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Editors

# Collision or Collaboration

Archaeology Encounters Economic Development

# Chapter 13
# Developing Archaeology

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## Introduction

In this paper I will argue, and I believe most archaeologists who work with living communities will agree, that the best reason for archaeologists to participate in economic development is to promote human rights. Many archaeologists still see their major motivation as "preservation," but experience has shown that colonially inspired term to be problematic, and programs that attempt to enforce global values at a local level to be unsustainable. Increased community access to opportunities and resources through development is seen as a means for increasing self-determination. But the results of economic development programs are complex and often unpredictable; many competing interests are usually involved and not all the powerful actors are concerned with human rights (Pyburn 2007).

When archaeology is involved in development, sites are usually expected to contribute to revenue generated through tourism. But how this translates into "development" is varied and often unspecified. Tourist dollars can benefit any number of social programs, some of which help local and descendant communities by offering wage labor and markets for crafts; some of which oppress them by relegating them to poorly paid service roles and rudely commoditizing their heritage. There is always a trade-off between government agendas and local needs. It is commonplace for the locals to get the short (and progressively shorter) end of the stick to such an extent that the development program fails (Bregglia 2006; Gould and Paterlini, Chap. 10, this volume), or if it succeeds it fails to have a positive effect on human rights.

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Although archaeologically based economic development projects are becoming commonplace, most projects are still seat-of-the-pants efforts and assessment is still a new idea, so it is hard to evaluate an approach (Atalay 2012; Nicholas 2010). How can we navigate between the Scylla of unbridled and exploitative capitalism and the Charybdis of paralyzing anticolonialism to help the people whose heritage is in the test pit, to preserve the heritage that many stakeholders (including archaeologists) revere, and find something out about the past?

Aware of these pitfalls, archaeologists have turned to the communities where they work, seeking advice on how to improve their practice (Pyburn 2014; Atalay 2012; Nicholas 2010; Hollowell and Nicholas 2009; Castaneda and Matthews 2008; Little and Shackel 2007). However, despite the rise of concern among archaeologists for grass roots movements and inclusionary development programs that emphasize community participation, development from below is still development. Programs aimed at development, education, and self-determination simultaneously define target communities as lacking in these qualities. d'Iribarne (2011) summarizes the problem of community development succinctly as a choice between promoting a western idea of cooperation at the community level and identifying and developing preexisting local ideas of cooperation—or giving up. Local variations in local conditions make it impossible to responsibly promote any single strategy (see Gould, Chap. 12, this volume).

But despite cultural variation in how communities view entrepreneurship, management, collaboration, and profits, a community by definition entails commonalities of residence, property, consumption, and subsistence. Decades of research and analysis led Elinor Ostrom (1990) to identify an economic strategy that seems highly compatible with the sort of community engagement that many archaeologists now espouse. For an archaeologist hoping to contribute to community development, treating archaeological heritage as a common pool resource (CPR) for primary stakeholders seems like a way to develop a sustainable tourist economy. A sustainably developed CPR could provide the economic stability that many believe underpins human rights. But observing a strategy is not the same as creating one.

CPR puts control of resources in the hands of the local and often descendant groups, whom many now consider to be the primary stakeholders in the economic development of heritage resources. The idea of a "common pool" seems like an alternative to the worst kind of top-down project resulting in capitalistic competition for private property that critics argue characterizes development (Hamilakis 2015; Hutchings 2013). But creating such a collaboration from scratch within a local community could take years to accomplish and would probably not work. However, a community that already has a system of pooled resources and has volunteered to add archaeology into its community resource pool would be too tempting to pass up. So I tried it.

## Developing Chau Hiix

In 1989, I began a collaboration with the Village of Crooked Tree in northern Belize on a project that had all the earmarks of CPR development. The village had previously collaborated with the Massachusetts Audubon Society to establish their wetlands as a bird sanctuary, which had the dual benefit of circumscribing access to the resources of the sanctuary and creating a tourist destination. Tourists then became one of the pooled resources of the sanctuary.

The Crooked Tree Wildlife sanctuary never functioned to prevent residents' access to its game and grasslands; the sanctuary designation served to keep outsiders from exploiting village territory, though some sorts of exploitation such as the use of large nets to collect fish were curbed and became controversial. In addition, the sanctuary attracted a steady stream of tourists into the village who often hired local guides, patronized village eateries, and stayed in Crooked Tree's guest lodges. The sanctuary had been functioning for several years before I was approached by the village chairman, who thought that the archaeological site near the village could be a similar source of sustainable revenue for the village by increasing the flow of visitors. The chairman explained to me that the ruins had recently been disturbed by outsiders (paralleling the ongoing problem with the village wetlands), and that the village wanted to develop a project at the site that would result in a tourist attraction. He knew that Belize law requires an experienced and credentialed archaeologist to prepare a site for tourism; he had quietly investigated my methods and decided I would do. He invited me to Crooked Tree to "see some mounds." At the time he particularly emphasized that my help was needed to get the government to support preservation of the site, since control of all archaeological sites and resources is legally the responsibility of the Belize government. For me, having already had my fill of archaeologists' exploitation of local resources with little or no attempt to engage with local communities, this invitation was nothing short of magical.

Although I had never heard of CPRs and so didn't know that the key to success is in community governance (Gould 2014, and Chap. 12, this volume), I did know something about economic development so I did two things immediately. I made an agreement with the village chairman that all the hiring for the project would be done through the village council, who would set the terms of employment, and that all people employed on the project would come from the village. I reasoned that since I would come with a permit to excavate granted by the government, the village would not be able to control me or my practices. Since my goal was to put as much control into the hands of the villagers as possible, an elected village council overseeing hiring was the best I could do. To create sustainable site preservation, the village needed a stake in the site, and top-down management by me or the government would probably have a negative effect. Fortunately, the village council system provided a handily available infrastructure already in use for grass roots development of the sanctuary.

The second thing I did was consult with the Commissioner of Archaeology, Harriot Topsey, about how to go about developing the site for tourism. The site was relatively inaccessible, which I regarded as a crucial asset since it would mean that the villagers could control access, and the commissioner agreed to make every effort to get the site into the general development plan for the country. I asked if he would consider a community museum, and he said that while at that time community museums were illegal and insecure, such a museum was being considered at another site and he would take my request into account. He understood perfectly why a local museum would enhance the value of the site for villagers and tourists and consequently the likelihood of sustained site preservation.

I should emphasize here that the decision to work at Chau Hiix was not driven by my research interests. I was planning a second season in another location and not intending to take on investigation of the monumental center of an ancient community. But it was clear that for Chau Hiix to become a destination for tourists and therefore a valuable resource that Crooked Tree villagers would protect, monumental structures would need to be displayed, and vulnerable deposits would need to be curated. Bringing visitors to the site without taking the precaution of removing easily lootable objects would be irresponsible. So I developed a research design that incorporated what I deemed to be important questions about Maya history that could be addressed by excavating the monuments at Chau Hiix. And I combined these responsibilities with research into the lives of ancient people that was more valuable to me as a scholar than research questions that reify elite power and discount the agency of ordinary people.

The villagers knew what they wanted, but they needed my help. A good example of my relationship with Crooked Tree is how the site was named. When I first visited, the site, like many sites in Belize, it was called "Indian Hill." The chairman and several villagers argued that the site needed a name that was more distinctive. The village council wanted a Maya name rather than a Creole name so tourists would know it was a Maya site, but no one in the village spoke a Maya language. A visiting anthropologist who spoke Kekchi suggested Chau Hiix—a Maya word meaning jaguarondi—because we had seen one when a group of village council members and anthropologists had visited to the site together.

Altun Ha, about 40 km away from Chau Hiix is the closest known site (Pendergast 1990); it is a common tourist destination. The central precinct has been completely exposed and very little tree cover is left to provide shade or animal habitats. I was concerned that excavation and reconstruction of Chau Hiix did not disrupt the natural habitats for birds and other animals that attracted tourists to the village sanctuary. I consulted with biologists and locals to decide what buildings to reconstruct and which to leave alone, which trees to remove that were destroying buildings, and which ecologically valuable trees should have priority over the protection of ancient structures. I walked over the site with Harriot Topsey and got his permission to leave certain trees and we devised a preliminary plan for the partial reconstruction of key buildings.

At this point (though I didn't know it) I had the "principles for designing governance structures for CPRs" more or less in place (Ostrom 1990:88–104), cited in Gould, Chap. 12, this volume):

- The individuals or households who have rights to withdraw resource units from the CPR—the appropriators—must be *clearly defined*, as must be the boundaries of the CPR itself. In my case this was the village, under the direction of the village council, who had no trouble defining "resident."
- The rules for appropriating resources from the CPR must be *congruent with local conditions*. Villagers were already aware of and receptive to the government restriction on site destruction and looting and depended on government regulations for support of their plan for sustainable development based on site preserva-

tion. The local conditions were met by placing the hiring in the hands of the village council. Control of tourism was already handled under their control of the sanctuary through the village council and the villagers who were paid by Audubon to be sanctuary wardens.

- The operational rules of the CPR may be modified though *collective choice arrangements* that give most individuals the right to participate. This was met because the village council was an elected (collective choice) body, and I had given the council the power to decide and regulate employment. The sanctuary wardens were ostensibly Audubon employees, but as villagers they generally acquiesced to the village council. My project put me in a position that was structurally similar to theirs; I was permitted by the Belize government and funded by outside sources (the US National Science Foundation [award numbers 9223103, 9507204] and Indiana University), but my relations with the village, that in all practicality controlled access to the site as well as my access to labor and supplies, was controlled by the village council. It is important to note that this was because of a decision I made that was not forbidden but not entirely approved by the government of Belize, which is understandably jealous of its control of the heritage resources that fuel its economy.
- Those who *monitor appropriations* from the CPR are either accountable to the appropriator or are themselves the appropriators. I shared information about my grants and project budgets and government tax documents with the elected village council chairman (the incumbent changed several times during the course of the Chau Hiix Project); the chairman knew what money was available for hiring, for camp upkeep, for consolidation, and for training and made decisions on allocation of resources with me. At one point I was asked by certain employees for a raise in salary (at that time I was paying the highest wages of any archaeologist working in Belize, John Morris, *pers. comm.*). I took their request to the village council and carefully laid out that season's budget for excavation. I explained that as I didn't have any more money that year it would be necessary to either cut other salaries or layoff people to increase salaries. I reminded them it was up to them to decide who would be cut. The grumbling stopped.
- Low-cost, efficient mechanisms are rapidly available to *resolve conflicts* among the appropriators. The infrastructure needed for this was already in place in the village council; when relations with the council failed (as they did in 2001), Belize's archaeological commissioner stepped in and negotiated with the village council.
- The community of appropriators should have *minimal recognition* by external government authorities of their right to organize. Though the government of Belize recognizes the elected leadership of Crooked Tree and the Department of Archaeology stepped in when necessary (one chairwoman suggested that I be thrown out and the village be allowed to excavate the site themselves), government prefers not to interfere in village politics.
- And, for CPRs that are elements of larger systems, all of these rules are organized in *multiple layers of nested enterprises* that assign responsibilities to the lowest possible levels in the structure. The tourist hotels and guide services in the village could be construed as "nested" within the regulations for the Audubon Center, which, along with the Chau Hiix Project was nested in the village council

governing structure, which was then nested within the governing structures of the country of Belize regarding archaeological sites. In practice, there was usually some confusion over authority in a given instance.

Perhaps because most of the governing criteria were met, the Chau Hiix project collaboration with Crooked Tree Village lasted for 17 years. The event that spelled its ultimate demise was the premature death of Harriot Topsey in 1995, because the Chau Hiix tourism development plan died with him. The new commissioner was (rightly) skeptical that enough tourists would find their way to the site to make it worth government investment in preservation. As I was already deep into a program of research, I continued to hire, and train villagers to map, draw artifacts, process artifacts, dig, and teach field school students to dig. I also continued to negotiate with the government to enlist support for preservation of the site; since it was not forthcoming, I covered the cost of the site watchman myself.

I made every effort to jump-start tourism. At the request of the village I advertised in *Archaeology Magazine*, I negotiated with Audubon to get the site formally incorporated into the sanctuary, I trained tour guides, I created displays for village festivals, I welcomed visitors during my excavations and gave tours myself, I put up information signs on the site. But unfortunately, the only real common pool resource from Chau Hiix was me, and the salaries and opportunities I and my field school students and participants brought to the village. I finally realized that without government support no amount of input from me would make preservation of the site sustainable beyond my death, so I stopped paying the watchman. Since the site was much too large to actually be protected by a single isolated watchman, the watchman was really a symbolic figure for the village, signaling my commitment to come back every year. The villagers protected the site because they were protecting their common resource—me. When I stopped his salary, they no longer saw any reason to protect Chau Hiix. When the site was subsequently damaged by villagers (see http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/85755), the damage was to the structures of the archaeology camp. The burglar bars, wooden doors, and tin roof were salvaged from the cement block bodega I had built to contain many years of collected and cataloged artifacts. Clearly it was these project resources rather than the Maya archaeological resources that Creole Crooked Tree villagers felt belonged to them.

## Research for Developing a Better World

One day the village chairman stuck me in a receiving line to welcome some political dignitaries who were visiting Crooked Tree. Standing between the village nurse and the village policeman, I was introduced as the village archaeologist. At the time I was charmed by this public display of acceptance, but in retrospect I can see how it signaled what would go wrong. The nurse and the policemen were permanent village resources, no matter who filled the role, the role would remain. But village archaeologist is not a permanent job.

Had there been ongoing and permanent government support for the development of Chau Hiix as a tourist destination, I believe we could have achieved a reasonably sustainable program of economic development. Many of the papers in this volume describe similar problems; where economic development is most needed, resources and infrastructure for archaeological development and preservation are likely to be scarce. Governments have to make hard choices among possible development projects, and in a country like Belize, where there is an embarrassment of archaeological riches, some choices are more cost effective than others. As outsiders most archaeologists are not in a position to do more than encourage local infrastructure with publicity and grants, which have a limited time frame. Even when large-scale research and development goes on for decades, this is only the blink of an eye in archaeological time.

Harriot Topsey felt strongly that the common pool idea that underlies the unofficial national motto of Belize, "All a we da one," trumped identity politics and that the Creole village of Crooked Tree would be perfectly capable and willing to care for Maya Chau Hiix in perpetuity as a community resource. Had Topsey survived and made good on his promise to connect the national infrastructure of guards and guides to Chau Hiix through Crooked Tree, the village economy could have continued to benefit from the site without my presence, but no development program is permanently sustainable. Government partisanship, multinational interests, the market vagaries of tourism, unstable community politics, climate change, and innumerable other factors influence the persistence of archaeological heritage over millennia. Chau Hiix is already 3000 years old.

As an archaeologist, I was neither permanent nor able to greatly influence government decisions. The Chau Hiix Project brought one-half million dollars in wages and resources into the tiny village of Crooked Tree (population ca. 500) and during the 17 years of its life more children went to high school, a number of houses were built, and plenty of cows were purchased. But the preservation of the site today is as informal as it was before I came to Crooked Tree, and the site's present contribution to economic development is negligible. Perhaps 17 years in the context of an impoverished community is as sustainable as could be expected. I believe the CPR approach was the correct strategy for the development of Chau Hiix and I consider its application successful, and an indication that a CPR could achieve longer lived success in other circumstances.

But I believe archaeologists have something to offer that affects economic development indirectly that may have a more sustainable impact and a more direct impact on human rights. Archaeologists whose work feeds development—those who find the things that go into the national museum that promote respect for glamorous heritage and clear the way for economically desirable hotels and shops to be built conveniently near the presentable portion of the site—and those who consult on packaging the reconstruction of structures and histories for tourists will feel they have done their best. But have they? Archaeologists who take an ethnographic turn and work to mediate between developers and governments and communities to empower local and descendant groups strive to meet an ethical and moral responsibility to the living, but have we lost sight of our professional responsibility to mediate between the present and the past?

Archaeologists, whether foreign researchers or managers of resources related to their own patrimony or heritage, can certainly contribute to short-term development schemes, like the one that succeeded in Crooked Tree for 17 years. In general, the project had a positive legacy through salaries to villagers, training for local guides, educational outreach, and the collection and preservation of data, so it was worthwhile. But whether such programs are sustainable is not really in our control because archaeologists are not (and I would argue should not be) in control of either the top or the bottom of the system. We are not government officials or villagers. But we can control the focus, import, and impact of our research and that control can have repercussions in the present which we can ignore, sell, or try to handle responsibly.

## Archaeology, Development, Human Rights

Like many social scientists (e.g., Ostrom 1990), Richard Salisbury accepted Polanyi's (1944) substantivist position. But he rejected the Polanyi typology of economical cultures, seeing that to define a culture according to whether exchange systems followed rules of reciprocity, redistribution or the market (Salisbury 1968:480)—i.e., by contrasting its economy to capitalism—was both ethnocentric and imperialistic. Nevertheless, 50 years later many archaeologists remain unreflexive and continue to think about cultural institutions as integrated systems with predictable interactions and trajectories of change that evolve from simple to complex (aka capitalism), adhering to a slim hierarchy of typological options. I have argued elsewhere that this sort of cultural essentialism that permits archaeologists to treat the past in sweeping terms (rise, decline, collapse) has nasty political implications in the present (Pyburn 2014; Hutson et al. 2012). For development engineers the implications are similar, so this is one area where archaeological entanglement with the political present ought to entail great concern; not just whether our efforts support the inevitability of the rise of capitalism (which is simplistic), but whether our research programs treat the past responsibly.

I believe the most important area in which archaeologists can contribute to development is through their research. Too many people, including many archaeologists, are too intent on "finding things"—without concern for which things or where the ideas that underlie the selection and valuation of things originate. The results of this type of investigation will always be to verify that "everything we know is true." These programs discover an expected past with endemic violence, political control by wealth-displaying elites, despotic kings, "advances" based on technology, male dominance, environmental overexploitation, Malthusian population growth, and economic systems based on false consciousness. The past these research programs describe was different, but only in certain preordained ways. I am not arguing that the world was not different in the past, I am arguing that archaeologists need to pay more attention to where ideas about the difference come from, and think about using our research to question the status quo rather than creating a pedigree for it. Challenging reconstructions of the past seems to me to be a

surprisingly underutilized way for the less powerful to use heritage as a stage to bring their concerns to a wide audience, regardless of the efforts of their government or multinational developers to undermine local control.

To take a responsible stance on preservation and development, archaeologists must first consider what archaeological data are valuable to the cultural context of their research, and this cannot rest solely on "finding things." The UNESCO distinction between tangible and intangible heritage (UNESCO n.d.) muddies the water around such decisions by suggesting that material heritage is not defined by intangible values. In reality, a building is not heritage; all "heritage" is intangible, whether it is attached to a song, a meal, or a palace. What archaeologists discover and how we interpret what we discover has a significant impact on what becomes heritage. Neither the development context nor the academic import of archaeology is paramount in crafting a research design; our ultimate concern—which takes both scholarship and contemporary political economy into account—must be human rights.

Scholarly priorities will vary and conflict among professionals and may be irreconcilable with varied local values or political context. Nevertheless, it is often the case that the archaeologist may be in the best position to realize the potential of their research findings to promote positive economic change and strengthen the voices of local communities in national and international arenas. What I am arguing is that archaeologists consider using their authority on research priorities and preservation requirements strategically. Chronological sequences that seek to determine the priority of one culture over another; reconstructions of ancient technological or environmental missteps; or pedigrees of violence, sexism, and intolerance developed by locating their origins in the past are typical research agendas that have predictable political outcomes (not to mention obvious cultural origins). But most research agendas can address human rights without losing scholarly integrity. Defining past economies in simple contrast to the present essentializes both and misses the opportunity to empower the living with a human connection to the past—to their past—to our past; to see ourselves in the other, not simply as a reflection or a contradiction but in human terms dealing with human issues.

Intellectual freedom is not intellectual license; it comes with a burden of integrity and humility. Investigating the agency and creativity of ordinary people in the sweep of history, looking at very old cultures for evidence of sustainability, reconstructing historical divisions and conflicts as contextual and not defining moments of heritage will not impinge on our scholarly integrity. Considering the questions, concerns, economic needs, and political conditions of people who have been silenced and oppressed as we design our research and craft our interpretations of the past is not bad science, it is responsible science. Such an approach will not always produce a positive reaction from governments and developers who fund us, but it is time for archaeologists to think more carefully about why we find certain things and not others and whether our finds have only one interpretation.

What the archaeology of Chau Hiix has to say about the Maya past may yet have a lasting impact on human rights, despite the failure of the Chau Hiix Project to have a sustainable impact on contemporary human needs. The Chau Hiix Project did find things, but we went at the research intent on challenging ideas about the past that

damage and restrict the present. Project members recovered information about an environmentally specific and unique agricultural system that was sustained for centuries, an elaborate and sustained trade in commodities and food that reached households throughout the settlement, and indications of a well-fed and healthy community that survived into the seventeenth century, and therefore pose a serious challenge to the concept of a Maya "collapse" (Andres 2009; Pyburn 2003, 2008). If the past of politically oppressed people cannot be written off as a collapse, if noncorporate agriculture cannot be ignored as unsustainable, if family farms cannot be blamed for global warming, if ancient economies can be investigated for what they have to tell us about unique forms of consumer culture and ancient (dare I say) capitalism, then archaeologists really do have something to say about development that could make a sustainable contribution to human rights.

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