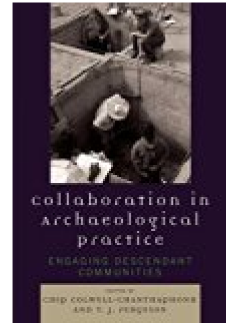
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, T. J. Ferguson, eds. *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice: Engaging Descendant Communities.* Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008. xii + 317 pp. $80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7591-1053-3; $34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7591-1054-0.



Reviewed by Christopher Slogar, PhD
Published on H-AfrArts (April, 2009)
Commissioned by Jean M. Borgatti

Engaging Indigenous Voices

Considering the ongoing and sometimes heated debate about cultural continuity (note, for example, the recent discussion of Stonehenge on the listserv of the World Archaeological Congress), *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice* is a particularly relevant and important collection of essays that describes the major theoretical, methodological, ethical, and practical issues surrounding the emergent field of collaborative archaeology. In defining "collaborative archaeology," the editors explain that it shares with community archaeology a similar ideological underpinning, quoting Stephanie Moser et al., that "it is no longer acceptable for archaeologists to reap the material and intellectual benefits of another society's heritage without that society being involved and able to benefit equally from the endeavor" (p. 8).[1] Hence, the volume draws inspiration from the practice of collaborative inquiry, which is based on the premise that, according to Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T. J. Ferguson, "research is conducted *with* people, not *on* them or *about* them."[2] Accordingly, indigenous voices are prominent throughout the book, in the selection of authors as well as the discussions concerning the participation of local representatives, which are integral to any truly collaborative research project.

The thirteen essays represent the contributions of twenty-two authors, including the forward by David Hurst Thomas. While chapters 6 (on South African parks) and 9 (on African American archaeology) will be of particular interest to Africanists, there is otherwise a great deal of useful and thought-provoking information relevant to any researcher engaged in archaeological and/or ethnographic fieldwork, no matter the location. The book is organized into three parts: the first deals with knowledge (chapters 2-4), the second examines ethics (chapters 5-8), while the third explores practice (chapters 9-12).

The editors explain that part 1 "investigate[s] the ways in which descendant communities are encouraging researchers to re-think how archaeological knowledge, built over the decades from the Western scientific tradition, is produced, consumed, and disseminated" (p. 14). It begins with chapter 2, "Navigating the Fluidity of Social Identity: Collaborative Research into Cultural Affiliation in the American Southwest" by Michael Adler and Susan Bruning. The authors describe their project working with several Pueblo communities to assess (though not to decide upon) claims of cultural affiliation to the ancient Hummingbird Pueblo site. They came to realize that group identity should be examined not from a single methodology, but "with an open-ended understanding and appreciation for the processes by which [it] is negotiated, asserted, and contested in a social context" (p. 48).

Chapter 3, "Unusual or 'Extreme' Beliefs about the Past, Community Identity, and Dealing with the Fringe," by Larry J. Zimmerman, uses the case of the Kensington Rune Stone to detail the various sources of "weird beliefs" that run counter to the scientific method (e.g.,

mistrust of science) (pp. 60-62). Zimmerman includes some soul-searching about archaeological practice and the misuse of the concepts of truth and validity, finding that "archaeology would do better to allow for pasts that are multi-vocal and multi-threaded.... Rather than say that archaeology has *the* truth, archaeologists might be better off saying that they have *a* truth" (p. 76).

One of the more provocative essays of the book is chapter 4, "Things Are Not Always What They Seem: Indigenous Knowledge and Pattern Recognition in the Archaeological Interpretation of Cultural Landscapes" by Norm Sheehan and Ian Lilley. The authors seek to "take collaboration to its logical conclusion by integrating archaeological and indigenous views at a theoretical level" (p. 88). They assert that "ontological differences are the source of cultural divergences, so differences between Western and Indigenous approaches to knowledge can only be dealt with on an ontological level" (p. 93). Sheehan and Lilley admit the difficulty in trying to explain indigenous knowledge (IK) with clear-cut definitions, which is a Western approach to ontology, whereas "IK is based in an understanding that knowledge is distributed throughout natural systems in many formations of Being" (p. 98). They then explain how they teach IK to students, by using visual patterns that are arranged and interpreted in a manner designed to get them thinking beyond their preconceptions. According to the authors, IK holds that a visual image "exhibits an agency" (p. 102). Certainly thought provoking, this essay should be read with chapter 8, which offers further elucidation of the tenets of Australian Aboriginal knowledge and how they are often diametrically opposed to Western ontology.

Part 2, concerning ethics, examines the basic premise that "collaboration fundamentally involves creating new kinds of relationships and therefore new kinds of ethical obligations for archaeologists." Hence, this section "address[es] what archaeology is and what it ought to be" (p. 16). Chapter 5, "Not the End, Not the Middle, But the Beginning: Repatriation as a Transformative Mechanism for Archaeologists and Indigenous Peoples," is Dorothy Lippert's personalized response to the idea that "we are in a new world, one in which Native people are not seen as merely part of the environment but as active participants in the understanding of this environment" (p. 120). Lippert thoughtfully recounts her experiences with the effects of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) as a case officer at the National Museum of Natural History. Lippert reminds us of the museum's colonial roots and the sometimes very divergent ways that anthropologists and native peoples consider human remains in a museum context. She concludes that "the process of telling [our ancestors'] stories can only be richer by the addition of new voices, as long as we clearly view the environment on which we stand when we tell them" (p. 128).

In chapter 6, "Heritage Ethics and Descendant Communities," Lynn Meskell and Lynette Sibongile Masuku Van Damme examine the cases of two South African national parks (Kruger and Mapungubwe) from the perspective of cosmopolitanism, the responsibilities of which "are premised on respect for cultural difference and can be motivated against injustice and oppression" (p. 132). The authors outline the history of the South African National Parks (SANParks) since its inception in 1926 under colonialism and, more significantly, its shift in mission from 1996, when SANParks "committed itself to adopting a meaningful role in bringing about social justice, redress, and development" (p. 136). Their efforts could serve as a model for other African nations' treatment of museums and the practice of archaeology, which are struggling to maintain their relevance–or even to become relevant–to most Africans today, especially those living outside metropolitan areas. Hence, their rightful conclusion that "a just relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is one that involves dialogue, which must occur under conditions that are acceptable to both parties," could equally apply to the relationship between Africans familiar with academe and museums, and those who are not (p. 147).

A much more personal account of collaborative archaeology is offered by Leigh J. Kuwanwisiwma in chapter 7–"Collaboration Means Equality, Respect, and Reciprocity: A Conversation about Archaeology and the Hopi Tribe." Here, Ferguson recounts his interview with Kuwanwisiwma, who has directed the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office for sixteen years. Kuwanwisiwma's culture and work are grounded in the fact that archaeological sites on Hopi land "are still a living part of the Hopi people, whereas the science of archaeology has traditionally sought to separate living cultures from archaeology" (p. 157). He therefore holds that to achieve meaningful collaboration, the Hopi Tribe "should be an active player" in any proposed research (p. 162).

In chapter 8–"The Ethics of Collaboration: Whose Culture? Whose Intellectual Property? Who Benefits? "–Claire Smith and Gary Jackson offer some pearls of practical wisdom developed over seventeen years working with the Barunga-Wugularr community in Northern Territory, Australia. Their guidelines for eth-

ical research include recognizing differences in knowledge systems (also a useful adjunct to chapter 4), respecting existing social and political systems, publishing with permission, and sharing the benefits. This really should be required reading for any student contemplating fieldwork.

Part 3, on practice, begins with chapter 9, "In New Africa: Understanding the Americanization of African Descent Groups through Archaeology," with Thomas W. Cuddy and Mark P. Leone illuminating the early Christian community of eighteenth-century Annapolis, Maryland, and its relation to the African Americans who live there now. Their work begins with an examination of the significance of two hoodoo caches (i.e., collections of ritual items associated with African religious traditions) found at the Reynold's Tavern site. Similar caches have been found elsewhere around the Chesapeake basin, and Leone's contributions to the field are well known. The authors' current archaeological work and their collaboration with the local African American community have yielded important results, including fascinating insight into the history of Wye House.

But this reviewer must respectfully disagree with one aspect of their historical conclusions, i.e., the hypothesis that there "may have been only one Christian community overall among whites and blacks [in Maryland]. There may be much variety, many traditions, much survival from Africa, but only one vibrant Christian community" (p. 214). To cite Yvonne P. Chireau's *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (2003) in this regard, as they do, that "she sees one tradition" is to overlook the point of her argument, which develops amid painstaking attention to historical detail, including the revelation of much contentious discussion about "conjuring" among African American Christians themselves (p. 214). In her concluding paragraphs, Chireau in fact states, "I wish to underscore the fact that even though conjuring practices were compatible with the religious beliefs of many black Americans, these two traditions [i.e., Conjuring and Christianity] were not identical."[3] So what is the point of homogenizing such a complicated and diverse history into "one large believing community" other than to maximize a sense of common purpose and minimize the contention (p. 220)?

Immediately following the first statement cited above on page 214, the authors write "that vibrant community can still be found today at St. Stephen's African Methodist Episcopal Church in Unionville [Maryland]." Now the intention of this is clear enough–to spiritually identify a descendant African American community with an ancestral one–but as written, the declaration unnecessarily revives the ethnographic present, not to mention its conflation of eighteenth- and twenty-first-century Christianity. One typographical error also should be noted: The lone mention of Melville Herskovits's name is misspelled on page 214, which could mislead someone wanting to investigate his work.

In chapter 10, " 'I Wish for Paradise': Memory and Class in Hampden, Baltimore," Paul A. Shackel and David A. Gadsby detail their efforts to design a community archaeology project that will overcome the "amnesia of the community's working class history" and address its primary concerns today: gentrification, labor, and race (p. 228). In chapter 11, "Entering the Agora: Archaeology, Conservation, and Indigenous Peoples in the Amazon," Michael J. Heckenberger describes scientific knowledge production through the metaphor of the *agora*, referring not only to the Greek meeting place but also to a term in Brazilian Portuguese that means "here and now" (p. 247). He recounts a fifteen-year ethnoarchaeology project with the Xinguano nation of Brazil, ever mindful of the question, "How do we impart Western knowledge deriving from these local collaborations to communities and research participants in meaningful ways" (p. 252)?

The final chapter, "Collaborative Encounters," by George P. Nicholas, John R. Welch, and Eldon C. Yellowhorn, discusses examples of collaboration with descendent Native American communities in British Columbia and Arizona. Working within a best-practices approach, the authors conclude that "archaeology *of* a given group or region has a greater prior probability of producing useful and meaningful knowledge when it is pursued, at least in part, *by* members of descendant communities and *for* their benefit" (p. 294).

Collaboration in Archaeological Practice is reflective of the recent sea-change in research across disciplinary boundaries that recognizes the importance and agency of indigenous voices. The book is a welcome and useful addition for anyone involved in, or even considering, field research.

Notes

[1]. Stephanie Moser et al., "Transforming Archaeology through Practice: Strategies for Collaborative Archaeology and the Community Archaeology Project at Quseir, Egypt," *World Archaeology* 34, no. 2 (2002): 220-248, quotation on 221.

[2]. Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson, following John N. Bray et al., *Collaborative Inquiry in Practice* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000), p. 9.

[3]. Yvonne P. Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 154.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

https://networks.h-net.org/h-afrarts

Citation: Christopher Slogar, PhD. Review of Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Chip; Ferguson, T. J., eds, *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice: Engaging Descendant Communities.* H-AfrArts, H-Net Reviews. April, 2009.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23474

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.