



Archaeologies of Violence and Privilege

Christopher N. Matthews and Bradley D. Phillippi (editors), University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2020. 306 pp., 34 figs., 5 tables, list of contributors, index. \$85.00 cloth

Kelly M. Britt

Accepted: 8 December 2021 / Published online: 3 January 2022
© The Author(s) under exclusive licence to Society for Historical Archaeology 2021

This edited volume by Christopher N. Matthews and Bradley D. Phillippi takes the current anthropological dialogue on the important topics of violence and privilege and yokes them theoretically in time and space through global case studies. The contributions to this volume highlight that while direct violence has been and can be studied empirically, through archaeology, structural violence and aspects of privilege supporting that violence can be studied empirically as well. Most importantly, the volume also highlights how the practice of archaeology as a discipline is not immune to the reproduction and support of these direct and structural modes of violence and privilege.

One of the most exciting aspects of this volume is that it ends not on a conclusion, but rather with a commentary and forum-style rebuttal by the contributors. As volume commenter LouAnn Wurst points out, while the book is not organized thematically, the articles are clearly focused through three lenses: colonial violence, racial violence, and class violence. Additionally, a theoretical chapter (Reinhard Bernbeck) following the introduction (Matthews and Phillippi) grounds the entire volume's discussion in an examination of the violence in and by archaeology. Wurst does an excellent job identifying the common themes that emerge from the chapters,

including the need to challenge commonly held narratives of the past, the necessity of providing a connection between past and present, and the notion of resilience and what that means to those in the past. The book challenges researchers to move beyond the idea that structural violence is largely invisible to the recognition that it can be seen materially. It explores these material ways of seeing structural violence and elucidates how archaeology is uniquely positioned to reveal these violent spaces and challenge them in the present.

While all chapters take an intersectional look at their subject matter, they each have a main focal theme to their discussions of colonial, racial, or class violence and privilege. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 (Guido Pezzarossi, Kathryn E. Sampeck, and Douglas K. Smit and Terren K. Proctor, respectively) explore violence from a Spanish colonial perspective. Both Pezzarossi's chapter, situated in the Highlands of Guatemala, and Smit and Proctor's, located in colonial Huancavelica in Peru, interrogate two types of violence (direct and structural). They illustrate ongoing discursive narratives that promote collusion and bias, and the legacy that extraction leaves in the environment and in the physical bodies of the descendants of those who suffered direct colonial violence. While all three of the chapters explore violence through landscape analyses, Sampeck looks at space in El Salvador and La Florida as not just places where violence occurred, but where it continues to occur in the present through symbolic violence. Sampeck

K. M. Britt (✉)
Brooklyn College, CUNY, NY, Brooklyn, New York,
U.S.A.
e-mail: kellym.britt@brooklyn.cuny.edu

unpacks spatial symbolic violence in her two case studies, attempting to give “place to the placeless” (p. 86). This work illuminates the destruction done by colonial forces, but also sheds light on how so many of these same forms of violence can be seen today. These ideas evoke thoughts on the impact of food deserts, transportation routes, segregated planning programs, and other planning/public policies on certain populations—particularly structural violence deemed invisible, yet illuminated by the COVID-19 pandemic such as access to personal protective equipment and vaccines. She succeeds in highlighting the privilege of those wielding power in these postcolonial contexts.

Racial and class violence are explored in several chapters as they highlight the direct and structural violence embedded in the landscape, primarily through capitalist modes of production and policy, but also through privilege that upholds direct and structural power relations that continue to exist today in various forms. Koji Lau-Ozawa (chap. 7), Paul R. Mullins, Kyle Huskins, and Susan B. Hyatt (chap. 8), and Matthews (chap. 9) focus on structural racial violence seen through 20th-century landscapes. Gardens at Japanese American incarceration camps in Arizona, water systems in Indiana, and transportation systems in Essex County, New Jersey, are the contexts that trace these forms of violence. These all underscore spatial privilege and violence through what Matthews labels “carceral landscapes.” Ozawa shows how racist employment limitations placed on Japanese Americans, which forced many to acquire skills through employment in the gardening and farming industry, were then incorporated into the camps to invoke aspects of “home.” Mullins, Huskins, and Hyatt, as well as Matthews, look at the natural (White River) and built (pools, beaches, and highways) environments as spaces of freedom or constraint, depending on what side of privilege communities fell. They are reminders of the inextricable link between landscapes and trauma: one that does not cease once the act of displacement commences, but is passed on generationally through the loss of place.

Chapter 6, by Michael P. Roller, highlights how subjective, systematic, and symbolic forms of violence can be explored through the materiality of class in the 19th-century coal mining town of Hazelton, Pennsylvania, through the Lattimer Massacre. This work illustrates how racial class stratification is

intertwined with police violence. This point weighs extremely heavy today as we see the legacy of this racialized systemic violence made manifest in literally minutes—whether it was three minutes in the case of the Lattimer Massacre, or eight minutes and 46 seconds for George Floyd. While an understanding of these power dynamics is key to change, when will our better understanding and knowledge of these systems of power shift to changing them? This is not a critique of this volume, for that was not the intended purpose of the book, but rather a critique of our discipline itself.

By far, the work that most haunted me from this volume is Bernbeck’s on “Violence in Archaeology and the Violence of Archaeology.” As Bernbeck warns, and Wurst reiterates, the very nature of archaeology and academia, from fieldwork to publication, contains reificatory inclinations and thereby can be violent itself. Bernbeck questions who truly has the right to speak for the people we study, as people of the past are embodied in the objects we study and documentation we do (as in photography) in the present. His call to limit archaeological excavation to instances of salvage in order to bind this violence may seem drastic or extreme to some, but also gives pause for us to ponder and makes us question what (or who) we study and why.

The unique volume format is refreshing and deserves to be highlighted here. Individual contributor chapters followed by Wurst’s commentary and responses by the authors firmly situate the book as a written dialogue. Especially given the dense and complex nature of the discussions, the book’s structure lifts some of this weight by situating the work as something unfinished, a conversation that includes rather than instructs the reader. So many volumes could benefit from this, for so much of what we do and write about does not necessitate a conclusion but rather further questions and more dialogue. The format of this volume makes it an excellent resource for upper undergraduate and graduate students to use in total or in part with commentary and forum. The volume is also available as an audiobook, once again excellent for a larger and more diverse audience.

Wurst highlights some important areas of critique for the volume, including the need to build upon the work to include the violence of capitalism. However, given the important nature of the discussion on the history of structural violence and privilege from

various viewpoints, and the limitations to an edited work of this sort, the book speaks volumes not only on how we can understand the past and present, but also how this research can impact the present and future. One new direction a publisher could take to mitigate those structural constraints of limited space might be to continue this dialogue on violence and privilege in a series, with comparative spaces on these same themes of colonial, racial, and class violence, including ways to enact change. Until then, this edited volume is an excellent compilation of

work that addresses not only the history of structural inequalities, but also forces us to ask what our role in this structural violence is.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.