

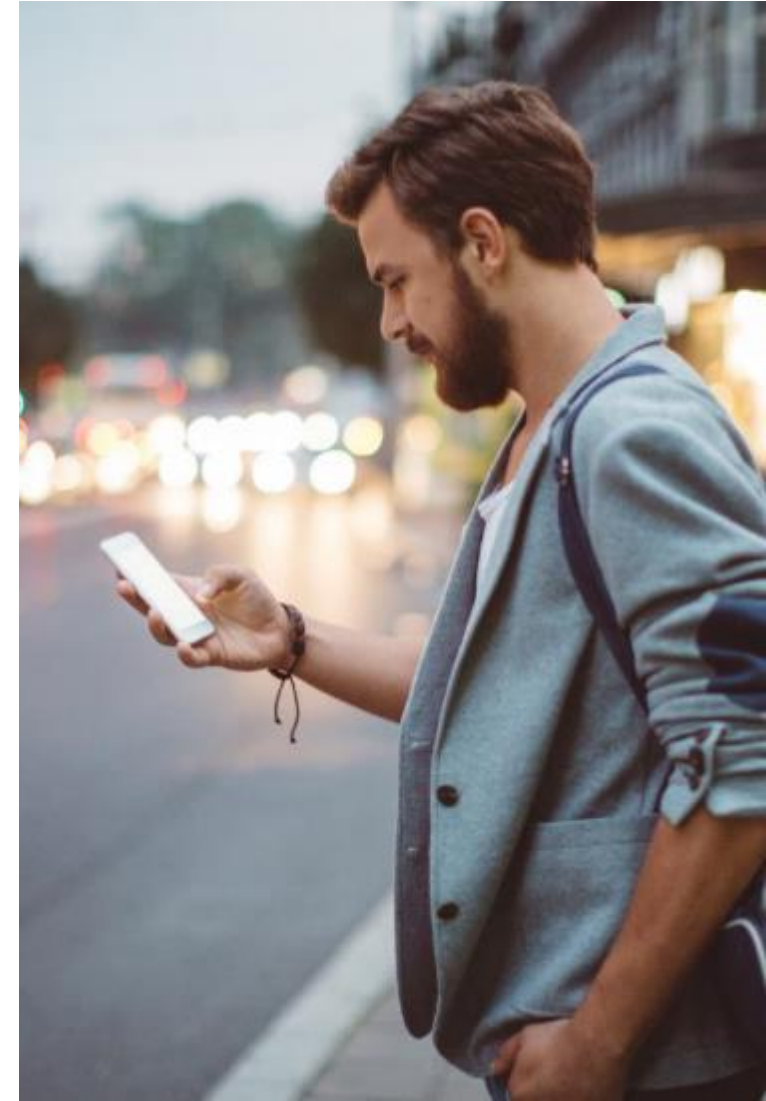


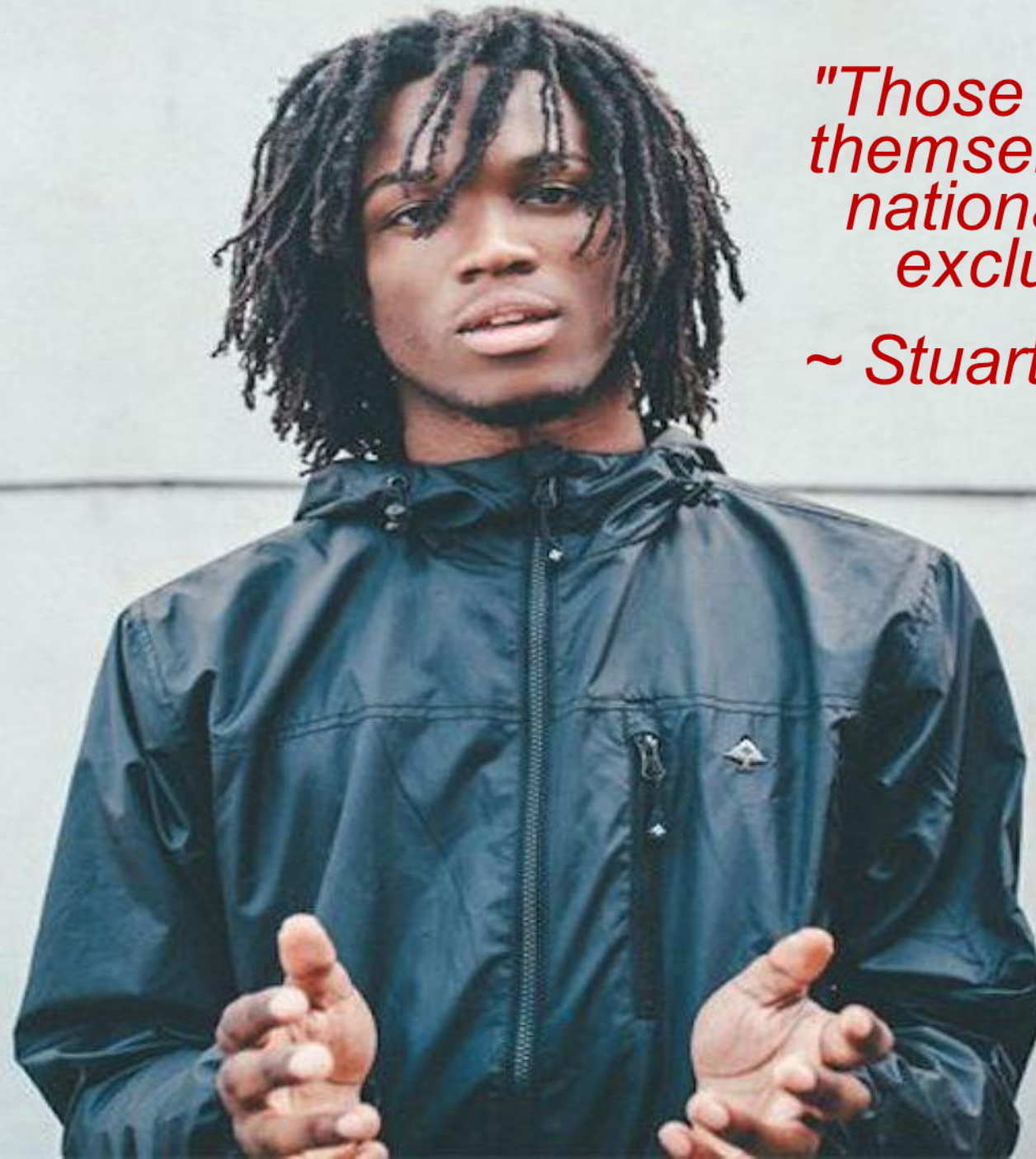
Showcasing Memory: Opening Society to its Archives

Stanley H. Griffin, PhD

Question:

In "*Opening the Archives*",
are we providing access to
buildings, materials, or meanings?





"Those who do not see themselves reflected in national heritage are excluded from it."

~ Stuart Hall (2002, 65)

Elements of Heritage:

A
continuum
of static
influence

With ‘fixed
content, context
and structure”

Museums

Built environment

Works of art

Places of Historical Interest

Material objects/culture



Barbados Department of Archives

“Over the three and half centuries of colonization, [the island] acquired a valuable archives which has only rarely been explored, leading many locals to believe that it did not even exist...”

- Victoria Borg O’Flaherty, 2018,385

01/04/2013
Brimstone Hill Fort
St. Kitts

“Every culture is an archiving culture...”

Whether as a folk dance, religious festivals, formal dance theatre, music, parades, or celebrations,

performance is a powerful evoker and transmitter of cultural knowledge”

-Jeannette Bastian, 2023, 70



The Masquerade of St Kitts and Nevis



“...A sliver of social memory and the archival residue in documents is but a sliver of documentary record”

-Verne Harris 2002

“...a sliver of memory ...”



“No archive can be the depository of the entire history of a society, of all that has happened in that society. Through archived documents, we are presented with pieces of time to be assembled, fragments of life to be placed in order, one after the other, in an attempt to formulate a story that acquires its coherence through **the ability to craft links** between beginning and the end.”

-Achille Mbembe, 2002



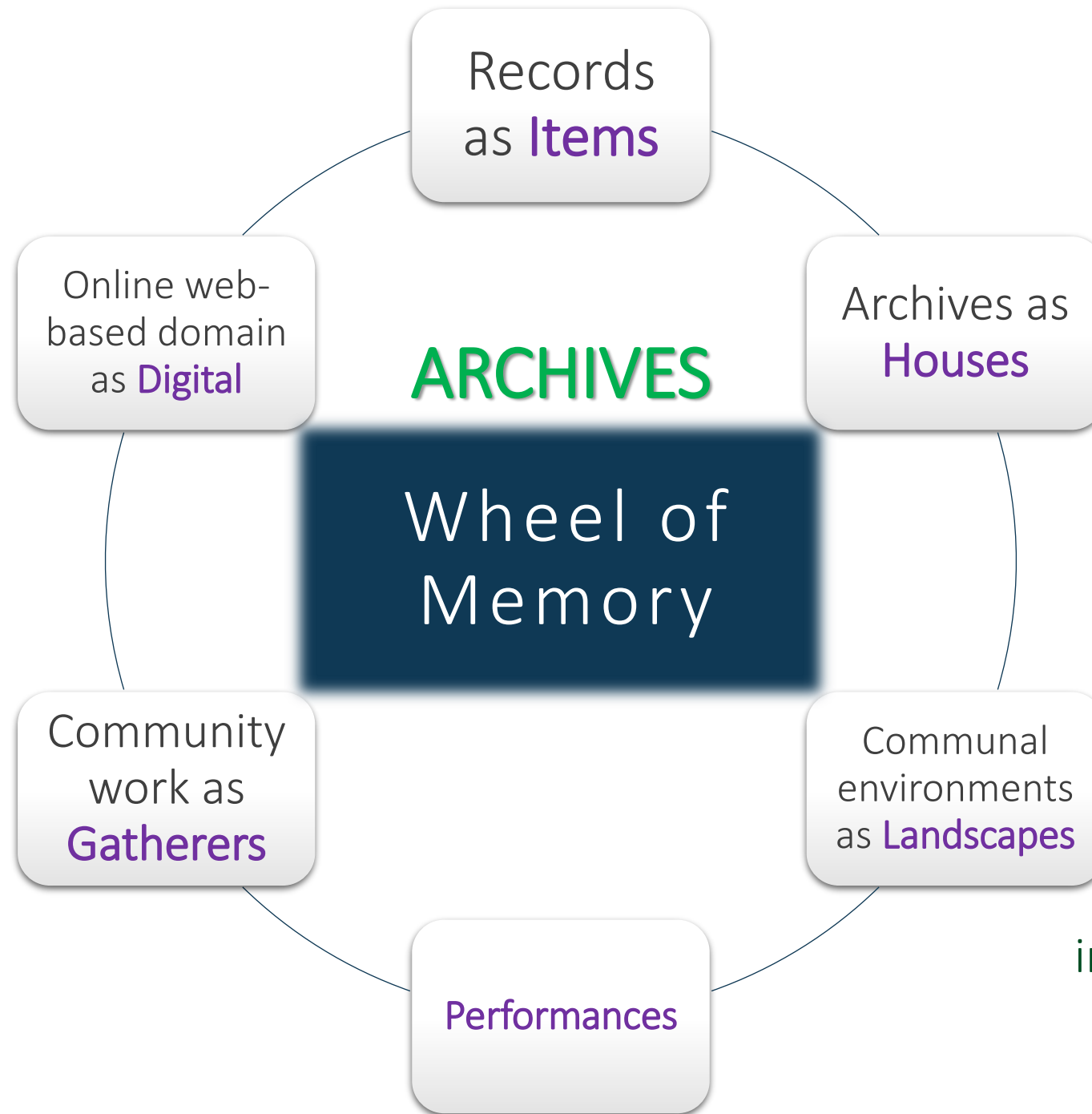
A Wheel of Memory

Within this documentary series of related parts, I would like to explore various formats, places, and practices as a continued connection of archival sources that, once opened, offers much more than content and perspective.

This interconnected wheel of memory gives the society access to meanings...



Memory has many parts and expressions: each an equal aspect of the whole memory...



Each element on the Wheel of Memory is Archival.

The activities on the Wheel of Memory can be recognized in the cultural traditions of every society

What we call memory is in fact the gigantic and breath-taking storehouse of material stock of what it would be impossible for us to remember, ..."
-Pierre Nora

The Rastafari of Jamaica

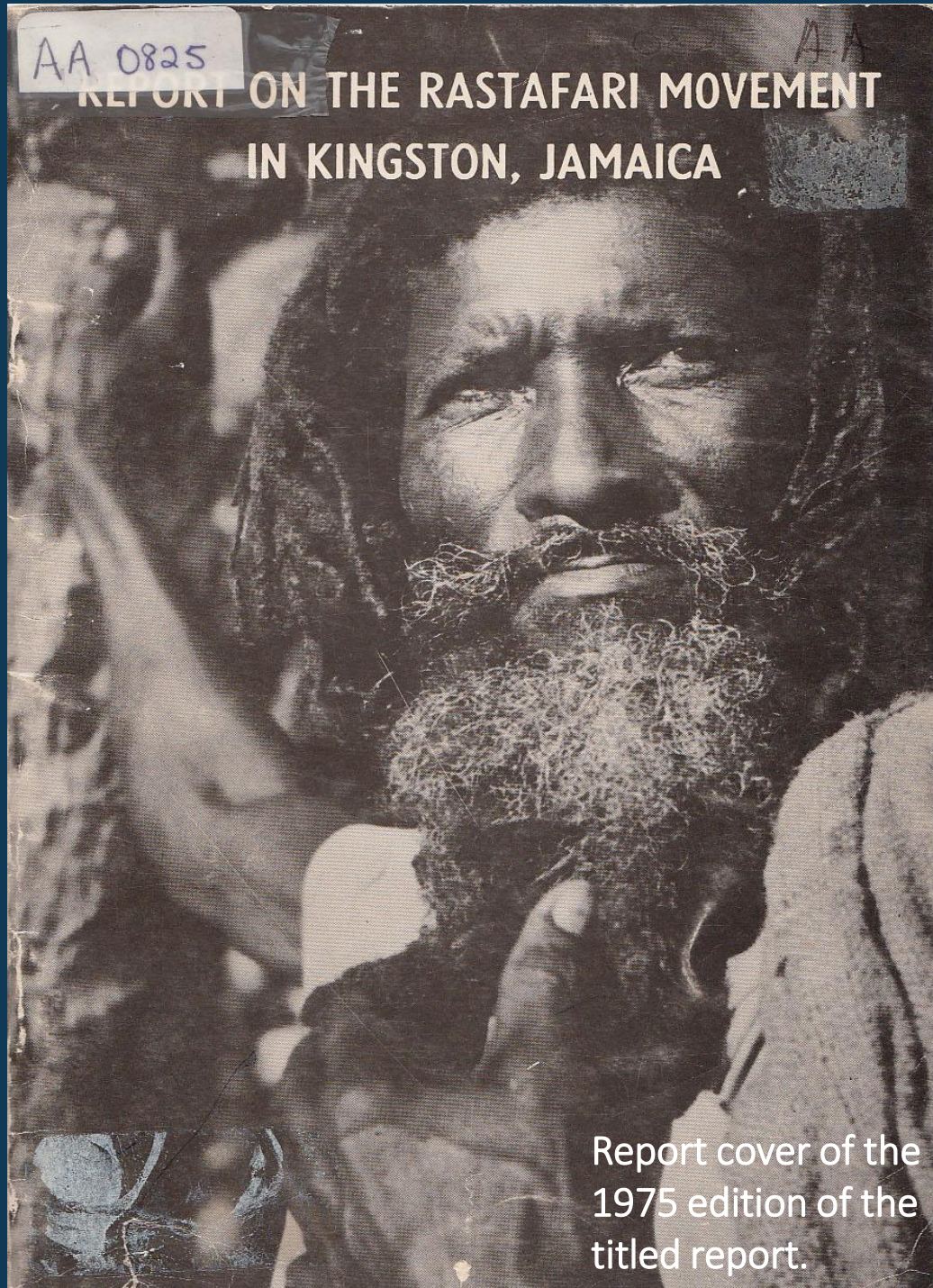
- There are no 'records' of their perspectives
- Official records are not positive, or representative of their experiences
- Are not written/recorded by them
- Need for self validation

Rastafari needs their own Records...

- A culturally distinct group in Jamaica
- A 'different' historical experience
- Mis/Under/Represented by Official records
- 'marginalised' by Society







Items of Memory

“The archival records that have been retained perpetuate colonial prejudices under the guise of archival preservation and national heritage.”

- The only file, “Sedition in St Thomas” consists of cabinet submissions, reports from community members—including clergymen and other concerned citizens, orders, and correspondence between ministers, Commissioner of police and Prime Ministers, Rastafari representatives, beginning in the 1930s.
- Reflect the ways in which colonial society criminalized and devalued the Rastafari community
- “These records outline and explain the beginnings of stereotypes and prejudices that plague Rastafari followers throughout the 20th century, with vestiges of these biases still affecting the community today”



Jamaica Archives
building, 1st
purpose-build
repository in
Commonwealth
Caribbean

Houses of Memory

“...Repositories, spaces, and containers that hold records, manuscripts and memorabilia of our collective pasts”

- Bastian, 2003, 9

- “Archival institutions founded in colonialism find it difficult to evolve and shed their coloniality articulated in their archival policies, practices and even procedures”
- There is a disconnect between popular community memory and the documents archived by authorities.
- British-style archiving did not assign much, if any, value to cultural articulations of memory. Neither did it allow... for the inclusion of the non-textual items of memory

Performances of Memory

Through the creation and performance of music, for example, persons and societies document and shape their lived experiences.

- Oral traditional forms are not considered authentic and objective as the colonial recordkeeping methodologies or colonial archives
- When Rastas gather for reasoning, intimate views and details on faith, philosophy, religious practices and historical experiences are articulated, expressed and shared.”
- Popular culture serves as a window to a society’s past and present and a repository to accessing their stories, experiences, and identity constructions





Landscapes of Memory

Pinnacle, St
Catherine,
foundation
community for
Jamaican Rastafari

“There is no place without a history, there is no place that has not been imaginatively grasped through song, dance and design, no place where traditional owners cannot see the imprint of sacred creation” –Deborah Rose, 1996

The landscape as an archival record becomes a map for describing the circumstances documented and a conduit for a sensory experience of the documented past.

Gatherers of Memory

1. Community of Records

Records that are specifically for and about, and practiced by, the specific community.



2. Community Archives

The act of creating or gathering memory, to form an access point—if not a repository, is...a means of recognizing and making available the value of the community's history, voices and narratives



Digital Memory



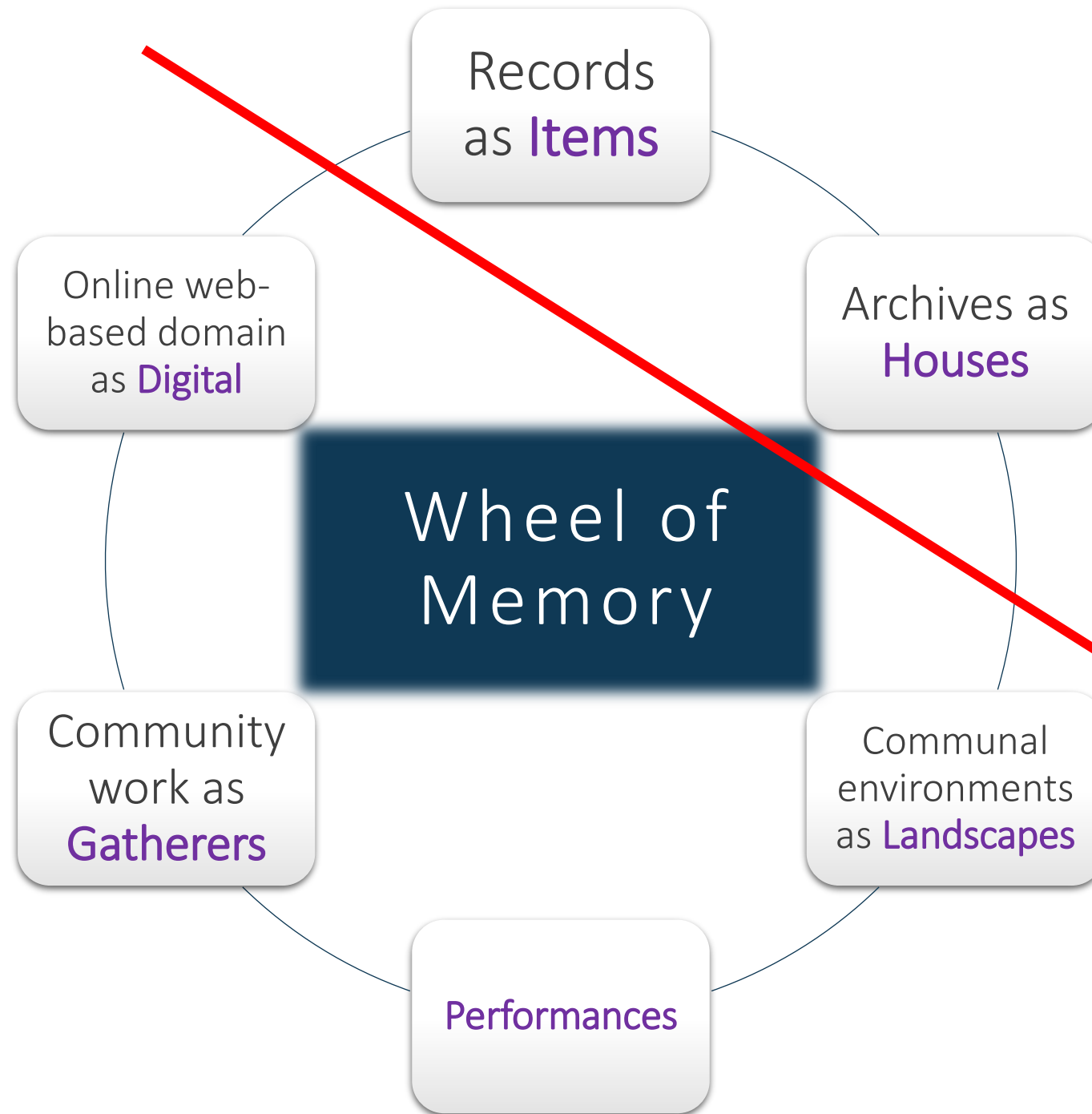
“The concept of **the selfie [is] a way of documenting memories and with a unique ability to foster the creation of our own narratives...** the image is to become part of an individual collection of memories, presenting the past, which shapes the decisions made for the future.

The individual automatically documents their memories: **the ‘self-taker’ makes a record of the fact that ‘they were there’ or that ‘they are friends of these other individuals’**...They develop an individual narrative which relates them to their surroundings...” –Susanne Boresma, 2019

It is in the small mundane act of documentation and remembrance, the byproduct of human activity, that the selfie, acts as an archival record. **The selfie is indeed a representative record of our time.**

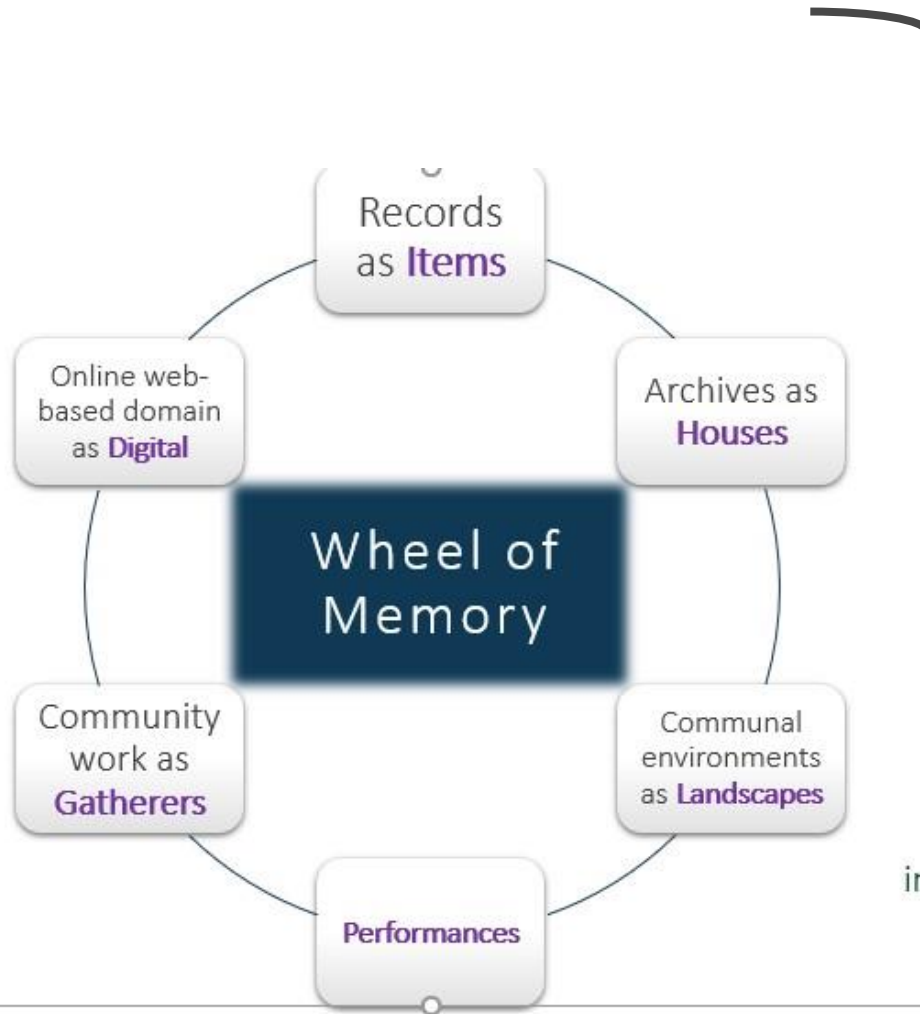
Interrogating the Wheel of Memory

The other elements on the Wheel of Memory are expressions already considered archival by non-writing cultures for generations



The items and houses of memory could easily be seen as Eurocentric, paternalistic and the only materials and places to be considered archival.

Embracing the Wheel of Memory

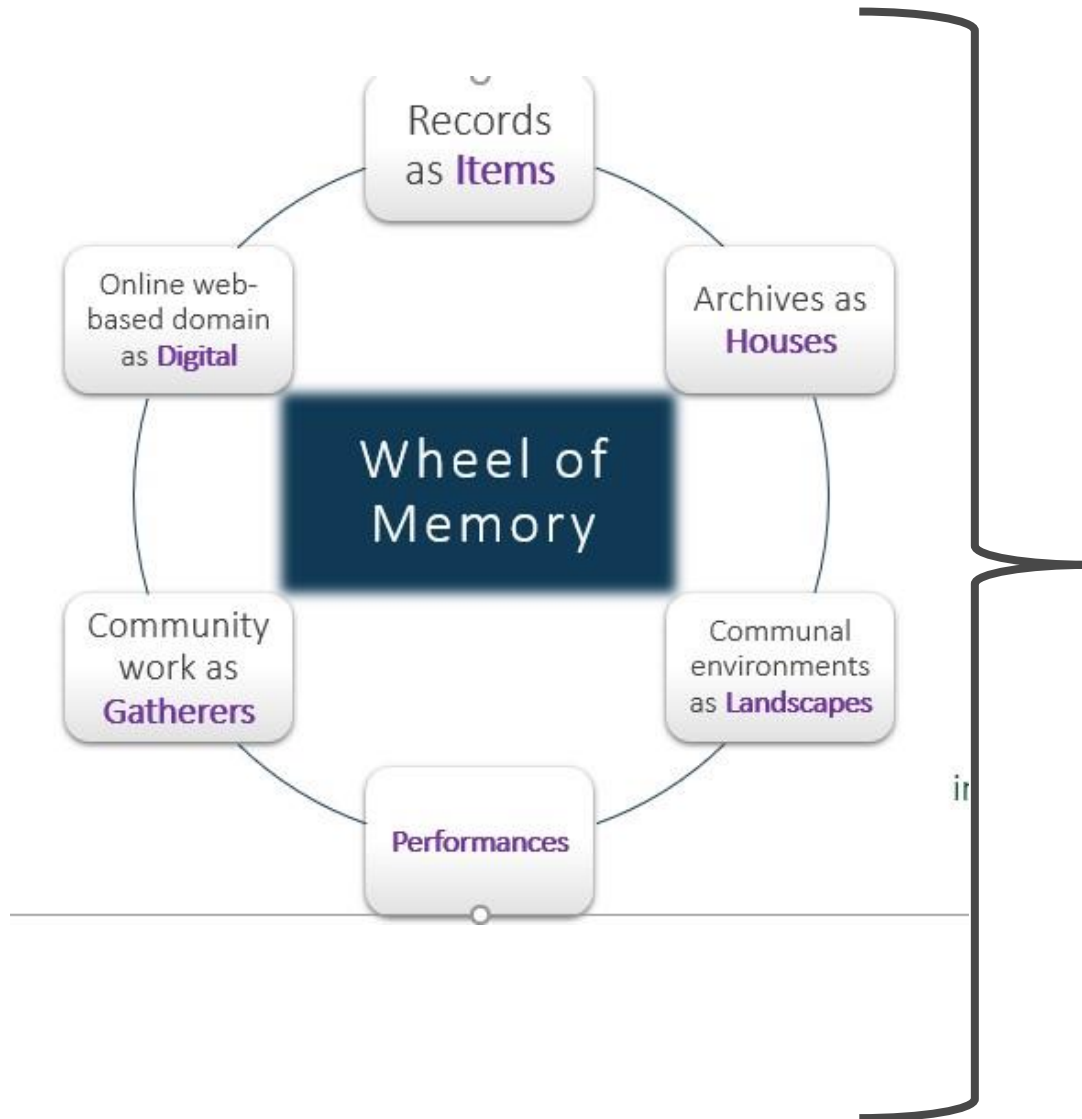


“In any community, **collective memory is supported through a mosaic of different forms**, but this is particularly the case for societies that encountered literacy and written records within the fairly recent past.

Throughout the Pacific Islands, **the sliver of community memory and evidence constituted by written records preserved in local archival institutions is exceptionally slender**. It represents a few tattered strands in **a finely woven mat of sources... with stories, songs, dances, myths, and traditions passed through generations by word of mouth”**

-Evelyn Wareham, 2001, 35

Embracing the Wheel of Memory



When we embrace all the elements on the wheel of memory, we give access to meanings, since each element documents and preserves aspects of the story according to the structure of the format and the context and content of the tradition. This gives unique contributions to understanding humanity.

The future of archival access is really about finding and giving meanings: the reasons behind and for the activity document.
the lessons to learn from the wheel of memory.



Access and Engagement: the challenge

We cannot limit opening the archives to repository doors or paywalls to digital content... the performative cannot be boxed and shelved in paper-ideal storage conditions. **Safeguarding contexts and meanings may become the primary work of the archivists and preservationists**, as much as tangible materials are the domain of the conservators.

This act of opening the archives will be painful for both archivist and society...**the performative elements of memory can transmit as much pain and darkness as the textual items of memory. A lament by drumbeat and dance movement can bring one to tears as much as a painful report or letter.**

Call to Innovation

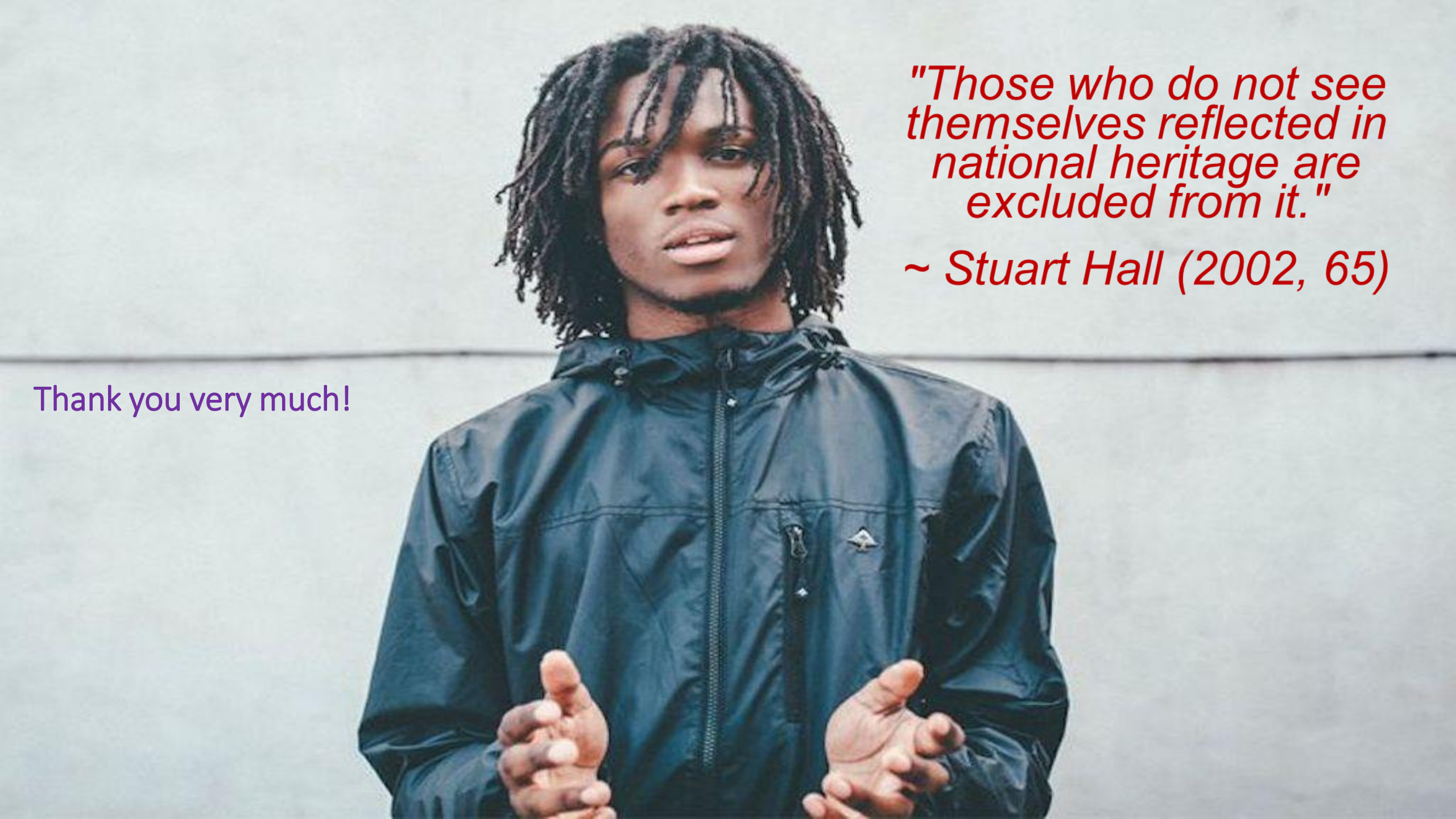
Our Archival Business is to provide access to Meanings, not just materials



A call to finding innovative new ways of appraising elements of memory in order to capture, preserve and make available contemporary ways of documentation and share meanings rather than just content.

We can no longer allow the archives to be perceived as mere repositories of historical curiosities and wonders, but ..

As dynamic reflections of the cultures, identities, power dynamics and social justice struggles of their times.



"Those who do not see themselves reflected in national heritage are excluded from it."

~ Stuart Hall (2002, 65)

Thank you very much!