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Any study that considers cultural transmission and cultural dynamics seriously, without getting bogged down in the “evolutionary theories” that have been endlessly sold to archaeologists for the past 20 years, must be saluted, as does any study paying attention to a category of social actors whose sheer importance through time and space seems inversely proportional to the attention devoted to them in archaeological discussions. Cameron's paper is thus a most welcome addition to current debates on the dynamics of cultural interactions, especially because it offers a refreshing perspective on cultural transfers with its “bottom-up” perspective. I certainly rally to her contention that we should change the scale of archaeological approaches and that captives qualify as potential agents of culture change. The extent to which the Atlantic slave trade affected religious, food, or language practices in the New World is a good illustration at hand.

Yet the question of how such potential materializes in artifact production and may be recognized as such in the archaeological record remains severely challenging. At the end of her paper, Cameron seems to oscillate between two positions. The first, inspired by Clark (2001), considers that the less visible and socially invested elements of material culture (e.g., mundane objects, production tasks) are likely arenas within which captives herald their native identities and resist dominant culture. They do so in reproducing knowledge and know-how acquired before their capture, thus becoming individual “depositories” of cultural practices that may be partially transferred to captors' societies so long as they stay “below the radar” of the dominant culture. Cameron's second position is more nuanced. It states that the decision to abandon or reproduce native ways of doing depends on the social position and attitude of both captives and captors. Thus, the recipient culture is not just “another context” where cultural practices are to be transferred but a socially and historically constituted world where the changing relationships between captives and captors determine the dynamics of cultural transmission. And given the variety of status and attitudes in captors' societies through time and space, such dynamics are likely to be highly variable.

Both positions could be considered complementary. I am afraid, however, that the first is too reductionist to serve Cameron's aim. Having developed a model similar to Clark's (Gosselain 2000), I now believe that this “low physical and contextual visibility” line of reasoning is wrong because it keeps an outsider point of view on technical practice (Gosselain 2008). “Doing” is not just a question of fitting with explicit cultural expectations or prescriptions; from a producer point of view, it is also a way of defining one's own

identity through membership in a meaningful context (Lave 1996). But what is a “meaningful context” for captives engaged in production activities? Their new society? Their native society? Following Lave, I would rather point to their social world of activity. In societies where captives or slaves assume most or all craft activities, newcomers are likely to enter pre-existing communities of practice whose members share a common technical and aesthetic repertoire. Becoming a member means adopting such a repertoire. The newcomers may refuse to do so. But as slavery involves an initial dehumanization of individuals through the stripping of their former social identity (Kopytoff 1982), this would relegate them to some sort of “social limbo,” an unbearable position in most human societies. Developing membership through shared practice, on the other hand, is a powerful way of acquiring a new social identity and, in the case of slaves, being rehumanized. This means, however, adopting parts of a repertoire that may have low physical and contextual visibility for outsiders (Gosselain 2008).

Captives would thus be better positioned as agents of culture change if they did not constitute a specialized force of production or if they were subject to segregation rather than assimilation. In the first case, novel techniques and ideas would be introduced randomly and in isolation, depending on captives' prior knowledge and capacity to put them into practice. Note, however, that the adoption of alien things generally involves a reformulation (Wenger 1998). In the second case, captives may tend to reproduce native ways in areas uncontrolled by their captors, for example, making pots the native way and for one's own consumption, as in New World plantations. But then what is their ability to affect the captor's culture? If inserted into castelike specialist groups, however, captives are likely to become invisible, both because of the resocialization process endured when entering a new community of practice and because captors consume what they produce.

Such complexity should not compel us to stop looking for captives and their effect in the archaeological record. My point is just that doing so requires that aspects such as social stratification and craft specialization be taken into consideration. Fortunately, these are not out of reach for archaeologists.

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“Captives and Culture Change: Implications for Archaeology,” by Catherine M. Cameron, discusses the role captive women played as agents of change. The article contributes to an ongoing discussion concerning the means through which knowl-