History, Memory, and [Archaeological?] Heritage at Nombre De Dios, Panama

Meghan Habas Siudzinski

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History, Memory, and [Archaeological?] Heritage
at Nombre de Dios, Panama

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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This thesis explores notions of 'heritage' among residents of Nombre de Dios, Panama through the combined ethnographic methods of participant-observation, public archaeology and semi-structured interviews. This diversified strategy enabled an examination of history, memory, and the archaeological past at the individual, community, and national levels of society. Illustrating the discursive relationship between society and the individual in forming conceptions of 'heritage,' this research argues for an expanded treatment of the term. Rather than a static idea, 'heritage' is better considered an emergent process with people negotiating constantly-evolving narrations of their relationships with the past.

This thesis further provides an example of how ethnographic research within archaeological endeavors can illuminate local priorities, rather than simply serving to further archaeologists' purposes. Conducted in this way, archaeologists have the opportunity to make their work relevant by more closely aligning their own priorities with those of descendent and community stakeholders.
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DEDICATION

To the people of Nombre de Dios and to Robert with gratitude
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Several people have been influential in my development as an anthropological thinker. I have benefited from the instruction and insights of interested and talented faculty members within the Department of Anthropology. Among them, I am especially grateful for the counsel and enthusiasm of my committee members, Drs. Michael Blakey, Marley Brown, Grey Gundaker, and Matt Liebmann. Their advice was instrumental in the shaping and completion of this document.

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I am grateful to Maria Salamanca for the invitation to join her doctoral research team, and to produce a thesis from my work there. Catalina Medina Hall was a wonderful partner in the conduct of the interviews. Bibiana Etayo, Alejandra Garces, and Paola Sanabria’s contributions to the public outreach sessions helped us succeed in spite of very challenging circumstances. I’d also like to thank the dedicated and able Alfonso Ricardo Palacios and Melissa Palacios, who translated and transcribed the interviews tapes, and provided helpful insights during the analytical phase of my research.

I am humbled by, and grateful to, the residents of Nombre de Dios, who had every reason to distrust a group of Americans and Colombians that descended upon their town. Their enthusiasm for our work was inspiring; the willingness and sincerity of those I interviewed, generous.

I am grateful to my family for their faithful moral support. It has been a significantly steadying force through all my endeavors.

It is with utmost appreciation that I thank my husband, Robert Siudzinski—himself a social scientist—for his sincere interest, dedicated counsel, and willingness to endure hardships in the interest of my scholarly pursuits. I cannot imagine a more supportive or enthusiastic partner.
INTRODUCTION

I went to the small, coastal town of Nombre de Dios, Panama curious to know if and how people there related to the nearby 500-year-old archaeological site where Spain began its expansion into the Americas. My assumptions, as an archaeologist, were that the site was important and warranted excavation, interpretation, and public interest, and that it needed protection from looting. I hoped that residents would respond strongly to our excavations and public outreach sessions and that they would be eager to join the conversation as stakeholders. I expected them to see the site as a part of their heritage, that is, that they would relate to the site as a symbol of their past, and that from this relationship would spring their interest in the archaeology and stewardship of the site. What I found was an entirely different situation, the discovery of which is the focus of this document.

Notions of heritage factor into daily life for most people in most places. In Chapter 1, I describe the development of notions of ‘heritage’ in academic and heritage industry realms. The main treatments of the term are critically examined, followed by my definition of heritage for the purpose of this study. History and memory have been treated as separate components of heritage by academics and those in the heritage industry. History has been defined as written ‘official’ representations of the past, while memory is defined as socially transmitted, unwritten representations of the past. Depictions of heritage through display of historic objects at museums and archaeological sites turn these places into “cathedrals of identity,” whereby representations of the past create ‘official’ histories at community, national, and global scales (Adams 2003: 2005:433). These combine with memories and practices to inform conceptions of heritage.
Nombre de Dios is a rural, Panamanian town of about 500 residents bordered on the north by the Atlantic Ocean, and by tropical forest on the south. Influenced by numerous waves of diaspora and immigration, the town’s largely Afro-Caribbean population is diverse. As such, this complex history produced a unique modern context for the examination of conceptions of ‘heritage.’ Chapter 2 contextualizes this study by describing more broadly the historical background of Panama and Nombre de Dios.

Chapter 3 details the combined strategy of ethnographic methodologies that I used to collect the evidence for this research, the findings of which I describe in Chapter 4. Here, I detail the complexity of local conceptions and expressions of heritage, which are centered on the Congo festival. I also explain how local interests concerning the archaeological site are in a decidedly different direction.

I conclude by summarizing and reflecting upon the research findings, and identifying ways in which my research stands to make a contribution. Beyond the core chapters of this thesis are seven appendices—five summarizing the semi-structured interviews I conducted, one containing consent form created for participants in this study, and one containing Institutional Review Board approval of my research.
CHAPTER I

NOTIONS OF HERITAGE

The purpose of my research was to examine the existence of, or potential for, archaeological heritage among local residents. **Heritage** is an abstract term used for different purposes by people in varied contexts and must first be defined. Used by nationalist movements, defined by heritage industry professionals and examined by academic scholars across the humanities and social sciences, treatments of the term fall into three basic categories: 1) **Heritage** has been invoked as a vision of history for nationalist strategies; 2) The heritage industry uses the term to identify sites of significance at local, regional, national and international levels; 3) Academic treatments of the term have changed over time from early definitions limited to material objects and the built environment, to current conceptions that include cognitive aspects. Notions of heritage within the heritage industry and academia are most relevant to this research and are described more fully, and critically considered, below. This section concludes with a declaration of definition for the purposes of this research project.

Early academic consideration of heritage often addressed the relationships of written history and memory and distinguished the two in terms of form, credibility and value. Benedict Anderson, Maurice Halbwachs, and Pierre Nora each grappled with these distinctions in their scholarship on the formation of the nation-state. According to Anderson, nation-states emerge out of *imagined communities*—people who collectively determine on what is remembered and what is forgotten, and from this, produce histories (Anderson 1983).
In *The Collective Memory* (1980), Halbwachs defines history as the documented, objective and universal past, while memory is collective and refers to the past within the lifetimes of those remembering. Historians and other scholars of the past considered written documents to be superior and more reliable than memories that often take the form of folkways (Holtorf 2000:2.8). The privileging of written documents has since been thoroughly debated among scholars, particularly those of history and anthropology, resulting in general agreement among academics that documents are equally subjective and as problematic as any other source. This perception among the general public is not as widely held, which illustrates the potential political power of written historical documents. As French sociologist Nora wrote, “History belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority” (Nora, 1989:9).

Research on memory emerged as a backlash against the imbued authority of documented history. Voices from within the public history sphere were among those to stress the importance of memory upon conceptions of heritage:

> The workings of human memory are of interest to all who hope to explicate the present through examination of the past. The new memory research is especially important because it is audience-focused and recognizes that examining how humans receive information and construct memory is critical to our work [Archibald 1997:64].

In problematizing how history should be written, Nora also treats written history and memory as fundamentally different. However, he favors memory over documents. In his seven-volume work, *Les Lieux de Memoire* (1984-1992), Nora regards memory as true, while documented history is artificial: “Memory is life, born by living societies founded in its name” (Nora 1989:8), but historical texts are “the terrorism of historicized memory”
Similarly, historian David Glassberg describes how 'official' histories produced by those in positions of power can mute local histories: “Historical imagery disseminated by government and mass media advance the imagined community of the nation while suppressing authentic local and group memories and collective identities” (Glassberg 1996:12). This reversal of privilege is also not productive because it assumes that memory is not subject to the influences that also shape documents. The idea that memories are somehow more pure, true, or ‘authentic’ than written accounts of the past is incorrect. Decisions to include and exclude details of orally transmitted accounts about the past are just as political as those written down. This means that all sources of information about the past should receive both equal consideration and scrutiny.

Clear distinctions between history and memory have been challenged more recently by scholars who recognize the significant overlap that exists between the two spheres. That history (the documented past) and memory (belief about the past) work together to inform people’s conceptions of the past has led scholars to consider more closely the relationship of these two areas once defined as fundamentally different. The past may be learned about through school, various forms of media, the stories of ancestors, and often through some combination of sources (Holtorf 2000:2.3). In his discussion of structuration, Anthony Giddens describes how individual understanding is socially embedded (Giddens 1984). Applied to heritage, we can see that:

[I]t becomes fruitless to discuss whether or not a particular event or process remembered corresponds to the actual past: all that matters are the specific conditions under which such memory is constructed as well as the personal and social implications of memories held...The distinction between individual and cultural memory is thus not necessarily a sharp one. Both
reflect first and foremost the conditions of the present in which they originate [Holtorf 2000:2.7].

As a result of the history/memory debate, researchers strive to overcome their own a priori assumptions about the existence and composition of heritage because, as Jan Assman has observed, “through its cultural heritage a society becomes visible to itself and to others. Which past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in its identificatory appropriation tells us much about the constitution and tendencies of a society” (Assman 1995:133). Instead of imposing our own biases about what should inform people’s beliefs about the past, these orientations emerge from within a society. Jefferson Singer and Peter Salovey observe that highly personal experiences, such as emotion and perception, factor in heritage construction: “how we interpret the story, how we feel about past incidents of our lives, will influence the story still to come. In the act of looking back as a means to anticipate the future, we change the future.” (Singer and Salovey 1993 in Archibald 1997:62).

These descriptions differ from the consensus theory of heritage held by some in public history and public archaeology settings that conceive of heritage as “based on a shared value system that people have about culture and their past…Heritage is necessary for sustaining local identity and a sense of place” (Shackel 2004:10). The shared value system referenced here is often determined by stakeholders in academia and the heritage industry and imposed in a top-down strategy upon the public in order to make relevant the work of the former groups. Archaeologists have taken steps to call attention to the powerful role the past plays in the present (e.g. Handsman and Leone 1989; Leone 1995; Potter 1994), many of these scholars are producers of knowledge, rather than conversational facilitators among
stakeholders. Increasingly, archaeologists are positioning ourselves differently because we are often engaged with a local community to whom we try to relate our work (e.g. LaRoche and Blakey 1997; McDavid 1997). Whereas the heritage industry has not always found it necessary or important to do so, it is necessary for archaeologists to collaborate with invested local people.

Cultural patrimony and the heritage industry produce a consensus view of past events, distilling histories into one story containing limited, but commonly recognized, figures, events, and institutions (Edson 2004:337), often for profit. Like written texts, heritage tourism’s ‘official’ presentations exercise significant influence on public conceptions: “history and heritage make a selective use of the past for current purposes and transform it through interpretation” (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996:6). More recent academic and industry definitions of heritage have attempted to address these issues. Academics began to address the competing interests of stakeholders, including themselves, within their research. Heritage industry discourse has begun to consider what this means for its role:

Traditionally, heritage has been confined to the distant past, but the gap between past and present grows ever closer as heritage managers are forced to come to grips with the implications it has in the present [Waterton 2005:320].

Changes in academic circles have been reflected in definitions of international heritage organizations, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), which attempt to standardize terminology, definitions and policies regarding heritage tourism.
around the world. Since the 1964 adoption of the Venice Charter of the Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments (Ahmad 2006:292), which used the term ‘heritage’ strictly in reference to the built environment, the heritage industry’s treatment of the term has become more inclusive. Cultural landscapes and social factors were later included in the definition, and more recently, *intangible* values were added (Ahmad 2006: 294). These include practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills (as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and their associated cultural spaces) that communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their “cultural heritage.”

This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly created by communities and groups in response to their environments, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity [UNESCO 2003:Article 2:2].

While this is an improvement upon earlier, more restrictive definitions of *heritage*, the fact remains that standards generated by the heritage industry are used to determine what qualifies as a ‘significant’ site and ‘official’ versions of the past. As outside stakeholders with a financial interest, the heritage industry’s priorities may compete with local interests, but through collaborative efforts, can be brought into alignment with those of residents. As Cathy Stanton suggests, those working in the heritage industry have the opportunity and responsibility to address differing motivations and interests among stakeholders:

[Heritage professionals’] ability to provide a simultaneous dual focus—on those who are excluded or subordinated through heritage practices as well as those who control those practices—may be one of the most important contributions we can make...By working to clarify underlying motivations and causes at the sites we study...we may be able to help
reframe conversations among disparate groups and move discussions away from more surface issues [Stanton 2005:428-429].

The previously discussed definitional developments within academic scholarship and the heritage industry illustrate that limited conceptions of heritage fall short of allowing for the complexity of the notion. Instead, heritage requires a flexible definition open to the inclusion of various forms of information. In the articulation of documented history and memory, heritage develops at the individual, community, regional, national and broader levels. As Gary Edson has simply and eloquently described:

[Heritage] is a means by which human beings orient themselves to their past, and many of the elements of the past—both real and imagined, cultural and natural, tangible and intangible—are organized chronologically [Edson 2004:341].

Similarly, Ben Porter and Noel Salazar have defined heritage as having intensional and extensional components. That is, “heritage presents itself as ‘a sense of the self in the past’ where the...‘self’ is ascribed at increasingly broad scales of the individual, community, nation, and globe, and the temporal links between the subject and the past are based on perceived genealogical, biological, or community connections” (Porter and Salazar 2005:362). This is an evolutionary process: “We will experience our present differently in accordance with the different pasts to which we are able to connect that present” (Connerton 1989:2). These descriptions do not exclude certain types of information, and convey that people’s sense of the past is ever-changing as it is informed by various sources. It is this broad notion of heritage to which I refer in this research.
In the past, scholarship on memory focused on institutional producers of history, such as higher education, government agencies, and the media. More recently, inquiry has focused on public understanding to discern how people make sense of the various sources of historical information, including designated historical places (according to government or vernacular standards), popular culture, art and literature, and oral sources such as family stories. These various sources create what Robert Redfield called “the social organization of tradition” (Redfield 1967:67-104). In addition to examining social structures that inform heritage, individuals’ memories of the past allow us to glimpse the memory of the group(s) in which an individual operates. As Glassberg writes: “An individual memory is the product of group communication, intimately linked to a collective memory of the community” (Glassberg 1996:10). As both social factors and products, historical knowledge, memory and heritage are intrinsically political.

Today, archaeology is widely recognized as inherently political and is taken as one of the many factors that may inform heritage: “Self-definition today coalesces around genealogy, heritage, citizenship, and sameness, but underlying that are also diverse and troubling contemporary concerns about disenfranchisement and difference” (Meskell 2002:28). Archaeological sites are known to serve as symbols of history, foci of memory, and have been used for political purposes to create conceptions of heritage and people’s understanding of themselves (Holtorf 2000:5.5). Archaeology also contributes to the discursive processes required toward better understanding the nature of heritage: “despite the difficulties in reconciling archaeology’s role in national constructions, most scholars now affirm that the active nature of material culture precludes static readings of the past and that
identity construction itself is a fluid, fractured and ongoing set of processes” (Meskell 2002:293).

Archaeological studies that acknowledge the complexity of heritage are replacing reductionist ones (Meskell 2002:284). Historian Eric Hobsbawm articulates that, though rooted in the past, all of these concepts have contemporary relevance:

Traditions, meanings, and memories are invented, and they become legitimate through repetition or a process of formalization and ritualization characterized by reference to the past. By implying continuity with the past—and sometimes that is a matter of forgetting a past—or reinventing a collective memory, these traditions reinforce values and behavior [Hobsbawm in Shackel & Chambers 2004:3].

We can see, then, that the social phenomenon of heritage is both a factor in, and a product of, discursive processes—shaping and being shaped by individuals and society.

The main conceptions of heritage put forth by academia and industry have been described here. The literature informs us as to how notions of heritage are articulated through history and memory, but these distinctions are problematic in the case of Nombre de Dios, due to its tumultuous past. I will show through the research findings in Chapter 5 that residents of Nombre de Dios are remembering their own memories and those of others, and performing and researching the past. All of these aspects become heritage, and as such, the notion requires flexible, broad treatment. Before we consider the research findings; however, we must situate the evidence in the context of Nombre de Dios’s past.
CHAPTER II
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The post-Columbian period of Panama began with the founding of Nombre de Dios. Spain initiated its efforts to colonize the New World in 1492 and soon established three ports authorized to trade with the Spanish crown: Nombre de Dios (1509) on the Caribbean/Atlantic coast of what came to be known as Panama, Veracruz (1519) in what would become Mexico, and Cartagena (1533) in what is now Colombia. Established March 8, 1509 by Diego de Nicuesa, Nombre de Dios was the main export site of Peruvian silver and gold through much of the 16th century (Thrower 2001:11). Beginning in 1520, the Camino Real, or Royal Road, figured prominently in this function in that it connected the fifty miles between Panama City on the Pacific Coast to Nombre de Dios (and Portobelo after 1596) on the Caribbean coast for over 200 years. By 1535, the Camino Real was the main overland route for goods. Raw materials of precious metals, Pacific pearls and tobacco were exported to Spain, while European manufactured goods were imported to the colonies (Howarth 1967:60). During this time, it is estimated that Spain’s gold and silver income grew by more than 3,500 percent, which translated at the time into approximately 200,000 tons of silver, and less clear amounts of gold (Harding 2006: 12-13; Howarth 1967:61).

The number of indigenous people that occupied the area that became Nombre de Dios is unknown (Ward 1993:34), but as was the pattern in many other colonial situations, the indigenous groups of Panama suffered from the Encomienda system imposed by the Spanish and the diseases they introduced. As a result, Spain began importing enslaved Africans to
Panama through Nombre de Dios (Harding 2006:13). Tens of thousands of Africans were sold mainly by the English to the Spanish and shipped to Nombre de Dios, with many of these redistributed to Peru and other locations within the Spanish empire (Howarth 1967:64). A census of Panama City in 1610, almost a century after its founding, identified 75 percent of the population as black or mulatto. Spanish settlers often took Indians and Africans as wives or concubines because of the lack of Spanish women in the colony. The mestizo, or mixed-ethnic, population of Panama soon comprised the majority, while white Europeans controlled Panamanian economics and politics (Harding 2006:13). While ethnic mixture no doubt took place under free and forced circumstances from its establishment as a Spanish colony, interaction between ethnic groups also caused great social tension and sometimes upheaval in the town. Spanish records indicate that about 30% of Africans that made it to Nombre de Dios successfully escaped (Howarth 1967:64), and by 1570, at least three maroon settlements existed in the Darien region, the residents of which were known to menace the Camino Real and Nombre de Dios (Harding 2006:13; Howarth 1967:65).

Though it functioned as a key port city for nearly 75 years, the undoing of Nombre de Dios was brought on by conditions that persisted from the time of its founding. The harbor on which the city was situated was wide and exposed, making it vulnerable to attacks. Following two previous, unsuccessful attempts, Sir Francis Drake of England sacked Nombre de Dios on July 29, 1572. Aided by his crew and a group of escaped enslaved Africans, or cimarrones, Drake sought vengeance for the battle of San Juan de Ulua on the Mexican coast where Spaniards tried to seize a fleet that was in harbor for repairs (Howarth 1967:65). Following his attack, Drake described a town larger than Plymouth, England with
streets, a market, stone government buildings, wooden homes, and a stockade (Howarth 1967:69). His description of the town is one of only three known to exist from the colonial period.

**Panama**

Vulnerability to sieges such as those carried out by Drake, high death rates due to malaria and yellow fever that ran rampant in the wet conditions of the tropics, and attacks by cimarrones (escaped enslaved Africans) that had established maroon settlements nearby all led to the abandonment of Nombre de Dios for Portobelo between 1596 and 1601 (Thrower 2001:1). Though better protected by the narrow pass into its bay bordered by steep slopes that afforded advantageous lookout and defense points, Portobelo was eventually taken by the English in 1739, which led the Spanish crown to revoke Panama’s trading rights. Due to economic dependency on trade, Panama was unable to sustain itself, and for the next 50 years, it existed as a forgotten backwater (Harding 2006:14).

Throughout the rest of the 18th century, resentment grew toward Spain across much of Spanish America, with tensions rising between criollos (Spanish descendents born in the Americas) and peninsulares (people born on the Spanish main). Peninsulares were the white Europeans and tended to hold important positions in government, with criollos occupying lower status jobs. These ethnic tensions would be a precursor to later waves of migration, all of which became major forces in Panamanian social history. The unrest between criollos and peninsulares, along with continued Spanish-imposed restrictions on trade with other nations, fueled revolutionary sentiments (Harding 2006:15).
In 1807, Napoleon’s army overthrew the Spanish crown, which many people across Spanish America took as an opportunity for revolutionary efforts toward independence. Panama, however, remained a royal outpost and sent soldiers to fight the revolution. Trade and economic difficulties resulted from the war, and an abusive military government replaced the Spanish viceroy in 1821, leading Panamanians to unify and make a declaration of independence on November 28 of that year, further galvanizing a sense of Panameñismo, Panamanian national identity (Harding 2006:15-16). Soon after though, Panama joined Bolivar’s Republic of Grand Colombia. From the start of its independence, Panama was the focus of power struggles between larger and more powerful nations, especially Britain and the United States. That trade and economic policy was negotiated through Bogota stoked nationalistic sentiment among Panamanians. For 20 years, the politically powerful in Bogota ignored Panamanian trade interests and by 1840, Colombia successfully squelched three attempts at Panamanian independence (Harding 2006:17).

Panama’s advantageous geographic location for international trade had long been recognized. With the gold rush of 1849, Americans sought ways to shorten the year-long wagon trip from the east coast to California. A US firm negotiated with Bogota to develop a cross-isthmus railroad, trimming the length of the trip down to weeks (Harding 2006: 18). Completed in 1869, the railroad brought economic gains to the US and other foreign investors in Panama City, but benefits to the Panamanian people were limited to construction jobs (Harding 2006:19). Construction of the railroad also employed so many immigrants from the West Indies (mainly Jamaica), Africa, China, England, Ireland and Germany, that Panamanians were almost outnumbered in the work zone. The continued presence of
Americans and many immigrants after completion of the railroad frustrated Panamanians who recognized the cultural and economic force of these groups (Harding 2006:19). Though slavery was abolished in 1851 (Fortune 1962:29) with Panamanian citizenship granted to those emancipated (Joly 1968:8), Panamanian blacks would remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy, a situation exacerbated by conditions in the Canal Zone in the 20th century.

The Canal

The Panamanian railroad functioned as a short-cut for passengers pursuing and returning from the American west throughout and after the gold rush. However, the profitability of the venture raised interest in the development of a cross-isthmus canal. A concession was granted by Bogota to a French company and construction commenced in 1881; however, this endeavor went bankrupt within five years, and would sit unfinished for another 20.

At the turn of the 20th century, after Bogota’s negotiation of the railroad and canal development projects, Panamanians saw that Colombian attention to the isthmus was limited to its own financial interests. No attention was given to grievances about unfair economic development policies, to which Panamanians responded with revolts. Between 1856 and Panama’s eventual independence from Colombia in 1903, the US intervened in 14 Panamanian uprisings. Though the United States had assisted Colombia in suppressing the uprisings, the US ultimately assisted Panama in gaining independence when American negotiations with Bogota over assumption of the French canal commission stymied.
Panamanians were eager to negotiate with the US, seeing it as a chance at economic and political independence (Harding 2006:21).

Unfortunately, American control of the Canal and the Canal Zone (an area encompassing the canal and extending 20km on either side of the Canal) brought racial oppression and economic and political dependence. For nearly the entire 20th century, the US government had near-complete political control of the Canal Zone, and shared the majority of financial benefits with foreign investors and the Panamanian oligarchy. Jobs for Panamanians were limited to Canal construction from 1904 to 1914—a far cry from the political and economic freedom Panamanians had hoped the Canal would bring (Howarth 1967:245). Laborers were again imported for the construction of the canal, this time from 97 countries. Under American management of the venture, blacks were treated differentially, with a clear line of distinction and prejudice drawn between Panamanian and West Indian blacks. Panamanians considered West Indians intruders because they were mostly Protestant and spoke English, both of which gave them an employment advantage with the Americans (Harding 2006:37). The American impact on Panamanian society was furthered by imposition of American racial beliefs and segregation policies within the Canal Zone. The English language and the American dollar also threatened Spanish as the national language and the peso-based monetary system (Harding 2006:20).

In 1949, Biesanz observed that a nationalist spirit grew among Panamanians in the face of these ethnic and cultural differences. Panamanians saw the West Indians as servile while they took pride in being rebellious. Resisting Americanization, Panamanians used the
Spanish language as one of the symbols of their heritage, and created a policy that required all organizations to bear Spanish names and conduct their business in Spanish. Signs were to post business names larger in Spanish with a smaller English translation. Further, primary schools conducted classes in Spanish and taught English as a foreign language (Biesanz 1949:777). As retribution for preferential treatment of West Indian blacks by Americans within the Canal Zone, Panamanians gave preference to descendents of Spanish colonial blacks over West Indian blacks outside of the Zone (Gracie 1968:14).

Though the colonial-era reference to skin color and hair texture as a rough index of status was still used in the mid-twentieth century, African physical traits alone did not prevent one from climbing the social ladder. Biesanz noted that even then, Negroes of old Panamanian stock debated in the National Assembly, taught in the National University, and achieved prominent positions in business, publishing, writing, law and medicine, as well as having already had two black Panamanian presidents [Biesanz 1949:773].

Almost 20 years later, Gracie observed that the descendents of West Indian immigrants had been gradually assimilated and acculturated into Panamanian Hispanic traditions and language as a result of attendance at schools in Panama. Still, she observed, these descendents identified more with American, rather than Panamanian, blacks (Gracie 1968:13). Due to its colonial roots of early intermixing, a history of international ports, and the trans-national canal zone, international and interracial marriages and children have resulted in a population that is generally described as mestizo, or mixed. Even so, Gracie observed that children of lighter complexion are favored in families and people will marry people with lighter complexion in the interest of improving the race (Gracie 1968:16). While
texts and the Panamanian people themselves will often identify as Panamanian or mestizo, instead of referring to any pigment-related descriptor, some still use categories to describe people that are similar to those used in the early colonial period (Luz & Juanita). Seven years after the US turned over control of the canal to Panama, the cross-isthmus route remains a central issue in contemporary Panamanian economic and political issues, and its social impact is still felt.

Panama Today

The United Nations has designated Panama as an underdeveloped country due to a lack of an agricultural system and industrialization. Public education has not been focused on providing skilled training in agriculture and industrial fields that might supply economic stability (Gracie 1968:12, Luz 2007). Perhaps because of its long history as a trade-based economy, Panamanian education instead prepares students for less stable and less available futures in business (Luz 2007). Political and social instability has been the inheritance of a colonial past, tenuous relationships with more powerful, opportunistic states, and recent dictatorial and military governments followed by the current oligarchy. The divide between rich and poor is ever-widening, exacerbated by corrupt banking and legal institutions. Unemployment is on the rise, with many high school graduates seeking employment or higher education outside of Panama. The potential for revolution is an increasingly common topic of conversation (David 2007). Since the turnover of the Panama Canal at the end of 1999, economic stability has been sought with foreign investment and development in Panama City, mainly of the tourism variety. Among these are getaways for the wealthy: real estate mogul Donald Trump is building a sailboat-shaped, luxury condominium high-rise that
will be among the new constructions to dominate the city’s skyline in the next few years. While these projects seem to be physical evidence of good things to come for Panama’s economy, the degree of benefit to Panamanian citizens remains to be seen.

**Nombre de Dios Today**

What came of the port city after its abandonment near the end of the 16th century is unclear, as records of its existence since then are few. Some 17th- and 18th-century reports from mariners observed no signs of a town or people in the vicinity (Thrower 1996:13, 15), though maroon settlements are known to have existed in the area. Photographs taken in the 19th-century of African descendents in front of indigenous-looking huts identify the location as Nombre de Dios. More is known about events there during the 20th century. An airstrip was constructed in 1959, and government programs during the 1970s led to the relocation of people from the interior of the country to coastal areas, including Nombre de Dios. A manganese mining operation was active in the early 1990s. Periodically, scientists come to study various creatures that make their home in the jungle that hugs the town, and underwater archaeologists have investigated a shipwreck in the waters at Playa Damas, unconfirmed but suspected to be Columbus’s Biscaina.

I visited Nombre de Dios for five weeks in January and February of 2007 as a member of an archaeological research team funded by National Geographic. In addition to conducting a phase 1 survey of the area suspected to be the location of the colonial town, I also coordinated educational outreach programs with my team members for residents of the town. The modern town of Nombre de Dios numbers approximately 500 residents and is
situated to the east of the site of the 16th-century port-city. Located two-and-a-half hours’
drive from Panama City and surrounded by jungle, the town is rural to be sure. Family-run
stores and house-based restaurants, coconut cultivation and sand excavation represent the few
small industries in town. Fishing is a common occupation among men, and many residents
have relocated there for retirement (Julia 2007; Luz 2007). I was there during the
Panamanian summer, and people could be found around town most days and at most times.
Activities, such as sporting tournaments between rival towns, were ongoing.

Panama is classified as a third-world country; however, it can be confusing and
difficult to discern how this status translates into the lived experiences of the people. In
Nombre de Dios, half of the town has to collect their water from two spigots and haul it to
their homes because of a pump that has been broken for the past five years. After a few days
of our research group performing this exercise, it became clear why so many residents opted
to bathe in the river. On the other hand, many residents have cell phones, and TVs and
stereos are common household appliances.

The importance of Nombre de Dios in the opening of the New World to European
influence is clear. Its history encompasses nearly the entire 16th century of Spanish
exploration and development of its American empire (Thrower 2001:1). It is especially
curious, then, why no formal archaeological investigations have been conducted before now,
especially when presence of the site has long been known. When the airstrip was constructed
in 1959, sixteenth-century artifacts were found and kept in the local schoolroom for a time,
but were eventually taken to the National Museum in Panama City (Thrower 2001:10;
Graciela 2007). For years, people of Nombre de Dios have collected numerous objects likely related to the site, including coins, metal implements, beads and ceramics. Others have sold unique and treasured objects, such as coins, to tourists (David 2007).

The notion of looting is frustrating to an archaeologist, yet understandable given the economic state of things in Panama. Indeed, some areas of the site have been extensively damaged by pot hunting. Conversations with several Nombre de Dios residents revealed that objects of visual impress such as cannon, intact ceramic vessels and guns found by archaeologists at nearby Portobelo are sometimes sold to private collectors instead of being preserved by the museum (Cristóbal 2007, David 2007).

The lack of information about the 16th-century port city and active looting of the site make an excellent argument for conducting archaeological excavation, but for me, it also presented the question of how people would relate to the archaeological remains of a past about which so little is known. The welcome sign as you enter Nombre de Dios declares only the date of its founding, its founder, and its patron saint – an ominous indicator that this might also be the extent of what people know about the colonial history of their town. Did they, in fact, know so little? If so, why? And how would this affect their perceptions of heritage and their attitudes toward the archaeological site? I carried these questions with me into Nombre de Dios.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my research was to examine the ways in which the archaeological site of the colonial port-city next to which the people of Nombre de Dios live factors in their sense of heritage. Through a combination of ethnographic strategies, I was able to gain insight into the residents’ attitudinal dispositions toward the archaeological site and the factors that impinged upon these perceptions. Traditional participant-observation, public archaeology programming, and semi-structured interviews comprised the ethnographic methodologies I used to access various contexts and sources that inform residents’ sense of heritage.

Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic fieldwork, has been called “the foundation of cultural anthropology” (Bernard 1995:136). This research method can take many forms, including observation, conversation, interviews, and questionnaires to name a few, with the key feature being researcher’s presence among the people she or he is studying. Researchers live with and/or among the group that is the focus of their work, often for many months or years. Studies comparing the findings of long- and short-term ethnographies found that studies lasting at least a year often included more sensitive issues such as political conflicts, sexuality and witchcraft (Naroll 1962), and those conducted over decades reported on diachronic social change (Foster et al. 1979). While there are clear benefits to long-term ethnographic research, this is not always possible, nor desirable. Many studies are conducted over a period of a few
weeks through rapid assessment (Bernhard 1995:139) or topic-oriented ethnography (Spradley 1980). Each of these describes an approach to focused ethnography, which is conducted over shorter periods of time and tends to focus on only two or three aspects of a culture (Hogle & Sweat, 1996; Mull et al., 2001). Evidence collected for this research focused on knowledge of and attitudes toward the archaeological site among the Nombre de Dios community. Designed as a focused ethnography with a limited time frame of five weeks, this study also provided the opportunity to explore more generally residents’ sense of heritage.

A focused ethnographic approach enabled me to interact with residents in the context of daily life, informal settings where they felt comfortable sharing information about history and archaeology. Such a direct method was needed to observe the knowledge of history and attitudes concerning archaeological heritage among members of the community. Situated in the words and environment of the participants, the focused ethnographic research approach had certain advantages over other data collection methods previously used with the public, such as the anonymous survey (see Bartoy 1999). Though survey methods are effective for gathering large samples of data, they can lack the contextual details and descriptions vital to understanding the complexity of attitudes toward archaeology as an aspect or representation of heritage. Use of participant-observation also provided opportunities to examine these complexities.

**Participant Observation**

For five weeks, I lived with seven research team members in the modern town of
Nombre de Dios. Two white American males, five Colombian females and one white American female made up the research team. I am the latter. We hired two young men from the town who had recently graduated from high school to assist us in the field. Each day, we ate lunch at Yelixa, a home-based restaurant near the archaeological site, and each night, we ate dinner at Fonda Chela, another home-based restaurant near the center of town. We made daily purchases of water and Gatorade™ at one of the four stores in town, and visited with neighbors and other townspeople at night, sometimes playing games with local children in the street. This pattern enabled us to talk with some people, though a distance was maintained by the females of our team, who did not want to encourage attention from local males, and resultant anger from local women. All of our team members were light skinned and European-looking compared to the majority of the local population, which created a high degree of interest, at least initially. They must have gotten used to seeing at us after about the second week, when shouts of “Gringos!” when we walked through town were replaced with greetings of “Buenas!”

My goal in conducting participant-observation was to identify aspects of Panamanian culture at the individual, community and national levels of society that might impinge on residents’ knowledge of history and sense of heritage concerning the archaeological site. In order to do so, I planned to visit six museums while I was in Panama, but was only able to visit one: the 17th-century forts at Portobelo. Four of the five I planned to visit in Panama City had been closed, except for Panama Viejo (Old Panama). I was unable to visit Panama Viejo due to illness that required me to return at the end of five weeks of research, instead of the six I originally planned to undertake.
I took field notes regularly, if not daily, including observations that might provide insight to the focus of my research. I noted aspects of daily life in the town, details from conversations had and overheard. At the Portobelo museum, I observed and took notes on the organization and themes under which history was presented, details of the displays, and presentation of the forts and grounds. I visited and made notes on the indoor museum store and the souvenirs for sale. I jotted down details from conversations I had with two cab drivers that lasted over an hour each, and made notes of multiple conversations I had with an American expatriate who had lived and operated businesses in Panama since the 1970s. I also frequently interviewed my research team members following interactions with residents to gain their perspectives on those interactions and information exchanged through them. While these observations provided access to the treatment and representation of history within Panamanian society at the national and (to a lesser extent) community strata, personal interactions were required to learn what Nombre de Dios residents knew about the past, and if and how they related to the archaeological site adjacent to their town.

Public Archaeology

Glassberg argues that historians are in a good position to “discover the relationship of the memories that circulate among family and friends to the historical representations that circulate in public on a wider scale, in towns, regions, nation, mass media” (Glassberg 1996:10). I found that I, too, was uniquely positioned an historical archaeologist working within the context of a public archaeology project to examine this relationship. There are several ways and several reasons to conduct public archaeology. As Barbara Little has described, public archaeology is able to address many purposes, including “education,
community cohesion, entertainment and economic development” (Little 2002:1). In the United States, well-known examples of public archaeology projects include the New York African Burial Ground (LaRoche & Blakey 1997), the Levi Jordan Plantation in Texas (McDavid 1997), and Virginia’s Colonial Williamsburg and Historic Jamestowne, both outdoor history museums with public archaeology programs. Public archaeology in the U.S. is increasingly common, and scholarship on the subject has been growing since the 1980s. However, similar efforts in Central and South America are far less frequent.

While public archaeology usually includes the public being on site at some point, whether to observe or to participate in excavation, this was not the case at Nombre de Dios. Out of respect for the property owners’ wishes, to avoid inadvertently encouraging looting, and because the site is approximately ½ mile from the modern town -- further away than most residents were willing to walk -- community members did not come to the site. Instead, the research team brought our work to the community through public archaeology sessions.

During our second week of work in Nombre de Dios, we held our first public meeting in the town square to introduce the archaeological group, and to explain our research goals. We also invited them to participate in our research by attending the educational sessions, and by sharing their oral histories and opinions about the archaeological investigation through interviews. Over the five weeks of the project, we held four public education sessions with children and adults, spoke informally with residents, some of who toured our lab that was set up in the kitchen of the house we were renting, and conducted interviews with individuals. Through the public archaeology programming, the research group displayed and discussed
recently found artifacts, Panamanian laws concerning looting, and archaeological methods. In these sessions, members of the group stressed the informational, not monetary, value of artifacts, explained the details and repercussions of looting laws, and illustrated archaeological methods through engaging activities.

The reasons for conducting the public sessions in this way was in the interest of being transparent in our archaeological practices, being informative, and being accessible to talk with the local people about what they were interested to know, and what they were interested to tell us. While transparency in the interest of gaining public trust was certainly part of our motivation for the public sessions, we were also very clear about our goal of reducing tolerance for, and actual, looting of the site. These gatherings provided opportunities to interact with community members, and get a gist of community perspectives on the past in general and the archaeological site in particular. While the public archaeology sessions were occasions of intensive interactions with the public, the flow of information in these settings was mainly from the research group to the community.

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

The semi-structured interviews were an attempt to equalize this informational imbalance by creating opportunities for community members to educate me with oral histories, and voice their ideas and attitudes about the past and the archaeological site. While dozens of people spoke with members of the research team during the public education sessions, and while we were about town, I was able to interview only five residents. Using a video camera and audio device to record the interactions, I conducted semi-structured
interviews using a list of guiding questions, but often deviated from the list as unexpected topics arose from the conversation, or if I wanted to ask for more detail about something the interviewee said (Bernard 1995:209-210). Through the interviews, I was able to target the specific issues of history, memory and heritage. I was also able to identify factors at the individual, communal and national levels of society that impinge upon perceptions of all three. While some questions could be considered to address more than one aspect, I have divided the sample questions below according to which facet (history, memory or heritage) they were most intended to access, and noted in parentheses which level of social influence the question was intended to reveal.

Questions aimed at addressing *history*:

- What are the different ways you learn about the past?  
  (individual/community/national)

- What can you remember learning about the history of Panama when you were in school? (national)

- What did you learn about the history of Nombre de Dios when you were in school? (community/national)

- What national museums or historic sites have you visited? (national)

Questions intended to address *memory*:

- I’m interested in your family history; who are your ancestors? (individual)
When/why/how did your family come to live in Nombre de Dios? (individual/community)

What do you know about the people who lived here when it was a Spanish colony? (individual/community)

Questions intended to address notions of heritage:

What types of events or celebrations are held in Nombre de Dios that celebrate aspects of people’s culture or heritage? (community/national)

What types of community organizations exist related to culture? (community)

Do you feel any connection with the colonial town and the people that lived here? (individual)

Who do you think should be involved in deciding what happens to the artifacts and the site? (individual/community/national)

What would you like to happen with the artifacts and the site? (individual/community/national)

Interviews ranged from approximately 40 to 75 minutes, and were usually conducted at the interviewee’s home. Only one of the interviews was conducted at the house that the research team was renting, and this was done at the interviewee’s request. Though he grew up in Nombre de Dios, he did not live there anymore and preferred not to use the homes of his family members who did remain in the town. In the interest of building rapport, I tried to avoid using academic terminology and archaeological jargon.
**Informed Consent and Participant Confidentiality**

Consistent with recent and historical methodological practices that strive to protect informants from unnecessary risks, I received approval from the Committee on Human Subjects within the College of William and Mary’s Institutional Review Board (see Appendix G). While actual names were used during the interviews, pseudonyms were used during analysis and writing to maintain confidentiality. All participants of this research study were provided with full details about the research project and were informed of the known possible consequences of participation prior to taking part in the study. Though I created a consent form and took copies of it with the intent of getting participants’ signatures, two Colombian teammates, Archaeological Project Director, Maria Salamanca, and Public Outreach Co-Coordinator, Catalina Medina Hall (who had both worked in rural Latin-American contexts before), counseled me that this degree of formality may have jeopardized people’s willingness to participate in the interviews. Instead, I verbally paraphrased the contents of the informed consent form prior to the interview and had the participant give verbal agreement to the interview, all of which was video and audio recorded. In compliance with IRB requirements, and as stated in the informed consent, all interview tapes were kept under lock and key to protect participant confidentiality.

**Translation**

I conducted the semi-structured interviews with Catalina Medina Hall, who is Colombian, assisting as translator. Though I speak enough Spanish to converse, it sometimes proved challenging due to differences in dialect. I learned to speak the proper “high” Spanish taught in American academic classes, which differs from Latin American Spanish, and even
more so from coastal Panamanian dialects. It was my hope that by having the assistance of a Colombian teammate, the interviews would proceed more smoothly and remain focused on the ideas instead of frustrating interviewees with dialectical difficulties. The same concern for dialectical differences required that I hire a translator to transcribe the tapes to English. Once I returned home to the US, I hired Alfonso Ricardo Palacios and his American wife, Melissa Palacios, to translate and transcribe the recorded interviews. Alfonso was born in Honduras, and lived in numerous places within Central America, including Panama.

**Sampling and Number of Participants**

Individuals I approached for interviews were among the people who voluntarily came to our public education sessions, or who approached us to inquire about our work. In this way, the people I interviewed were already self-selected as at least nominally curious in the work of the research team. While many people agreed to be interviewed, numerous things came up that limited my total number of recorded interviews. Complications such as schedule changes and unanticipated unavailability on the part of interviewees, and my own illness that resulted in my return home two weeks early, prevented me from collecting more ethnographic evidence. As a result, I was only able to conduct five interviews.

Qualitative methodology does not generally require large data sets, as with quantitative research methods. Qualitative researchers argue that there is no direct relationship between the number of participants and the quality of the study (Hatch 2002; Moran 2003). Though most agree that smaller numbers necessitate greater attention to provide sufficient evidence to generate enough depth to justify a study, Kvale prompts
researchers to “interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know” (Kvale 1996:101). The fewer the number of participants though, the more important it is to include multiple data sources (Hatch, 2002). In light of this, evidence collected through participant-observation and the public archaeology programming was especially important.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

The focus of this research was to discover the relationships of residents of Nombre de Dios, Panama to the archaeological site adjacent to the modern town. The combined ethnographic methods of participant-observation, public archaeology and semi-structured interviews enabled me to examine these subjects through a multi-scalar approach. I examined social aspects of history, memory, and a sense of heritage toward the 16th-century archaeological site at the individual, community, and national levels. When I planned my research questions, I thought they would lead me to find that people varied in their affinity toward the archaeological site. I anticipated some orientation to the site in people’s notions of heritage, but this was not the case. Instead, residents’ responses bear out an experiential conception of heritage, and a future-focused interest in the archaeological site.

History

Semi-structured interviews, a visit to a popular museum, and informal interactions with local residents identified sources and awareness of ‘official’ history. The five people I interviewed included one male and four females. All were over 34 years of age, and three of the women had retired in the last few years. All of the interviewees expressed that they knew very little about Panama’s history or the town’s colonial history. One interviewee that had not been born in Nombre de Dios reported: “I don’t know anything about this here town” (Julia 2007), even though she had lived in the town for 15 years and her husband was a native of the town. When asked what are the different ways that they learn about the past,
responses pointed to limited primary and secondary school history curricula. Manuela said that the teachers who taught in the local school knew nothing of local history (Manuela 2007). This was further confirmed by Graciela, a retired school teacher, who said that she focused on subjects like writing, reading, math, music and physical education in lieu of history and geography. Her thinking was that students could learn the latter two subjects if they know how to read (Graciela 2007). This reasoning was perhaps substantiated by an inaccessibility to historical texts. Cristóbal explained that what little history is taught focuses on general Panamanian history, and not on the small localities (Cristóbal 2007). Luz further described that the generalized national history also “take[s] out everything that is black from the Republic with the goal to be recognized as a whole [single] ethnicity” (Luz 2007).

Museums are also included here as sources of official historical knowledge, not because they are necessarily owned by the government, but because museums as institutions form and represent the national historical narrative. Two of the five informants had visited the now-closed Museum of Man in Panama City and one had visited the forts at Portobelo, which presents a Portobelo-centric history, without contextual information about events leading to or following its heyday as an international trade center. The museum in the Aduana, or Customs House, in Portobelo is the only one on my list of six museums that I was able to visit. Located about an hour’s drive from Portobelo, the museum sits on the town square between the ruined forts of Portobelo, and together, are one of the main tourist attractions in the region. Constructed 1630-1638, the Aduana was also in ruins, and in the

1 Four of the other museums I had planned to visit were located in Panama City and had been closed down with no explanation. Panama Viejo was the only other museum on my list that remained open, which I was unable to visit due to illness that resulted in my departure after five weeks—two weeks earlier than planned.
early 1990s was reconstructed as a gift to Panama from the Spanish government (field notes, 2/12/07).

The museum is divided into two large rooms located on either side of the open-air main hall on the ground floor of the building. One side contains a tremendous hodge-podge of artifacts found during the excavations and reconstruction of the Aduana, including guns, scales, a typewriter from 1920, nails and hinges, cannon balls, a cauldron, ceramic botillas, large pieces of glass, grinding tools, and something that looked like a sword. Most of these items scattered along the perimeter of the floor and walls have labels that at least identify them, and may or may not give dates of the objects. Here, you pay the $1 per person entry fee, can buy guidebooks for the fort ruins in English, German, or Spanish, and can read newspaper articles about the site that have been clipped and taped to the walls. On one wall of this space is a display of a local artist’s work that was also for sale.

The large room on the other side of the passageway was home to a museum exhibit that opened in 2000 as a collaborative effort between the Instituto Nacional de Cultura de Panama (INAC) and a few other organizations listed less prominently in the credits of the introductory 10-minute video. The video voice-over was recorded in English with no subtitles in another language. It described Henry Morgan and Francis Drake as pirates, and Portobelo as “our town”, and the forts as “our defenses.” It went on to describe the use of enslaved labor by the Spanish and the presence of cimarrones, or escaped slaves, particularly Filipio and Bayano, two cimarrones most feared by the Spanish. It identified 1850 as the year that slavery was abolished in Panama and moved into a description of the Congo festivals.
that take place across Panama leading up to Ash Wednesday each year. The Pilgrimage of the Black Christ, which takes place in Portobelo, was also highlighted.

From the video viewing room, the large space is partitioned into thematically organized smaller spaces. The text under “Vida” (Life) described the seasonal trade fairs of the 17th and 18th centuries in Portobelo. Artifacts included a pyramid of cannon balls and an Iberian jug with no explanations about the objects or their relation to the theme. Next was “Ciudad” (The Town), which contained dioramas of the Fuerte San Fernanda and Fuerte San Jeronimo. The only text billed the town “Una ciudad vulnerable e instable,” (A vulnerable and unstable town). The next space was about the same size as the previous two, but its panels were divided between “Cultura” (Culture) on one side and “Gente” (People) on the other. Under “Culture,” cimarrones were described in more detail, with the text describing the living conditions of slavery as the triggers of rebellion. Costenas were identified as the contemporary descendents of African slaves. “Gente” (People) described Panama as “Un rico mestizaje de razas y culturas,” (a rich melting pot of races and culture), and revisits the Congo dance:

Congo is an Afro-Panamanian tradition that reflects the adaptation of slaves to their new coastal-jungle environment. It is genuine folk theatre in a natural setting. During the dry season, the black population reinforces its identity with a delirious expression of songs, dances and theatrical performances [field notes, 2/12/07, La Aduana, Portobelo, Panama].

More details about the Pilgrimage of the Black Christ are also included in this section. The last little room is titled “Naturaleza” (Nature) and contains coral, shells, and a squirrel
carved from a coconut. The text here describes humans and nature as a threatening challenge, mentions exploitation of natural resources and describes the forest as the unknown frontier that should have never been trespassed.

Outside, the grounds of the forts are open for walking. Two are on the town side of the bay, and the other is atop the hill across the bay, requiring a water taxi to get there. I toured San Jeronimo, the fort closest to the Aduana. The walls had been partially reconstructed and patched in places. Cannon were propped in their niches, pointing out at the bay. Here and there throughout the fort was a label identifying what the space was called, usually indicating its use. The grounds were mostly grass covered, with muddy spots in low-lying or oft-visited spots. Trash was abundant, which I found to be pretty typical of public outdoor Panamanian spaces.

Beyond formal education and national historic sites, two interviewees engaged in self-education to learn about Panamanian history. Cristóbal and Luz both indicated that they had done some independent reading that augmented what little they knew from school about Panamanian history and, to a lesser extent, Nombre de Dios. Through an informal “Negritude” study group, Luz had learned much about her African heritage and the one-sided accounts provided by history books: “[I]n the history books, from the US, the focus is on the dark side of slavery, on the black cimarrones as the trouble makers, but the black is communal and spiritual. The history of Nombre de Dios has a lot to do with the cimarronaje. From there is our heritage.” She went on to cite the royal ancestry of figures such as Bayano, an African king and leader of cimarrones in Panama, about whom little is known and nothing
taught. Instead, she said, “it is Spanish history that is the focus of the school books” (Luz 2007).

Questions about ancestors were intended to identify interviewees’ knowledge of 1) the colonial impact on the present-day population of Panama and their potential relationship to enslaved Africans, Spanish colonists and indigenous peoples, and 2) how their specific families may have been impacted by more recent migration patterns in Panama. Responses addressing the first issue exhibited general awareness of a colonial past and a sense of modern Panama as a mixed nation. Most of what they described about the colonial period was summarized on the town’s welcome sign: the town’s founding by Diego de Nicuesa on March 8, 1509, and the origination of the town’s name due to Nicuesa’s exhaustion from terrible sea conditions when he declared, “Let us stop here in the name of God.”

They seemed to have a sense that these details made the town an important place, and two interviewees complained that Portobelo got all the tourist attention and money, though it was founded nearly 100 years later than Nombre de Dios (Cristóbal & Luz). Interviewees’ responses to questions about the second issue recounted birthplaces and migrations of parents and grandparents. Some described migrations in the past century related to construction of the Panama Canal and other job opportunities, with one interviewee descended from French Antilleans and one from Jamaicans. Through the interviews it became clear that, though history education in Nombre de Dios does not factor in, community-embedded traditions were significant in determining how interviewees related to the past.
Memory

Informants indicated that community-based traditions are mainly responsible for the preservation and transmission of local heritage. The past is memorialized through story-telling by the elders, and more publicly through theatrical street performances called “Congo”. When she came to teach in Nombre de Dios in 1953, the school director instructed Graciela and the other teachers to talk with the elders of the community to learn about the history of the town (Graciela 2007). All five informants indicated that their community elders had been significant sources in their own understanding of the past, particularly in cultivating an interest and understanding of “Los Congos.”

One of the wonderful surprises of this research endeavor was that our field season corresponded with the events leading up to Carnival, the Caribbean version of Mardi Gras. During this time, residents of Nombre de Dios and other nearby towns participated in activities and events performed by groups called “Los Congos.” Theatrical song, dance and drumming exhibited an African influence. Scholarship on these rituals describes them as having been created and perpetuated by enslaved Africans in antithesis to the oppressive European slavers, and as a form of differentiation and resistance (Lecumberry 2005: 40). Panamanian artist-scholar Arturo Lindsay focuses much of his work on the Congo, and has established an artist colony in Portobelo, Panama where American and Panamanian artists live and work together (Lindsay 2000). He described the Congo celebration:

Congo performance today is a dramatized living tradition that brings to life the history and culture of the group beginning each year on the 20th of January with the raising of the Congo flag, and ending on Ash Wednesday with the "baptism of the devils." The tradition consists

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2 The timeframe in which this research was conducted was during the high season of Carnival, when numerous related activities and events, like the Congo performances, were taking place and easily observed.
of six essential elements including a complex social structure, jargon, material culture, music, dance, drama, and culinary customs. These traditions are manifested primarily during the carnival period in Panama and on special occasions [Lindsay 1997; 2000].

Aspects of both individual and community memory were reflected by all of the interviewees in their telling of the Congo tradition.

When asked about Congo performances, interviewees were generally more interested, informed and excited to talk about these events than any other aspect of their cultural heritage. Several of our interviewees were either participating in the current Congo festivities, or had participated in the past. Cristóbal, Julia and Manuela were all involved in 2007 Congo festivals; Cristóbal as a devil in Nombre de Dios and Colon, Julia as queen of the Congos in her hometown of Colon, and Manuela as the lead Congo singer in her hometown group in Miramar. There, she is the President of the Congo group, which has produced a CD of Congo songs. Luz and Graciela told about how the general community participates in the festivities leading up to and culminating on “el día de los Congos,” a progressive street drama of the Congos versus the devils that takes place on Ash Wednesday.

Interviewees reported varied degrees of detail about the history of Los Congos and their rituals varied among interviewees. Most related to it as something practiced by, and learned from, elders, while others added symbolic details. Manuela explained that the Spanish called the enslaved Africans “Congos,” which is where the name derives from, but now refers to the music, the dance and the people themselves. She said that the slaves created songs and wore clothes inside-out in rebellion against harsh treatment by their Spanish masters. She identifies as a descendent of the Congos and went on to say, “The Congos is
what one carries in the blood, right?” (Manuela 2007). Luz echoed Manuela’s statement, describing the Congo performance as “a struggle; a resistance” (Luz 2007).

It is said that the Congo was born from what happened in Nombre de Dios many years ago. The Congo was not in the time of the Spanish. The folklore of this town appeared using our imagination of the time of the slaves. [Cristóbal 2007].

While Cristóbal suggested that the Congo tradition was probably a modern invention or representation of colonial relationships between Africans and their Spanish slavers during, he also added that the theatrical performance may not be far from what really happened. He explained that such traditions and oral histories serve a purpose when there is no physical evidence of the past, and compared the standing architectural ruins of Portobelo to the archaeological evidence of Nombre de Dios’s past in this regard:

[T]he ruins, the footprints, they are touchable in that town. You don’t have to use your imagination. It’s not like the case of Nombre de Dios. Here, we have to assume and let our imaginations fly because the footprints are not so touchable. Here, we only have oral histories to form our own puzzles [Cristóbal 2007].

The Congo rituals serve as both an embodiment and mode of transmitting aspects of the past and adaptations in the present that build a sense of shared heritage. As Assman writes, “[A] group bases its consciousness of unity and specificity upon this knowledge and derives formative and normative impulses from it, which allows the group to reproduce its identity. In this sense objectivized culture has the structure of memory” (Assman 1995:128).

3 In her dissertation on the Congo performance of Portobelo, Jacqueline Renee Alexander identifies a native of Nombre de Dios as the source of Portobelo’s Congo tradition (Alexander 2005).
While Congo may have begun out of specific memories, the practice is now a full-blown social movement.

The Congo tradition takes place all over Panama, especially in the coastal areas where there is a concentration of Afro-Caribbean descendents (Alexander 2005). Beginning in 2000, on the Saturday following Ash Wednesday in the Panama Viejo area of Panama City, an annual national exhibition was organized in Panama City where groups from all over the country would come and compete (Alexander 2005:45). The Congo singers competed amongst themselves, and the devils had their own competition. While the distinctive styles of the groups were obvious through this event, some think it has changed the focus from the tradition and the uniqueness of local groups to a focus on outdoing one another’s costumes, leading to more homogeneity across groups (Alexander 2005). It is likely that the Congo performances have always undergone change, but this may be expedited by increased contact among formerly localized groups.4 We may see over time an ‘official’ national expression of Congo groups in place of the local diversity currently observed.

Heritage

A sense of heritage, or relationship to the past, and specifically the archaeological site at Nombre de Dios, varied in expression and intensity among members of the public, those I interviewed, and national authorities. Attendees at the public education sessions were interested and expressed gratitude that someone [presumably someone with archaeological

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4 See Appendix D, specifically Manuela’s comments about increasing youth interest in devil roles over Congo roles, and the details about her grandmother’s participation in “Cumbia” dance.
training as opposed to looters] was investigating the site. Considering that the town has a population of about 500, these sessions drew nice sized crowds. The lowest attendance was at our first session, with 22, and the session with the highest attendance drew approximately 50 people.\(^5\) We were often asked what we were going to do with the artifacts we displayed, which was usually followed by some version of the story about the museum that had been discussed for a few years now, but had never materialized. These sentiments were often combined with expressions of interest in building tourism in the town, much like that of Portobelo. While no one mentioned the idea of reconstructing the colonial town, they seemed to think that a museum could draw enough visitors to boost the town’s economy and provide the opportunity to educate people about the significance of Nombre de Dios, namely, that it was the oldest Panamanian city. It became clear that residents’ sense of heritage did not include the archaeological site. Their relationship to the past was expressed through the Congo festival, while the interest in and relationship to the archaeological site had more to do with their future.

Luz and Graciela, both born in Nombre de Dios, related to the site, though in different ways. Whereas Luz said she felt a connection to the people that lived in Nombre de Dios during the colonial period, Graciela was not sure that was what she felt. Though she did express a desire for the artifacts to be placed in a local museum where the importance of the town can be shared: “Nombre de Dios is the most ancient city of the Republic of Panama, but we are forgotten,” she said. While my etic perspective identified numerous reasons why the archaeological site should factor into local notions of heritage, Lynn Meskell reminds us that:

\(^{5}\) These differences may have been due in part to differences in promotional format and prior notice that the community received.
Rather than trying to quantify past and present identities in the face of significant methodological hurdles, it may prove more fitting to argue that specific groups constitute appropriate custodians because they have traditionally, or historically, legitimate cultural or spiritual responsibility for the cultural property at hand. This places more importance on living groups...our subjects are not always dead [Meskell 2002:291].

Though Cristóbal currently lives in Colon, he grew up in Nombre de Dios and still has family there. Cristóbal expressed that he feels a connection with the people of the 16th century through daily things, particularly the practices of the Congos: “There is a connection because before we were talking about the Congos – this is something that we do from this [colonial] time.” He said the archaeological site is important because it offers information that is not yet known: “It seems to me the lack of information is what maintains this laziness and this little interest in what is under us – the history.” Once it is known, he said, that part of the past will be valued. Further, he expressed excitement about establishing a museum and creating economic benefits for the community. Luz, who participates in the “Negritude” study group, is also on the town committee that has formed in anticipation of the 500th anniversary of the founding of Nombre de Dios on March 8, 2009. She is hopeful that the information we found can be incorporated into the celebratory events in 2009. Graciela is also a member of this committee. Julia and Manuela were not born in Nombre de Dios. Julia moved to the town 15 years ago with her husband who is a native, and Manuela has worked there for 31 years, though neither considers herself a member of the community. Perhaps this is why neither of them expressed a sense of identity with the site or the artifacts. As Manuela put it, “It is not my place.” Even so, both women think that whatever comes out of the archaeological investigations should be used “for the good of the district” (Manuela 2007).
While two of the interviewees were fairly non-committal concerning the archaeological site, the overall sense I got from other interviews and the community members that attended the public sessions suggests that residents’ economic orientation to the site creates the potential for “an association with past events or objects even though the current generation had no direct connection with the heritage resource” (Edson 2004:339). In this way, the archaeological site might become an economic resource through heritage tourism in the town’s future. Archaeologists working in publicly engaged contexts have to meet the public where they are. It is helpful to remember that:

> There was probably never a time in the history of humankind when heritage was not subject to invention, restoration, or adaptation to meet the social, political, spiritual, or financial requirements of the subject community [Edson 2004:339].

Beyond individual and community conceptions, I also considered indications of archaeological heritage at the national level. The importance of Nombre de Dios in the opening of the New World to European influence is clear. Its history encompasses nearly the entire 16th century of Spanish exploration and development of its American empire (Thrower 2001:1). It is especially curious, then, why no formal archaeological investigations have been conducted before now, especially when presence of the site has long been known.

When an airstrip was constructed in 1959, sixteenth-century artifacts were found and kept in the local schoolroom for a time, but were eventually taken to the National Museum in Panama City (Thrower 2001:10; Graciela 2007). For years, residents have collected numerous objects likely related to the site, including coins, metal implements, beads and
ceramics. Others have sold unique and treasured objects, such as coins, to tourists (David 2007). Reasons why are difficult to discern, but seem to relate to the preference of the National Institute of Archaeology and Culture (INAC) to investigate sites with standing structural remains, such as in the cases of Old Panama and Portobelo. Panamanian archaeological authorities also tend to focus on glamorous archaeological finds. There, as with much archaeology around the world, unique and beautiful finds capture the most attention, whereas sites with little to no above-ground, observable remnants seem to attract only the attention of pot hunters and academics. The inaction among authorities is unfortunately not due to a lack of awareness.

The first indication I had of what the national archaeological authority’s take on the site was during a conversation with a staff member of INAC when I spoke with him in Panama City. He was filling out paperwork we required before commencing with the project and was joking that the looting was so bad, he would be surprised if there was anything left to be found. I asked why the first survey of the site was being conducted by a team of foreign researchers and why, if the looting was so widespread and known to the staff of INAC, they had neglected to address it. He explained that INAC was very understaffed and that everyone was overworked, with his attention focusing mostly on issuing permits and collecting fines related to all the construction going on in Panama City (field notes, 1/19/07).

When I relayed this conversation to David, an American expatriate who was very enthusiastic about our project a few weeks later, he shared with me another facet of the story. Apparently, one of the main newspapers in Panama City had run a story on the looting of the
site the previous year. In it, INAC officials who were asked what the authorities were going to do about it blamed the looting on the property owner. They said that the looting wouldn’t happen if he protected his land better. The article went on to describe the landowner as a poor, fat, pig farmer who did nothing but push his wheelbarrow around town. The irony is that Panamanian law stipulates that landholders own the topsoil only — anything beneath it belongs to the state. As a result of the article (and possibly out of embarrassment or guilt), the landowner invited INAC to conduct an archaeological investigation. They did not, but in turn, invited a Colombian woman attending graduate school in the US to apply for grants and use the site as her dissertation project.

Conversations with Nombre de Dios residents revealed further details of conflicts over archaeological objects at other sites. Some told me that items of visual impress such as cannon, intact ceramic vessels and guns found at nearby Portobelo are sometimes sold to private collectors instead of being preserved by the museum (Cristóbal 2007, David 2007). I remembered that many of the display pedestals were empty when I visited the museum at Portobelo, though I cannot be sure of the reasons. That all except one of the museums I had planned to visit in Panama City had been closed down made me additionally suspect about what was going on with the historic patrimony in Panama. People expressed suspicions about mismanagement and corruption within the staffs of the national museums (Cristóbal 2007, Luz 2007).

Evidence of discord over the archaeological project may have also been present in Nombre de Dios. A few times throughout the project, we arrived to the site to find that
someone had disturbed our grid over night. Flags and nails had been pulled up and tossed aside or planted right smack in the center of test units. It is not clear how to interpret these actions, but I have a few ideas. It is possible that it may have just been kids playing pranks on us. It could have been evidence of boredom and willingness to sabotage (it was hardly sabotage) or poke fun at the long-term visitors. Someone or some ones may have been displeased that we were conducting archaeological investigation there. They could have targeted the house where we stayed, or they could have attacked us in public on our circuits around town. But they didn’t, they disturbed the archaeological site. Whether they were kids playing pranks, looters who saw us as competitors, or just community members who felt we had no right to be there, these events suggest at least the possibility of discord over the archaeological site among residents of the town.

In the interviews, I asked how people felt about the research team doing the archaeological investigation. Two individuals, Critobal and Luz, expressed a desire for the research to be conducted by Panamanians instead of foreigners. Luz said she understood that it is not always possible for local people to do the work (due to money and education), but that she would prefer it that way. All said they thought the artifacts should remain locally, but understood that they had to be kept in Panama City at Panama Viejo because they are more secure until Nombre de Dios has a sufficient facility. Ideally, the town would serve as stewards of the materials and would be an equal stakeholder in development of a museum facility and interpretive endeavors. As the national archaeological authority, and because INAC recruited the doctoral student to conduct the research and made available its laboratory
facility for analysis and storage of the artifacts, the organization is sure to play a major role in
determining the future of the materials and the site.
CONCLUSION

This research project was designed to explore conceptions of heritage among residents of Nombre de Dios, Panama, and to determine if a nearby archaeological site factored in these conceptions. In doing so, I examined the roles of history and memory at the individual, community and societal levels in forming notions of heritage. History was defined as recorded events in the past, often presented as ‘official’ by stakeholders within academia and the heritage industry. Memory was defined as unwritten, socially transmitted remembrances about the past that often take the form of oral and performance traditions. Heritage was defined as a person’s relationship to the past, which is often informed by a combination of history and memory.

While some of the interviewees recognized a genealogical and geographical relationship with colonial-era indigenous people, enslaved Africans and Spanish settlers, reports based on ‘official’ historical events and facts were not very detailed. Instead, most interviewees spoke in greater detail about the recent past, usually going back their grandparents’ generation. The current makeup of this rural Panamanian town is heterogeneous. Due to numerous and recent waves of migration in Panama, many people of Nombre de Dios or their families are fairly new arrivals to the town, having moved there within their lifetime or within the past two generations. Access to and knowledge of history was limited among those included in this study. The disjointed presentation of history at the museum and preserved military forts at Portobelo, and the testimony of a retired teacher that
history was not stressed in local primary and secondary education, suggest that history does not factor strongly into conceptions of heritage for most residents of Nombre de Dios.

Memory was mainly exhibited through the knowledge of and participation in the Congo festival by the majority of town residents. This tradition, which is transmitted orally and through practice, represents what many residents identify as heritage. The configuration of heritage varied among residents, with some drawing more on historical sources than others. Applying Assman’s logic to the case of Nombre de Dios, the Congo festival emerged as an expression of local heritage, while perceptions of the archaeological site as an economic opportunity indicates the needs and interests of the contemporary citizens. The various forms of participation in the Congo festival—either as Congo singer/dancer, as a devil, or as an active audience member—

embody these ideas and represent and communicate past times in the present. While no single utterance, practice or object may fully represent a society’s heritage, these instances become bound in various publicly accessible discourses [Porter and Salazar 2005: 362].

That Congo is performed in numerous towns across Panama in ways particular to each locality (Alexander 2005) is evidence of its memorial specificity. However, the initiation of an annual national competition in 2000 indicates that Congo is becoming, or already has become, part of the national memory. While heritage for the town residents was evidenced in the Congo festival, the orientation toward the archaeological site was focused not on the past, but instead, on the future.
That we archaeologists were interested in their town’s history, were willing to share our research, and cared about the community’s attitudes and desires seemed inspiring for some. Many were interested in the educational sessions, and the newly formed committee for the 500th anniversary of the town expressed interest in incorporating archaeological aspects into the celebration and discussed plans for the creation of a museum. Residents’ interest in the site was expressed mainly in three ways: 1) as a source that can contribute to filling an informational void about the past, 2) as means to draw tourism, and related to this, 3) as an opportunity to improve the economic situation of the community.

Community members expressed frustration that Nombre de Dios’s status as the oldest Panamanian city is not widely recognized, and they chafed at the idea that nearby Portobelo, though a century younger than Nombre de Dios, is a successful tourist attraction. Many see the archaeological investigation as an impetus to create a museum, thereby exhibiting the town’s significance in history, and additionally drawing tourists and their money for an improved economic situation. Residents often voiced hopes for job opportunities for the youth and economic opportunities for the community through development of tourism-related businesses.

If the residents of Nombre de Dios decide to pursue the economic possibilities of the archaeological site through development of a museum, which may also include interpretive programming and education, orientations toward the site may change. As people learn about the past through engagement with the popular discourse (such as with Luz’s negritude group), and out of a long-standing association with the Spanish and because of suspicion and
fatigue of dealing with Americans (and possibly Colombians), local residents may develop a
sense of stewardship, and possibly heritage, toward the site. As Glassberg states, through
developments such as this, it is possible for “disparate individuals and groups [to] envision
themselves as members of a collective with a common present and future” (Glassberg
1996:11-12). While the archaeological site is not currently included in notions of heritage,
this does suggest the possibility that it could eventually be incorporated into the complex
equation. Further, “sites of memory and other references to the past can support and enhance
the cultural identities of groups on a local, regional, national, supranational, or even global
level” (Holtorf 2000:5.5).

Contributions

This study stands to contribute in several ways. First, it is a case study of the
examination of conceptualizations of heritage that illustrates the discursive relationship
between society and the individual, and urges an expanded treatment of the term. In the case
of Nombre de Dios where people have been enslaved, impacted by many occupying powers,
experienced numerous migrations, and the modern population remains highly transient,
circumstances may be more complex than most definitions of heritage allow. In this context,
heritage is better considered an emergent process with people negotiating constantly evolving
narrations of their relationships with the past. This flexible view of heritage requires
historical archaeologists working in highly complex contexts to consider that our existing
conceptions may not fit the contours where local people’s notions were developed. Heritage
should be treated as a loose, unstructured term that, like tradition, refers to a sum total of
people’s recollections, emotions, and attitudes about the past—written and unwritten—with which they positively identify.

Undertaken in a previously unexamined Latin American context, this research also serves as an example of how public engagement within archaeological endeavors can illuminate local priorities concerning the site and related issues, rather than just serving as a way to disseminate information. Conducted in this way, archaeologists have the opportunity to make their work relevant to local people through social problem solving, as with interests in economic development among residents of Nombre de Dios. This is in line with current trends in the discipline:

Archaeologies of identity, past and present, represent one of the most significant growth areas in our discipline. They represent our contemporary engagement with other fields and audiences and fulfill part of our ethical responsibility as public figures charged with the trusteeship of the past [Meskell 2002:294].

Effectively engaging the public requires a degree of archaeological education for local people, and a willingness to share authority on the part of the archaeologists. According to Matthew Reeves, “Involvement in the research process necessitates that descendants have some understanding of how archaeology is carried out, what archaeological data consists of, and finally how archaeologists interpret the data” (Reeves 2004:79). This can lead to a more informed research program and richer interpretation in that such interpretation reflects the priorities of the community. In this way, site interpretation and further developments would
reflect changing political and cultural realities, instead of guiding them. As Paul Shackel and Erve Chambers describe:

Community participation means that scientists are no longer the cultural brokers. Practitioners are beginning to realize that many histories can exist in any one place, and these stories of the past are continually being shaped and reconstructed. Archaeologists are in a good place to address these changing perspectives, and they need to respond effectively to these challenges and opportunities [Shackel & Chambers 2004:2].

The people of Nombre de Dios stand to become powerful stakeholders in the process of investigating and interpreting the archaeological site for public consumption. Economic benefits sought by residents may result as a product of this endeavor in the long-term. As Barbara Little describes, publicly engaged archaeology can have many “purposes of education, community cohesion, entertainment and economic development” (Little 2002:1). If these desired outcomes are realized, this project would be one of a few of its kind. As Lynn Meskell describes:

Despite the evocative nature of archaeology and its political mobilizations, few archaeologists have seen the potential for linking heritage, national modernity, and tourism. Archaeological monuments lie at a powerful nexus between ethnoscapes and financescapes. (Meskell 2002:289).

It is often the case with historical archaeology that issues important in the lives of those who created the archaeological record comprise a social inheritance that continues to impinge upon the lives of modern people. Through public engagement, archaeologists can address the often politically and emotionally charged issues of the past, and their
relationships to the present, toward social problem solving. Further, archaeology conducted in the public interest advocates actively contributing to the promotion of equality, social justice, and conflict resolution at these sites. Interestingly, over the past two decades, archaeologists and museum anthropologists have tended to be more active in this regard [Adams 2003:436].

Studying the dynamics of public attitudes toward an archaeological site within a context like that of Nombre de Dios illustrates the need for archaeologists to set aside our preconceived notions of heritage. Insights to the various ways that people conceive of heritage can inform and enhance public engagement projects with archaeological components. While the archaeological site at Nombre de Dios is not an integral part of local conceptions of heritage, it is viewed as a potentially economic opportunity for the future. It is possible that through engagement with the popular discourse, residents will develop a sense of stewardship, and possibly heritage, toward the site and its materials. This research into notions of heritage and future economic developments concerning the archaeology at Nombre de Dios keeps the focus where it belongs—on contemporary people.
APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH “JULIA”

The informant I call “Julia” is a 69 year-old retired woman who moved to Nombre de Dios 15 years ago with her husband, who was born there. Julia was born in Miramar, where she lived before moving to Colon for ten years. Julia expressed that she did not know much about Nombre de Dios, and as we spoke, it became obvious that she felt more of an affinity for Colon. When I interviewed her in 2007, she had been elected “Queen of the Congos” for that year’s festival by the Congos of Colon, the group to which she belongs and for which she regularly travels more than two hours by bus in order to participate. Julia explained the elements of the queen’s costume, including the skirt, shirt and crown, and spoke about the symbolism of the different elements of the costume. She said that almost all of the little towns in the area have Congo groups, and described in brief the progression of events on Ash Wednesday, when the Congo seasons ends.
APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH “LUZ”

The informant that I call “Luz” is a retired nurse who returned to Nombre de Dios with her husband seven years ago, after living in Colon for much of her life. Luz was born in Nombre de Dios and was one of the first residents to express interest in the research team’s excavations and public sessions. She voiced interest in economic opportunities that might result from the investigations, and was particularly interested in job opportunities that could be created for the local youth, who so far had to seek higher education and employment in Panama’s larger cities, and often outside of the country.

Luz is part of a group of local residents that research negritude, the history of diasporic Africans, specifically in Panama. They think that history texts are biased and often represent Africans as ignorant and violent. They are focused on exposing the strengths and positive elements of African culture and contributions of Africans and African descendents. She connected this negritude movement when she described the Congo festival, and spoke excitedly about the Congo festival as a representation of Panama’s heritage. While Luz herself was not participating in the 2007 Congo festival as a Congo singer/dancer or performing as a devil, she was looking forward to participating as a member of the general crowd, which also plays a key role in the celebration. She provided many details about the progression of the Congo season and the events on Ash Wednesday, when the Congo festival
culminates in the street performance depicting the capture of the devil by the Congos and his eventual baptism.
APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH “CRISTÓBAL”

The informant that I call “Cristóbal” is a 34 year-old taxi driver. He was born in Portobelo, but grew up between Portobelo and Nombre de Dios, where he also had family. Today, Cristóbal’s mother and brother, along with his family, live in Nombre de Dios. Cristóbal now lives with wife and three children in Colon, about two and a half hours away from Nombre de Dios. His business brings him near or to Nombre de Dios regularly and he has maintained close ties with family and friends there.

Cristóbal spoke with me at length about the history of Nombre de Dios and the experiences of Africans during the colonial period. He explained that the Congo festival, about which he is extremely enthusiastic, is an expression of some of the social dynamics of the colonial period. He is part of the Congo group in Colon, where he plays the part of a secondary, or “little” devil. Cristóbal explained the symbolism of the costumes of both Congos and devils, and provided great details about the design and construction of the Diablo Mayor costumes.

Cristóbal expressed desires for economic opportunities to be developed out of the archaeological site in Nombre de Dios, as he had seen done with the forts and Aduana in Portobelo. He thinks that tourists will be interested in Nombre de Dios because it is the oldest historical site in Panama and that the tourism traffic will improve the local economy. When
we spoke, he voiced an interest in creating a website about the archaeological site and was brainstorming ways to use his taxi business for tours and other history-tourism services.
APPENDIX D

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH “MANUELA”

The informant that I call “Manuela” is a medical assistant who has worked in the clinic in Nombre de Dios for 31 years. While she lives in the residence provided for clinic staff throughout the week, she commutes home to Miramar on weekends to be with her husband and children. Manuela expressed that she does not know much about the history of Nombre de Dios and did not seem to consider herself a part of the community. Manuela was born in Colon, but identifies Miramar as her home, where she participates as the lead vocalist in her Congo group.

Manuela described the details of the Congo festival events, and explained the symbolism of the festival and elements of the costumes. She also described the competitions that occur between Congo singing groups. Her group has produced a CD, which many research team members purchased from her. The group was preparing to video record the upcoming festival performances that will also be available for sale.

In talking about her family background, Manuela described her grandmother’s involvement in a dance tradition that Manuela identified as pre-dating the Congo festival. The “Tambor de Orden” was a group that organized “Cumbias,” (dances to drums). As a child, Manuela remembered watching these events take place through the streets of town. She likened the “Cumbia” to the Congo festival, but said that the Cumbia is performed no longer.
Manuela said that the Congo festival is not as organized as it once was, and that she has observed a decrease in commitment among participants. She described that people used to be very enthusiastic about all of the roles of the festival, but that the youth today are mostly interested in the costumes of the diablos, and less so in the meaning of the tradition. She thinks this derives from less interaction between the old and the young, where she thinks the meaning and value of the Congo festival is instilled.
The interview with the woman I call "Graciela" was conducted using my list of questions that guided the other interviews by Catalina Medina Hall and Maria Salamanca. I was unable to attend due to illness. As a result, some topics, such as the Congos, were not touched upon that I would have liked to inquire about in more detail.

Graciela is an 81 year-old retired school teacher who was born in Nombre de Dios. She left Nombre de Dios for eight years to work in Puerto Lindo and Colon, but has lived and worked in Nombre de Dios most of her life. Graciela described the changes in the town due to the influences of different international influences and labor-related migrations. Her own grandparents came to the area from the West Indies.

She described changes in the organization of local schools and talked about the curriculum when she was a teacher. Graciela said that her knowledge of local history was limited to the conversations she had with local elders when she returned to Nombre de Dios to teach. (Graciela is now recognized as one of the town elders and two other interviewees recommended that I speak with her). From the elders, she learned a story about the founding and naming of the town by Diego de Nicuesa. In her teaching, Graciela focused more on basic skills such as reading, writing and math, which she thought enabled students to learn on their own topics like history and geography.
Graciela is the President of the committee that has formed in anticipation of the town’s 500th anniversary celebration next year. She said that other committee roles include a vice president, treasurer, and secretaries of sports, and culture. The committee plans to visit the Spanish embassy and try to gain support for the activities they are planning, which she did not go into in any detail. Graciela’s brief discussion of the Congo festival mentioned a few specific changes that have taken place in aspects of the street performance.
Participant Consent Form  
College of William & Mary

The general nature of this study entitled, "Archaeological Heritage at Nombre de Dios, Panama" conducted by Meghan Habas Siudzinski has been explained to me. I understand that I will be asked to answer questions about my family history, the history of Nombre de Dios and my opinions about the investigation, preservation and interpretation of the archaeological site. My participation in this interview should take a total of about one hour. I understand that my responses will be confidential, meaning that my identity and responses will be known to the investigators, but will not be divulged in the research products, unless I give permission otherwise. I know that I may refuse to answer any question asked and that I may discontinue participation at any time. Potential risks resulting from my participation in this project have been described to me. I am aware that I may report dissatisfactions with any aspect of this experiment to the Chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee, Dr. Michael Deschenes, 757-221-2778 or mrdesc@wm.edu. I am aware that I must be at least 18 years of age to participate. My signature below signifies my voluntary participation in this project, and that I have received a copy of this consent form.

_________________________________________  
Date  
Signature  

_________________________________________  
Print Name  

I give permission, by signing below, for segments of this interview to be used in producing a video, which will be used for archival, and possibly educational, purposes with the public.

_________________________________________  
Date  
Signature  

_________________________________________  
Print Name  

THIS PROJECT WAS APPROVED BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2007-01-22 AND EXPIRES ON 2008-01-22.
APPENDIX G

NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
This is to notify you on behalf of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee (PHSC) that protocol PHSC-2007-01-09-4536-mhsiud titled Archaeological Heritage at Nombre de Dios, Panama has been approved through the EXPEDITED review process with a start date of 2007-01-22.

This protocol will expire on 2008-01-22 at which time work must discontinue. Should there be any changes to this protocol during the project period or if you wish to continue the protocol after this expiration date, please submit your request to the committee for review using the Protocol and Compliance Management channel on the Self Service tab within myWM (http://my.wm.edu/).

Please add the following statement to the footer of all consent forms, cover letters, etc.:

THIS PROJECT WAS APPROVED BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2007-01-22 AND EXPIRES ON 2008-01-22.

You are required to notify Dr. Deschenes, chair of the PHSC at 757-221-2778 (PHSC-L@wm.edu) if any issues arise with participants during this study.

Good luck with your study.
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A native of South Carolina, Meghan Habas Siudzinski was introduced to and trained in archaeological field methods by Martha Zierden, archaeologist at the Charleston Museum. She earned her Baccalaureate degree from the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina (1998), and her Masters degree from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia (2008).

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