Relationality, Corporeality and Bioarchaeology: Bodies *qua* Bodies, Bodies in Context

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The temporality of bodies has featured prominently in bioarchaeologists' studies of embodiment, lifecycle, plasticity and ancestor veneration, amongst other topics. We focus here on the temporality of violence, as evidenced by peri-mortem marks on and post-mortem treatments of bodies. Such evidence can signal violence that is either interpersonal or symbolic, though we realize the distinction may be a materially subtle one. To this end, we look to archaeologists' recent theoretical forays into temporality. More specifically, we deliberate about relationality, which invites reflective comparison between past and present bodies. Relationality allows bioarchaeologists to examine bodies qua bodies, as well as demands that they contextualize their ancient (or historic) case studies and present-day research in time and place. To explore these ideas, we draw upon a variety of sources, not all of which are traditional (i.e. impersonal) academic discussions. The latter can obfuscate or overlook the more emotional or politicized dimensions of violated bodies.

Of all the objects of archaeological inquiry, it is arguable that bodies are the most profoundly shaped by temporality. Corporeal transformation happens throughout the course of a life cycle, and bioarchaeological researchers have examined the marks of development milestones, ritual passages and generational connections (e.g. Bonogofsky 2011; Geller 2004; 2012; Robb 2002; Sofaer 2006). Bodies' biological cessation also produces universally dramatic physical changes about which anthropologists have long theorized (e.g. Douglas 1966; Hertz 1960). Well after death, we see a life of the body — whether in the form of the socially active ancestor, politically contested corpus or scientifically probed specimen.

We would argue that in the capacity of *subjects* with culturally contingent significance, more so than analytical object, bodies lose some of their 'thingness'. Several researchers have theorized recently that regarding human remains as things is useful for grappling with certain intellectual dialectics — between object and subject, the short-lived and *longue durée*, the past and present (e.g. Filippucci *et al.* 2012; Sofaer 2006). Such an intellectual frame may be useful given the research queries posed and sample under study. 'While material', Filippucci and colleagues (2012, 206) remark (and we concur), 'human remains do not seem to trigger the same responses that artifacts do'. Hence, researchers approach bodies with a certain amount of ambivalence. It is possible, however, that Western scholars' qualification of a body as a thing may unwittingly provide another etic and analytically distant (or clinical) perspective. Such a conceptualization presumes a universal understanding of the biological with regard to bodily parts, fluids and processes and it works to elide salient communities' emic conceptions of corporeality in both the here and hereafter.

Descendent communities, for example, may take issue with their ancestral dead being categorized as things. Human remains are often more, not less, culturally and politically sensitive than other types of material remains (e.g. La Roche & Blakey 1997). For this reason, those who work with them have attended of late to the ethical implications of doing so. Such conversations are often born out of, or perhaps provide the impetus for, the passage of significant legislation. In the United States, Native Americans' concerns and

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the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA) catalyzed discussions amongst researchers who examine ancient and historic remains (Larsen & Walker 2005; Walker 2008), while in the United Kingdom the Human Tissue Act of 2004 had an impact on museum practices (Peers 2009). Researchers working outside of these nations have taken ethical lessons in hand and begun to delineate the common ground and points of departure in national contexts contoured by different histories, cultures and conceptions of indigeneity (e.g. Chile: Lozada 2011; Mexico (Cucina 2013); Peru: Turner & Andrushko 2011).

Of course, ethical obligations to the dead are not circumscribed to indigenous communities, though history certainly teaches us that the latter have been disproportionately affected. Dead human bodies have agency, not all of which bioarchaeologists fully comprehend. The aim of this article is to point those who study human remains, especially ancient ones, down some new intellectual pathways. Here we will take up and develop the connections between temporality and corporeality, an intersection about which a small though increasing number of scholars have deliberated (Filppucci *et al.* 2012; Gowland & Thompson 2013; Peers 2009; Robb 2002; 2009). As Robb (2002, 153) has recognized, the body is a tool for understanding 'the way archaeologists have theorized time (e.g. debates about linearity *versus* circularity and the integration of time into social orders)'. Hence, we deliberate about bodies *qua* bodies not just for didactic purposes, but as a conceptual tool for interrogating the discipline's understanding of temporality. While we are primarily speaking about bioarchaeology, inclusive of the study of human remains are also mortuary archaeology, forensic archaeology and forensic anthropology.

With regards to human remains, the temporal connection may be a linear one inasmuch as contemporary communities are descendant ones. Alternatively the connection can be characterized by relationality that invites comparison. 'Rather than detachment or genealogy', Shannon Dawdy (2009a, 140) remarks, 'the relationship between the past and present could be one of reflective comparison'. What does the comparison of those representations in the past and present tell us about the practice of bioarchaeology and relations between practitioners and contemporary communities? The answers to this question — and indeed the question itself — are complex and intimately tied to the ways that bioarchaeologists understand bodies *qua* bodies, as well as the way we view time and politics (both ancient and modern). In this article we will tackle these challenging issues through one particular lens, that of violence. We argue that at the nexus of death and violence, temporally dynamic meanings are created by and through bodies. Ultimately, a relational consideration of corporeality, temporality and violence point us in the direction of a more reflective bioarchaeological practice.

To begin these considerations, we meditate on our work with pre-Columbian human remains from Mesoamerica. Some of what we offer here derives from our experiences in the field. Rather than reading these accounts as idiosyncratic or anecdotal, we hope such narratives resonate with bioarchaeologists and serve as ingress for deliberating about the overarching sociopolitical context in which past practices occurred and present-day researchers' studies take place. We see this conversation, for instance, as extending discussions of cannibalism in the prehispanic American Southwest with regard to bioarchaeological investigation, practitioners' dissemination of information and contemporary Native Americans' responses and experiences (e.g. Dogonske *et al.* 2000; Nichols & Crown 2008). In Mesoamerica, specifically, violent practices — evidenced by peri-mortem trauma, post-mortem fragmentation and stylized display — were ubiquitous in the past, as considerable bioarchaeological studies attest (e.g. Agrinier 1978; Barrett & Scherer 2005; Berryman 2007; Duncan 2005; 2011; Massey & Steele 1997; Mock 1998; Pijoan Aguadé & Lory 1997; Saul & Saul 2002; Tiesler & Cucina 2006; 2007; 2012; Weiss-Krejci 2003). Intriguingly, this is not only the case in pre-Columbian times but also in contemporary Mexican and Central American regions. Part and parcel of corporeal violence and violations are more subtle acts of desecration that practitioners may enact inadvertently. When working with ancient dead bodies connected to living communities, whether direct descendants or otherwise, might we make transparent the exercise of symbolic violence in our bioarchaeological studies? We believe there is a relationality between past and present corporeal practices, especially those which indicate interpersonal and symbolic violence, that begs deeper discussion — 'a reflective comparison' per Dawdy. Hence, we see this piece as creating a space in bioarchaeology for practitioners to discuss more deeply intersections that may generate ambivalence or unsettle.

Untimely deaths

Adapted from M.K. Stockett Suri's Field Journal, 5 April 2002

LAS CANOAS, SANTA BARBARA, HONDURAS

While excavating some skeletal remains today, I came face to face with the convergence of past and present in

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a most unexpected and disturbing manner. The burial I am currently uncovering appears to be that of an individual cut down in the prime of life. A prominent mandibular abscess is already visible and may have been the cause of death. The remains are remarkably well preserved and I was engrossed in studying them — but not so engrossed I didn't hear the cry go up among the local Hondurans assisting with our work. There was an emergency — the young daughter of one of our workers had been playing by the river and fallen in.

I abandoned my study of the long dead skeleton and rushed to help, but I was too late — we all were. The girl had drowned. Suddenly the skeletal remains that had been of such urgent interest a few moments ago paled in importance to this all-too fresh corpse. We all stood around in shock — helpless.

The girl's grieving father soon communicated that his extended family lived many hours away, far up in the mountains. He, his wife, and his children had come to the Santa Barbara valley by bus seeking seasonal agricultural work and stayed on when my project began hiring. They had no vehicle, little money, and no means of returning their daughter's body home, so I volunteered to drive them.

We loaded the girl's body into the back of the pickup truck, cushioning it on old mattresses. The family piled into the cab with me, while others rode at the margins of the truck bed — an entire funeral procession in a single rickety pickup. The drive took three hours, but it felt like a lifetime. The sobs of the girl's family, my feelings of shock and sorrow, and the horror of looking into the rear-view mirror and seeing a corpse stretched out behind me were visceral and inescapable.

The sun began to set. The girl's father told me when and where to turn. Paved roads turned to dirt, dirt roads to rutted tracks in the mountains. I had no idea where I was going. I was sad and afraid. A million thoughts ran through my mind. Chief among them: how violent and final the act of dying can be.

But . . . what a strange thing for an archaeologist to think. In our view, after all, death is often not final. It unfolds over time, even after the dying is done. Not only does a physical body remain for the living to deal with, but an impression of that person as he or she was in life lingers — growing and changing differently in the memory of each person who knew him or her.

The bioarchaeological work undertaken at Las Canoas and the tragedy that unfolded down by the river give us an opportunity to reflect on the complex ways that past and present bodies may brush up against one another in time, eliding clear distinctions between prehistory, history and modernity. As such, the meanings encoded in and communicated through bodies can be temporally contingent and transitory. One reason for this is that bodies themselves are constantly in flux — from birth, through childhood and rites of passage, into adulthood and old age, in dying and after death. Resultant from developmental changes and/or social actions, bodies' meanings similarly transform.

Robb's (2002) aforementioned deliberation about the body and time are useful for linking up a culture's conception of corporeality, mutability and physical remains. Time, as he describes, extends from the experiential to the social to the cosmological. Experiential time is subjectively embodied and pertains to human activities, routine or remarkable ones, at various junctures throughout an individual's life history. Mediating between the scale of the individual and the cosmos, social time marks age-related shifts in statuses. These statuses, which are often associated with discernible bodily changes, are shared by cohorts and dictate interactions between generations. Osteobiographic analysis, according to Robb, illumines decedents' life histories and how they are contoured by personal experiences, cultural ideals and broader sociopolitical circumstances.

Yet, as bioarchaeologists, we must attempt to recover more than just life histories encoded in bone. Building on Robb's ideas, Geller (2012) has developed 'death history': the concept describes a community's ongoing engagement with decedents' bodies. Such relations are materially discernible, symbolically meaningful and contextually contingent. Narration of a death history offers information about a culture's understanding of cosmological time. As Robb writes, cosmological time extends beyond human lifetimes, and accordingly it is eternal and indifferent to mortal meddling. An individual's death provides the convergence of all three temporalities. Examining 'the history of human remains after death' (Robb 2002, 160), death histories helps us to understand how a culture links the experiential to the social to the cosmological. When taken together, life and death histories facilitate recognition of bodies as a nexus for experiencing the world, as a focus of external cultural expectation and attention and as sites for political engagement — both during life and after death. Bodies *qua* bodies are thus not only physical objects but also sites for less tangible meaning-making and expression. In this way, they are an ideal subject for scholars interested in examining the intersection of temporality, modernity and memory (e.g. Dawdy 2009a, b; 2010; Delle 2008; González-Ruibal 2008; Prus 2007; Shackel 2001; Stockett 2010).

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This intersectionality of past and present bodies may be examined if we return to the case of the pre-Columbian skeletal remains from Las Canoas and the tragedy of the worker's daughter. In both cases, the material traces of death were few. Similar to the majority of graves excavated in this region, the pre-Columbian body was not marked or memorialized in any materially explicit way. The decedent, a probable female aged 20–30 years, was tightly flexed, her body facing west. Skeletal analysis also indicates the presence of a severe abscess near the lower right first molar, which may have been the cause of death (Stockett 2005). Her remains, which date to the Late Classic period (AD 650–900), were interred in a hasty pit situated approximately 20 cm below the exterior southwest corner of Structure 24. This structure was a modestly sized cobble and earthen residential building located near the center of the Las Canoas community (Stockett 2005).

Given her likely commoner status, no ancient texts narrated information about her life. No shrines were erected over her grave site and no objects were interred with her as a commentary upon her identity in life or after death (Stockett 2005). In fact, until her remains were excavated, this woman was, for all intents and purposes, forgotten. Such treatment is not atypical for pre-Columbian remains from northwestern Honduras, save those from Maya sites such as Copán (see for example Bell *et al.* 2004.; Buikstra *et al.* 2004; Price *et al.* 2010). While some individuals are buried beneath benches or house floors, few at the site of Las Canoas received much in the way of grave goods or burial furniture. Beyond death and through time, these individuals' lives and the weight attached to the events of their deaths have been further erased by a widespread feeling among modern indigenous people that they lack cultural or ethnic connection to the prehispanic inhabitants of the region (though see Euraque 2002). When asked about their relation to the archaeological remains they help excavate, most in the Las Canoas region see only 'indos pobres' and few view them as potential ancestors. The same sentiment, as we discuss later, is also expressed by local peoples where Geller has worked.

Through the acts of modern excavation and analysis, however, information about the life of the woman unearthed at Las Canoas has been partially recreated and re-remembered. In addition to certain information about demographics and mortuary practices, we know she belonged to a small community that flourished rapidly and was equally rapidly abandoned when economic and political troubles rippled through the region at the Late Classic period's close (Stockett 2007; 2010). We know that Las Canoas rose and fell on its economic efforts, particularly those focused around the production of pottery. It is not hard to imagine that like most in the village, this woman laboured at some aspect of that craft. Furthermore, we know her family took the trouble to bury her remains close to their home, perhaps for sentimental reasons and perhaps to strengthen their link between the living and the dead and signal the connection between lineage and place (e.g. McAnany 1995; McAnany *et al.* 1999). From the bioarchaeological work of creating life and death histories, this woman's body was imbued with subjectivity and significance; some of those meanings took on new shape in light of a more recently deceased body — that of the worker's daughter.

On the surface, it is tempting to draw parallels between past and present deaths at Las Canoas. Both the excavated skeleton and the worker's young daughter were taken from the world too early in life, in ways both violent and likely painful. Both were mourned and buried in humble graves near their homes. But, these bodies are separated by over a thousand years of socio-political and cultural change, and the connections between them must be interrogated more deeply. The little girl who drowned met her fate enmeshed in a political system that kept her family in poverty, forced them to travel in search of work and left them dependent on those with greater economic resources and more sociopolitical power. Was this also true for the woman whose skeleton was being unearthed at Las Canoas? Likely not. Mourners, after all, buried her under a distinctly different set of circumstances. As noted above, the Las Canoas community experienced a brief but significant period of prosperity, distributing their ceramic wares throughout the neighbouring Naco and Cacaulapa valleys (Stockett 2007) and the pre-Columbian woman likely did not die in poverty, at least as we conceptualize it today. Her communities' politico-economic success, however, was relatively short-lived. As larger forces of collapse and warfare spread throughout the ancient Mesoamerican world, the efforts of tiny Las Canoas were overpowered by struggles for power playing out in distant regions. But, we do see some commonality inasmuch as politico-economic forces beyond the control of both ancient woman and modern girl would have significantly impacted and shaped their life histories. We could also argue that in some ways the experiences of the pre-Columbian woman — the rise and eventual fall of her village and later her entire society, followed by its oppression and transformation at the hands of the Spanish — contributed meaningfully to the conditions and world into which the worker's daughter was born and died.

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Furthermore, it is important to reflect on the ways that past and present intermingle at archaeological sites, both theoretically and ideologically, as well as how our research impacts local peoples. Archaeologists and bioarchaeologists are not set apart from the economic and political forces in the countries where they conduct their work. The mere act of hiring local labour to assist with fieldwork can dramatically alter dynamics within small communities, especially those dependent upon seasonal labour, like the towns surrounding the site of Las Canoas. One may even raise the following query: had Stockett Suri not hired that girl's father, would his daughter be alive today? There is no way to know, but one thing is certain: we cannot turn a blind eye to the myriad ways our fieldwork impacts the people and communities with whom we work. Nor can we ignore the fact that our presence is made possible by, and sometimes even contributes to, the political systems in which those communities exist — and this issue, that of symbolic violence, is one to which we return later.

We argue that it is important to consider that we have an obligation not just to the bodies of the ancient dead, but those still living as well. As Dawdy reminds us, 'The terms of excavation opportunity are often set by forces much larger and more powerful than either the archaeologist or descendant community members' (2009b, 190). Our experiences in Honduras have underscored this point in dramatic ways. To explore these elisions of past and present more deeply, we turn now to considerations of violence and the ways both modern and ancient bodies may be transformed by it. An article from the Guatemalan *Prensa Libre* provides an entry point to considering these issues.

Corporeal violence

27/10/10 - 00:00 *Nacionales*

Violencia imparable deja ocho muertos

La Policía Nacional Civil reportó ayer la muerte de ocho personas, en distintos hechos y regiones del país.

Cuatro hombres con armas de fuego y cubiertas las caras con pasamontaña asaltaron un microbús en el cantón Lagunilla, Jutiapa.

Para despojar de sus pertenencias a los pasajeros tomaron de rehén a la estudiante Eunice Arana Rodríguez, a quien hirieron de bala, y luego huyeron. La estudiante de magisterio murió cuando la trasladaban al hospital de Jutiapa.

Aparte, en la zona 4 de la cabecera de Chiquimula se halló el cuerpo de una mujer decapitada. La occisa, de unos 23 años, también tenía señales de haber sido torturada, y a la par había un rótulo en donde se leía: 'Esto es para la gente de Honduras. Para ti Chando. Ven a pelear; si quieres o tienes miedo. Puto de 200'.

En otro hecho, balearon a dos hombres, que no portaban documentos, en la 4a. calle y 5a. avenida de la zona 1 de la cabecera de Chimaltenango.

En Jalapa encontraron tres cadáveres, el de María Dorinda Cifuentes Pérez, 48, en San Pedro Pinula; el de Leonel Camposeco Mont, 64, en el barrio El Porvenir, de la cabecera, y el de Benigno Cerna González, 28, en Monjas.

Adán Méndez Aguilar, 34, fue muerto a balazos a inmediaciones del campo de la feria de Génova, Quetzaltenango.[1]

The 27 October 2010 *Prensa Libre* headline, included above, read 'Unstoppable violence leaves eight dead'. The brief article in the Guatemalan newspaper went on to provide an accounting of eight violent deaths in disparate locales throughout the nation: in the southeastern Department of Jutiapa, four masked man robbed a microbus. A student was taken hostage and then shot. He died after being transported to the hospital. Elsewhere in the Department of Chiquimula, the headless body of a young woman, who also carried the marks of torture, was discovered. Two men who carried no identifying documentation had been gunned down in Chimaltenango. In three different locations in the Department of Jalapa, three people died following violent encounters, while in the western highland Department of Quetzaltenango, near the fair grounds of Génova, a man was shot to death.

Such news items are not uncommon in a region of the world known for high homicide rates.[2] Intentional homicides throughout all of Central America have increased sharply since 2007 as a consequence of organized crime, drug trafficking, youth and gang violence, weak criminal justice and the availability of firearms (UNODC 2011, 25; World Bank 2011; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2011; World Bank 2011).[3] Despite the normalization of violent deaths, however, the 23-year-old woman discovered in Chiquimula stands out. Another news report remarked on her body's advanced state of decomposition, the desolated road where it was found and the discovery of her head in the city's park.[4] The woman's tortured, headless and decomposing body invites us to deliberate about the meanings attached to and sociopolitical circumstances that engender such extreme corporeal violation and fragmentation in both the past and the present.

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Death by or in association with decapitation speaks to a particular type of peri- and/or post-mortem corporeal violence that is rife with symbolism. The effects of violent, bodily fragmentation are two-fold. As an act of interpersonal violence, decapitation obfuscates identity and concomitantly dehumanizes. Decapitation also signals a gruesome warning to the larger community. In this regional context, those who perpetrate such acts are often involved in organized crime, namely drug trafficking. 'Narco-violence' fixates on post-mortem fragmentation and stylized display of bodies. As Howard Campbell (2014, 6–7) has discussed for Mexican drug cartels:

> The victims of drug killings are deliberately dumped in open view. These acts of extraordinary calculated horror include creating piles of multiple decapitated individuals or cadavers with butchered limbs or other forms of dismemberment and/or sexual torture. Often the bodies or severed heads, singly and multiply, have been posed in a degraded choreography, such as to form the letter Z (a direct reference to the Zetas drug cartel). Severed heads or other amputated body parts have been displayed on top of cars, rolled onto a dance floor, lined up in rows, exhibited in public parks and plazas, secreted in ice chests, left in front of politicians' homes or government offices, or impaled on poles and fences. Bodies have also been hung by ropes from bridges and buildings, burned with acid, crucified on barbed wire fences, decorated with masks (commonly that of a pig), written on or carved with knives, and disfigured or mocked in numerous other ways, such as flaying a face and stitching it to a soccer ball or dressing a body in the traditional garb of a stereotypical drunken peasant farmer.

Given the permeability of national borders, traversed easily though more often than not illegally, it is unsurprising that narco-violence like that found in Mexico has escalated recently in Central American nations. On 15 May 2011, for instance, *Prensa Libre* reported on the mutilated and decapitated remains of 27 labourers discovered on a cattle ranch near La Libertad, a municipality in northwestern Guatemala's Petén region. News stories suggest that Z200, a local branch of the Mexican Los Zetas drug cartel, were responsible for the violent executions. Reportedly using the blood from a victim's severed leg, the perpetrators left a message for the ranch owner on the walls of a building: 'What's up, Otto Salguero, you bastard? We are going to find you and behead you, too. Sincerely Z200.'[5] While news accounts suggested that Salguero was involved in the drug trade, the labourers seemed to have been innocent victims.

The scale of bloodshed in the Petén case is certainly newsworthy and somewhat atypical. But, as the decapitated body of the 23-year-old woman discovered in Chiquimula also suggests, such violence is not random or idiosyncratic. Corporeal violence is a direct consequence of the push and pull of politicized democratizing processes, historic legacies of postcolonial mass killings and militarization and a lucrative and illicit global trade in drugs.

A top-down perspective, however, may prevent researchers from grasping how such situations pertain directly to their own investigations of ancient bodies. Thinking from the bottom up, Geller has realized that she and the unnamed woman in the *Prensa Libre* article have treaded some unexpected common ground. The decapitation victim was rumored to be the mistress of Amilcar Alexander Ardón. In 2007, Ardón was elected mayor of El Paraíso, a municipality in Honduras' Department of Copán just 60 miles east of Chiquimula. Attached to the women's body was a message, presumably meant for Ardón. 'This is for the people of Honduras. For you, Chando. Come and fight if you like — or maybe you're scared. Fucked by 200'[6] Given the message, the woman may have been a victim of narco-trafficking. It is possible that 200 refers to Z200, the aforementioned branch of Los Zetas. Los Zetas cartel has a violent rivalry with the Sinaloa cartel and Ardón has been linked with the latter (Arnson & Olson 2011, 30 & 80). Narco-trafficking then may have provided impetus for the woman's beheading. Certainly, Ardón's politics are questionable from the perspective of human rights. Information about his acts of intimidation were detailed in a 16 July 2009 correspondence that U.S. Ambassador to Honduras Hugo Llorens sent to various federal agencies and departments. The confidential correspondence was later made public by WikiLeaks.

> 3. (C) Amilcar Alexander Ardon, the National Party mayor of El Paraiso, Copan Department, allegedly arrived at the home of teacher Oscar Barrera with a contingent of armed men and ordered Barrera to call his personnel and advise them to resume teaching classes July 15. Ardon went on to say he had given the armed men the 'green light' to do 'whatever needs to be done' to ensure that classes resume. Similar actions were taken against the director of the local high school, Lito Lemuz. Lemuz claims that Ardon threatened him with bodily harm if classes did not resume.(Note: The teachers unions are considered part of Zelaya's core support and have been protesting for his return.[7])

El Paraíso is a town of about 18,000 people and its voters elected Ardón mayor in 2007. He is a member of the

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National Party, and his political accession seemed to echo other though mostly minor changes taking place in the community, the most significant of which was the internet's introduction. Having lived and worked there from 2004 to 2007 as part of the El Paraíso Region Archaeological Project (PAREP), Geller had always found the town to be small, rural and insular though not unfriendly. After Ardón's election, change in the community became much more palpable. Hummers and luxury sedans were not an uncommon sight on El Paraíso's dirt roads. Large construction projects were initiated, the most remarkable was renovation of the town's meeting hall to accommodate a heliport.

Despite the recent changes, the omnipresence of the ancient past has remained a perduring variable. El Paraíso's modern occupants reside on or near pre-Columbian settlements that stretch back to the Late Preclassic (*c.* 200 BC to AD 250). While the archaeological past is always present, the valley's residents make no claim to indigenous origins and recognize no direct cultural ties to archaeological sites or their associated bodies. When PAREP initiated formal archaeological investigations in 2002 (Canuto & Bell 2003), researchers found that this disconnect had historically produced ambivalence — disinterest, neglect, destruction and curiosity. Over the decades, ancient structures had fallen to the plough as land owners made way for coffee *fincas*, house gardens or cattle grazing. Some families even incorporated ancient building stones into their modern houses.

Comparable to Stockett Suri's experiences in the Las Canoas region, Geller has found that inhabitants of the El Paraíso valley primarily regard prehispanic human remains with detachment. For instance, while putting in the foundations for a new structure, one community member encountered skeletal materials less than one metre below the modern ground surface. He then presented these fragments to project members. Dental development indicated that the disturbed grave's occupant had been 5–9 years old at the time of death. Yet, from the general disinterest and lack of emotion he displayed, it was clear that the local man did not perceive a direct lineal connection to the decedent, whose antiquity was suggested by a nearby chert biface. It also appeared that he saw little economic value or social prestige to be gained from systematic excavation, analysis and conservation of the pre-Columbian grave. Despite the presence of numerous ancient sites in the El Paraíso valley, its current residents have benefitted little from archaeological investigations. This situation presents a marked contrast to the experiences of Hondurans living near Copán. Contemporary consolidation of royal Maya tombs at this important centre has engendered a lucrative global tourist industry (Mortensen 2007). As was the case in the Classic period (AD 400–900) when the Copán kingdom held political sway over multi-ethnic secondary centres in the El Paraíso valley (Canuto & Bell 2013), El Paraíso has retained a backwater status, which ironically enough has facilitated the growth of industries that are more illicit than tourism but just as lucrative, like narco-trafficking.

Given the community's ambivalence, PAREP aimed to increase understanding and preservation of prehistory in the region and to establish a program of public outreach and education that disseminated research results to local community members. To these ends, a community-responsive project that involved local secondary school students in archaeological field work was undertaken in summer 2007 (Bell *et al.* 2007a,b; Geller 2008). Manuel Aroldo Lemus, Director of El Paraíso's secondary school the Instituto Paraíso Occidental, acted as a liaison between PAREP and local students. Lemus, who goes more familiarly by the nickname Lito and is mentioned in Llorens correspondence, had offered encouragement and advice since PAREP's inception. The site originally selected for excavation was the Late Preclassic monumental center Las Orquídeas (*c.* 200 BC to AD 250). This work was to extend understanding of non-Maya peoples who occupied this landscape prior to the rise of the Copán kingdom. Unforeseen by all those associated with PAREP, however, was the site's destruction. Ardón had purchased the land in early 2007 and ploughed it for cattle grazing. The site's heavy disturbance made archaeological excavation unfeasible.

As Honduras in the political present grows more dangerous and uncertain, personal corporeal safety has trumped investigation of the past. These connections have coloured Geller's thinking about peri- and post-mortem violence in pre-Columbian period. This is not to suggest that we see contemporary instances of violence and stylized display as a direct historic analogue for drawing inferences about past practices. Rather, with a relational frame in place, the present can spotlight the complicated machinations driving such acts regardless of temporal period; the intertwining of sociopolitical circumstances, economic interactions and semiotic intent. The present also acts as a guide inasmuch as corporeal violence always has a sensual dimension — a smell, a sight, a taste, a feel — that victims experience and viewers witness, which of course we must contemplate in terms of cultural and historical context. While these aspects of violence may be difficult to recapture archaeologically, modern acts of violence remind us of them all too strongly.

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The materially and artistically discernible traces of decapitation, flaying and dismemberment performed by the pre-Columbian Maya and their neighbours also speak to ritualized violence and desecration of personhood. Similar to present-day practices, the selection of particular body parts was symbolically-laden and patterned in prehistory. The violence that occurred in the wake of warfare appears to have been premeditated and orchestrated. The Maya, for example, featured detached heads in artistic renderings as significant symbols of power, which were retained long after their removal from bodies (Houston *et al.* 2006, 70–72; Miller & Martin 2004, 195; Schele & Freidel 1990, 124). Ancient muralists prominently depicted severed heads in Bonampak's infamous battle scene. Numerous polychrome vessels portray upside-down trophy heads affixed to weapons, fashioned into masks, situated in headdresses or other garments and held as if in offering.[8] Landa's sixteenth-century chronicling recounted how warriors would ornament themselves with the detached and defleshed jaws of their defeated enemies (Tozzer 1941, 123).

Bioarchaeological researchers have identified the interment of skulls as dedications made presentable by decapitation and dismemberment (e.g. Colha, Belize: Barrett & Scherer 2005; Massey & Steele 1997; Mock 1998; Ixlú, Guatemala: Duncan 2011; Miramar, Mexico: Agrinier 1978; Seibal, Guatemala: Smith 1982, 60 & 62). At the Postclassic site of Ixlú, for instance, excavators uncovered a total of 21 decapitated crania. As Duncan (2011) relates, 15 crania were arranged in two parallel lines in front of an altar and stratigraphy suggested they had been placed prior to the altar's construction.

Hence, it may appear that corporeal violence in the pre-Columbian period is no more random than present-day practices — driven by warfare, commanded by (polity or drug) lords and incorporating artistic and display elements. A relational comparison between past and present, however, underscores where the similarities cease. For example, in comparing the aforementioned cattle ranch near La Libertad and its bloody tableau to the skeletonized one unearthed at ancient Ixlú, a site located less than 50 km south, the latter indicates a ritualized violence intended to create cohesion and not chaos. Empirical evidence at Ixlú — without romanticizing these violent deaths — suggests corporeal treatment that was sanctioned by the state and not organized criminals. There are important interpretive insights to be gleaned here about past practices that may seem immoral and pernicious to contemporary bioarchaeologists. While at La Libertad, walls painted in blood and decapitation portend the pathological and anti-social, the dramatic and grotesque but not the canonical or spiritually evocative.

Yet, we must proceed cautiously. As Avexnim Cojti Ren (2006), an indigenous scholar and K'iche Maya, reminds us, glorifying or spotlighting pre-Columbian violence in a modern political climate defined by recent genocide, ongoing violence and deep-seated racism is not without problems. To do so, she recognizes, 'leads to the notion that our present situation as targets of violence and oppressive national policies is just a continuation of the past' (2006, 12). Her statements speak to the symbolic violence, unintended though it may be, that bioarchaeological inquiry has the potential to engender.

Symbolic violence

Adapted from P.L. Geller's Field Journal, 4 July 1999

PROGRAMME FOR BELIZE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

DOS BARBARAS, RÍO BRAVO CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT AREA

As I crouched at the bottom of the excavation unit – hunched and cramped from sitting too long in one claustrophobic space – the local Belizean workers hovered a good foot away, peering down at me. Their reaction to the commoner's burial I am in the process of excavating can be best characterized as consternation tempered by superstitious reverence.

It is clear from their comments, however, that the grave contains no one they perceive to be of lineal descent. The workers live in the nearby village of San Felipe, and any relationship to the burial's pre-Columbian occupant is a coincidence of geographic proximity rather than cultural connection.

I am far more excited than the workers about this burial. The decedent is surprisingly well-preserved and appears to have a shaped cranium!!! After excavation is completed, the decedent's remains will be transported to the field laboratory for formal osteological analysis. And once the remains are secured in the lab, I know that everyone will rest easier.

To deepen this discussion, we might also reflect on the more subtle acts of desecration — the symbolic violence — sometimes inadvertently produced by contemporary researchers' study of ancient and historic human remains. The post-mortem cultural practices performed on decedents' bodies by bioarchaeological researchers were certainly unforeseen by their original mourners and may create or alter meanings intended

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by past peoples. During analysis, for instance, it is common for a project's researchers to catalogue decedents in accordance with standard operating procedures. In the case of the pre-Columbian Maya burial from Belize, Geller re-christened the decedent 'Individual 35', a designation which at the time was intended by her to humanize, to counter the faceless blobbiness (per Tringham 1991) of much past research. In contrast to the original excavation designation 3-YY-6, 'Individual' seemed less likely to objectify the ancient decedent. In retrospect, however, we recognize that even this act may be regarded as naïve and far from neutral. 'The founding action of Christian imperialism [following conquest of the New World]', literary critic Stephen Greenblatt (1991, 83) chides, 'is christening'. Often, analysts' ability to exhume decedents, examine their remains and in turn name them is part and parcel of colonialism's legacy, researchers' political privilege and local community members' ambivalence.

Geller's efforts to soften the scientific designation of the remains she exhumed and analysed were motivated by the best intentions but nevertheless highlight one way researchers may inadvertently inflict symbolic violence on ancient bodies. This issue is scalar and not necessarily avoidable. In most cases we will never learn the names of the ancient bodies we excavate and analyse. We must label those remains for our analytic purposes and so, of necessity, we commit small acts of symbolic violence against them. This issue, though, scales up in ways that may have a wider-reaching impact. For example, symbolic violence may also be inflicted if we do not deliberate about the potential consequences of our research priorities or dissemination of our findings beyond the academic community.

We believe most will acknowledge that our work and the choices we make as we carry it out are never as objective as we might wish to think. The world in which we conduct research is rife with demands related to time and funding, not to mention the complex socio-political landscapes that often force us to prioritize in ways we wish we did not have to. A striking example of this comes from the work of the Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG).

The FAFG is best known for their work exhuming, recovering and analysing the bodies of Maya peoples massacred by the Guatemalan government from the late-1970s to the mid-1980s. Disinterring human remains from clandestine cemeteries has offered heartbreaking truth to the governmental powers that orchestrated genocide, highlighting the type of corporeal violence we discussed earlier in the paper on a large scale. But, for these analysts of human remains, the present and past sometimes collide in unexpected ways, forcing researchers to make choices that privilege more recently deceased bodies over more ancient ones.

In her haunting ethnography *Buried Secrets*, for instance, Victoria Sanford (2003) describes FAFG's exhumation of victims from beneath a colonial Catholic church in San Andrés Sajcabajá. As they dug, they discovered that the building's occupation extended back into the Postclassic period. A pre-Columbian Maya structure, as evidenced by an ancient plaster floor, provided the foundation for a Spanish colonial church. Within the latter phase, FAFG members unearthed the remains of unbaptized infants, and then they encountered the mass grave of 26 genocide victims from the twentieth century. Hence, the building's stratigraphy 'spoke to centuries of religious desecration and shifting religious practice' (Sanford 2003, 125). While the Postclassic and colonial period bodies represent life and death histories no less worthy of investigation, the past went unexplored by investigators in the face of more immediate human rights violations. In this case, ancient and historic bodies became a stratigraphic footnote — arguably an act of symbolic violence against them, but also arguably the ethical action to take in this instance.

The point we wish to highlight here is that the symbolic violence done to past bodies by modern researchers is neither right nor wrong. Decisions about what work to prioritize, which bodies to bring to light and which to leave in the ground and how to analyse those remains are contingent and must be understood in context. That these *are* choices, however, deserves to be made explicit as does, perhaps, the reasons behind the choices we make. These issues, we believe are not just related to our article's topic of corporeality and violence, but also to our concerns with the relational comparison. We turn to the work of FAFG again to illustrate this point.

Interestingly, given their expertise in the excavation of mass graves, member of FAFG were summoned in 2005 to excavate pre-Columbian remains at the site of Cancuen (Moran & Koumenalis 2005). Given their knowledge of local taphonomy and experience with commingled and fragmented skeletal remains, their involvement with bodies *qua* bodies seems sound, methodologically speaking. Specifically, FAFG members exhumed the remains of 31 decedents from a cistern located at the entrance to the site's Late Classic royal palace. Nonetheless, FAFG's presence and their association with recovery of genocide victims may have also unconsciously informed inferences drawn about past peoples and events. As reported widely in numerous news sources, researchers

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at Cancuen who were not affiliated with FAFG have argued that the mass grave represents a royal massacre — a 'war crime' —dating to the early ninth-century (e.g. Arun 2005; Gugliotta 2007; Lovgren 2005; Moran & Koumenalis 2005).[9] In bringing warfare, murder, dismemberment and victimization to the fore these researchers are — perhaps intentionally, perhaps unintentionally — making a relational comparison between past and present practices. Yet, in this case, that connection seems to lack the reflection and nuance we argue for above. As a consequence, we see the creation of a temporal elision between modern genocide and pre-Columbian political practices, which make the historical and sociopolitical context appear inconsequential. Here symbolic violence is carried out through sensationalized descriptions in popular media that miss an opportunity for meaningful relational comparison between time periods and cultural practices.

Conclusion

A young girl drowns while her father labours at an archaeological site in Honduras. A woman is decapitated in an act of politically motivated violence in Chiquimula. Elsewhere in Guatemala, two mass graves are exhumed — one revealing sacrificed ancient royalty, another victims of modern genocide. These instances of violence may seem unrelated, but we argue they are linked in a real and significant way. All of these examples — be they intimate moments from our own fieldwork, ritualized violence in the pre-Columbian past, or starkly politicized encounters with contemporary violence — highlight two notions about corporeality. In studying bodies *qua* bodies, bioarchaeologists must account for temporality, because bodies communicate crucial meanings long after death has claimed them. Accordingly, bioarchaeologists gain an opportunity to reflect on the experience of death and the relationality of past and present within a landscape that has seen both dramatic transformation and remarkable cultural continuity through time.

Indeed, we believe a relational approach allows us to move beyond perennial debates about violence that operate under moral absolutism — humanity's innate predisposition for it or, the newest spin on these considerations, that modern humans are moving toward a more peaceable kingdom (e.g. Pinker 2011). As Phillip Walker (2001, 574) recognizes, the study of human remains can 'greatly expand our understanding of the human potential for both violent and nonviolent behavior ... the spectrum of human capacities for selfless kindness and utter cruelty'. While he highlighted the potential of bioarchaeology to do so, we recognize that insight can be gleaned from contextualized studies of corporeal violence through space and time.

How might reflection on the modern landscape of bodies help us enrich our considerations of ancient ones? In Mexico and Central America today, do the bodies of seasonal labourers, victims of drug cartels, or those cut down in a politically motivated genocide bear any relation to pre-Columbian remains? Or are they linked through shared geography alone? We believe blurring the boundaries between bodies may provide fruitful ground for, as Dawdy (2009a) suggests, reflective comparison. Though many of the bodies we have discussed in this article are separated by a vast ocean of time, though they were shaped by different historic and politico-economic forces, and though they were subjected to violence for different reasons, they nevertheless exist within a relational cultural continuum. A changing one, yes, and a complex one that does not simplistically presume continuity is akin to human nature, but still a relationally relevant one. To ignore this, to draw objective boxes around chunks of time, as if they can be divorced for one another, does the bodies we study and the varied audiences we purport to study them for, a disservice.

The burial from Las Canoas, for example, may have remained little more than an unremarkable entry in a list of excavated human remains, a woman who died with nothing to mark her passing — her life and death histories a virtual blank in the appendices of a dissertation. But the untimely drowning of a little girl more than one thousand years later suddenly cast new light on her life and death. The death of a little girl made *all* death suddenly more real, more visceral and more significant. It reminded us that the burial from Las Canoas was not only an assemblage of bones to be cataloged and analysed, but the body of a person who was likely a productive member of a small, tight-knit community, a woman who was no doubt loved, mourned and remembered — even if that remembering left no significant material traces for us to find. Geller's work in the El Paraíso valley similarly highlights the value of a relational approach to bioarchaeological research, but with a greater emphasis on overt political violence that impacts living members of the community. Relationality is also useful for teasing out the potential symbolic violences associated with bioarchaeological investigations. For instance, we may learn that researchers evoke ownership through the process of excavation, documentation and analysis. Or, perhaps more problematic, they do not contemplate the future consequences of their scientific studies of the past. We may also discover that

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local peoples characterize certain ancient remains as less valuable than immediate economic concerns and bids for local power.

What we propose is not that bioarchaeologists radically alter their methodologies or approaches to excavating and analysing human remains. Certainly, FAFG's work stresses the importance of technical expertise regardless of the time period under study. Rather, we suggest a broadening of perspective in interpreting those remains, in creating their life and death histories and in positioning their significance within the larger temporal and cultural framework. We ask that bioarchaeologists continue to cultivate relations with the communities in which they work and grapple with the political and economic realities of these research locales. We do not see such an effort as necessarily extending the work of community archaeologists or political activists. Rather, relational comparison enriches our experiences as researchers and enhances comparative and contrastive — anthropological — study of people.

These efforts to highlight the importance of relational comparison and temporality are preliminary and we admit, still somewhat theoretical in nature. We do not pretend to know whether viewing ancient bodies as part of a long, twisting and not always linear temporal space will be transformative for bioarchaeology or simply prove one more tool in the interpretive kit. Either way, we believe it will be intellectually stimulating and interpretively productive and may provide bioarchaeologists with another means of perceiving and understanding the physical and symbolic transformations bodies undergo as they pass through life, into death and beyond.

Notes

1. See http://www.prensalibre.com/noticias/Violencia-imparable-deja-muertos_0_361163922.html, accessed 19 June 2013.
2. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the estimated number of intentional homicides in Central American nations is 'relatively high given the size of their respective populations' (UNODC 2011, 19). Statistically speaking, Honduras's homicide rate is 82.1 per 100,000 population followed by El Salvador at 70.9, Belize at 41.7, and Guatemala at 46.0 per 100,000 population. To put this in perspective, from 2008–2010, only four other nations in the world had comparable rates — Cote d'Ivoire (56.9), Jamaica (61.6), St Kitts and Nevis (52.2), and Venezuela (52.0). And, in the United States the intentional homicide rate is listed as 5.3, while the United Kingdom (England and Wales) has a rate of 1.2 per 100,000 population.
3. These reports are not without issue. In the UNODC report, for instance, sources include criminal justice and public health records, and these documents may be compromised by governmental corruption at the local level and inadequate record keeping. The UNODC report is also incomplete inasmuch as there is no data for some countries or data for only certain years between 1995 and 2010. Finally, the document is very specific about what falls under its purview: 'Those acts in which the perpetrator intended to cause death or serious injury by his or her actions ... which excludes deaths related to conflicts, deaths caused when the perpetrator was reckless or negligent, as well as killings that are usually considered justifiable according to penal law' (UNODC 2011, 3). Given this definition, deaths resultant from warfare or structural violence do not qualify as intentional homicides.
4. Additional information about her death and the student's shooting in Jutiapa was also reported on 26 October 2010. See http://www.prensalibre.com/noticias/justicia/estudiante-asalto-microbus-jutiapa_0_360564087.html, accessed on 21 December 2013.
5. Very graphic images of the crime scene can be found at the following blog: http://boingboing.net/2011/05/16/guatemala-27-massacr.html. These have been culled from various social media sources.
6. The last phrase, 'Puto de 200', is open to interpretation (i.e. 'Fucking 200', 'Fucked by 200' or 'Whore of 200). It is unclear whether the subject is the decapitated woman or Chando, though most likely it is the latter.
7. http://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09TEGUCIGALPA605_a.html.
8. In the Maya Vase Data base, examples of decapitated heads can be found on many polychrome vessels (e.g. K680, K0182, K1229, K2342, K5390, K6316 and K764). The data base, an archive of rollout photographs created by Justin Kerr, can be found at http://www.famsi.org/research/kerr/index.html.
9. To date, information about this mass grave has not appeared in peer-reviewed, scholarly publications.

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