The Contradictions of Engaged Archaeology at Punta Laguna, Yucatan, Mexico

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Abstract

Engaged archaeology, like other forms of research, is replete with contradictions. Over the last several years, members of the Punta Laguna Archaeology Project—a community-based endeavor in Yucatan, Mexico—have encountered and sought to address several paradoxical questions. Do attempts to mitigate certain forms of inequality unintentionally sustain other forms of inequality? Can the production of capital alleviate rather than exacerbate unequal social relationships? And, can Western social theories be marshalled to advocate for and increase Maya and other Indigenous perspectives in archaeology? This article examines these contradictory questions and analyzes them as potential sources of dialectical change. To conclude, the article suggests three new foci for engaged archaeology: intersectionality, control, and authoritative speech.
Keywords: **engaged archaeology**; **inequality**; **contradictions**; **Maya archaeology**; **Yucatan**

1. Introduction

At first glance, contradictions—broadly defined as logical incongruities or entities consisting of opposing ideas—may appear nonsensical or even inane. Indeed, the absurdity of contradictions has been a source of humor. Yogi Berra, for example, famously quipped that "nobody goes there anymore. It's too crowded." And, Oscar Wilde once said, "I can resist everything except temptation." The absurdity of contradictions has also been a source of contemplation and social critique. In George Orwell's 1984, for instance, the fictional ruling party adopts a paradoxical slogan that gives readers pause: "War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength." Within the social sciences, contradictions have often been understood as catalysts, as phenomena that generate new knowledge and bring about social change. As Georg Hegel [1] wrote, "contradiction is the root of all movement and life; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, is possessed of instinct and activity." Put simply, contradictions generate change [2].

Like other forms of research, engaged archaeology—archaeology that is "community-serving rather than strictly research-generating" [3]—including activist or action archaeology [4,5], community archaeology [6,7], and Indigenous archaeology [8,9] is replete with contradictions. Over the last several years, members of the Punta Laguna Archaeology Project, a community-based endeavor in the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico, have aimed to practice engaged archaeology such that Maya peoples generate information about the Maya past, control how they are represented to tourists, and otherwise benefit their own communities. Such goals, however, are difficult to achieve. As other scholars have noted, the "challenges to collaborative [and other forms of engaged] archaeology should not be underestimated" [10]. At Punta Laguna, fieldwork

has led to a series of paradoxical questions likely encountered by those working with and for other Indigenous communities. Do attempts to mitigate certain forms of inequality unintentionally sustain other forms of inequality? Can the production of capital alleviate rather than exacerbate unequal social relationships? And, can Western social theories be used to advocate for and increase Maya and other Indigenous perspectives in archaeology?

Rather than glossing over these contradictions or viewing them as frivolous, this article examines them in detail and analyzes them as potential sources of new knowledge and social change. Indeed, "reflection on successes, failures, and unexpected consequences of social action has been a vital source of new understandings" [11]. This article will first consider the concept of contradictions and how engaged archaeology can be a contradictory endeavor. It will then provide context for the emergence of engaged forms of archaeology in the Maya area and introduce Punta Laguna and the Punta Laguna Archaeology Project. Finally, the article will explore three different contradictions encountered by project members—contradictions associated with labor, capital, and praxis—and suggest three new foci for engaged archaeology: intersectionality, control, and authoritative speech. Like the other contributions to this special issue, this article thus focuses on the process of practicing engaged archaeology with and for a Maya community, and encourages further experimentation with engaged forms of archaeology in the Maya area and beyond.

2. Contradictions and Engaged Archaeology

Contradictions have substantially influenced social thought, perhaps most notably in the form of the dialectic. As originally described by Hegel, a proposition, or thesis, contains within itself and leads to the expression of its opposite, or antithesis. The struggle between thesis and antithesis leads to a new proposition, or synthesis [12]. In Hegel's [13] words, "we are dealing with forms of consciousness each of which in realizing itself at the same time abolishes and transcends itself, [and] has for its result its own negation—and so passes into a higher form." Karl Marx adopted from Hegel the notion that history progresses through dialectical change and that every historical epoch contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Unlike Hegel, however, Marx argued that social change is driven by the forces and relations of production, and that the antithesis, or contradictory source of change, is class struggle [12,14,15].

The notion of the dialectic, and the explanatory power of contradictions more generally, have influenced numerous scholars [16]. Practice theorists have described the relationship between structure and agency as dialectical. Put differently, changes to structuring principles and the habitus occur because each contains within itself, influences, and alters the other [17]. Structuration theorists have similarly posited a dialectical relationship between social rules and the actions of human agents [18]. Further, historical ecologists have understood human environmental interactions as reflexive, postulating "a dialectic at work between nature and culture, an evolving relationship in which the present adapts to the results of past interactions" [19,20].

More broadly, the history of science has been described in terms of dialectical change. In his mid-century publication The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Thomas Kuhn [21] argued that scientific knowledge does not, as traditionally thought, progress in a linear fashion through the gradual accumulation of data. Rather, he argued that the history of science is better characterized as a series of revolutions that occur when the anomalies and inconsistencies inherent to a particular research paradigm come to light. (Nevertheless, some [22,23,24] have critiqued the term research paradigm and its applicability to developments within archaeology.) Put differently, for Kuhn and others, science has progressed dialectically, with each research paradigm containing inconsistencies that lead to its repudiation by the scientific establishment. Knowledge about the world thus increases not because of the slow and steady "accumulation of established truths," but because of "revolutionary breakthroughs in science [which] often derive from growing recognition of contradictions and aporias within paradigms" [11].

Drawing on various scholars including those noted above, several archaeologists have suggested that contradictions fueled social changes in past societies [25,26,27,28,29,30,31,32,33]. Christopher Tilley [31], for instance, has argued that differences between represented and actual social relationships led to the collapse of the hegemonic social order in middle Neolithic southern Sweden. Randall McGuire and Dean Saitta [28,34,35], to take a second example, have argued that the logical incongruities of a simultaneously

egalitarian and hierarchical society were a critical impetus for shifts in social organization in the pre-Hispanic southwestern United States.

Those practicing engaged forms of archaeology have used the notion of contradictions not only to explain past social change, but also to characterize the causes and consequences of their own research. Often, engaged archaeologists are both spurred and haunted [36] by contemporary contradictions. On the one hand, such scholars tend to enmesh themselves in social struggles catalyzed by logical incongruities—social struggles "born in contradictions: between the protagonists' aspirations for well-being and the oppressive social conditions they confront; between their own analysis of their surroundings and dominant representations of their oppression as justified or inevitable" [37].

On the other hand, the practice of engaged archaeology is itself contradictory. For many, and particularly members of marginalized groups, the notion of equitable or ethical research is an oxymoron. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith [38] has written, "from the vantage point of the colonized … the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism." She continues, noting that "the word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" [39]. Indeed, archaeological and other forms of research can generate the selfsame inequalities and hierarchies that engaged scholars try to combat, and can do so regardless of an intent to produce emancipatory knowledge [39]. Despite the best intentions, "all kinds of institutional patterns end up reinforcing the very inequities that the knowledge ostensibly contests" [37].

This article argues that the contradictions of engaged archaeology, like those of other research programs, should not be minimized but instead brought to the fore, investigated in detail, and examined as potential sources of new knowledge and founts of social change. Specifically, this article considers a series of contradictions encountered by the community-based Punta Laguna Archaeology Project—contradictions associated with labor, capital, and praxis. First, however, this article will briefly provide context for the emergence of engaged archaeology in the Maya area and introduce Punta Laguna and the Punta Laguna Archaeology Project.

3. The Maya Area, Punta Laguna, and the Punta Laguna Archaeology Project

In the Maya area, as in many other parts of the world, the relationships between archaeologists and members of descendant communities have traditionally been problematic. (Patricia McAnany [36] has provided an insightful overview of how indigenous groups and archaeologists have engaged the Maya past.). In the first half of the twentieth century, the earliest archaeological explorers in the region marveled at the ancient cities while simultaneously disparaging the contemporary inhabitants. In his 1927 account of the Mason–Spinden survey of the east coast of the Yucatan Peninsula, Gregory Mason [40], for example, described the archaeological sites as "splendid" and "lovely," but the local people as "ignorant" and as an unfortunate but necessary part of fieldwork. He lamented that "again and again we have reached a ruin only to have an Indian appear as if by magic and keep a close eye on us until we had finished our work" [40].

In the following decades, members of the first large-scale projects in the Maya lowlands collaborated with national governments, but rarely mentioned local communities or contemporary Maya peoples. At least some archaeologists believed the Maya to have existed solely in the past. In one instance, William Coe [41] wrote of the need to

"rescue [the ancient Maya metropolis of] Tikal for our edification by whatever means we have. It is old; it belongs to a people whose culture for the most part died long ago. If its history and that of its makers have bearing on today, it lies most likely in the causes of civilization and those factors, both natural and human, that made it die."

More recently, archaeologists have reconsidered and redefined their relationships with contemporary Maya peoples. Over the last two decades, several archaeological projects in the Maya area have actively redressed inequities resulting from archaeological research. McAnany and colleagues' Maya Area Cultural Heritage Initiative [36,42,43]; Richard Leventhal and colleagues' Community Heritage Project in Tihosuco [44]; Traci Ardren and colleague's [45,46] work at Chunchucmil and beyond; and Héctor Hernández Álvarez and colleagues' [47] work at Cholul, offer prominent examples.

The Punta Laguna Archaeology Project has continued this trend. Punta Laguna is located in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, approximately 20km northeast of Cobá (**Figure 1**). The contemporary village consists of approximately 150 residents who speak Yucatec Mayan as their primary language. Most also

speak Spanish. Like other villages in the area, Punta Laguna includes a bilingual grade school for young children; a small church used by traveling religious personnel; a modest store selling snacks, cleaning supplies, and other goods; a concrete soccer field; house compounds; and milpas (agricultural and often corn fields). Notably, the village also operates an ecotourist attraction: the Otoch Ma'ax Yetel Kooh (House of the Monkey and Puma), also known as the Punta Laguna Nature Reserve (**Figure 2**). Those visiting the reserve can walk with a local Maya guide on trails through the jungle to search for spider monkeys and archaeological structures; canoe and ride a zip line across the lagoon; and buy crafts such as needlework and jewelry from local artisans. Visitors can also participate in a Maya purification ceremony, led by a village shaman, and conducted entirely in Yucatec Mayan. This ceremony takes place around a traditional wooden altar and includes burning copal incense and drinking non-alcoholic balché from a gourd. Punta Laguna is a rare example of an ecotourist attraction created by, and that tangibly benefits, Indigenous peoples [48].
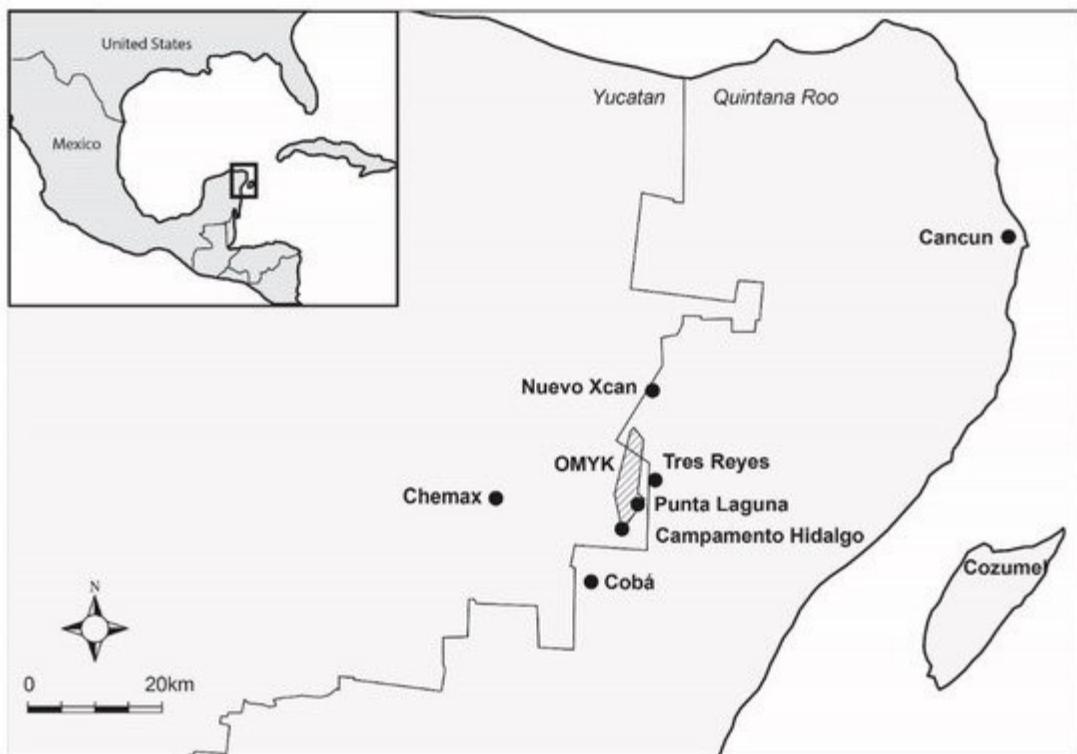

Figure 1. A map showing the location of Punta Laguna, the Otoch Ma'ax Yetel Kooh (OMYK), and other locales in the northeastern Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. Map by author.

Figure 2. Tourist activities at Punta Laguna. Clockwise from upper left: (**a**) a spider monkey, (**b**) a miniature masonry shrine, (**c**) a purification ceremony, (**d**) a canoe ride across the lagoon. Photographs by Conrad Erb.

The archaeological site of Punta Laguna, located almost entirely within the nature reserve, includes a cenote (a natural sinkhole filled with water) containing an ancient mortuary deposit of at least 120 individuals [49,50,51,52,53]; stelae; a series of caves [54,55]; and the remains of over 200 mounds (**Figure 3**). These mounds range in height from just above ground level to approximately 6m and include seven miniature masonry shrines (see **Figure 2**)—one room buildings that span only a few meters in length, width, and height [56,57,58]. Ceramics [59] suggest that Punta Laguna was occupied continuously, with ebbs and flows, from the Middle Preclassic (600−300 BCE) through the Postclassic period (1100−1550 CE) [60].
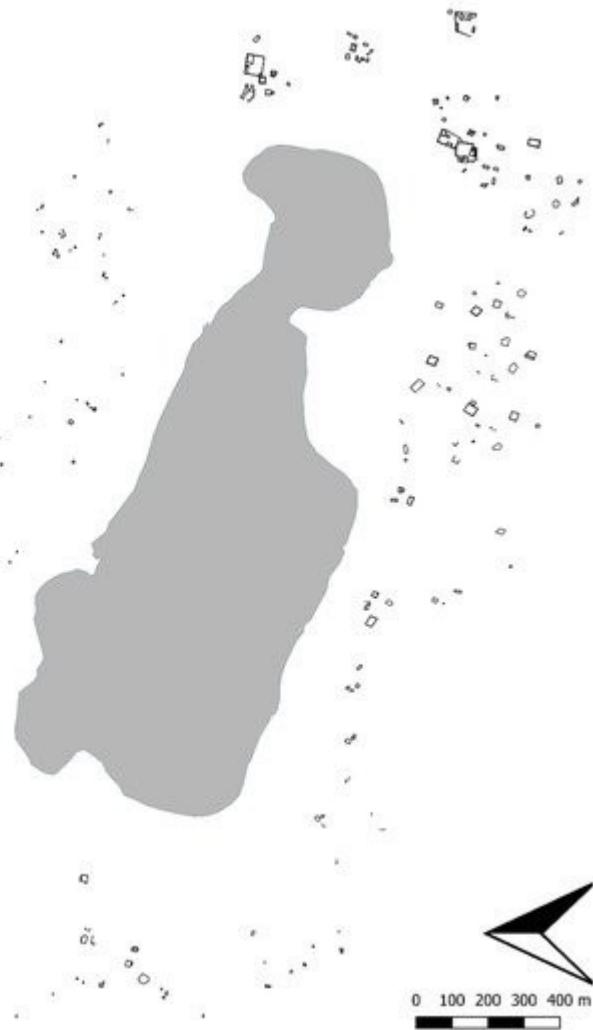
Figure 3. A conventional, Malerized site map of Punta Laguna. The gray area represents the lagoon and the black lines indicate structures. Map by David Rogoff and Sarah Kurnick.

Since 2014, the Punta Laguna Archaeology Project, codirected by Sarah Kurnick and David Rogoff, has endeavored to work collaboratively with and for members of the Punta Laguna community. Many decisions, including what research questions to address and how to disseminate the project's findings, have been made collaboratively. At community meetings in 2015, for example, village residents asked that the project first provide answers to commonly asked tourist questions, including when the structures were built. Community members also expressed interest in knowing whether those who lived at Punta Laguna in the past had a communal system of government, like the current residents, or whether they were subjects of a king. As a result of these conversations, the project is currently investigating the occupation history of the site as well as the nature of Maya political authority during the Postclassic period. Critically, the Najil Tucha cooperative, comprised entirely of local community members, grants permission for research to be conducted at Punta Laguna and can terminate the project at any time.

4. The Contradictions of Labor

From the outset, project members, including the codirectors and local residents, have been deeply concerned with labor. Marx defined labor as a process whereby humans act on the external environment to benefit themselves. In Marx's [61] words, an individual "opposes himself to Nature as one of her own

forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants." In contemporary, capitalist societies, labor power—the capacity to produce labor—functions as a commodity. In other words, individuals who do not own the means of production sell their labor power to those who do in exchange for wages. Marx argued that such an economic system is necessarily exploitative. To maximize their profits, those who own the means of production must pay workers less than the actual value of their labor, and workers continually produce surplus value that belongs not to themselves, but to the owners [12,61,62].

Drawing on these ideas, various scholars have suggested that the extent to which individuals control their own labor is and has been a key variable in the emergence and persistence of economic inequality and extreme economic disparities [63]. Indeed, labor and inequality are intimately intertwined. Some archaeologists have proposed that institutionalized inequality ultimately emerged in past, non-capitalist societies because of socioeconomic changes that permitted a few to control the labor of many. Jean Arnold [64,65], for example, has argued that institutionalized social hierarchies arose among historic complex hunter-gatherer societies, including the Chumash of California's Channel Islands, when, for a variety of historical and environmental circumstances, most individuals were forced to work at the behest of, and according to the rules set by, the elite. Further, once the majority of people lose control over their labor, there is little to stop wealth from accumulating in the hands of a few.

Critically, archaeologists not only study past labor systems, but also create and participate in contemporary ones. In the Maya area and elsewhere, archaeologists often hire local peoples to assist with excavations, clean sherds, and cook meals, among other tasks. Such employment opportunities can help individuals earn additional income and stimulate the local economy. However, as noted above, buying labor power is necessarily exploitative. Regardless of how well they pay or how many benefits they provide, archaeological projects ask local peoples to sell their labor power for wages. Moreover, while some individuals are appreciative of opportunities to earn extra income, others are resentful. When asked why he did not want to work for archaeologists, one farmer in Yucatan said, "I do not ask for work. I do not have employment and I do not answer to any patron" [66,67,68]. Engaged archaeologists who hire wage laborers can thus find themselves trying to combat inequality while simultaneously sustaining it.

Archaeological labor systems are also intertwined with inequality in other ways. A common concern is that archaeological projects intensify inequality by hiring and paying wages to only a small subset of a community. Rarely do projects have enough funds to hire all community members. Further, the economic benefits of archaeological research are generally distributed unequally. While professional archaeologists profit from publications, presentations, and grants, too often local peoples gain little other than wages. In an insightful analysis of why archaeology is not yet postcolonial, George Nicholas and Julie Hollowell [69] argue that archaeologists "hold the power in terms of the actual production and interpretation of archaeological knowledge, access to or use of data, and the capital derived from these processes" and that a key challenge is to distribute more equitably the economic, social, and cultural benefits of academic research.

To ensure that they retain as much control over their labor as possible, Punta Laguna residents established the project's labor system, including what appropriate pay is, what appropriate hours are, and who should work. Community members decided that the opportunity and responsibility of working with the project should rotate among village families so that all families participate and benefit equally. Consequently, each workday, two different families send individuals to assist with excavations and laboratory analyses. Each day, the co-directors thus work with a different group of people. Some of these individuals work with the project several times during a field season, while others do so only once or twice.

This rotating labor system has both benefits and drawbacks. It allows the codirectors to work directly with a substantial portion of the community and ensures that the project produces equal amounts of capital for all families. Punta Laguna residents do not want the project to create new, or exacerbate existing, economic inequality. However, this labor system also slows excavations considerably and requires that the scale of excavations be kept small. Each day begins with a general conversation about what archaeology is and why and how it should be done, and a specific conversation about the goals and methods of that particular workday. To maintain high excavation standards, there are always an equal number of trained archaeologists and community members working together. During the project's 2018 field season, for instance, the two co-directors and two graduate students worked alongside a rotating group of four community members.

This rotating labor system has also raised an ethical dilemma—indeed a contradiction—with no easy answers. Village families have only ever sent men to work with the project. At Punta Laguna, as at other

archaeological sites in the Yucatan peninsula, "consultations by foreign researchers with primarily all-male community leaders [have] result[ed] in hiring practices that continue to re-enforce social ideals of gendered labor" [70]. At most sites, local men participate in survey and excavation, and local women participate in lab work, and especially washing ceramic sherds [70]. At Punta Laguna, however, it is men who help not only with survey and excavation, but also with lab work, including artifact washing. Regardless of the task or the setting, the project has only ever collaborated with Maya men.

The root causes of local women's lack of participation in the project remain unknown, and additional conversations with Punta Laguna women are needed. Nevertheless, the co-directors remain concerned that, while attempting to ameliorate the economic inequities resulting from wage labor, they inadvertently maintained gender stereotypes, and specifically the notion that only men should interact with foreign researchers and participate in foreign research projects. Margaret Conkey [39] has written thoughtfully about such paradoxes. She notes that "there are multiple relations of domination that have structured and informed the production of archaeological knowledge" including those based on race, class, and gender, but that, with most archaeology projects, "it is just one axis of difference or oppression that tends to be foregrounded" [39]. She advocates that researchers "recognize and engage with the 'whole picture' of what archaeology is, and how it is that what is power for some is precisely someone else's powerlessness" [39].

5. The Contradictions of Capital

As the project conducts research within the Otoch Ma'ax Yetel Kooh—a nature reserve and ecotourist attraction established, communally owned, and communally operated by Maya peoples—project members have also been deeply concerned with capital. Broadly meaning an asset, Marx [71] understood capital as money used to buy a commodity, and specifically labor, to create more money. For Marx, capital was thus wealth used to buy the labor of others, and thereby produce more wealth. A critical aspect of capital is that it is not evenly distributed throughout societies. Rather, over time, it accumulates in the hands of a few and distinguishes those who buy the labor of others from those who sell their own labor for wages [72]. Importantly, as Pierre Bourdieu [73] has argued, capital can be economic, including goods and property; cultural, including specialized knowledge and particular mannerisms; and social, including group memberships and other types of connections.

Archaeologists have studied the emergence and effects of capital and capitalism in past societies [74,75,76,77] as well as the relationship between archaeology and capitalism in the contemporary world [27,78]. Some scholars have argued that the discipline has, often unintentionally, sustained and naturalized capitalist ideologies. Yannis Hamilakis [79,80], for instance, has argued that archaeology's traditional, Western focus on inanimate objects reinforces commodity fetishism: the misunderstanding of social relationships as relationships between things. As Hamilakis [80] writes, it is the "foundational logic of modernist archaeology that makes it part of the framework of capital: its fetishization of things, and their constitution as autonomous objects, divorced from the [social] relationships, flows and connections that have led to their constitution."

More commonly, scholars have critiqued archaeology's role in the commodification of the past—in the transformation of places, artifacts, and identities into items to be bought and sold by developers, corporations, and tourists. Indeed, archaeological tourist attractions, be they reconsolidated sites, cultural performances, or theme parks, are often problematic [8]. In some instances, nation states and corporations exoticize marginalized groups and appropriate their history and culture for profit [46,81]. In other instances, a desire to attract tourists, and to generate as much revenue as possible, leads to the trivialization of the past and the presentation of historical inaccuracies [82,83,84,85,86,87]. In still other instances, the creation of archaeological tourist attractions, and their associated marketing, results in the promotion of essentialized and homogenized identities. Capitalist endeavors, including but not limited to archaeological tourist attractions, frequently make unique peoples indistinguishable and unique places interchangeable [82,83,87,88,89].

For these and other reasons, many have criticized the commodification of the past and oppose the production of archaeology-related capital. A few [90] take this argument further and contend not only that the past should not be used to create capital, but that it should be used to question capitalist ideologies that maintain contemporary inequities. Many engaged archaeologists aim to use the past to ameliorate present day inequalities, and their "ultimate goal is the empowerment of marginalized groups to resist domination in the contemporary world" [91]. Here, a paradox emerges. What if such empowerment can be achieved,

in part, through the production of capital? What if marginalized groups who own the means of production want to profit from their own histories and cultures? In some instances, can the commodification of the past alleviate rather than exacerbate inequality?

Punta Laguna offers a useful case. The Valladolid ejido owns the land on which the nature reserve sits and the Najil Tucha cooperative, comprised entirely of Punta Laguna residents, manages the ecotourist reserve and makes decisions about what to charge, how best to offer tours, and what information to communicate to visitors. Rather than relying on wage labor, the community distributes its revenue equally among village families. At Punta Laguna, local Maya peoples thus own the means of production and benefit economically from the commodification of Maya history and culture. Further, the ecotourist attraction allows Punta Laguna residents to present information about their own identities to outsiders. By choosing what information to present in the guided tours, which aspects of Maya culture to emphasize in the ceremonies, and what to put on display in the museum, community members can resist, at least in part, the imposition of a homogenized and essentialized Maya identity [48]. Perhaps not surprisingly, there is no mention at Punta Laguna—as at other nearby tourist attractions owned and operated by non-Maya peoples—of collapse, conquest, or colonization. Residents of Punta Laguna choose instead to impart information about Yucatec Maya religious practices, traditional medicine, and daily life.

For these reasons, and despite the generally negative effects of capitalism and capitalist ideologies, the archaeological project takes as a primary goal the production of economic, cultural, and social capital with and for the Punta Laguna community. Economically, the project has aided in the advertisement of the reserve to tourists by collaboratively designing and hanging a large roadside banner and by collaboratively designing and distributing bilingual brochures. Culturally, the project has distributed to community members books about the ancient Maya and accessible, image-based field reports describing the results of project field seasons. Further, it has created and updates annually a display in the museum about the archaeology of the site. Socially, the project is collaboratively designing a website and has hired a professional photographer to take images with and for village residents. Local peoples will thus be able to choose how to represent themselves to others when joining online social networks or making other connections.

The relationships between capital, inequality, and archaeology are thus not straightforward [86,87,92,93]. Rather, they are more nuanced. At issue is not simply whether the past should be commodified, but who owns the means of production and how the capital is distributed. Paradoxically, those practicing engaged archaeology may thus need to "investigate the empowering, as well as the disadvantaging force that the commodification process can have" for members of marginalized groups [94].

6. The Contradictions of Praxis

Since the project aims to effect social change, and specifically to practice archaeology such that Maya peoples generate information about the Maya past, control how they are represented to others, and benefit their own communities, project members have also thought carefully about praxis. While not the only archaeologist championing praxis, Randall McGuire [95] has been among its most vocal advocates. As he and colleagues have written, praxis is action informed by theory [91]. Archaeologists "generate knowledge about the past, use this knowledge to engage in a critique of our own world, and come to action based on this realization that there is real oppression in the world that must be challenged" [91]. Or, as Marx famously wrote, "philosophers have only interpreted the world. the point is to change it" [96].

Perhaps not surprisingly, many engaged archaeologists have promoted praxis as one way to alleviate contemporary inequalities and empower members of marginalized groups. However, one common and critical form of inequity within archaeology is the dearth of Indigenous voices and the "lack of standing given to alternative [non-Western] worldviews and ways of meaning-making" [69]. At least historically, archaeology has relied on solely Western perspectives and archaeologists have focused on the "material, scientific, observable world over the spiritual, experiential, and unquantifiable aspects of archaeological sites, ancient peoples, and artifacts" [8,9,97,98]. The need to incorporate Indigenous perspectives in archaeological research has led to another paradoxical question for engaged archaeologists. Can Western theoretical concepts be marshalled to empower Indigenous groups? Specifically, can the notion of praxis be used to advocate for and increase non-Western voices in archaeology?

In part to move beyond the discipline's traditional reliance on solely Western perspectives, several archaeologists have advocated approaches that combine Western and Indigenous forms of knowledge. To take a few examples, Sonya Atalay has proposed the notion of "braided knowledge" in which "community

knowledge intertwines with archaeological data to create new and richly textured interpretations of the past," [6] and Chip Colwell and colleagues have advocated "multivocality" or "an engagement of different voices arising together to tell a whole and complex story" [99,100]. Taking a different approach, other archaeologists have examined ontologies: "historically specific structures of being, presence, reality, and personhood" [101]. Among other issues, these scholars have debated whether individuals can communicate across different ontologies and how archaeological data and ontological insights can best inform one another [102,103,104,105]. One of the most notable consequences of the ontological turn in archaeology has been the increased "importance given to the non-human, to things, as equal partners in the creation of social worlds" [106,107,108].

However, despite having similar intentions—to make archaeology more inclusive, more relevant, and more responsive to the needs of local communities—research programs that advocate praxis and that incorporate non-Western knowledge and ontologies are in many ways dissonant. Daryl Stump [109], for example, has argued that it is illogical for scholars to "advocate the 'blending' of local conceptions of history within archaeological interpretation while simultaneously attempting to draw on the authority of archaeology as a 'western' science in order to influence modern policies." Put differently, Stump suggests that scholars cannot concurrently critique Western perspectives and employ those perspectives to mitigate inequality and foster other forms of social change. Zoe Todd [110] has also argued that the use of Indigenous perspectives and engaged archaeology are incompatible with one another, but for a different reason. She notes that Indigenous thinkers are often overlooked in archaeological considerations of local knowledge and non-Western ontologies, and that such oversight is one aspect of structural violence within academia. As she writes,

"Indigenous peoples, throughout the world, are fighting for recognition—fighting to assert their laws, philosophies, and stories on their own terms. When anthropologists and other assembled social scientists sashay in and start cherry-picking parts of Indigenous thought that appeal to them without engaging directly in (or unambiguously acknowledging) the political situation, agency, legal orders and relationality of both Indigenous people and scholars, we immediately become complicit in colonial violence" [110].

Despite such tensions, Punta Laguna project members have simultaneously engaged in praxis and incorporated Maya knowledge and ontologies. On the one hand, the project relies primarily on Western theoretical frameworks and, as noted in detail above, has sought to mitigate inequality by producing forms of capital with and for Punta Laguna community members. On the other hand, the project has integrated Indigenous Maya perspectives in its research, interpretations, and publications. Most notably, project members have produced two maps of Punta Laguna: one based on traditional archaeological conventions and the other on Indigenous Maya spatial ontologies [111] (Figure 3 and Figure 4). This latter map, like other colonial period Maya maps, is circular in form with east at the top of the page: the cardinal directions are in Yucatec Mayan. It adopts multiple viewpoints and relies on neither a grid nor a scale. Important locations are represented by unique toponyms, roads by solid black lines, and narrative events involving movement—including migration and intensive social interactions—by paths with footprints. Both human and supernatural figures are present, and the various aspects of the built environment derive their importance from the human and supernatural relationships they mediate.
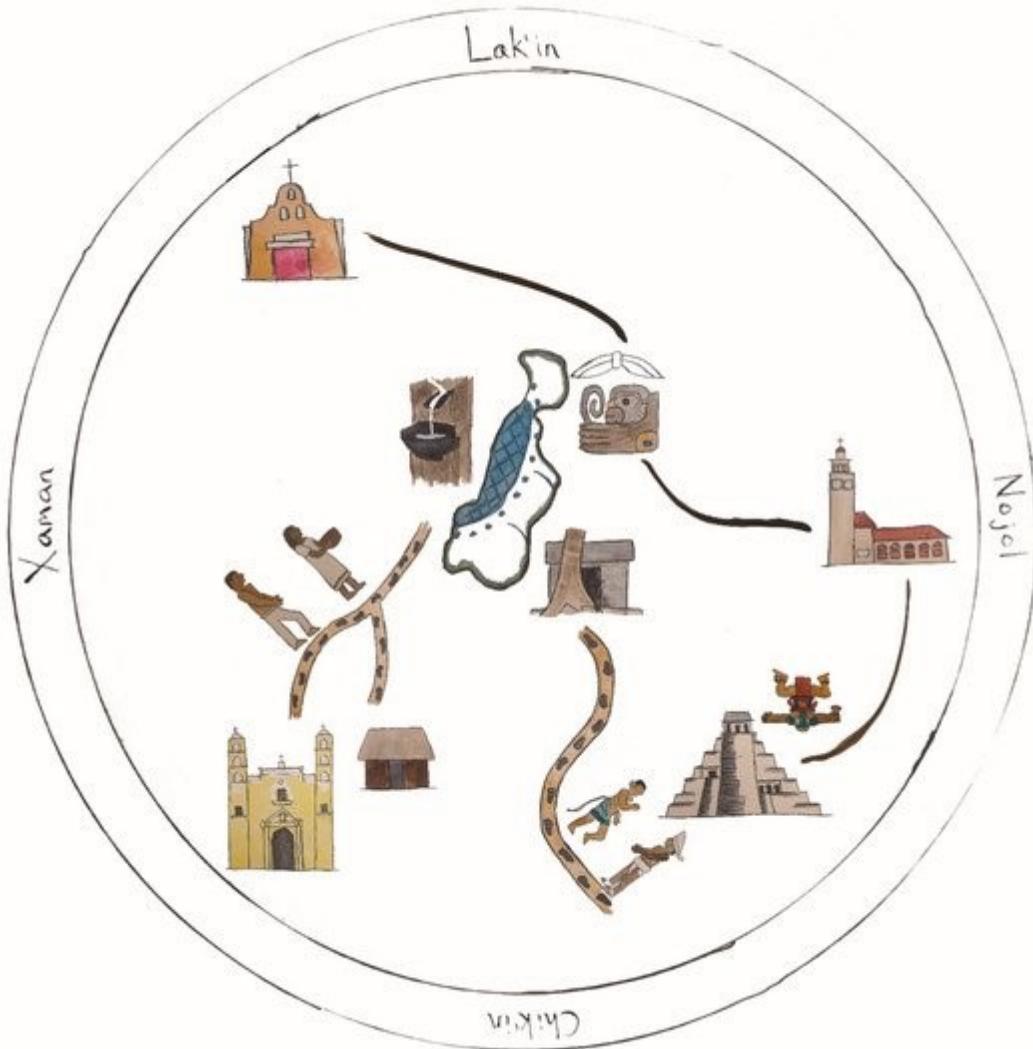
Figure 4. An Indigenous Maya visual cartographic history of Punta Laguna. Map by David Rogoff and Sarah Kurnick.

The project produced this map for two primary reasons. First, Indigenous Maya maps often include historical and experiential information omitted in conventional site maps. Further, because they adopt a relational rather than an abstract understanding of space, Maya maps are arguably more congruous with contemporary social theories about space than are traditional Western ones. Second, the juxtaposition of two different maps of the same space suggests that Western spatial ontologies are neither natural nor ubiquitous and that there is no one correct or most accurate map of an archaeological site. The creation and use of Maya maps thus offer one way to question hegemonic Western understandings of the world and to affirm the value and utility of non-Western perspectives.

The tensions between practicing praxis and incorporating Indigenous Maya knowledge, between engaged archaeology and the ontological turn, are thus present at Punta Laguna. To describe these tensions, Stump [109] uses words such as "confusion" and "ambiguity" and, cautioning against the "danger of conflation of arguments," suggests that archaeological projects not simultaneously rely on, and critique as inadequate, Western perspectives. At Punta Laguna, however, project members have understood this combination of approaches not as an uncritical amalgamation of related ideas, but as a clear contradiction that should be explored and mined as a potential source of new knowledge and social change. How to do so forms the subject of the conclusion.

7. Conclusions

Like the other contributions to this special issue, this article has considered the process of practicing engaged archaeology with and for members of a Maya community and aims to encourage exploration and experimentation with engaged forms of archaeology in the Maya area and beyond. Specifically, this article has examined the contradictions of engaged archaeology and three paradoxical questions encountered by members of the Punta Laguna Archaeology Project. Do attempts to mitigate certain forms of inequality unintentionally sustain other forms of inequality? Can the production of capital alleviate rather than exacerbate unequal social relationships? And, can Western social theories be used to advocate for and increase Maya and other Indigenous perspectives in archaeology? Further, this article has argued that these and other contradictions should not be minimized, but instead brought to the fore, investigated in detail, and regarded as potential sources of dialectical change. But how exactly does a consideration of these contradictions help advance the field of engaged archaeology? How, in this instance, can contradictions generate change?

The paradoxical questions noted above raise new concerns and bring to light promising new areas of research for engaged archaeologists. The contradictions of labor, and particularly how attempts to ameliorate one form of inequality can lead to the perpetuation of other forms of inequality, suggests that intersectionality should be a key aspect of engaged archaeology [39]. Put differently, scholars seeking to mitigate inequality should consider how various aspects of identity—including but not limited to ethnicity, gender, age, and class—combine to create different types of inequities for different members of marginalized groups. As Conkey [39] writes, engaged archaeologists must recognize the "intersections of hierarchies and aspects of 'identity'" and "take into account the convergences of several dimensions of difference."

The contradictions of capital, including how the commodification of the past can both undermine and empower marginalized groups, suggests that issues of control should be another integral element of engaged archaeology. The critical question is not whether the past should be commodified, but who controls the means of production and who controls the content to be presented to tourists and other consumers. If members of marginalized groups own the means of production, then commodification can help ameliorate economic inequality. Further, if members of marginalized groups decide what information is presented about themselves to outsiders, they can, at least in part, resist the imposition of exotified or homogenized identities. Indeed, archaeological tourist attractions are not inherently problematic because they commodify the past. They tend to be problematic instead because too often "one group is in a position to name another group, to describe them, to demonstrate and assess their historical and contemporary significance, to place them in the world, [and] to choose their cultural identity" [67].

The contradictions of praxis, and particularly the tensions that arise from using Western theoretical frameworks to advocate for and increase Maya and other Indigenous perspectives in archaeology, suggest authoritative speech as a third potentially fruitful avenue of study for those practicing engaged archaeology. Put differently, how is that "some forms of speech and language. have a greater impact on the constitution of reality than others" [112]? Why, as Todd [110] notes, are Indigenous thinkers often overlooked in academic writing about Indigenous ontologies? And can this be changed? Linguistic research has demonstrated that the "forms of language and the ideas associated with the dominant or more highly valued social category flourish, while the forms of language and ideas associated with the subordinate or less highly valued social category are constructed and disattended" [112]. But exactly which aspects of language do archaeologists tend to value and why, and can such valuations be altered?

These suggestions—that engaged archaeologists focus on intersectionality, control, and authoritative speech—do not in any way solve the thorny contradictions or answer the paradoxical questions posed above. Instead, as with all sources of dialectical change, they suggest potential ways to move forward. As McGuire [27] writes, the "dialectic offers us no destination or resolution to our quest, but only an ongoing process of dialogue that builds understanding." And building understanding is undoubtedly a worthwhile endeavor that may change the future of engaged archaeology. Or, to quote Yogi Berra one more time, increased understanding and dialogue makes it such that "the future ain't what it used to be."

Funding

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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