Post-Medieval Archaeology

ISSN: 0079-4236 (Print) 1745-8137 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ypma20

Preliminary report on locally manufactured pottery at Christiansborg Castle in Osu, Accra, Ghana

Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann

To cite this article: Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann (2019): Preliminary report on locally manufactured pottery at Christiansborg Castle in Osu, Accra, Ghana, Post-Medieval Archaeology, DOI: 10.1080/00794236.2019.1659586

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00794236.2019.1659586

Published online: 17 Oct 2019.

Post-Medieval Archaeology **0/0** (2019), 1–7

Notes and News

Preliminary report on locally manufactured pottery at Christiansborg Castle in Osu, Accra, Ghana

By RACHEL AMA ASAA ENGMANN

Since 2014, my research has focused on Christiansborg Castle, a 17th-century former trading post, Danish and British colonial seat of government and Office of the President of the Republic of Ghana. Christiansborg Castle is a United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site. Today, it is locally known as simply 'The Castle'. This is the first archaeological excavation at Christiansborg Castle. Work was conducted under the guise of the Christiansborg Archaeological Heritage Project (CAHP) (www.christiansborgarchaeologicalheritage-project.org) (Fig. 1).

This brief preliminary report directs close attention to locally manufactured pottery.[1] Certainly, European colonial written accounts document local manufacture and trade, but they rarely provide detailed descriptions and illustrations of locally manufactured pottery. This note examines the criteria necessary for developing a locally manufactured pottery typology classification for the Christiansborg Castle site. As materially distinct deposits, locally manufactured pottery is the most abundant dataset found at the site. In the past, pottery was commonly employed for a number of purposes and within reach of most households economically. Pottery is a durable material and, though it fractures and breaks into sherds, it does not disintegrate. Since pottery fragments retain their material form, they can be studied. Archaeological analysis is still ongoing, yet some preliminary observations can still be made. Bredwa-Mensah has proposed a typological sequence for local pottery ceramics from Frederiksgave, a Danish plantation site nearby in the Akwapim Hills.[2] Once a detailed study is complete, it will be possible to ascertain whether Bredwah-Mensah's typology is appropriate for this study. Clearly, this topic finds resonance with existing archaeological scholarship in the region.[3]

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Christiansborg Castle was built by the Swedes in 1652 as a lodge, but later appropriated by the Danes in 1660. In 1661, Denmark purchased the land beneath the lodge, constructing a stone fort named Christiansborg (Christian's Fortress), after the King of Denmark, Christian V. As time passed, the site was enlarged and converted into a castle, becoming the Danish headquarters in 1685. Christiansborg Castle contained a courtyard, cistern, chapel, 'mulatto school', storerooms, living quarters, gable bell tower and cannon. Between 1694 and 1803, the Danes conducted trade with Africans at the castle, purchasing gold and captive Africans in exchange for flintlock guns, powder and bullets, liquor, cloth, iron knives and tools, brass bracelets and bowls, in addition to glass beads. Denmark occupied the castle for most of the period 1661–1849, except that in

DOI: 10.1080/00794236.2019.1659586

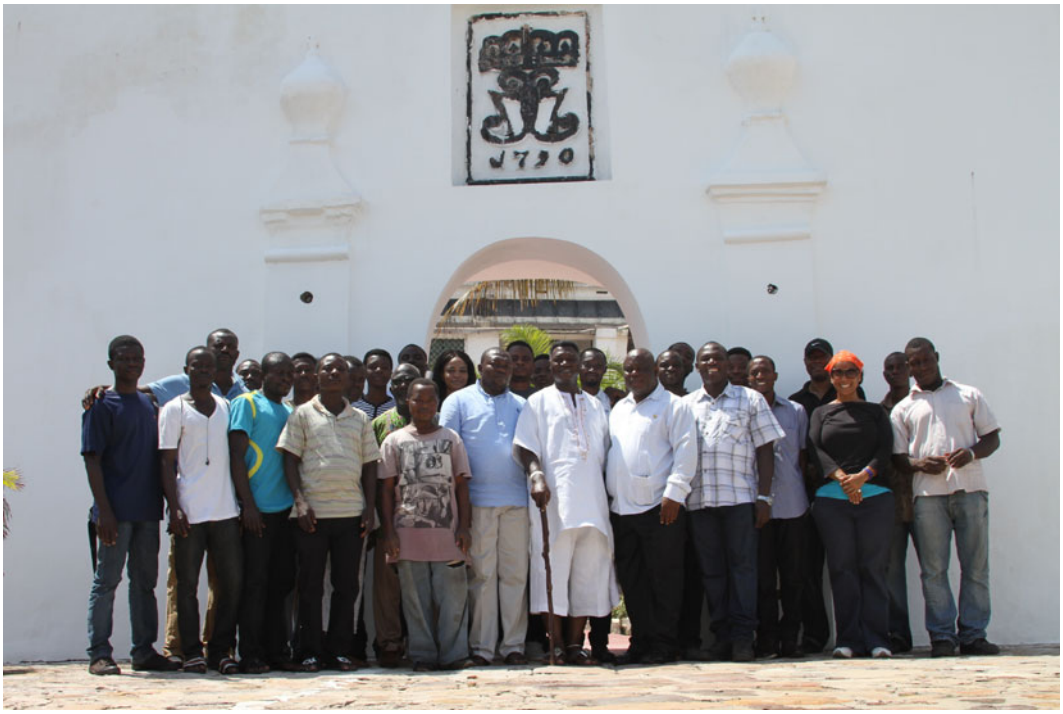

FIG. 1
Christiansborg Archaeological Heritage Project Team. Courtesy of the Author.

1679–83 it was bought and occupied by the Portuguese; in 1685–89 it was remortgaged to the British; and in 1693 Asameni, an Akwamu trader, gained possession of the castle through subterfuge. In 1849, Christiansborg Castle was sold to the British. In 1873, Christiansborg Castle became British seat of colonial government on the Gold Coast, following structural reconstructions due to severe damage caused by the 1862 earthquake. After 1876, British colonial governors resided in the castle, temporarily abandoning it between 1890 and 1901, when it functioned as a constabulary mess and, later, as a lunatic asylum. In 1902, it reverted to the British colonial seat of government. With Ghana's 1957 independence, Christiansborg Castle was renamed Government House. From 1960 onwards, under President Kwame Nkrumah, the castle continued as the seat of government and presidential residence. President Flt Lt Jerry John Rawlings continued this arrangement. In 2008, President John Agyekum Kufour moved the seat of government to another location, Flagstaff House. However, in 2009, President John Atta Mills subsequently reversed this decision. In 2013, President John Dramani Mahama returned to Flagstaff House, and this was continued in 2016 by President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo. It is the intention this excavated archaeological collection will contribute to the Ghanaian government's plans to convert the castle into a museum.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND EXCAVATIONS AT CHRISTIANSBORG CASTLE

In October 2014, a preliminary survey, test excavations and salvage archaeology at the old castle gardens immediate environs and building were conducted. In July 2016, archaeological excavations continued in the castle garden. Eight pits of varying sizes were excavated with an arbitrary level of 0.1m. Much of the locally manufactured pottery retrieved derived from a midden, although a great deal of data also came from several units, and in particular one unit that later developed into a trench that was revealed to be a pre-colonial settlement. A total of 26,797 artefacts were recovered from the dig. Locally manufactured pottery sherds constitute 11,597 or approximately 43% of the total find assemblage. A variety of locally manufactured pottery fragments were retrieved belonging to rims, necks, bodies, bases and carinations. Body sherds are the most predominant.

Archaeological analysis is ongoing, but preliminary insights can be ascertained from artefact analysis in the field comprising chronology, ethnic and geographic location of finds, technology or method of manufacture and other diagnostic features and representative characteristics, more specifically, the analysis of attributes such as vessel fabric, surface and inner colour, shapes and forms including function, decorative style and surface treatment.

Christiansborg Castle dates from 1652 to the present. Written sources, oral narratives and associated dated imported artefacts — for instance, European smoking pipes — date to a corresponding time period. Chronometric dating is yet to be conducted.

ETHNIC AND GEOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS

Situated in Danish-Osu, the castle and its surrounding area comprised a cosmopolitan, urban, coastal community including Ga, Danes and Danish-Ga, as well as other Africans and Europeans. Locally manufactured pottery divulges important historical and material information concerning connections between pottery styles and identity,[4] in terms of producers and consumers. Rather than rehearse them here, it is important to keep in mind the shifting, dynamic, fluid nature of identity amongst African Atlantic coastal communities in the 17th and 18th centuries.

TECHNOLOGY

Historically, locally manufactured pottery utilizes a hand modelling technique. A widely known form of material culture, specific regions illustrate distinct workmanship, techniques, styles and decorations. Locally manufactured pottery has customarily been the purview of women. Pottery manufacture by men is taboo, and it is claimed males who attempt to engage in this tradition are or will become sexually impotent. Young women often assist, but do not make potting their profession until later in life. In this way, knowledge and skills are passed down through the generations through an informal apprenticeship. Often, a potter's initiation ceremony is conducted prior to officially entering the profession. In the Accra plains, pottery is manufactured using a manual technology and tools produced from the local environment, employing one of two methods. First, the pinching method, whereby the clay is formed into a ball and then pinched into a shape with one hand whilst turned with the other. Such forms are normally applied to small, easily worked objects. Second, the coiling method applies rope-like coils of clay to a base. Additional coils are added, forming walls that are later smoothed over until the spaces between the coils are solidly filled and the vessel surface becomes smooth. The pot's walls are then shaped depending on the vessel's function. Objects of various sizes can be produced with this method. Pots are fired or baked in an open-air furnace. Dried bamboo, twigs and dried cornhusks are laid, the pots are placed on top and then the structure is set on fire and allowed to burn. Once fired, the pottery is removed by using a long piece of bamboo from the hot embers. Such pots produced turn a reddish- or orange-brown colour since they are simply removed and exposed to the air. In order to achieve a black pot, a process known as 'smoke glazing' or smudging is adopted. Removing the hot vessel from the fire produces this post-firing decorative style and immediately placing it in a bed of fresh leaves, usually neem tree or cashew tree leaves.

FABRIC

In general, the pottery sherds are in a good condition, although select fragments demonstrate some attrition. Many sherds are blackened, as a consequence of accumulated soot from cooking on an open fire. They are well fired.

Fabric surface colour can be divided into:

i. Brown: 10 YR/6 brownish-yellow; 5 YR/5 reddish-brown; 2.5 YR/6 light red; 7.5 YR/6 reddish-yellow
ii. Black and greyish-black: 2.5 Y/1 black; 2.5 Y/3 very dark grey; 2.5 Y/6 grey

Fabric inner colour corresponds to the surface colour as follows:

i. Brown: identical
ii. Black and greyish-black: 2.5 YR/6 reddish grey; 5YR/3 very dark grey; 2.5 Y/3 very dark grey

The geological mineral content is yet to be determined, although it has been hypothesized as hornblende.

SHAPES, FORMS AND FUNCTION

Locally manufactured pottery at the castle includes small, medium and large pottery types. Vessels can be categorized into tableware (serving and drinking), culinary ware, conveyance, storage and special purpose objects, such as those for ritual and medicinal usage. Many pottery vessel types overlap in terms of use.

Kukwɛi (small, medium and large, wide, globular) includes cooking, serving and eating vessels with burnished outer surfaces, for the most part, fire-smudged. Many are carinated, round- and flat-bottomed, contain everted ridges, and range from shallow to relatively deep vessels. Certain sherds possess

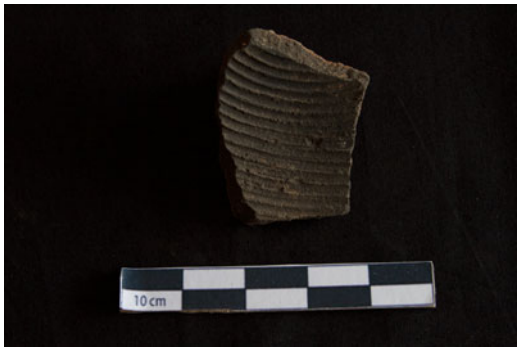

FIG. 2
Courtesy of the Author.

FIG. 3
Courtesy of the Author.

stepped lips, indicating that they probably accommodated lids. The outer surfaces are plain and coarse, with a burnished and fire-smudged to shiny black appearance. These are typically are used for soups and stews, including those for the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival. Larger bowls were used for communal eating. Pottery used for preparing medicinal pharmacopeia contain flat, rounded or pedestalled bases, but generally flared, everted rims.

Ka (small, medium and large wide-mouthed globular spheroid), found in large numbers in the archaeological assemblage, were used for food preparation, serving and consumption. These vessels alternate between plain, coarse, burnished brown and reddish bowls and smudged, black, shiny vessels. They contain a flat, disk, ring base. Pot rims are thick and can be incurving, everted or horizontally flattened on the top edges. Those pots used for eating, normally eating bowls for women's use, contain smooth inner surfaces. Vessels for grinding condiments, for instance, *weika* used to prepare soups and stews, possess concentric incisions and, at times, a pod base, which is a pointed base in an inverted cone shape affixed to the body (Fig. 2).

Gbɛ (medium, large and very large globular or oval pots) have round bottoms and narrow and wide everted angular rims attached to shoulders, separating the body from the upper parts of the vessels. Vessel rims and bodies contain decorative elements, such as simple line incisions, punctates, curvilinear lines and a range of dotted punctate marks. Some inner rims and shoulders depict painted design decorations, including crossed and wavy lines, narrow bands and reticulate or semicircular designs. These pots were used for conveying water from the river to the home and storing water for domestic purposes, and thus were kept in cool places in the house. They were also used in the collection, storing and serving of locally produced drinks, including tɛ*daa* (palm wine) and nmɛ*daa* (non-alcoholic maize drink), as well as cooking and storing solid food materials such as corn dough.

The coarseware has a rough texture whilst the fineware has smooth texture. In terms of thickness, the brown coarseware is on average 11mm thick and the fineware 9.19mm thick. The black and greyish-black coarseware is 11.35mm thick and the fineware is 8.5mm thick.

DECORATIVE STYLE

Locally manufactured pottery illustrates a number of polyphonic aesthetic qualities, produced by incorporating multiple techniques and design. A variety of decorations characterize these artefacts. In some instances, pottery sherds were ornamented with multiple zone decorations, i.e. two or more different kinds of decorative effects on the same sherd. The most predominant decorations are those with incisions, largely multiple grooves, followed by single grooves, and are found on neck sherds, carinations, rim exterior and interiors. Grooves are of different thicknesses. Most are horizontal, although a few are vertical and even diagonal. Others depict a combination of horizontal, vertical and diagonal designs on the same vessel (Fig. 3).

Another decorative style includes sharp or fine single and multiple incisions, with the former more common than the latter. These are found on vessel exteriors. Highly prevalent is stamping created by employing a variety of different tools, such as what is perchance a metal chain stamp (Fig. 4), alongside plain wooden fixed and rolling stamps. Triangular, semicircular comb and dot stamps are found on vessel exterior necks as well as inner rims (Fig. 5). Some pottery contains a combination of different wooden stamp designs on a single sherd, producing complex patterns (Fig. 6), at times with the same

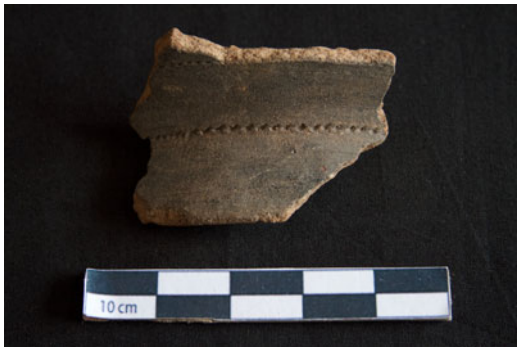

FIG. 4
Courtesy of the Author.

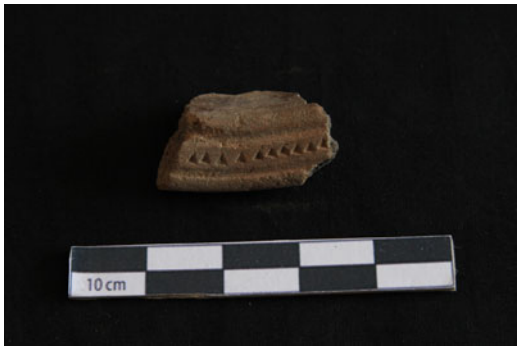

FIG. 5
Courtesy of the Author.

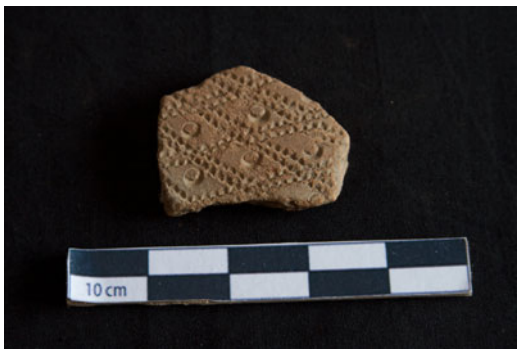

FIG. 6
Courtesy of the Author.

tool and at others with a different tool (Fig. 7). A few illustrate a cord roulette pattern. It is important to note a select few sherds contain deliberate linear

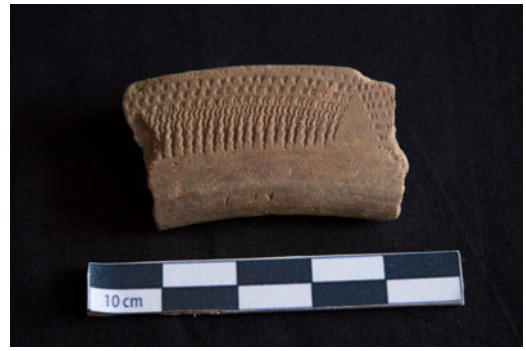

FIG. 7
Courtesy of the Author.

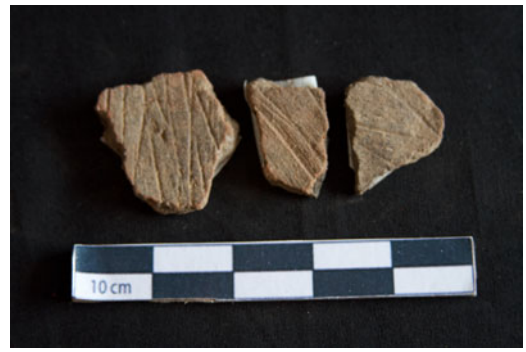

FIG. 8
Courtesy of the Author.

patterning on the inner side while the exterior is plain. One sherd has fine, horizontal lines and is likely a pot; others have wavy and/or thick grooves and in all likelihood are bowls. Indeed, a few sherds contain inner designs, horizontal and vertical, yet these are not held to be deliberate, but rather as a result of a potter's tool lightly scratching the surface (Fig. 8).

In terms of surface treatment, the coarseware is left as it is, meaning that it shows no surface treatment. The fineware is burnished and smudged. Certainly, this makes sense since tableware and cooking ware should be smooth for the purposes of cooking and eating.

SURFACE TREATMENT

Applied colour decorations are visible on many pottery sherds, in particular, the black coloured

FIG. 9
Courtesy of the Author.

fineware. As such, these are subdued and hence it is thought decorations are applied prior to firing. The patterning created includes continuous wavy, semicircular criss-crosses on the inner side of the rim or lip (Fig. 9). The brown fineware has a combination of painted applications and stamps. Both broken and black fineware depict a colour wash on the exteriors.

In the past, pottery was not widely manufactured in Danish-Osu, although it is claimed that some families engaged in pottery manufacture on a very small scale. The region, largely a fishing area, lacks the necessary high-quality clays, as well as granite rock for tempering the clay, and certain botanicals and rock pebbles required (though water, sand and wood are available), usually found along stream and riverbanks, for local pottery manufacture. Therefore, it is vital to learn more concerning pottery producers in the region, where pottery originated from and the kinds of pottery obtained. Preliminary analysis suggests the locally manufactured pottery recovered from Christiansborg Castle is characteristic of that from the Frederiksgave Plantation. In future, inter-site data comparisons exploring the affinities between excavated locally manufactured pottery from the nearby Crevecoeur and Jamestown forts will be critical with the Christiansborg Castle finds. Ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological research will also be important. Analysis of the physical properties of pottery and soil samples will divulge their mineralogical composition. It is hoped future work will further analyse the locally manufactured pottery presented here.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend special thanks to His Excellencies, the Presidents of Ghana: President Flt Lt. John Jerry Rawlings, President John Agyekum Kufour, President John Atta Mills, President John Dramani Mahama and President Nana Addo Akufo-Addo. My gratitude also goes to Nii Okwei Kinka Dowuona VI, Nii Bonne V, Nii Dzamlodza VI, Nii Kwashie Aniefi V, Nii Ako Nortei IV, Aawon Klotey, Aawon Opobi, Naa Ashorkor Obaniehi I, Nii Kwabena Bonnie IV, Saban Atsen, Nii Sorgla and Earl Teddy Nartey, and the Osu Traditional Council. I owe thanks to Dr. Raymond Atuguba, Col. Mark Alo, Julius Debrah, Yaw Donkor, Prosper Dzakobo, Col. Mantey, Gen. Larry Gbevlo-Lartey, Ayiku Wilson, Nana Asante Bediatuo, Akosua Frema Osei-Opare, Samuel Abu Jinapor, Col. Michael Opoku, Dr. Hon Zanetor Agyeman-Rawlings and Kingsley Ofosu Ntiamoah. My thanks to the people who requested anonymity. Thanks are also due to Raymond Agbo, Gideon Agyare, Kofi Amekudi, George Anorchie, William Barnor, Ernest Fiador, Daniel Kumah, Edward Nyarko and Samuel Nobah. Thanks of course, to the entire team. My deepest appreciation goes to the people of Osu. This research was possible thanks to generous grants and awards from the Stanford Archaeology Center, Stanford Anthropology Department, Joukowsky Institute, Whiting Foundation, Rappaport Foundation, Martha Joukowsky Foundation, Wenner-Gren Foundation. Thanks are due to the Danish Maritime Museum, Danish Royal Library, Danish National Archives, and British National Archives for their support. My thanks to James Anquandah for his feedback on this essay.

NOTES

[1] Excluding locally manufactured smoking pipes.
[2] Bredwa-Mensah's pottery originates from Manhean, Afuamang, Weija and Oblogo in the Densu Valley; Bredwa-Mensah 2002.
[3] Anquandah 2016.; Boachie-Ansah 2006; 2007; Bredwa-Mensah 2002; 2004; DeCorse 2001a; 2001b.
[4] Barth 1969; Gosselain 1999; Hodder 1982.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anquandah, J.K. 2016, 'Fort Crevecoeur/Ussher, Accra, Ghana: A Historical Archaeology Perspective', unpubl. manuscript.

Barth, F. 1969, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Boachie-Ansah, J. 2006, 'Excavations at Wodoku and Ladoku and their implications for the archaeology of the Accra Plains', *Research Review Supplement* **17**, 55–89.

Boachie-Ansah, J. 2007, 'Traditions and changes in pottery from Mount Mary Training College and Adjikpo-Yokunya, Eastern Region, Ghana',

Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift **48**:1, 83–107.

Bredwa-Mensah, Y. 2002, 'Historical-Archaeological Investigations at the Frederiksgave Plantation, Ghana: a Case Study of Slavery and Plantation Life on a Nineteenth Century Danish Plantation on the Gold Coast', unpubl. PhD thesis.

Bredwa-Mensah, Y. 2004, 'Global encounters: slavery and slave lifeways on nineteenth century Danish plantations on the Gold Coast, Ghana', *J. of African Archaeol.* **2**:2, 203–27.

DeCorse, C.R. 2001a, *An Archaeology of Elmina: Africans and Europeans on the Gold Coast, 1400–1900*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

DeCorse, C.R. 2001b, *West Africa During the Atlantic Slave Trade: Archaeological Perspectives*, London: Leicester University Press.

Gosselain, O.P. 1999, 'In pots we trust: the processing of clay and symbols in sub-Saharan Africa', *J. of Mater. Cult.* **4**: 205–30.

Hodder, I. 1982, *Symbols in Action*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Critical Social Inquiry, Hampshire College, US