Introduction

*No it isn’t easy to forget*

*What we refuse to remember*

Grace Nichols, ‘Taint’, in *I is a long memoried woman* (1983)

Slavery was a part of everyday life in Britain. While most British people never witnessed the scenes of brutal exploitation upon which the plantation system depended, almost all were implicated in it. The perception that it was only wealthy white male plantocrats who benefitted from slavery has enabled broad swathes of the public to reject any sense of themselves as implicated subjects. Falling back on hierarchies of suffering rooted in eighteenth century proslavery discourse, some have responded to the idea that the nation benefitted from slavery by insisting that their families were ‘ordinary’ and therefore free from the taint of British involvement. The British state, and the nation as a whole, reaped the benefits from the duties collected on slave-produced colonial goods. From the upper echelons of the country house-owning elite, to the enterprising merchant classes, to poverty-stricken textile workers—slavery permeated throughout British society.[[1]](#endnote-1) The consumption of cheap slave-produced colonial commodities was widespread; as James Walvin describes, the produce of slave labour—coffee, tobacco, and sugar—could be found in the paradigmatic public space of eighteenth century Britain, the coffee house.[[2]](#endnote-2) When the formal abolition movement began to generate momentum after 1787, British people from all backgrounds, from every corner of the country, participated in that too. The popular imaginary may prioritise the work of a few ‘Saints’ in its commemorations of the abolition campaigns, but without millions of signatories to their petitions, and thousands of lives lost across the Atlantic in slave uprisings, they would never have succeeded. The history of British slavery and its abolition is not exclusively the history of the wealthy and privileged, any more than it is of the oppressed working classes. It is not ‘black history’. It is everyone’s history.

In Britain the collective history of slavery is a contested terrain; its racialised, classed, gendered and regionalised contours threaten the fragile bonds that give meaning to a unified and unifying vision of ‘Britishness’. In order to satisfy the construction of a Britain that champions the liberal model of freedom, free trade, democracy and equality, slavery had to be forgotten and abolition remembered. Linda Colley comments on this irony: ‘From being the world’s greediest and most successful traders of slaves in the eighteenth century the British had shifted to being able to preen themselves on being the world’s foremost opponents of slavery.’ This, she argued, ‘revealed as much if not more about how the British thought about themselves.’[[3]](#endnote-3) That abolition continues to be a cornerstone of British national identity can be read in Prime Minister David Cameron’s 2014 iteration of ‘British values’, which included a reminder that ‘this is the country that helped […] abolish slavery’. [[4]](#endnote-4) This view of Britain has its roots in early histories of abolition; Thomas Clarkson’s *History* in 1808 cast the movements squarely as national phenomena.[[5]](#endnote-5) His whiggish nineteenth-century successors linked antislavery activism to a love of liberty and justice supposedly inherent to all Britons. This characterisation required the suppression of both popular proslavery ideology and the similarly ‘national’ spread of investment in the slavery business.[[6]](#endnote-6) This tendency reached its nauseating apogee in 1869 with W. E. H. Lecky’s description of the ‘inglorious crusade of England against slavery’ as ‘among the three or four perfectly virtuous acts recorded in the history of nations’—an appraisal that has remained surprisingly tenacious in contemporary public discourse.[[7]](#endnote-7)

This book has been written precisely at a time in which the whole project of ‘Britishness’ seems to have come under threat. That threat has emerged in the wake of a constitutional crisis which nearly saw Scotland leave the Union following a referendum in 2014. Some Scottish nationalists have sought to present the country’s historic relationship with England as unproblematically that of colonised and coloniser—Scottish freedom in contrast with English tyranny. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin have offered a note of caution in relation to this positioning suggesting that ‘[w]hilst it is possible to argue that these societies [Ireland, Scotland and Wales] were the first victims of English expansion, their subsequent complicity in the British imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonized people outside of Britain to accept their identity as post-colonial.’[[8]](#endnote-8) Whilst less work has been done on the involvement of Ireland and Wales in the slavery business, recent studies highlighting the centrality of the Scots to the running of empire confirms these assertions (see Michael Morris, Chapter Ten).[[9]](#endnote-9) The over-representation of Scottish slave-owners in the Legacies of British Slave-ownership database demonstrates empirically the enthusiastic participation of Scots in the British imperial project. Indeed it was noted in the *Jamaica Observer* that should Scotland leave the United Kingdom that as an independent country it would have to be added to the list of governments from which the Caribbean would seek reparations.[[10]](#endnote-10)

The vexed issue of reparations continues to shape ideas about the history, memory and legacies of slavery in public discourse in both the Caribbean and Britain. Rooted in the pioneering historiographical work of C. L. R. James, Walter Rodney and Eric Williams, and drawing from recent economic analyses of slave-owner compensation by Nicholas Draper, Hilary Beckles has set out the case for reparatory justice.[[11]](#endnote-11) In March 2014 the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) agreed on a ten-point reparations plan and indicated that it would pursue the European governments who participated in and benefitted from transatlantic slavery using both diplomatic and potentially legal means. Beckles, as the Chairman of the CARICOM Reparations Commission, has argued that rather than a horror confined to the past, slavery continues to impact on the lived experiences of the peoples of the Caribbean. He has written that the

Memory of slavery in the Caribbean is no sporting matter. Nearly one hundred seventy years since general emancipation in the English-speaking sub-region, the immediacy of the recollection of slavery still angers many in the regional community. It also hinders movement toward ethnic reconciliation, and serves to sustain the identity consciousness that energizes the rapidly emerging reparations movement.[[12]](#endnote-12)

If Britain is haunted by the ghost of its slaving past, then the Caribbean lives with the visceral embodiment of a present shaped by its encounters with slavery and colonialism. A British Foreign Office spokesman responded to CARICOM’s move rejecting the case for reparations and adding that ‘We regret and condemn the iniquities of the historic slave trade, but these shameful activities belong to the past. Governments today cannot take responsibility for what happened over 200 years ago.’[[13]](#endnote-13) The asymmetrical memory of an institution that on the one hand consigns historic ‘shameful activities’ to the past, yet on the other spends millions of pounds on commemorating the noble undertaking of abolition must not be lost on the people of the Anglophone Caribbean.

The development of ‘big history’ datasets has revealed the astounding scale and pervasiveness of Britain’s national involvement in transatlantic slavery. The digitisation and, more recently, ‘crowd-sourcing’ nature of these databases has meant that the mapping of many archives, images and activities has opened up new global avenues of research for academic and public historians. The internet has made it possible for academic history to have a global reach; projects that focus on the digitisation of local and national archival material not only increase the accessibility of the records, but also remind the user of the interconnections between the local, the national and the global. Alongside digitising historical archives of Britain’s investments in slavery and its abolition through, for example, the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database and the Legacies of British Slave-ownership project, another large dataset (the Antislavery Usable Past project) is currently being developed to archive and digitise materials related to the commemoration and memorialisation of the slave trade across Britain.

It is tempting, when confronted with these statistical topographies of slavery and abolition, to conceptualise such investments wholly within their national or transnational contexts. Indeed, looking outward from Britain tells us much about the global consequences of transatlantic slavery.[[14]](#endnote-14) However, while transnational history has risen in popularity, it has been accompanied by a surge in interest in regional and local studies, resulting in a greater awareness of the range of political and social experiences of those in provincial Britain.[[15]](#endnote-15) For most British people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, slavery was something primarily encountered within and understood through their local communities, networks and families. The quite specific nature of any given geographical area’s interactions with slavery and abolition necessarily impacted upon the ways in which they were viewed locally. Both within academia and public history, small-scale, in-depth analysis of particular areas has provided rich material for considering the impact of slavery, abolition and the historic black presence. In the wake of 2007, during the marking of the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, many local studies unearthed previously unknown connections resulting in a flurry of pamphlets, archive guides and walking tours.[[16]](#endnote-16) This focus on local linkages to the slavery business reminds us ‘of the continued importance of the local as a mental category for organizing collective engagements with the past’.[[17]](#endnote-17) Driven by the needs of local communities many of these projects engaged in the task of ‘memory activism’; reflecting the unstable nature of the local in an increasingly mobile world. These initiatives often posed a challenge to the national narrative by drawing on notions of ‘recoveries of lost history, and the projection of alternative ways of remembering.’[[18]](#endnote-18) Although it was a national reckoning with the slaving past that acted as a catalyst for reflection, as Geoff Cubitt has argued ‘locality emerged as a key framework… in a process of re-remembering.’[[19]](#endnote-19) Concentrating on the ways in which the local interacts with the global, these representations reconfigured narrow and parochial ideas about identity, home and belonging by demonstrating the ways in which such places and their populations were shaped by the imperial world they inhabited.

Within the overall picture of British slavery, therefore, it is possible to identify significant regional variations with regards to the level and nature of pro- and antislavery rhetoric, culture and investment. By looking inward, and focusing on these small stories, we can begin to disinter how the larger historical contexts of empire, commerce and slavery impacted on people’s lived experiences, and vice versa. Britain’s principal slaving ports of Bristol, Liverpool and London have all been the subjects of significant bodies of work.[[20]](#endnote-20) In Bristol and Liverpool, local investment in the slave trade contributed significantly to an extended period of economic prosperity during the eighteenth century and accounted for much of their hinterlands’ employment infrastructure.[[21]](#endnote-21) In London it also led to the development of financial and commercial structures which supported not only the slave trade but also lucrative businesses in slave-produced commodities. Seymour Drescher, Madge Dresser and others have demonstrated that popular antipathy towards abolition in Liverpool and Bristol (though the latter less pronouncedly) was significantly higher than elsewhere in the country, partly as a consequence of the benefits they derived from slavery.[[22]](#endnote-22) As the contributions in the first half of this collection show, local interests impacted on how slavery and abolition were viewed all across the country, often in quite surprising ways.

Geography was not the only type of locality to act as a filter through which British people viewed slavery. A recent resurgence of biographical works have used the individual as a lens through which to explore the wider issues that shaped involvement in both the slavery business and its dismantling.[[23]](#endnote-23) As Catherine Hall, Sheryllne Haggerty, Ann Stott and others have suggested, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century networks of business, friendship and kin significantly impacted on how the business of slavery, and indeed the tasks of abolition, were undertaken.[[24]](#endnote-24) While they were, by their very nature, bound to particular sites of production, transaction or resistance, these networks of influence were by no means always restricted to a given geographical area. Nevertheless, dynastic and emotional ties to a particular corner of Britain often led these ‘citizens of the world’ to claim peculiarly parochial personal identities.[[25]](#endnote-25) Thus while colonial commercial networks, regularly overlapping with familial and social ones, could be comprised of agents based in three or more continents, they still might be characterised as, for example, ‘Lancaster traders’, or a ‘Glasgow family’.

Even in the very crucible of modern global capitalism, the worlds in which most British agents dealt with slavery had only small populations, subject to the vagaries of their own particular, interdependent historical contexts. Beyond the realms of business there has been important new scholarship on the ways in which slavery altered the structure of the family both in the Caribbean and in Britain.[[26]](#endnote-26) The upsurge in popularity of family history has increased public interest and participation in genealogical work. Academic, popular and personal history recognise the continued power of the family to shape history and historical memory. Indeed, a key task of this book is to uncover these intimate worlds and interrogate the processes, ideologies and objectives that bound them together and plugged them into markets and movements that spanned the globe.

Britain’s Memory of Slavery – a ‘Forgotten’ History?

The process of remembering slavery has been an uneven, geographically and temporally specific process. A series of key events in the 1990s served as an impetus towards commemoration in the Atlantic world. Fuelled in part by processes of globalization, the advent of the internet, and the increasing accessibility of global travel, these events arose alongside a broader political context of transitional justice movements which sought the recognition and redressing of past wrongs, most notably through the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of post-apartheid South Africa in 1994.[[27]](#endnote-27) The geographical span of such activity has meant that it is possible to frame slavery remembrance as a ‘genuinely transnational phenomena’, certainly from the 1990s onwards.[[28]](#endnote-28) As Ana Lucia Araujo has documented, the 500th anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas (1992), the UNESCO Slave Trade Route Project (1994) and the 150th anniversary of the second abolition of slavery in the French colonies (1998) all provided an international context for remembering slavery. Memory work undertaken in post-independence Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America underscored the importance of slavery and colonialism in the making of new national identities, providing a new narrative that moved away from associations with the great European emancipators.[[29]](#endnote-29)

In the case of Britain, arguably it was the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 2007 that created the public space and funds to engage in a meaningful dialogue about Britain’s enslaving past beyond isolated interactions in some of the former slave ports (London, Bristol, and Liverpool). In the lead up to the official commemorations there emerged a keen interest, and indeed public concern, over the ‘memory’ of this difficult history. How slavery figures (or not) in museums and public history, the school curriculum, public monuments, local and national narratives, and public consciousness more broadly remains a contentious issue. This can be read in the Labour government’s decision post-2007 to include the topic as a compulsory part of the national curriculum, followed by its subsequent removal by the coalition government under Conservative Education Secretary Michael Gove. Relegated to a non-statutory requirement, it can no longer be guaranteed that young people will gain any knowledge of this history. Even more overtly, in UKIP’s (the United Kingdom Independence Party) manifesto of 2010, ‘Restoring Britishness’, slavery was isolated as an ‘issue which has been deliberately used to undermine Britishness.’[[30]](#endnote-30) It went on to call for the British Empire to be taught and celebrated for ‘its achievements in terms of democracy, law, freedoms and trade.’ The obvious question to ask of these claims is, whose freedoms? In arguing that ‘UK citizens must learn a common history and draw from a unified heritage’ the UKIP manifesto ignored that British history and heritage is also a global history and heritage. It is part of a shared (if unequal) imperial experience, the history and memory of which is necessarily shaped by the individual’s position within the relationship of colonized and colonizer.

More commonly, however, concern over the representation of transatlantic slavery in Britain is articulated as an ‘amnesia’, a ‘forgetting’, or something ‘buried’; as something which regularly requires uncovering at periodic intervals.[[31]](#endnote-31) Forgetting, in the context of public memory, however, is not a passive act. As Guyanese poet Grace Nichols suggests, it is a process which takes constant and vigilant work. Catherine Hall has described this as an act of ‘[d]isavowal and distantiation’. These practices of psychological disassociation, she argues, have ‘been the crucial mechanisms facilitating avoidance and evasion; ‘it didn’t happen here’, ‘not our responsibility’.[[32]](#endnote-32) Because British slavery happened, in the large part, on the plantations of the Caribbean, geographic distance has enabled a distancing of the mind. Further, the ‘forgetting’ of Britain’s immense role in transatlantic slavery—and the obscuring of this segment of the ‘national story’ for the best part of two hundred years has relied on a great deal of mythologizing about slavery itself, and in particular a ‘re-framing’ of the history of transatlantic slavery through the more morally comforting narrative of abolition.

John Oldfield has highlighted the dominance of what he terms a ‘culture of abolitionism’ in Britain, which has displaced memories of slavery with those of abolition and emancipation.[[33]](#endnote-33) Marcus Wood has more vehemently termed the iconography produced within Emancipation processes as a ‘spasmodic white ejection’—creating a mythology of abolition which obscures knowledge of transatlantic slavery.[[34]](#endnote-34) Perhaps, then, ‘forgetting’ is the wrong word. Commemorations, narratives and other public past-to-present relationships perhaps more fittingly constitute an ‘organised forgetting’, or an ‘un-remembering’ of particular aspects of history.[[35]](#endnote-35) There is a history to the public memory of slavery in Britain, but it is fragmented, warped and partial, shaped by successive efforts to foreground abolition as a key facet of national identity construction, especially in relation to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century imperial aims and ambitions—where the ‘anti-slavery mission’ drove empire further into the African continent.[[36]](#endnote-36)

Some aspects of Britain’s involvement in transatlantic slavery have, therefore, been very well ‘remembered’ at a national level. This pattern has been reflected in museological history too, where, from the beginning of the twentieth century until the early 1990s, the only permanent museum representation of transatlantic slavery was at Wilberforce House, Hull (the birthplace of William Wilberforce), which necessarily focused on the life and political career of the famous abolitionist. Material concerning the history of slavery more broadly wasn’t added until the 1980s.[[37]](#endnote-37) However, later twentieth century demographic changes (namely West African and Caribbean immigration and settlement) and cultural shifts from around the 1970s onwards disrupted this picture dramatically. The subsequent foregrounding of Britain’s entanglements with slavery owe much to the social politics of 1970s and 1980s anti-racist and black activism alongside accompanying research and revisionist histories of race, gender, colonialism and the black British presence. This shift reflected a keen awareness of the need to re-engage critically with ‘whitewashed’ histories of empire, including, at their tortured heart, transatlantic slavery. However, as Stuart Hall noted, such shifts also embodied a particular ‘politics of representation’. It was not only the absence (or ‘forgetting’) of particular black experiences in British national memory that was the issue; it was their representation, simplification, stereotypical portrayal—their absence of nuance.[[38]](#endnote-38)

It was against this background, as well as a decade of particularly pronounced racial tensions (especially riots in London, Bristol and Liverpool in the 1980s) that the first exhibitions opened in Britain which focused on transatlantic slavery, but did not have ‘Wilberforce’ in their titles. In 1994, the *Transatlantic Slavery: Against Human Dignity* gallery opened in the basement of the Merseyside Maritime Museum, in Liverpool’s Albert Dock. Bristol had a number of exhibitions and events exploring the city’s involvement in transatlantic slavery between 1997 and 2000, including an exhibition in the Georgian House in Great George Street and a series of events and exhibitions in the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery in 1999 called *A Respectable Trade?*[[39]](#endnote-39) The city’s Industrial Museum also developed content related to links to transatlantic slavery through local trade.[[40]](#endnote-40) After several decades of silence on the matter, the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich opened its ‘Trade and Empire’ gallery in 1999, amidst controversy over the disruption this caused to the museum’s overall narrative of British maritime identity.[[41]](#endnote-41) Smaller slave ports also played a role. Lancaster’s modest permanent exhibition, *Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery* in the city museum focused on the involvement of and impact on the port and city.[[42]](#endnote-42) However, exhibitions at this time were largely restricted to former slave ports or coastal locations—foregrounding what John Beech has argued constituted a ‘maritimizing’ of Britain and transatlantic slavery.[[43]](#endnote-43)

In addition to museological representations, some of which dealt with national assessments of Britain and transatlantic slavery and some (Bristol and Lancaster) which chose to focus on more local connections, a host of other activities and ‘memory work’ emerged towards the turn of the century including walking tours and historical trails in Bristol and Liverpool, leaflets, books and educational initiatives. In 1999, Liverpool city council officially ‘apologised’ for its role in transatlantic slavery, and the city also annually marks Slavery Remembrance Day on 23 August, to coincide with the anniversary of the Haitian Uprising. In a pattern mirroring museological development, public memorials commemorated abolitionists rather than the enslaved until the latter part of the twentieth century. Whilst numerous monuments erected to honour the likes of William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson have stood proudly in civic centres and national memorial sites; it wasn’t until ‘Pero’s Bridge’ in Bristol (1999), ‘Captured Africans’ memorial in Lancaster (2005)[[44]](#endnote-44) and the ‘Gilt of Cain’ monument in London (2008) that the subject of memorialisation diversified.

Much of the academic scholarship on ‘memory work’ from the 1990s and into the new millennium has focused on the content of museum exhibitions themselves, alongside contemporary developments in ‘new museology’, post-modern developments in representation and display, and the ‘experiential turn’ in heritage seen in the development of a number of heritage sites which drew on reconstruction and performance.[[45]](#endnote-45) Such sites became the focus of debates over the representation of the past, and work on Britain’s ‘slavery heritage’ in part reflected some of this debate.[[46]](#endnote-46) Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace’s monograph *The British Slave Trade and Public Memory* dealt in part with museological representations of slavery alongside literature and broader cultural sources, yet positioned these developments in relation to ‘Millennial reckonings’. This reflected their timing in relation to the publication of significant reports into race relations, such as the 1999 MacPherson Report, the inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence; and the *Parekh* report into the ‘future of multi-ethnic Britain’, in 2000.[[47]](#endnote-47) Other scholarship around this time that touched on Britain’s memory of slavery largely drew on the experiences of those involved in developing exhibitions.[[48]](#endnote-48)

The national marking of 2007, the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the British Slave Trade, represented—in part—a departure from this earlier pattern of representation. The availability of finance for projects and exhibitions through the Heritage Lottery Fund as well as substantial governmental backing from the then Labour government meant that a great wealth of institutions and heritage organisations could host exhibitions which connected their locales to the history of transatlantic slavery and its abolition. This meant that, significantly, representations of slavery appeared, not only in former slaving ports,[[49]](#endnote-49) or places associated with famous abolitionists,[[50]](#endnote-50) but also in places not previously publically associated with this history, from the coastal locales of Swansea and Plymouth to land-locked galleries in Wolverhampton and Hitchin.

The Bicentenary was a contested moment in national public discourse. The engagement of museums with this history was largely ‘anxious and ambiguous’ in part because of the contentious nature of this history, and associated issues of race and racism, but also in relation to concern over what role museums could, or indeed should, play in relation to ‘established narratives of national identity’.[[51]](#endnote-51) The Bicentenary was criticised by some groups for a focus on white abolitionists—a ‘Wilberfest’[[52]](#endnote-52)— though other commentators saw a greater diversity of abolitionists ‘celebrated’: figures such as Hannah More and Olaudah Equiano featured in exhibitions frequently. There was also a greater sense of diversity more generally, which reflected the contexts, demographics, and histories of individual cities, towns and villages. In large part, as Geoffrey Cubitt has suggested, smaller exhibitions sought ways to make meaning through local connections as a way of ‘bringing home’ this transatlantic history.[[53]](#endnote-53) Much academic scholarship has emerged in the aftermath of 2007 which has looked critically at the processes and experiences of marking the Bicentenary itself.[[54]](#endnote-54) Predominantly this has focused on issues faced by museums and patterns of representation, themes and omissions within exhibitions themselves,[[55]](#endnote-55) However there has been some notable commentary on broader public discourse, media, and political rhetoric.[[56]](#endnote-56)

The Bicentenary—conflicted, contradictory and ‘ambiguous’ though it may have been—has had some notable impacts. National heritage organisations were prompted to look again at the interpretation of their sites, including a renewed focus on country houses—places which had largely remained absent from the story of transatlantic slavery and its legacies.[[57]](#endnote-57) Two of the most significant impacts of 2007, however, have been in local history and in considerations of ‘memory’. Archives have been scoured for links to abolitionists, but also, less predictably, to the enslaved and their descendants, to slave-traders and plantation owners, and to local trade and industry, which have re-figured the narratives of place in some areas. The second major impact has been on the public debate the Bicentenary initiated over the *representation* of slavery in the public sphere, the sensitivities the public history of slavery necessarily touches upon and the ways in which slavery is ‘imagined’.[[58]](#endnote-58)

Both of these facets, through the multiple local-level projects and activities initiated by the Bicentenary, have revived an interest in the local history and memory of slavery, scholarship around which can significantly advance our understanding of Britain and transatlantic slavery more broadly. There is also potential in this new work to shift the focus of the scholarly study of Britain’s memory of slavery, away from analysing the more overt ‘memory-work’ of the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (museums, memorials, and art specifically about slavery), to a more critical focus on processes of ‘forgetting’. The study of absence, omissions or collective ‘amnesia’ can be critically interrogated to forge a better understanding of how memories of slavery are ‘organised’ in relation to cultural shifts, local politics and civic identity narratives. Work has already begun to touch critically on ‘forgetting’ through taking a longer historical view, as John Oldfield and Madge Dresser’s work on the historical commemoration of abolition in Hull and Bristol respectively does.[[59]](#endnote-59) Alan Rice, meanwhile, has shed light on Lancaster’s ‘amnesiac’ memory of slavery through its civic identity narratives.[[60]](#endnote-60) More focused studies draw out the nuances of memory in local context, at points challenging broader national generalisations and aiding a deeper understanding of remembering and forgetting in context.

Structure, Content, and Approach

It is out of these specific academic and public history contexts and developments that this book has been written. New research into the history and memory of Britain’s involvement in transatlantic slavery has changed the ways in which the local, national and global stories of enslavement and abolition are represented, disseminated and consumed. The authors have focused on methodologies and sources which analyse places, people, families, networks, representations and narratives in their ‘local’ context. The following chapters demonstrate that both the history *and* memory of Britain and transatlantic slavery must be considered together in order to forge meaningful understandings of the past, and indeed the present.

Part One presents new research into individuals, places, families and networks of the *history* of Britain and slavery. Brycchan Carey recovers a forgotten local history of slavery: how widespread plantation-ownership changed the course of the British abolition movement in Cornwall and the Channel Islands during the eighteenth century. In doing so he reveals slavery’s rural connections, challenging the notion that slave-ownership only affected metropolitan centres. Ryan Hanley traces the experiences of John Jea, an African Methodist preacher, as he travelled through Liverpool and Portsmouth during the years bracketing the passing of the abolition of the slave trade. The content and style of Jea’s antislavery preaching, Hanley argues, was fundamentally influenced in both towns by local religious and political influences on popular attitudes to slavery. Jane Longmore argues for a fresh assessment of the balance between slave trading and other mercantile activities in late-eighteenth century Liverpool, through an examination of the life of Thomas Staniforth, a prominent member of the shadowy community of Liverpool slave traders. In doing so, she explores aspects of the troubled relationship between history and popular memory in Liverpool. Hannah Young offers new persepctives on the gendered history and memory of plantation-ownership and management through an intimate examination of Jamaica proprietress Anna Eliza Elletson’s relationship with her overseers and attorneys. In the concluding chapter of Part One, Chris Jeppeson argues that the archival and historiographical separation of empire into discreet geographical areas has impacted on the ways in which we understand and represent trans-imperial histories. Through an examination of the connections between and within West and East India families he uncovers the local, national and global networks that structured commerce and colonization at the turn of the eighteenth century.

Part Two presents a critical engagement with the ways in which memory interacts with local identities and histories. Importantly it reflects on the ways in which this history has been disseminated within the public sphere. Catherine Hall considers the power of history writing as ‘memory’ in relation to the ways in which the proslavery lobby shaped ideas about race, nation and empire through a detailed case study of the great historian of Jamaica—Edward Long. Building on her recent work on Frederick Marryat and Charles Kingsley, she argues that the echoes of proslavery racial rhetoric continue to inform ideas of race in the present. Jessica Moody complicates and challenges John Beech’s argument that Britain’s memory of slavery has been ‘maritimized’ by deconstructing the place of slavery within Liverpool’s maritime identity narratives in public discourse, arguing that ‘maritimizing’ slavery is a process bound up in the city’s own collective identity construction. She looks beyond the museum space of the 1990s and 2000s so often the focus of work on slavery and memory and considers the contested relationship a constructed maritime ‘heritage’ and the history of slavery across a *longue duree*. Katie Donington’s chapter uses the project ‘Local Roots / Global Routes’ (2013-2015) as a local lens to explore the multifaceted links to slavery found in Hackney. In doing so she reflects critically on the ways in which this challenged local narratives of identity created and sustained by historic identifications with radicalism and abolitionism. Leanne Munroe’s chapter takes a closer look at the memory of abolition in Olney through the local identity narratives constructed in the town around John Newton, one of its better-known inhabitants. Like Moody, Munroe also engages with historical narratives of place, people and identity to contextualise more recent memory work. Part Two ends with a consideration by Michael Morris of recent Scottish efforts to recover/remember connections to slavery. He interrogates Glaswegian memories of slavery, against local and indeed evolving ‘national’ identity narratives, which shape and distort history and memory.

Taken together, the contributions in this collection develop the process of hetrogenising and diversifying our understanding of Britain’s continuing relationship with transatlantic slavery. The *history* of this involvement is intimately intertwined with its *memory*. We cannot meaningfully understand the historical processes associated with a history so bound up in moral battles, argument and identity, mythology, pain, shame and guilt, without embracing processes of remembering and forgetting as central to that understanding. Processes of ‘history’ (both lived and written) and ‘memory’ (both ‘remembered’ and ‘forgotten’), so often only arbitrarily different sides of the same cultural coin, forged dominant understandings of Britain and slavery which, in recent years, have become increasingly contested. The historical and memorial centre stage, for too long occupied by (predominantly) white, male abolitionists, has been disrupted. Narratives of large-scale, transnational economics and national identity narratives, forged through active memory-work and selective constructions of the past, have been significantly complicated by ‘local’ analysis of both history and memory. The structure and content of this book foreground this ‘intertwining’ of history and memory, focusing on the small-scale specifics of place and people in ways that challenge the ‘national’ narrative of Britain’s relationship with transatlantic slavery. In this way, this book ‘nuances’ our understanding of Britain and slavery by interrogating complex, contradictory, and locally contextualised narratives of a so-called ‘national sin’.

Notes

1. ## Madge Dresser and Andrew Hann (eds.), *Slavery and the British Country House* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2013); Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper, Keith McClelland, Katie Donington and Rachel Lang, *Legacies of British Slave-ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

   [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. James Walvin, *Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 3-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 1994), p. 351. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. David Cameron, ‘British values’, *Daily Mail*, 15 June 2014. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/british-values-article-by-david-cameron> [Accessed 23 July 2015] [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Thomas Clarkson, *History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament* (London: Longman et. al., 1808). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
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12. Hilary McD. Beckles, ‘Slavery Was a Long Time Ago: Remembrance, Reconciliation and the Reparations Discourse in the Caribbean’, <http://www.ariel.ucalgary.ca/ariel/index.php/ariel/article/viewFile/21/19> [accessed 17 July 2015]. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
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36. See Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Exhibitions also appeared in the Wisbech Museum, Norfolk, to celebrate ‘local’ abolitionist Thomas Clarkson. See Chapter Five of Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom*. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Stuart Hall, quoted in Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *The British Slave Trade and Public Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 11-12. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. John Beech, G., ‘The Marketing of Slavery Heritage in the United Kingdom,’ in *Slavery, Contested Heritage, and Thanatourism*, ed. G.M. Dann and A.V. Seaton (New York: Haworth Hospitality Press, 2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom*, 122. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
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42. Beech, ‘The Marketing of Slavery Heritage,’ 98. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Beech, ‘The Marketing of Slavery Heritage,’103; see also Chapter 7 of this volume. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
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48. Lonnie Bunch, "The Challenge of Remembering Slavery," in *Transatlantic Slavery: Against Human Dignity (2nd Edition)*, ed. Anthony Tibbles (Liverpool: National Museums Liverpol / Liverpool University Press, 2005); Anthony Tibbles, "Interpreting Transatlantic Slavery: The Role of Museums," in *Transatlantic Slavery: Against Human Dignity*, ed. Anthony Tibbles (London: HMSO/National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 2005). [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
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50. Wilberforce House, Hull, launched a redesigned exhibition in this year. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Geoffrey Cubitt, Laurajane Smith, and Ross Wilson, "Introduction: Anxiety and Ambiguity in the Representation of Dissonant History," in *Representing Enslavement and Abolition in Museums: Ambiguous Engagements*, ed. Laurajane Smith, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Term used by Toyin Agbetu, an African British activist and founder of Ligali, a Pan-African organisation. Philippe Vervaecke, ""Wilberfest" No More? The Memory of Slavery and Anti-Slavery in Britain 1833-2007," in *Crafting Identities, Re-Mapping Nationalities: The English-Speaking World in the Age of Globalization*, ed. Cecile Coquet-Mokoko and Trevor Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Geoffrey Cubitt, "Bringing It Home: Making Local Meaning in 2007 Bicentenary Exhibitions," *Slavery & Abolition* 30:2 (2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. See special issues of *Museums & Society,* 8:3 (2010); *History Workshop Journal*, 64:1 (2007); *Slavery & Abolition*, 30:2(2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. In addition to the above, see Marcus Wood, ‘Significant Silence: Where Was Slave Agency in the Popular Imagery of 2007?,’ in *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*, ed. Cora Kaplan and John. Oldfield (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Anthony Tibbles, ‘Facing Slavery's Past: The Bicentenary of the Abolition of the British Slave Trade,’ *Slavery and Abolition* 29, no. 2 (2008); James Walvin, ‘What Should We Do About Slavery? Slavery, Abolition and Public History,’ in *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn*, ed. Iain McCalman and Paul A. Pickering (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
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57. English Heritage funded new research into a number of properties which resulted in a publication—Dresser and Hann (eds.), *Slavery and the British Country House*. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. See Cora Kaplan and John. Oldfield, ‘Introduction,’ in *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*, ed. Cora Kaplan and John. Oldfield (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Madge Dresser has compared the anniversaries in 1907 and 2007 in Bristol. See Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom*; Madge Dresser, "Remembering Slavery and Abolition in Bristol," *Slavery & Abolition* 30:2 (2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Rice, *Creating Memorials.* [↑](#endnote-ref-60)