



Editors:

Jaime Almansa Sánchez & Elena Papagiannopoulou



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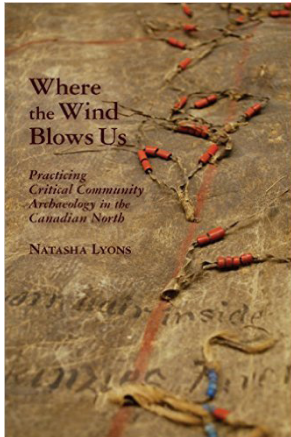
*Online Journal in Public Archaeology*

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## REVIEWS



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**Where the Wind Blows Us:  
Practicing Critical Community  
Archaeology in the Canadian North**  
[Natasha Lyons]

Tucson: University of Arizona Press  
ISBN: 978-0-8165-2993-3  
230 pages, 2013

*Where the Wind Blows Us* is the tenth book produced as part of the *Archaeology of Colonialism in Native North America* series by the University of Arizona Press. It is a fitting volume for a series dedicated to illuminating a full range of methodological strategies used to understand the processes of colonialism and its effects on populations. Its ultimate goal is to set a course for undertaking an inclusive archaeology with colonized Indigenous populations and is based on the substantial experience of the author working alongside Inuvialuit communities in the Canadian Western Arctic.

The author, Natasha Lyons, is a consulting archaeologist based in British Columbia. She first became involved with Inuvialuit communities when working for the Canadian Federal Agency, Parks Canada, in 2003. This experience turned into a long-term partnership with the Inuvialuit on which Lyons based her PhD dissertation (2007) along with many other academic and community outcomes. This volume brings together the results from her dissertation with more recent work undertaken with the aid of the Smithsonian. The result is a thoughtful,

engaging and well-written reflection on her approach to Indigenous community archaeology, focusing on the use of localized critical theory, archaeological responses to community concerns, and the significance of a multi-vocal presentation of historical narratives.

The volume is divided into three primary sections: Critique; Practice; and Reflection, each with their own preface. There is also a substantial Preface to the volume and a shorter Afterword. The Preface is used to situate the volume “to explore the question of how we develop sound research frameworks that are both inclusive and critically constructed” and “follows the path of a community-based archaeology program” (p.xii). It reflects on the process from which the book was derived and concludes by informing the reader about her hopes for the book’s usefulness – as a handbook for conducting critical community archaeology with relevance to students, practitioners and communities.

Following a small preface, Section 1 (Critique) is divided into two chapters which situate the work theoretically, regionally and culturally. In the first chapter, the history of community archaeology is traced back to its roots in the post-processual critique. It was here that the book felt most like a PhD dissertation drawing out the lineage of the theoretical approach, with references to several projects that did not meet contemporary standards. That said, it was a joy to see so many references in this chapter (and throughout the book) to the work of Bruce Trigger, who was drawing attention to the colonial nature of archaeology long before other researchers. In 1980, he famously noted that “the New Archaeology continues to treat Native people as objects rather than subjects of research” (Trigger 1980:662). Today Trigger’s visionary work is often absent from post-colonial syllabi, and students and practitioners alike are not always able to make the connections between his early observations and the kinds of community engagement which Lyons advocates.

Having brought us to present day, the author makes a firm decision to situate her work as *community archaeology* rather than *Indigenous*

*archaeology*. In this manner Lyons is able to demonstrate the connection of her research to the global movement in archaeology towards a conscious critique of the social, political and economic imbalances inherent in historical narrative making as well as introduce shared decision making with partner communities and advocate strongly for local and multi-vocal interpretations of the past. Furthermore, by situating Indigenous archaeology within the greater framework of community archaeology she re-centres the work from the margins of archaeological practice to the mainstream. She then moves on to the more particular culture-history of the Inuvialuit people in chapter 2, recounting the manner in which different outsiders - from explorers to social scientists - have colonized and framed Inuvialuit history.

Section 2 (Practice) includes four chapters which explore ways in which archaeology can move beyond its imperialist past. In chapters 3 and 5 she advocates working with communities to find ways to decolonize research. For Indigenous communities, this process often involves a shift in archaeological methodology away from excavation and focused instead on low impact data collection using ground penetrating radar, surface collection, digitization and, most important to this particular work, the local contextualization of extant collections. The methodology outlined by Lyons emphasises communication, trust building, respect and negotiation in order to establish project goals and outcomes that are acceptable for all parties. This is not a methodology for the faint of heart as it cannot be accomplished in the course of a regular archaeological field season. Building trust involves long-term commitments on the part of archaeologists to continually engage and re-engage with communities. Having now spent fifteen years working with Inuit communities in Labrador, the author of this review has seen personally the advantages of such commitment. The archaeology becomes richly infused with local meaning, and is ultimately used for community aims such as teaching, policy making and capacity building. As Lyons aptly points out – adhering to local goals does not mean there is no room for scholarly products such as theses, books and articles

(p.78). In fact, Lyons experience, and mine, is just the opposite. These products are widely circulated, give communities greater recognition in the wider scholarly world and through relationship-building also become a source of community pride. However, community archaeology requires that these are only part of the final product of historical enquiry, and that other items such as film, website and curriculum content may be more significant outcomes for the communities.

Chapters 4 and 6 explore the ways that Inuvialuit elders have engaged with two extant collections from their territory – one an archaeological collection held by Parks Canada, and the other an ethnographic collection housed at the Arctic Studies Center of the Smithsonian Institution. These were the most engaging chapters of the volume, as it was uplifting and informative to learn how Inuvialuit contextualized and infused the objects within their own personal histories. In both instances, observing and handling these collections produced vibrant discussions, bringing a life to the objects that was much more engaging than the static archaeological descriptions might suggest. Genuine themes emerged from these encounters providing “a window into Inuvialuit understandings of the past, the production of the past, and its relation to present conditions and the education of Inuvialuit youth” (p.126). Elders embedded the artifacts with anecdotal recollections, the history of families, of life on the land, of tradition, learning and identity. Their cultural and historical insights broadened the archaeological interpretations in ways which allow outside observers to speculate on the original intent and motivations of the individuals who produced the objects because they were given situated meanings.

Their discussion also raised new questions about present-day ownership of this content, about rights to the reproduction of ancestral designs and other knowledge, and about how best to use these objects to educate the next generation of Inuvialuit. Thus, objects from the past were also used to situate ongoing colonialism and form part of an ongoing dialogue with the dominant culture to the south.

Section 3 (Reflection) consists of two chapters. Chapter 7 begins with an assessment of community-based heritage partnerships, how they have developed and are currently articulated in Canada and globally in the fields of cultural resource management and academic archaeology. It suggests, and I would whole-heartedly agree, that it is now more acceptable for academic archaeologists and their emerging graduate students to work in and with communities, and the expanding value of outreach in the academic setting.

Chapter 8 entitled *Inuvialuit Identity and the Material Past* summarizes the significance that Inuvialuit place on their historical narratives as the foundation of their cultural identity. For many, archaeology, oral histories and language are seen as three components supporting this identity. The challenge is how to transform this knowledge into "educational mediums that are digestible by youth and other community members" (p. 148 as originally noted by *Billy Archie comments*). Lyons then reflects on the process of the Inuvialuit Archaeology Partnership and the need for a critical archaeology tailored for specific communities as the form of a community-based program will vary in each instance depending on the goals of the partners and context of the community involved.

Overall, I found this a very compelling volume and an inspiring synthesis for those of us engaged in community archaeology or interested in the topic. However, the volume is at times repetitive. The forwards to each section, while drawing attention to the primary goals of the associated chapters, are redundant. Furthermore, much of the same theoretical material is rehashed in each section, and reframed to address different aspects of the critical and reflexive process. That said, I believe the volume has surpassed Lyons' goal to create a handbook as the author of this review confesses to reading her list of community-based research outcomes in order to see if their own project had successfully addressed each item, and planning discussions with the Labrador Inuit about how they may



want to address some of the issues raised here. It is an encompassing history of community archaeology and an exceptional example of how one might approach a community partnership. Having come of age in archaeology alongside the post-processual critique, it was a good reminder of how far the archaeological discipline has come. Community archaeology is now part of most archaeology undertaken among Indigenous communities in Canada as well as many other areas around the globe. Many archaeologists now have some training on how to work in concert with community goals. For my generation, the process was largely intuitive but volumes like this lay essential groundwork for training. That said, there remains much, much more to be done. Community archaeology is not yet fully embraced by the discipline as a core concept. We need to continue to raise awareness of successful partnered research like this and continue to find guidance and creativity within the communities themselves.

## **References**

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