

Liminal Spaces within the Caribbean Plantation Landscape

Review by Anthony R. Tricarico

Archaeologies of Slavery and Freedom in the Caribbean: Exploring the Spaces in Between

by Lynsey A Bates, John M Chenoweth, and James A Delle

University of Florida Press, 2016

Archaeologies of Slavery and Freedom in the Caribbean: Exploring the Spaces in Between, co-edited by Lynsey A. Bates, John M. Chenoweth, and James A. Delle exemplifies the benefits of applying a postcolonial epistemology in archaeological research. Bates et al. (2016) set out to examine the implications of liminal spaces across the landscape. Archaeological praxis of postcolonial theory entered academic discourse towards the late-20th century. Postcolonial perspectives from across the Caribbean take into account the presence of differential transcultural influences of archaeological material assemblages. Bates et al. (2016) encapsulates Good and Good's (2008) argument that the construction of locally situated postcolonial practice is embedded in the unique culture histories of different areas across the Caribbean Archipelago. Specifically, these culture histories reveal how both the "colonized" and "colonizers" influenced each other's cultures (Good and Good 2008) and the manifestation of these relationships in the archaeological record. European culture was in a sense adopted and adapted by enslaved Africans and that of the enslaved Africans by European Planters, "indigenizing" non-local cultural traditions (Appadurai 2007). However, developing locally situated archaeological praxis of postcolonial theories as Bates et al. (2016) attempts, necessitated the grounding of subaltern realities in place-based constructions of identity. The editors seemingly draw upon Escobar's (2001) argument that cultural realities and an individual sense of identity are embedded in place. *Archaeologies of Slavery and Freedom in the Caribbean* examined the construction and renegotiation of identity through the active construction of liminal spaces across the plantation landscape. The landscape was the stage through which to understand "...interstitial places [as]

contestation for identity” (Meniketti 2016, 189). Bate et al. (2016) seeks to capture the lived experiences of enslaved Africans utilizing liminal spaces to exercise a degree of control over one’s life, separate from the potentialities of surveillance within the plantation core.

Caribbean islands, whether “...large or small supported European empires and formed the foundation for the economic engine that ran them, fueled by sugar, rum, and profits, squeezed from the blood and sweat of enslaved people (Chenoweth et al. 2016, 1). Globalization had fundamentally altered the relationship between place and identity (Escobar 2001) for millions of enslaved Africans forcefully transported to the Caribbean. Cultural construction of identity in the Caribbean no longer relied solely on place, but on the fundamental basis of intra-island community networks fostered by the construction and use of liminal spaces (Bates et al. 2016). *Archaeologies of Slavery and Freedom in the Caribbean* is divided into two parts. Part one, “The Spaces Between and Within” examines the socio-cultural implications of liminal spaces across the Caribbean landscape. Part two, “Transition and Postemancipation Spaces” examines changes in lived experiences prior- and post-emancipation within and between interstitial spaces. Specific case studies from lesser studied islands were utilized by each of the 14 chapters, including the islands of Dominica, St. Lucia, the British Virgin Islands, and the Dominican Republic. Chapters, which focus on more well studied islands, such as Jamaica, or Barbados, actively sought to reexamine the traditional epistemological foundations of prior research. Throughout the *Archaeologies of Slavery and Freedom in the Caribbean* both postcolonial and landscape archaeological traditions were drawn upon, forming an epistemological foundation for exploring the social construction of physical spaces by subaltern populations. Bates et al. (2016) was influenced by the legacy of Scott (1994) *Those of Little Note* and Haviser (1999) *African Sites Archaeology in the Caribbean*, building on these works by examining the influences of colonial racial and social structures on the mobility of enslaved Africans.

James A. Delle explores this socio-spatial reality in chapter five, titled *Life beyond the Village: Field Houses and Liminal Space on a Jamaican Coffee Plantation*. On Jamaica, prior research had cast doubt on the degree of movement afforded to enslaved Africans, citing that the construction of a plantation system that was specifically developed to keep structure, order, and discipline. “The plantation system that characterized the British West Indies for most of the colonial history was a particularly violent and oppressive manifestation of colonial capitalism” (Delle 2016, 111). However, Delle (2016) argues that while surveillance may have been implemented on colonial Jamaican plantations, their size limited

planters' ability to surveil every area. As a result, liminal spaces formed on the landscape, providing enslaved Africans a measure of social and economic control over their lives. The site of Marshall's Pen in Jamaica exemplifies the early 19th century push by British planters to develop the interior of the island for coffee production. Marshall's pen, owned by the absentee planter Alexander Lindsey, the Earl of Balcarres, came under production in 1812. The site was closely managed, but as with all sites within the interior, defined by ambiguous boundaries. Historical analysis revealed the existence of two enslaved African villages, though these they did not house all enslaved Africans. Temporary houses were dispersed across the landscape, forming liminal spaces out of sight of planters. These areas provided a sense of sovereignty over one's mobility, contradicting earlier epistemological constructions of structure, and order on plantation landscapes (Delle 2016). Delle (2016) argues that this proves the plantation landscape cannot be thought of in terms of socio-dichotomous divisions.

Sovereignty over one's mobility on the plantation landscape was a product of plantation structures, but also the physical geography of Caribbean landscapes. Frederick H. Smith and Hayden Bassett explore the implications of geography on the creation of identity in chapter two, titled *The Roles of Gullies in Escape, Mobility, and the Creation of Community Networks among Enslaved Peoples of Barbados*. Smith and Bassett (2016) argue that the archaeology of liminal spaces of plantation societies has traditionally been understudied, instead favoring the construction of subaltern lived experiences based upon limited culture-historical and bioarchaeological approaches. However, Smith and Bassett (2016) assert that caves and gully systems across St. Peter Parish, Barbados are vital for understanding the private lives of enslaved Africans on the island. Smith and Bossert (2016) further Delle's (2016) argument that these spaces afforded sovereignty over mobility, while also arguing that these spaces served as meeting areas for interstitial social interactions. Social interaction between enslaved Africans on different plantations across the landscape would have not only created a regional network, but places to learn about the shared conditions of others across the island. These gullies created "...conduits and corridors that connected communities in the plantation-dominated landscape of Barbados, places that offered a temporary respite from the challenges of plantation life" (Smith and Bassert 2016, 31-32). These places fostered social and economic interaction among marginalized peoples, while also potentially serving as places of refuge for individuals seeking 'petite marronage'. Smith and Bossert (2016) reexamine and contradict Delle's (1998) assertion that the density of production on Barbados contributed to a landscape devoid of private spaces. Gullies served as the conduit of identity formation, and spaces embodied with localized knowledge of landscape mobility.

Smith and Bossert (2016) argue that these caves may also provide a link between the materiality of pre- and post-emancipation Caribbean landscapes.

The materiality of space and place throughout the pre- and post-emancipation period was examined by Marco Meniketti in chapter eight, titled *Dimensions of Space and Identity in an Emancipation-Era Village: Analysis of Material Culture and Site Abandonment at Morgan's Village, Nevis, West Indies*. Meniketti (2016) explored the social, economic, and cultural experiences of enslaved Africans at the level of the village. Specifically, Meniketti (2016) explores the degree of agency visible in material assemblages across sites that were actively used pre- and post-emancipation. Landscapes across the Caribbean became places for the contestation of identity (Meniketti 2016), the degree of which may be present in the use, and adaptation of material culture for various socio-cultural and economic purposes across historical contexts. Space and place were active in constructing identity, resistance, and cultural continuity across the Caribbean. The construction of identity post-emancipation was discussed by Kirsten R. Fellows in chapter 13, titled *Double Consciousness and an African American Enclave: Being Black and American on Hispaniola*. Fellows (2016) describes the renegotiation of identity as a group immigrated to Haiti in the 1820s. This group experienced the challenges of community formation and maintenance levied by a new diasporic identity.

Liminal spaces across the Caribbean became places of refuge from the surveillance of the plantation complex and places through which enslaved Africans could exercise a degree of sovereignty over their movement. These spaces serve as active places of identity construction and maintenance of community networks. Bates et al. (2016) *Archaeologies of Slavery and Freedom in the Caribbean* encapsulates the lived experiences of enslaved Africans through a postcolonial and landscape perspective, illuminating new directions for future research of previously overlooked and understudied archaeological assemblages.

References Cited

Appadurai, A. "Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy". *Theory, culture & society* 7(2) (1990):295-310.

Escobar, A. "Culture sits in places: reflections on globalism and subaltern strategies of localization." *Political geography* 20(2) (2001):139-174.

Good, B. J., M.-J. D. Good, S. T. Hyde and S. Pinto “Postcolonial disorders: Reflections on subjectivity in the contemporary world.” *Postcolonial disorders* (2008):1-40.

Haviser, J. B. *African sites: archaeology in the Caribbean*. Markus Weiner Publishers: Ian Randle Publishers, (1999).

Scott, E. M. *Those of Little Note: gender, race, and class in Historical archaeology*. University of Arizona Press, (1994).

Anthony R. Tricarico is a Ph.D. student in Applied Anthropology at the University of South Florida.



© 2017