COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A. Introduction

For generations, archaeology has been conducted for, and shared among, a small group of scholars, but now many archaeologists consider "community engagement" to be an important part of their work. Archaeologists may make special efforts to share their interpretations in ways that are more accessible to a wide audience than are scholarly publications or even traditional **museum** displays and documentary films. Archaeologists may wish to see their research benefit modern groups with ties to the site through, for example, increased heritage tourism to their area, or the enhancement of their status by drawing attention to the group's past. Archaeologists may believe that they have an ethical or political obligation to ensure that their research is beneficial to these groups. Archaeologists may even find that encouraging members of these groups to participate in their research increases their understanding of a site, or improves their access to important data. Although all of the above are important, community engagement in archaeology extends far beyond these measures.

Community engagement means that archaeologists think about non-professionals as potentially active participants in, not simply passive audiences for, their research. It means that community members can influence the goals and outcomes of a project. It means that as a result of their close collaboration, archaeologists might learn things that change the way they approach a particular site, or more significantly, the methods and theories that they use to understand the archaeological record and interpret past human actions. These ideas are not uncontroversial. Many archaeologists are unconvinced that we can continue to consider knowledge production to be "science" once its political or ideological underpinnings are revealed. Such questions have been raised with respect to the "public" or "applied" scholarship produced in one of archaeology's sister disciplines: **anthropology**. (but see Mullins 2011 in "Further Reading").

This paradigm shift has occurred in multiple disciplines. In archaeology, specifically, **postprocessual** frameworks have developed research themes that inspire community-oriented work and also fostered the self-reflexivity that must underpin serious community engagement. But changes in media, communication, and travel also create structures which shape this relatively new way of approaching archaeological practice, as do contemporary heritage law and the global political economy. Thus, it seems that community engagement will be a feature of archaeological practice for some time to come.

B. Definition

Although many archaeologists initially became interested in community engagement through projects that connected them with the descendants of the people who created the sites they studied, researchers have come to realize that there are many types of communities for whom archaeology matters, who ought to be engaged. Certainly descendant communities have a special relationship to the sites and landscapes occupied by their ancestors, and their assertion of an authority on par with, or surpassing that of, archaeologists is increasingly supported by national and international law, as described below. However, other collectivities are considered by archaeologists to be legitimate stakeholders in the archaeological process. For example, people who live in the vicinity of archaeological sites form another kind of significant community—one that hews more closely to the traditional meanings of "community archaeology:" the archaeological study of a past community, often defined by the proximity of its members or the scale of the group (larger than a household, smaller than a polity) (Canuto & Yaeger 2000).

The aim of community engagement in archaeology is to go beyond simply sharing the results of one's research with an audience with some claim to a site or social group in the past. Rather, archaeologists seek to produce scholarship that benefits that group, conceiving of them not as an "audience," but as a real

constituency, one that has a very real stake in the outcome in an archaeological project. Furthermore, the aim of the archaeologist is to share power and responsibility with that group in the very act of research (see, for example, Blakey 2010 in "Further Reading").

A good question to consider, then, is where does "public archaeology" end and "community engagement" begin? One useful distinction is the idea that public archaeology is any archaeological interaction with a public (i.e. non-archaeologists) and any scholarship analyzing these efforts. Whereas "community archaeology" is public archaeology that creates the opportunity for all involved—community members and archaeologists—to reflect upon the ideas and interests that they share, and is furthermore less likely to be oriented towards scholarly interests than other forms of archaeological practice (McDavid 2009: 166). Some commentators emphasize the importance of community control over the archaeological project, and in fact stress community engagement's transformative effect on scholarly research (see, for example, Marshall 2002a; or Green et al. 2003). Indeed, archaeologists are growing increasingly self-reflexive in their discussions about what it means to do archaeology in the real world.

So here, "community engagement" should be taken to mean archaeology that responds to imperatives established by collectivities whose stake in the archaeological record is not professional, but rather stems from some other connection. Perhaps the site was occupied by their ancestors, or they live in the site's vicinity, or they identify with the site's inhabitants because of some shared status or identity. Whatever the reason, these people have a social connection with people in the past, people who left material traces that are amenable to archaeological study. As a result, these present-day people are connected with one another. When the connection extends to encompass the archaeological project as well, when the ideas of these community members have a meaningful effect on the research, when their values and ideas are considered alongside those of the discipline, then we are speaking of community engagement in archaeology.

C. Historical Background

Milestones in the development of archaeologies of community engagement may be marked by the development of influential research programs. Other important watersheds include publications which either report on these programs, or synthetic and analytical treatments of the challenges and rewards of engaged scholarship.

Two early examples of community engagement in archaeology come from the Chesapeake region of the US, an area with a long tradition of **historical archaeology**. The first, Alexandria Archaeology grew out of a community initiative to protect archaeological sites threatened by development. In 1975, the city established the Alexandria Archaeology Commission, hiring city archaeologist Pamela Cressey two years later. The program's aims include excavating sites, curating and interpreting finds, and especially providing opportunities for volunteer participation in preservation activities. By way of contrast the second example, Archaeology in Annapolis, has tended to emphasize visitor education, rather than public participation, as central to their strategy for community engagement. Since 1981, tourists have been able to visit ongoing archaeological excavations and discuss life in the city from the 18th century to the present, using strategies and themes grounded in the project's **Marxist** approach to archaeology (see Potter 1994 in "Further Reading").

Elsewhere in the US, work began at Little Rapids in the early 1980s as a traditional research project. But several years into the study, principal investigator Janet Spector's strategy shifted. **Feminist** concerns about bias and exclusion in scientific practice led her to critically reflect on what it would mean to

> include Indian people in the production of archaeological knowledge about their histories and cultures. How will this affect the ways we set our research agendas, organize field projects, treat archaeological materials? How would their inclusion shape the ways we generate, express and present our understandings of the past or the audiences we write for? (Spector 1991: 389)

Similar concerns about the exclusion of **Indigenous people** from the archaeological study of their ancestors—in addition to development pressures—led the Navajo Nation to establish the Navajo Nation Archaeology Department, wherein the archaeological and ethnographic staff must adhere not only to US law, but also to laws and policies established by the Nation. While this mandate upholds the authority of Navajo people over the archaeological sites within their reservation, it does not mean that the people performing day-to-day archaeology are necessarily tribal members (Thompson 2009). The authority of the Navajo Nation to compel engagement and control archaeologists' access to materials is buttressed by federal legislation such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (**NAGPRA**). At the African Burial Ground in Manhattan, on the other hand, existing laws only mandated mitigation of damage to the archaeological resources, not engagement with any communities. The well-publicized struggle by New Yorkers and concerned African Americans to participate in decisions about the study and disposition of the burials has marked a major watershed in how US federal agencies and archaeologists work with descendant communities (see, for example, La Roche & Blakey 1997).

At the same time that marginalized communities in the US were becoming increasingly assertive of their right to the materials that archaeologists study, archaeologists working in economically- and politically- marginalized nations were teaming up with local communities in efforts that some labelled "applied archaeology" (Erickson 1998), and others, "action archaeology." The latter term is used by Mayanist Jeremy A. Sabloff to indicate "*involvement or engagement with the problems facing the modern world through archaeology*. In other words, by 'action archaeology,' I mean archaeologists working *for* living communities, not just *in* or near them" (Sabloff 2008: 17, emphasis in the original). Over the years, examples have included identifying ancient land-use techniques that promote higher crop yields than prevailing agricultural practices (Erickson 1998), creatively engaging host communities in site protection, promoting development or educational projects in host communities and incorporating local perspectives into research agendas (see, for example Atalay 2007).

The Community Archaeology Project at Quesir has had an extraordinary influence on how archaeologists approach community engagement. Most significantly, the scholars responsible for that project put forth a general methodology for engaged archaeology, rather than a set of instructions or a how-to program (Moser et al. 2002).

The archaeological programs described above, and many others, are represented in, and paralleled by, a series of key publications. Notable contributions include collections of essays about engagement between archaeologists and Indigenous communities and between archaeologists and members of the African diaspora. The issue of *World Archaeology* edited by Yvonne Marshall continues to have a major impact, not least because of its broad global scope. A recent collection compiled by Barbara J. Little and Paul A. Shackel emphasizes the role of archaeology in enhancing civil society, specifically. (see in "Further Reading:" McDavid & Babson 1997; Swidler et al. 1997; Marshall 2002b; Shackel & Chambers 2004; Little & Shackel 2007; Colwell-Chanthaphonh & Ferguson 2008; Bruchac et al. 2010).

D. Key Issues/Current Debates

Ever since archaeologists have discussed explicitly what it means to engage with communities, there have been disagreements about whether and to what end this engagement ought to take place. Parker Potter took early practitioners of "plantation archaeology" (now treated as a subset of **African American or African diaspora archaeology**) to task for failing to come to terms with the needs and desires of a broad-based descendant community of African Americans and for, in some cases, producing scholarship inimical to those same needs and desires. Responses to this critique ranged from the retort that archaeologists should question

their relevance not only to descendant audiences, but also to scholars in other subfields who found archaeological studies of plantations to be arcane and irrelevant, to a rejection of the idea that practitioners open the research process up to non-archaeologists, or "that valid research questions and interpretations can be developed out of the contemporary agendas of groups on either side of the power line" (see Potter 1991; Farnsworth 1993; McKee 1994: 5 in "Further Reading").

While it might seem that a decision on the part of archaeologists to further engage with communities would be beneficial, or at worst, harmless, concerns have been raised, many of them centring on the idea of *which* communities merit engagement and on what terms. In a recent essay concerning the usefulness of archaeology, Shannon Lee Dawdy considered whether **public archaeology** and its related forms might be a stalking horse for a range of nationalist agendas. She sees this as a special danger in settings without a long history of (and therefore wariness about) **nationalist archaeologies**, and settings in which archaeology is meant to be of use to a subaltern community. Though engagement is often meant to benefit the marginalized, archaeology can also serve powerful statist and extragovernmental interests, and Dawdy's essay asks that archaeologists critically reflect upon the distinction. Archaeologists from a variety of employment sectors, and across the globe responded to this analysis by refining the distinction between "public" archaeology and "community" archaeology (as described in "Definition," above) and providing concrete examples in which archaeological practice benefited constituencies besides archaeologists or the structures (institutional, economic, and political) that underpin archaeology's existence (see Dawdy 2009, in "Further Reading").

Many of the practical advances archaeologists have made in engaging with communities have been in the exploitation of new media environments. Just as newspapers and novels, the new media of the early modern period, were instrumental in creating alternatives to a purely local "community," the new media of the new millennium have allowed archaeologists to connect with others in fruitful ways. Archaeologists easily grasped the potential for the Internet to multiply the number of individuals who could "experience" a site, or to communicate interpretations to colleagues and other interested parties. However, some have realized the ways in which the Internet can be used to facilitate collaboration and dialogues—to support the process of engagement. An early pioneer in this effort is Carol McDavid, whose work at the Levi Jordan Plantation was both a product of, and engine driving, the project website. Such endeavours have only grown with the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies and the ascendance of electronic social media.

Archaeological associations and university departments have begun to explore how best to incorporate community engagement into archaeological education generally and especially how to expose future archaeologists to ideas about community engagement. An educational movement that has gained considerable following in universities in the US is "service learning" in which students' intellectual and civic education is enhanced by opportunities to apply the principles of a particular discipline. As Michael Nassaney observes, this form of pedagogical practice is ideally suited to a hands-on, experiential endeavour such as archaeology (Nassaney 2009).

In the **Society for American Archaeology**'s volume *Teaching Archaeology in the Twenty-first Century*, community engagement is presented as one of several areas that need additional attention, as educators consider the skills needed by emerging practitioners. The toolkit for archaeologists who effectively engage communities includes respect for different points of view, intensive coursework in ethics, an appreciation for the heterogeneity of communities, and a strong sense of professionalism. These matters are so important because, as the authors of one contribution conclude, "it is hard to deny the proposition that the social context in which archaeological research unfolds influences directly both the quality and efficiency of fieldwork and the validity of the knowledge that it generates" (Watkins et al. 2000: 80-81). The transformative effect of community engagement on archaeological knowledge is explored further below, under "Future Directions."

E. International Perspectives

Several observers have noted that the most prolific (English-language) writing about community engagement in archaeology comes from former settler societies—modern states with origins in colonialism and settlement by a foreign power, with continuing power imbalances between descendants of settlers and descendants of the indigenous inhabitants. It seems worthwhile, then, to consider community engagement as it relates to **colonialism**, **postcoloniality**, and **indigenous archaeology**.

Archaeology as a modern enterprise has been intimately linked with colonialism, with archaeologists from the metropole excavating sites located in nations in "the periphery." Like anthropology and many other scientific enterprises, archaeology served, whether deliberately or unintentionally, to provide ideological support for the domination of some nations by others (for a summary, see Lydon & Rizvi 2010). At times, this purpose could be served by the reification of social-evolutionary schema, or the treatment of descendant groups as timeless and static, suitable analogues for archaeological data. Or the colonialist stance may even have acted to *dis*engage or alienate contemporary communities from the archaeological sites occupied by their ancestors or other predecessors, as is especially common when the story of an ancient civilization ends in "collapse" or "disappearance." However, the postcolonial critique has begun to influence the practice of archaeology, including archaeologies of community engagement.

Postcolonial archaeologies, like other forms of postcolonial critique, have "a fundamental ethical basis in examining oppression and inequality in the present...reconsider[ing] colonialism from the perspective of colonized people and their cultures" (Lydon & Rizvi 2010: 19). To the extent that community engaged archaeology seeks to work "for" and "with," not "on" and "in," contemporary communities, there are significant parallels between the postcolonial and engagement agendas. While modern states with prior histories of colonial occupation and/or colonialist archaeology have in many cases managed to curtail the wholesale removal and exploitation of their archaeological patrimony by foreign researchers, new structures have not necessarily meant *local* community control or oversight. And indeed, much of the population may be as alienated as ever from the process of archaeology and the resulting discoveries (see examples described in Atalay 2007; Moser et al. 2002, Eze-Uzomaka 2000; or Chirikure et al. 2010).

Through sustained and vigorous effort, many indigenous groups the world over have gained authority over the sites occupied by their ancestors. Many of the strategies and concepts that undergird community engagement in archaeology have their roots in **indigenous archaeology** (Atalay 2007). The promulgation of ethical standards has certainly done much to persuade archaeologists of the legitimacy of indigenous claims to archaeological sites, artefacts, and ancestral remains. The **World Archaeological Congress**'s First Code of Ethics asserts, among other points "that the indigenous cultural heritage rightfully belongs to the indigenous descendants of that heritage" and urges archaeologists to "establish equitable partnerships and relationships between Members and indigenous peoples whose cultural heritage is being investigated" (World Archaeological Congress 1990). However, such appeals may have been ignored if it were not for laws mandating engagement with indigenous communities. NAGPRA—a US law has already been mentioned above. In Australia, a federal law, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Amendment Act (1987), picks up where a variety of state laws, such as the Heritage Conservation Act (1991) of the Northern Territory, leave off (see Colley 2002 in "Further Reading").

Evolving circumstances within settler societies—like the US and Australia—as well as between former colonizers and former colonies, have compelled many archaeologists from the global North to engage with communities at home and abroad. Similar efforts are underway among professionals around the world who recognize the importance of connecting with communities formerly alienated from archaeological research. Pamela Eze-Uzomaka notes, for example, that even a strategy as straightforward as using radio, newspapers, or television to inform people about archaeological discoveries and goals has been ineffective in Nigeria. Scholars from elsewhere in Africa suggest that the question is one of bringing community and scholar

interests into alignment, as with some programs that have as a primary goal consultation and empowerment but also include poverty alleviation through employment or tourism (see Eze-Uzomaka 2000: 35; Chirikure et al. 2010).

Ajay Pratap observes that there is still an urban and majoritarian bias to history (and by extension, archaeology) in India. He describes tribal exhibits in museums that treat these people as a part of the nation's timeless "natural" history.

> The fact that the past of ethnic minorities, particularly tribes, is usually neglected, even sixty years after independence is not a very pleasing scenario...[It] is a serious lacuna in our curriculums that needs to be addressed and rectified. In a context when history writing in India is increasingly being identified as an exercise in postcoloniality, how can we possibly justify the deletion of the pasts of ethnic minorities? (Pratap 2009: 15)

What distinguishes Pratap's perspective from that of his colleagues in the West, is that he views this as a problem to be solved using archaeological methods rather than policy.

If one were to characterize the "styles" of community engagement that appear to predominate in a range of international settings, the following patterns seem to emerge (see also Marshall 2002a: 212-214). Within the states that have emerged from the independence movements and revolutions of the 20th century, "community engagement" is frequently described as necessary in order for archaeology to remain viable in tenuous economic or political environments (e.g.: Eze-Uzomaka 2000), or in the face of **looting** (e.g.: Qin 2004: 298, in "Further Reading"). Furthermore, engagement becomes a management concern, or a problem of definition—which communities should participate? How does an archaeologist build collaborations with resistant communities (e.g.: Chirikure et al. 2010)? In the former colonial centres, "community engagement" often seems to entail community participation not only in establishing goals and research agendas, but especially in the actual collection of archaeological data (e.g: Merriman 2004; Smith & Waterton 2009, in "Further Reading"). Meanwhile, within the settler societies "community engagement" tends to be oriented toward addressing imbalances, and ameliorating the social and political hardships of subaltern groups. This tendency is also evident in the projects described by researchers with origins or training in the global North at work in the South (e.g.: Green et al. 2003). All of which prompts one to consider to what extent these different international "styles" of community engagement have their roots in the power relationships within and among contemporary societies, as well as modern concepts of "self" and "other."

F. Future Directions

Archaeologists often expect community engagement to bring (positive) change to a community. Sometimes, they expect it to reshape an archaeological project. Recent analyses suggest that community engagement has a transformative effect on the discipline more generally. Certainly, working with stakeholders also has led archaeologists to, for example, take oral history more seriously, and consider the significance of non-scientific ways of knowing about the past. Archaeologists must also confront the real-world consequences of their research activities. These are no small matters in and of themselves, but community engagement can reach farther, even, than this.

Changes to archaeological practice may shape methods or techniques, for example, something as prosaic as identifying new kinds of sites or landscapes to examine. In one case, investigators were encouraged to think about their research problems spatially rather than temporally—a major methodological shift that helped them to better understand how to tackle a complex regional history. The researchers also learned a great deal about local concepts of ethnic-group belonging that were grounded in theories of **identity** very different from those traditionally used by social scientists (Green et al. 2003). Multiple cases also demonstrate that engaging with communities permits archaeologists to envision an ethics that is situational without being relativist. These examples reinforce Yvonne Marshall's argument that "Community archaeology represents

an opportunity. We need it, not because it is politically correct, but because it enriches our discipline." And furthermore that examples such as those hinted at above should "change the perspective that community archaeology is simply a **CRM** [Cultural Resource Management] or heritage management issue and of little relevance for academic research" (Marshall 2002a: 218, 215).

One of the factors militating against the closer integration of academic researchers and communities is the structure of the academy itself. For although engaged scholarship can be intellectually complex, theoretically grounded, and rigorously executed, the standards for assessment are less obvious than with the traditional process of publication for peer review. Without metrics in place for evaluating the quality of community engagement projects in archaeology, or any other discipline—and thus the assurance that such work "counts," these endeavours can seem risky to scholars whose careers are not yet established. One reason to hope for change sooner rather than later is that many of these same universities, while uncertain how to handle engaged scholarship on the part of their faculty and staff, aggressively promote its importance for students (though a casual examination suggests that this trend is more pronounced among institutions in the global North).

It may be that the imperative to provide quality training for the next generation of practitioners will have the unintended consequence of encouraging engaged scholarship at the research level. "Recent developments in archaeological practice [including openness to community engagement] have led to the recognition that training archaeology students poses new challenges as the discipline attempts to meet the diverse needs of the twenty-first century" (Nassaney 2009: 4).

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