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Characterizing an Archaeology of Coloniality in the Maya Lowlands

Kasey Diserens Morgan and Tiffany C. Fryer

Archaeologists working in historically Maya-speaking territories (today's southeastern Mexico, Belize, northern Honduras, and Guatemala) have long influenced developments across the discipline. These researchers have produced a rich body of scholarship exploring Maya society before Spanish invasion and settlement. They have contributed regionally and internationally, creating and testing new standards for archaeological practice, perfecting innovative scientific techniques, exploring the inclusion of ethnographic and epigraphic methods, and helping illuminate the processes involved in the rise, maintenance, and collapse of intricate state-level societies (Marcus 2003; Nichols and Pool 2012; Chase and Chase 2016). Unlike archaeology in other settler colonial societies such as the United States and Australia, however, Mayanist archaeology has been slower to embrace the study of post-fifteenth-century life in the region (but see Rice and Rice 2004; Kepecs and Alexander 2005; Alexander and Kepecs 2018; Alexander 2019).

Maya experiences with European colonialism have instead typically been the domain of intrepid revisionist ethnohistorians (Farriss 1984; Clendinnen [1987]

2003; Jones 1989; Restall 1997; on Latin America as settler colonial society, see Gott 2007; Castellanos 2017). Scholars of the New Philology—the study of the Colonial period using documents authored in native languages by Indigenous subjects—have greatly shifted the conversation about so-called Conquest and the Colonial periods toward interpretations that center native peoples’ understanding of the life of colonialism (Restall 2012). Legal and religious documents authored in Latin script by Maya—much like the tablets and stelae that preceded them—provide a window into how Maya incorporated and pressed back against the technologies of colonialism at play in their lives (Restall 1997; Hanks 2010; McCrea 2010; Sigal 2013; Quezada 2014; Christensen 2016; Dutt 2017). The vantage point offered by the material record may help to amplify these efforts, allowing archaeologists to contribute to offsetting the frequency with which taken-for-granted assumptions based on colonial documentation authored by the “conquerors” are replicated across the fields of (post)colonial Maya history and anthropology.

The few archaeological works in this area tend typically—and importantly—to focus on the transitional phase between the Late Postclassic and Early Colonial periods (roughly AD 1350–1650; e.g., Lee 1979; Graham, Pendergast, and Jones 1989; Emery 1990, 1999; Hanson 1995; Kepecs 1997, 1999, 2005; García Targa 2000; Nance, Whittington, and Jones-Borg 2003; Andrews, Benavides Castillo, and Jones 2006; deFrance and Hanson 2008; Oland and Palka 2016), leaving the Middle Colonial period through Early National period (roughly AD 1650–1910) largely unexplored. Archaeological studies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the Maya lowlands are almost nonexistent. Post-transitional historical archaeologies have not been entirely ignored in the subfield of Maya studies, but they tend to be represented by one-off articles or as a single chapter in a larger volume dedicated to work on the deeper past (Miller and Farriss 1979; Ariás López and Burgos Villanueva 2001; Yaeger et al. 2004; Mathews and Lizama-Rogers 2005; Palka 2005; Andrews, Burgos Villanueva, and Millet Cámara 2006; Martos López 2010; Andrews 2012a; Ramsey 2016; Kaeding 2017; Mathews and Gust 2017). Work on transitions from the Late Postclassic to Early Postconquest periods may be thriving, but archaeological research on eras following that transition is scarce.

There may be a less rigid line drawn between the “prehistoric” and “historic” periods in Mesoamerican archaeologies broadly (Fowler 2009, 429) because of works on these transitional periods, but the simultaneous devaluation of historical archaeologies in Mesoamerica, and specifically the Maya region, endures. Indeed, the question of the archaeological significance of the material remains of (post)colonial history still biases researchers against this work (Mrozowski, Delle, and Paynter 2000, xxii). That is: what is archaeology able to add to our knowledge about this period that productively adds to the already robust

ethnohistorical scholarship? Moreover, characterizations of the future of the field over the past four decades consistently chart exciting and ever-innovative paths for Mayanist archaeologists yet make no mention of the efficacy of engaging in archaeological studies of Mayan history post-fifteenth century (Marcus 1983, 1995; Demarest 2009). Pioneering in her field, Hattula Moholy-Nagy at Tikal conducted work in Guatemala in the 1950s (Moholy-Nagy 2012), which blazed the way for the serious study of the Colonial period by archaeologists as part of the long-term history of Mayas in the region. Despite its marginalization, a handful of scholars working across post-fifteenth-century sites since the 1980s charted the way for the growth of historical archaeologies in the region (see, esp., Andrews 1981, 2012b; García Targa 1995; Alexander 1997, 2003, 2004; for recent useful reviews, see Fowler 2009; Palka 2009; Alexander 2012; Joyce, Gómez, and Sheptak 2015). Recent monographs such as Rani Alexander's (2004) *Yaxcabá and the Caste War of Yucatán*, Jorge Victoria Ojeda and Jorge Canto Alcocer's (2006) *San Fernando Aké*, Jennifer P. Mathews and Gillian Schultz's (2009) *Chicle*, Allan Meyers's (2012) *Outside the Hacienda Walls*, and Sam Sweitz's (2012) *On the Periphery of the Periphery* have all made way for deeper archaeological engagements with more recent periods of Mayan history.

This volume builds on the decades of work by these few determined scholars of the Maya region who do focus on the historic period, defined as the Colonial era and its aftermath (roughly 1500 to present). We are exceedingly grateful for those who laid the groundwork and attested to the value and relevance of historical archaeology in the region early on. We are especially motivated by the proliferation of doctoral and master's dissertations focused on the post-fifteenth-century Maya world since the early 2000s, including Jennifer Dornan's (2004) "Even By Night We Only Become Aware They Are Killing Us," Kira Blaisdell-Sloan's (2006) "An Archaeology of Place and Self," Olivia Ng's (2007) "View from the Periphery," Maxine Oland's (2009) "Long-Term Indigenous History on a Colonial Frontier," Steven Morandi's (2010) "Xibun Maya," Adam Kaeding's (2013) "Negotiated Survival," Erin Schmidt's "An Examination of Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Haciendas in Yucatan, Mexico," Russell Sheptak's (2013) "Colonial Masca in Motion," Collin Gillenwater's (2014) "Agency at Hacienda Pancota," Alison Hodges's (2015) "Resistance, the Church, and a Comparison of Ceramics from Sixteenth-Century Caluco, El Salvador," Guido Pezzarossi's (2014) "New Materialist Archaeology of Antimarkets, Power and Capitalist Effects in Colonial Guatemala," Tracie Mayfield's (2015) "The Nineteenth Century British Plantation Settlement at Lamanai, Belize," Alyssa Bonorden's (2016) "Comparing Colonial Experiences in Northwestern Belize," John Gust's (2016) "Bittersweet," Christopher Thrasher's (2017) "Surviving Spanish Conquest," Alejandra Badillo Sánchez's (2018) "Rumbo al Corazón de la Tierra Macehual," and Tiffany Cain's (2019) "Materializing Political Violence." The chapters here will demonstrate

how we have moved beyond the study of the (Post)Colonial periods as an afterthought that was tacked on obligatorily as archaeologists attempted to account for historic materials recovered on their ancient Maya-centric field projects.

Transitional archaeologies focused on changes in Maya lifeways since the onset of Spanish colonialism are incredibly important, and we hope that such studies will continue to grow. But the contributors to this volume highlight an even more marginalized period: the Late Colonial period to the Early National period (roughly, the eighteenth to twentieth centuries), at which point Spanish colonial—and later Yucatecan and Mexican settler colonial—systems had become well ingrained, giving way to new social categories and cultural practices. Together, our contributors push for making historical archaeology a part of a critical tool kit for scholars of the Maya region. They are principally concerned with interrogating broader processes of (post)colonial change over time, and how the impacts of those changes continue to resonate in and influence life in the region today. We also think critically about the impact of our studies on local communities and the communities within which we work. By doing so, we join efforts to create a more inclusive and dynamic practice of archaeology broadly.

Historical Archaeologies of Coloniality

Although the contributors to this volume have each come to engage historical archaeology through different avenues, the pieces are united by an understanding of historical archaeologies as those archaeologies that concern themselves with “the last 500 years . . . a period of the differential penetration of European-inspired practices of domination around the globe” (Paynter 2000, 170). Historical archaeologies, thus, are archaeologies of colonialism, capitalism, and the notion of modernity itself. By examining colonialism and postcolonialism as a set of dynamic long-term processes of social, economic, and political control manifest through quotidian relationships, historical archaeologists can address processes such as imperialism, capitalism, racialization, globalization, modern warfare, ethnogenesis, and cultural tourism. They can effectively shed light on how the social constructs of Indigeneity, race, place, power, resistance, agency, history, and heritage materialize (McGuire and Paynter 1991; Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002; Kazanjian 2003; Gosden 2004; Jordan 2009; Liebmann and Murphy 2010; Liebmann 2012; Oland, Hart, and Frink 2012; Voss and Casella 2012; Ferriss, Harrison, Wilcox 2014; Orser 2019).

But, because historical archaeologies address so many histories we might characterize as transitional—from native autonomy to colonial rule to Republican nationhood to transnational entanglements—periodization can become messy. Throughout the volume, readers will encounter references to the Colonial or Republican period but also to colonial and (post)colonial spaces. Such differences

lie in the juridical distinction between formal colonial subjugation under competing European imperial powers and the social engineering of colonialism whose systems maintain power long after juridical decolonization. As historical anthropologist Ann Stoler (2016, ix–x) insists, the notion (post)colonial references a skepticism of and lack of clarity about the assumed line between the postcolonial present and the colonial—and, we would add, precolonial—pasts.

Latin Americanist postcolonial theorists at the end of the twentieth century began to think of this permeable boundary in terms of what they called *coloniality*—or the ongoing systems of social order and knowledge production engendered by European colonialism and left unimpeded after Independence (Lander 2000; Quijano 2000, 2007; Wynter 2003, Lugones 2010). Coloniality refers to how colonialist logics become intertwined with material practices to provide the necessary conditions for the maintenance of oppressive, hierarchically gendered, and racialized power structures. Coloniality is a critique of the *performance* of colonial dominance that relies on the myth of cultural and genealogical absorption of Indigenous peoples rather than their outright non-existence or apparent elimination (as the myth in many British colonial contexts goes; Castellanos 2017, 778). Coloniality positions the “real *indio*” at the point of contact—the point from which Indigeneity begins to be disavowed through a process of racial dilution. The same process is deployed against African descendant peoples in many Latin American countries when the capitalist usefulness of the category “Black” becomes antithetical to the post-Independence national project (Restall 2009). Coloniality provides a framework for comprehending how so-called Conquest was not a homogenous event but a long-term (and yet unfinished) process (Oland and Palka 2016). The coloniality literature can be critiqued because it obscures the strategies of elimination and dispossession that occurred—and continue to occur—under colonialism (Speed 2017). In Spanish-speaking contexts, *colonialismo* implies settlement (Castellanos 2017, 778). Thus, studies of Spanish colonialism are always studies of postinvasion settlement. Postinvasion settlement implies the ushering in of new sets of social relationships, some of which were foreseen and orchestrated by the Crown, others of which could never have been predicted (Bianchi Vilelli 2011).

However, coloniality is a premise of modernity in the American context (and arguably elsewhere; see Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Over the past two decades, a proliferation of research on modernity as a subset of historical archaeology has emerged (Thomas 2004; González-Ruibal 2008, 2013; Dawdy 2010). This work opens the door to understanding not only how the mentality of power delimited by the notion of coloniality undergirds the modern project but also how that mentality is reinforced through material practices. Attention to the materiality of coloniality allows us to break down the conceptual divide between coloniality and settler colonialism, as well as to confront the difficulties of periodization

that can occur when investigating the unfolding of modernity in a “postcontact,” postinvasion settled world. These cooccurring histories shape space and place across temporal boundaries. Understanding contemporary inequities set in motion by colonial processes requires us to understand space as a physical expression of both past and present power structures (Manuel-Navarrete 2012). By studying Maya history since the Postclassic period, and drawing connections between those histories and present-day social concerns, Mayanist archaeologists may position their work to expose the breakdown of colonial systems, or the continuity of those systems as resonant structures of power that seek to subjugate particular kinds of people (Liebmann and Rizvi 2008).

It is critical to acknowledge how colonialism differentially impacted regions and people. By tacking back and forth between time periods and traversing geopolitical boundaries in this volume, we show how new cultures formed as a result of colonialism—how “what was previously understood as acculturation has come to be viewed instead as transculturation, creolization, and ethnogenesis, [global] processes that were shaped by local factors and resulted in varied outcomes” (Van Buren 2010, 157–158). Mary Van Buren (2010) describes recent trends in the archaeological study of colonialism, with an increased focus on bottom-up approaches to understanding the agency of local actors and the production of new identities. She addresses the varied responses of members of colonial and postcolonial society to “identity and culture change, demographic effects of European Expansion, missionization, the changing nature of economic activities, and urbanization” (159). Other anthropologists have drawn attention to the variety of colonial practices and pressures that lead to uneven assimilation, ethnogenesis, and, in some spaces, extreme attempts to secure autonomy where racialized oppressions preclude the possibilities of recognition (Montejo 1999; Gabbert 2004; Vanthuyne 2009; Joyce, Gómez, and Sheptak 2015; Balaton-Chrimes and Stead 2017). Understanding these processes as growing out of a settler colonial milieu and as enabling the performance of coloniality strengthens the theoretical frameworks from which archaeologists may explore the complicated history of postinvasion, settlement-based modernity in Mesoamerica and beyond.

Thus, historical archaeologies of the Maya region center not only on the mechanics and materials of the colonial past but also on the presence of colonial structures today (Gosden 1999; Stoler 2016). They are necessarily archaeologies of coloniality. Joel Palka’s (2005) study of the “unconquered” Lacandon Maya offers an interesting example of how contact and colonialism reshaped the lives of those groups seen as on the edge of the influence of colonialism. His study shows that colonialism is a multidirectional process, the outcomes of which are only so predictable. Through recent investigations like this, scholars rework the histories of Maya America, moving beyond tropes of collapse

and conquest (Restall 2003), to include broader histories of a multicultural societies that were homogenous neither before (Yaeger and Robin 2004) nor after (Tiesler, Zabala, and Cucina 2010; Wesp, chapter 3 in this volume) the onset of European colonialism.

These variabilities result from the negotiation of power, social life, and the formulation of identity under inequitable conditions (Van Buren 2010; Kaeding 2013, 2017; Bühner et al. 2017). By recognizing the Maya lowland region as a settler colonial context, within which coloniality is performed and reproduced daily, we can identify how studies of the sixteenth century might have important ramifications for the goings-on of the twenty-first. Addressing the present-day issues that are a result of the continuation of colonial power structures under new regimes, as well as more specific concerns—such as migration (Meierhoff, chapter 8 in this volume), food insecurity (Dedrick, McAnany, and Batún Alpuche, chapter 2 in this volume), violence (García Lara and Olán, chapter 4 in this volume; Fryer, chapter 5 in this volume; Badillo Sánchez, chapter 6 in this volume), and control over historic resources (Diserens Morgan, chapter 11 in this volume)—becomes possible. For instance, some scholars show that racial and social domination can be manifested in the design of colonial structures and towns (Gutiérrez 1983; Solari 2013; Nemser 2017). Studies of space, power, and urbanism in pre-Spanish invasion Mayanist archaeologies have been influential, providing comparative baselines for archaeologies being conducted in the region and across the globe. Such emphases could easily be reworked to address the study of colonialism in the Maya region. In fact, studies such as Allan Meyers's (2012) investigation of Hacienda Tabi in northwestern Yucatán have already shown how investigating discrete spaces of (post)colonial life—for instance, plantations—can change the conversation about how people negotiate power and individuality in policed spaces of domination.

Acknowledging Colonialist Thought in Mayanist Archaeologies and Anthropologies

The ways in which historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries studied “the Maya” were themselves often artifacts of colonialism. Ethnohistorian Nancy Farriss (1983, 2) suggested that many of the modern studies of Maya by scholars are comparable to their exploitation during colonial times. Indeed, the very shaping of a people called “the Maya” indexes the durability of colonialist ideals such that even the subject of study, notwithstanding considerable increases in self-reflexivity on the part of Mayanist researchers, becomes a unified and unquestioned subject—one for which widespread and generalizable conclusions may be drawn (Castañeda 1996, 2004; Gabbert 2004; Joyce 2005; Armstrong-Fumero 2009). Widely regarded anthropological studies such as Robert Redfield and Alfonso Villa Rojas's ([1934]

1967) *Chan Kom: A Maya Village* and the subsequent *A Village That Chose Progress: Chan Kom Revisited* (Redfield 1957) illuminated little-understood aspects of Maya social life while concretizing ahistorical representations of Maya communities and suggesting their eventual extinction due to encroaching forces of globalization (see Armstrong-Fumero, chapter 13 in this volume).

Ethnicization and objectification of “the Maya” by archaeologists, anthropologists, government, and tourism industries give rise to other forms of power imbalances, whereby millions of today’s Maya peoples (those Indigenous peoples who are Maya language family speakers and descendants) are characterized as unworthy of their histories, lesser than their genealogical predecessors, and culturally consumable but politically expendable (Watanabe 1995; Pyburn 1998; Cojti Ren 2006; Breglia 2006). Such studies perpetuate long standing colonially derived biases toward Indigenous peoples—they are the artifacts of the coloniality of power in Maya America. Some current scholarship examines discursive practices of othering and/or homogenizing in Mayanist anthropology and archaeology, producing work that instead complicates the complex relationships between colonizer and colonized, people of differentially racialized identities, researcher and researched across the historically Maya regions of Central America (e.g., Pyburn 2004; Ardren 2004; Cojti Ren 2006; Armstrong-Fumero and Hoil Gutierrez 2017; Kaeding 2017). The continued othering of “the” Maya by governmental agents and researchers, as well as the expansive cultural and archaeological tourism industry across historically Maya territories, further distances Maya-identified peoples from each other and from their respective histories (McAnany and Parks 2012).

Coloniality in the Maya Lowlands: This Volume’s Approach

This volume began as an organized session entitled “Recent Shifts in Maya Archaeology: Investigations of the Colonial and National Periods of the Yucatan,” at the Society for American Archaeology in 2017. We aimed to bring together scholars who were braving unconventional dialogues about postinvasion experiences across the historically Maya region to share and exchange findings, challenges, and achievements with one another. We are together nineteen archaeologists and anthropologists working in what are today southeastern Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras—though in order to provide some cohesion, we have tried to limit our case studies to lowland contexts. Some contributors started as ancient Mayanists and others as historical archaeologists; some are just beginning their academic journeys as graduate students, and some are seasoned senior scholars. When we decided to pursue this volume, we wanted to demonstrate that the study of the Colonial and Postcolonial periods offers great value for the expansion of Mayanist archaeologies. The contributors to this volume are committed not only to the expansion

of knowledge about these marginalized time periods in Maya archaeology but also to addressing some of the field's most pressing theoretical and methodological questions—how to conceive of and grapple with the material realities of coloniality, for example—at a regional level.

As Richard Wilk noted in his 1985 article “The Ancient Maya and the Political Present,” our archaeological research interests are never far from the current political moment. But, as editors, we believe that by reflexively embracing those agendas, we can mobilize archaeology to address critical social, economic, and political issues facing the communities within which and with whom we work. We address violence, resource insecurity, land rights, refugees, the control of borders, the movement of contraband, surveillance, individual and collective agency, consumption, uses of historic resources, and the futures of Maya archaeology—all colonial endurances. Although not every project focused on the recent past will be overtly political, the reality of coloniality means that such projects will be difficult to disentangle from the sociopolitical concerns of the present moment, and we remain unconvinced that they should be. Aligning with recent trends in archaeology and anthropology (e.g., Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2007; Hale 2007; Atalay 2012; Atalay et al. 2014; McAnany 2016; Fryer and Diserens Morgan 2021), many of our authors thus combine their archaeological research with ethnographic, engaged, and activism-oriented methodologies, examining the impact of their work on modern-day descendant communities and the ways engagement with modern-day communities in turn impacts their research.

The wide variety of case studies presented here seek a better understanding of what living through shifting power dynamics and social, cultural, and religious transformations requires; what living through tumultuous political regimes, revolt, and the precarity of newly formed nation states requires; what frequent migration due to political and economic upheaval requires; and what newly globalizing economies require. These chapters respect Maya people, both past and present, as actors in the shaping of a globalized, modern world. They attend to how change is managed, adapted to, and eventually leaves its mark in the archaeological record.

Organization of the Volume

The volume is divided into three parts, grouping the essays along semichronological and thematic lines. Each part opens with a preface where readers will find short background essays briefly outlining histories (and highlighting additional sources not cited in this introduction) to contextualize the chapters that follow. Following this Introduction, “Part I: Colonial Lives” focuses on the construction and maintenance of new lifeways throughout the Middle and Late Colonial periods. Dedrick, McAnany, and Batún Alpuche (chapter 2) discuss how economic

strategies and agriculture changed over the course of the Colonial period. They argue that communities forcibly gathered under the Spanish colonial system of *congregación* organized to use *rejolladas*, or soil-filled sink holes, to achieve food security under otherwise precarious conditions. In chapter 3, Wesp explores some of the ways in which peoples of African descent adapted to life in colonial Mexico and how that story has been obscured over time, especially in the Maya region. She argues that ongoing discrimination against Black Mexicans is exacerbated by the dichotomous characterization of colonial life as an exclusive opposition between Spanish and Indigenous peoples. Attention to colonial society as multiracial is a first step toward more fully illuminating the experiences of life under colonialism throughout the historically Maya region. Finally, in chapter 4, García Lara and Olán explore the clash of empires as reflected in changes to the landscape through fortification practices on the eastern frontier of the Yucatán. They address the violence of piracy and the movement of contraband across international borders—a problem that continues to resonate today.

Opening “Part II: (Post)Colonial Lives,” Fryer (chapter 5) picks up on the theme of violence by examining the same region as García Lara and Olán but moving us into the latter half of the nineteenth century following the region’s Independence from Spain. Drawing on work with a collaborative heritage initiative, she shows how the prolonged violence of the so-called Caste War of Yucatán (*guerra de castas*, 1847–1901) altered human geographies across the area, arguing that attention to core objects of social life such as rock walls and corn-grinding stones can illuminate how collective violence transforms the sphere of daily life. The Caste War figures prominently in the three chapters that follow Fryer’s. In chapter 6, Badillo Sánchez interrogates the military operations of the final years of the conflict as the Mexican Army swept through the jungle, plowing toward the sanctuary and former stronghold of the insurrectionists still controlling what is today southeastern Quintana Roo. She shows how the grafting of new biopolitics onto the occupied territories during and following the final affront engineered new social relations and geographies.

In chapter 7, “Living on the Edge,” Houk, Bonorden, and Kilgore investigate the formation of new communities after war-induced migration. Comparing three refugee communities in British Honduras, they show how people tried to achieve a sense of normalcy in their daily lives as they simultaneously constructed new lives and did what they could to maintain their individual social and cultural identities—a process that has been documented among today’s global refugee communities. Meierhoff (chapter 8) shifts the conversation about refugee livelihoods from the logging regions of northern British Honduras to the ruins of Tikal, Guatemala. His study speaks to the temporal circulation of places, how a place once abandoned can become home again to people who find themselves removed from the places they once knew as home. Together,

these two chapters make a compelling case for the contribution archaeology can make to refugee studies while reinforcing Wesp's call in chapter 3 for archaeologists to take the reality of multiethnic societies at both the heart and edge of empire seriously. Still, in times of war, some people cannot or choose not to leave war-torn areas. Often, the social structures that lead to war become amplified in those spaces (Lubkemann 2010), creating paradoxical social geographies. Part II closes with Gust's piece (chapter 9) on the intensification of debt peonage and the expansion of the plantation system in northern Yucatán from the late nineteenth century, as the Caste War raged on, until the Mexican Revolution. Through careful archival research, he shows how labor and land are intimately connected and how nuanced differences in access to and control over land can variously intensify or diminish the insecurities felt by people trapped within systems of unfree labor.

"Part III: Futures for Recent Maya History" opens with Mathews, Gust, and Fedick's retrospective (chapter 10) on taking up historical archaeology in the Yucatán. Situated between the themes of global commodity exchange, capitalist expansion, and postwar life, their study mobilizes ethnographic, ethnoarchaeological, and archival methods to illuminate the importance of small-scale commodities industries throughout the history of the region. In chapter 11, Diserens Morgan turns to a contemporary example of the reinhabitation of ruins and what happens when those resettled places come under the influence of modern-day heritage. She introduces the concept of the "living dead" as a precaution and call to action for archaeologists, alongside heritage specialists and historic preservationists, to reconsider how ideals around loss—and which places and objects are significant enough to pursue programs that stall loss—can distract from the heritage *and* livelihood value of these places to the local communities that continue to inhabit them. Both of these chapters present a foray into archaeological ethnography as an essential component of historical archaeologies of the Maya world for the future.

The volume concludes with two commentaries on the major themes presented in the book and the future of historical archaeology across the historically Maya regions of what are today southern Mexico and Central America. In chapter 12, Joyce underscores that the historical archaeology of this region is poised to help us understand how new ways of being in the Maya world were formed and have changed over time, and that these types of analyses can be done on a regional level. Finally, Armstrong-Fumero (chapter 13) highlights the shared investments of historical archaeologists and sociocultural anthropologists working in the Maya region, tracing four major themes of the book that would provide fruitful points of engagement for ethnographers working in this space: ethnicity, agricultural change, political geography, and historical migrations.

This introduction is by no means exhaustive, but we hope that it is illustrative of both the trajectory of historical archaeology in the Maya region as well as the spaces of opportunity for studying life following Spanish invasion in Mayanist archaeologies. We advocate approaching the Maya region as a settler colonial context and attending to the material practices of coloniality that continue to unfold there. As such, we reimagine where “Maya archaeology is headed” (re: Marcus 1995) with the hope that readers, whether new to the field or well seasoned, will think twice before disregarding the (post)colonial lenses in their excavation units, take seriously the knowledge held and shared by Maya communities with whom they work, and embrace the opportunity to contribute to wide-reaching conversations about the history (and presence) of colonialism in the Americas.

Acknowledgments. As scholars beginning our journey in the field of Maya historical archaeology, we are grateful to those who came before us, whose work is highlighted in this introduction. We are also exceedingly grateful to all of our authors and the participants of the original SAA 2017 session and the Maya communities who have welcomed us all year after year to conduct the research reflected in this collection. Finally a special thank you to our discussants, Rosemary A. Joyce and Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, and the anonymous reviewers whose generous commentary strengthened the volume immensely.

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