

## Settler Colonialism and Archaeology in North America: Challenges and Progress

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One of Susan Pollock's most important contributions to world archaeology has been her commitment to an engaged archaeology in service of contemporary politics and social justice. We had the privilege of working with Susan at Binghamton University in the state of New York, United States. As archaeologists studying Native Americans in a settler-colonial state, we face different challenges than Susan does in her work in the Near East and in Germany. Nonetheless, Susan taught us much about how to do an engaged archaeology, and we often sought her counsel.

The Americas, Australia, and South Africa are all examples of settler-colonist states. Settler-colonialism occurs when colonists come to stay, seizing territory and replacing Native populations through genocide, assimilation, or more subtle means (Veracini 2010). We are Euroamerican archaeologists and descendant of settler-colonists who have spent our careers studying the Native American past in the United States Southwest/Mexican Northwest. The area includes the U.S. states of Arizona, New Mexico, southeast Utah, southwest Colorado and trans-Pecos Texas. South of the border, it encompasses the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora. Aboriginal peoples in the region grew corn, beans and squash and lived in villages and towns with populations up to several thousand people. Archaeologically, this is the most intensively studied region in North America. However, Euroamerican archaeologists such as ourselves

carry out our research in a historical context of half a millennium of racism, genocide, and disempowerment perpetrated by our ancestors on the ancestors of the people with whom we work. Our Euroamerican ancestors took Native American lands, destroyed their livelihoods, and slaughtered them in one of the greatest episodes of ethnic cleansing in the history of the world.

In this paper, we discuss some of the challenges of doing an archaeology of Native American, Indigenous descendant communities. We will first situate Indigenous archaeology within its historical context and then explore many of the complexities faced by archaeologists working in the ancient Indigenous Southwest/Northwest. Archaeological teaching, practice, and research have been utterly transformed in our lifetimes by archaeology's engagement with Indigenous communities (Colwell 2016). As we seek to decolonize our discipline, there have been successes, but tremendous challenges and obstacles remain.

### Archaeology and Native America

In North America, white, Euroamerican archaeologists are the descendants of the conquerors studying the ancestors of the conquered. Archaeology as a discipline emerged from Euroamerican violence against Native American ancestors. As settler-colonists moved across the North American continent displacing, slaughtering and disenfranchising Natives,

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they rejected archaeological evidence demonstrating Native achievements and presence. It was expeditious to view Mississippian mounds, for example, as the work of a lost mound builder race that red savages had destroyed a few hundred years ago (thus giving Europeans an excuse to eliminate the “savage Indians”). While some Euroamericans sought to wipe out Native peoples, others saw them as simple savages in need of salvation and civilization. In the late nineteenth century, Bureau of American Ethnology archaeologists such as Jesse Walter Fewkes sought to counter racist mound builder views – they undertook excavations in the U.S. Southwest, Midwest and Southeast in part to prove that Indigenous peoples were responsible for the ancient sites and monuments that whites had discovered riding the wave of conquest west. Others romanticized the “disappearing” Indians in poetry, song and stories. But from a Native perspective, scholars like Fewkes appropriated and exploited Native knowledge, materials, and bodies to build their careers.

Today, a pervasive romanticization of Southwest Native peoples continues, and it attracts naïve (although often well-meaning) publics from around the world. When tourists bask in the romance of “lost civilizations” at archaeological parks like Mesa Verde and Chaco Canyon, most are oblivious to the racism inherent in the notion of “vanishing” or “wise” ancient “Indians,” and the ways in which these views legitimated European expansion. Archaeologists today continue to be surprised when Native people angrily and vocally mistrust our motives (Deloria 1969; 1992; Watkins 2003). But why wouldn’t they be? Not only did our own Euroamerican “pioneer” ancestors spend 500 years slaughtering them, belittling them, taking their lands, and then romanticizing them, but today we archaeologists have subjected them to the ultimate indignity – building careers out of the literal bones of their ancestors (McGuire 1992).

Through the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States government attempted to eliminate Native communities by assimilating them to Euroamerican culture. The government failed. The 2010 U.S. census counted 3 million Native Americans in the United States, and nearly half a million of them live in the American Southwest. Of the two million people living in the state of New Mexico in 2010, nearly 10% identified as Native American. Following a succession of treaties beginning in 1778, federally recognized American Indian Tribes have semi-sovereign status within the United States. Tribal leaders interact with U.S. government entities on a nation-to-nation basis, because the states have no authority over Indian nations (Deloria and Lytle 1984). Indian nations retain sovereign rights, including the right to control archaeological research on their lands. There are more than 50 federally recognized Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes in the four U.S. Southwest states of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado. These federally recognized groups claim cultural affiliation with the archaeological sites and remains of the region. The contemporary relationships among these Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos are complex and subject to controversy (e.g., Cordell and Kintigh 2010; Schillaci and Bustard 2010).

Roughly a third of the Southwest/Northwest culture area lies in México (McGuire 2008, 140–87). México is also a settler state but with a very different history, culture and set of laws than the United States. The legal relationships between Native peoples and the national government are different in México. Indigenous peoples do not have a semi-sovereign status. Mexican national identity rests in the concept of the *mestizo*, the mixed blood descendants of Spanish conquerors and the conquered Indigenous peoples. The vast majority of Mexican people identify as *mestizo*. Thus, Mexican scholars see the archaeology as the products of their own indigenous ancestors. Indigenous people in México have

by and large not raised the same objections to archaeology as Native Americans. The exception to this is on the U.S.-México border. The U.S.-México border divides several indigenous communities including the O'odham, the Yaqui and the Cocopah. These people do not accept the idea of the *mestizo* and seek to maintain trans-border communities. They also share in the Native American disdain for archaeology.

On the border, the Euroamerican archaeologists enter a complex relationship of double colonialism. U.S. archaeologists participate in an imperialist archaeology throughout Latin America: this is the first colonialism. Both U.S. and Mexican archaeologies entail members of the educated middle class studying indigenous peoples who are politically and culturally marginalized in the nation. This is the second colonialism. Both developed in the process of their respective states seeking to legitimate the establishment of a European nation on indigenous lands. Yet each nation and archaeology came to a very different ideology to legitimate themselves. These ideologies come into conflict on the border. If Euroamerican archaeologists attempt to decolonize one of these colonialisms, they necessarily participate in the other.

Native Americans never liked Euroamerican scientists disturbing their dead (McGuire 1992, 827–28). Early archaeologists and anthropologists, however, collected Native objects and bodies, often over the objections of Native Peoples. The scientists classified these objects and bodies as lab specimens, advertised them as curiosities, and filled museums with them. In the Southwest, archaeologists employed local Native people as workers on their excavations and asked them for insights about past inhabitants, but the knowledge being produced was for white, Euroamerican consumption. In the early 1970s, with the rise of the American Indian Movement (AIM), Native Americans in the United States began to push back, using the law to advocate for

their interests and overturn centuries of colonialist abuses. By the late 1970s, some Native Nations began to develop their own rescue archaeology programs (Anyon and Ferguson 1995; Anyon et al. 2000; Begay 1997; Colwell and Koyiyumptewa 2018). The 1979 Archaeological Resources and Protection Act required Tribal consent for the issuance of federal archaeological permits to excavate on Native lands. A 1992 amendment to the National Historic Preservation Act helped Native peoples implement their own cultural preservation programs and assume managerial authority over archaeology on their lands. As Southwest archaeologists began to interact more intensively with Native communities, some began to work towards finding “common ground” (Dongoske et al. 2000; Ferguson 1996; Swidler et al. 1997; Watkins 2000). But Native people remained very critical of archaeologists, most of whom continued to work without Native consent or input (Deloria 1992; Echo-Hawk 1986).

In the U.S., ultimately, it was the passage of the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) that forced profound changes in the way archaeology is practiced, and conceived, in the US Southwest (Ferguson 1996). NAGPRA mandated that institutions receiving federal funds must inventory and return all Native burials, grave goods and religious objects to affiliated descendant communities. NAGPRA further stipulated that no new destructive excavations or collections impacting burials should take place without Native American “consultation” (Fine-Dare 2002). The law mandates that archaeologists, at minimum, “consult” with “culturally affiliated” communities. Some of the language has proven to be problematic, as there are many ways to define (or contest) “cultural affiliation” (Adler and Bruning 2008; Dongoske et al. 1997). But today in the U.S. Southwest, all archaeology must engage with descendant communities. As a result, Southwest archaeology has undergone profound changes in our

practices, our research questions, our teaching, and our ethics (Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010; Fowles 2010; Silliman 2008; Schachner 2018).

In México, by contrast, all archaeological remains are property of the nation state of México. In México, the law and scholars do not see the archaeology of the pre-Columbian past as an archaeology of the “other,” but rather something that the *mestizo* people inherited from their Indigenous ancestors. However, this creates its own kinds of difficulties for Indigenous peoples who are not of a mixed-race background. They are the poorest of the poor and legally and culturally marginalized, but without the rights afforded by the semi-sovereign status that Native Americans have. They, therefore, have little or no control over the remains, sites and artifacts of their ancestors.

### **Decolonizing Southwest/ Northwest archaeology**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, most archaeologists in North America endeavor – with varying degrees of success – to come to ethical terms with the destructive impacts wrought by our own discipline, to construct meaningful engagements and collaborations with the Indigenous descendant communities, and to help chart a positive path forward for all. We seek to redress the wrongs of the past. We respect Native knowledge, authority, and control over Native histories, materials, bodies, and intellectual property. These processes are sometimes glossed as “decolonizing archaeology” (Atalay 2006; 2012; Smith and Wobst 2005).

No legislation comparable to NAGPRA exists in México, and archaeology remains are property of the state. Virtually the entire Mexican archaeological community treats archaeological remains as scientific data that they have the supreme right to gather, interpret, publish and display. They justify

this control both in terms of the law and by their *mestizo* identity.

Not all U.S. archaeologists have responded in the same way to the post-NAGPRA world. Contemporary perspectives and practices follow a continuum anchored by four positions. These positions are not rigid categories, nor do they necessarily break along generational lines, although they tend to reflect institutional networks (see Van Dyke 2020 for a more detailed discussion).

In the first and most conservative position, some North American archaeologists continue to view our discipline as an inherently important, objective and value-neutral pursuit of scientific knowledge. While few colleagues today openly advocate this position, some consider NAGPRA and Native concerns to be nothing more than a legal hindrance to be circumvented when possible. For example, Kennett et al. (2017) recently exploited a legal loophole to conduct an ancient DNA analysis of human remains from Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon without undertaking any discussion with Native peoples. The study greatly angered Pueblo descendant communities, eroding the trust that other Southwest archaeologists have been building with Native peoples (Balter 2017).

Second position adherents recognize the need for and importance of collaborations with Native peoples, but they nonetheless continue to prioritize their own, western scientific goals. These colleagues believe that, with enough communication, Native people will understand the importance and benefits of archaeology, and will embrace the Euroamerican point of view. Colleagues with this position legitimate their work by arguing that archaeological knowledge is for the greater good of all humanity (Kintigh et al. 2014). But this is paternalism, not decolonization. Furthermore, the idea that past bodies and materials are “resources” best deployed towards the construction of

knowledge conflicts directly with Native philosophies that emphasize communal ownership, collective responsibilities, and the need to protect against potential harm (Tsosie 2007; TallBear 2013).

Many of our colleagues today work from a third position – one that values genuine collaboration and respectful engagement. They want to continue to pursue archaeological questions, but in tandem with Native desires and goals. This requires years of conversations and interactions, deep commitments of time and resources, and the slow building of trust.

In ideal situations, both archaeologists and Native communities find shared interests, and both work together, respectfully, towards shared goals. An outstanding example is the thirty-year collaboration between the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office and overlapping groups of Southwest archaeologists loosely connected through the University of Arizona (Ferguson et al. 2015; authors in Kuwanwisiwma et al. 2018).

Those in a fourth position have built careers as facilitators and consultants to Indigenous groups. These colleagues advocate for Native groups, or act as intermediaries between Indigenous Nations and the world of white archaeology (e.g., Anschuetz 2007; Dongoske et al. 1997). An excellent example of this kind of work is Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthophonh's (2006) study of the archaeological landscape of the San Pedro River Valley in southern Arizona, involving cultural experts from Hopi, Zuni, Western Apache, and O'odham communities.

Ultimately, in a fully decolonized Southwest archaeology, Native community needs would drive research and practice. Archaeology would be conducted not only for, but by Indigenous peoples. The number of Indigenous Southwest archaeologists is slowly increasing (Two Bears 2006). Many Indigenous archaeologists are

positioned to impact the future of our field through their leadership and faculty roles in anthropology programs such as that at Northern Arizona University.

## Challenges

There are many challenges in building collaborative archaeologists (Bruchac et al. 2016; Halperin 2017; La Salle 2010; Ray 2009). Here we want to highlight a few issues that are particularly cogent in the Native American Southwest U.S. and Northwest México.

In the U.S. Southwest, we rarely conduct excavations of ancient Native sites for purely research purposes, nor do we engage in the aDNA analyses that are sweeping much of the discipline. This is because many Native communities oppose destructive archaeological research practices – for them, ancestors still live in archaeological sites, so sites should not be violently probed or exhumed (Anschuetz and Dongoske 2017, 7–8). Researchers working from within positions 1 or 2 above simply try to find ways around Native sensibilities. But even those archaeologists who feel a deep ethical responsibility to listen, understand and respect Native perspectives can simultaneously feel frustrated to recognize that some kinds of information will simply remain beyond their grasp. Archaeologists rarely publicly acknowledge or discuss these frustrations.

Native peoples are not monolithic entities – Tribes contain multiple internal factions, and archaeologists generally work with only a small subset of Native groups. Clans and sodalities have differential access to knowledge, and not all knowledge can or should be shared with outsiders or, indeed, with other community members (Bernardini 2005). Archaeologists frequently are unaware (or do not understand) how their engagement plays into local disputes and factional alliances. And, there are conflicts of interest between Native groups that archaeologists must navigate. Elsewhere Van Dyke (2017)

has written at length about the complexities of working in Chaco Canyon – an area claimed by Pueblo and by Navajo descendant communities, two groups that often clash. For some Native groups, archaeological sites are literally sites of struggle over the right to be heard, and rights to political and economic resources. There is no solution that does not signal particular academic positions and Tribal alliances.

For non-Natives and Natives alike, there are gendered differences in access to knowledge and to cultural experts. Many Native Southwest groups are matriarchal, yet older men frequently populate Tribal Councils and speak for the group. When Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthaphonh (both male) visited sites in the San Pedro Valley with Native cultural experts, all the experts were male (Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2006). When informally queried about this, Ferguson and Colwell explained that for Hopi, it would not have been appropriate for women to visit these sites. If it is not appropriate for Pueblo women to visit or to access particular kinds of knowledge about ancient archaeological sites, what does that mean for female archaeologists seeking to learn and collaborate? A recent collaborative project between Crow Canyon Archaeological Center and the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office directly tackled this issue. As part a project studying ancient farming, a team of archaeologists, plant scientists, and cultural specialists from Hopi purposefully includes both men and women to encompass gendered roles, responsibilities, and knowledge in Hopi maize agriculture (Kyle Bocinsky, personal communication, August 2019).

Well-intentioned Euroamerican research archaeologists often find it difficult to establish relationships with Indigenous communities. As researchers reach out, they may be perplexed to find that Tribes do not reach back. Letters go unanswered, phone calls and emails go unreturned. The impatient

researcher may think that Native peoples lack interest or are even hostile to the overtures. In reality, there can be many reasons for difficulties in establishing communication that have nothing to do with the archaeologist. Tribal councils have lots of issues competing for their attention. Improving schools and infrastructure, improving economies, and working on Native language programs are just a few of the issues that may be more pressing than archaeology. Native cultural experts are likely to also be key social and religious leaders who have many ceremonial obligations in the course of the ritual calendar. And trust between Tribal leaders and archaeologists takes time and patience. Successful collaborative projects do not lend themselves to the timeframe of a graduate degree program or a tenure clock.

Sometimes Natives share information that is not for publication or dissemination. Pueblos, Tribes and Nations may officially and specifically prohibit consulting archaeologists from sharing their work and findings with non-Tribal members, the public, or other archaeologists. This is for several reasons. First, Native communities have experienced centuries of colonialist appropriation of their ceremonies, culture, objects, and bodies – appropriations that benefited white researchers rather than community members. Second, in many Native Southwest societies, social and religious power springs from secret knowledge. Access to this knowledge is based on clan or moiety membership as well as initiation into specific societies. Archaeologists who work with Native groups do so with the understanding that they should ask permission before publishing or speaking about sensitive issues. Furthermore, archaeologists who seek to build trust must respect Native wishes to keep silent about information. These practices can be in direct conflict with research archaeologists' needs to publish, and with the Western academic ideal of "open access" to knowledge. But privileging Science above Native interests in these matters

perpetuates a cycle of colonialist violence that dismisses Native values and concerns.

### **Stronger together**

Power is at the crux of the matter. Collaborating with Native communities requires archaeologists to relinquish control. Some contend our ultimate goal should be to return the helm of Southwest/Northwest archaeology to Native peoples. We believe we can do this without giving up our positions as archaeologists. Archaeologists have authority that comes from our craft, but this is different from the authority to set the agenda, determine the questions, and control the intellectual and material results of our work (McGuire 2008, 84–86, 90–91). We have our own particular kinds of knowledge and training that is different from, and at times complementary to, Native interests and epistemologies. We can use our archaeological authority to help counter neoliberal and destructive forces in our world. When Native and archaeological interests overlap, we can combat these forces together, and effect real change in the world.

In one example, Van Dyke and Heitman (2021) are spearheading a collaborative multimedia book project with approximately half the content existing as online videos. The greater Chaco landscape in the U.S. Southwest is threatened by aggressive oil and gas development. This situation is of grave concern to many Indigenous peoples, archaeologists, environmentalists, and members of the public. The National Park Service asked us to undertake an edited book project to bring attention to the greater Chaco landscape. We included the usual roster of academic chapters but we recognized that Native peoples of the region should be the most important voices in this discussion. When we asked a Native colleague for guidance, we were reminded that oral presentation would be the most traditional and appropriate way for descendant communities to discuss and share knowledge. So, we invited Native colleagues from Navajo,

Acoma, Hopi and Zuni to participate in the volume through spoken contributions filmed in Chaco Canyon, and we learned much from each other during several intensive filming events. We hope the resulting open access multimedia volume will help to raise public and scholarly awareness about the need to protect, and respect, the greater Chaco landscape.

We can also seek to atone for the sins of our archaeological ancestors (Bauer-Clapp and Pérez 2014; Darling et al. 2015). In 1902, a party of Yaqui warriors freed hundreds of enslaved Yaquis from haciendas near Hermosillo, Sonora, México. They defeated a Mexican army column and sought refuge in the rugged Sierra Mazatan. On the night of June 7<sup>th</sup>, Mexican troops outflanked the Yaqui warriors. The next morning, they attacked the camp of women and children killing 124 Yaqui. Three weeks later, the North American physical anthropologist Aleš Hrdlička collected the skulls of 10 individuals, human bone, hats, blankets, weapons, and a cradleboard from the battlefield. He shipped these materials to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Mexican scholars (Raquel Padilla Ramos and José Luis Moctezuma) joined with U.S. scholars (Andrew Darling, Ventura Perez, and Randall McGuire) to create the bi-national Proyecto Cerro Mazatan project. The project worked collaboratively with the Yaqui tribes of Sonora and Arizona to repatriate the human remains and other materials that Hrdlička took from the battlefield. The collaboration was a success and, in the fall of 2009, the National Museum of American History returned the remains to the Yaqui People.

### **Conclusion**

We wrote this article to try to help our colleagues who do not work in settler-colonial situations to understand some of the complexities of Indigenous archaeology in the Southwest U.S., and the ways in which it continues to transform our discipline here.

Thirty years after NAGPRA, we have come to realize that we, as Euroamerican archaeologists, owe Native peoples a debt that we can never repay. In the Southwest/Northwest, not all archaeology needs to be activist, but all archaeology is political. To pretend otherwise is to continue to enable colonialist attitudes and practices. In our view, the best we can do is to continue what Susan helped us start in Binghamton: to be rigorously self-reflexive, own our own positions, and try to do good in the world.

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