Introduction to Webs of Memory, Frames of Power: Collective Remembering in the Archaeological Record

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Abstract Over the past few decades, archaeologists have increasingly viewed collective memory as critical to the establishment and legitimation of power relations. For societies in the past and present, collective memory can be drawn on to clarify group identity, justify or subvert hierarchies, invent traditions, and define behaviors. The contributors to this special issue focus on the process of remembering, how it produced multiple archaeologically visible understandings of the past, and how these viewpoints impacted power-laden social negotiations. To better elucidate this process, this introduction situates the concept of *collective remembering* within recent materialist frameworks that emphasize the integration of human and nonhuman actors into webs of interaction. We suggest that by viewing collective memory from the standpoint of interactions, multiple viewpoints can be recognized. We argue in turn that accounting for the diverse actors invested in memory production provides archaeologists a means to delineate how the past becomes a site of contested values that social groups are constantly reworking to define membership, justify social hierarchy, and validate resistance.

On January 22, 2017, during an interview with Chuck Todd on *Meet the Press* (NBC News Productions 2017), Kellyanne Conway, Counselor to President Donald Trump and one of the public faces of the Trump administration, spoke of "alternative facts" as a way of explaining White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer's contention that the media deliberately underestimated the size of the crowd at Trump's presidential inauguration. Conway claimed that Spicer had presented "alternative facts" as evidence for the large crowd size at Trump's inauguration. She was heavily derided for the use of the term "alternative facts," with

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reporters quickly likening it to the *newspeak* from George Orwell's (1949) novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (*e.g.*, Abramson 2017). Conway and Spicer's statements were an active attempt to produce an alternative set of memories that contradicted other widely held recollections of the inauguration. These actions were clearly power-laden—those at the top of a power structure wished to perpetuate a more complimentary version of events, despite documentary evidence that this "alternative" account was fabricated. As of this writing, it is too soon to say how these two accounts of Trump's inauguration will fair over time. However, it seems likely that these "alternative facts" may survive and be remembered by groups who choose to believe in an alternative version of what happened.

Narratives of the past have incredible influence on power dynamics. Over the past two decades, archaeologists have been increasingly interested in investigating how memories impacted social and political interactions in past contexts. Just as in the modern day, ancient institutions and identities were constructed on a foundation of collective memory—an understanding of the past shared by two or more people (see Halbwachs 1980 [1950], 1992 [1925]). Collective memory functions as a set of ideas that can be drawn on for many purposes, including to clarify group identity, justify or subvert the arrangement of power relations, invent traditions, and define behaviors.

Since the so-called "memory boom" of the 1970s, the subject of collective (or social) memory has been taken up in a wide variety of disciplines, including sociology, history, psychology, art history, and anthropology (see Olick and Robbins 1998 and Olick *et al.* 2011 for reviews). Early applications of collective memory theories to the archaeological record grew out of several different branches of archaeology, including landscape archaeology (Alcock 2001, 2002; Bradley and Williams 1998), mortuary archaeology (Chesson 2001; Jonker 1995; McAnany 1995), and the study of object life histories (Hendon 2000; Kopytoff 1986; Lillios 1999). The publication of *Archaeologies of Memory* (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003) laid the foundation for an array of significant cross-cultural and culture-specific treatments in the intervening years (*e.g.*, Hendon 2010; Jones 2007; Lillios 2008; Mills and Walker 2008a; Olivier 2011 [2008]; Starzmann and Roby 2016; Williams 2003; Yoffee 2007). Because of its focus on the material remnants of the past, archaeology is well-positioned to make important contributions to the study of collective memory in contexts where non-text-based engagements with the past can be identified.

However, with a few exceptions (*e.g.*, Hendon 2010; Lucero 2008, 2010; Wilson 2010), applications of memory studies in archaeology are often applied in a top-down fashion (see Overholtzer and Bolnick, this volume for a more detailed discussion). This perspective regards collective memory as a coherent body of ideas that can be manipulated by rulers, community leaders, or social collectives to legitimize positions of power or historicize claims to the landscape. In part, this approach reflects the most accessible evidence for collective memory in the archaeological record, which includes prominent markers including texts, monuments, and the built environment. To see collective memory at work in these settings, archaeologists have drawn particularly strongly on social anthropologist Paul Connerton's (1989) ideas of incorporated and inscribed memory. Connerton (1989: 41–71) was particularly interested in "commemorative ceremonies" as a venue for the production of collective memories. Through collective bodily participation in these ceremonies, groups incorporated their memory. As such, the space in which these events took place served as a mnemonic to recall these common experiences. Similarly, recorded accounts of these events are inscribed forms of memory, which reflect intentional efforts to perpetuate a

specific recording, or understanding, of those events. Although Connerton was focused on modern media (texts, film, audio recordings), archaeologists have rightly expanded the notion to include monuments, architecture, and other mnemonics that can be written on or associated with the past through oral traditions.

Connerton's ideas hold an obvious appeal to archaeologists. Plazas, palaces, and built landscapes of all kinds can easily be interpreted as gathering places for commemorative ceremonies, while monuments and ancient texts are clear repositories of inscribed memory. Furthermore, in these settings, incorporated and inscribed memories are clear political tools for establishing and perpetuating official narratives about the past. When taken at face value, however, these forms of evidence also present archaeologists with a biased accounting of ancient perceptions of the past precisely because they were created and actively manipulated by those in power (Gillespie 2008; Overholtzer 2013; Trouillot 1995). Indeed, scholars who study resistance emphasize that crowded public assemblies provide individuals the anonymity to reject official narratives and even to express dissent (Scott 1990: 172–182). Archaeologists' traditional focus on material mnemonics and their role in legitimizing power often does not account for the complex networks of agents from across the sociopolitical spectrum who actively negotiate for the production of collective memory. Moreover, shifts in those networks over relatively short periods of time are often not recognized or examined.

In this volume, we advocate for an approach to collective memory that emphasizes the processes through which shared memories are formed in social contexts. Indeed, previous scholars have explicitly emphasized the social contexts of memory—even preferring the term "social memory" because of the connotation that memory is formed in social contexts (Mills and Walker 2008b: 6). The volume *Memory Work: Archaeologies of Material Practices* (Mills and Walker 2008a; see also Van Dyke 2009) made important methodological strides in this direction by connecting material remains to moments when collective memory was actively manipulated for social purposes. Building on this approach, we advocate for models that explore how memory transforms over time and varies based on social roles, materialities, and cultural predispositions. The nexus of power and collective memory rests in the constructive nature of memory (Bartlett 1932)—that memory is cited in the present context and in service to the present needs—and in an acknowledgement that multiple conceptions of the past exist simultaneously, each of which has saliency to different social groups. In the current post-truth political world (*The Economist* Staff 2016) where "alternative facts" are actively disseminated, the power-laden notions of collective memory should be familiar to most. The approaches undertaken here attempt to move beyond elite messaging and propaganda to examine how material indicators reveal multiple sets of actors that legitimize agendas in the present by drawing on the past in diverse ways.

Drawing on ethnographic, sociological, and psychological models, contributors to this special issue advocate for a pluralistic approach that focuses on how collective memory is instantiated through complex processes of human interaction. Memory is not just formed in the moments that are remembered. Instead, memory is created and transformed through ongoing conversations and social interactions that work discursively to influence how particular moments, people, objects, and events are remembered (Halbwachs 1980 [1950]; Middleton and Edwards 1990a). To better elucidate this process, we draw on the concept of *collective remembering* (Middleton and Edwards 1990b; Wertsch 2002, 2009) and situate our examination of social interactions within the recent materialist frameworks associated with the *ontological turn* that emphasize the integration of human and nonhuman

actors into webs of interaction (Alberti *et al*. 2011; Hodder 2012; Latour 2005, Olsen 2010). As defined by memory studies' scholars, collective remembering refers to the process by which a common understanding of the past is *resolved* from individual versions of events (Middleton and Edwards 1990b; Wertsch 2002, 2009). This process is impacted by differences in recollection, variable attribution of importance to particular events, and individual and collective agendas, among many other variables. Because collective memories emerge from repeated social interactions between individuals, the process of collective remembering can be partly modeled by tracing the material correlates for networks of recurrent social interactions.

Furthermore, these networks entangle materials and locations that are bundled with diverse associations and meanings attached to memories of the past (Keane 2003, 2005). Because of these associations, material objects and places function as mnemonics to which memories, texts, and oral traditions may be attached (*e.g.*, Basso 1996; Nora 1989). However, because of time and agendas, memories attached to these mnemonics are not pure. Rather, they become distorted, or translated (Van Dyke 2009), through social, cultural, temporal, and political lenses. Real events may become myths (Gosden and Lock 1998), and events that never occurred may become attached to particular places (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Roediger *et al*. 2001). These ideas can be deployed archaeologically by evaluating how webs of relationships between objects, people, places, and memories shape behaviors and afford influence and authority upon one another.

The contributions to this issue explore these ideas through global case studies that span diverse time periods and scales of social complexity. Contributors examine how acts of remembering operate as a discursive foundation for the assertion and contestation of power and authority. The benefits of these archaeological approaches to memory are grounded in their ability to trace and explore multiple, simultaneously existing, understandings of the past. Doing so pushes our discipline to reflect on alternative narratives not necessarily evident within the material remnants left behind by dominant power structures.

In pairing notions of collective remembering with perspectives on human and nonhuman networks, we focus on the process whereby threads of individual memories adhere to one another and become generalized to create a web of collective memory. We suggest this process takes place through three interrelated pathways: (1) daily interactions between humans and things across space, that (2) produce memories attached to people, things, and places, which afford these agents the potential to (3) actively deploy or modify collective memory for particular ambitions. The third factor has long been discussed as a way of justifying and maintaining unequal power relations through propaganda, performance, and the construction of historical morality (following Connerton 1989). Things are often built, and myths or stories are often told, in an attempt encode inequality within a historical trajectory (Gosden and Lock 1998; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Nevertheless, daily interactions among individuals create opportunities for power structures to be reproduced *and* resisted. These interactions can also lead to the construction of alternative narratives that can stimulate the transformation of such structures. This is what binds the contributions of this issue together and furthers our understanding of memory studies from an archaeological perspective. Accounting for the diverse actors invested in memory production provides archaeologists a means to delineate how the past becomes a site of contested values that social groups are constantly reworking to define membership, justify social hierarchy, and validate resistance.

It is through communication within the contexts of daily life, such as households, markets, and fields (or hunting parties), that individuals disseminate their memories and interpretations of events. These interactions can cause ideas and opinions to stabilize or fluctuate—possibly converging or possibly diverging and hardening in disagreement. What individuals choose to remember can be greatly influenced by those they interact with frequently, leading to divergent interpretations of the past between groups (Zerubavel 1996). For example, elements of household or kin group collective memories will differ across a community, accounting for specific familial histories and different interpretations of the broader community's past. Furthermore, the constant nature of these interactions means that memories—beginning at an individual scale and then converging at a collective scale where individuals reconcile a shared past—are constantly changing as narratives of the past are recast in the context of continuing conversations, personal experiences, and the ever-changing material conditions of the present. It is these shifting networks of interaction between humans, things and places, memories of the past, and attitudes toward the future, that give rise to social agreement—producing broadly accepted rules, norms, and understandings that structure and define social collectives at different scales.

As archaeologists, the material reservoirs of memory found in the archaeological record (and sometimes ethnohistorical texts) serve as our access points to these discursive networks of interaction. Collective memory has typically been discussed as retained and maintained, especially into the distant future, through mnemonics such as written and oral histories, periodic celebrations, and associations with particular places or objects (Lillos and Tsamis 2010; Mills and Walker 2008a; Joyce 2000; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). Following recent materialist perspectives, this issue aims to explicitly consider how the divergence of individual and group memory affects the manner in which materials become bundled within a reticulation of meanings and attitudes that are continuously reforming amidst daily interactions. Because of their durability, material reservoirs of memory serve to perpetuate dominant narratives, but also preserve alternative understandings of the past that need not conform to official interpretations presented by a given leader(s). As such, the process of collective remembering provides space for material mediators to affect networks, causing resistance to, and/or the renegotiation of, power structures.

Contributions to this issue draw on a variety of archaeological examples focused on the role collective remembering plays in network processes that create, maintain, resist, and transform power relations. To discern these networks, the authors draw upon case studies that identify multiple stakeholders through their diverse interactions and associations with material reservoirs of memory. Thus, recognizing the processes of collective remembering in archaeological contexts becomes possible by explicitly outlining variable and changing engagements with memory by individuals and collectives from different socioeconomic, ethnic, kin, or other social categories.

Because of diverse disciplinary roots of memory studies, a large number of theoretical frameworks have been developed to explain how groups collectively remember the past. As a result, a wide variety of definitions have been put forward for collective memory. Although the editors of this issue have promoted the concept of collective remembering, each of the authors has adopted the terms and definitions they prefer for collective (or social) memory. What unifies the case studies is a focus on memory, materiality, and the identification of multiple agents mediating the reticulation of a particular social network.

This issue begins with two articles about the recent past that provide clear examples of the processes encompassed by collective remembering. Although both case studies are interesting in their own right, they can also be viewed as holding significant analogical potential for understanding archaeological contexts from the deeper past. Ruth Van Dyke's article addresses how the interplay of remembering and forgetting can produce competing claims to the past of a single historic building. In this case, excavations at a historic house site in Texas revealed the remains of a nineteenth-century Alsatian kitchen fireplace behind a modern bathroom wall. Competing claims to this house, and its past, developed as it was prepared as a heritage site. As of the article's submission, the descendants of the Alsatian immigrants favored returning the house to its original form, while descendants of the more recent occupants remembered their grandmother's kitchen and preferred on reverting the house to its mid-twentieth century form. This case study provides an example of how durable materials can be remembered in multiple ways by different social groups.

Carla Klehm provides another look at how archaeological sites may be remembered in the modern day. Her contribution evaluates multiple understandings of local ancestors who are believed to occupy an Iron Age hilltop village enclosure in Botswana. The memory and power of these ancestors shifts during repeated interactions between site ruins, the community, and modern-day ritual practitioners.

Lisa Overholtzer and Deborah Bolnick, in their article, advocate for expanding the breadth of archaeological inquiry into collective memory through an explicit focus on the construction of memory within commoner households. Drawing on examples from research at the Aztec center of Xaltocan in Central Mexico, they deploy a combination of careful stratigraphy, radiocarbon dates, and ancient DNA analysis to build a detailed occupation and burial sequence within a single household. By tracing, in detail, the occupation of this household, the authors point to burial practices as an instrumental form of collective remembering used to recall descent and legitimize inheritance of land and houses. Through an analysis of sequential burials, they argue that the structure and function of these burial practices parallels genealogical claims made by Central Mexican pictorial histories. While official histories are tools of rulers, burial practices facilitated the maintenance of local pasts and smoothed over disruptions in occupation and genealogical continuity to ensure the durability of land claims attached to descent. Ultimately, Overholtzer and Bolnick argue that the collective memories of all groups are instrumental, though the scale of political impacts may differ.

In a similar vein, the papers by Shannon Iverson and Parker VanValkenburgh contrast official ethnohistoric accounts of the past with archaeological evidence for collective remembering. Arguing that history is simply a materialized form of collective remembering, Iverson points to how Aztec rulers co-opted the symbols of the Toltec capital at Tula in Central Mexico to legitimize their own power. She then elucidates how the descendants of Aztec kings later used these symbols to establish historical linkages to the region around Tula to maintain control of the region during the colonial era. She delves into the ways that the physical remains of Aztec and colonial settlements at Tula reveal strategies of truth production during these agenda-driven periods of collective remembering.

VanValkenburgh adeptly points to the ability of forced relocation to inculcate populations in official narratives and lifeways. His paper traces how the shifting landscape of daily life under the Spanish policy of *reducción* in coastal Peru produced embodied memories that slowly altered indigenous understandings of how the past was inscribed on the local landscape. Indigenous practices of collective remembering were altered by

Spanish spatial operations and slowly led to the subjectification of indigenous minds, as well as bodies. In the long term, however, local populations were able to co-opt the Spanish hegemonic ideas to their own purposes. Indigenous populations utilized Spanish ideas to justify the resumption of some pre-Columbian practices.

The remainder of the issue shifts to prehistoric contexts. In each of these contexts, monuments, monumental construction, or urban plans—rather than texts—provide evidence for dominant narratives about the past. Drawing on evidence from standing stone monuments in circumpolar regions, William Fitzhugh provides comparative case studies from the Canadian arctic, Mongolian steppe, and Scotland to look how monuments serve as anchors for collective memories in megalithic traditions. The identities of groups living in these areas are tied to acts of collective remembering manifest in repeated interactions with horizon-breaking stone monuments during both their daily activities and periodic gatherings.

Building on the materialization of memory within a landscape, Edward Henry's paper delves explicitly into how the construction of earthen monuments includes the bundling of power-laden associations among symbolic things, places, and people that is structured by the ongoing process of collective remembering. Henry focuses specifically on shifting performances of coalition-based kinship and intragroup equity by tracing the discursive practices of memorialization associated with Adena-Hopewell mounds in the Eastern North America. The separate phases of one monument's construction reflect how the materialization of collective remembering varies depending on how networks of people and things are ordered at any given time.

The remaining case studies focus on how collective remembering acts to create and reconcile divergent understandings of the past between different social groups. Christopher Pool and Michael Loughlin contrast acts of elite and non-elite collective remembering evident in stone carvings found in the Olmec Heartland of Mexico. The former are a set of politically calculated actions aimed at legitimizing the power of sequential rulers, while the latter shows how the collective remembering of common members in society can be inscribed overtime through spontaneous actions, and subsequent interaction, in a boulder field covered in petroglyphs.

David Mixter's paper looks at the subversive power of dwelling among the ruins of a Preclassic Maya capital during the Classic period and following the subsequent political collapse. After being conquered and placed under foreign rule for at least 300 years, the changing practices of the local community indicate that the inhabitants of Actuncan drew on their memory of the site's long-past importance as they rebuilt their sociopolitical institutions. He argues that the continued daily interaction of local community members with each other and with Actuncan's vacant pyramids led to an insular process of collective remembering that glorified the site's past and organized the resistance to official narratives disseminated by their Classic period foreign overlords. The local web of interactions between community members and monuments solidified a local collective memory that focused on Actuncan's past rather than the dynastic lineage of their foreign rulers.

Together, these contributions to the study of collective remembering in archaeology work to diversify our understandings of the ways humans, places, and things worked in concert to create the conditions for the past to impact the present in antiquity. We encourage future scholars interested in collective memory to consider not just the clear power dynamics at play but to seek evidence for multiple perspectives on the past that may alter what is remembered.

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