

Editorial

# Recent Reflections on the Sociology of Archaeology: Introduction

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Nothing in the past 60 years has nullified the impact of the social positioning of archaeologists and the discipline in the creation of archaeological knowledge. However, while papers on single topics appear sporadically in journals and frequently in conferences, written compendiums of thoughts and remedies are not as common as they need to be. Compendiums are useful for documenting progress or the lack thereof and for spreading the word on problems and solutions, thus this special issue of *Humans*.

In the 1980s, parity issues dominated the sociology of archaeology publications, particularly regarding gender disparities in the profession. Fewer voices were encouraging demonstrations of archaeological relevance or accommodation to descendent, local, and public stakeholders. Today, the sociology of archaeology has the opposite emphasis. It is much more focused on collaborative archaeology, decolonization, action archaeology, and the empowerment of other-than-archaeologists using the archaeological record judging from conferences and professional organizations although problems and remedies for persistent parity issues, typically between the Global North and Global South, continue to be identified and proffered. Parity for gender seems to have been accomplished in some settings such as in widely circulating English-language journals and press and journal editorial boards.

Eight papers are assembled here that give an admittedly narrow perspective of today's social issues in archaeology. Alice Kehoe [1], in "Seeing with the Strong Programme", traces the start of the sociology of archaeology to the Strong Programme's (Edinburgh) sociology of science in the 1960s. Questions about both the social milieu of scientists and social justice issues stimulated their inquiries. Kehoe critically examines the influence of Lewis Binford and the path down which he led United States archaeology, through his assertion that Truth could be obtained through behavioral laws and hypothetic-deductive reasoning. Kehoe also exposes the role of Sally Rosen Binford in Lewis Binford's scholarship. Ironically, the historical particularism prior to Binford is even more particularistic today as local and community archaeology has come to the fore.

The Strong Programme inquiry sought to reveal the social conditions under which archaeologists work. Just such an exposure is offered by Kenneth Aitchison [2] in "Professional Archaeology in the UK under COVID-19". Academic and museum archaeologists in the UK suffered more during the COVID-19 shutdown than excavators did due to increased government contracts. COVID-19's impact on women archaeologists' writing has been assessed by several journals with some concluding "impact" and other concluding "no impact" (see Claassen's paper, this collection).

Parity issues among archaeologists persist in 2022. Shawn Lambert and Carol Colaninno [3] in "Bending the Trajectory of Field School Teaching and Learning through Active and Advocacy Archaeology" present the results of a survey among archaeologists working in the Southeastern United States about sexual harassment and assault in field schools. This setting, surprisingly, has been overlooked in earlier assessments of training environments in archaeology [4]. Sixty-six percent of the respondents reported harassment at field school and 13% reported assault. The authors rightly point out that field school is a "mapping on" experience—men learn how to behave as directors and staff and women and sexual



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minorities learn what to fear about fieldwork. Many victims may decide that archaeology is not for them, thus exacerbating the loss of diversity among potential practitioners. What it means for those who stay in archaeology after harassment—the 66%—is not explored, but the two authors, both victimized during field school, now conduct field schools that strive for a safe environment. They foreground recommendations for generating feelings of safety and inclusiveness including the elimination of field hierarchies. Lambert and Colaninno's discussion of empowering fieldworkers will recall those conversations of earlier decades [5,6] about the invaluable perspective at the trowel's edge, perceptions that may go unreported if a field worker is avoiding a staff member or feels belittled by peers. Furthermore, their call for the elimination of personnel hierarchies echoes calls from the early 1990s [7]. Questions of safety are also relevant to differently abled workers and visitors, a concern recently explored by the Society for American Archaeology [8] and in geology [9].

Michael Shott [10] joins Lambert and Colaninno in calling out missed opportunities to increase diversity among archaeologists. Socio-economic class at birth has an impact on who becomes an archaeologist, where they are employed, their scholarly productivity, and possibly, their impact in archaeology as demonstrated by Shott in his paper "Class Barriers to Merit in the American Professoriate: An Archaeology Example and Proposals for Reform". Few authors have examined class specifically which may be due to our society-wide assumption of meritocracy in academia and everywhere else in life. One suggestion Shott makes is for academic programs to eliminate geographical specialties in departmental hires. A department's focus on one region means that there are fewer jobs for good candidates who specialize in a different region and it means that more subpar hires will be made in the favored geography.

Cheryl Claassen's paper "African Archaeological Journals and Social Issues 2014–2021" is the first of two papers to conduct a content analysis of archaeological journals [11]. Looking at three journals that focus on African archaeology, she concludes that gender parity in article authorship has been achieved while a vestige of paternalism remains in the greater number of book reviews with male authors penned by male reviewers and a high proportion of women reviewing women authors. A large number of African countries/archaeologies are missing from the pages of these journals as are the archaeologists who live in and research in those countries.

Beyond parity questions for authorship and book reviews, Claassen examined editorial statements and papers addressing stakeholders and collaborators. Stakeholders in the form of local communities were mentioned with some frequency (as seen through paper titles) with unnamed collaborators appearing primarily in ethnoarchaeological accounts. Editors published statements that were sensitive to travel and research impediments to African archaeologists, and presented ethics statements. Stakeholder politics were most visible in the books reviewed and a few Special Issues. In a 2014 introduction to a Special Issue on ethics, the authors said "While collaborative archaeology is becoming more commonplace it often accomplishes little more than paying local people to excavate and telling communities what has been found" [12].

Lambert and Colaninno [3] assert that "it is the responsibility of the anthropologist to help people convert their awareness of social need into social action" to produce an archaeology that solves real-world problems. This attitude/perspective seems to prevail among anthropological archaeologists trained in North America and Europe today and is represented by two papers included in this Special Issue. However, eight years after the 2014 statement (above), Alice Wright [13], in another journal content analysis paper "From the Trowel's Edge to the Scholarly Sidelines: Community-Based Research in Academic Archaeology 2012–2021", finds that only 1% of articles in eight major archaeological journals could be considered to report on "community-based" archaeology. Wright looked at the type of community (descendent, local, public), the periods explored, the regions, and several other parameters. Co-authorship with community members was rare, the historical period prevailed. Among those few articles, 42% of them were collaborations with descendent

communities and 35% with local communities. Nor was there any increase over these 9 years in published community-based archaeology papers. She concludes with great disappointment, that community archaeology is a “niche methodology”.

Lawrence Moore [14] queries how community archaeology has changed Cultural Resource Management (CRM) in the United States in “Local Knowledge in American Archaeology: A Study in High Context Communication”. He provides an update on the three laws most pertinent to CRM in the United States and notes that agencies conducting archaeological assessments must consult with public and federally recognized tribes. His larger perspective is that this too shall pass and he asserts that this, the Fourth Great Awakening characterized by postmodern archaeological concerns, will last several more decades.

United States laws have pushed the CRM enterprise into community archaeology. As the norm in practice then, Alice Wright’s failure to find it in the eight major archaeological research journals raises a conundrum. Where do we find its impact and record? Perhaps the irony of community-based archaeology is that it isn’t about academics’ goals—the reward of publication, for instance—or that the experience, methodologies, the results may not fit well into an article format. The books of community-based archaeology projects and perspectives reviewed in the three African archaeology journals examined by Claassen (herein) suggest that community-based archaeology is a much larger enterprise or a much less divisible enterprise than field and lab archaeology studies are. The “results” may be, like many non-archaeologists’ community norms, better expressed as oral history and written as narratives, or documented in videos, not the stuff of academic journals. At the least, reporting these projects may require the multivolume publications customary in many CRM projects.

The movement of archaeological theory into arguments for the agency of artifacts and of landscapes suggests that we might consider these entities as other-than-human Beings and fold them into our social realm, thus into the sociology of archaeology. Assaf Nativ’s “A Case for Buried Culture: From an Unknown Known to a Known Unknown” has been included in this collection for just this reason [15]. Nativ speaks of Buried Culture as “post human” and “located beyond our senses and outside the sphere of social operations” both of which could be read as an other-than-human being. Much of what he says in the introduction to his paper reminds me of various Native American experiences and beliefs that our “garbage” is their “ensouled beings” kept and honored as beings or as housing for beings, constituting McNiven’s ritual middening [16]. Aside from this musing, Nativ argues that Buried culture is best interpreted through the lens of aesthetics/art criticism and turns our gaze then upon a mid-last century landfill in Israel. He concludes that “a physically distinct three-dimensional being . . . beings hitherto conceived to be depleted and distorted are now regarded as complete”.

These papers offer the reader glimpses into historical and sociological situations in the United Kingdom, the United States and Africa today, and in some cases, backstepping to the 1960s and 1970s, as well as stakeholders such as excavators, students, CRM companies, descendent and local communities, and archaeological scholars. Many of the authors are concerned with diversity in perspectives believing that this diversity will strengthen archaeological research design, hypotheses, interpretations, and relevance. New sociological relations are being recognized each decade by archaeologists as new solutions. This collection offers a bit of both and anticipates the next compendium. There will always need to be inquiries into the circumstances of archaeological knowledge.

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