has come to be defined primarily through the theme of witchcraft and witches. Mike witnessed the cast and crew of the television show *Bewitched* filming in Salem for part of a season entitled *The Salem Saga*. He has seen the tourism infrastructure expanding at a considerable rate to attract outsiders, as merchants and tourists continue to come up with more creative ways to venerate the place through the witch symbolism and paraphernalia. To Mike, many of these developments seem to be a poor attempt at remembering, including the recent unveiling of a statue of Samantha Stevens, the main character from the television series *Bewitched*. The statue, erected in the centre of town, prompts him to reflect on the banal mix of contemporary mass-mediated popular culture with tragic events from history:

Would you do that, you know, three hundred years from now, with the World Trade Center site? Would it be a big place for Hallowe’en because it’s haunted, you know, with the souls of the people that died there? I mean that’s pretty distasteful.

When the statue was erected, John Carr (another resident of Salem) was quoted in the *Salem News* comparing the installation of the Samantha statue to the construction of a statue of Colonel Klink at Auschwitz. Both Mike and Katherine find it meaningful to select events from the past to make comparisons, and they assess whether things have been remembered appropriately. Mike compares the practices of commemoration and remembering of the 1692 events of the witch trials in Salem with the 2001 events surrounding the World Trade Center in New York City. He makes a direct comparison between the two events as both tragic and violent. But he is puzzled because they are remembered so differently.

Vinitzky-Seroussi (2002) suggests that agents of memory all have the desire to work on commemorative projects but differ in levels and types of capital they possess. As the case of the World Trade Center demonstrates, victims of tragic events and their surviving family members have affective capital to influence how the events are remembered. Local, state and national governments employ civic capital to shape how this
prime space of New York City’s financial district is to be rehabilitated. Finally, a wide variety of philanthropists and private investors supply financial capital to support specific commemorative initiatives and rehabilitation projects at the site.

**People From the Past**

The way that people rather than events of the trials are remembered is a touchy subject; what meanings do we attach to their deaths? Arguably, the victims were persecuted not because of their beliefs, but because of the beliefs and intolerance of their accusers. Yet, it is not clear for what kind of beliefs these people died. Who were these persecuted people? Did they choose to die rather than confess to witchcraft? There are no transcripts of the actual court trials. Local mythology surrounds the factual information about the character of those involved. Many of the stories tell of individual personalities, suggesting that Giles Cory was fatally stubborn and that Bridget Bishop – also executed for witchcraft in 1692 – was the seventeenth-century version of a radical feminist. Their collective commitment to preserve their Puritan identity has also been posited as a reason for their deaths. A tract distributed by The Temple of Nine Wells, a local wiccan group, states that they died for religious freedom. These are contested questions among the residents in Salem. Mike asserts:

> These people were very Christian – the ones who died. ... It was the people who were so Christian who couldn’t bring themselves to the point of lying about that, and those were the ones who were immediately brought out and hanged to the point of you know putting the noose around their neck and still giving them a chance to say those words and they wouldn’t do it – so it was the most Christian of them all that were killed. ...

Here, Mike is referring to claims by a local community variously referred to as Neo-Pagan or Wiccan, a group unified through a belief system based largely on neopagan religious rituals of pre-Christian and pre-Judaic mythology (Adler 1986). Witches, witchcraft and magick (sic) are central to their belief and their ritual practice. Here, magick is intentionally spelled
with a ‘k’ to differentiate what is considered a central aspect of their rituals from the use of the word in other contexts as, for example, in the case of trickery performed on stage. Mike and Katherine’s familiarity with this group is limited. Mike assumes that the existence of modern witches in Salem is a given yet he is not able to articulate who these modern witches are. Both Mike and Katherine dismiss completely the group’s interpretation of history and them as legitimate agents of memory. Katherine asserts: ‘[The executed] were devout Puritans … it’s dishonourable to their memories to see them as heroes for Wiccans. There’s no connection’.

The Wiccan community in Salem seeks to inform the public about their belief and their rituals through a number of organizations such as the Witches Education Bureau (W.E.B.), The Witches League for Public Awareness and The Pagan Resource and Network Council of Educators (P.R.A.N.C.E.). These organizations have a mission to educate the public in order to combat what they see as ‘misinformation about witches’. These organizations are active within the Salem community and have participated in the development of tourist venues such as the Salem Witch Village.

**Hallowe’en and ‘Haunted Happenings’**

During the month of October, Salem dresses up for tourists: Witch City becomes a proscenium. Since 1982, for three weeks, the community of Salem has hosted what is called ‘Haunted Happenings’. Estimates of tourists attending the festival are in the hundreds of thousands and many tour guides advertise Salem as a place that receives a million visitors annually. Not associated with the trials, albeit consistent with the Hallowe’en theme, are newer tourist attractions like Dracula’s Castle, Spellbound Museum and Haunted/Ghost Tours, as well as sites not associated with Hallowe’en, such as the New England Pirate Museum and Pioneer Village. In 2006, events, walking tours and haunted houses during Haunted Happenings included the ‘Spirit of Salem Séance’, ‘The Terror Trail’, ‘Salem Witchcraft Walk’ and ‘Frankenstein’s Laboratory’.

One example of the events that happen during this festival is the theatrical reenactment at ‘The Witch House’ where visitors can ‘relive … events’ and ‘enter the Nathaniel Hawthorne House’ and be ‘interrogated by magistrate, John Hathorne, Hawthorne’s great-great grandfather, who is
infamous for his role in the condemnation and deaths of so many people’.
The Haunted Happenings website invites visitors to come and ‘encounter
the tormented, the accused and their accusers in this interactive theatrical
experience’ and warns them to ‘beware, you may find yourself being
accused of “writing in the devil’s book!”’

Haunted Happenings includes a heterogeneous group of events. Visitors
can choose to go to the regular tourist spots to attend special engagements.
In 2005, Haunted Happenings even hosted a convention on Harry Potter, the
bestselling fiction series by J.K. Rowling. What used to be a day when
children dressed in ‘little ghost costumes’ went from house to house ringing
doorbells and collecting treats has now become a weeks-long event,
sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce. The three-dimensional physicality
of the city becomes overshadowed by representations, models, kitsch and
the like. Salem gets cloaked in the façade of Witch City, a multidimensional
reality which can be profane and sacred, historical and fun, true and false.

Katherine, the tourist, considers many attractions in Salem as places
where ‘what’s being sold is more sort of lies than truth’. Nonetheless, she
also imagines a Salem with a ‘true history’. She is familiar with the
different museums and tourist spots and she is able to make a distinction
between what we might call tourist ‘traps’ and places that are ‘serious
about education’. Mike, the local, advises tourists to ‘read a book’ if they
want to learn about the Salem witch trials, while Katherine describes her
experience of the Haunted Happenings in the 1990s as different from
what Salem residents told her to expect:

The ordinary people of Salem … I don’t know many of them [but] their
attitude was ‘oh god, you don’t want to do that!’ … They were appalled
by the vulgarity of it. [But] I had a wonderful time. I thought it was a
great time [with] huge groups of people enjoying themselves … lots of
families … lots of people enjoying themselves in a sort of happy
innocent way.

Katherine reports that her impressions of the events were ‘more
favourable than expected’. Katherine didn’t see any ‘vulgarity’ at these
events but she was afraid people may dress up and be ‘ghoulish’. She
resisted going on a tour in Salem because the guide was ‘pacing up and
down with a mask talking about murder’. She praises a public
presentation of a ghost story where the teller ‘delivered mostly factual information’. Other tourists, she says, ‘seemed genuinely interested in the history but it also entertained a lot of kids’. She was pleasantly surprised that a lot of people dressed up in comical rather than creepy costumes. For this tourist, the extended Hallowe’en celebration through what is called Haunted Happenings should be a fun event but (apparently because of Salem’s unique history) it is a good thing to avoid the ‘vulgar’ representations that are normally associated with Hallowe’en.

In 2006, I visited Salem during the week leading up to Hallowe’en. Downtown was full of ‘warring’ tours. Everywhere you turned there were tour guides with headset microphones leading groups of visitors adorned with stickers labelling them as members of each respective tour agency. The Charter Street Cemetery was packed full of people; it was odd to see such a large number of people knitting a trail throughout the network of

Figure 1: Local tour guide provides commentary at the foot of a family crypt in Charter Street Cemetery during ‘Haunted Happenings’ in Salem, Massachusetts October, 2006.
graves and tombs. The cemetery is directly beside the Salem Witch Trial Memorial, where we ended our cemetery tour. As we listened to the tour guide explain the memorial stones (which jut out from the stone wall and include the engraved names of twenty of those executed) situated around the edge of the courtyard of the memorial, we noticed people sitting on one of the stones eating funnel cakes.

There was a mix of tourism commodities and ‘festival-type’ products. One merchant from the shop ‘Witch Tee’s’ sold t-shirts that read ‘Salem Coroner’ on the front and on the back, ‘Stop by for a Cold One’. Another t-shirt read ‘Coed naked witchcraft: because sometimes you need the exorcise’. In the ‘Haunted Neighborhood’ that was the most carnival-like space, food stands offered ‘fried dough’ and other culinary delights commonly found at a place of amusement. Historical sights like The Witch House held special engagements like ‘Haunted City’ (a theatrical interpretation of folklore surrounding the witch trials) in order to indulge visitors looking for a spooky or festive event.

The custodians of historical sites are often inclined to be creative with history in order to attract tourists. For example, The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum in Springfield, Illinois, has incorporated a talking Honest Abe hologram in order to educate and entertain visitors. In Salem, a live reenactment of the trial of Bridget Bishop begins at a designated spot downtown where the audience participates as the ‘angry mob’ that follows Bridget to her trial at Salem’s Town Hall.

The Magick Circle Walk

The group known as The Temple of Nine Wells becomes most visible during the Hallowe’en season when members come from afar to celebrate Samhain by holding their annual ‘Magick Circle Ceremony’ at Gallows Hill Park. Samhain, also known as All Hallows’ Eve or Hallowe’en, is celebrated on 31 October, when the Wiccan community observes the beginning of a new year. Samhain has also become an occasion during which this community pays homage to the victims of the witch trials by holding a ‘commemorative Candlelight Walk’ to Salem’s Witchcraft Memorial.

In 2006 we attended the ritual of The Temple of the Nine Wells, which we learned about from the Halloween Haunted Happenings web site. The
walk and ritual was advertised in the events section under the heading ‘Samhain Magick Circle Ceremony and Walk’. On the flyer (which we later discovered in a Wiccan retail shop in the middle of town), the event was advertised as being the fourteenth annual ritual/celebration. On the way to the event we caught a bit of an exchange between a young man with a black and red cape and an individual holding a sign with text that read: ‘YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN’. As we passed, the young man asked the man holding the sign, ‘Don’t you feel immoral standing out here? I mean, this is the Pagan high holy day!’

The meeting place was in front of Nu Aeon, a Wiccan/pagan retail shop on Wharf Street. It was easy to spot the large crowd of participants. There was a lot of chatter, as we seemed to be waiting for the event to begin. We knew that we were planning to walk to Gallows Hill Park but were unsure of the route that we would take. We were inured to the experience of participating in and watching urban marches and parades and mistakenly thought that this would be the same sort of event. We imagined that someone, ahead of time, would clear a path for us and people would be respectfully waiting on the sidelines to celebrate the demonstration. We also expected some heckling, considering the conflict we had observed during the preceding week between passers by and the religious demonstrators. But no one had reserved space for us to walk and the only spectators were corralled around a street performance unrelated to the march that was going on in front of the visitors’ centre. We walked along Essex (the main drag of the pedestrian mall), or rather, we weaved through shoulder-to-shoulder crowds. It was as if we were one large group of strangers who just happened to be cutting through the crowded bodies at the same time, and going in the same direction. We made note of many individuals who seemed to notice our haphazard parade, probably because of our similar attire (i.e. robes/capes).

**Meaningful Engagement With the Past**

Why do we make historical analogies, and generic links between different historical events, people and places? Zerubavel (2003) argues that we use the past in a moralizing way, in order to learn from our mistakes, because we dread that history could be repeating itself. Here, the pronoun ‘we’ has
a particular meaning in that if ‘we’ remember mistakes, ‘we’ will not repeat them. In the case of Salem, the villagers of 1692 made a mistake that ‘we’ can learn from.

Mike and Katherine adamantly support the idea that the memory of the witch trials is crucial to our current understanding of the world. Mike calls it a ‘human rights issue’ and says that, at one point, he attempted to advocate for the Human Rights Film Festival to go to Salem because he believed Salem to be a fitting setting for the festival. He thinks that ‘the story of what happened there can be connected to the stories of today’, such as ‘the abuse and mistreatment of women’. For Katherine, too, it is extremely important to remember what happened in Salem in 1692. She is keenly interested in the actual story of the witch trials and in what the process that surrounded them can teach us about social relations and power more generally:

What happened in Salem … if you know how the witch hunt grew and why, you actually see those tendencies illustrated very clearly … hardwired in human nature … people in power … the tendency of people to finally realize what is going on and start working against it. It shows so clearly that people can be led to believe the absolutely fantastical and impossible if it fits into a certain belief system. When you get to know about what happened, you realize people have extraordinary propensity to believe anything if it suits their ends – spiritual, economical …

Katherine refers to lessons that are learned by remembering well known moments in history, which have sometimes been reduced to clichés. Roach (2002) calls the events of 1692 ‘one of American history’s favorite stereotypes of intolerance and superstition’. Indeed, Salem has been used as a parable by those who wish to confront injustice in creative ways. Beginning with Arthur Miller’s play, *The Crucible*, the seventeenth-century events continue to be a slice of history savoured at moments of dilemma and adversity. The play is an allegory for what has come to be called McCarthyism, named after an influential politician, Joseph McCarthy (1908–1957), determined to ‘fight the spread of communism inside the United States’. This post-World War II era is marked in the history and collective memory of the United States as a period of gross
civil rights violations and abuses of power during what is often referred to as the ‘anticommunist era’.

During the dedication of Salem’s Witch Trials Memorial in 1992, a powerful symbolic analogy between the victims of witch trials and the Holocaust victims was made. Many notables, including Arthur Miller, were invited to speak. The choice of the keynote speaker was Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor whose experiences in the death camps have been unforgettable captured in his book Night (1960). In his speech, Wiesel claimed that there are ‘many Salems’ in the world. He referred to the witch trials as a metaphorical event; an event that should remind us that similar injustice and intolerance exists today. While conditions or circumstances of the two events may or may not be comparable, both are viewed as instances of using dogmatic beliefs to justify their persecution of others.

Conclusion

Salem is a vibrant community with a complex tourism infrastructure and a distinct space worthy of examination into the intricacies of relationships between memory and tourism. Contact with the past is affected by individual and collective impulses to preserve artefacts, build monuments or reenact events. Investigating the development of Salem’s tourism infrastructure and exploring the meaningful web of relationships between and among agents of memory, be it Salem natives or tourists, can help us understand the ways events are collectively remembered. The example of Witch City may help us understand better how mnemonic tourism shapes not only the way people and events from the past are remembered but also the lives of people who live in themed environments.

Notes

1. I thank an anonymous reviewer for providing thoughtful recommendations and acknowledge the assistance of Sarah Daynes, Melissa Monroe and Vera Zolberg. I thank my partner, Theresa Nolan, for her continued support and reassurance.

2. I want to thank Vida Bajc for pointing out the applicability of the work of Vinitzky-Seroussi in relation to my own study. ‘Agents of memory’ is a term used by Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi (2002). For Vinitzky-Seroussi, ‘agents of memory’ are the
individuals that she interviewed after the death of Yitzhak Rabin – his widow, personal assistants, members of the Israeli Knesset, etc. Thus, different ‘agents’ may be the ‘initiators’ of different discourses of the past, which are intended for heterogeneous audiences. She concludes that these individuals, ‘in their various capacities and positions ... initiated and shaped mnemonic practices’ (32–33). In this article, the term is used to describe the capacity for any individual, or group of individuals who chooses what gets remembered and how, or by what modes of expression, in order to render this social memory to diverse audiences.


5. There is no evidence conclusive enough to be certain where the nineteen people were hanged in 1692. This site is purportedly the only one with the altitude to have been the highest point in Salem at that time – a characteristic the site would have certainly possessed considering the practice of creating a spectacle out of executions. No commemorative projects have taken shape at Gallows Hill – only a public park.

6. Werner Klemperer played Colonel Klink, the commandant of a German prisoner-of-war camp, in Hogan's Heroes, the popular television comedy series on CBS (1965–1971) about Nazis and allied POWs.

7. Neopagans/Wiccans are part of an ever more visible yet widely misunderstood group in the United States. Ignorance of the group and associated beliefs and practices may be attributed to a wide misconception of ‘witchcraft’ and the stereotype of the ‘Satanist’.


References

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