

INDIGENOUS ARCHAEOLOGY AS COMPLEMENT TO, NOT SEPARATE FROM, SCIENTIFIC ARCHAEOLOGY

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Abstract

Defining Indigenous Archaeology is as difficult as defining “Indigenous”. In some areas the term “Indigenous” is applied to people who existed in an area prior to colonization (“Geography”); in other areas it is applied to people who are related to those people whose ancestors created the culture being studied (“Descendancy”); in others it is applied to the community of people who live in the area where the archaeology is being conducted (“Proximity”). This paper recognizes that Indigenous Archaeology, however defined, has characteristics that add to the scientific study of the human past; that Indigenous Archaeology is not meant to supplant scientific archaeology but to add to archaeology’s interpretative powers. In this paper I will provide an overview of Indigenous Archaeology, examine some of the problems in trying to discuss its many facets as a single disciplinary approach to the interpretation of the past, and then close

Resumen

Definir la arqueología indígena es tan difícil como definir “Indígena”. En algunas áreas el término “indígena” es aplicado a gente que existió en el área antes de la colonización (“geografía”); en otras área esta definición es aplicada a personas que están relacionadas con esas personas cuyos ancestros crearon la cultura que se estudia (“descendencia”); en otros contexto el concepto es aplicado a la comunidad de personas que viven en un área donde se conducen investigaciones arqueológicas (“Proximidad”). Este artículo reconoce que la arqueología indígena, como sea definida, tiene elementos que la adhieren al estudio científico del pasado humano; que la arqueología indígena no supone suplantar a la arqueología científica, sino por el contrario esa arqueología desea usar el poder interpretativo de la arqueología. En este artículo proveeré una mirada de la arqueología indígena, examinaré algunos de sus problemas en

with an examination of the possibilities inherent in the generalized approach to the study of the past by partnering with communities and organizations.

Keywords: Indigenous archaeology, scientific archaeology, indigenous communities

la perspectiva de discutir varias de sus facetas como una aproximación disciplinaria única a la interpretación del pasado; después cerraré con un examen de las posibilidades inherentes en la aproximación generalizada al estudio del pasado por medio de la asociación con comunidades y organizaciones.

Palabras clave: Arqueología indígena, arqueología científica, comunidades indígenas

Who are the Indigenous people throughout the world whose perspectives on the practice of archaeology are becoming more important? In North America they might be called by general names such as “American Indians”, “Native Americans”, “Native Alaskan corporations”, or “Native Hawaiians”; in Canada they may be referred to as “First Nations” or “Meti”; in Australia they might be called “Aboriginals”, “Maori” in New Zealand or “Sami” in Scandinavia. More recently, in Japan, the Ainu have been recognized as an “Indigenous population”. Despite the fact that each group has a specific name by which it identifies, a particular name by which these people are recognized in particular countries or regions, these “indigenous people” are generally lumped into a category that identifies their relationship with the dominant government that controls the land upon which they live.

48

A note about capitalization is warranted here. I generally capitalize “Indigenous” when I am referring to a group of people, much as one would capitalize “American”, “English”, or “Colombian.” I also capitalize “Indigenous Archaeology” when I use it as a programmatic approach to integrating archaeology with Indigenous perspectives; however, if I am quoting the works of another author, I maintain the capitalization used by that particular author.

Who is “Indigenous”?

I have elsewhere offered a more pointed discussion of the question of “Who is Indigenous?” (Watkins 2005), and I do not wish to repeat that here, but it is important to understand that the definition of “Indigenous” carries with it economic, political and social implications that reach beyond the practice of archaeology. Therefore, please allow me a short summation of the numerous issues related to the definition of “Indigenous”.

The International Labor Organization offers a couple of pointed definitions: indigenous people are “peoples in independent countries whose so-



cial, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.” It also recognizes that being indigenous can be based on “descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present State boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions” (ILO 1989).

The Asian Development Bank (2004) bases its definition of “Indigenous” on economic criteria, while the World Health Organization used rather broad categories in its development of a set of ethics for dealing with Indigenous groups (World Health Organization 2004). Each definition is related to various and specific aspects of the communities’ involvement with outside organizations or governments.

In general, these definitions use, as Renée Sylvain (2002:1075) notes, four broad criteria for identifying indigenous peoples: “(1) genealogical heritage (i.e., historical continuity with prior occupants of a region); (2) political, economic, or ‘structural’ marginalization (i.e., nondominance); (3) cultural attributes (i.e., being ‘culturally distinct’); and (4) self-identification.” And, because of the political and social structures within which these people generally operate, these groups are general composed of “politically weak, economically marginal, and culturally stigmatized members of the national societies that have overtaken them and their lands” (Dyck 1992:1).

In addition to these definitions, a series of historical issues have influenced the continuing perception of Indigenous populations as second-class citizens within their country’s borders. Colonizing interlopers interrupted established land tenure and resulted in the disruption of local relationships to land. The suppression of native language by an increasingly-dominant society that sought to integrate dissimilar cultures into a singular “homogenous” one disrupted one of the most important mechanisms of cultural continuity. Finally, the perception that indigenous people are somehow an inferior race in comparison to the conquering culture contributed to histo-

ric trauma that continues to plague these populations. These issues, coupled with the social and economic marginalization of the group as a whole, continue to cause problems over which such groups have minimal control.

In Australia, “Indigenous” is somewhat equated with “Aboriginal”, and “Aboriginality” has been the topic of discussion for nearly two decades (c.f., Anderson 1985). Special Issue 2 of *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* (1991) provided a series of articles reflecting on the status of “Aboriginal Studies” in Australia. Archer (1991: 163) noted that “Aboriginality as a construction for purposes of political action has all the characteristic contradictions of nationalism”, and Lewins noted “it is not possible to keep Aboriginality and politics apart” (1991:177). Thiele (1991:180) argued Aboriginality involves “descentism”, based “solely on the grounds of biological parentage”. Alan Roughly (1991: 211) wrote that race, nationality, possession and difference were “the controlling and central terms in the written history of a racial discourse that must be continuously deconstructed”, while Sackett detailed the stereotypical belief held by some that “aboriginal values and practices are somehow or another more ‘ecologically sound’ than those of non-Aborigines” (1991: 235). Finally, Davidson noted that, in the changing relationships between archaeologists and Aborigines, “the motives of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in the cooperation have not always been the same” (1991: 256). This discussion again chose to recognize that being “Indigenous” carries with it a marked difference.

In essence, then, “Indigenous” can be related to the area where a group of people maintains cultural relationships (“Geography”), to people who are genetically related to the culture being studied (“Descendancy”), or to the local community in the area where the archaeology is being conducted (“Proximity”). This variety of applications, however, is not problematic if archaeologists understand the reasons why such variety of application is relevant.

What is “Indigenous Archaeology”?

Coupled with the difficulty of defining “Indigenous” with its political and social issues regarding identity and self-representation, Indigenous Ar-

chaeology must be viewed in a broad framework within which local or regional manifestations occur. What is considered Indigenous Archaeology in the United States might not be applicable to Indigenous Archaeology in Canada, Colombia, Japan or New Zealand.

In the Introduction to an article on Indigenous Archaeology in the *Encyclopedia of Archaeology* (2008: 1660), George Nicholas writes:

Indigenous archaeology is an expression of archaeological theory and practice in which the discipline intersects with Indigenous values, knowledge, practices, ethics, and sensibilities, and through collaborative and community-originated or -directed projects, and related critical perspectives. Indigenous archaeology seeks to (1) make archaeology more representative of, responsible to, and relevant for Indigenous communities; (2) redress real and perceived inequalities in the practice of archaeology; and (3) inform and broaden the understanding and interpretation of the archaeological record through the incorporation of Aboriginal worldviews, histories, and science.

Stephen Silliman's 2008 volume *Collaborating at the Trowel's Edge: Teaching and Learning in Indigenous Archaeology* looks at Indigenous Archaeology as it relates to the specific communities within which archaeologists in North America operate, but at the field school level – that point where many young archaeologists (professionally speaking, at least) first learn archaeological methodology and techniques. His discussion of Indigenous Archaeology includes expanding its reach to a collaborative level rather than merely including an Indigenous perspective in discreet portions of the archaeological process.

Since Nicholas and Silliman provide a broad discussion of Indigenous Archaeology, presenting examples of what is going on within this sub-discipline of archaeology, I will not comment further, at least as it relates to practice in North American and Australia. It is important to note, however, that Indigenous Archaeology already exists in Latin America.

The tension between cultural property and the groups that relate to them has become increasingly obvious in Latin America. Clemency Coggins

(2003) wrote about the inherent conflict in the economic progress sought by Latin American countries toward “globalization of the economy and the internationalization of culture to create a global patrimony” while at the same time struggling toward “the reestablishment of separate national languages and cultures” within those countries.

In Mexico, for example, political rulers appropriated great heritage items from the social and cultural “peripheries” of the country to construct a national identity that suited their needs, yet indigenous people were given little opportunity to be involved in the nation that was constructed. The “heritage” of local groups was co-opted and moved to centralized museums to create a “national patrimony” without consideration of local or regional identity; ultimately, this national patrimony was reflective more of an artificially constructed identity developed through academic, political, or social perspectives rather than cultural ones.

There have been more opportunities for involvement in recent years, however. In November 2002 a conference entitled “Toward a More Ethical Mayan Archeology” held at the University of British Columbia brought together indigenous people and professional archaeologists who offered their opinions not only on the economic impacts of archaeology, but also on some of the philosophical aspects of archaeology as it is currently practiced in Mesoamerica. The majority of the presenters were academics or students pursuing a degree in archaeology, and their perspectives on archaeology are derived not from interaction with archaeologists as an outsider, but primarily from interaction with the discipline through internal relationships. In the rest of Mesoamerica, few non-professionals are given the opportunity to offer their perspectives. The situation is mirrored in certain areas of South America as well.

Peruvian archaeologist Garth Bawden (personal communication 2004) noted that there is a lack of “indigenous” populations (i.e., “original settlers”) because of social factors such as population decimation due to health problems, migration, or other social aspects resulting from colonization. This absence of “original settlers” might be viewed as the reason that economic or social factors have replaced biological or genealogical ones as defining mechanisms for the concept of “Indigenous.”

Alejandro Haber, for example, chooses to focus on social class rather than biological or genealogical ones in his research in Argentina, thereby equating “peasants” with “Indigenous” (Haber 2005). Maria-Luz Endere, another Argentine archaeologist, utilizes the relationships between subordinated and dominant social and governmental groups as a means to inform her research in much the same way that American archaeologists examine relationships between dominant and Indigenous groups (Endere 2002).

Others are working in various directions as well. For example, the July 2003 issue of *Chungará*, a publication of the Department of Archaeology and Museology of the Faculty of Social, Administrative, and Economics Sciences of the University of Tarapaca, Chile, contains a number of articles that appear to signal an up-swing in what might be considered Indigenous archaeology in the area. The authors write about the impact of communicating with and being informed by local population perspectives on archaeology; again, while these local populations might not necessarily be biologically or genetically related to the cultures that produced the archaeological cultures under consideration, they are considered “Indigenous” by local officials.

More specifically, Álvaro Luis Romero Guevara’s paper on his work in northern Chile (2003: 337-46) argues that, while there has been little interaction between scientific archaeology and the indigenous population in the provinces of Arica and Parinacota in Northern Chile, the initiation of more effective political policies toward the protection of cultural patrimony and indigenous rights has led to increasing and more open interaction between archaeologists and indigenous populations. Mauricio Uribe Rodríguez and Leonor Ádan Alfaro (2003: 295-304) discuss the ways that societies construct and reconstruct their historic memories and the particular cultural contingency of the Chilean State regarding these issues, ultimately arguing that the archaeological (scientific) community must take a position concerning the role of science and, particularly, archaeology, in the society of which it is a part.

These instances of archaeologists actively working with local populations can be viewed as initial examples of ways that Indigenous issues are co-

ming to be interspersed in the archaeological enterprise in this area. Interestingly enough, the editor of the publication, Vickie Cassman of the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, is a North American anthropologist in a North American university. These articles are written by archaeologists beginning to undertake projects that actively work with indigenous populations (however defined).

Why “Indigenous Archaeology”?

Indigenous Archaeology, in spite of the difficulty of defining it, can complement the scientific practice of archaeology. In the remainder of the paper, I would like to offer a few suggestions for including “Indigenous Archaeology” within mainstream archaeological practice, utilizing five broad topical areas: relational, processual, representational, operational, and pedagogical.

Relational

54

First, Indigenous Archaeology offers possibilities for archaeologists and the discipline to improve relationships between the academy and the local/Indigenous populations. The improvement of such relationships – through interaction, public education and outreach, active and reflective listening, collaboration, and many other ways – will allow for the inclusion (or consideration) of alternative perspectives that can help elucidate the archaeological record.

Second, the more we include local and Indigenous perspectives within our research, the more we create support for what we do. In the United States, the general population often does not support archaeology – either because it does not know what we do, or because we have not adequately involved them in our work. But when we strengthen our networks, we help develop active supporters for our work, instill a sense of “ownership” in the archaeological record, and help develop a stronger base to protect the archaeological sites and cultural patrimony of our countries.

Third, as our relationships with local and Indigenous groups grow stronger, our ability to mobilize political support for archaeological issues increa-



ses. We garner more “grass-roots” support, and with it stronger support for cultural protection and management.

Processual

As archaeologists, we are interested in processes – the processes of cultural change, the processes of technological innovation and continuity, and the processes of materiality, to name only three – but we should also be aware of the processes involved in the general process within which we practice archaeology.

Indigenous Archaeology requires that we focus on the “process” or archaeology more than the “product.” In this manner, we seek to integrate the concerns of local and Indigenous groups at all levels of our research, not just at the end, when we have produced the report of our research. As Silliman (2008: 9) writes, “the ‘output’ ... cannot be understood outside of the process that produces it.”

In the United States, the involvement of Native American groups within the practice of archaeology has been primarily in the area of “historic preservation” or “heritage protection” as tribes try to develop more control over the management of heritage resources of tribal origin or geographical control. Tribal involvement in the process from the outset influences not only the questions archaeologists ask of the data they recover, but also the research questions used by the archaeologists in developing the archaeological programs.

Representational

Archaeology has been criticized as presenting Indigenous groups as “vanished”, as “primitive”, or as “simple.” Indigenous Archaeology, allows local and Indigenous groups to participate in the ways that their cultures and archaeological heritage is represented in the contemporary cultural context.

As archaeologists share the platforms that are used to create images of the local and Indigenous groups, different pictures and representations of

those groups will emerge. Indigenous Archaeology does not mean that archaeologists must succumb to pressure to create fictional representations, but participation by local and Indigenous groups allows them the opportunity to influence the ways that they are represented in the archaeological publications created as a result of archaeological programs.

With involvement of local and Indigenous groups, the stories we as archaeologist tell will change. We will be able to better represent the needs and interests of the populations we should serve outside of our academic or museum communities. No longer should we expect to be the only storytellers, but only one of a multivocality that will broaden the facets of culture that can be interpreted from the archaeological record.

Operational

Indigenous Archaeology can influence the ways that archaeologists go about their professional business. Increased involvement of local and Indigenous groups will create flexibility in the process that holds significant promise for shaking archaeologists out of their comfort zones in order to help them confront the methodological and operational perspectives within which they currently operate.

As we include more communities in our archaeological processes, we will likely give up some control over the way we conduct our archaeology, but we should not fear change. In the United States, consultation is required by particular legislation aimed at protecting the national cultural patrimony. Archaeologists involved in projects operating under these legislative limits have continued to practice “good” archaeology and their researches are informed as a result of their conversations with “affected parties.” While the process has been altered, the sharing of information and the gathering of alternative perspectives has not “harmed” archaeology, but expanded its views.

The active involvement of local and Indigenous communities in the archaeological process will also contribute a degree of longevity to archaeological programs that work cooperatively with and in those communities.

Increased involvement with those communities will require that we strengthen our presence there. While it might not require that we create permanent physical structures or infrastructure, it increases the likelihood of multiscale and multiyear programs that create fuller relationships beyond the superficial ones of short-term projects.

Pedagogical

At this point in time, there are relatively few publications concerning the ways the Indigenous Archaeology can and will influence education and the educational processes, but as our involvement with local and Indigenous communities deepens, the ways in which we educate them about the past will evolve. This examination of the pedagogical aspects of Indigenous Archaeology will likely be a burgeoning field in the near future as local and Indigenous groups examine ways of integrating archaeology into local, regional, and national curricula.

As archaeologists, we generally operate within the scientific process. This requires that we begin with observations, develop hypothesis to explain the observations, collect data to help us test our hypotheses, interpret our results, refine our experiments, and so forth. This process is based within the Western scientific model used in exploring the universe. But how might an Indigenous science operate? Would experimentation necessarily follow observation, or would explanation without experimentation be “wrong?”

Indigenous science might not necessarily be the same as Western science, but is it any less valid as a means of explaining our universe? This is a philosophical issue that many archaeologists might have difficulty accepting, but our explanations may be no less foreign to local and Indigenous communities. Archaeological cultures, for example, often bear no resemblance to contemporary or historical cultures, and yet we as archaeologists use them extensively to illustrate the past.

Is it wrong to assume that other means of teaching about the past are invalid? Alternately, how can we assume that the Western means of teaching about the past is the only valid way of doing so?

Drawbacks

I am not naïve enough to believe that there will not be drawbacks to archaeology's increased involvement with local and Indigenous communities. Recently, discussion concerning Indigenous Archaeology has played out in the journal *American Antiquity*, with Robert McGhee noting that he believes that Indigenous Archaeology has been founded on a paradigm of Aboriginal essentialism, the adoption of which has "led to problematic assumptions that have negative consequences for both the practice of archaeology and for the lives of those who identify themselves as Indigenous" (2008: 579). His concerns with Indigenous Archaeology may be shared by others, but most comments in reaction to his article (Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al 2010; Silliman 2010; Wilcox 2010; but see response by McGhee 2010) have been in support of Indigenous Archaeology.

Generally speaking, we will give up portions of our control over the archaeological record. We will sometimes be forced to ask permission to operate within arenas that previously we took as our own. We will have personality conflicts and programmatic lapses. We will shake our heads at interpretations and representations, but I believe archaeology will survive and become stronger.

Conclusions

Indigenous Archaeology, for all the reasons listed above and because of its history, has the possibility of offering additional perspectives toward the archaeological and cultural past that scientific archaeology by itself cannot offer. It can provide color to the somewhat dim past and enlighten our researches and interpretations.

For those archaeologists who might argue that archaeology should try to continue to maintain a somewhat "objective" path toward politics and social science, it is important to remember that archaeology can never be apolitical or neutral in that regard. Archaeologist David Kojan (2008: 69-85), in his discussion of Evo Morales' use of the archaeological site, Tiwanaku, for example, adeptly demonstrates how archaeology and the archaeological record continues to be interwoven into contemporary society.

Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh writes of the promise of Indigenous archaeology: “Many archaeologists are shifting from notions of self-ascribed, narrowly defined scientific stewardship to the notion of ‘collaborative stewardship,’ a joint venture among descendant communities and researchers to appreciate and understand the past. ... Including Native Americans and other descendant communities is a categorical means of expanding the circle of archaeology’s moral community.” (2009: 195).

Such collaborations as described in Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthaphonh’s *History is in the Land* (2006), Kerber’s *Cross-Cultural Collaboration: Native Americans and Archaeology in the Northeastern United States* (2006) and Silliman’s *Collaborating at the Trowel’s Edge: Teaching and Learning in Indigenous Archaeology* (2008) offer insights in ways that archaeology can benefit and be strengthened by collaboration with Indigenous groups in the United States. The work of the authors represented in these volumes contributes to better understanding of the relationships between archaeologists and the communities where they work by offering insights into the ways that various perspectives can be used to inform not only the research but also the products of that research.

In 2000, I wrote an entire book about Indigenous Archaeology without actually defining it; Nicholas’ 2008 article not only defined it but gave a cogent history of the term and its usages in such a way and detail that archaeologists can handily use it to get a glimpse of what is covered in the term. Silliman’s concept of “collaborative indigenous archaeology” (2008: 3) requires that archaeologists consider Indigenous perspectives (however defined *locally*) throughout the project – project formulation, development, initiation, data recovery, laboratory analysis, data evaluation and interpretation, report writing, and project shutdown – from beginning to end and all points in between.

Regardless of the history of the term or the current iterations of its application, Indigenous Archaeology doesn’t need concise definitions to exist. As long as archaeologists involve local perspectives within their programs of research, some form of Indigenous Archaeology will develop and exist. If archaeologists choose to insulate themselves from the local populations who see themselves as the social, political, or cultural stewards of the ar-

archaeological record or cultural heritage, then the practice of archaeology runs the risk of continuing to be a sterile act, serving only the needs of one group of people. In that future, archaeology will continue to be a handmaiden of colonialism through the recitation of narratives developed outside of the culture within which it is a part. Archaeology must be a part of, not apart from, the society within which it operates.

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