

University of Florida
Department of Anthropology
ANG 6930 & ANT 4930; Spring 2012
Social Memory

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Tues. Per. 10--E1&2
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The seminar described below transcends boundaries between cultural anthropology and archaeology. It is as appropriate for cultural anthropologists as it is for archaeologists and biophysical anthropologists.

This seminar explores the historical contingencies in which social memory takes shape. We will read a variety of treatments that draw on the role of materiality in social memory, including the ways that culturally constructed landscapes inform social memory. A wide range of phenomena elicit, inform, and help to conserve social memory—monuments, heirlooms passed on within families, exhibits of cultural trophies, archaeological “sites” and ruins, regalia, photographs, buildings, pathways and avenues, keepsakes and war memorabilia—these are but a few of the full gamut of such interrelationships with human memory. The institutionalization of devices that ensure the conservation of social memory such as shrines, the conferral of place names laden with tropic meanings, and subaltern and oppositional perspectives submerged by such devices also capture our attention.

Our concerns will also touch on how social memory is sometimes retained at the expense of weaker histories that do not sustain popularity or are not concertized in the material world. Forgetting is an active process, the counterpart of memory that figures prominently in any social memory retention. Emotional and social trauma, and how it affects forgetting and remembering, are key to unlocking how social disruptions influence memory and the way history is represented.

We will also examine how social memory is embodied through dramatic performance and dance, ritual performance, masquerades, and gestures. The interplay of sacred places with ritual and other rites also compel inquiry, especially the exclusions of certain social groups thus ensuring forgetting as well as memory retention. A key theoretical concern, right from the beginning of the course and throughout, is the question of whether or not there is a separation between social memory and history. For those who maintain that there is, we pose counter questions: Is such a separation the consequence of a literary tradition that divides history from the non-material forms of remembering history, and, does such a separation help or hinder us from understanding how non-literate peoples sustain social memory in the absence of written history? The silencing of history also enters into our discourse, with an inquiry into the role of the state as well as the political, economic, and social dimensions of why certain memories are forgotten while others are valorized and retained.