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A Future That Does Not Forget: Collaborative Archaeology in the Colonial Context of Sint Eustatius (Dutch Caribbean).

Dr. marjolijn kok, 2022.

- Introduction.

This article is written on request of the St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance, powered by Ubuntu Connected Front Caribbean (UCF),¹ not as a paid commission but as an act of solidarity. I met the alliance through signing their petition² to stop the excavation of the ancestral remains of enslaved Africans near the airport of Sint Eustatius and protest the lack of community involvement. As a white archaeologist I am not writing this article to tell the narrative of the enslaved Africans as I feel the descendent community³ has to be in control of that narrative. This article concerns the archaeological circumstances in which the protest takes place and tries to shed light on the way forward of dealing with ancestral remains. The ideas I put forward are not new in an international context; the same type of struggles over African burial grounds occur in other places such as St. Helena and Flatbush (NY) at the moment but they are not much discussed in Dutch archaeology. Suggestions are put forward for collaborative archaeology and guidelines for dealing with sensitive archaeology.

- Archaeology as a colonial practice

From the start of the discipline archaeology and colonialism have been closely associated as well in subject, methods, and concepts as in (national) representations.⁴ The transatlantic slave trade is part of the colonial process. In Dutch archaeology this connection to the colonial can be traced back to early predecessors such as Johan Picardt who openly defended slavery.⁵ Casper Reuven, the founder of academic archaeology in the Netherlands, developed his interest in archaeology through visiting colonial collections at the Louvre and other museums during his Law study in Paris. He later founded the State Museum for Antiquities in Leiden which acquired a large part of its collection through colonial practices.⁶

¹ Ubuntu is the principle of I am because we are. The spelling of Afrikan with a 'k' refers to a pan-Afrikan spelling that includes both the Afrikan continent and the diaspora. It reflects the spelling of "Afrika" in all Afrikan languages.

²https://www.change.org/p/dutch-government-stop-the-excavations-at-st-eustatius-african-burial-ground?utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=custom_url&recruited_by_id=35203c80-8f79-11e8-88f1-4548c7e7290c

³ This term will be explained in the part on collaborative archaeology.

⁴ Atalay, 2006; Barkan 2002, 19-21; Halbertsma, 2003, 4; Kohl and Fawcett, 1995; Liebman and Rizvi, 2008, 1; Lowenthal, 2008, 239-243; Lyons and Papadoulos, 2002, 2; Nicholas and Hollowell, 2007, 60; Trigger, 1984.

⁵ Hondius, Jouwe, Stam and Tosch, 2019, 145.

⁶ Halbertsma, 2003 21-23, 32-38, 75-87, 97-106.

Archaeology's colonial inheritance did not disappear when most colonial rule ended. Not only are there still colonial ties to the Caribbean area but as Gloria Wekker delineated you cannot erase 400 years of a colonial mindset with one big gesture.⁷ The colonial mindset, maybe hidden nowadays but is still present in our cultural archive and in extension in our cultural institutions, including archaeology. This does not mean that archaeologists consciously adhere to colonial concepts but that it is deeply embedded within the discipline and we have to critically and reflectively engage with this inheritance. Only in this way can archaeology become more inclusive and socially just. The position that archaeology as a science is neutral and objective and the related idea that scientists have a right to data as it is for the good of all is responsible for some of the colonial practices still happening today.⁸ By placing yourself outside of politics you acquit yourself of any charges that do point to the colonial/political part of your practice. This is closely related to the next point that words are not neutral either. Part of the colonial heritage is situated in our language use. Museums are more aware of this as comes to the fore in recent discussions and the publication '*Woorden doen ertoe*' (Words Matter). Although there are some Dutch publications on colonialism and archaeology⁹ - some in an European context¹⁰ - in general in Dutch archaeology the discussion on our colonial heritage has not been broadly considered. For example, a study of the in the Netherlands widely distributed magazine *Archeobrief* (1996-2016) shows that each magazine issue had at least four items with references to colonial archaeology. However, there is no critical engagement with colonialism or even mentioning of the colonial aspect of the archaeology and most of them have a positive feel.¹¹ In the current world it is more than time for a broad discussion on Dutch archaeology and colonialism to take place. We should be sensitive in how to approach such a discussion. Schor and Martina¹² rightly criticize the tendency to polarize the discussion into good and bad and then finding a middle way which disguises the institutional problems. The colonial inheritance of archaeology is an institutional problem that needs our full attention. Internationally the debate on the relation between archaeology and colonialism has been taken up.¹³ We can learn from the issues these discussions put forward. Here a postcolonial approach is used in which we see, as Ashcroft explicated, that the effects of colonialism on cultures is a continuous process which influences the present day and "the grounding of the term (postcolonialism) in European colonialist histories and institutional practices, and the responses (resistant or otherwise) to these practices on the part of all colonized peoples, remain fundamental."¹⁴ How this postcolonialism plays out is grounded in the local situation and therefore it is of interest to focus on the history of the Dutch Caribbean archaeology and especially the present situation on Sint Eustatius.

In the 19th and most part of the 20th century there was little archaeological interest in the Dutch Caribbean. Between 1870 and 1890 a priest conducted amateur investigations into

⁷ Wekker, 2016, 2.

⁸ La Salle, 2010; Nicholas and Hollowell, 2007, 64; Zimmerman 1990.

⁹ Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2020; Van der Linde 2012.

¹⁰ Van der Linde a.o.

¹¹ kok in prep.

¹² Schor en Martina, 2018, 78.

¹³ Liebman and Rivzi, 2008; Lydon and Rizvi, 2010.

¹⁴ Ashcroft, 2000, 171.

archaeological sites on Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. In the 1920's the Leiden anthropologist de Josselin de Jong did some investigations on Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten. Private collectors were the only ones interested in archaeology in the Caribbean and their collections have found their way into the local museums.¹⁵ In the late 1960s the Dutch State Antiquity Service and Leiden University started the first professional archaeological research mainly on Curaçao and Aruba.¹⁶ The State service, however, did not report on this work in their normal publication: *Berichten van de Rijksdienst van het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek*. Soon the first phd's at Leiden University appeared. In 1967 the Archaeological Anthropological Institute of the Netherlands Antilles (AAINA) was established on Curaçao.¹⁷ From here (foreign) research was supervised. The first project was the field school of the College of William and Mary from Williamsburg (US) on Sint Eustatius which lasted several years (1981-1986). The archaeological finds from these excavations were taken to the United States. This would have been unthinkable if an excavation had taken place in The Netherlands. The second project was excavations by Leiden University between 1983 and 1986 at Sint Eustatius at the Golden Rock site. The materials from these excavations were also taken from the island but at least they remained within the national borders. Jay Havisier supervised these projects and it was not the concern of the AAINA what happened to the artefacts collected.¹⁸ This is of course a curious situation to supervise excavations but not to care about the material excavated. In the 90s some of the collections returned to the AAINA. In 1998 to cut costs the AAINA was dissolved into a foundation and in 2008 changed its name to National Archaeological Anthropological Memory Management Foundation (NAAM) focusing mainly on collection maintenance.¹⁹ In the early 2000s on several islands archaeological foundations were set up. In 2000 R. Grant Gilmore founded the St. Eustatius Center for Archaeological Research (SECAR) which as its working structure has a for-profit field-school model. The local St. Eustatius Historical Foundation and the St. Eustatius Museum have supported SECAR.²⁰ SECAR has done a variety of archaeological research from different periods on Sint Eustatius, including field work, desk-based research, predictive modelling and academic writings.²¹ In 2011 Leiden University undertook an archaeological assessment of 'The Farm' with small test pits and a rescue excavation at Smith Gut. The University focuses mainly on pre-Columbian archaeology. The influence of the University Leiden is also felt in the fact that they trained staff members or workers of SECAR that have worked there through the years. SECAR has performed excavations in areas that were not threatened by development, for example at the Corre Corre Bay 2 site in 2013 and Fair Play Plantation in 2014.²² In the Netherlands this would have been impossible as so-called *lust-grabungen*²³ are not allowed to be done by commercial companies. In July 2021 an excavation by SECAR of an 18th century

¹⁵ Hofman and Havisier, 2015, 29.

¹⁶ van der Linde, 2012, 139.

¹⁷ Hofman and Havisier, 2015, 29.

¹⁸ Hofman and Havisier, 2015, 30.

¹⁹ Hofman and Havisier 2015, 30.

²⁰ Havisier 2015, 138.

²¹ Visit the SECAR website for a list of publications: <https://secar.org/research/>

²² Morsink et al. 2013, 1; Cook and Stelten 2014, 6.

²³ A *lust-grabung* is an archaeological excavation that takes place without an immediate threat to the site but purely for the interest of the archaeologist.

burial place of free and enslaved Africans near the airport was stopped after local protests by various organizations including UCF, Brighter Path Foundation, SEAD (St Eustatius Awareness and Development Movement) and various less clearly organized concerned citizens. At the end of 2021 the protest was mainly organized by the St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance. SECAR was accused of being disrespectful to the ancestors of the African descendent community on Sint Eustatius and the lack of engagement in the process with the descendant community. The local government formed the Statia Heritage and Research Commission to look into the issue and write a report on how to deal with these kinds of burials. It should not come as a surprise that the local community was not involved as according to Havisier SECAR is known to do as little as possible community engagement.²⁴ In the same article SECAR is seen as the least de-colonized company in the former Netherlands Antilles. This comes also to the fore when reading their reports. They still adhere to a cultural archive that is unreflexive about the colonial legacy in the Caribbean. For example, in multiple reports they state that slavery on Sint Eustatius wasn't as bad as on other Caribbean islands, due to the access some enslaved people had to material goods and the idea that the enslaved Africans weren't watched as closely as on other islands.²⁵ As Sint Eustatius was one of the richest islands of that time it should not be a surprise that there was more left over at Sint Eustatius for the enslaved people to utilize and therefore it says little about their actual living circumstances. A golden cage remains a cage. Furthermore, the fact that escape was near impossible due to the size of the island may make the absence of close control even more harrowing as there was no way out except to swim across the ocean or board a ship as did happen sometimes. Either way we should not want to order slavery on a scale of horror as it is a crime against humanity in any sense. Furthermore, the SECAR reports often talk about slaves instead of enslaved people, showing they have little regard for the debate around the terms they use. Although this debate is relatively new in the general media, it has been part of academia for a quarter of a century.²⁶ In later reports both the term slave and enslaved African are used which shows a lack of consistent use.²⁷ And when they mention enslaved people in general historical overviews it is usually merely their numbers and not their agency which is mentioned. The colonizers, who have more detailed personal information such as their origins are described as setting up plantations while the enslaved people are racialized by calling them black and red and are not mentioned as the actual people who did the work on those plantations, they were just required.²⁸ To understand the position of SECAR within Dutch archaeology we need to look at the political structure of the island.

-Sint Eustatius as a colonial political place.

Since the 10th of October 2010 Sint Eustatius is a public body of the Netherlands. In effect the island falls under Dutch law, but there is a period of transition. It is, however, unclear how long

²⁴ Havisier 2015, 148.

²⁵ Havisier and Stelten 2012, 11; Stelten 2012, 8; Stelten 2013, 10; Cook and Stelten 2014, 10.

²⁶ For example, La Roche and Blakey 1997, 94.

²⁷ Van Keulen, 2018; Van Keulen, Stelten and Hinton 2020, 14.

²⁸ Stelten 2013, 5; Stelten 2012, 4.

this period of transition will take. To confuse matters at several official sites it is stated that Sint Eustatius is a special municipality, which is not true but covers the colonial aspect of governance. It is suggested that the special before municipality mainly means that the island does not belong to a province.²⁹ However, it turns out that the Erfgoedwet (Heritage Law) does not apply to Sint Eustatius and the other so-called special municipalities: Bonaire and Saba. They fall under the monumentenwet BES (monuments law BES), which basically means they have very limited laws and regulations when it comes to archaeology. So in essence there is a pick and choose application of Dutch law and it is clear that heritage is not given the same status on the islands as it does in the Netherlands itself. This sends a message to the inhabitants of Sint Eustatius that their culture is deemed less worth protecting than the culture of the Netherlands. It does seem that the Malta convention applies to the islands, which means that there has to be archaeological research before building activities. Without the Erfgoedwet (Heritage Law) there is, however, little legal framework about how the Malta convention is dealt with in a practical sense. In essence the local government decides what has to be done in relation to archaeology. SECAR is the only so-called expert institution on Sint Eustatius concerning archaeology. They do not need certification as is compulsory in the Netherlands and although they tend to excavate according to the Dutch norms, there is no institution to check their work or an obligation to put their excavation data in the national electronic depot.³⁰ Normally the island has a Governor and Executive Council who make decisions. They are controlled by the Island Council which could be equated with the local council in Dutch municipalities. In February 2018, however, this structure was dissolved by the Dutch parliament under the Temporary Act of Neglect of Duty and a Government Commissioner and a Deputy Commissioner were appointed. In effect Sint Eustatius is back under colonial rule. In 2020 the Island Council was reinstated but they can and are overruled by the commissioners. There has been an influx of white non-citizens of Sint Eustatius and many citizens of African Descent feel they are left out and looked down on as second and third class citizens. Developments take place that hardly benefit the locals but many people are afraid to speak up because this may cost their livelihood. For example, there is talk of instating Dutch as the instruction language while English is the common language of Sint Eustatius. Such a move would make it difficult for local people to achieve better jobs.³¹ Furthermore, new regulations for the Chamber of Commerce starting January 1st 2022 make it much more expensive to have an organization or foundation registered, while it is free of charge in the Netherlands.³² In this way financial barriers are put up which limit the possibilities for organizing the local community and applying for funding for cultural projects. If you start a community project on Sint Eustatius you need to be aware of these political circumstances. Sensitivity to the imbalance of power may prevent tensions and can help to create a place for healing and social justice.³³

²⁹ State website consulted at 8 December 2021:

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/caribische-deel-van-het-koninkrijk/rechtspositie-politieke-ambtsdraggers-bonaire-sint-eustatius-saba>

³⁰ <https://easy.dans.knaw.nl>

³¹ Personal communication with inhabitants of African descent of St. Eustatius.

³² Viewed December 27th 2021.

<https://bes-reporter.com/much-higher-chamber-of-commerce-fees-will-also-hit-entrepreneurs-on-st-eustatius-and-saba/>

³³ Nicholas and Hollowell, 2007, 63.

- Case study St Eustatius, the Godet site and the Golden Rock Plantation site.

The lack of regulations when it comes to archaeology has already had its effect on Sint Eustatius. There are two related cases that point to the ethical problems when it comes to the excavation of enslaved Africans. The sites concerned are the multiple excavations at the Godet Plantation burial site and the halted excavation at the burial site near the airport at the Golden Rock (Plantation) site³⁴ Here a short summary of the activities at the sites are given and the problems are pointed out.

The first case is the excavation of ancestral remains from the Godet Plantation site. Due to coastal erosion this site was in danger and an excavation by SECAR of some of the burials took place in 2012.³⁵ The ancestral remains were taken and there has been little information on what has actually happened to these remains and where they are kept. There is no (interim-) report on the excavation available on the website of SECAR although it took place several years ago. In 2017 hurricane Irma and Maria further damaged the site and in 2018 through the Texas State University and SECAR students from across the United States excavated more graves. Again no report is available but in the council meeting of September 20th 2021 it was said that the remains were “possibly a mix of soldiers and slaves”. At that time SECAR and the Cultural Department were discussing reburial and the possibility of a monument. The impression at the council meeting was that one person of the department spoke with SECAR. This is all done without much information being given to the wider community. For example, it was not made clear where the ancestral remains were kept. During the questions at a local council meeting³⁶ a person from the audience who was not introduced or in view suggested SECAR could not inform people due to the contract they had with the owners of the site. If this is the case, in new policies the government could limit this period of secrecy in relation to the archaeological findings. However, it seems that SECAR was allowed to share information as two of the researchers presented a poster at the 89th Annual Meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists in 2020 and a student wrote a MA-thesis on the subject.³⁷ Both publications do not mention possible soldiers among the ancestral remains. There seems to be a lack of consistent communication with the community leading to confusion and distrust. At the moment the site looks a mess with graves half covered in tarps and stones.³⁸ No measures are taken to protect the site from further coastal erosion.

³⁴ The Golden Rock site mainly concerns the pre-Columbian time, here however, it points to the Golden Rock Plantation. Therefore, the word Plantation is added to distinguish the periods.

³⁵ Bowden 2019, 40.

³⁶ Viewed December 20th 2021.

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?extid=NS-UNK-UNK-UNK-IOS_GK0T-GK1C&ref=watch_permalink&v=979937822753610

³⁷ Viewed on December 27th 2021.

<https://meeting.physanth.org/program/documents/2020/11352.pdf> and Bowden 2019.

³⁸ See Youtube for a video of the site made by Kenneth Cuvalay in November 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpEFzBmQBjQ>

The second case involves the excavations near the airport of a burial site of enslaved Africans at the Golden Rock Plantation from the 18th century. In 2020 SECAR was asked by the local government to do a desk study of an area near the airport that used to be part of the Golden Rock Plantation.³⁹ The government wanted to use the soil of the hill for road constructions. A desk study indicated that there was a chance of finding the remains of the plantation and especially the settlement of the enslaved people. Also there could be parts of the indigenous Golden Rock site which was not fully excavated in the 1980s. SECAR dug three parallel test trenches to estimate the extent of the archaeological features. In the eastern and middle part of these trenches they found many features both dating to the precolonial period and the time of the plantation. They also excavated a single burial of probably an enslaved African and Ruud Stelten of SECAR explained that they expected to have found a burial site. According to their report they excavated one individual; examined and covered for later excavation a child burial; and identified fifteen visible burial outlines and expected 60-70 graves. This could be one of the largest burial grounds of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean⁴⁰ It was decided that an excavation of the area was necessary but due to the weather it was postponed to 2021. Also they needed a bigger team and specialists for excavating human remains. All this indicates that there was every reason to believe they had discovered a burial ground of enslaved Africans, however, besides the local government they did not reach out to the descendent community. They say they wanted to be sure first of the extent of the burial site, but then you are already too late to involve the descendent community in a meaningful way. Also the number of burials should not be an issue when engaging with descendant communities. The remains of one ancestor should be seen as enough reason to contact descendants. They even state in their report “the oppressed often did not have a voice in history”⁴¹ but fail to recognize the voices of the descendant community. In April of 2021 a bigger and international team started to work and 69 graves were excavated. During the excavation the descendent community became aware of the excavation and protests started to appear demanding the excavations to be stopped. On the 21th of June a Town Hall meeting was organized where the process was explained and the first results were presented. Here it became clear that the council and SECAR realized they made mistakes in the process but were still not very forthcoming about how they wanted to involve the descendent communities. If they would have maintained a better relationship with the local community over a longer period of time. They could have consulted with descendent communities during the process even when things were not yet sure. People would have understood the process better and what to expect.⁴² If outreach is only conceived of as giving information on specific sites or archaeological finds to the local community without actually involving them, it explains why they only want to tell things after the facts. However, the council, in recognizing their lack of understanding, have formed the Statia Heritage Research Commission. This commission of 15 persons taken from both professionals in the heritage sector and local community members has two main goals. First, it has to evaluate the burial site

³⁹ The information is taken from the recording of the Town Hall meeting of June 21st 2021. Viewed December 20th 2021.
https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?extid=NS-UNK-UNK-UNK-IOS_GK0T-GK1C&ref=watch_permalink&v=979937822753610

⁴⁰ Van Keulen, Stelten and Hinton 2020, 26, 47.

⁴¹ Van Keulen, Stelten and Hinton 2020, 47.

⁴² For example, Atalay 2020, 9.

near the airport and give recommendations to the government. Second, it has to give professional and community advice regarding cultural heritage research practices on Sint Eustatius and give recommendations for the future based on international standards. The report of the commission was due in December 2021 but has not been made public at that time. How the commission was formed is less clear and how the council can evaluate the outcomes of the commission is also not evident. The lack of expertise is not uncommon in local councils also in the Netherlands, but there they often can rely on support from the province or archaeological advisors who work for multiple communities or even the State Service for Cultural Heritage. On Sint Eustatius there is a limited amount of people they can reach out to. These people have a long working history in the Caribbean but they have little experience working with descendant communities beyond schools as this has never been a priority beyond giving lip service in academic articles.⁴³ To paraphrase La Salle: are archaeologists making people comfortable so archaeologists can do the research they want.⁴⁴

- Collaborative archaeology, a community based approach

The excavation of ancestral remains in colonial settings will always need extra attention. This should not be seen as a disadvantage but shows us the role archaeology can play in situations where social justice is not something that can be taken for granted. Recognizing the different power dimensions is a first step that needs to be taken. We can no longer assume that archaeology is an objective science for the good of all, as many case-studies have shown that this attitude can lead to harm that needs a lot of reparation.⁴⁵ To balance the powers a collaborative approach can involve communities in meaningful ways by not just informing people on what the archaeologists are doing, as is the case in many public archaeology projects, but actually letting them co-decide on project goals and methods.

It is not the case that we have to start from scratch. There are multiple international guidelines that should inform archaeological practice in general and more specific when related to ancestral remains. For collaborative archaeology you have to know the community and here we have to look further. Many of the guidelines are formed due to the work of indigenous people and their constant reminder that their ancestors are not just data of a culture and people that are of the past but play a central role in the present.⁴⁶ An omission from many of these guidelines such as NAGPRA⁴⁷ are, however, the indigenous people who are not recognized by the state, and non-indigenous people of African descent who were forcibly put in a colonial context. Therefore there is the call for forming an AAGPRA for African American ancestors.⁴⁸ This omission and its consequences was recognized early on by the team of archaeologists involved

⁴³ For example, Havisser, 2015.

⁴⁴ La Salle, 2010, 411.

⁴⁵ Zimmerman 1990; Reardon and Tallbear, 2012. González-Tennant 2014, 28.

⁴⁶ Atalay, 2006, 288.

⁴⁷ Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act established in 1990.

⁴⁸ Dunnivant, Justinvil Colwell, 2021.

in the excavation of the New York African Burial Ground after they took over from the initial archaeological team after public protests. They coined the term ‘descendent communities’ and I will quote here at length:

“Like a culturally affiliated group used for NAGPRA, it is a descendant community whose social history preserves it with continuing common relationships with the broader society and shared meanings among its members. This is consistent with the definition of an ethnic group. Some, though not all, members of a descendant community are plausibly consanguineal relatives of the ancestral population. American slavery deliberately tore connections of genetic relations, and this should not be the high bar of plausible descendancy, although it also opens up broadened possibilities for undocumented consanguines. ... Importantly, the descendant community is defined by those asserting stewardship because they care about the disposition of ancestors in question, thus making them vulnerable to harm by anthropological treatment. They therefore are subject to and empowered by professional ethics (an ethical client) with rights to some version of informed consent over the disposition of their ancestral remains and arguably even over the interpretation of their histories...”⁴⁹

Important about this definition is that the blood-relation is not seen as all important as slavery deliberately broke up family ties.⁵⁰ This aspect leads others to extend on the notion of descendent communities and the right of communities on deciding who is a member, where the emphasis of membership lies on care, stewardship, and consent.⁵¹ This can be seen as a healing process for descendant communities whose ancestors had no say over which community they belonged to or wanted to belong to. Descendant communities, however, are not homogenous entities and disagreement and discussion will be part of any meaningful engagement.⁵²

There are several aspects to involving the descendant communities in archaeological projects concerning ancestral remains. On the one hand, there are guidelines, regulations and proposals that help shape the framework. On the other, there are sets of questions that need to be asked to deal with specific situations.

To start with the guidelines and regulations, fortunately they are plentiful and usually accessible online so that non-specialists can also know and use them, although some use difficult legal jargon. Most of them still assume research is for the good of all.⁵³ And many guidelines are vague in what exactly needs to be done. For example, respect for the local community is mentioned, but what does that mean in practice? These guidelines do evolve and some become

⁴⁹ Blakey, 2020, 190-191.

⁵⁰ Hartman, 2007; Harvey, 2020; Sharpe 2010.

⁵¹ National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2018.

⁵² Franklin and Mckee, 2004, 4.

⁵³ Society for American Archaeology, Principles of Archaeological Ethics, Principle No. 1; ICOMOS, Charter for the protection and management of the archaeological heritage; Association of European Archaeologists, Code of Practice.

more precise over the years.⁵⁴ There is no place here to discuss all guidelines and proposals, therefore there will be a focus on the aspects relevant for the research into ancestral remains on Sint Eustatius.

1. The descendent community should have priority of decision-making over research when it concerns ancestral remains.⁵⁵
2. If ancestral remains are researched it should be explicated what type of research is done and with what goal. These techniques and goals should be approved by the descendant communities. No additional research or exchange of material is allowed without consulting the descendent community.⁵⁶
3. At all times during the process the ancestral remains are respected and kept as individuals. Residue of samples are returned to the specific individuals.
4. After the research is completed the ancestral remains are returned in the custody of the descendent community.

It is important to be aware that there are also spiritual issues involved that may not be part of the scientist's worldview. Therefore it is important to also consult practitioners and/or specialists concerning African ancestral rituals.

To adapt to specific circumstances it is relevant to ask the right questions before you start a project. Collaborative archaeology is getting more and more attention, especially in the United States where indigenous and African-American groups claim their right to be involved in their heritage. Several articles emphasize that what matters most is asking the right questions, not only in relation to your research goal but on how to engage with communities.⁵⁷ Here I propose three main questions with several sub-questions that can guide the collaborative process.

What community?

It is not always self-evident what the community is. As Cheryl White⁵⁸ has explained some descendent communities are still in the process of defining themselves as an interested party. Furthermore, the community will not be homogenous and debates may arise within. What researchers have to be careful about is not confusing the few local people that are happy to engage with them with the representatives of the community. It takes time to get to know a community or diverse groups within a community. Related to this are questions as posed by Sonya Atalay: What does it mean to have one's history, story, or knowledge examined, interpreted, and displayed by "outsiders"? Who has access to this knowledge? Who has the right to examine it, to write about it? Who owns the imagery, symbols, and knowledge of a cultural, social, or ethnic group, and who controls how that is used? Who has the right to

⁵⁴ For example, The World Archaeological Congress, changed from respect in their The Vermillion Accord on Human Remains from 1989 to permission from affected communities in their The Tamaki Makau-rau Accord on the Display of Human Remains and Sacred Objects from 2005.

⁵⁵ The International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, draft for Code of Ethics, section 2; NAGPRA; Blakey 2020, 191; White 2010, 488.

⁵⁶ Dunnavant et al. 2021, 340; Reardon and Tallbear, 2012, 243-244.

⁵⁷ Atalay 2006; La Salle 2010.

⁵⁸ Cheryl White, online presentation at Local Voices webinar on September 7th 2021.

interpret it, speak about it, display it, profit from it?⁵⁹ These are all questions related to how you engage with a community or how different groups interact. Although it may sound like legal questions such as who owns something? Within collaborative archaeology you have to think about this in an ethical manner. These questions concern social justice as groups are given the possibilities for self determination where they may have had less opportunity in the past.

What research?

Archaeologists may think that they know what they would like to research but is this what they should research? Community involvement is crucial here at an early stage. Some research questions may be deemed offensive or irrelevant by the community, while other things they are interested in may be overlooked. At this point the knowledge within the community can also be brought into the research process. The outcome of research can be highly enriched with what Atalay calls “braided knowledge”⁶⁰ where Western science and other ways of knowing like oral traditions are combined on equal footing. This is also the point where limits to the research of ancestral remains can take shape as the meaning of the ancestors within present-day society is not just an abstract concept but actually informs the research. It also questions whether Western scientific methods are the best way to interpret the past. La Salle⁶¹ suggested some further questions that will help the process: Who is involved in shaping the research topic? What is and is not being explored, and why? Who will do the analysis and write the interpretation, and what is influencing their perspectives? And, critically, who decided that this was a topic worth studying in the first place, and why?

Who Benefits?

As collaborative postcolonial archaeology is about social justice, we cannot ignore the question of who benefits either financially or status wise. Having access to data is certainly an ability related to power, finance and status.

La Salle⁶² poses the questions: Who is funding the research, and what are they getting out of it? How will the results be published and who will benefit? But we also have to think further if the archaeological results are used in tourism. Will the local community benefit from tourism in more than just menial jobs as cleaners in hotels? Jobs are of course important but we have to consider who benefits most. Are foreign investors the main beneficiaries? Will there still be space left for the local community? Especially on small islands these questions cannot be overlooked as space is severely limited. If archaeology is for the good of all, it must at least not enlarge the problems people are facing in their daily life.

- Conclusion

For postcolonial archaeology it is important that we know the history of our profession to avoid continuing practices of social injustice. A collaborative approach with descendant communities

⁵⁹ Atalay 2006, 301.

⁶⁰ Atalay 2020.

⁶¹ La Salle, 2010, 414.

⁶² La Salle, 2010, 414.

is viewed as essential when researching ancestral remains. The sharing of power is the base of this collaboration where the descendent community has the final say in what happens to their ancestors. If we want an archaeology that is meaningful in the future we have to respect the rights and knowledges of the people affected by our work. These are long term commitments in which we strive for non-hierarchical relations. If our goal as archaeologists is to understand human society, we have to consider ourselves as part of that society. It may mean that sometimes we have to stop our archaeological research but it does not mean we have to stop engaging with creating a world where social justice and archaeology go hand in hand. On Sint Eustatius we are now at a crossroad where we can decide to continue business as usual or make archaeology fully engage with the descendant community of enslaved Africans who are still living on the island.

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