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Agency, practical politics and the archaeology of culture contact

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ABSTRACT

I use this paper to intersect the trajectory of the agency concept in archaeology. On a theoretical front, I summarize briefly the state of 'agency' in archaeology and its deployment in theories of practice. This opens a space to introduce the concepts of practical politics and doxa, and I illustrate their effectiveness in addressing issues of social relations, power, identity and daily practice. I then pinpoint their particular applicability to colonial and culture-contact studies. On an empirical front, I turn the lenses of doxa and practical politics to a case study in nineteenth-century northern California. My focus is on Native American involvement in the Rancho Petaluma and the continuity of lithic practices in this secular colonial setting. I conclude that although lithic practices display a material continuity in technology, they are in fact part of a social change surrounding the politics of practice.

KEYWORDS

agency ● California ● colonialism ● culture contact ● doxa ● lithics ● practice theory ● Rancho Petaluma ● ranchos

■ INTRODUCTION

Concepts of social agency have proliferated in many sectors of archaeology, from the postmodern influences of interpretive archaeology and Marxist approaches on class and conflict to the methodological individualism of evolutionary ecology. In this way, it is difficult to chart the theoretical terrain of the agency concept or the extent of its variable applications (see Dobres and Robb, 2000). In light of this diversity, I choose to focus on those approaches that conceptualize social agency under the rubric of 'practice theory', meaning that I am interested in those archaeological approaches that draw on the theoretical writings of Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990). I limit my discussion to the approaches inspired by Giddens and Bourdieu because they are commonly deployed in both prehistoric and historical archaeological contexts, because they comprise the core of much contemporary social theory in interpretive archaeology and because they inform the case study presented in this article.

I use this article to explore briefly the current state of the agency concept within social theories of practice. Upon this background, I seek to expand the applicability of practice theory to archaeology with the concept of practical politics, which I develop in tandem with the notion of *doxa* introduced by Bourdieu (1977). Moments of colonialism and culture contact are ideal venues for teasing apart some of these issues because of the confrontations of different cultural histories within a nexus of often severe inequalities. I draw them together briefly in an archaeological case study of nineteenth-century colonialism in California. The context is a Mexican-Californian rancho located north of San Francisco Bay that had a large Native American laboring force during the 1830s and 1840s.

■ SOCIAL THEORIES OF AGENCY AND PRACTICE

Over the last 15 years, archaeologists have introduced social theories of practice to undermine processual archaeologies (Hodder, 1991; Johnson, 1989; Shanks and Tilley, 1987); to highlight political struggles and social evolutionary processes (Blanton et al., 1996; Joyce and Winter, 1996; Roscoe, 1993); to study ethnicity and identity (Jones, 1997; Lightfoot et al., 1998); and to examine gender (Dobres, 1995; Gilchrist, 1994), space (Donley-Reid, 1990), technology (Dobres, 2000; Dobres and Hoffman, 1994) and resistance (Shackel, 2000). This list is, of course, only a limited sample. The focus on the conduct of everyday life, tradition and routine has been a methodological and analytical strength of practice-based approaches because these relate to lived experience and power (Donley-Reid, 1990; Lightfoot et al., 1998; Meskell, 1998; Pauketat, 2000). Within practice



theory, social agents are frequently conceived of as individuals with goals, intentions and subjectivities and as historical moments in the negotiation of social structure, strategies and relations. Yet, some archaeologists are expressing concern that the analytical weight of the latter has crushed attempts to 'examine agency in terms of the forward-looking intentionality of individual lives' (Hodder, 2000: 24). I would argue that such a proposed reorientation is premature, despite its usefulness in tracking some aspects of lived experience. Instead, as I discuss below, more attention should be devoted to sorting out the parameters of action – the alternatives and limitations for an individual in any given social setting (Wobst, 2000: 41).

Although archaeologists using some version of practice theory draw on the same theoretical source materials of Giddens and Bourdieu, archaeological concepts of agency tend to segregate into two distinct types. In one incarnation, social agents are assumed to act strategically and intentionally to advance their own interests (Blanton et al., 1996; Joyce and Winter, 1996). Individuals in these interpretations tend to be portrayed as rational actors, maximizing some aspect of economic, political or symbolic capital. Their motives are frequently seen as autonomous and universal. A more extreme version of this type of individual action informs some evolutionary approaches (e.g. Hayden, 1995). This type of individual agent has been adeptly criticized (Barrett, 2000; Gero, 2000).

At the other end of the continuum are archaeologists who view individuals acting meaningfully in historical and social circumstances only partly of their own making (Barrett, 2000; Dobres and Hoffman, 1994; Hodder, 1991; Johnson, 1989; Pauketat, 2000; Wilkie and Bartoy, 2000). In this scheme, individual actions are contextualized within an array of rules and resources that precede them but that give them opportunity. The dialectic is one between structure and agency (Giddens, 1984). In these perspectives, individuals often conduct their daily affairs in intentional and strategic *and* in routinized, nondiscursive or preconscious ways. To state the common expression, social agents are both constrained and enabled by structure.

This paper adheres to the second version of agency theory. My theoretical approach holds that social agents often do act with explicit intent and strategies for accomplishing their objectives, but they also act in ways that allow them to 'go on' in the world (Giddens, 1984). The latter aspect, the lived experience of frequently nondiscursive action, gives strength to the label of 'practice theory' (Ortner, 1984; see also Pauketat, 2000: 114–15). Ortner provided the most lucid definition of practice as 'anything people do' (Ortner, 1984: 149), whether discursive or not. The definition is simple and crisp, but theoretical slippage occurs when anthropologists implicitly render this definition as 'everything people do'. The overextension neglects the clarification that Ortner provided in the next sentence: '[T]he most significant forms of practice are those with intentional or unintentional *political* [emphasis added] implications' (Ortner, 1984: 149). This point is

not trifling. It would be nearly impossible and highly suspect for anthropologists to study every aspect of personal experience as relevant to *social* analysis. Therefore, it is necessary to home in on those practices with political ramifications, a challenging task in archaeological contexts.

■ PRACTICAL POLITICS AND THE ROLE OF DOXA

To investigate the role of practices and their impact on political and social relations, I argue that two concepts – doxa and practical politics – are useful. The former demarcates the boundaries of the overtly political by delimiting the taken-for-granted aspects of social interaction, while the latter serves to widen that which is considered political.

Doxa

Doxa refers to the unquestioned and often unacknowledged shared backdrop of givens in discourse and social interactions (Bourdieu, 1977: 159–71). As doxa, ‘the established cosmological and political order is perceived . . . as . . . a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 166). Some doxic practices exist outside the realm of intentionality, as generally defined, because they are invariant, unquestioned and frequently preconscious. Examples might be some of the rote, mundane activities of everyday life. In contrast, other doxic practices are intentional because individuals may share motivations and life histories, a situation leading to Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990) related concept of *habitus* as a set of durable dispositions and Giddens’ (1979, 1984) notion of practical consciousness as a preconscious way to ‘go on’ in the world. Intentionality may thus lead not to divergent actions, but to virtually identical ones. Therefore, to sort out the nuances of social agency, doxic practices need to be identified archaeologically.

At a superficial level, doxa appears much like the age-old definition of culture, but it differs in two important respects. First, doxa operates at a variety of scales. As used in this article, doxa refers to a quality of particular circumstances, materials or social relations rather than to a general state of existence or societal ‘level’. This contrasts with Bourdieu’s (1977) original use. Certain social aspects – dietary habits, bodily attire, burial practices, production, exchange, sexual relations – exhibit doxic qualities depending on the individuals involved or the contexts in which they occur. All have their own array of acceptability, limits and alternatives, but they vary by an individual’s gender, age, status, class, ethnic affiliation, sexual orientation and occupation.

Second, although defined as the shared and unquestioned backdrop of



social interaction, doxa embodies contestation and opinion in its juxtaposition between heterodoxy and orthodoxy. This is probably the only justification for using the otherwise obtuse term. The ways in which aspects of the political and social order take on the status of doxa are typically neither a neutral series of unintended consequences nor total consensus, although they can be. More frequently, the creation and dissolution of doxa is a political process, linking it to aspects of ideology (e.g. Burke, 1999: 11–36). When the unquestioned orders of doxa are no longer shared or when individuals attempt to reify a doxic reality, opinion and action schism into orthodoxy and heterodoxy. In orthodoxy, individuals attempt to reinstate, or create a new, doxa because they have a vested interest in that particular arbitrary order and the complicit silence of discourse around it. In heterodoxy, individuals accentuate the arbitrariness of doxa for social change or personal gain – they expose the politics built into doxa or introduce new ones to it. This transformation, or dissolution, of doxa is a highly charged political and social one in which individuals contest the meanings of the arbitrary, of the taken-for-granted. The negotiation can occur on the grand stages of social performance or in the practices of everyday life.

Practical politics

Politics constantly surround, but do not always infiltrate, daily practice. That is, politics are not always explicit, consequential or even contested in the world of everyday conduct. This is particularly true in the realm of doxic practices. If a practice is truly locked within a consensual doxa, it does not carry political connotations because there are no other alternatives to action. Yet this begs the question: how many practices truly occur within doxa, with no divergent opinions or no alternatives? The answer varies by cultural context, but I would suggest that it closely approximates ‘very few’. Other questions arise as well: why are there no alternatives? What aspects of social power are behind this apparent lack of alternatives? Politics are not static, and studying the process of politicization highlights the movements, both subtle and outright, of daily practice in and out of a political realm as part of social negotiation. These movements, whether rapid or gradual, mark the fluctuating perimeter of doxa. The shifting edges are highly pronounced in colonial contexts.

I use the term ‘practical politics’ to refer to the negotiation of politics of social position and identity in daily practices. In many ways, they are akin to the *infrapolitics* discussed by Scott (1990: 183–201) when referring to individuals’ attempts to maneuver the social terrain within a hierarchical system. The concept of practical politics broadens the scope of political relevance to include everyday practices since these comprise the lived experience of individuals. A focus on practical politics and lived experience renders acts of residence as analytically important as acts of resistance. By

acts of residence, I mean the attempts of individuals to stake out a claim in their social worlds, even under contexts of oppression and domination, that may have little to do with outright or even impromptu resistance. As Scott (1985, 1990) and others have shown, many social agents are not active revolutionaries out to usurp the powers that oppress them, even if they want to be, and individuals frequently organize their daily lives not around taking over a place but around forging residence in it. 'Without leaving the place where he [sic] has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity' (De Certeau, 1984: 30). Plurality and creativity are what give the archaeological record of colonialism such theoretical promise.

In cases of significantly unequal social relations such as those implicated in colonialism, the political charge of daily practices can fluctuate along two inter-related fronts. First, those seeking domination can single out mundane, everyday activities as a way to control bodies and routines – that is, practices become nodes in political maneuvering. In its most conspicuous form, the process involves the discipline discussed by Foucault (1979). Those wielding power attempt to control the minutiae of daily life as a way to re-constitute individual subjectivities. Innocuous activities of daily life become the source of constant scrutiny as they are presumed to comprise the social essence of particular groups, ethnicities or individuals. They become politically-charged markers of stereotyped bodies and groups. An example is the sixteenth- to nineteenth-century Spanish mission system in North America that stretched from Florida to California. Spanish padres attempted to convert indigenous people by prohibiting particular activities, controlling sexual practices, requiring Catholic rituals and routines and enforcing labor – all aspects of daily practice (Silliman, 2001).

Second, quotidian practices of daily life take on explicit political significance for those conducting them (Lightfoot et al., 1998: 202). These practices are pathways for exerting social agency; they can express a range of resistance, compliance or simply 'getting by' within rigid power structures. On the one hand, individuals are aware that their activities are being watched. Conducting particular practices can serve as outright resistance, while not conducting them can demonstrate compliance, at least at a socially visible level (Paynter and McGuire, 1991: 12). Non-conduct can also represent a *depoliticization* of practice – what practices the dominant feel that they have eradicated, the subordinate no longer consider socially significant or constitutive. On the other hand, individuals can use both novel and 'traditional' daily practices as a forum for reworking identity, often through the appropriation of material culture. These negotiations may occur far-removed from anything that might be termed resistance. As Upton described it, 'invented traditions reveal the process by which ethnic groups form themselves by *choosing* to commodify their identities and to attach them to equally consciously chosen material signs' (Upton, 1996: 5; see also



Jones, 1997, 1999). Because individuals experience the world through everyday conduct, these are the venues for trying to cope with, instigate or circumvent social change.

■ COLONIALISM AND THE RANCHO PETALUMA

In numerous cases worldwide, post-Columbian colonialism propelled many daily practices into new political fields. Doxic practices of both colonizer and colonized often fragmented into contested arenas, and other practices shifted or intensified their political nature. Bourdieu himself stated:

The practical questioning of the theses implied in a particular way of living that is brought about by 'culture contact' . . . is . . . the deliberate, methodical suspension of native adherence to the world. The critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation . . . destroys self-evidence practically. (Bourdieu, 1977: 168)

I prefer the term puncture over destroy to signify the ambiguity and incompleteness of this process. Although 'contact' altered the unquestioned worlds (i.e. doxa) of all those involved in or undergoing colonization, numerous studies have shown that indigenous people reacted to these episodes in ways that made sense *to them* (Lightfoot et al., 1998; Milliken, 1995; Sahlins, 1981, 1985; Thomas, 1991). At the same time, colonial encounters vested 'traditional' alternatives and limitations with new politics. Indigenous individuals could manipulate precontact power and social relations for new ends, seizing opportunities that may have been denied before (see Sahlins, 1981: 36, 1985: 28 for Pacific cases). In addition, drastic new alternatives and limitations to action may have appeared where only minor ones had been assumed before in diet, technology, material culture, symbolism, social status, marriage and sexual relations. Furthermore, the introduction of colonial material culture provided a novel suite of items for use in social strategies and relations. Although these items presenced the colonial apparatus, they were objects without local history. Native social agents could appropriate these materials in various forms and combinations as a way to negotiate social positions and identities (Lightfoot et al., 1998: 202; Thomas, 1991). These material and social relations all revolve around shifting practical politics.

It might be argued falsely that a perspective on the politicization of practice in colonial and culture contact settings relegates precontact indigenous practices to an apolitical, or worse, pre-political realm. The approach might be read to assume that colonialism bestowed social agency on indigenous individuals because, before 'contact', people had blindly followed cultural prescriptions and norms. Taking Bourdieu (1977: 164, 167) too literally would support such a claim. However, the conclusion would be incorrect. I contend that all practices have the potential to intersect politics and that all

individuals have agency, or are social agents (Cowgill, 2000: 52), within the bounds of doxa. The key is to investigate the *changes* in practical politics and in the boundaries of doxa at moments of social transformation, not only as they comprise change, but also as they envelope daily experience. Colonial settings simply provide stark episodes of rapid and often violent social upheaval. The Rancho Petaluma case from nineteenth-century northern California in the western USA serves as a case in point.

Background

Aside from a handful of coastal landfalls by European explorers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the official colonial period in California began with the arrival of Spanish colonists in 1769. These colonists began to found missions, presidios and pueblos along the coast of California from San Diego to San Francisco in a tripartite scheme to convert Native Americans to Catholicism, render them loyal subjects of the Spanish crown and secure the West Coast of North America for Spain (Costello and Hornbeck, 1989). Indigenous hunter-gatherers of northern California witnessed the colonial arrival in 1776 with the establishment of Mission San Francisco de Asis and the military post of the Presidio de San Francisco where the modern city of San Francisco now exists (Figure 1). By the early 1800s, three Spanish Franciscan missions were actively proselytizing, recruiting and decimating (usually by disease) the indigenous populations that occupied the entire ring of the San Francisco Bay and adjoining waterways (Milliken, 1995). In 1823, Mission San Francisco Solano – the last Franciscan mission, the fifth one in the San Francisco Bay Area and the first one under Mexican rule – was established in the Sonoma Valley, just east of the Petaluma Valley (Smilie, 1975). Native individuals seem to have abandoned most of their villages in the area by this time due to disease and prior missionization by the established missions, but many Native Americans who had been removed from the region during earlier missionary efforts returned to help found the new mission (Smilie, 1975). Missionaries also increased proselytizing efforts into mountains to the north and river and delta areas northeast of Sonoma.

In 1834, the colonial scene changed dramatically. The Mexican government secularized the Franciscan missions, which released many native people from the mission communities and freed land for secular colonization. Some California Native American people returned to old villages, some formed new communities, and others joined the labor forces of nearby ranchos. Ranchos were land grants offered by the colonial government that required the recipient to build on and use the land for livestock or agriculture (Greenwood, 1989; Sánchez, 1986). In the area north of San Francisco, one result of the secularization process was the Rancho Petaluma, a land grant offered to Mariano G. Vallejo by the Mexican government as repayment for his loyalty and service to the military (Rosenus, 1995). The Rancho Petaluma



covered over 26,700 hectares from the defunct Mission San Francisco Solano in the east to the Petaluma River in the west. The core of the rancho was the Petaluma Adobe, an enormous two-storey adobe-brick building built on a large knoll in the Petaluma Valley. Approximately half of this structure stands today. Archaeological excavation (Clemmer, 1961; Gebhardt, 1962) and a historical survey map (O'Farrell, 1848) variably revealed two additional structures, probably corrals, to the northwest of the Petaluma Adobe and two unidentified buildings in a field a few hundred meters due east of the Petaluma Adobe, across Adobe Creek.

In addition to its large size, a critical feature of the Rancho Petaluma was the large number of Native Americans working there from 1834 until the early 1850s (Davis, 1929; Silliman, 2000). Numbers ranged from 200 to probably 1000, depending on the year and season (Silliman, 2000: 78). Native workers were individuals (a) who turned over cattle and land, perhaps under coercion, to Vallejo to care for in exchange for their labor, (b) who had been captured in military raids, (c) who formed part of a broader military and political alliance between Vallejo and local native leaders and (d) who potentially used the Rancho Petaluma as a stopover in a seasonal round (Silliman, 2000: 41–3). These factors made life on the rancho a complex mixture of oppression and opportunity. Ultimately, there were more native individuals working on the Rancho Petaluma than could be kept there by physical force. Unlike mission settings, Vallejo and his overseers exerted few, if any, overt restrictions on native dress, diet, ritual or material practices as long as rancho work was completed (e.g. Vallejo, 1875: 10–11). Very few non-native individuals lived on the Rancho Petaluma, and these were typically limited to the *majordomo* (overseer), Vallejo's family from time to time and a handful of artisans who resided in the large Petaluma Adobe structure. There is no evidence that any of these individuals intermarried with native workers.

Numerous native individuals worked on the rancho depending on the agricultural and livestock slaughtering schedules, but some probably labored year-round as household servants. Duties for native workers included herding and slaughtering cattle, plowing and harvesting fields, manufacturing goods and processing and preparing food (Silliman, 2000: 88–95). Vallejo designed many of these tasks to generate the economic surplus needed for trade with other colonies and with ships in the San Francisco Bay, but he earmarked some foods and goods for consumption by his family, settlers under his care and native workers. Native women usually prepared food, wove blankets and baskets and worked in the Petaluma Adobe itself; men were often field hands, slaughterers and *vaqueros* (cowboys). The division of labor was also hierarchical depending on experience: those who had mission training were often task leaders or sub-supervisors, whereas those who arrived from unmissionized villages generally took assistant roles (Davis, 1929: 136).

Archaeological investigations

From 1996–1998, I conducted an archaeological project to locate and study evidence of the native workers on the Rancho Petaluma by focusing on the Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park, a 41-acre parcel of land that preserves the rancho's core (Silliman, 2000). Despite my extensive archival research, I could locate very few documentary sources that touched upon native residences, origins, diet or daily life (see Silliman, 2000: 71–100 for synthesis of available materials). As a result, I turned to archaeology for these answers. Following pedestrian survey, geophysical prospection and surface testing, I isolated a dense archaeological deposit to the east of the Petaluma Adobe, across Adobe Creek and in the vicinity of the reputed buildings on the 1848 survey map (Silliman, 2000: 107–15). Upon excavation of single units,

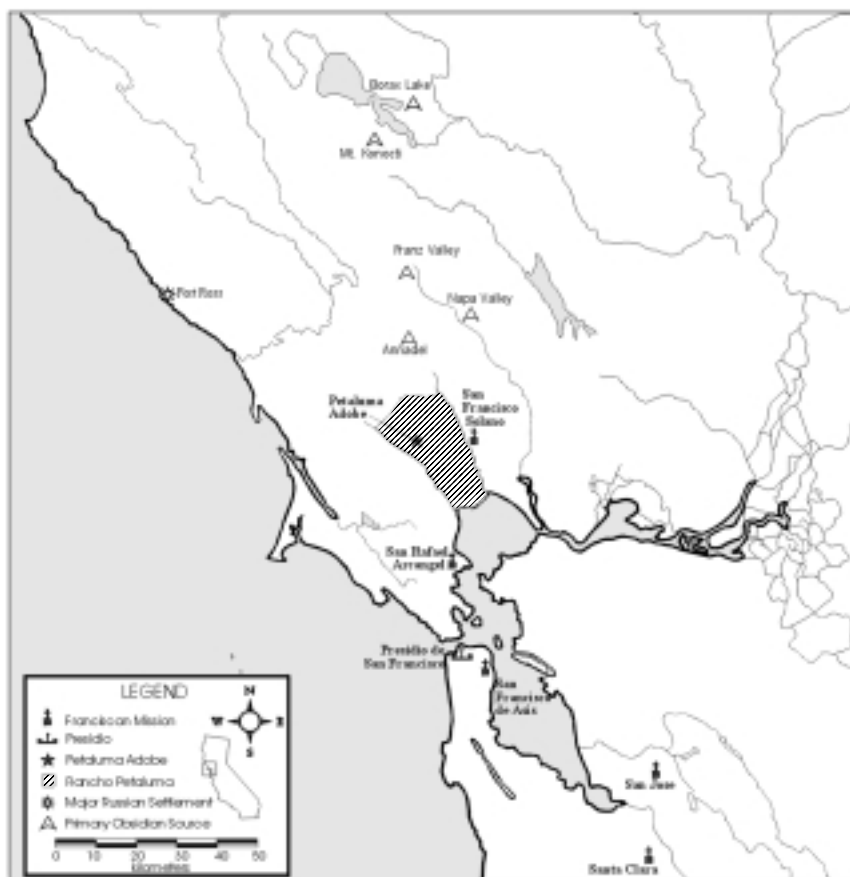


Figure 1 Map of northern California, circa 1835



trenches and a block exposure, I determined that the site represented a residential and refuse area for native workers at the Rancho Petaluma. I discovered no actual residences and no evidence for the presumed adobe buildings that had once occupied the field, but the presence of substantial residential debris indicated that living quarters would have been nearby. These residences were undoubtedly 'traditional' housing in the form of conical thatched structures. Such houses are notoriously difficult to detect archaeologically, especially in heavily bioturbated soils.

A dense residential midden across the stream from the Petaluma Adobe contained strong evidence of native domestic and laboring practices in the 1830s–1850s (Figure 2). Other nineteenth-century features approximately 25 m east of the midden included two processing features, a large discrete

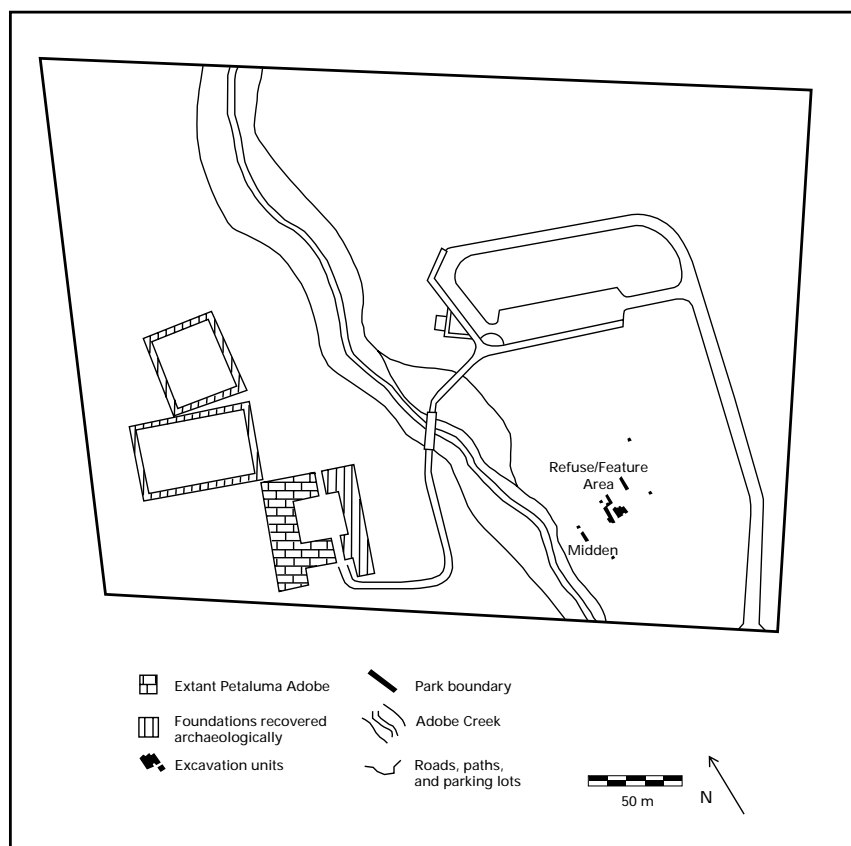


Figure 2 Map of the Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park with relevant archaeological investigations

pile of faunal and other debris, one refuse pit and two potential cooking features turned into refuse pits (Silliman, 2000: 115–47). All artifacts recovered from the features, midden and general artifact scatter revealed a combination of Western mass-produced goods such as 1176 glass beads, 2896 glass sherds, 322 ceramics sherds and 1020 metal artifacts and fragments (including 420 nails), and ‘traditional’ native artifacts such as 3009 chipped-stone lithics, 25 groundstones and fragments, 2 shell beads, and 20 worked bone items. All of these items were consistently associated with each other across the site. Faunal and floral remains were also dense and abundant, evidencing a mixture of provisioned foods such as cattle, sheep, wheat, barley and corn with wild foods such as deer, fish, birds, rodents, acorns, manzanita berries, bay laurel nuts and grass seeds (Silliman, 2000: 264–99). Using a combination of obsidian hydration analysis, manufacturing dates of one ceramic hallmark and one backstamped button and general date ranges for ceramic wares, metal goods and glass types and colors, I could attribute the vast majority of artifacts to the 1830s–1850s (Silliman, 2000: 400–3). Some obsidian artifacts predate the nineteenth century based on hydration readings, and some mass-produced goods such as wire nails and particular glass colors postdate the second quarter of the 1800s. However, these outliers do not detract from the primary conclusion about native practices during the zenith of the Rancho Petaluma.

Lithics and daily practice

Because of the high diversity and quantity of lithic materials and their strong association with the numerous other material classes at the site, I focus my interpretive efforts here on the chipped stone tools and related debris. They reveal particularly salient aspects of practical politics and doxa in this context.

During excavations, we recovered 3009 lithic artifacts in the raw material categories of obsidian (43.3%), microcrystalline silicates (39.4%), fine-grained igneous stone (8.8%) and others (8.4%) (Silliman, 2000: Table 6.1). These materials were recovered from all excavated areas but, like most other artifact classes, they were most concentrated in the midden. Manufacturing debris and products varied per raw material. Obsidian contained the full array of reduction and production, including cores, cortical flakes, interior flakes, angular shatter, worked debitage and formal tools such as bifaces and projectile points. The microcrystalline silicate and igneous artifacts contained the same categories except for the presence of only one formal tool, an early-stage chert biface. Current evidence from debitage and tools suggests that obsidian reduction on the site reflects a strong focus on biface production, but individuals focused strongly on reducing cores with the microcrystalline silicate and igneous lithic materials (Silliman, 2000: 226–8).



When placed in a social context, the lithic data have much to offer regarding doxa and practical politics at the Rancho Petaluma. I argue that these lithic practices trace the edges of a fractured doxa, revealing points of contestation and negotiation. Although individuals undoubtedly contested stylistic or raw material aspects of lithic technology in prehistory, lithic manufacture as a broad technology had to have rested in the realm of doxa – it was the accepted way to manufacture hard, durable or sharp implements. The advent of the colonial period and the involvement of Native Americans in the rancho system changed that, as numerous material and technological alternatives were introduced. Vallejo and his contemporaries in northern California had reliable access to glass, metal and ceramic goods courtesy of numerous trading and whaling ships in San Francisco Bay and adjacent waters. Yet, in spite of exposure to nineteenth-century industrial and mass-produced items, native laborers at the Rancho Petaluma remained focused on lithic technology. As I demonstrate below, the choice was a political one. I can outline the involvement of lithic practices in practical politics by considering alternative explanations. The process is crucial because these alternatives not only circumscribe my interpretation but also once served as actual alternatives – actions and choices – for individuals in the past.

A potential explanation for the continuity of lithic practices could be the lack of native access to metal or other tools at the rancho. However, the assemblage contains metal tools such as fragments of scissors, thimbles, files, iron kettles, flatware, guns and other items (Silliman, 2000: 341–8). This suggests that metal was available in various forms to the site's residents, much like the Western ceramics and glass found in the native deposits. In addition, native people at the Rancho Petaluma worked for hours a day plowing and harvesting fields, butchering cattle, making candles and blankets and cooking and serving food. Given the wealth of Vallejo's landholdings and his prime access to material goods, native workers probably performed these labor duties with products of nineteenth-century industry.

Another alternative for explaining lithic continuity could be that individuals needed stone tools to complete the required rancho duties in the absence of sufficient metal tools. Perhaps the presence of 600 native workers taxed even the wealthy Vallejo's ability to provide enough tools for the jobs at hand. Unfortunately, this cannot be addressed fully with the current archival or archaeological data. The noticeable deficit of metal knives, cleavers and axes in the assemblage may indicate that the labor overseers at the Petaluma Adobe carefully safeguarded these prized tools and prevented workers from obtaining them, or that they were less likely to break and be discarded. Yet, the complete absence of *any* field tools or accoutrements suggests that native men, who were involved with such tools on a daily basis, did not introduce these items into the household, quite unlike the attempts by native women to incorporate rancho sewing goods

into the home (Silliman, 2000: 416–20). However, even if the metal tool deficit hypothesis is true, only rancho tasks such as livestock butchering and hide preparation could have accommodated lithic tools, and it is unlikely that individuals would have made formal bifacial tools for these jobs since retouched flakes and steep-sided scrapers generally work better for cutting and scraping, respectively.

Related to the previous two alternatives is the possibility that native individuals, probably men, needed stone projectile points for hunting wild game because guns were in restricted supply. Even if true, this alternative would explain only a small component of the lithic assemblage (i.e. projectile points and associated manufacturing debris). Despite the strong focus on cattle for both duty and consumption, the presence of deer in the faunal assemblage confirms hunting. Rabbit, rodent, fish and bird bones further round out the non-domestic faunal assemblage, but these were probably taken with nets and traps (Silliman, 2000: 283–91). Undoubtedly, arrows were used to dispatch deer, but numerous pieces of lead shot and a handful of firearms-related artifacts indicate that guns were available, at least to some individuals during certain times.

With these three alternatives offering less than satisfactory accounts for the continuity of lithic technology, I argue that lithic practices were part of the active daily negotiation of colonialism. Aspects of lithic practices exited the cracks in doxa. Lithic working and use may have done little to subvert rancho labor, but they were active ways for individuals to stake out a claim in the material and social world. That is, they helped stake out a residence in the colonial world, casting traditional technology into new social orders. Given the control of space and time exerted by labor regimentation, individuals could have manufactured stone tools only during off-work hours, those times when friends and families regrouped during an early afternoon siesta or at the end of the work day. Contrary to ‘acculturation’, these stone artifacts were conscripted as active materializations, rather than passive vestiges, of native identity. This is especially significant in light of the large numbers of ex-mission converts in the labor force who might have been part of the Franciscan mission system for at least a generation. Many might assume that these mission residents had long since replaced stone tool technology with metal tools, but mission excavations in other parts of California reveal quite the opposite (Allen, 1998; Deetz, 1963; Hoover and Costello, 1985).

The raw material used in stone working offers additional insight. The critical point is that stone tool production was not simply a convenient decision since lithic sources were not located in the immediate vicinity. Chert and igneous stones were available semi-locally, but the nearest obsidian sources – both primary and secondary deposits – were 23–35 km away (Silliman, 2000: Figure 6.16). The obsidian indicates that (a) native individuals on the rancho had seasonal or other opportunities to visit obsidian



sources and/or (b) they maintained exchange relationships with groups outside the rancho. Given the extensive patterns of trade in northern California during prehistoric and historic periods, the latter is highly probable. Obsidian may have served as a common material and symbolic currency linking native people ensnared in the rancho system with those outside of its reach.

The interest in maintaining access to lithic sources is put into relief when contrasted with the worked bottle glass assemblage. Like many other colonial sites, native individuals at the Rancho Petaluma directed the practice of lithic technology onto glass bottles. However, in contrast to other contact-period assemblages in the West such as Colony Ross (Silliman, 1997) or Mission San Antonio (Hoover and Costello, 1985), the modification and utilization of bottles at Petaluma involved primarily expedient use rather than formal tool manufacture. In other words, I discovered no projectile points or other bifacial tools, although I recovered some shards with clear bifacial retouch (Silliman, 2000: 339–40). This is significant in light of the discussion of doxa and practical politics. Given their quantity in the site assemblage, glass bottles were numerous and readily available for tool manufacture, and they are a superior raw material to some of the microcrystalline silicates and igneous stones found in the lithic collection. Nevertheless, native laborers sought out actual stone material for the majority of expedient and formal tool production, despite the distance and presumed effort involved.

Summary

The breakdown of doxa surrounding lithic practices offered the possibility of change as individuals encountered different alternatives. The trajectory of change could have gone in any number of directions, and the presence of lithic artifacts at the Rancho Petaluma might seem rather like a lack of change. On the contrary, I argue that the continuity of the material practice belies the changes in the social practice of making and using the lithic tools. Even though the lithic tools served some functional or economic needs, they also participated in rancho social relations. It appears that some native individuals may have consciously chosen these material signs to activate or solidify a nineteenth-century identity. Given the diversity of lithic products that are present, from tools to expedient flakes to debitage, both men and women may have done so. However, men may have been the main ones who intensified the political nature of lithic practices, choosing to use stone rather than colonial tools for their everyday tasks or in the household negotiation of gender or identity. In contrast, women seem to have incorporated both familiar goods such as grinding stones and introduced items such as scissors, needles and thimbles that they used in their rancho tasks (Silliman, 2000: 416–20).

Depending on scale, lithic practices at the Rancho Petaluma reveal both heterodoxy and orthodoxy. Lithic practices were heterodox in the pluralistic colonial community where the dominant group (i.e. Mexican-Californians) controlled much of the material world and where various indigenous individuals chose to use new technologies and materials. They were orthodox in segments of the native population where individuals adhered to a familiar practice, perhaps trying to drive it back into doxa. Because lithic practices could rest in both realms, they were no longer doxic and became part of active political and social negotiations. The Rancho Petaluma is probably not unique in this respect, and other colonial and contact-period sites in North America with such lithic 'continuity' might warrant closer consideration. I believe this would complement the socially-informed focus that archaeologists are now developing for studies of contact-period lithic practices (Bamforth, 1993; Hudson, 1993).

■ CONCLUSION

This article has explored, albeit briefly, the role of agency in interpreting indigenous responses to colonial contact. However, the theoretical approach has much broader implications because it focuses on the inter-relationship of social change and the politics of daily practice. Depending on social and power relations, daily practices may leave the hazy realm of doxa and take on a political charge in the negotiation of identity, gender and status. This does not mean the advent of agency, but rather an alteration of its expression. Material change usually denotes social change in archaeological contexts, but rarely do archaeologists have the opportunity to see how the lack of material change can reveal actual changes in practical politics. Historical archaeologists may be in the best position to entertain and evaluate these possibilities. Practice-as-politics may be more difficult to sort out from practice-as-doxa in prehistoric than in historical contexts, but the efforts are necessary in all cases for understanding social agency.

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