# Community Collaboration and Other Good Intentions

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## ABSTRACT

Collaborative and community-based archaeological research encompasses a broad spectrum of approaches; however, there are often discrepancies between how researchers 'sell' the collaborative endeavour in theory and how it is actually practised. Over the past several years, I have had the opportunity to participate in several projects, ranging from those that claimed to be 'truly collaborative,' to research that maybe *should* have asked, 'what community?' These experiences raised difficult and disturbing questions concerning the nature and practice of collaborative and community-based archaeology. In this paper, I confront these issues as I have experienced them personally. While community-based practices aim to redress a historical and ongoing power imbalance between the researcher and the researched, constant vigilance is required lest the 'good intentions' of anthropologists inadvertently mask an exploitation that may be inherent in the structure of research itself. In considering the corporate nature of academia, I query whether the collaborative research model represents a break with the past, or is instead simply the same old practice dressed up in fashionable new language.

Résumé: Les recherches archéologiques menées en collaboration et associant les communautés locales recouvrent un large éventail de méthodes, mais il existe souvent des différences entre la façon dont les chercheurs «vendent» en théorie l'effort de collaboration et comment celui-ci est en réalité pratiqué. Au cours des dernières années, j'ai eu l'occasion de participer à plusieurs projets, allant de ceux qui prétendaient être «une véritable collaboration» à des recherches qui, peut-être, auraient dû se demander «quelle communauté?». Ces expériences ont soulevé des questions difficiles et inquiétantes sur la nature et la pratique de l'archéologie en collaboration et communautaire. J'aborde, dans cette étude, ces questions dont j'ai pu faire personnellement l'expérience. Bien que les pratiques communautaires visent à corriger un déséquilibre de

pouvoir historique et permanent entre le chercheur et les recherches, il est nécessaire d'exercer une vigilance constante afin que les «bonnes intentions» des anthropologues ne cachent pas par mégarde une exploitation pouvant être intrinsèque à la structure des recherches elle-même. Tenant compte du caractère corporatiste du monde universitaire, je me demande si le modèle de recherche en collaboration représente une rupture avec le passé ou n'est pas simplement une ancienne pratique dissimulée sous un nouveau langage à la mode.

Resumen: Los estudios arqueológicos cooperativos y basados en la comunidad abarcan un amplio espectro de enfoques. No obstante, suele haber diferencias entre la forma en que los investigadores «venden» el trabajo cooperativo en teoría y cómo se practica realmente. En los últimos años, he tenido la oportunidad de participar en varios proyectos, desde aquellos que podríamos definir como «realmente cooperativos» a otros en los que se dudaba incluso cuál era la comunidad. Estas experiencias han dado pie a preguntas difíciles e inquietantes en relación con la naturaleza y la práctica de la arqueología cooperativa basada en la comunidad. En este trabajo, abordo estas cuestiones a la luz de mi propia experiencia. Aunque las prácticas basadas en la comunidad tienen como objetivo solucionar el desequilibrio de poder histórico y aún existente entre el investigador y los investigados, se requiere una vigilancia constante para que las «buenas intenciones» de los antropólogos no oculten sin querer la explotación que subyace en la estructura de la propia investigación. Al considerar la naturaleza corporativa del mundo académico, me pregunto si el modelo de investigación cooperativa representa una ruptura con el pasado o si, por el contrario, no es más que la misma práctica de siempre, pero abordada con un lenguaje nuevo y moderno.

> Why does man not see things? He is himself standing in the way: he conceals things.
>
> –Nietzsche 1881.

I am a white, middle-class, able-bodied woman of 33 years, living in a heterosexual relationship in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. My father was Quebecois, born to a middle-class family in the countryside of Quebec, Canada, and was an artist, a federalist, and a manual labourer after

rejecting the career in accounting for which he had attended university. My mother's family were poor farmers from Ireland who emigrated in 1922 to Ontario, Canada, where my mother was raised until she dropped out of high school to join her father and the beatnik movement in Gastown, Vancouver, British Columbia. Together, and later apart, my parents were working-class feminists and hippies who celebrated counter-culture, and instilled in my sister and me anti-capitalist and anti-racist values in the way they lived and in how they treated people. My life has been characterized by upward mobility as my mother became a technology professional, and I eventually entered university as a mature student after my father's death; I am now in the third year of my Doctoral degree at a Tier One international research-intensive university in British Columbia.

Since my undergraduate days, I have become increasingly interested in questions of ethics, human rights, social justice, and anti-colonial practice in archaeology, influenced in large part by the political climate of Aboriginal right and title court cases and land claims in this province. I have come to believe that archaeology has little if anything to do with accessing 'the past,' and instead is mostly about the exercise of power through the production of self-interested and self-referential knowledge. For these reasons, I see that it is necessary to 'locate' myself and my agenda in research, and so in this paper. Presently, I am striving in my degree to approach archaeology as a heuristic tool for self-reflection and therefore as a platform for political action based on challenging the status quo. It is in this spirit that the following is written.

This paper represents the cumulative product of 10 years as a student engaging with archaeology and anthropology, and my encounters with the spectrum of collaborative research. These experiences are situated specifically in the context of research in Indigenous communities in British Columbia, although I believe the analyses presented herein are relevant for community-based projects more broadly. While there are an ever increasing number of edited volumes on collaboration in archaeology, this paper is based firmly on my personal experiences of research relationships, exploring collaboration from a practice-based perspective. As such, this narrative relates my observations as I experienced them, raises the questions that were prompted in me as they occurred, and offers an emerging analysis of an increasingly popular yet problematic trend that I see in archaeology.

## Collaboration: How Did We Get Here?

My career as a student began in a post-NAGPRA era in archaeology.[1] In my coursework, this translated into a focus on the societal relevance and responsibility of archaeology, alongside standard memorization of projectile

point sequences and the details of radiocarbon dating. In the first year of my undergraduate degree, an assignment on archaeological ethics and "Kennewick Man" was used to highlight the participation of Indigenous peoples in archaeology, and demonstrate the importance of working through differing values and commitments between descendant communities and archaeologists to build relationships based on trust, respect, and understanding.

At the end of my second year, I went into the field for the first time as a paid field assistant on a project involving excavation at two village sites on the northern coast of British Columbia, one of which was supervised by my professor and the other, where I primarily worked, by a graduate student who was completing her Doctoral research. Before leaving for the field, I remember telling my family that our research team would be working hand-in-hand with the local First Nation,[2] as all archaeology in British Columbia was done this way. During our second week on site, I began to question this, when three people from the First Nation showed up and wondered what archaeologists were doing there. They had seen our boat travelling to and from the site, which was located in an area of dispute as it was Crown land but within their asserted traditional territory. After brief discussion, they took a copy of the government research permit from the graduate student, which I learned the band was supposed to have approved before it was granted, and then they left. Excavations continued for another week, and then human remains were found.

It was immediately agreed that this find meant excavation would cease in that unit and a new unit would be placed one metre away, which I understood as standard practice when human remains are discovered. However, debate ensued amongst all the archaeologists regarding whether or not to contact the First Nation about the remains, which were probably considered to be ancestral.[3] Some felt that involving the Nation was simply the *right* thing to do, while others suggested we notify them because that was the politically correct thing to do. Still others, including the senior supervisors, said it was not *necessary* to contact 'them,' and instead 'we' should just keep it to ourselves and continue 'our' work, or they might shut down the project—a disaster for both our summer research plans, and the larger project as a whole.

After much discussion, the graduate student directing research at that site did contact the Nation, and her contact there happened to be an archaeologist who was a band member, so she decided to join us for the rest of the summer. She agreed that ceasing excavation and contacting the band had been the right course of action, and was grateful to be on the project. I was also grateful to have her, as it was in talking with her over the weeks that I actually learned about the people whose history I was studying—about land claims, colonialism, and what heritage really means.

At the end of the field season, our excavation team gave a presentation to the Nation. Hardly anyone came, but those who did were glad that we were sharing what we had done. Yet the question they had for us was: why were they not involved from the beginning? And we had no answer.

## Marx's Good Intentions

As my introduction to some of the uncomfortable truths about archaeology, this experience is a microcosm for how the discipline has come to collaboration and why. The history of anthropology is one steeped in colonialism and exploitation, wherein anthropologists, unwittingly and not, acted as facilitators for imperial conquest (McNiven and Russell 2005; Thomas 1994), and archaeologists were often not much more than methodical grave-robbers (Deloria 1992, 1995). We have a nasty history, indeed.

This relationship between anthropologists and the people they study has been one characterized by inequality. At the 2008 Society for American Archaeology plenary session in Vancouver, I attended a paper given by George Nicholas on collaboration wherein he characterized this inequality within a Marxist framework as representing the relations of knowledge production in archaeology (Figure 1). Nicholas drew a comparison between archaeologists and the bourgeoisie, "defined by their monopolization of the means of production," while Indigenous peoples represent the proletariat, "defined by their lack of access to the means of production." In this relationship, the researcher uses his or her position of authority and financial privilege to access a community, extract knowledge or artifacts, and produce publications that are translated into prestige in the academic economy; this process has been termed "scientific colonialism" (Nicholas and
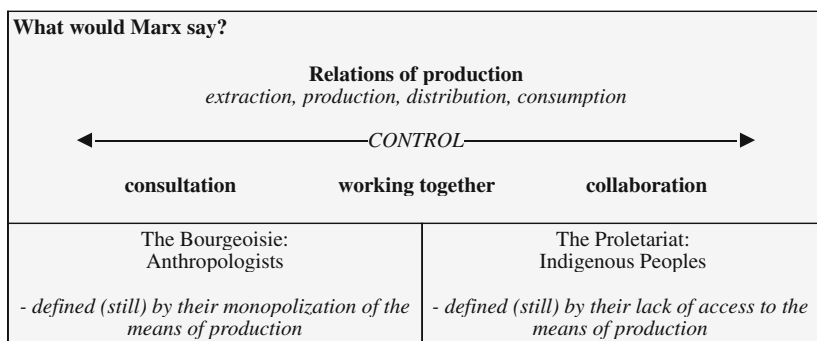
| What would Marx say? | |
|---|---|
| **Relations of production** *extraction, production, distribution, consumption* | |
| ◄────────────CONTROL────────────► | |
| **consultation**   **working together**   **collaboration** | |
| The Bourgeoisie: Anthropologists | The Proletariat: Indigenous Peoples |
| *- defined (still) by their monopolization of the means of production* | *- defined (still) by their lack of access to the means of production* |

**Figure 1.** What would Marx say? Spectrum of control over relations of production (*top*) and the two major 'stakeholders' (*bottom*) in the collaborative endeavour. Modified from Nicholas (2008)

Hollowell 2008). Meanwhile, the researched community receives little to no benefits, and has no control over the information extracted. By all definitions, this is a relationship of exploitation.

A disconnect has thus prevailed between researcher interests and the priorities and needs of the subject community, who remained estranged. Beginning with the many social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Indigenous peoples the world over called for an end to this intellectual exploitation and demanded more control over research (Deloria 1969). Increasingly since then, archaeologists[4] have consulted with Indigenous communities when approaching research in their territories, and incorporated them into the production process (Zimmerman 2006), most often as labourers, liaisons, or paid token representatives; often, these relationships have been characterized as 'working together' (Nicholas 2008).

However, collaboration means much more than either consultation or simply working together. The difference is not just in who does the work, but in who designs the research, who funds it, and how the benefits are distributed (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008:5–6, 10). The goal of collaboration and community-based research is to redress the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched by ensuring equality in this relationship at all stages of the research process (Atalay 2007; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008). These goals are often articulated under the umbrella of decolonization (Smith and Wobst 2005), recognized as "*a long-term process* involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power" (Smith 1999:98, emphasis in original).

## What Does Collaboration Actually *Mean*?

Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson (2008:1) define collaboration as "not one uniform idea or practice but a range of strategies that seek to link the archaeological enterprise with different publics by working together." They articulate four steps in this approach: (1) establish a group of peers "in which research is conducted *with* people—not *on* them or *about* them"; (2) go through cycles of reflection about the research process; (3) find a question important to all inquirers; and (4) make meaning by constructing group knowledge (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008:9). This, they argue, will result in "a more accurate, inclusive, and ethically sound practice" for archaeology (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008:2).

In theory, and on paper, these aspirations appear sound; in practice, however, the flexibility allowed for in this definition means that the boundaries between working together, consultation, and collaboration are not necessarily easy to distinguish. For example, in my fourth year of

university, I participated on a field school in southern British Columbia that was organized closely with the local First Nation and framed by my professor as a collaborative project. The field school crew had a very public presence, often giving site tours to Indigenous visitors; there were also two individuals from the Nation working with the rest of the student crew in the field. Throughout those two summer months, there were a handful of social events, some hosted by the field school students and some by the Nation; as such, there was ongoing interaction between these communities.

Was this collaboration? I don't know. Partly, I am unsure because, as a student, I was not privy to the decision-making process between my supervisors and the Nation that created the project, defined its goals and agreed upon its structure. These matters are perhaps understandably handled by the leaders of both organizations, but this lack of involvement makes it very difficult for students who later want to do collaborative research but have never seen just how it works. As such, and from my perspective as a student, this project did not appear to be collaborative. But, referring back to Nicholas' relations of archaeological production, does that mean necessarily that it was exploitative? I am not certain about that either.

Since then, I have been involved for 3 years as a graduate student teaching assistant on my current university's local field school. This project is advertised formally as a collaborative venture between the university and the local First Nation; the research questions and the methods employed are decided by a steering committee of two professors and one member of the band, and informed by a larger steering group comprised of the First Nation's Council, community, and university professionals. A few people from the Nation have also worked in supervisory roles on the field project, while others have acted as guest speakers. The field school agenda entails striving to meet the priorities of the community as well as teaching archaeology. On this project, I have been present for community information sessions, where people have the chance to contribute their opinion and ask questions; however, it is not at this level that the official decision-making process occurs, and so again I cannot comment on this process. Instead, my involvement has been in the day-to-day, on the ground interaction with the students and community members who visit the field school. This experience has highlighted that relationships are central to collaboration as both its means and its end; it is the nature of these relationships that concerns me.

## Consultation and Capitalism

Although all archaeology involves building relationships, it was not until I hung up my trowel and picked up a notepad and tape-recorder that I

learned the power they held and could affect. In the summer of 2007, I participated on a 6-week ethnographic field school, organized by a professor at my university and based in his own community, a small island Indian Reserve town in northern British Columbia. My project focused on the issue of 'consultation'—what it is, how it works, and what it looks like in practice, specifically investigating the local impact of this process on the Indigenous community. This project was suggested to me by my professor after a large wind energy development was proposed in the Nation's traditional territory. Consulting anthropologists from a large corporate firm were sent into the community by the project proponent to provide a week-long training session for local people to develop a traditional use study (TUS). Such studies are often undertaken in British Columbia as part of the environmental assessment required before developments are approved, and involve interviewing Indigenous community members about traditional plant, animal, and other resource use; these locations are then plotted onto a map for use in the assessment by the governing agencies (see Tobias 2000).

My project involved interviewing community members and the consulting anthropologists, and attending the TUS training session, which was designed to teach community members the tools of anthropology—participant observation, interviewing, note-taking. The TUS project was also described to me by one consulting anthropologist as ''community-based research.'' Since I was learning how to be an anthropologist and doing what my field school professor described as community-based research, this project provided the opportunity for almost mind-boggling reflexivity, and it was by studying how the consultants interacted with community members that I became concerned about the work I was doing.

Central to my concern was the question of *extraction*. I sat in the week-long TUS training session listening to concerns, questions and enthusiasm from the community, and watched the consultants try to keep the conversation on track to cover the basics of map-making, questionnaire design, and interviewing skills. There was one point that the consultants raised again and again, and that was: *how do you make people feel comfortable so they will talk to you?*

## Making People Feel Comfortable

It made me shudder when I first heard this objective stated so casually. I felt it implied insincerity, manipulation, and a 'by all means necessary' approach to securing the objective—in this case, data.

This in turn prompted me to consider the methods that the project developers were using to make the community feel 'comfortable,' to make

their presence acceptable to the First Nation in order for this project to go ahead. While the TUS trainees were taught to make people feel comfortable in their interviews, I came to realize that the TUS itself, within the framework of consultation and especially when paid for by the project proponent, was being used as a goodwill gesture to make the community trust the consultants and developers, by showing them that they respect Indigenous culture, values and traditions. The TUS was, in effect, just another 'trade bead.' In this context, making people feel comfortable *was* manipulating their hopes and fears to further the goal of development, in a power structure that reflects and ultimately contributes to the ongoing process of colonization (see Markey 2001).

Yet as I began to put these pieces together, I also looked very hard in the mirror at what I was doing. How to make people feel comfortable *so that they will talk to you*. Did my work fit into this category? After all, I, too, was trying to make people feel comfortable in my interviews. Was I also being manipulative, even as I protested against these methods? Were the two community 'liaisons' hired by my professor to facilitate interviews for the field school students also another form of manipulation? An internal dialogue raged between the part of me that felt I was doing ethical research—it was even framed by my professor as "collaborative," although I never understood how or why—and the other part that wondered if I was really just one of 'those' anthropologists of years past, who made anthropology for many researched communities a dirty word (Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997:3; Deloria 1969:99–100; Smith 1999:11, 67).

## Wearing the 'Anthropologist at Work' Hat

This uneasiness continued to brew until 2009, when I was able to attend an interdisciplinary workshop at the University of Washington on the topic of community-based participatory research (CBPR), described by Hollowell and Nicholas (2009:147) as "negotiated research practices that build the capacity and expertise of local researchers and share the results and benefits of research among participants and partners." Listening to the discussions of those researchers, who worked in health, environment, archaeology, and beyond, I realized they were also in a sense becoming 'anthropologists,' asking the questions that those in the discipline had been asking for a 100 years about reflexivity, the emic-etic paradox, and how to do ethical research based on principles of democracy and equality. This was the perfect opportunity therefore to look in the mirror at my experiences a little more deeply.

Stressed repeatedly in that workshop was exactly something that I have myself previously stated, and heard others say: collaboration is rewarding

because of the relationship that is formed, which improves the research process and translates into a much better and more relevant end product for everyone. Yet as I listened, my mind drifted back to the words of one of the TUS consultants: "for something like traditional use studies…it's a fundamental requirement that you have community members working with you. You know, *the elders just won't talk otherwise.*"

During that ethnographic field school, my professor told me that "anthropology approximates friendship; it isn't friendship." Encompassed in this statement is the core of my concern about collaboration. What exactly *is* the relationship formed in collaboration? Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson (2008:13) describe it as encompassing "virtues such as civility, benevolence, generosity, loyalty, dependability, thoughtfulness, and friendliness," engendering "professional relationships." What, then, is my responsibility to the people I interview, to the community I am working in? Are we friends? Are we business partners? If I make a joke and we laugh, is this being polite and chit-chatting, or 'greasing the wheels' for me to capitalize on an opportunity to extract data from a source? If the person I am interviewing breaks down in front of me, do I comfort them, or take notes, or do nothing? When does the 'Anthropologist-At-Work' hat come off…or does it?

## Collaboration, a Corporate Model?

Earlier in this paper, I discussed the relationship between researchers and their subject communities as exploitative and capitalist. I suggested that this is why collaboration, and CBPR, are so important: they aim to counter the inequality that characterizes the history of archaeology.

Yet as I thought about the good intentions of those at the workshop, of the projects I had worked on, and of myself as a small fish in this great academic pond, I realized that I have seen an analogy for this. It's called the corporation. The corporation is a community with its own set of values and ideology driven by one end goal: to make money for its shareholders. The challenge for corporations in achieving this goal is to convince consumers to part with their money. This task is increasingly accomplished by appealing through branding and marketing to broader societal values, such as environmental concerns; as Bakan (2004:32) notes, "pious social responsibility themes now vie with sex for top billing in corporate advertising."

While corporations sell an image of social concern and 'people over profits' to consumers, its employees are likewise sold a sense of community and solidarity in purpose by creating a "corporate culture" (Deal and Kennedy 2000) that appeals to a pervasive sense of alienation of the worker from its product and co-workers. Employee motivational and wellness

programs make people feel good about the work they do and the company they work for, so they want it to succeed; this feeds the expectation that the 'end product' is better and more valuable if people are happy creating it (Deal and Kennedy 2000:4–5). These are all corporate tactics of social manipulation, placating workers to be complicit in their own exploitation, and consumers to see corporations as ''part of the solution to world ills, not the cause'' (Bakan 2004:32).

Ultimately, this sort of ''benevolent rhetoric and deeds of socially responsible corporations create attractive corporate images, and likely do some good in the world. They do not, however, change the corporation's *fundamental institutional nature*: its unblinking commitment to its own self-interest'' (Bakan 2004:50, emphasis added). In other words, this is business: the bottom line is still the bottom dollar, and ''good intentions, like good-looking girls, can sell goods'' (Bakan 2004:34).

Thinking about these marketing strategies, I connected the dots and looked again in the mirror, and thought, is this what archaeologists are doing? Making people feel comfortable so 'we' can continue 'our' research. After all, universities are increasingly becoming branded and corporatized (Moghaddam 1997; Steck 2003; Hamilakis 2004; see also Frontline 2010; UBC 2010), and the same relations of production exist in the knowledge economy of academia as in the market economy (Figure 2). Lacking access to the means of production, students are excluded from decision-making processes and serve primarily as labour for research projects, which are marketed as self-interested investments that will lead to a degree and a future of upward mobility into the 'professor' class (a future seldom realized). Unnervingly, the same terminology and hierarchical structure as corporations are also employed, for example in the creation of Steering Groups comprised of Stakeholders who create Brands, have Workshops to discuss Performance, Accountability and Transparency, meet Milestones, and ultimately produce Deliverables. In this case however, the bottom line

| The Market Economy | | The Knowledge Economy |
|---|---|---|
| Corporation | *motivating ideology* | Academia |
| Shareholders | *bourgeois elites* | Professors |
| Employees | *proletariat* | Students |
| Consumers | *resource gatekeepers* | Communities |
| $$$ | *desired resource* | Data |

**Figure 2.** A side-by-side comparison of market and knowledge economies. The boundaries between corporate and academic ideologies, if any exist at all, are hard to identify, despite the notion of 'academic freedom.'

is 'publish or perish,' a currency that also translates into social capital, academic prestige, funding and, ultimately, employment.

Just as anthropology has been seen as the handmaiden of imperialism (Asad 1973), colonialism is inextricably intertwined with capitalism (Amin 1997:137; Smith 1999:21), and this is certainly the case in archaeology. Addressing contemporary Canadian imperialist policy and the cultural assimilation of First Nations, Alfred (2005:135, emphasis added) suggests that the very category of 'aboriginal' as opposed to Euro-Canadian ensures that "settlers can remain who and what they are, and *injustice can be reconciled by the mere allowance of the Other to become one of Us.*" My concern is that, as a colonial discipline, this same paradigm also operates in archaeology: collaboration allows community members to become 'researchers.' However, becoming 'one of us' is deceiving, as upward mobility is restricted. Under the 'working together' model, Nicholas (2008) equated Indigenous peoples with the proletariat class—that is, equivalent to students, *not* Professors, the academic elites. I am not sure that 'collaboration' fixes this. After all, how *is* the power actually shifted when the people, the gatekeepers to and objects of our study, become our partners in it? Does that really alter the bottom line of the knowledge economy? Or does that make the research(ed) community party to what remains fundamentally exploitation?

Handler (2008:115) puts it simply: "despite all our talk about dialogue with the local folks, about constructing a history informed by their oral traditions and useful to them as well as to us, we should not fool ourselves. This sort of work is *our* project, not theirs. They could do very well, in most cases, without it. We could not." Bearing this in mind, what if collaboration, despite all of the good intentions of those who are sincerely committed to 'decolonization,' is really just making everyone *feel better* about continuing an exploitation that may, in fact, be *inherent* in the system?

## Collaboration: Just a Pretty Face?

Since my first field experience, I have learned that 'collaboration' has many faces, but I have become increasingly wary of which ones to trust. If all of the projects I have participated on that were *framed* as collaboration actually *were* collaborative, then this approach represents no break from past practices and does not 'decolonize' anything. This exemplifies precisely the difference between collaboration in *theory* and *practice:* what is said (and written) and what is done. While establishing a check-list for collaboration is far from ideal, more open and honest dialogue is needed about the collaborative model (McManamon et al. 2008:23), rather than more

publications that invariably gloss over the less flattering frustrations and failures. Collaboration is the fancy new buzzword, and there needs to be some consensus on what it actually entails to be sure that archaeologists are not simply dressing up inequity in the language of equality, disguising common self-interest with noble ideology. Indeed, a democratic equality is often espoused as a central tenet of collaborative relationships. Yet Chomsky reminds us that "the more there is a need to talk about the ideals of democracy, the less democratic the system usually is" (Chomsky and Macedo 2000:17). So perhaps there is something even deeper to be concerned about, for if inequality is built into the research model itself, then all of our good intentions may be in vain.

The question remains, what is the alternative? I think often of Audre Lorde's (1984) famous declaration that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. Perhaps collaboration must then be anarchic in order to emancipate (Graeber 2004), creating a new 'space' to avoid merely reifying the inequality this approach seeks to challenge and overthrow (Lefebvre 1991[1974]); perhaps the corporation should not be the model employed, and instead *practice* should precede theorizing. But can one actually 'think outside the box' to affect real social change? Or, as individuals trained in a Western tradition and operating under Western capitalist ideology, are we destined merely to reproduce what came before, which is all we have ever known?

Looking to other disciplines, I found social workers struggling with the same paradox, and feeling the same scepticism of 'community-based research' that has engendered in me distrust of all things 'collaborative,' a term now often used colloquially as a synonym for 'ethical.' Operating in a practice-based discipline, these researchers criticise the current trend of 'community-based research' because they observed how "academic researchers claimed that their research was 'participatory,' but the locus of power and initiation of the research remained firmly grounded in the hands of the academics, not the 'participants'" (Brown and Strega 2005:256). They advocate for a move towards 'anti-oppressive research,' which entails a firm commitment to social justice and political action, and a recognition that all knowledge is about power, "to devise strategies that disrupt patterns of domination" (Dabulkis-Hunter 2002:54).

Unfortunately, I have found that most archaeologists avoid overtly aligning their research with politics. Instead of advocating, archaeologists tend to downplay 'activism,' shifting the focus instead to collaboration as "a dynamic that also works to open up space for other voices in the academe" (Castaneda 2008:71), engendering a "critical multivocality in which multiple perspectives and values are brought together to expand shared historical understandings" (Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010:233). The trend is thus to promote negotiation, compromise, and mutual

understanding through a democratic process. This is a particularly Western, modern, and liberal viewpoint, and one that conveniently excuses archaeologists from taking a stand: by retreating into a rhetoric of democracy, archaeologists become simply apolitical mediators in the process. Perhaps this reticence is because archaeologists "have traditionally operated on the assumption that they are not implicated in the representation and struggles of living peoples and that all such political engagement is negatively charged" (Meskell 2005:123); yet it is the assertion that research can exist independently from our values that enables marginalization in the first place. By not taking a stand, archaeologists become complicit in this process.

Many archaeologists have, however, moved towards examining the political nature of knowledge (e.g. Bender 1998; Holtorf 2005; Pyburn 2007; Shanks and Tilley 1989). They see in archaeology the power "to know the world, to critique the world, and to take action in the world" (McGuire 2008:xi), and thus pursue the opportunity to "disturb the dominant discourse" (Leone 2008:126). These efforts begin with 'locating' oneself in the research, which requires that researchers continually ask themselves: Who is involved in shaping the research topic? What is and is not being explored, and why? Who is funding the research, and what are they getting out of it? Who will do the analysis and write the interpretation, and what is influencing their perspectives? How will the results be published and who will benefit? And, critically, who decided that this was a topic worth studying in the first place, and why?

For some researchers, asking these questions has lead them to believe that "it is unethical to do research in which you have no stake whatsoever…you have to be positioned in it and connected to it" (Absolon and Willet 2005:104). This echoes Foucault (1980[1977]:64), who insisted that "if one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then this is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question." Social workers Potts and Brown (2005:263) stress the need to "shift power from those removed from what is trying to be 'known' to those closest to it—that is, those people with epistemic privilege or lived experience of the issue under study." After all, it follows that "people who have experienced an issue are perhaps the best people to research that issue" (Potts and Brown 2005:259; see Wolf 1996 for a thorough discussion of the complexities of this).

However, a commitment to this approach challenges the identities of all who engage in research, blurring the roles of experts, teachers, students, and subjects, and leaving some empowered and others dislocated. This shift in control shakes the very foundations upon which the ivory towers are constructed, from whence academic privilege stems. But without challenging the foundations of academic power and our own locations

within that structure, collaborative archaeology becomes simply "an ideologically white middle-class notion of politics that ties itself to securing footholds within existing power structures rather than critiquing the fundamental racism inherent in those institutional structures" (Mullins 2008:117). Indeed, multivocality appears to be a central tenet of collaborative research, but this becomes merely rhetoric (like marketing 'socially-responsible' corporations) when archaeologists continue to insist that they are still the experts of the 'past' (e.g. McGuire 2008:63); the voices of archaeologists, in professional literature, throughout the media, on the courtroom witness stand, and in the field, continue to be privileged above the communities whose heritage is studied. Advocating for community control over research, and yet maintaining that archaeologists still have authority, sounds suspiciously familiar: something like, "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell 1996[1945]:133).

## Beyond Collaboration

In the spring of 2009, Alison Wylie came to the Anthropology department at the University of British Columbia to speak on the issue of collaboration and why archaeologists should do it, from an epistemological and scientific perspective. At the end of her talk, one audience member, a colleague of mine, raised the very issue that had been playing in my mind. He said, collaboration is great, we all agree about its benefits and the reasons to do it; however, it is also not enough, because the issue on the table is more than just equality. For the First Nations in British Columbia, as elsewhere throughout the colonized world, it is about self-representation and self-determination, and it is about *sovereignty*.

In the knowledge economy, collaboration facilitates the extraction of data from precisely those communities that 40 years ago demanded control over research affecting them. Rather than give up this control, archaeologists have instead advocated for collaborative relationships. This has meant that archaeologists can keep doing what they want to do: archaeology. For example, Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson (2008:13) argue that collaborative work "is grounded in the experiences of community members," and yet insist that the archaeologist "is not outside of the research experience but necessarily and fundamentally a *part of it*" (2008:10, emphasis added). McGuire (2008:45) similarly argues that "knowledge and critique should be based in a genuine understanding of *the experience of the social group* whose interest their [archaeologists'] scholarship serves," and yet suggests that researchers can and should "have some *independence from the social groups* and interests that we serve" (2008:94–95), therefore "the key to praxis lies in *collaboration*" (2008:232; emphases added). Nicholas and

Bannister (2004:346) openly recognize that there is *always* an agenda at hand, yet then call for ''sharing'' of power and ''working cooperatively'' without addressing the crucial question: on what basis do archaeologists claim the right to have *any* control? And is that right justified? Without engaging in these difficult and challenging questions, efforts at collaboration read as simply another way that elites are protecting their privilege. As one researcher put it, ''Euro-Canadian knowledge producers generally espouse such views because, among other things, *it keeps them in a job*'' (Dabulkis-Hunter 2002:100, emphasis added). Indeed, the sheer volume of literature recently produced about 'collaborative archaeology' demonstrates its currency in the academic economy; archaeologists are still 'getting rich' off of this stuff.

For these reasons, I suggest that the continuum of consultation to collaboration needs a new end point—one that not every community will necessarily want or even every project need, but one that archaeologists, as 'outsider researchers' (Dabulkis-Hunter 2002), must nonetheless be prepared for. Archaeology is a technical craft; thus, in this model, archaeologists do not *drive* research, but rather, if invited, act as *technicians* for the vehicle. If we are truly committed to 'decolonization' (a problematic concept in itself), we need to be prepared to go beyond collaboration, beyond 'sharing,' to change the roles we *still* play in perpetuating systemic inequality, and to relinquish control over the engine of research entirely. The result could be truly community-based projects with internally-set agendas, as some archaeologists have already argued for (e.g. Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997:18; McNiven and Russell 2005:230; Yellowhorn 2002; see also Alfred 2009); some archaeologists may become *employees* of these communities, as many already are. This may not avoid replicating some power structures, and it may not necessarily produce the kind of democracy idealized by archaeologists in *their* vision of decolonization; conversely, it may end up creating precisely the anarchic 'new space' that is needed. *But this is not the point; the point is about power.* Giving up control respects the repeated call for self-determination and sovereignty, with power firmly in the hands of the people who are most closely affected by what research they choose to do. Critically, under this model, they can also decide *not* to do research in the first place, an option that simply does not exist for shareholders in the knowledge economy. For archaeologists, giving up this control may also result in professional and personal dislocation, and a serious reassessment of ''not just ethics but the nature of anthropology itself and of modernity as well'' (Meskell and Pels 2005:8); yet this is a necessary undertaking to reform an endeavour founded on colonialist and capitalist epistemology.

I may be out on a limb here, and some readers may feel that my critique is a little extreme. Indeed, I realize that there is probably 'good work' being done in the name of collaboration, and that meaningful relationships

are being made, with benefits for many. I, for example, have already bene-fited by publishing this paper, thereby increasing my academic capital. Yet the problem is not one that can be cured by individuals with good inten-tions, as it exists in the structure of research itself, and so ''these same individuals, when they are employed or are rewarded by elite power struc-tures that are founded upon racist ideologies, sustain these structures'' (Dabulkis-Hunter 2002:77). As Biolsi and Zimmerman (1997:6) note,

> systems of domination—colonialism and racism, among them—have remark-able abilities to appease and contain resistance and to appear (at least to some) as not oppressive; and all emancipatory openings face the ongoing threat of cooptation. Some things have remained very much the same…

That which is comfortable may be all too *familiar*; archaeologists should thus be wary of making themselves, and others, feel too comfortable with their perspectives, positions and practices. Social change just isn't that easy. What is required, is constant vigilance.

Therefore, despite the celebrated benefits of collaboration, I believe the critique presented here is a good limb to venture out on, indeed an essen-tial one; for when we stop looking inwardly and honestly at our own agen-das, then we very easily slide into what is familiar. Our history has shown this as a path that no one wants to return to.

## Acknowledgments

## Notes

1. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act was passed in 1990 in the United States of America. It represents a milestone in the formal relationship between Indigenous peoples and heritage professionals, and is

frequently discussed in textbooks to highlight issues of archaeological ethics. The impact of the Act is therefore felt throughout archaeology organizations and institutions in Canada, where no equivalent legislation exists, as well as more broadly in colonized countries.

2. The traditional territories of many First Nations in British Columbia overlap geographically. However, in all of my field experiences that involved 'the local First Nation,' any competing claims to the area/site by other Nations were not discussed openly amongst the professors, students, and community representatives.

3. The British Columbia Archaeology Branch policy on 'Found Human Remains' stipulates that human remains discovered at an archaeological site covered by a permit should remain undisturbed if discovered in situ, and be handled according to the wishes of the relevant cultural group(s), who should be contacted by the project director.

4. Throughout this paper, I make the distinction between 'archaeologists' and 'communities.' This is to highlight the nature of the relations of production between these groups as 'classes,' and is not signifying either a racialized dichotomy (i.e. communities as Aboriginal and archaeologists as non-Aboriginal) or implying that communities are homogeneous entities.

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