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SPECIAL SECTION: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION: MAYA ARCHAEOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEMORY

> Memory is … a social process of remembering and forgetting that is embedded in the materiality of existence (Hendon 2010: 1–2).

The past decade or so has witnessed a burgeoning of studies on memory, collective memory, and social memory in the humanities and social sciences (Climo and Cattell 2002; Klein 2000; Olick and Robbins 1998). Berliner (2005) employs the phrases "memory boom," "memory craze," and "obsession with memory" to describe the current state of affairs of social memory studies in anthropology and history. Archaeology joined in this trend, and about ten years ago many citations to the foundational literature in social memory studies (Assmann 1995; Connerton 1989; Halbwachs 1980, 1992; LeGoff 1992; Nora 1996) started to appear in connection with archaeological research on historic and prehistoric societies (Golden 2005).

Studies of intersubjective personal memory and social memory as a process in ancient Mesoamerica, however, have been a bit slow to develop compared to some other contemporary topics such as landscape, materiality, embodiment, spatiality, and temporality which are entangled with memory and which can (or must) be linked in any archaeological study of social memory. Even at sites with no written texts, such as some of those treated in the present collection, this conceptual entanglement allows a reading of social memory from settlement patterns, architecture, monuments, burials, votive caches, and portable material culture (Bradley 2002; Chesson 2001; Hodder and Cessford 2004; Holtorf 1997, 2001; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Williams 2003).

With specific regard to past Mesoamerican societies, several recent studies have begun to explore the importance of history and social memory in the everyday lives and affairs of individuals, social groups, and communities (Clark and Colman 2008; Hendon 2010; Joyce 2003; Megged 2010; Schortman and Urban 2011; Stanton and Magnoni 2008). These publications demonstrate that studies of social memory have reached a vigorous stage of development in Mesoamerican archaeology and ethnohistory, if indeed a young stage in which a coherent methodological and theoretical framework is lacking (Golden 2005:273).

In this Special Section we offer a collection of papers on social memory among the ancient Lowland Maya of southeastern Mexico and northern Central America that continue this trend and will perhaps stimulate further debate with regard to methodological and theoretical elaboration. In the first paper, **Miranda Stockett** advocates a view of archaeological sites as spaces where human dramas unfold, stages for the enactment of power and processes of social memory through the "making, altering, and remaking" of important places during the Late to Terminal Classic transition (A.D. 650-900) in southeastern Mesoamerica, and specifically the site of Las Canoas, Honduras. She argues that this making, altering, and remaking of places in the past reflect the dynamics of the manipulation of memory for political strategy. **Sonja A. Schwake** and **Gyles Ianonne**, in the second paper, discuss ritual remains and collective memory from the Late Classic sites of Minanha and Zubin, in west-central Belize. While the former is a medium-sized major center, the latter is a minor center; both provide intriguing archaeological evidence of ritual commemorative events spanning several generations.

In the third paper, **Lisa J. LeCount** offers a bottom-up approach to the formation of community identity and social memory at Xunantunich, in the upper Belize River valley. With a primary emphasis on domestic foodways, LeCount argues that a distinctive type of common vessel for cooking and serving became a collective symbol of social identity for the people of the Xunantunich region in the Late Classic period. These foodways, she argues, served as a powerful source of collective memory that reinforced group identity. **Gyles Iannone** follows with his examination of the role that collective memory plays in defining territorial boundaries and in producing and reproducing frontier identities, from the perspective of the case study of the Late Classic Minanha site in Belize. In the fifth paper, **Charles Golden** also examines borders, social memory, and history with reference to the peripheries of the Classic Maya kingdoms of Piedras Negras, Guatemala, and Yaxchilan, Mexico. **Greg Borstede** follows with an examination of social memory and sacred sites in the western Maya highlands region with examples from Jacaltenango, Guatemala. In the penultimate paper, **Matthew Restall** presents a historiographic essay on the politics of social memory, the writing of history of the non-Hispanic inhabitants of Yucatan, the Maya mystique, Afro-Yucatecan invisibility, and the need to bridge the social distance created by temporal and cultural gaps within and between these two groups.

Finally, **Susan Gillespie** presents a most perceptive critical overview of the contributions. We strongly agree with her that these papers demonstrate the great potential for anthropologically oriented social memory studies in Maya archaeology.

WILLIAM R. FOWLER

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Social memory and its closely related theoretical cousins, including public memory and collective memory, have had an increasing impact on the social sciences and humanities in the past decade. The timing of this growth in the developing discipline, if it can be called such at present, is not entirely clear. Certainly many of the key publications that have informed the current social memory literature are nearly a century old, particularly the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1980, 1992) who is arguably the central figure in social memory studies. Perhaps we could attribute the growing interest to a "crisis in memory" or the "death of memory," the sense of dislocation and disembeddedness that many scholars feel to be a condition of postmodernity (e.g., Baumann 2001:125; Cattell and Climo 2002:6; Hobsbawm 1996:40; Nora 1989).

Yet, clearly a focus on social memory and its importance in culture and society does not represent a death or a crisis in memory, but instead a refocus on the vibrancy, malleability, and centrality of memory. The explosion in social memory studies grows out of an interest in collective memory within the discipline of history, and has gained ground in other social sciences—such as anthropology, archaeology, and political science—as scholars move beyond the individual-focused psychology and memorialization of Freud and his contemporaries, and come to realize the active nature of collective or social remembering, in a variety of forms, in interpreting the past and the present. This theoretical diversity, though, presents problems of its own, as Jeffery K. Olick and Joyce Robbins (1998:106), among others, suggest that serious problems remain in achieving the goal of structuring collective memory into an academic discipline. They note that the study of collective memory is plagued by an "imprecision of concept, lack of disciplinary hegemony, [and] lack of theoretical development," problems that we do not believe have been solved at present.

Within anthropology the shift of attention to social memory has been irregular. Studies have tended to develop in one of two ways: a focus on collective memory in Western culture in detail, often in book-length analyses (e.g., Lowenthal 1985; Klein 1997); or as an overview of social memory in cross-cultural perspective, often as edited collections in widely varying cultural contexts (e.g., Cattell and Climo 2002; Sutton 1998, 2001; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). For American archaeology in particular, a focus on social memory has been most fully developed within American historical archaeology, usually termed "public memory," and focused on Western cultural developments and the processes of remembering and forgetting (e.g., Shackel 2001a; 2001b). Moves outside this domain have tended to be broadly cross-cultural with little synthesis or analysis of how social memory functions within specific cultural contexts.

As social memory becomes an important theoretical tool in understanding the role, importance, and practice of remembering and forgetting collectively, there is an even greater need for analyzing the concept cross-culturally in meaningful and detailed ways. At issue is the relevance of social memory—as either an analytic tool or as an emic epistemological way of knowing—in non-Western societies and cultures. At the risk of reifying cultural difference, one approach is to examine the role of social memory in detail in a non-Western setting utilizing multiple lines of evidence that cross-cut modern disciplinary boundaries and examine social memory as it functioned in the past and its effect on the present. The present Special Section is conceived in this vein—as a detailed study of social memory through archaeology, history, and ethnography within a single, non-Western cultural milieu. What does this tell us about social memory as a theoretical tool? Is it merely jargon; a Western-derived concept imposed on non-Western contexts to make them more comprehensible to Western academics? Or can we say something more universal and cross-cultural about social memory and the processes behind collective remembrance?

Social Memory

The study of social memory in the social sciences broadly has its roots in earlier developments within the discipline of history. In a seminal work by Maurice Halbwachs (1980 [1925]), collective memory was contrasted with history as two alternative ways of understanding the past. Drawing on the drive for objectivism in the middle of the twentieth century, Halbwachs characterized the study of History as a scientific endeavor that collected and organized facts into a comprehensible and overarching picture of the past that is enduring. In contrast, memory is a contingent collection of versions of the past based on the experiences of individuals within a society. Its subjective and incomplete nature (vis à vis History) means that it simultaneously cannot outlive an individual and has many versions extant within society. For Halbwachs, these contrastive epistemologies are sequential—Memory as subjective/tradition precedes History as objective/science.

While historians have largely abandoned a number of Halbwachs' postulations—such as the absolute, objective nature of Western history—he introduced a number of key ideas that have gained great importance in understanding how societies conceptualize the past. Halbwachs argued that memory is not possible outside of society, specifically those structures constructed for the purpose of remembrance (Halbwachs 1992:43; see also Lowenthal 1997). That is, the construction and development of memories is based on social and cultural conventions. In this sense memory is social or collective because it cannot be cleanly extricated from its cultural context.

Halbwachs' suggestion that collective memory is inherent in "frameworks" or structures depends on a largely structural-functional perspective of society. Building upon this idea, recent scholarship has suggested instead that structures are not necessary preconditions for memory (or history, for that matter), but that they develop in tandem. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, social scientists perceive structures not as monolithic, static entities, but as malleable and changeable (Olick and Robbins 1998:108). Memory, like other aspects of society and culture, simultaneously influence and are influenced by the frameworks of society. This interdependence strikes a balance between the social stasis of structural-functionalism and the imbalanced fluidity of extreme constructivism through a focus on the practices, which are socioculturally situated, of individuals. In this sense, memory, like many other aspects of society such as identity, is both collective and individual, active and passive.

The development of theories regarding social memory in history has mirrored developments in the social sciences more broadly. The temporal implications of Halbwachs' model have been examined, suggesting that instead of a necessary (almost evolutionary) move from collective memory to "scientific" history these can coexist within cultural traditions not as dichotomous poles, but as interwoven themes. Similarly, the scale of history has come under examination, with research on micro-historical contexts becoming more important (Olick and Robbins 1998). These have tended to stress practice and agency in the construction of social memory as well as cultural relativism. Also, the role of modernity has been studied in relation to memory and history, questioning whether or not History as a discipline is a product of or necessary requirement for the modern situation.

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Ultimately social memory moved out of academic History and its relevance to many social scientists was obvious and directly applicable in various contexts. Anthropologists in particular see a theoretical discussion to which anthropological data—cross-cultural, social, "traditional society,"—was directly relevant (see contributions in Climo and Cattell 2002). Moreover, anthropologists view social memory as a means of making anthropological research relevant in the modern world; social memory, reframed in anthropological terms as traditional, non-Western ways of knowing the past, is an important way that anthropology can contribute to contemporary dialogues on heritage and preservation, indigenous communities and rights, and sociopolitical activism and identity in the modern world.

Current Directions in Social Memory

The explosion of research on social memory in the social sciences in recent years has introduced and developed the concept in a number of different, and unexpected, directions. While these are too many to list here, a few bear mentioning in this context. First, there has been a clear shift towards understanding collective memory as a result of the actions and practices of individuals (e.g., Wilce 2002). As mentioned before, these studies draw on the theory and scholarship of Pierre Bourdieu and the role of practices—culturally contextualized activities—in the construction and maintenance of Halbwachs' "frameworks" of social collective memory. This approach is diverse as well, however, with some researchers focusing on the individual person while others focus on the agency of the individual—a collective designation that reinforces the active nature of memory on a small scale. These approaches usually study the role of the individual, memory, and society within small scale, limited contexts with occasional generalizations to society, history, or the past as a whole. By stressing agency and practice, these studies highlight the active nature of memory—as remembering and forgetting, often in an individual way. More complex studies then move to detail how remembering and forgetting affects broader social understandings and frameworks.

A second important trajectory is social memory as alternative to history. Halbwachs suggested that History, in the course of becoming objective and supplanting traditional social memory, became the "official" version of the past. This view of history and social memory has been challenged on a number of fronts, particularly within anthropology and history. Building on studies of non-Western societies and the growing influence of non-Western academics (indigenous and otherwise), "alternative histories" are being posited to counter "official" histories (Schmidt and Patterson 1995). This has at least two trajectories of study: the movement within post-colonial studies to challenge "official" history as sponsored by the state (Young 2001) and the movement within indigenous communities to develop "alternative histories" that are based on non-Western sources such as oral history, hieroglyphic writing, and oral history. Social memory plays an important role in both of these trajectories, as a form of "alternative history" as well as a means of challenging the hegemony of Western history.

Third, there has been an increase on studies that focus on the materialization of social memory. Theses studies are primarily within archaeology and material culture studies, disciplines that have an inherent interest in material culture, objects, structures, and sites (e.g., Hallam and Hockey 2001). On the one hand, the materialization of social memory is antithetical to Halbwachs original definition of collective memory, which could not outlast the life of the individual and was "traditional" in the sense that it was unwritten (oral, for example, although that raises another set of questions about memory's longevity).

As researchers expanded the definition of collective memory, however, it was only a matter of time before the association was made between memory and material culture. Historical archaeology in the United States and heritage studies in Great Britain have developed this idea most fully, examining the role of collective memory in: statues, as depictions of past events or people; memorials, as more (or less) abstract materializations for the purposes of remembrance; historically important buildings, structures, and sites, as edifices or places that play a more indirect role in remembrance (they are not constructed specifically to remember or remind, but are preserved or protected from a given period). These studies are augmented by material culture studies, often but not always Western in nature, that focus more on portable objects as a means of remembrance.

Another direction in which social memory studies are expanding in the social sciences is towards an understanding of the embodiment of social memory. In a way similar to that of agency and practice, social scientists are examining how memories can be situated within the context of the body. This has expressed itself in a number of ways, from body modification to studies of death and burial (see, for example, contributions in Johnson 2004). In archaeology in particular, burial practices and the rituals of death, in both an individual and corporate sense—have been the focus of a number of detailed studies of mortuary data (Chesson 2001). Death and burial provide a complex but rich context in which to study social memory: it is an active, ritual situation; it materializes many conceptions of death and the afterlife; and it embodies social memory through the perceived permanence and longevity of the condition.

Social Memory and the Maya

These developments in the study of social memory, as well as others, are directly applicable to the context of the Maya. At the risk of essentializing cultural identity, we characterize the "Maya" as a distinct cultural tradition that expresses itself in a number of different ways in both the past (an archaeological heritage defined from at least A.D. 200 to 1500; and a historical heritage that includes hieroglyphic texts, protohistoric writings from A.D. 1100 to 1500, Conquest era and Colonial period historical documents, and modern history) and the present (over twenty different languages and ethnic communities, hundreds of contemporary closed corporate communities, and a modern indigenous movement).

The distinctiveness of this cultural tradition as a whole has its origins in either Conquest period interactions between the Spanish and indigenous communities, or in Western public and academic thought. The abundance of historical and cultural information make it an ideal case study for examining social memory in a detailed, rich way through multiple lines of evidence in a non-Western context. In addition, the results are applicable to the contemporary situation in the Maya area—to state governments, indigenous communities and movements, academics, and others with a stake in understanding Maya culture in the present.

Social memory among the Maya can be categorized into four complementary divisions as a vehicle for understanding Maya culture. It is in these areas that the social memory must be conceptualized and the categories into which the following contributions situate Maya social memory. The first is as a set of processes that unite disparate Maya traditions and experiences into a unified whole. In this sense, social memory is understood as a part of a Maya cultural tradition. At the same time as collective memory is

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unifying, researchers are exploring how specific memories divide and separate traditions, such as individual communities or polities in the past and present.

The second way of approaching social memory in Maya studies is as a theoretical, heuristic concept of Western tradition imported into the Maya context. This plays itself out in the past, as social memory is examined in archaeological contexts, and in the present, as versions of the past are reconceptualized as memory (rather than "History", for example), and deployed for political purposes in the modern world.

The third approach to social memory is as a vehicle for integrating various lines of evidence. The Maya past has been studied through archaeology, epigraphy, oral history, ethnohistory, document history, and ethnography. Social memory provides a means by which, at least in analytic terms, these various lines of evidence can be incorporated into a holistic presentation of the past. It also provides a more neutral "alternative history" that can coexist with "official" histories while still managing to carry the authority of versions of the past constructed in Western academia that are valued by political actors in contemporary Maya indigenous movements.

Fourth, and allied with the previous, is the utilization of social memory as a vehicle for integrating Western academic traditions and studies with indigenous concerns (and those of other stakeholders). Social memory, particularly those processes of which it is comprised, are often viewed as providing a more incorporative version of the past (here building on Halbwachs' original characterization of collective memory as arising in "traditional" culture) positioned either in opposition to official histories or in conjunction with them. Social memory can tie together the past and the present as well as structure and change within a specific cultural tradition such as the Maya.

It is in this last category that this volume will contribute most to studies of social memory generally and the Maya more specifically. Whether or not social memory is conceived as a Western academic imposition, it does provide the opportunity to integrate culture, society, and history under a single analytic banner. The result of such investigations has relevance beyond strictly academic concerns.

The Current Contributions

This Special Section represents a unique contribution of papers analyzing the theoretical dimensions of social memory and history within the context of a single cultural tradition over a period of two millennia. Although, as discussed above, other publications have explored the issues and implications of social/collective memory as a theoretical topic, no other compiled work has done so through an in-depth and long-term focus within a single cultural tradition. The authors here present a series of theoretical interpretations drawing data from case studies involving archaeology, ethnohistory, and ethnography, and ranging in time from the Classic period to present.

Greg Borgstede
Charles W. Golden

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