

Affirming participatory archaeology and heritage in Africa: Review of Peter Schmidt (ed.), *Participatory Archaeology and Heritage Studies: Perspectives from Africa*

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Participatory archaeology and heritage studies: Perspectives from Africa presents a collection of papers, edited by Peter Schmidt, that aims to define what participatory archaeology in Africa is; argue for a particular historical genesis of this approach; and present examples of projects that embody these ideals.

It should be noted that this is not a wholly original work, but a collection of papers - already peer-reviewed and published - from the *Journal of Community Archaeology and Heritage*, collected here with a preface by Carol McDavid and Suzie Thomas (editors of *JCAH*) and an introduction by Schmidt. This means that (as the publisher instructs on pp. vii) citing a paper from this volume will involve citing the original publication information from *JCAH*. It also means that from the perspective of future bibliographies, this volume only exists insofar as the preface, introduction, and overall composition of the book can ever be cited. This is not necessarily problematic given that the goal in producing the volume is to allow 'peer-reviewed journal content to reach wider audiences' (pp. xi), and McDavid and Thomas draw attention in their preface to the need to connect 'academic ethics to academic writing', including making writing more public. (The volume sells for £115 on Routledge's website.) That said, considering that the volume's content has already been peer-reviewed, a review should concern itself with those elements that *are* novel, and consider what work they are doing here.

Schmidt's introduction hinges on the themes of intersectionality (which tends to subsume the theme of synthesis) and epistemic humility - this latter a concept that elaborates on points Schmidt (Chapter 1) makes elsewhere. Intersectionality here refers to something different from its original development in feminist theory of the 1980s (Cooper 2016; cf. Wiegman 2012 for a critique of the term's over-extension). In this volume, intersectionality emerges from the synthesis of the 'best Western and

best indigenous' practices in archaeology, a nexus characterised by researchers engaging with 'day to day searches for solutions' in African life and the rejection of 'top down' research agendas formulated in the academy. Questioning the power structures behind academic research leads on to the introduction's second major theme of epistemic humility, which entails not only that academic archaeologists step away from leadership roles but that they commit to power-sharing and decision-making through long-term engagements with stakeholder communities. In raising these points, Schmidt sketches out an intellectual platform for participatory archaeology in Africa that is positioned as kindred with Sonya Atalay's (2012) *Community-based archaeology* and distant from much of the rest of public archaeology. (Arguably, as a sub-field developed in Europe and traced back to early twentieth century British practices, the hybrid nature of public archaeology has never been as well-historicised or well-theorised in Africa as it has for other theatres of Anglo-European research, cf. Moshenska 2017.)

Moreover, though, this volume's introduction and arrangement suggest that its vision of participatory archaeology has been active long before Atalay's volume or even the public/community/participatory/collaborative global archaeology boom of the last 20 years. Part I of Schmidt's volume is organised to suggest a genealogy of participatory archaeology in Africa, with Merrick Posnansky (Chapter 2) and Thurstan Shaw as its progenitors, Schmidt as the second generation inheritor (Chapter 1), and Schmidt's own students as the third. Parts II (Chapters 3-5) and III (Chapters 6-8) then elaborate on where these participatory ideas are translated into action and are resonant with African archaeological practice, with Part II focusing especially on long-term participatory engagements and Part III on heritage management and assessment.

Although the papers presented in the volume have been available in *JCAH* for varying lengths of time now (the earliest published in 2014 and the most recent in 2017), their ensemble in this volume raises interesting questions around practices of knowledge production around archaeological sites in Africa. While Part I proposes that the foundations of participatory archaeology are to be found within Euro-American archaeologists' interventions in Africa, the pivot to chapters in Parts II and III illustrates how the stakes of participatory approaches can be quite different for African archaeologists than for 'outsiders' (to use Schmidt's word). Chapurukha Kusimba's Chapter 4, for instance, offers a powerful juxtaposition with the two to either side of it (by Kathryn Weedman Arthur et al. and Schmidt), in that Kusimba details the fraught politics of attempting to be participatory, which ultimately caused him to become the subject of vilification and surveillance from some quarters. Accounts like this serve as a reminder that while being more participatory will (as Schmidt argues here and elsewhere) produce better-quality, more relevant knowledge, knowledge production is never politically neutral; there is always something at stake and the consequences of this work are not evenly distributed among those involved.

The volume's efforts to showcase participatory approaches in managing heritage also underscore where more work is needed to understand the historical contexts for different forms of heritage management across the continent. Especially in light of the history of participatory archaeology proposed in Part I, the case studies in Part III (by Jane Humphris and Rebecca Bradshaw; Susan Keitumetse and Michelle Grace Pampiri; and Nthabiseng Mokoena) illustrate that participatory projects intersect with a wide range of heritage management strategies in Africa, each of which emerged from a specific nexus of politics, history, and indigenous relationships to the past. This cluster of articles offers some useful, detailed perspectives on this

theme, which resonate with points made by Susan Keitumetse (2016) in her recent book. It demonstrates the imperative not to treat African indigenous knowledge as ahistorical (cf. Stump 2010), but embedded in long-term experiences not only of colonialism but also of governmental and international interventions, all of which impact the values attached to archaeological projects and how participation within these is welcomed. We are reminded that participation in any form must address itself not just to long-term engagements with relevant constituencies, but equally with the long-term *processes* that have generated the context in which participation occurs. The bar for historical awareness in participation is high, then, and worth reflecting on in all projects.

In sum, the papers in this volume each present a different facet of what participation looks like in Africa, and give the impression of a healthy community of scholars arrayed around the topic. The volume itself represents an argument that this community has roots in multiple places, both within archaeological field projects in Africa and, especially, in longer interventions in the continent.

References

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