

SONYA ATALAY

COMMUNITY-BASED ARCHAEOLOGY

Research with, by, and for Indigenous and Local Communities



ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeology affects the lives of indigenous, local, and descendant communities, yet these groups often provide little input to archaeological research, and the results of research remain inaccessible to them. As archaeologists consider the consequences and benefits of research in such communities, the skills, methodologies, and practices required of them will differ dramatically from those accepted in past decades. As an archaeologist and a Native American, Sonya Atalay has investigated the rewards and complex challenges of conducting research in partnership with indigenous and local communities. In *Community-Based Archaeology*, she outlines the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR) and demonstrates how it can be applied effectively to archaeology. Drawing on her own experiences with research projects in North America and the Near East, Atalay provides theoretical discussions along with practical examples of establishing and developing collaborative relationships and sharing results. This book will contribute to building an archaeology that is engaged, ethical, relevant, and sustainable.

“Community-based participatory research in archaeology finally comes of age with Atalay’s long-anticipated volume. She promotes a collaborative approach to knowledge gathering, interpretation, and use that benefits descendant communities and archaeological practitioners, contributing to a more relevant, rewarding, and responsible archaeology. This is essential reading for anyone who asks why we do archaeology, for whom, and how best it can be done.”

GEORGE NICHOLAS, author of *Being and Becoming Indigenous Archaeologists*

“Sonya Atalay shows archaeologists how the process of community-based participatory research can move our efforts at collaboration with local communities beyond theory and good intentions to a sustainable practice. This is a game-changing book that every archaeologist must read.”

RANDALL H. McGUIRE, author of *Archaeology as Political Action*



SONYA ATALAY is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at University of Massachusetts–Amherst. She was a UCOP postdoctoral fellow at UC Berkeley and a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellow at Stanford. In 2009, she was appointed by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior to a presidential committee concerning enforcement of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. She edits the series *Archaeology and Indigenous Issues* (Left Coast Press).

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Berkeley 94704 www.ucpress.edu

Cover illustration: Detail from *Spiritual Renewal* by Daphne Odjig, © 1984. Author photo: Abbas Shirinifard.

ISBN 978-0-520-27336-8



9 780520 273368

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University of California Press, one of the most distinguished university presses in the United States, enriches lives around the world by advancing scholarship in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Its activities are supported by the UC Press Foundation and by philanthropic contributions from individuals and institutions. For more information, visit www.ucpress.edu.

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

© 2012 by The Regents of the University of California

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Atalay, Sonya, 1968-

Community-based archaeology : research with, by, and for indigenous and local communities / Sonya Atalay.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-520-27335-1 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-520-27336-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Community archaeology—United States.
2. Archaeology—Social aspects—United States.
3. Indians of North America—Antiquities—Conservation and restoration. 4. Cultural property—Protection—United States. I. Title.

CC77.C66A83 2012

930.1—dc23

2012007437

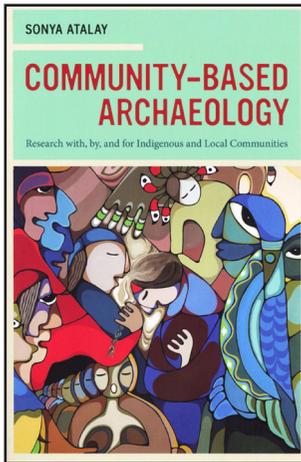
Manufactured in the United States of America

21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R 2002) (*Permanence of Paper*).

In keeping with a commitment to support environmentally responsible and sustainable printing practices, UC Press has printed this book on Rolland Enviro100, a 100% post-consumer fiber paper that is FSC certified, deinked, processed chlorine-free, and manufactured with renewable biogas energy. It is acid-free and EcoLogo certified.



Community-Based Archaeology: Research with, by, and for Indigenous and Local Communities

Sonya Atalay. (2012). University of California Press, ix+312 pp., 4 tables, 3 maps, and 21 figures, index. \$29.95 (paper and ePUB), \$70.00 (cloth).

Reviewed by Melody Pope, Office of the State Archaeologist, The University of Iowa

Sonya Atalay's book reminds us that doing archaeology is a luxury and a privilege, with real-world consequences for people's everyday lives. Wherever you have practiced archaeology, you were likely at some point (maybe often) considered by members of communities in which you worked as foreign or alien, an interloper whose 'real' interests were not with the living people with whom you interacted daily, but with those of a remote past that you hoped to learn something about using abstract theories and concepts, well-sharpened shovels, and (perhaps) local labor. In *Community-Based Archaeology*, Atalay presents an alternative framework and methodology for an archaeology that engages differently with the communities, places, and people it touches. A professional archaeologist by training and an Anishinabe woman by descent, Atalay introduces the reader to a broad-based cross-disciplinary scholarship on *Community-Based Participant Research* (CBPR). She uses five case studies to explain and illustrate the basic tenants and methodology of CBPR applied to real-world, on-the-ground archaeology situations, contexts, and problems. Archaeologists, educators, students, and anyone interested in CBPR in general, will benefit from reading this book. Even if you never intend to participate in or design a CBPR project, this book is well worth your attention. As Randy McGuire states on the back cover, *Community-Based Archaeology*, is a "game-changing book that every archaeologist must read."

Atalay advocates a collaborative approach to archaeological practice, and situates CBPR within wider movements in the social sciences concerned with activism, the production and democratization of knowledge, and "decolonizing" the research process. For scholars concerned with why archaeology is relevant to the past, present, and future, I heartily recommend this book. As Atalay convincingly argues, future archaeology will be sustainable and relevant because it is humane, actively engaged with issues of social justice, collaborative, and has transformative power on political, personal, social and professional levels. I approached *Community-Based Archaeology* with strong interest in learning about CBPR, how it works, its theoretical lineage, its challenges and insights, and how it compares with other public archaeology practices and educational outreach, and I was not disappointed.

At the outset, Atalay situates her interest in CBPR in the personal stories, histories, and struggles of descendant communities globally, and within the context of Native American cultural resurgence and prophecies. She tells us these prophecies speak to choosing paths of compassion and ways to "combine Indigenous systems of knowledge and traditional ways

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of understanding with those of Western science... The challenge for *our* generation is to work cooperatively—to use the diverse knowledge of all to build strength on the path to mutual success and peace” (p. x). As outlined in the first chapter, her commitment to a sustainable archaeology through collaborative, reciprocal, ethical, and socially responsible scholarship drives Atalay’s practice of CBPR and her dedication to training future generations of archaeologists. A central concept introduced by Atalay to address challenges that arise from attempts to reconcile conflicting interpretations of archaeological data is *braided knowledge*. Considered as an alternative to *multivocal* approaches, which have received some criticism in the literature, the braided-knowledge concept refers to practices that strive to intertwine community knowledge with archaeological data to “create new and richly textured interpretations of the past” (p. 27).

The book’s first two chapters introduce CBPR as a multi-disciplinary and collaborative approach, and indicate that community-based archaeological research stems from the current emphasis on collaboration and engagement in academia, and from past and contemporary politics and social-justice movements. In Chapter 1, Atalay introduces five case studies that draw on her personal involvement and reflections on CBPR. These include: (1) the multi-year project at the archaeological site of Çatal Höyük, Turkey; (2) the Ziibiwing Repatriation Research Project, (3) the Ziibiwing Sanilac Petroglyph Intellectual Property Project, (4) the Flint Stone Street Ancestral Recovery and Site Management Project; and, (5) the Waapaahiiki Siippiwi Mound Project in partnership with the Sullivan County American Indian Council of Sullivan County, Indiana. She also integrates examples from CBPR projects outside of archaeology in conservation, forestry and natural resource management, sociology, education, the arts, and public health. These diverse examples offer numerous insights into the challenges, pitfalls, logistics, complexities, and successes of CBPR applications in archaeology.

Chapter 2 considers community research in contemporary archaeology within the multiple contexts of collaborative and engaged research in academia broadly, the struggles of indigenous peoples worldwide, Native American activism during the latter half of the last century, the National Museum of the American Indian Act of 1989, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990. On-the-ground activism, legislation, the emergence of Indigenous archaeology, critiques of exploitative research practices within and outside of the discipline, and the impact of Public Archaeology are explored in detail. Atalay traces the role each has played (and is playing) in moving forward a collaborative archaeology and setting the stage for a practice of CBPR that is theoretically grounded and methodologically rigorous. The chapter ends with a discussion of archaeological CBPR as a specific collaborative approach. Here Atalay defines and differentiates CBPR from other approaches, including community and public archaeology, civic engagement, and service learning. Her *Table 1* provides a summary of various collaborative approaches, relating key concepts and references that illustrate examples of each. The table is paired with *Figure 1*, a graphic that illustrates what Atalay considers as overlapping and interconnected practices within a “collaborative continuum” (p. 48).

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While Atalay underscores the overlapping nature of collaborative practices in different settings and circumstances, and acknowledges the challenges of terminology (public archaeology, community archaeology, CBPR), her graphic has an embedded hierarchy that ranks other forms of collaborative public or community archaeology below CBPR in terms of level of community participation and decision-making. Although CBPR projects include elements of education and outreach, the framework is useful for differentiating between approaches that are community-involved and those that are community-driven and participatory. As Atalay states, CBPR has an “explicitly political and action focus that most public and community archaeology projects do not” (p. 51). The political-action focus sets CBPR apart and links it to explicit theoretical and methodological approaches concerned with knowledge production and decolonizing the research process. Atalay argues that it is critical to make such theoretical linkages explicit to improve practice and to situate CBPR more broadly within the academy—where community-based research has traditionally been devalued or considered “service” work (p. 50).

Atalay is devoted to the mission of educating students about the principles and techniques of CBPR and to training that emphasizes moving “abstract, theoretical concepts of collaboration and reciprocal community partnership into the work of daily, on-the-ground, dirt archaeology” (p. 28). She delivers on the promise of translating theory into practice in chapters 3 through 8, where she outlines and documents the processes and methodologies for conducting archaeological CBPR. In Chapter 3, Atalay explores issues of power in knowledge production and addresses questions about “...what knowledge is produced, by whom, for whose interest, and toward what ends” (p. 59). After outlining the five principles of CBPR to: (1) embrace fully participatory research, (2) engage community partnerships (3) build community capacity, (4) be reciprocal, and (5) acknowledge contributions of multiple knowledge systems, Atalay discusses each in turn and in depth. The theme of knowledge production, central to this book, is masterfully threaded through this and subsequent chapters that address important concerns of “objectivity” and “rigor” (p. 84) in the research process, the expertise issue, intellectual property rights, and university institutional review boards (IRBs).

Community-Based Archaeology is a thought-provoking, well-written, and exhaustive presentation of CBPR as an approach and methodology in archaeological research that is intertwined with heritage management and tourism, preservation and compliance, public outreach, and pedagogy. While Atalay rightly links CPBR practices to broader theoretical and methodological concerns in the academy regarding the production and democratization of knowledge and decolonization of the research process, other influencing perspectives within archaeology are left out. Both political economy and feminist anthropology perspectives have in many cases influenced movements in archaeology by advocating humane, ethical, equitable, engaged, politically active, and socially aware practices. To be fair, Atalay does reference influences from Marxists and Feminist approaches broadly, but a more detailed discussion of some of the contributions of feminist perspectives in anthropological archaeology would have added breadth to the theoretical lineage of archaeological CBPR. That being said, this

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book lays down an important foundation from which to teach, reflect, and continue to move archaeology into the 21st century. Students, educators, and indigenous and local communities with interests in archaeology will benefit from Atalay's experiences and visions for archaeological CBPR.