

Myth of the Anasazi: Archaeological Language, Collaborative Communities, and the Contested Past

CHIP COLWELL-CHANTHAPHONH

Denver Museum of Nature and Science, USA

‘Anasazi’, the term archaeologists have used since the 1930s to describe the ancient Pueblo inhabitants of the American Southwest, is today a contested word — contested for misconstruing the Navajo concept of *Anaasáží*, misrepresenting the Pueblo past, misleading the public, and misdirecting archaeological research. This essay examines how this single word, when unpacked, can provide insights into the larger issues of identity, affinity, and authority infused in archaeological practice. I argue that the fundamental questions about archaeology’s operation in the world are prompted by — and perhaps ultimately can be resolved by — collaborating with descendant communities through methods that move across anthropology’s disciplinary boundaries, from archaeology to ethnography. Who is — and who should be — empowered to interpret the ancient past? This is the tangled question at the heart of the controversy over ‘Anasazi’. Its answer will help not only elucidate archaeology’s labyrinthine past with Native peoples, but also illuminate the potential for the discipline’s engaged and ethical future.

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Introduction: power and language

Anasazi. What does this word conjure? For the archaeologist: farmers living in the northern American Southwest between AD 300 and 1500, the forebears of the contemporary Pueblo peoples (Stuart, 2000: 217). For the public: a mysterious ancient tribe who one day vanished, like smoke, into the air (Reed, 2004: 8). For the Navajo traditionalist: they are the *Anaasáží* or ancient enemy (Holt, 1983: 595), the ancients who severed their roots to the earth and so ‘serve as a reminder of death and destruction in the midst of life’ (McPherson, 1992: 3). For the modern Puebloan: a scientific invention, an affront that divorces Pueblo people from their own ancestors and heritage (Widdison, 1991: 33). ‘Anasazi’ invokes an array of arguments, histories, and worldviews.

The language of archaeological practice shapes not only our conceptualizations of the past, but also social relations of power in the present. The scientific process of naming people and places is deeply rooted in the colonial projects of the last five centuries. As David Hurst Thomas (2000: xxxviii) has written about the Americas, 'the single most enduring theme throughout the centuries of Indian-Euroamerican interaction involves the power to name, which ultimately reflects the power to conquer and control'. In turn, the effort to rethink and re-imagine the names and labels ascribed to the world is a step towards self-determination and self-definition for Native peoples. As modern archaeology was conceived in the womb of colonialism (Trigger, 1984; Schmidt and Patterson, 1995; van Dommelen, 1997; Hall, 2000; McNiven and Russell, 2005), so the discipline's language has often served to conceptualize and communicate colonialist authority. The Cameronese writer Bongasu Tanla Kishani (1994) has indicted colonial agents for demeaning African languages, framing them as unofficial, non-administrative, local, and non-scientific, while elevating European languages as inherently official, administrative, universal, and scientific. These implicit operations of language have long underpinned African colonial life. To undo them, Kishani (1994: 97) asserts that, 'African language research, policy, and practice need to remain, not only indigenous and African-centred in their orientations, but also, serviceable first and foremost to Africans'.

In North America, researchers working from indigenous perspectives have similarly emphasized the need to find a new language for archaeology (Million, 2005; Blom et al., 2006; Martinez, 2006). Joe Watkins (2006) has compellingly argued not that scientific terms should be mindlessly discarded, but rather that archaeologists must become more aware of how their words are interpreted by different publics. 'It is important that we move beyond the elementary idea that merely talking with or telling the public is enough,' Watkins maintains, 'it is important that we move on to actually communicating with them' (2006: 101–102). In one example, Watkins describes how the term 'abandonment' is often misused, and hence misinterpreted, to mean that a place has been permanently deserted and disowned. When archaeologists unthinkingly say that a place like Chaco Canyon has been abandoned — to mean that particular sites were vacated permanently, or perhaps that the broader landscape was depopulated — they are implicitly repudiating how the canyon has remained a place of spiritual force for generations of Native communities. Pilgrimages are still made, and prayers are still offered for this preternaturally stark land (Begay, 2004; Kuwanwisiwma, 2004; Swentzell, 2004). Moreover, the single term 'abandonment' masks an array of social behaviours, including immigration, emigration, aggregation, dispersal, and enduring religious connections, thereby disregarding more complex histories of human movement (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson, 2006a: 38). Like 'abandonment', 'Anasazi' is a problematic term because it obscures our understanding of past lives and it denies ongoing relationships between ancient and living peoples. 'Anasazi' is not a timeless or naturally effective phrase, but one that emerged and has changed in specific discursive settings.

This article aims to explore the historical meanings of Anasazi for different stakeholders; the questions of identity, affinity, and authority that arise from a contested idiom; and how ethnographic approaches can both decipher and transform the social context of archaeological language. In this way, 'Anasazi' serves as a foil to examine

the socio-political and ethical dynamics of the scientific lexicon, and contribute to recent queries on language and narratives in archaeology (e.g., Silberman, 1995; Pluciennik, 1999; Ballard, 2003; Bender et al., 2007). Among the more important volumes on these themes is Rosemary Joyce's (2002) singular book, but the discussion presented here seeks to examine not so much the process of archaeological writing, as the cultural climate in which the language of archaeology circulates. Ethnographic approaches are one vital means of addressing the social life of archaeological discourse, and so this work builds from emerging models of anthropological research that bridge ethnography and archaeology, ultimately aspiring 'to understand how the value of the past is calibrated across a wide social spectrum' (Meskell, 2005: 82). In the end, ethnographic methods enable the creation of 'collaborative communities', laying an ethical avenue for pursuing a multivocal and multivalent understanding of the past.

Anasazi and Anaasázi

'Anasazi' was first used in public when Richard Wetherill presented ancient artefacts from the Colorado Plateau at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois (Cordell, 1984: 77–88). The term was more formally introduced into the scientific lexicon by A V Kidder to 'apply to the Basket Maker and to those Pueblo groups which can be shown to have derived the basic framework of their material culture from the Basket Maker' (Kidder and Shepard, 1936: 590). Archaeologists quickly, and without demur, adopted the term (Baldwin, 1938; Fewkes, 1938), and soon the 'Anasazi' was deemed to be one of the four 'basic cultures' in the ancient American Southwest (Colton, 1938). Over the course of the 20th century, Anasazi became the default term for professional archaeologists and public interpreters to describe, in general terms, the people who lived in the humble villages and spectacular pueblos of the Colorado Plateau in the eight centuries before European contact.

By the late 1980s, some scholars advocated moving away from the simplicity of culture areas in the American Southwest (Dean, 1988; Speth, 1988). Today most researchers use 'Ancestral Puebloans' in place of Anasazi (Lekson, 2006: 6). Significantly, some researchers are recognizing the theoretical limitations of one cultural label to describe thousands of people spread across hundreds of miles over centuries of time through an assortment of material attributes, pottery and architecture (Ferguson, 2003). Many archaeologists in the American Southwest now work with ever more refined taxonomic units such as districts and settlement clusters, and sometimes even at the level of specific clans and sub-groups (Bernardini, 2005a: 16). Southwestern scholars are taking seriously the old adage: pots do not equal people (Adler and Bruning, 2008; Naranjo, 2008).

The origins of 'Anasazi' come from the Diné, or Navajo, language. In the late 1800s, many sites were excavated with Navajo labourers who informally shared their opinions with archaeologists. Most acknowledge that the term comes from *Anaasázi*, with roots that mean *anaa* (war, alien, enemy) and *sazi* (ancestor, ancestral); and so it is typically translated as 'enemy ancestor' (Begay, 2003: 35). However, Navajos today offer a range of more nuanced translations, including 'people that are not here anymore', 'ancestors who are around us', 'foreigners', 'alien ancestors', and

‘non-Navajos who lived beside Navajos’ (Begay, 2003: 35). While some Navajos claim no ancestral relationship with the *Anaasázi*, some traditional histories indicate *K’é* (kinship/relationships), which ‘is established through marriage, warfare, trading, ceremonies, and other activities that involve contact between individuals, families, or societies. It is through *K’é* that a number of Navajo clans today are linked to *Anaasázi* culture’ (Begay, 2003: 6). Richard M. Begay’s study sought to illustrate through ethnographic interviews with clan and ceremonial leaders that there is ‘a wide range of views within Navajo society about relationship with *Anaasázi*’ (Begay, 2003: 68), but that fundamentally, the *Anaasázi* are not ‘enemies’, in the English sense of the word, from war. Rather, they are enemies because they can cause ‘the contamination of sickness brought about by contact with dead’ (Begay, 2003: 72). Some Navajos believe that ancient sites used for ceremonies ‘carry a ritual power that is enduring and not to be violated without potentially threatening the welfare of the families involved’ (Doyel, 1982: 637); the ghosts of the past can haunt living Navajos (McPherson, 1992: 121). Begay (2003: 73) argued that, based on Diné traditional knowledge, at least 14 clans can be identified as being related to *Anaasázi* people or places.

The Navajo Nation’s Historic Preservation Department reportedly fanned the flames of discord when its official burial policy defined *Anaasázi* — note, not the archaeological term, Anasazi — as ‘the Diné term for all ancient peoples who inhabited Diné customary lands, including all people whom the archaeologists call “pre-historic”’ (Begay, 1997: 162). Objections to Navajo assertions to a more distant past in the Colorado Plateau are linked to abiding conflicts between Navajos and the Pueblos (e.g. Brugge, 1999), as well as arguments about the timing of the Navajo people’s arrival in the Southwest from lands to the far north (Hester, 1963; Reed and Horn, 1990; Towner, 1996). While some researchers posit that the Navajo initially arrived in modern-day New Mexico around AD 1000, most place the arrival closer to AD 1500 (Towner and Dean, 1996: 8; Begay, 2003: 33), more than a century after the villages archaeologists have regarded as ‘Anasazi’ were vacated.

With uncertain scientific evidence, and drawing from their own traditions about the Southwest’s ancient sites, many Pueblo tribal representatives doubt Navajo claims of affinity to the Ancestral Puebloans, even when couched in the culturally specific concept of *Anaasázi*. More to the point, Pueblo religious and political leaders have opposed the use of ‘Anasazi’ at all — objecting to the use of a non-Pueblo term to describe their own cherished ancestors (Dongoske et al., 1997: 602, 608). Hopis, as an example of one Pueblo group, are sceptical when ‘archaeological cultures represent static configurations of architecture, pottery, and forms of material culture’ because ‘Hopi traditional histories offer dynamic views of the past’ (Ferguson et al., 2001: 21). When thinking about and sharing traditional histories, Hopis do not speak of the Anasazi, but the *Hisatsinom* and *Motisinom*, which encompass multiple archaeological cultures; they trace the story of their ancestors through the interlaced migrations over the centuries of dozens of clans, who eventually came together as the *Hopisinom* to fulfil their destiny on the Hopi Mesas (Dongoske et al., 1993; Kuwanwisiwma, 2002; Loma’omvaya and Ferguson, 2003).

These debates are centred on a small set of words, but they relate to expansive claims over tangible objects and intangible histories. For one, US laws such as the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) are

partly built around a federally recognized tribe's ability to demonstrate 'cultural affiliation' with past identifiable groups, such as the Ancestral Puebloans. These debates are thus in part about who has a say in the fate of untold thousands of cultural objects and human remains. Moreover, they are about rights over which contemporary communities should control the stories of the past. When the Mesa Verde National Park gift shop managers elected not to sell any books that describe the region's inhabitants as 'Anasazi' out of deference to Pueblo wishes, heated discussions emerged about academic freedom and the rights of non-Pueblo groups to have a say in interpreting Pueblo history (Michel, 2006). Richard M. Begay (1997: 162–163) has ultimately laid the blame squarely on archaeologists for subverting a Navajo concept; his arguments for the acknowledgement of the term *Anaasázi* are grounded in a desire to reclaim a rightful Navajo worldview:

Archaeologists have had a detrimental impact on Navajo culture. They have taken a perfectly good Navajo word and institutionalized it to refer only to 'puebloan' peoples, assigning temporal affiliations based on material culture complexity. Many archaeologists have even offered their own interpretations of the word Anaasazi. By their words and actions, non-native archaeologists seem to be trying to define the past for the Navajo people without any regard to Navajo cultural traditions. As Navajo cultural resource professionals, we are faced with cleaning up the ensuing mess. We must take the word Anaasazi back and apply it as it is traditionally used. Perhaps this calls for an overall revision of the archaeological nomenclature.

Fascinatingly, even as many academics have moved away from using Anasazi, popular science writers still cling to the term with its exotic patina (Childs, 2007). 'Anasazi' seems to resonate strongly today with the general public in the Southwest — many of whom are newcomers, in the demographically growing states of Colorado, Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico — who seek to attach themselves to anything enigmatic, rooted, ancient, and Other. Anasazi is becoming a brand to beguile: you can now don Anasazi climbing shoes, eat gourmet Anasazi beans, or even live in Anasazi Meadows, a new housing development north of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Politics and ethics

The myth of the Anasazi is the idea that an ancient race of Indians in the American Southwest built a thriving polity, then they suddenly vanished, forever abandoning their homes. This invention, which continues to suffuse public understanding of Pueblo history, fundamentally involves key questions about identity, affinity, and authority. As discussed below, all three intertwined issues extend far beyond debates about Anasazis and into anthropological inquiry that addresses the ways in which human communities use — and sometimes abuse — the past in the social and political present.

Questions of identity have long been implicitly and explicitly a part of archaeological investigations in the American Southwest (Reed, 1942; Preucel, 2002; Mills, 2004). The construction of ancient identities is used to craft modern identities. Over the last several centuries, archaeological sites have become especially a vehicle for the

expression of national and local identities (Dietler, 1994; Abu el-Haj, 2001; Levy, 2006). The result is far from innocuous, as social and physical violence has erupted from battles over heritage sites (Bernbeck and Pollock, 1996; Coningham and Lewer, 1999; Meskell, 2002). In the United States, scholars have explicated how the ‘mound builder myth’ in the 1800s depended on the fiction of the vanished Indian to justify America’s imperialist westward expansion (Trigger, 1980: 665; Fowler, 1987: 230; McGuire, 1992: 820). In the Southwest, the myth of the Anasazi similarly depends on ideas of a vanished race of Indians, which diminish contemporary Pueblo claims. This ties back into the concept of abandonment: ‘The archaeological notion of “abandonment” helped to facilitate the taking of land — if the land was not being used, it was free for the taking, and the myriad of “abandoned ruins” throughout the Southwest was perceived as “evidence” that the land had indeed been “deserted”’ (Ferguson et al., 2001: 10). The vanished Anasazi frees Pueblo sites to become the heritage of all. Such consequences emphasize why questions of identity are about politics, as well as ethics (Brown, 2003; Appiah, 2005) — how we understand past and present identities creates different kinds of ethical outcomes and obligations. Rather than seeing the political as avoidable, a ‘political ethic’ provides ‘the most profound and penetrating archaeological reflexivity’ (Hamilakis, 2007: 24). A robust ethical commitment to communities entails a deep engagement with politics and how identities in the present are crafted from the past (McGuire, 2008).

Questions of affinity — the connection between ancient peoples and modern peoples — have taken on particular import since 1990 with the passage of NAGPRA (Miheuah, 2000; Bray, 2001; Fine-Dare, 2002; Johnson, 2007). Framed in NAGPRA as ‘cultural affiliation’, the statute’s ‘goal is limited to establishing a legal process to resolve claims for control over particular Native American remains and cultural items’ (Bruning, 2006: 509). Thus, NAGPRA is a legal solution to a complex social and political problem, in which constructions of affiliation impact the rights of contemporary communities. Among the most public controversies of affiliation in recent years has been the struggle over the so-called Kennewick Man (Watkins, 2005a; Zimmerman, 2005). Less visible, though perhaps just as heated, has been the debate about the affiliation of the Ancestral Puebloans. In 1999, the National Park Service determined that multiple Southwestern tribes, including the Navajo, were culturally affiliated under NAGPRA with remains at Chaco Canyon National Historic Park (Warburton and Begay, 2005); Pueblo communities strongly objected, especially the Hopi Tribe (Sullivan, 2000). As Robert W. Preucel (2005: 191) has written, ‘The Hopi Tribe argues that this homogenization of Pueblo people as a collective ignores the diversity, uniqueness, and independence of their separate cultural traditions and is a political expediency.’ The National Park Service’s interpretation of NAGPRA’s definition of cultural affiliation ‘implies a theoretical commitment to a stable (primordialist) as opposed to a fluid (instrumentalist) approach to identity or ethnicity’, which is at odds with how Hopi traditionalists relate their own history (Preucel, 2005: 191–192). Like the Kennewick Man controversy, disagreement emerges from the phrasing and interpretation of archaeological language concerning affiliation: in the case of Kennewick Man, the use of ‘Caucasoid’ as a biological term (Chatters, 2001: 170), and in the case of Chaco Canyon, the monolithic Anasazi to describe the complex affinities many groups express for these ancient sites and peoples.

Questions of authority are about the control and legitimization of interpretations — who gets to define the past. Scholarly language has been used to control the very terms by which we conceptualize the past, as colonists have long known that ‘the power to name reflected an underlying power to control the land, its indigenous people, and its history’ (Thomas, 2000: 4). Ethnographers have come to recognize it is through texts that anthropological authority is sown and harvested (Clifford, 1983; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1988). Several scholars have similarly emphasized how archaeological representations are produced by — and simultaneously reproduce — power relations (Hodder, 1989; Sinclair, 2000; Joyce, 2002). The control of language in archaeological discourse is about the control of history; and the control of history is about the control of artefacts, human remains, sacred places, even land and water (Gulliford, 2000). Researchers have increasingly seen how scholarly language itself can be a wounding form of colonial estrangement (Smith and Jackson, 2006: 313). As Joe Watkins (2006: 109) has challengingly written about the potentially dire consequences of archaeological language for Native Americans, ‘Alienation of Indian land through the Jerome Commission (1889–93) and the Dawes Commission (1893–1907) failed. The Wheeler-Howard Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 failed. Governmental policies of assimilation and termination failed. Will archaeologists succeed?’

From this brief review of how the term Anasazi raises questions of identity, affinity, and authority, first, we can begin to see how these discussions are not merely academic but interlaced with mechanisms of control — control over physical places but also the discourse of history. Who is empowered to interpret the ancient past? This is a question of politics, and the answer reflects a landscape of power, of those who are positioned to present and disseminate their interpretations widely, compared with those who are unable to voice their versions of the past. Second, the question of politics bleeds into the question of ethics because we must ask ourselves if the current structures of power are equitable and evenhanded, if they afford a flourishing of individual lives and society as a whole. Who *should* be empowered to interpret the ancient past? This is a normative question at the centre of the Anasazi debates, and the answer will guide how archaeologists interact with descendant communities and other stakeholders, the ways in which they can justly balance the rights of free speech with the rights of identity. It is an ethical question about why and how archaeologists can open up their discipline to a range of dialogues without drowning out history in a cacophony of disparate voices.

Beyond archaeology

In recent years ethnographic approaches have been used in two primary ways in archaeological inquiry. Ethnography, for some, serves as an external and relatively objective lens, a way to examine the science of archaeology as a social practice — archaeology as alien culture, in which ethnographers take an interest in archaeology as they do in the sex lives of Samoans or cattle herding among the Nuer. This is the approach of most of the papers in Matt Edgeworth’s (2006) impressive edited volume, and from this work and previous studies we can see archaeology as an acutely social phenomenon (Castañeda, 1996; Fontein, 2006), while at the same time laying the

foundation for a critique of unfair practices such as gender discrimination (Gero, 1996; Politis, 2001).

Counterpoint to ethnography as critique, others see ethnography as aid. More than a century ago, researchers in the American Southwest often explicitly used insights provided by interviews and observations of living Pueblo peoples as models for ancient processes (Spielmann, 2005). Jesse Walter Fewkes (1900a; 1900b; 1909), for example, sought to join Hopi oral traditions of clan migrations with archaeological research, tying specific historical patterns seen in the material record with specific traditional histories. Over the last decade, some Southwestern archaeologists have again sought expressly to connect ethnographic insights of Pueblo culture with archaeological patterns of Ancestral Pueblo peoples (Ortman, 2000; Lyons, 2003; Bernardini, 2005b). Notably, unlike Fewkes and his contemporaries, few of these Southwestern archaeologists today have active ethnographic research programmes that work in conjunction with their material culture studies.

In turn, there is a small though growing cadre of scholars whose work falls in the interstice of ethnography and archaeology, in which ethnography serves both as an appraisal and a means of opening up new understandings of the past. Several new edited volumes relate the work of researchers who have a stake in both sub-disciplines — of ethnographers who want archaeologists to understand better their endeavour as social practice, and of archaeologists who want ethnographers to see the heritage of history as a legitimate and important field of study (Shackel and Chambers, 2004; Castañeda and Matthews, 2008; Mortensen and Hollowell, 2009; and the papers in this volume). Lynn Meskell, among others, has described this work as a new kind of ‘archaeological ethnography’, a hybrid practice in which ethnography explicates archaeology’s ‘critical reformulations, political negotiations, and constitutions of theory and interpretations’ (Meskell, 2005: 82). More concretely, it is a holistic approach to archaeology that includes ‘a mosaic of traditional forms including archaeological practice and museum or representational analysis, as well as long-term involvement, participant observation, interviewing, and archival work’ (Meskell, 2005: 83). This is not traditional ‘ethnoarchaeology’ — the study of present groups to understand past human behaviours — but a ‘reorientation’ that takes as its focus contemporary culture, ‘the ways in which archaeology works in the world’ (Meskell, 2005: 84). As such, it emphasizes ethnographic methodologies while making ‘a stronger commitment to contemporary situations centering archaeology and its primary stakeholders; the role of the state and new forms of governmentality; a recognition of archaeology’s political embeddedness; and expanded possibilities for ethical participation, advocacy, and outreach’ (Meskell, 2005: 84–85; c.f. Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos, this volume).

This conception of archaeological ethnography does not deny the broader conceptualizations of this emerging paradigm, as demonstrated by the exciting array of papers presented at the 2008 Poros Workshop on Archaeological Ethnographies and published in this volume. Rather Meskell’s definition emphasizes the *anthropological* dimensions of archaeology — how archaeological science, the construction of heritages, and the interpretations of the past, are intrinsically human occupations and pursuits. It might be said, with some surprise, that this approach thus builds on the legacy of Fewkes and other scholarly ancestors who undertook ethnographic fieldwork in part because they believed that living communities held unique

knowledge that could directly inform archaeological research. In other words, more than a century ago, Fewkes and others did ethnography because they understood that local indigenous communities held distinctive epistemological standpoints. This lost insight has been recovered in the guise of Standpoint Theory and emerging forms of collaborative archaeology. As Alison Wylie, in her 2008 AAA Patty Jo Watson Distinguished Lecture, recently emphasized, to avoid ‘epistemic blindness’ and ‘social entrenchment’ it is vital that scientists ‘seek out critical, collaborative engagement with those communities that are most likely to have the resources necessary, not only to complement and correct specific lacunae, but to generate a critical standpoint on their own knowledge making practices’ (see also Wylie, 1995, 2003; Longino, 2002; Solomon, 2008: 25–36). At the Poros Workshop on Archaeological Ethnographies, Julie Hollowell’s paper articulated most powerfully how ethnography can work to decentre long-held views and values in archaeological practice, providing insights into the political economy of science and alternative perspectives on the empire of things that archaeologists use and study.

In the United States, federal laws in the 1990s — principally NAGPRA and the 1992 amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act, which greatly increased tribal participation in the historic preservation process — brought archaeologists and Native Americans into direct dialogue. Although often contentious at first, many of these conversations led to the discovery of common ground, partnerships and collaborations (Dongoske et al., 2000; Swidler et al., 2000; Dowdall and Parrish, 2003; Kerber, 2006). Of course, animus and controversy continues in some quarters (Kehoe, 2008), but many collaborative projects have emerged that see responsible archaeology as applied archaeology (Pyburn and Wilk, 1995), combining ethnographic and archaeological approaches (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson, 2008; Silliman, 2008). These efforts in fact are part of a broader movement that goes beyond Native Americans (McDavid, 2002) and the Americas (Moser et al., 2002).

The response to the myth of the Anasazi has similarly emerged out of conversations between archaeologists and Native Americans, first largely in the context of federal laws, and then subsequently through collaborative research and the willingness of heritage managers to respond to Native concerns. Ethnographic research in this particular case can therefore elucidate Native American experiences and interpretations of the past, while at the same time provide a path for positive dialogue about more accurate and nuanced understandings of history. In this mode, ethnography serves equally as critique and aid.

In working with Hopi tribal members on various projects, I have often heard objections to the use of Anasazi on political grounds — that it is ethically dubious and politically disempowering to use a Navajo word to describe Hopi ancestors. They also emphasize, however, that the word distorts our understanding of the past. In the archaeological lexicon, Anasazi describes countless lives, lived over centuries of time across a vast and varied landscape. Hopis, in turn, present a much more complex concept of identity, emphasizing that the *Hisatsinom* consisted of scores of loosely grouped clans (and proto-clans), cross-cut by religious societies, village factions, and family relations. Consider the historical and research possibilities when we say (based just on archaeology) that 800 years ago, the Anasazi entered Arizona’s San Pedro Valley, occupied several villages, and eventually abandoned their homes; compared with saying (when we combine archaeology and oral traditions) that 800 years ago,

the *Hisatsinom*, made up of possibly some 30 clans (from the Bow Clan to the Parrot Clan to the Water Clan), travelled from pueblo to pueblo on their way from *Palatkwapi* (a storied village to the south) on their long sojourn to the Hopi Mesas (see Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthaphonh, 2006: 95–149). These 30 clans are today linked to specific Hopi villages; there are many narratives that tell of what life was like in the south; and there are specific rites and ceremonies brought from the south in ancient times, practised still by the *Aa'alt*, *Kwaakwant*, *Taatawkyam*, *Wuutsimt*, *Lalkont*, *Mamrawt*, and *O'waqölt* religious societies.

Hopi versions of their history are steeped in their own social logic and keen understanding of human experience. For example, clan and village segmentation was in fact necessary to deal with interpersonal discord, diseases and epidemics, and the survival of important religious practices. Relations between clans were patently necessary because one cannot marry a fellow clan member; and so clan histories are linked. To ignore the rich Hopi frames of history is to willingly don epistemological blinders. These kinds of insights then, gained through ethnographic methodologies, provide novel mechanisms to explore questions of migration, identity, demography, survival, and cultural histories. At the same time, this approach is ethically and politically engaged because it seeks to be inclusive of different standpoints, while not imposing an outside language that knowingly severs a community from its own heritage. Questioning the term 'Anasazi' does not shutter new possibilities for research and understanding the past, but opens them.

These discussions of the Anasazi feed directly into issues of control and power because 'cultural affiliation', under NAGPRA, is defined as 'a relationship of shared group identity which can reasonably be traced historically or prehistorically between members of a present-day Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization and an identifiable earlier group' (see Ferguson, 2004). In almost every case, ancient objects and human remains in the Southwest repatriated under NAGPRA use archaeological cultures — Hohokam, Mogollon, Anasazi, Mimbres, and so forth — as the 'identifiable earlier group' (Dongoske et al., 1997). And yet, some repatriations of ancient remains have suggested the possibilities of shifting these categories. In one case, a collection of ritual items (20 yellow wooden sunflowers, 5 white wooden sunflowers, 2 leather sunflowers, 26 wooden cones, and 1 wooden bird) excavated in 1915 in northern Arizona's Sunflower Cave, dating to the Pueblo I period (AD 750–975), are identical to ritual items documented as still in use by the Hopi Flute Clan on First Mesa (McManamon, 1997). As a First Mesa leader once told me, 'Those sunflowers and birds, those are ours. So I believe we did migrate through there. When we first got those back we used them in a ceremony, but now they're just stored. There is still power in those items' (Albert and Colwell-Chanthaphonh, 2007: ch. 2, p. 39). While NAGPRA stipulates that objects and human remains can only be repatriated to federally recognized tribes (and so, the Hopi Flute Clan can only effect a repatriation through the Hopi Tribe), isn't it arguable that the 'identifiable earlier group' was the ancient Flute Clan? For that matter, if we reference larger socio-cultural groups, why must we continue to use the Anasazi or Ancestral Pueblo as the 'identifiable earlier group' — why not the *Hisatsinom*? We must be aware of how archaeological language, even seemingly harmless terms such as the Anasazi, have real explanatory power of the past and the power to control heritage in the present.

Collaboration is at base conversation. Working together to answer shared questions entails finding a shared language. This does not necessarily exclude the use of scientific jargon or indigenous expressions (Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthaphonh, 2006: 20), but rather that all collaborators must be sensitive to how language can become either exclusive or inclusive, and how language can be divisive and deceive. If language is power, then working towards a shared language is one key means of working towards a shared authority (Frisch, 1990). In this sense, collaborative projects create a community in which face-to-face discussions allow people to see their common interests rather than see each other as adversaries. The feelings of community that arise from the process of collaboration — sharing not only philosophies and personal experiences, but often also meals, jokes, and family photos — go a long way towards cultivating empathy and trust (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson, 2006b). Collaborators will not agree always, but these feelings of community lay the foundation for honest and productive conversations. As should be clear here, ethnography plays a central role in moving archaeology beyond its image as a subject only concerned with things past. Ethnography can provide fresh insights into the past, but just as importantly, it enables direct engagements with living communities, compelling scholars to acknowledge and deal with the contemporary politics and ethics of their discipline.

At the moment, it is not entirely clear how the myth of the Anasazi will be resolved, but resolution can emerge most effectively through the creation of collaborative communities, in which a range of stakeholders try to work together to interpret the past in a way that is true, honest, and equitable. In other words, how we should think about the terms *Anasazi*, *Hisatsinom*, Ancestral Pueblo, and *Anaasázi* cannot be reconciled by one individual alone, but must become a process of cross-cultural exploration. No one story will emerge from this course, but multiple stories, or perhaps a single story told with multiple storytellers. This opening up of archaeology will in the end create a past that is multivocal and interpretations that are multivalent — a watch of history crafted from the springs of science, the gears of traditional knowledge, and the hands of passing time.

Conclusion: beyond the contested past

In recent years, the relationship between archaeologists and Native Americans has shifted dramatically (Ferguson, 1996; Watkins, 2005b). Much of the change is the result of battles over repatriation and reburial, the control of objects and human remains. In the coming years, the 'skull wars' will continue (Thomas, 2000), but the emerging dialogue will likely focus less on the control of specific things and more on archaeology's fundamental practices. The rise of indigenous archaeologies is a key part of this movement to decolonize then reformulate the basic principles of the discipline (Nicholas and Andrews, 1997; Smith and Wobst, 2005; Atalay, 2006; McGhee, 2008). Although 'NAGPRA is forever' (Rose et al., 1996), archaeology is nonetheless entering a 'post-NAGPRA era' (Wilcox, 2000) in which scholars and Native Americans alike are asking: what will the nature of our new relationship be?

The answer is bound up with understanding how scientific language affects constructions of identity, expressions of affinity, and claims of authority for disparate stakeholders. The controversy over 'Anasazi' and the use of scientific language is

hence a means to untangle archaeology's Gordian knot of the past, its contested present, and the potential for the discipline's engaged and ethical future. Projects that address these kinds of problems will also further clarify how 'archaeological ethnography' is not merely a methodological technique that bridges sub-fields, but also a theoretical reorientation. Such research consequently aims to oscillate the anthropological gaze between politics and ethics (Hamilakis and Duke, 2007; Meskell and Pels, 2005), analysing not merely who *does* interpret history, but also who *ought* to be empowered to interpret the past.

The language of archaeology has its intended consequences when terms such as Anasazi enable researchers to exchange ideas about ancient migrations, economics, demography, and a host of other ponderous topics. But, this same language has unintended consequences when it moves outside of the professional lexicon — when the public hear 'Anasazi' and think 'vanished', when the Navajo hear 'Anasazi' and imagine the *Anaasázi*, when the Puebloans hear 'Anasazi' and understand the insult. We must constantly work to better understand the socio-political ramifications of archaeological language beyond the discipline, to better understand the role of archaeology in the world.

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Notes on Contributor

Colwell-Chanthaphonh received his PhD from Indiana University in 2004. He has published five books and more than two dozen articles and book chapters, and is currently Curator of Anthropology at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science.

Correspondence to: Denver Museum of Nature and Science, Department of Anthropology, 2001 Colorado Blvd, Denver, CO 80205, USA. Email: Chip.C-C@dmns.org