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## Lost in Translation: Interpreting and Presenting Dublin's Colonial Past

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**Paper Title:** Lost in Translation: interpreting and presenting Dublin's colonial past

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## Introduction

Having experienced deteriorating economic conditions since 2008, Ireland became an increasingly embattled country as 2010 wore on. The arrival of officials from the IMF, the EU, and the ECB in late November brought the crisis to a crescendo, as the true reality of the country's economic circumstances finally became apparent. With job losses, negative equity, cuts in public funding and the age-old curse of emigration mounting, anger, frustration, disbelief and humiliation in equal measure become recurring themes aired in parliament by the opposition, on the streets by protesters and in the media by commentators of every hue. With the perilous state of the Irish economy making headline news abroad in European and international media, at home, the nature of the economic commentary assumed new overtones. As the banking crisis morphed into a sovereign debt crisis, the government became assailed with charges of bringing the Irish sovereign state to its knees, of 'selling out' the nation, and of threatening the state's legitimacy as an independent country. There were references to Ireland's centuries-long battle for independence from England, and to the ideals of the nationalists who had died for the state's freedom.

The fact that commentary and analysis of Ireland's economic fortunes came to be markedly overlain with narratives about sovereignty, nationhood and the state of the republic provides a useful backdrop to the topic under discussion in this paper: post-colonialism and the politics of memory. As a Western European country, an EU member state, and until relatively recently, a rapidly prosperous one at that, Ireland is not automatically thought of as a post-colonial state, at least not in popular discourse. In all likelihood, few Europeans realise that Ireland was recognised as a Republic only in 1949, just over 60 years ago. It had been a free state and a dominion within the British Commonwealth since 1922, but for over 700 years prior to that, it was ruled by England. On the surface, as a predominantly White, Caucasian, Christian, European society, Ireland lacks the obvious geographic and cultural markers that stereotypically signify colonised nations. Indeed, for the younger generations of Irish society who have grown up in the relative prosperity of recent decades, Ireland's colonial past might be

understood as having little contemporary meaning. However the resurgence of colonial-related discourses in the narratives surrounding the country's current difficulties hint otherwise.

This paper seeks to investigate how places deal with the difficult memories associated with colonisation. Specifically, it seeks to investigate how places deal with difficult memories when outsiders, namely tourists, are actively interested in accessing them. This topic has been receiving growing attention in the literature of late, and places associated with political conflict (e.g. Northern Ireland), the Holocaust (e.g. Aushwitz), and colonialism (e.g. Delhi) are all examples which have provided useful to researchers interested in unravelling the selective and often highly contested role that memory plays in reproducing contemporary place identities. While there is now an extensive and long-standing literature on tourism and post-colonisation, with few exceptions, there has been very little analysis of Irish contexts in this respect. This paper begins to redress this short-coming. It begins by reviewing relevant literature before moving to discuss the empirical findings of an exploratory study undertaken at Dublin Castle, a site of immense political and historical significance and one of the country's main visitor attractions. Adopting collective memory and representation as a framework, the study's main research objectives are to: identify and analyse what sort of history/ies are being told to tourists about this symbolic site and; investigate the role played by the tour guide, in shaping, narrating and in effect acting as gatekeeper of difficult collective memories.

## **2. Imagining the Nation: History and the politics of memory**

'Like language and culture, history plays a significant role in imagining the nation.' (Zuelow, 2009: 136). A shared past provides a nation with legitimacy, a catalogue of the numerous challenges faced by their ancestors and the ability to recount glorious deeds carried out over time (Zuelow, 2009). There can be no sense of identity for nations or indeed for individuals without remembering (McBride, 2001) as a rich legacy of memories is fundamental to the existence of a nation (Renan, 1990, cited in McBride,

2001). Questions of identity, of nationalism, of power and authority are touched very significantly by memory and its representation (Said, 2000). This 'memory is spontaneous, social, collective and encompassing; borne by living societies, it is permanently evolving like a coral reef, with a cumulative, incremental view of the past' (Whelan, 2003: 97). It is condensed in myth and this collective construction of memory is embedded in its defining narrative (Whelan, 2003). The representation of history through narrative is strongly challenged by historic memory and decisions (whether conscious or unconscious) as to what is remembered. Nora (1996) explains that 'history is perpetually suspicious of memory' (cited in Whelan, 2003: 97) and the way in which national history is evoked and collectively negotiated may differ, as remembering and collective memory are not always consistent and shared. These '... memories of the past are shaped in accordance with a certain notion of what 'we' or for that matter, 'they' really are' (Said, 2000: 243). They are both particular and universal (Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004) and are strongly influenced by the act of forgetting or 'forgetting to remember' (Devan & Heng, 1994: 267). 'The phenomenon of historical remembering and forgetting are not innocent acts of (mis)fortune but strategic undertakings that streamline the past in ways that are coherent to the present and profitable for the future' (Chang and Huang, 2005: 267). The act of forgetting or of getting history wrong is essential in the making of a nation (Renan, 1995: 145, cited in Legg, 2007). Memories are not fixed but are changeable in differing contexts and varying situations and are, according to Hoelscher & Alderman (2004), continually unfolding. The way in which memories are formed and valued change as one moves between regions, nations and continents' (Legg, 2007: 457). They are influenced by the pressures of the marketplace and commodification of the past (Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004). Collective memory is not an 'inert and passive thing but a field of activity, in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified and endowed with political meanings' (Said, 2000: 251). Memory is, according to Chang & Huang a 'great organiser of consciousness', selectively eliminating undesirable aspects from the past, highlighting favoured events and renders history 'tidy and suitable' (Lowentahl, 1975: 27-28, cited in Chang & Huang, 2005). Collective memory is both unpredictable and central to the maintenance and contestation of political identity (Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004).

Agreement that a nation has a common past is one thing; however it is another thing altogether to agree precisely on what that past was (Zuelow, 2009: 136). Representation of the past may be selective as memories differ across different social groups – government planners, business operators, residents and visitors (Chang & Huang, 2005). Consequently ‘... the art of memory for the modern world is ... very much something to be used, misused and exploited, rather than something that sits inertly there for each person to possess and contain’ (Said, 2000: 243). This raises the question not only of what is remembered but how and why? Alderman (2010: 90) explains that ‘what is defined as memorable or historically significant is open to social control, contest, and negotiation’. He claims that ‘places of memory narrate history in selective ways that not only contribute to the process of remembering, but also the process of forgetting’. Social agents always reconstruct the past anew in the present, in accordance with their present interests (Dos Santos, 2008). Gross (2000: 77) explains that particular elites, groups and institutions attempt to dictate which values, facts or historical events are recalled, how this information is remembered, and the types of emotions attached to these memories. ‘It is this potential struggle to determine what (and whose) conception of the past will prevail constitutes the politics of memory’ (Alderman, 2010: 90).

Of particular relevance to this paper is the way in which difficult memories or pasts are remembered and represented. The representation of difficult memories ‘poses particular challenges for countries as these events may be: (1) embarrassing to those sponsoring or participating in remembrance, or those being commemorated, (2) emotionally charged due to their association with casualties or other misfortunes, and (3) contested’ (Rivera, 2008: 613). This offers a dilemma for policy-makers as to what aspects of their history should be remembered and what should be ignored. This is an important consideration within a tourism context, as ‘tourism can serve as an effective means in reinforcing the legitimacy of nationalist discourses and national identities’ (Yu Park, 2011: 523). ‘Viewing the past – as opposed to history – as a set of discourses aimed at a particular group (in this case tourists) highlights the suggestion that history is for someone and that the contemporary dominant power élites are most likely to play a

significant part in shaping that reality when the target group is ordinary citizens in the guise of tourists' (Lennon & Foley, 2000: 162).

### **2.1 Tour Guides as Gatekeepers of Memory.**

Shaping that reality, in practical terms, is often the task of the tour guide. According to Pond (1993) it is s/he who is entrusted with the public relations missions to encapsulate the essence of a place (Pond, 1993). These '... places do not easily speak for themselves; some way must be found to enable the visitor to grasp what is seen in such a way that an informed freedom of interpretation is possible' (Brett, 1993: 187). In order for this heritage to be understood it must be placed in a narrative and this narrative is always interpretive and explanatory, 'that is further to say that it has been mediated' (Brett, 1993: 187). Guides are of crucial importance in this mediation process, as theirs is the task of selecting, glossing, and interpreting sights (Dahles, 2002). This mediation is more complex in the case of 'difficult heritage', as this type of heritage fails to assert a positive sense of identity and 'is an inheritance that many might wish to disown even while they acknowledge it to be part of their defining history' (MacDonald, 2006: 127). Where 'difficult heritage is addressed, it is quite likely to be implicated in a range of quite complex and even conflicting emotions and responses' (ibid). This results from what MacDonald refers to as its 'double coding of meaning including: that originally written in to the site and the preferred readings that guides attempt to encourage' (MacDonald, 2006: 128). The articulations of these difficult memories are contained within the narratives of guides who depict the past through interpretation and selectivity.

Thus, as Dahles (2002) argues, the role of guides extends well beyond welcoming and informing tourists and is crucial in conveying information, offering explanations, and developing narratives for tourists. Guides are 'cultural brokers ... directors and stage-managers' who 'choreograph tourists' movements' (Edensor, 2001: 69). These 'cultural brokers' ... pivotal role is 'to influence the visitors' impressions and attitudes, as well as enhance their appreciation and understanding of their surroundings' (Gurung et al.

1996 cited in Dahles 2002: 787). They 'serve as a buffer, insulating many travellers from the difficulties and possibly, some delights of the visited culture' (Gurung et al, 1996: 11-12 cited in Dahles, 2002: 787). They '...provide tourists with a glimpse of what is going on without revealing undesirable aspects. They are highly effective instruments of control, controlling the contact between tourists and the host society as well as 'the images and narratives by means of which the host society presents itself ...' (Dahles ... 787). They are engaged in trying to encode 'preferred readings' and the nature of their engagement may vary, where they are either ardently engaged in subscribing to conveying a particular account, or where they may be less engaged or perhaps even ironic (MacDonald, 2006: 123). Cohen's (1985) notion of the guide as mentor sees the guide as selecting the objects of interest according to their own preferences or taste, their professional training or what they assume is the interest of their party. Alternatively, Cohen explains the guide can act as a pathfinder that leads tourists through an environment in which they lack orientation, pointing out routes and attractions within a defined territory to which they have no access without the guide. These 'guided tours assure that tourists are channelled into the right place at the right time, doing so under the control of someone responsible' (Dahles, 2002: 787). Tours may be performed according to a script, which may not set out exactly what the guide should say but rather the main recommended stops providing a list of key themes for each (MacDonald, 2006: 124).

### **3. Heritage and institutional arrangements in Ireland**

Before moving to investigate how the debates in the literature reviewed above might have relevance for the Irish case, it is first of all necessary to give a brief overview of some of the key institutional arrangements supporting the management of heritage sites in Ireland. All of the heritage properties in the care and guardianship of the Irish state come under the remit of the Office of Public Works (OPW). It manages, maintains and preserves hundreds of national monuments and historic properties. Interpretation and guiding services are provided at 65 of these sites where 2.5 million visitors are attracted annually. The OPW's remit centres on conservation, preservation and



education. The physical care and maintenance of its properties is its key concern. Their presentation to the public is very much of subsequent concern. Generating tourist demand is not a stated objective of the OPW. Indeed the allocation of public funding to OPW sites pays little heed to their individual ability to generate visitor numbers: the budget allocated to Dublin Castle, as an OPW heritage site for example, does not reflect to any marked degree, its performance as a visitor attraction (Moir, personal communication, 2011).

Nevertheless, the OPW actively engages in the task of representing the sites under its care to visitors in the pursuit of developing 'public access'. Tourism statistics show that a very substantial proportion of these visitors, especially in iconic sites like Dublin Castle are visiting tourists from abroad. Tour Guides are employed and trained by the OPW. Training Guides is an important activity but the focus is mainly on areas like health and safety, standards of professionalism (in terms of e.g. dress code) and visitor service (in terms of e.g. handling visitor questions, ensuring a comfortable tour, etc.). Little training is given in respect of how Guides prepare and present information about a site. The information that is given to visitors is largely compiled by the Guides themselves. When recruiting, the OPW seeks to employ people who are interested, knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Guides are expected to 'self-learn' the knowledge that they need in order to give a tour of a specific site like Dublin Castle. The OPW has invested in publishing various monographs, histories and guides to its sites and related topics and these publications are made available to Guides as sources of information. Supervisory Guides are expected to ensure that Guides use these materials as appropriate to prepare for their guiding role. While there are no systems in place to control or monitor the sort of information that Guides give to visitors, there are informal understandings of what is and is not appropriate: for example, the OPW does not encourage an overly 'academic' narrative, believing that visitors do not want this. Equally, it promotes flexibility in delivery, different groups have different needs (youth, children, specialists, retirees), in addition, it believes that sensitivity to certain historical contexts and situations is required when working with particular types of visitors. In this context, the study reported here is interested to investigate what visitors are told about the historic sites, as well as who decides what they are told?

### **3.1 Dublin Castle and Ireland's colonial heritage**

The political, economic and socio-cultural significance of Dublin castle as a historical site cannot be overstated. Its origins date back to the foundation of the city by the Vikings in 842 AD, as it was here that the Viking invaders first established a settlement. Indeed the city's name comes from the 'Dubh Linn' or the Black Pool of water that once covered what is now the Castle garden. When the Anglo-Norman invaders removed the Vikings as rulers in 1170, they developed this site into what was to become the administrative heart of British rule in Ireland for the 700 year period when Ireland was colonized by Britain. It was here that the British vice-roy, head of the British administration in Ireland, resided. Equally it was the working heart of that administration, as well as being the headquarters of the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police force. Located adjacent to the Castle in Ship Street was a military barracks. When Ireland became a free state, but still a dominion within the British Commonwealth in 1922, it was here that the transfer of power took place.

Since then the castle has been in Irish state hands. Today, its key administrative functions continue. Parts of the Irish civil service and state police service are located in the lower courtyard and its environs. Meanwhile, in the Upper courtyard, those parts now known as the state apartments are used for state business, while another substantial section houses a conference centre used for state purposes. Quite apart from these functions, the castle is operated as a visitor attraction by the OPW, and in 2009 was the 6<sup>th</sup> most visited fee-paying visitor attraction in the state (Fáilte Ireland 2009), with 158,322 visitors (Fáilte Ireland nd).

## **4. Methods**

The methodology employed involved observation work and two semi-structured interviews with OPW personnel: a Supervisory Guide and an Assistant Principal Officer with responsibility for a number of sites within the city. Data collection took place in Spring 2011 and began with observation work. This involved the researchers partaking in guided tours of the castle as if they were visitors, i.e. they were not identified as

'researchers'. Both researchers took an initial tour, made observations and notes independent of each other and then compared these as a form of control on how the data were being gathered. In addition, each researcher undertook 2 further tours, each at different times and with different Guides. On each tour, the researcher focusing on reading the narrative of the tour. This 'reading' entailed: listening to the verbal detail and verbal emphases detailed both as the obvious 'tour script' and in asides offered in response to questions from tour group members and; noting the Guide's signaling of particular places, material objects, artifacts and symbols. It also involved noting the engagement of the visitor group. This observation work was followed up with interviews with an Assistant Principal Officer within the OPW who acted as Manager of a cluster of heritage sites in Dublin, including Dublin Castle; and with a Supervisory Guide working in Dublin Castle. The key questions guiding the research include: how is Dublin Castle presented to visitors? What stories is/are told about Dublin Castle? Who decides and who constructs the story/ies told? What role does the Guide play in this process? The outlining of the study's findings begins with a discussion of how visitors are generally oriented around the castle site. Focusing on the State apartments, it then deconstructs the narrative of the guided tour.

## **5. The Castle: Arrival and Orientation**

The Castle is located to the south of the city-centre in a part of the city that has a high concentration of both tourist attractions and visitor flows. It is well signposted and lies within a short walking distance of other leading attractions like Trinity College, Christchurch Cathedral and the popular Temple Bar district. Visitor entry to the Castle is possible at two points, through the lower and upper courtyards. Public access to external areas of the Castle complex is generally unrestricted. This is necessary given its many diverse functions, its sizeable working population and the traffic that this generates. In a tourism context, this means that private tour companies are free to bring groups of visitors onto the grounds of the Castle and to interpret the site for visitors. The OPW has no control over this. In contrast, access to the inside of the Castle is strictly controlled, limited and quite minimal. Access is only permitted in groups accompanied

by Guides, and while inside visitors must always remain with the tour. There is no scope for wandering off or for moving around at one's own pace.

The castle is not obviously constructed as a visitor site and upon entry it is not immediately apparent how the visitor should proceed. The Castle is a very sizeable and complex site with many different buildings (marked on a large sign at the entrance to the lower courtyard) serving a variety of purposes. Furthermore, a car park occupies the lower courtyard making orientation somewhat unclear. The ticket office for the Visitor Tour is located in the state apartments in the upper courtyard, but this fact is far from clear for first-time visitors. An indication of where to go is most obviously indicated by a cluster of people waiting around the entrance to the state apartments. On entering the ticket office on the ground floor, visitors are told the time of the next available tour. They can purchase tickets, are asked their nationality and are then requested to wait in the entrance hall. No printed literature/orientation maps of the site are offered. A few books on the Castle lie on the counter in the ticket office and it is presumed that visitors can leaf through them. Tours are given in English, unless a tour group specifically requests a tour in another language. In instances where there is some time to wait until the start of the next tour, the Guide selling the tickets may suggest that the visitor walk back out into the upper courtyard to take a look at one of the several interesting Castle buildings e.g. the Chapel, the Clock Tower, etc. However, this action is at the discretion of the Guide, and in any case, no map is available to help the visitor self-guide themselves through the courtyards to find individual buildings.

Overall, there is a sense that on arrival, the Castle is a site that must be actively discovered by the visitor. It is not constructed as an 'easily read' visitor attraction, rather it is offered as something of a blank canvass which the visitor must figure out, find their way around and make sense of. Its role as a visitor attraction obviously competes with, and can seem overwhelmed by other administrative, political and conference functions. The contemporary Castle functions as a vehicle of the state and can be closed to the public at any time, depending on the requirements of government. The state apartments are used to host state events and to entertain VIPS on official state visits. At the time of writing, they are being prepared for a series of official visits from

VIPS that include the Queen of England and the President of the USA. These preparations take precedence over accommodating visitor requirements and mean noise disruption during guided tours and alteration to routine tour routes. State visits themselves can mean the cancellation of visitor access to the Castle.

### **5.1 Touring the Castle**

As already explained, the researchers undertook a number of tours of the Castle site. All of the tours had an over-arching storyline that was broadly comparable. In essence, the storyline was fundamentally a tracing of the evolution of the castle over time. Although the narrative did not follow a chronological pattern, all of the tours commented on: Viking settlement and society from 842 AD onwards; the Anglo-Norman castle built in 1204; the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when the castle was the political and social centre of Dublin, the second city of the British Empire; the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when Ireland was struggling for independence and; the function and significance of the castle in contemporary society. All tours begin in the state apartments when visitors are led up the Great Staircase to the first floor landing. Here, the Guides began by synopsising the historical evolution of the castle over time: pointing through the window to the site that once contained the black pool of water, the 'Dubh Linn', from which the city gets its name, and briefly tracing in outline, Ireland's 700 year colonization by England, up to its emergence as an independent state in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. While all of the tours adhered to this basic storyline, there was tremendous variety in the emphases attached to particular elements of the narrative. In terms of symbolism, highlights of the narrative at this opening point of the tour were the official symbol of the State – the blue and gold harp - positioned over the main doorway on the landing and; the portraits of the Presidents of Ireland that adorn the landing and the top of the stairs. Thus, all the tours began by clearly asserting the Castle's ceremonial significance as a key marker of identity of the Irish state.

### **5.2 The social significance of the Castle**

Once underway, however, the tours were predominantly historical narratives that were located most frequently in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Of the varying emphases that marked the different tour narratives, most prominent was a preoccupation with the Castle's social significance. All of the Guides explained that the Castle housed the viceroy, the monarch's representative in Ireland. The state apartments were built in 1761 for this purpose. As such, visitors learned that the 'Castle Season', during which time the viceroy was in residence, dominated the social calendar of the land. One of the Guides in particular, emphasized the role of Dublin, and of the Castle, in Georgian society. She pointed to the grandeur of areas within the castle, explained how young Irish debutantes would have been presented here, talked about the balls and asked visitors to imagine how glamorous and exciting it all must have been. However, all of the tours took pains to explain the social history of the Castle. For example, the social functions of the different rooms and particular furnishings were explained: the Drawing Room was presented as a place to which the ladies retired after dinner; the firescreens therein served to protect the ladies make-up; while the convex mirrors in the Dining Room allowed the host to survey the conversations of guests. On occasion, Guides broadened the narrative to offer a commentary on the social composition of society at the time more generally, or to comment, for example, on how inheritance laws worked.

### **5.3 The Castle as a centre of wealth**

The various ways in which the power and importance of the Castle was symbolized was a key theme. All of the Guides pointed to examples of fine interior plasterwork, art work, furnishings and design features (the proportions and orientation of the rooms, for example), some of them produced by leading European artists, architects and designers of the day. All of these demonstrated the various ways in which Castle society was closely connected with contemporaneous trends and fashions prevailing on the Continent. One of the Guides pointed to the neoclassical influences on furnishings and design more generally in the Castle, and explained how they these represented the influence of the Palace of Versailles and the French Court.

#### 5.4 The Castle as a centre of power

The castle's social significance was clearly an extension of its enormous political power. Recurrent references to the viceroy down the ages were prevalent. Direct connections with the monarchy as evidenced, for example, by visits from various reigning monarchs were emphasized, especially in the Throne Room, one of the main rooms on the tour. Visitors learned about the visits of different British monarchs and considerable attention focused on the throne. Each Guide explained how this had been originally built to very substantial proportions to accommodate King George (infamously remembered in the children's rhyme 'Georgie Porgie') but was subsequently redesigned to enable Queen Victoria reach the seat. Visitors' attention was also drawn to the symbolism evident in the crown, lion and unicorn adorning the throne and the entwining of shamrocks, roses and thistles on the very ornate chandelier hanging in the centre of the room.

In general, however, the castle's role in an Irish historical context was largely depoliticized by the Guides. History attests to Ireland having been a most unwilling colony: in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century the Castle authorities were actively involved in quelling the United Irishmen rebellion; in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century it witnessed the national social tragedy that was the Great Famine, yet these political difficulties were very much downplayed, except in one of the tours, where the Guide began by taking visitors into the Viceroy's Private Apartments. He explained how during WW1 these had been transformed into a Red Cross Hospital to deal with British military casualties. One of these rooms is now called the Connolly Room, in honour of James Connolly, who as the guide explained, had been one of leaders of the 1916 Irish rising. Wounded during the 1916 conflict, Connolly had been taken to this very room in the Castle to be nursed and court martialled by the British for treason. The irony of Connolly having been nursed back to sufficient health to enable him to be transported for execution in Kilmainham Gaol came through clearly in the narrative. This story also came through in one of the other tours. However, this time the Guide related the story in humorous overtones and no attempt was made to put the story in the context of the 1916 Rising.

In general, the figure of the viceroy was painted in neutral or even positive tones: one of the Guides made recurring references to the viceroy as a benevolent figure, explaining how a lot of viceroys bequeathed furniture and other material to the state. At one point she characterized the viceroy as the British monarch's representative in Ireland whose task was to ensure that 'Ireland was behaving itself'. Later on, while interpreting a print showing a viceregal party leaving the Castle on horseback, overlooked by the heads of Irish people stuck on stakes emerging from the castle walls, she jokingly explained that this was what happened when 'Irish people did not behave themselves'. In similar vein, a highly symbolic painting displayed on the ceiling of the former ballroom, St Patrick's Hall was interpreted in terms of its portrayal of Ireland being 'under the care of England'. While the Order of the Knights of St Patrick, whose colours drape the Ballroom / St Patrick's Hall, was explained by this same Guide as being 'a little boost' for Irish people. In contrast, one of the other Guide's few references to the viceroy was to the very last one. He told the tour group that when leaving the castle in 1922, this viceroy took most of the furniture with him, thus leaving the rooms relatively bare.

### **5.5 The Castle and the Irish state**

Dublin Castle is of great symbolic importance in the transition of Ireland from colony into nation. Its association with James Connolly, one of the leaders of the 1916 rising has already been discussed as having been mentioned by two of the Guides. Historically, the castle is well documented as having been one of the key targets for rebels in both the uprisings of both 1798 and 1916, however, this received no mention in any of the tours. It is also the key site associated with the transfer of power in 1922. As one of the guides pointed out, the official ceremony at which the British transferred power back to the Irish took place here. As they went on to explain, it is reputed that the incumbent viceroy, FitzAlan-Howard, complained that Michael Collins, who was to receive the handover on behalf of the Irish Government, was seven minutes late in arriving. In response, Collins is reputed to have said 'you kept us waiting 700 years, you can have the extra 7 minutes'. In the life of the Irish state since then, the Castle remains very



significant. As all of the Guides explained, St Patrick's Hall is the site for a number of state ceremonial functions including the inauguration of Irish Presidents, vote-counting in the General election and the hosting of state functions for VIPs.

## **6. Discussion**

The findings show that while there was one central storyline running through the narrative, the Guides' interpretation and presentation of that storyline varied very noticeably. At one extreme was the Guide whose over-riding effect was to build a picture of Georgian Dublin that was glamorous, exciting and at the heart of all political and social action. In this context, England was portrayed as the benevolent 'carer', with Ireland as the 'dependent' with naughty tendencies. At the other extreme, visitors were given the merest hints of the tensions, conflicts and tragedies that have characterized the relationship between Ireland and its closest neighbour over time. Noteworthy among the findings are the fact that individual Guides were relatively free to shape the narratives that they delivered. Discussions with OPW personnel revealed that Guides openly draw on their own areas of expertise / points of interest in interpreting historic sites for visitors. Hence, Guides with an art history background will tend to draw upon their specialist expertise, and this will clearly differ from Guides whose interests lie in social history, etc. The freedom for Guides to act independently is in effect, permitted by the very hands-off role played by the OPW. As defined by the OPW, the primary role of the Guide is to protect the site. Educating and informing the public about the site's significance is a secondary role (Moir, personal communication, 2011).

Perhaps because of this, the agency does not detail policies on guiding, prescribe scripts or seek to monitor the content and nature of the interpretation offered by its Guides. Nevertheless, it is clear that it condones certain guiding norms and practices. One such norm is that tours must be tailored to meet the perceived needs of different tour groups. Hence, storylines are adapted differently depending on whether the group comprises school children, foreign language students, old age pensioners, etc. What

seemed unclear, however, was how the OPW determined what these different needs might be. Kelly (personal communication, 2011) spoke about informally assessing groups by sight on arrival (e.g. might people need to sit down, might English need to be spoken slowly, might the group be on a very tight schedule and so need a 'speeded up' tour). Beyond this, it seems that the OPW has yet to thoroughly investigate the needs of its visitors. Yet, drawing on experience, Kelly (personal communication, 2011) was clear that visitors did have particular preferences. Above all, she was clear that visitors don't want too much academic information and that Guides must guard against losing engagement with their visitors. Language barriers are another issue. While tours in foreign languages are provided on request in Dublin Castle, it is very likely that all tour groups comprise some non-English speaking visitors (this was the case for the 3 tours studied). According to Kelly, this restricts the Guide from developing a detailed, comprehensive narrative.

In addition, it is expected that Guides be well attuned to the sensitivities of the stories associated with their sites. The political significance of Dublin Castle is such that it is associated with numerous potential sensitivities, often of a political nature. In essence, it symbolizes an extensive period of Irish history when Ireland was oppressed by, and rebelling against, its colonizer England. The difficulties of remembering and retelling this history to outsiders (tourists) are compounded by the immensely close and complicated ties that have for centuries bound the two countries together. Not least of these is the fact that Ireland's largest overseas visitor market has long been the UK. Fifty two per cent of overseas visitors to Ireland in 2009 were from the United Kingdom, and 35% of British holiday-makers at that time were on a first-time visit (Tourism Ireland Limited 2010). The need to be conscious of political sensitivities is thus glaringly apparent, not only from a mercenary perspective, but from a purely human one. For the OPW, it is expected that Guides set aside their own political views and be considerate to these sensitivities (Moir, personal communication, 2011). The findings show that for the most part, the Guides were, as Dahles (2002) has suggested, 'highly effective instruments of control' and 'buffers' protecting the sensitivities of visitors. Nevertheless, there were indications that as agents actively reproducing storylines, they themselves were also in a position to challenge, however marginally, the dominant narratives. This was clear in the case of

one of the Guide's narratives studied here. Departing from the script in the Dublin Castle case was made possible by the fact that the Guides here are working from an outline script which, while having an overarching framework, gives plenty of scope for active reconstruction and elaboration.

Discussions with Moir (personal communication, 2011) revealed that plans to re-invent Dublin Castle are imminent and will be implemented before the current tourist season is over. Not surprisingly, in light of the divergence of emphases identified in the castle narratives discussed above, recent OPW surveys have identified that visitors to the Castle emerge somewhat confused as to the story of the site (Moir, personal communication, 2011). The intention, therefore is to re-orient the ordering of the tour more chronologically as well as to open up more important spaces within the Castle in order to reveal greater insights into its history. In addition, the visitor function of the site is to become more pronounced, with plans to remove the car park from the lower courtyard already agreed. There are also further plans to re-house some of the government functions currently in the Castle to properties recently acquired (because of private sector bankruptcies) by the state through NAMA (the National Assets Management Agency). This will improve the presentation of the site as a visitor attraction and enhance opportunities to orient visitors more effectively throughout the site.

The timing and speed at which these plans are being implemented brings to mind Hoelscher and Alderman's (2004) comments about how the valuing of collective memories is influenced by the pressures of the marketplace. Certainly tourism is being prioritized at the moment as part of government strategy to lift the Irish economy out of crisis, and it may be that as the key heritage stakeholder, the OPW will come under new pressure to further develop its heritage services. To date, the OPW has undoubtedly been concerned to control the way in which the historical site of the Castle is consumed by visitors, both in its relatively limited opening hours and in the guiding norms and practices that it employs to ensure that the interpretation offered is not

overly detailed, is inoffensive and somehow suitable to contemporary visitors, many of whom are on tight package tour schedules, or on prescribed itineraries.

## **7. Conclusions**

Dos Santos's (2008) claim that particular power groups present the past in accordance with their present interests is somewhat apparent in the representation of Dublin Castle to its visitors. While the OPW takes a hands-off approach to the tour script at Dublin Castle, their encouragement of a sensitive, flexible and non-academic story line appears to support a rather neutralised or de-politicised narrative. The prevailing narrative of any given tour is controlled by the individual guides. Representations of the castle are selective, as particular guides place different emphases on certain aspects of its past. The narratives and representations are, in a similar way to that acknowledged by Cohen (1985), largely constructed from the guides personal interests or backgrounds. This results in each tour being overlaid with different 'preferred readings' (MacDonald, 2006: 128) that can vary from a romanticised depiction of life in the castle during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, a more humorous or ironic depiction of the Viceroys and Monarchs, a focus on the role of the castle during the 1916 Rising or since Ireland became a Free State in 1949. While each narrative may in and of itself appear to be a neutralised account of the past, each story emphasises a particular sense of identity, that identity being determined by the individual guide. In consequence, visitors leave with varying interpretations and understandings of the significance of the castle. The symbolic meanings of Dublin Castle, as a repository of colonial memories thus become somewhat lost in translation. Meanwhile, various aspects of Irish identity remain similarly unrevealed. Of particular relevance perhaps, is the lack of a cohesive interpretation of the evocative and complex meanings of the Castle. Instead there is what might be termed a more 'commodified interpretation' that both reflects the preferences of the guide and their assessment of visitor needs.

The reasons for this and its significance are as yet unclear. What is clear however, is that the study reported here is merely scratching the surface of a topic that is very complex and multi-layered. Thus far, for example, no attention has been paid to the visitors who go to sites such as Dublin Castle. Do questions such as these posed here have any relevance for visitors? Are visitors interested in uncovering the layers of history encasing such sites or are they merely interested in 'selected highlights'? Do they, in any sense want to be able to select their own highlights? These are obvious questions for further research. Specifically in an Irish context, this research has begun to ask questions about the role of the OPW as gatekeeper of the state's historic sites. It is indisputable that as the guardian of the state's historic sites and national monuments, its main duty of care is protection and preservation. Its budget, allocated and determined by the Department of Finance, is overwhelmingly oriented towards this task. However, should education, access and interpretation play such subsidiary roles? In the face of current economic difficulties, will the OPW come under pressure to re-balance its priorities? All of these questions merit further research.

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