LIVING MEMORY: WHAT IT PORTENDS WHEN THE FOUNDERS STILL LIVE

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What informs an organization's identity? Older organizations have annals that record the history for posterity, but what of newer organizations? Their history has yet to be made and much of it is as open to negotiation as their future unfolds. To explore this contingency, I delve into one organization, a young fraternity, during an occasion in which memories are exchanged and organizational identity is expanded. What I discovered elucidates the power of living memory and the fecundity of an occasion such as a national convention for keeping it alive.

Introduction

Just over 25 years ago, Pierre Nora (1989) lamented that "the acceleration of history" has resulted in a proliferation of *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because of the disappearance of *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory (p. 7). He argued that memory has become crystallized in a fixed, archival past known as history and that "real memory… remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting" (p. 8). Yet his model does not apply to fledgling societies, the pasts of which are still as alive as their founders. With the help of Karl Mannheim's framework articulated in his "The Problem of Generations" – the seminal work exploring aberrations and continuity of knowledge transfer from one generation to the next – I will examine some of the characteristics, processes, and mechanisms of one such society, a men's fraternity, to negotiate its living memory as well as how and to what degree the fraternity comes to a reflexive collective historical awareness. Given the dynamics discussed, the ensuing portrait will elucidate what the future portends for the collective memory of the fraternity's membership once its living memory can no longer be verified by firsthand accounts.

Methodology

Participant observation was used over the course of nine consecutive, annual national conventions of the fraternity to which to author belongs. This experience as a whole does not constitute a formal ethnography but rather served to inform the present inquiry. While the fraternity serving as a case study will be obvious to those who know the author, its name will not be mentioned herein so as not to interfere with the organization's search engine results.

Following the national convention of July 2014, the author individually reached out to 12 attendees via email asking them about their convention experiences and perceptions about how the interactions between younger members and older alumni differed. The members were identified based on acquaintanceship with the author and segmented so that six were young alumni (having graduated college within the past five years) while the other six were older alumni (having graduated college six or more years prior). These categories are not standardized delimitations employed by the fraternity itself but instead reflect how the author perceives generational differences for the purpose of analysis. All twelve attendees agreed to participate in the study.

Since the attendees returned to their respective cities following Convention, interviews could not occur in person. In the interest of expediting data collection and avoiding scheduling issues, following conventional practices in exploratory research design (Henry, 2008, p. 92), the author thought it efficacious to send each participant a questionnaire via email to

which they could respond at their convenience. This asynchronous approach obviated the normal transcription process and allowed the author to code emergently and analyze the text with alacrity rather than after all questionnaires were completed.

Questions were formulated based on Mannheim's (1952) theory in order to test whether his observations held true for a categorically different type of inter-generational dynamic. How the object of this study is categorically different from Mannheim's (1952) work, as well as key aspects of his theory, will be unpacked throughout the remainder of this article.

Born Yesterday

Founded less than twenty years ago[1], this fraternity experienced explosive growth and maintains forty federated chapters across the continental United States. Due to such youthfulness, the fraternity lacks a true cultural memory in the sense of an objectified "past with fixed content and meanings" but rather is comprised entirely of communicative memory, or the "historical experiences of contemporaries within a few generations" (Erll, 2011, p. 311). This is to say that the National Founders of the fraternity are still alive. In turn, this allows for the past not to be a truly fixed history since members can still ask questions and receive answers from those who were agents in the history's forming.

Founded in the 1990s, the fraternity and its members were born into an emergent age of connectivity. By the time the earliest members were in college, email and text messaging were already commonplace and other social media such as Facebook became prominent as early as 2004 (Marichal, 2012, p. 4). This historical and social configuration made a formative impact on the fraternity's nascent identity by affording its members communicative capabilities far more dynamic and expeditious than the letter writing of older fraternities (Syrett, 2004, p. 107). In the place of snail mail, fraternity members have engaged in email correspondence via a national listserv, which disseminates messages to every single member who maintains a freely provided fraternity email account. This technological innovation has directly shaped the fraternity's social structure and culture, enabling a more accessible imagined community of a national brotherhood.

The community is imagined in the sense that members join at a particular chapter but are told that they are part of a nationwide brotherhood. As such, an individual member's experience may not expose him to the national scale, so such a community is imagined until experienced otherwise. As the historian Nicholas Syrett notes (2004), Benedict Anderson thought that print culture and letter writing "functioned as a way for citizens of newly constructed nations to imagine themselves as connected with their fellow citizens – to imagine, in essence, a nation" (p. 107).

But more than imagining, modern media and increased ease and speed of transportation compared to the nineteenth century have encouraged fraternity members to travel and meet each other via road trips, regional retreats, and national conventions. It is the latter phenomenon that I will explore as my case since it best exemplifies the processes and mechanisms by which living memory is negotiated.

A Bridge Between Worlds

Members of the fraternity (colloquially known as and henceforth referred to as Brothers) may attend a national convention for different reasons. Some of the undergraduates may ostensibly attend to fulfill a national requirement – that is, a minimum number of representatives required of each chapter to send so as to ensure that each chapter is represented. This requirement stems mostly from the desire that members from each chapter are able to experience the na-

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[1] At the time of this writing (Spring 2017).

tional brotherhood. The secondary reason is to ensure adequate attendance so that the fraternity does not lose money from the costs of organizing the convention. Other undergraduates may attend because they heard stories of how much fun it is. Alumni who attend, however, are under no pressure to do so[2] and tend to have been to at least one convention in the past. A number of alumni shared that one of their principal motivations for attending convention was to relive their college years. As one of them expounded, now that he has graduated and works a full time job, it is much less feasible "to visit as many different chapters as [he] could to see the similarities and differences we share as fraternity members." To this extent, he continued, "convention is a great time for alumni who are busy in their lives to come together and relive the basic commonality we have with each other, being in the fraternity." For such alumni, conventions clearly serve as *lieux de mémoire* at which they can reminisce about the past.

This "basic commonality" is as vital as sharing a common language and as will be demonstrated is the cornerstone that makes all meaningful interaction between Brothers possible. As one alumnus shared, "We all did similar things to join the fraternity and that gives us a natural connection that no one else has." Indeed, such consubstantiality, or identification with another through shared commonality that does not deny the distinctness of both parties (Burke, 1969, p. 21), facilitates not just the reconnecting between Brothers who previously knew each other, but also makes possible expeditiously intimate encounters between Brothers meeting for the first time. As another participant reminisced in one story,

> Despite not knowing the undergraduate [member], somehow I [could] relate to this individual based on the commonality of basic membership as well as a personal relationship with one of [the] distin-

guished alumni [from the undergraduate member's chapter].

This type of encounter, in which individuals previously unknown to each other were able to connect based on their consubstantiality and in some cases mutual friendships, is typical of Convention. As another alumnus summarized, intimate exchanges between brothers who hardly or did not previously know one another "is what Convention is all about." He then embellished: "what once was a fifty-school crowd on Thursday night ended up being a one-brotherhood crowd by Sunday." The fraternity prides itself on feeling like an extended family — a dynamic showcased annually at its family reunion known as Convention.

This effect would not be possible if Convention was merely a *lieux de mémoire*, for new bonds and memories are forged there year after year. One of the reasons for this is that Convention fosters a renewed sense of organizational embeddedness, or the sense that one's social ties are embedded in an organizational setting (Small, 2009, p. 229). Although no longer in the social location at which their ties were first made, the fraternity convention creates a synthetic locus of brotherhood similar enough to the chapter milieu that causes attendees to relocate themselves in *lieux de mémoire*. It facilitates a sense of familiarity and security that one alumnus described as a Fraternal Bubble:

> At convention, you feel unnaturally safe when you are with all of your brothers. Normally walking to 7-Eleven at 3am in the morning in a neighborhood you are not familiar with is absolutely absurd. However, at convention this notion never enters your head. It is like the confines of the real world disappear and you are basically in a Fraternal Bubble.

In this 'present continuum,' "the external environment itself takes over the job of ordering memory into a sequence… as long as we re-

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[2] The seven officers on the national executive board are an exception, as they organize each national convention and it would be a conspicuous *faux pas* for any of them to be absent.

main in these contexts, we remain surrounded by clues which prompt our memory" (Fentress & Wickham, 1992, p. 73). Maurice Halbwachs helpfully refers to clues in these contexts, which are primarily other people, as *cadres sociaux de la mémorie*, or social frameworks of memory. As he explains, "we often experience things in the company of other people who can later help us to recall these events" (1992, p. 40). To such an extent, returning to social frameworks of memory can effectively dredge up dormant or subconscious memories and corresponding personas associated with them (Stillman, 2014, p. 38). In essence, as historians James Fentress and Chris Wickham succinctly declare, "we are what we remember" (1992, p. 7).

The Future is Now

Conventions are also the sites of new memories, however, as they are more than occasions for alumni to relive their pasts. As one alumnus from an isolated chapter on the West Coast shared, "my motivation for attending was to meet new brothers and re-unite with ones I've met before." This dual inclination, both to renew extant ties and create new ones – combining sites with real environs of memory – characterizes much of the alumni rationale for attending.

Yet most of the attendees, in fact, are undergraduate members experiencing Convention for the first time.[3] For them, Convention is indubitably a *milieu de mémoire* in which many of them meet Brothers from distant chapters in a setting of expanded brotherhood. However, it is also a *lieux de mémoire*, as undergraduate attendees seemed to "talk about their pledge process, what

gear they have, [and] what types of 'debaucherous' activities they participated in with other brothers." When not discussing their careers or family, alumni, on the other hand, "talked a lot about what is missing from the fraternity for alumni participation and involvement [sic]." These substantial differences in conversation characterize much of the dialogue when undergraduates or alumni talked among themselves, but exchanges across generations tended to deviate significantly such that each was aware of the social location of the other. As one alumnus reported when a much older Brother introduced himself, "I found it kind of interesting how respectful everyone got initially. It was like a table of 'old heads' turned into NIBs." By NIBs, he was referring to the vernacular abbreviation for a newly inducted brother. While such a hierarchy of seniority is inculcated into members before they are initiated, generational differences between Brothers are not always so linear in practice.

It is important to highlight that 'generational' in this sense does not refer to the biological life course usually delimited every thirty years (Mannheim, 1969, p. 278), but instead reflects the fact that most members attend college for four years and so fraternal generations might be said to turn over every four years. Yet with the fraternity, generational location, that is, "one born within the same historical and cultural region" (p. 303),[4] is not determined by chronological time but by how far removed a member is from college. As Jan Assman and John Czaplicka note (1995), this is a temporal "horizon shifts in direct relation to the passing of time" (p. 127). For example, undergraduate Brothers may all

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[3] At the July 2014 convention, 168 Brothers attended, which is atypically less than the 200 or so who usually attend. Of the 168, 111 were undergraduates, representing just over 20% of the fraternity's undergraduate membership. One of the reasons that fewer alumni than undergraduates attend, despite there being significantly more Brothers who have graduated than are currently matriculated, has to do with the Convention itinerary. As one of the oldest alumni in attendance shared, "I would have liked to have seen [more] older alumni but if there aren't events geared towards the alum, what incentive is there for them to attend?" Most organized events are educational workshops targeting undergraduate edification in best practices. However, since a number of alumni discussed their desire for more programming targeting themselves, it is entirely possible that an "alumni track" may run parallel with an undergraduate track in the future, thereby encouraging greater alumni attendance.

[4] In the sense that I am appropriating the term, "born" may refer to being born into the fraternity.

be part of one generational location and alumni Brothers who are up to several years out of college may belong to the same insofar as they identify with the historical and cultural conditions of the generation (Mannheim, 1969, p. 288). However, after being removed from college five or more years, the social distance and generational location seem to collapse as if to consolidate similarities. As one alumnus who graduated college six years ago said of another who graduated fourteen years ago, "I remember [the older Brother] saying 'It's great to meet a like-minded individual.' We are from different eras of the fraternity but shared similar views." Here the generational gap seemed to close through a shared mentality, as the older alumnus recognized the younger one as a kindred spirit or 'old soul' rather than belonging to a subsequent era. Mannheim (1969) refers to this process as a "stratification" of experience or consciousness such that individuals from different generational locations, which are mere potentialities, "experience certain historical processes together" that in turn foster greater consubstantiality between them (p. 297-8). This generational stratification may be more common at national conventions since fewer older alumni attend, so perceiving the social distance between themselves and the younger Brothers makes it easier to bond with peer alumni with whom they have more in common.

Such commonality in disposition or mentality situated in a stratified socio-historical configuration does not, however, locate individuals belonging to different generational locations within the same "actual generation." Mannheim (1969) adopts this latter term to refer to "Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems" – a factual cohort within a fixed social location (p. 304). In the fraternity, the baseline actual generation is what is known as Line Brothers (LBs), or individuals who joined the organization during the same semester and year. During the new member education process preceding initiation, the fraternity emphasizes the importance of LBs as individuals to whom aspiring members

should seek support and fellowship, as they all experience the same concrete social forces and participate in a common destiny. The fraternity encourages this relationship between Line Brothers across the nation. During the intake process, the fraternity provides phone numbers to aspiring members at other chapters as a means of social support throughout the process. Typically LBs within the same geographic region will meet at least once before initiation to foster stronger ties. However, LBs at individual chapters may experience unique circumstances in their own chapter that differentiate them as separate generational units. While the LBs at other chapters serve as a support network, the vast majority of the intake process occurs within the social setting of their respective chapters, thereby affecting "the material of their common experiences in different specific ways" (Mannheim, 1969, p. 304).

Convention affords the opportunity for many LBs from across the nation to meet for the first time, which typically produces an immediate bond due to their heightened consubstantiality. As one alumnus shared after being approached by one of his LBs who he had not met,

> I immediately shook his hand and gave him a hug… We shared sentiments that Fall 2008 was a good semester and said our 'see ya laters.' Throughout Convention, in addition to remembering his name (tough thing to do when you meet 100 new people in two days), I would regard him as a closer acquaintance than the many other Brothers I shook hands with over the weekend.

The significance of the 'LB connection' is not just an orientation toward each other, but rather forming "a link between spatially separated individuals who may never come into personal contact at all" (Mannheim, 1969, p. 306). While this is true of all Brothers in the fraternity who hail from different chapters, the bond is especially strong among Line Brothers. As one younger alumnus embellished the connection, comment-

ing on seeing alumni from different generational locations interacting as previously described, "Regardless of age or [initiation] year they spoke to each other the way I speak to my Line Brothers." Indeed, Line Brothers have even created mechanisms such as private, exclusive groups on social media to cavort in their generational location – proclaiming such sentiments as the superiority of their semester compared to others – and sharing memories specific to their socio-historical configuration.

Aside from generational differences, another important difference is the individual cultures and traditions that develop at each chapter. When a new chapter is founded, the Brother chosen to oversee the expansion tends to bring traditions from his home chapter to a new offshoot of Brothers. As a result, idiosyncrasies can be transmitted from one chapter to another. These idiosyncrasies, which folklorists have termed 'oikotypes' (home types), come to characterize habits of thinking peculiar to one community (Fentress & Wickham, 1992, p. 74). As variations across chapters tend to emerge whether due to the founders not being present to affirm orthopraxy or otherwise,

> The existence of oikotypical variants demonstrates that [traditions][5] do evolve. Evolution here is a process of transmission and diffusion… We often… can trace certain paths by which the [tradition], or a new version of it, diffused from one group to another. We can also trace lines of transmission showing how a single [tradition] broke up into related 'species'. (p. 74)

As an example of this phenomenon, one alumnus recounted asking the oldest alumnus in attendance

How it is coming back and seeing where the fraternity is now. [The alumnus] said he never imagined they'd end up at this point. He also talked about how ridiculous some of the pledge traditions are. He said he went to [his alma mater chapter] to visit and [the Brothers] were asking him about some tradition they have. He was confused because they were so adamant that this was one of their most important traditions, but he realized that it was just something he decided to do when he was bored one night. It's interesting how the 'most important traditions' are rooted in the most irrelevant actions.

While it is unlikely that most important traditions manifested so willy-nilly, such an occurrence demonstrates one example of how oikotypes can manifest. In this way, differences within and across actual generations at various chapters can be traced back to common deviation.

The previous account likewise illustrates how national conventions facilitate dynamic renegotiation of the fraternity's collective memory, which is the "creation of shared versions of the past which come into being through interaction, communication, mediation, and institutionalization" (Erll, 2011, p. 305). More specifically and building off the 'brotherhood' metaphor, convention discourse exemplifies Halbwach's (1992) understanding of family memory as a "typical inter-generational memory: a kind of collective memory that is constituted through ongoing social interaction between [family members]" especially through sharing stories at family get-togethers (p. 306). Brothers share stories, both located in their particular chapter history and from the past, in a dynamic process of re-mythologizing the fraternity's collective memory.[6] In this way an exchange of "living memory" takes

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[5] Although contextually the authors are referring to stories, for all intents and purposes, stories are narrative traditions and so I have replaced references to stories with traditions in the cited quotation.

[6] It is hard to say if this process occurs at the conscious or subconscious level. I suspect it is a mixture of both in the sense that Brothers actively rearrange parts of their family memory when presented with contradictory or superseding information, though it is impossible to measure how such exposure comes to bear on their worldview.

place between eyewitnesses and descendants (p. 306). For the younger Brothers in attendance, Convention affords the ideal opportunity to access sites of memory hitherto unknown or previously inaccessible, allowing them to fill in gaps in their family memory. This dialectic process of renegotiating collective memory by exchanging stories and filling in memory gaps applies both to younger and older Brothers. For neither is it complete, as each lacks the insights of the other. For the younger, they learn about the past, which they appropriate into their repertoires. For the older, they learn about the present, which they likewise internalize – updating their living memory with new information often pertaining to fraternal events that transpired after they graduated college. This process often invokes nostalgia for the past and comparison of how things have changed and what has remained intact. As an older alumnus shared,

> I was proud to feel that our core values still existed but I felt that we lost the "family" feeling. We are almost too big… I could proudly say in 2003 I knew every single brother in the fraternity… I used to go everywhere and everyone knew who I was and was running to me to give me a hug.

Such a sentiment reflective of attachment to the past and resistance to structural and cultural changes between generations is common, as the experiences of each generation provincialize them to their respective generational locations and memories (Mannheim, 1969, p. 300; Connerton, 1989, p. 3).[7] Indeed, obstacles and adversaries considered formative to one generation may no longer be relevant to another just as practices that once were commonplace may become more difficult or precluded completely due to new circumstances.[8]

As Mannheim (1969) describes it, "the older generation cling to the re-orientation that had been the drama of their youth" (p. 301, emphasis original). While the older generations will not acclimate to new innovations as readily or as fully, as Mannheim (1969) notes, that is perfectly suitable to the natural order of generational succession (p. 302). For the younger generation, however, exposure to the living memory of the fraternity is vital to gleaning parts of the family memory not otherwise in its purview. One young alumnus from a relatively isolated chapter on the West Coast recounted a story in which he met two Brothers who were initiated soon after the fraternity's founding:

> When I had first met [the older Brothers], I had to ask them about the new member education process regarding their expansion effort with the [only nearby chapter], seeing that the expansion [New Member Educator] was from their chapter. I was very curious about [that chapter's] founding since they were the ones that pledged us when expansion occurred at [my chapter]. I've heard stories about this process before but I wanted to take the opportunity to directly hear it from them in person and get their insight as they were members at the time of this process. Throughout time, the styles, traditions, and formalities of the process has changed quite a bit to the point where [the older Brothers] don't recognize most, if not all, aspects of their process in today's modern process. But what I've come to learn is that members of [the older Brothers'] new member education process most accurately reflects how the Western region conducts [its] new member education process.

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[7] It should also be noted that when a member stops "go[ing] everywhere" and actively involving himself in the fraternity's affairs, he cannot expect new generations of Brothers to know who he is. Even so, there is something to be said for the fraternity's imagined community when the founders and oldest members confess that they never imagined it becoming as expansive as it did. As will be discussed later in the paper, an accelerated tempo of social change necessitates that traditional attitudes adapt toward "a new centre of configuration" that Mannheim calls generation entelechy (1969, p. 309).

[8] This is not to rule out the role of other formative factors in history. See Mannheim, 1969, p. 312-20).

There are several important takeaways from this episode. First, the alumnus from the West notes how he had heard stories that predated his initiation (in fact, they predated his chapter) that have come to bear on his experience. He recognized the opportunity to engage with the living memory of members from a previous generation of Brothers to verify the stories he had heard. Second, he noted that the current new member education process as it typically exists at most chapters has (d)evolved significantly since its inception and that the process at his chapter most closely reflects the original process as corroborated by the older Brothers. In this way, the oikotypical tracks can be verified not just by comparing what is to what is said to have been, but also through the link of an isolated region unexposed to the aberrations of the past.

Living Ancestor Worship

More than repositories of the past, older alumni also tend to be relegated to an almost mythical stature, as younger Brothers hear lionized accounts of the former's deeds and in many cases try to live up to them (Welzer, 2010, p. 7). These family memories "fulfill normative and formative, value-related and identity-related functions" (Erll, 2011, p. 307) such that they comprise a kind of mythology. One alumnus commented on this dynamic and his attempt to subvert it:

> Often times as the alumni become further removed, some of their stories become exaggerated and all of the work they have done for their chapter is placed on a pedestal. Therefore, when undergraduates hear of these great alumni, they often feel as if they can never live up to them. So some of the topics I shared included all of the delinquent behavior these respected alumni partook in when I visited [their chapter]. The reason I wanted to share these embarrassing stories was to humanize the alumni of the chapter so the undergraduates may see that they are not

any different from them. I feel by giving the undergraduates an opportunity to see the similarities of those respected alumni, they too may feel empowered to achieve that same sense of pride while being able to slip up here and there in college. It is through the fraternity that any brother can talk to another and share great stories because they have the commonality of membership.

The alumnus here expressly wanted to denounce the perceived fixity of the past by invoking consubstantiality to the more fallible characteristics or less glamorous experiences of alumni so younger Brothers would feel less pressure to live up to an impossible standard. It makes sense, however, that only the positive accounts of alumni are retold, as "social groups tend to remember that which corresponds to the self-image and interests of the group" (Erll, 2011, p. 307). As memories tend to serve as "models for future conduct and as ways of self-description" (Erll, 2011, p. 307), telling less than exemplary stories could have negative portents for all who hear the story (as well as those who experience the symptoms of such exposure).

This silencing of the past or selective forgetting applies not just to the stories of individuals, but to the mythologized cultural memory itself. The oldest alumni in attendance reported that a number of younger Brothers asked them what it was like in the early days and some asked about the fraternity's "true history." This occurrence is noteworthy not only because it allows younger Brothers to ask questions of the living memory of older alumni (which fosters their building a more complete family memory), but also because it reveals that some younger Brothers are aware that the history taught to them and advertised on social media may not be the full story. When asked about such a line of inquiry, one of the oldest alumni replied,

> Earlier on, it made sense to change our history in order to make us sound legitimate… I don't have an issue with telling

any Brother our history although I usually reserve that for more of the older alumni. To me, undergrads and new alumni are too immature to hear it.

This privileged information of a secret history, not archived in writing but only in the living memories of those privy to its existence, illustrates an integral function of national convention: the opportunity to exhume the mysteries of the past by interacting with its undertakers. Brothers exposed to such a version of the past are forced to reconcile the believed historicity of their collective memory and how this new information comes to bear on everything they took for granted. This illustrates Mannheim's (1969) point that "Even in negation our orientation is fundamentally centered upon that which is being negated, and we are still unwittingly determined by it" (p. 298). So long as the secret history remains in living memory, circulated among those privy to it, such a version of the past will inevitably infect how family memory is negotiated: it will just be a little family secret.

Herein lies the root of the problem of generations. As one alumnus observed, "Each year the number of alumni in attendance who I had experienced undergrad with becomes smaller and smaller." Having fewer older Brothers in attendance implies that each older Brother at convention becomes more of an authoritative narrator of the fraternity's living memory since there are fewer individuals who could contest his empirical testimony with their own (Collingwood, 1946, p. 235). As Astri Erll notes (2011), commenting on family memory: "Inter-generational memory thus goes back as far as the oldest members of the social group can remember either their own experiences or stories that they heard from their elders" (p. 306). Any Brothers with whom the secret history is shared then become secondary sources, prone to forget details in its retelling if such interstices were not already forgotten or left out when they first heard the story (Hobsbawm, 1972, p. 3). This means that when those Brothers who lived that secret history die

or stop attending convention, the fraternity's actual history, so long as it is never codified, acquires a mythic character — whispered about as it already is but this time patently unknowable.

The secret history is not the only "family tradition" excluded from formal codification. Another tradition involves stealing items that bear the fraternity's letters from other Brothers when visiting them, informing them of the theft after returning home, and the victims visiting the thief at his chapter to retrieve the stolen item(s). The original purpose of this tradition was to encourage Brothers from separate chapters to visit each other, but as the purpose sometimes gets left out of communicating the tradition, Brothers think the idea is just to steal lettered items from other Brothers. This communicative lapse often manifests during national conventions. At the July 2014 convention, when it was announced that some Brothers were missing a number of items, one younger Brother confessed to "not knowing there were rules and apologized for doing what he did." If such a tradition can be diffused without reference to its purpose, one can only imagine other oversights that have been transgressed — integral facts left out of the knowledge transfer devoid of qualifying details to contextualize the whole cosmology. As J. G. A. Pocock explains in greater detail, this is one symptom of the failure to codify the formal organization of a society (1962, p. 242).

The second implication of this problem of generations is what Mannheim (1969) calls the "entelechy" of a generation, or the centrifugal expression of a generation's way of experiencing life and the world (p. 283). Being part of a certain generation limits one to a "specific range of potential experiences, predisposing [one] for a certain characteristic type of historically relevant action" (Mannheim, 1969, p. 291). When the historical and social situation change, de-stabilization of the status quo occurs (Mannheim, 1969, p. 295). Effectively, new generations facilitate "reevaluation of our inventory and teaches us both to forget that which is no longer useful and

covet that which has yet to be done" (Mannheim, 1969, p. 294). This process becomes more fluid as fewer members of the older generations exist or are even present to provide input, so it becomes the prerogative of each generation to reflect on what vestiges of the past are relevant to incorporate into the present and which to discard to the void of history. In the case of the secret history, it has already been replaced by a crafted history more indicative of the normative values of the current generational entelechy.[9] There is also much to be said about the intrigue and power of an unverifiable myth, as it encourages a degree of symbolic restoration by which Brothers can evoke affective responses yoked toward living up to a nostalgic romanticized social imaginary (Hobsbawm, 1972, p. 8).

Limitations

This inquiry encompasses a single fraternity and is not intended to be generalizable to other fraternities or sororities for that matter. On the contrary, the spirit of inquiry guiding this exposé is meant not just to demonstrate how memory is negotiated in a young organization, but, as a corollary, how it can be manipulated and the factors involved in doing so. Readers should be mindful that history is by its nature an anthropological construct — that is to say not historicity — and is subject to the selection biases, incomplete accounts, and ideological agendas of its architects. As such, it would be prudent to approach it with 'hermeneutics of suspicion' — philosopher Paul Ricoeur's phrase for the air of skepticism one should take "to draw out less visible and less flattering truths" possibly occluded in a text (Felski, 2012).

Conclusion

The case of such a young fraternity offers an alluring account of how living memory is exchanged among members and what is at stake to be lost from its collective memory if eyewitness accounts are not archived for posterity. What legitimates the present and explains it is the idea of the past as a process of becoming the present (Hobsbawm, 1972, p. 11). So long as national conventions recur and are attended by Brothers young and old, the living memory of the fraternity will survive as *milieux de mémoire* regardless of codification. The conversations between Brothers of all generations exchanged at conventions foster a particularly reflexive historical awareness — one which, as it currently stands, openly engages with the past toward edifying the living memory of the fraternity.

Since whoever controls the past controls the future, as George Orwell warned, the future depends on those who have the power to narrate the past. In the case of the fraternity, that prerogative falls to older Brothers who can share their personal accounts with others. Or more politically, as one of the older alumni alluded to earlier, the national executive board can rewrite history in such a light as they want the fraternity to be known.

There is also the option that more concretely addresses, though does not resolve flawlessly, the "Problem of Generations" — to codify the stories told from which traditions are borne. By codifying the "why" — the telos behind institutionalized traditions — subsequent generations will be able to return to as close to the source as they can get to understand the *raison d'etre* for what they do, putting speculation to rest. While this may be a more difficult and creative task for older fraternities that lost their founders long ago, for younger ones such as the one discussed herein, the time is ripe to capture the past as it actually happened so as not to risk leaving the transfer of living memory to chance encounters.

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[9] In this case I am referring to a different kind of generational unit, one reflecting generational differences between national executive boards whose members have agency over the direction of the fraternity. As a member of what might be called the second generation of national executive boards — that is, the first generation in which no founding members occupied seats — I had a direct hand in rewriting the fraternity's official history to reflect a particular ideological agenda.

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