

UCSC Archaeology and Biological Anthropology Lunch Talks
Wednesday, Jan. 20th, 2021, 12:00 Noon
Zoom link information coming soon!

Contemporary Landscape Archaeology and Memory in the Bahamas

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The Millars Plantation on Eleuthera, Bahamas was established in 1803 as a cotton plantation and remained in operation through the 1830s. The last plantation owner left the 2000-acre property to the descendants of her former slaves and servants at the time of her death in 1871. Many local residents today trace their lineage to the families named in the Millar will, and continue to uphold their rights to the land in the face of a series of legal challenges by Bahamian and foreign investors who would seek to develop new tourism-based economies in the area. This talk addresses a community-based archaeology project focused on the history of a 19th century Bahamian cotton plantation and the present-day communities who live on and around the former plantation acreage. In the process of documenting the historical landscape of the Millars plantation estate through oral histories and landscape survey, the research revealed ways that residents today have materialized memory – piecing together object, story, and space – on a living landscape that has more often been framed as empty or relegated to the past. This research demonstrates how these contemporary Bahamian communities mobilize historical objects and memory as tools for community-building and activism against the threat of legal dispossession from ancestral lands.



Elena Sesma, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Kentucky. Dr. Sesma holds a doctorate in Anthropology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and is a University of California President's Postdoctoral Fellow. Her research interests include historical and contemporary archaeology, community based and public archaeology, African diaspora and Caribbean archaeology, Black feminist theory, critical heritage studies, intersectionality of race/class/gender, and literary perspectives in anthropology.