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Ethics of Archaeology

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Abstract

Ethics has abandoned its niche status to become a shared concern across archaeology. The appraisal of the sociopolitical context of archaeological practice since the 1980s has forced the discipline to take issue with the expanding array of ethical questions raised by work with living people. Thus, the original foci on the archaeological record, conservation, and scientific standards, which are behind most deontological codes, have been largely transcended and even challenged. In this line, this review emphasizes philosophical and political aspects over practical ones and examines some pressing ethical concerns that are related to archaeology's greater involvement with contemporary communities, political controversies, and social demands; discussion includes ethical responses to the indigenous critique, the benefits and risks of applied archaeology, the responsibilities of archaeologists in conflict and postconflict situations, vernacular digging and collecting practices, development-led archaeology, heritage, and the ethics of things.

INTRODUCTION: BEYOND THE CODE

Ethics have been playing an increasingly prominent role in archaeology since the mid-1980s. The notion of rupture (Wylie 2003, pp. 6–7) is useful to understand why this is happening. When a rupture occurs, that is, when we face a situation in which we are not sure what to do, it is impossible to go on doing business as usual. This notion is as true of scientific paradigms as it is of moral assumptions. When archaeologists started addressing the sociopolitical context in which their research was carried out, in the context of the postprocessual paradigm, they were forced to take living people seriously and expand the scope of archaeological ethics, from mere objects to human beings. Doing so meant that they had to face the same problems and questions of cultural anthropologists (Wylie 2005, p. 47). The 1980s and 1990s were a period of ethical ruptures that must be understood in relation to three wider phenomena: the spread of the participatory paradigm in Western liberal democracy, a new phase in the cultural politics of capitalism marked by multiculturalism, and the rising status of victimhood in Western political and juridical thought. These phenomena are related to the emergence of indigenous, decolonial, public, and forensic archaeologies, all of which overflow academic boundaries and challenge the limited engagement of conventional archaeology with society.

Ethical reflection in archaeology typically addresses three kinds of issues: practical, philosophical, and political. It is of course not always easy to distinguish the three, but the distinction holds some analytical value. Early ethical debates, some of them going as far back as the 1930s (Watkins 2015, p. 21), were eminently practical and had to do with internal, disciplinary behavior and were articulated through prescriptions and norms related to standards of scientific practice, conservation, and the trade in antiquities. These practical concerns were the core of the ethical codes that were discussed and approved by different professional bodies during the last decade of the twentieth century. This kind of ethics is deontological—that is, based on rules of proper behavior. However, ethics can also be explored from a more philosophical point of view (Wylie 2003, 2005; Scarre & Scarre 2006; Sørensen 2013; Pétursdóttir & Olsen 2018). The idea here is to widen the ethical discussion by asking questions about the nature of being human, the status of the dead, or our responsibility for things, which are all issues that cannot be easily translated into norms.

The relations between politics and ethics have been contentious: The latter has been accused of depoliticizing the discipline (Hamilakis 2007). In the beginning, however, ethical discussions took a clear political angle: This was the case with the founding of the World Archaeological Congress (WAC) in 1986 as a reaction to apartheid. Ethical discussions concerned with politics address issues of authority, power, discourse, and legitimacy and have been developed as part of indigenous, Marxist, feminist, and decolonial archaeologies. Yet nearly all ethical debates can be framed in political terms as well, from publication to contract archaeology.

However, we should perhaps wonder in the first place why we should use the term ethics at all instead of politics. Much of the debate that has developed in recent times could be framed more accurately as politics, as it is concerned with issues of equality, enfranchisement, conflict, power asymmetries, social justice, political economy, and capitalism, all of which are closer to political rather than ethical concerns (e.g., Hamilakis & Duke 2007, Gnecco 2015, Haber & Shepherd 2015). The choice of the term is not innocent and it can be linked to the neoliberal abhorrence of true, agonistic politics (Mouffe 2005; Hamilakis 2007, p. 23). Ethics looks like a much safer concept, due to its association with morals, virtuous behavior and policy. It also accommodates well the politics of identity that have occupied most of the space of politics in recent years (Meskell 2002). Not surprisingly, some of the more politicized commentators prefer to talk of “after ethics” (Haber & Shepherd 2015) or “political ethics” (Hamilakis 2007).

In the present review, a diversity of ethical issues are explored, giving precedence to political and philosophical perspectives. What these perspectives all have in common is their suspiciousness

toward deontological codes, on which centered much of the discussion during the 1980s and 1990s (Lynott & Wylie 1995, Lynott 1997). Codes have been accused of freezing reflexivity (Gnecco 2015, p. 1), bureaucratizing and instrumentalizing ethics (Hamilakis 2007, p. 20), and making static what should be contingent, situated, negotiated, and evolving ethical decisions (Meskell & Pels 2005, McDavid & Brock 2015). Also, the global aspirations of ethics have been criticized for being both parochial and universalistic and insensitive to cultural diversity (Smith & Burke 2003, Meskell & Pels 2005, Curtoni 2015, Gnecco 2015, McDavid & Brock 2015). The views presented here intend to expand the ethical debate by going beyond norms and regulations in theory, practice, and praxis (Gnecco & Lippert 2015).

INDIGENOUS ARCHAEOLOGIES AND THE DECOLONIZATION OF ETHICS

Ethics in archaeology largely emerged as a response to the multicultural challenge (Gnecco 2015, p. 2). Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, and other subaltern communities (such as the LGBTQ collective) became more vocal from the 1980s onward and their claims found echo in certain academic circles. Thus, the indigenous, postcolonial, and decolonial critiques exposed the unethical way in which practitioners had behaved in relation to the colonized and their descendants (Shepherd 2002, Watkins 2005, Lydon & Rizvi 2010, Haber 2012). Part of this critique has been accepted by mainstream archaeology and is now part of ethical codes, juridical apparatuses, institutions, and funding bodies, a situation that entails its own ethical problems. Some key concepts that deserve ethical scrutiny are reparation, collaboration, ontology, descent, and multivocality. Reparation, which links with restorative justice, has materialized in the return of human remains and objects to descendant communities. This act in itself has led to important debates revolving around notions of identity and descent among other issues (Watkins 2005, Nilsson Stutz 2013). Here I focus on the ethical questions entailed by notions of collaborative practices, ontology and diversity, and indigeneity—which comprises, but largely transcends, the notion of descent.

Collaboration is an ethical mandate that has become widely accepted, at least in theory (Colwell-Chanthaphonh & Ferguson 2008, Murray 2011), not only in indigenous archaeology but also in other contexts as part of community projects (Little & Shackel 2007). However, it is not an unequivocal way of conducting ethical research. Some scholars have voiced concerns that collaboration often boils down to cooptation or public relations, concealing structural inequalities (González-Ruibal 2009, Curtoni 2015) and minimizing much-needed structural change, such as redistribution or reallocation of rights over land (Herrera 2015, p. 49). The collaborative ethos is often expressed in paternalistic undertones, redolent of the ideology of development. True collaboration, it has been argued, requires the “undisciplining” of archaeology (Haber 2012, Shepherd 2015) and a willingness to abandon Western science in certain contexts (Gnecco 2013). Instead, collaborative practices may be seen as a way of making some concessions to circumvent the more onerous ethical demands (Gnecco 2015). In this way, they tally well with Western concepts of “hospitality” (Grosso 2015), which is the limited way in which the West usually welcomes otherness. In opposition to this view, Grosso (2015) proposes other forms of collaboration based on an excess of hospitality, which is characteristic of indigenous Andean societies (and of many nonmodern societies around the world). This hospitality without boundaries resonates with some Western philosophy: It can be found in the Jewish-inspired ethics of Levinas (1987) and in Derrida (1994), Lingis (1994), and Innerarity (2017). Excessive hospitality implies unrestricted responsibility, boundless generosity, and a total respect for the otherness of the Other.

The question of ontology is tightly related to collaboration. The multicultural framework in which indigenous and other collaborative archaeologies are based works with a limited idea of

diversity that can be articulated through multivocality (Curtoni 2015, Gnecco 2015). Thus, collaboration is often predicated, at least unconsciously, on the epistemological assumption that actors agree on the thing (the past is heritage) but disagree on how to approach it (scientific methods, Western philosophy, myth, ancestral knowledge, ritual). The problem is that in many cases archaeologists and communities will not agree on what the thing is to start with (Gnecco 2015, p. 15). Wylie (2005, p. 66) argues that negotiation “should begin with a recognition of difference, not the presumption that difference obscures an underlying (rational, universal) framework that is neutral with respect to diverse cultural values.” Thus, what archaeologists see as heritage, a non-Western community might see as a sacred place (Byrne 1995), as everyday lived practices (Bshara 2016), or as just another “matter of concern”—*Kaupapa* for the Maori (Phillips & Ross 2015, p. 35). In fact, using the term “heritage” at all might be a form of epistemic violence (Gnecco 2009, Haber 2009, González-Ruibal et al. 2018) that can even serve colonial purposes, as in Palestine (Abu El-Haj 2001; Bshara 2016, p. 124). A radical ethics should be willing to abandon Western conceptual foundations and to embrace a form of collaboration based on the notion of the “community of those who have nothing in common” (Lingis 1994).

Another issue with important ethical and political consequences is the very idea of indigeneity. Nilsson Stutz (2013), among others, has been critical of embracing notions of indigenous descent as a general rule and has argued that archaeologists should retain the right to criticize claims to the past by particular groups. We have to be wary of who is claiming indigeneity. In Europe, the concept has served oppressive purposes and has justified the marginalization (and extermination) of Roma, Jews, and recent immigrants (Tarlow 2001, p. 252; Nilsson Stutz 2013, p. 178). The presence of large immigrant populations in Europe challenges, in fact, conservative assumptions of aboriginality, which have guided archaeology and heritage management until recently (Holtorf 2009). The refugee crisis and growing negative attitudes toward newcomers have made the ethical dilemmas of nonindigenous populations ever more pressing (Hamilakis 2016). Tarlow (2001, p. 252) has suggested using concepts such as “subaltern” or “nondominant” rather than “indigenous”—an option that would stress solidarities between migrants and marginalized indigenous groups. Generally speaking, however, it is understood that “indigenous” refers to minority, non-Western cultures. The problem is that the concept has paradoxically a homogenizing effect. Indigenous societies all over the world look suspiciously similar in the archaeological literature, thus glossing over local experiences and diverse ontologies. Enforcing ethical codes that ban the display of bones may go against local beliefs and the emancipatory political uses of human remains (Ferrándiz 2013). Also, concepts of indigeneity may reify what are historical phenomena. Non-Western societies have, of course, evolved and so have their moral perspectives, including their treatment of human remains (Fernández 2015, p. 62).

APPLIED ARCHAEOLOGIES AND USABLE PASTS

One of the effects of the social turn in archaeology has been the ethical mandate of being useful to society (e.g., Little & Shackel 2007), which is presented as a categorical imperative. But what does it mean to be useful to society? Is not the production of knowledge per se a form of social good? In which ways can archaeology become applied science? And more importantly, what are the dangers of making science directly useful? In this case, we need consequential ethics because initiatives that are virtuous in theory can bring disaster in practice, as has been criticized of development projects (Escobar 1995). Haber (2015b, pp. 102–3), for instance, remarks the social disruption brought about by “community development,” which turns archaeological sites into tourist destinations. Giraudo & Porter (2010), in a similar line, note some of the risks of archaeotourism, such as masking stark imbalances of power under the guise of development, overexploitation, and the alienation of local communities from their heritage.

Applied archaeology, however, is not the same as archaeology that produces direct economic outcomes. Benefits can be social and environmental (Little 2009). These include what have been called “usable pasts” (Lane 2011): archaeological studies that address the problems and challenges that face contemporary communities and governments (Lane 2011, p. 14). This kind of archaeological approach may look, for instance, at environmental degradation or climate change through paleoenvironmental data. However, even the best-intentioned research may have serious consequences: Herrera (2015, pp. 46–48) has shown that the reintroduction of pre-Columbian agricultural systems in the Andes has largely failed owing to structural political-economic problems and the limitations inherent to archaeological data, among other things. Discourses in themselves might be dangerous; thus, linking climate change and violence as a result of fear of unpredictable resources may be useful for policy making, but it also normalizes violence as inevitable (Harrod & Martin 2013, p. 7). The same happens with studies on resilience and adaptation over the long term, which run the risk of downplaying the unique role of modernity and capitalism in the Anthropocene. Postcolonial narratives may be equally ambivalent. Thus, Giblin et al. (2014, p. 131) note that archaeology has helped deconstruct many negative stereotypes by proving that Africa was first in many things (humans, fire, tools, art) and at the heart of global connections for millennia. This notion is certainly true, but, using this argument, what shall we make of those who did not invent anything or were largely isolated? Perhaps it would be better to emphasize that human ingenuity is expressed in many ways and that being the first to do something is just one of those ways (González-Ruibal 2009).

CONFLICT ARCHAEOLOGY, ARCHAEOLOGY IN CONFLICT

The relationship between conflict and archaeology has grown stronger during the last three decades and has created a new set of ethical concerns (Moshenska 2008, González-Ruibal & Moshenska 2015). Here we must distinguish the archaeological investigation of twentieth- and twenty-first-century wars (Moshenska 2008) and the role of archaeology in ongoing or recent conflicts (Pollock 2016a). Regarding the first scenario, archaeologists have been increasingly involved in the study of modern wars, either as part of research projects or in the context of forensic investigations. The latter have become widespread since 1984, when the Argentinian Team of Forensic Anthropology was created to look for those who disappeared during the dictatorship (Doretti & Fondeviller 2001). Archaeologists have since worked with anthropologists and forensic scientists in many countries, both in areas of ongoing conflict (Ferlini 2007, Steele 2008, Congram 2015) and where violence ended decades ago (Ferrándiz 2013). Forensic archaeologists face important ethical dilemmas, some of which are new to the discipline (Blau 2009, Crossland & Joyce 2015), including those arising from complex interactions among various professionals, politicians, relatives, victims, states, and sponsoring institutions, and the complexities of cultural variability in the mourning and treatment of the dead. Archaeologists’ loyalties are invariably challenged in forensic scenarios: The ethical mandate of disseminating knowledge, for instance, is hampered by the legal mandate of confidentiality, and working with stakeholders is often forbidden or discouraged for legal or political reasons. The same reasons explain that archaeologists are often allowed only to work toward identifying the victims of human rights violations and are not allowed to investigate evidence related to the crimes themselves (Tuller 2015). This limitation presents not just scientific but also moral challenges to the researcher.

Although work with human remains has attracted most ethical discussion, dealing with other traces of recent violence (from battlefields to extermination camps) is usually contentious, particularly in contexts of civil war or genocide or where the lack of a master narrative has prevented closure (González-Ruibal et al. 2015). Critical ethical questions are concerned with the respect

due to unique experiences of suffering (Pollock 2016b); the exposure of perpetrators (Bernbeck & Pollock 2007); the collision of multiple memories, religions, and cultural sensibilities (Sturdy Colls 2015); and the continuities between historic and contemporary conflicts (López Mazz 2015). Postconflict narratives and heritage resources are produced by archaeologists and are equally sensitive and prone to misappropriations (Giblin 2014). Achieving a narrative that is accepted by society and free of partisan appropriation by the government is often difficult, particularly in cases of civil conflict (Salerno & Zarankin 2015).

A recent review of the role of archaeologists in war by Pollock (2016a) covers much ground, so this topic is discussed only briefly here. The Iraq War of 2003 brought an intense debate in archaeology and anthropology regarding the responsibilities of both disciplines in their collaboration (or lack of collaboration) with the military (Hamilakis 2003, 2009; Starzmann 2008; Stone 2011). The alleged greater concern for the monuments of Iraq than for the people put into question the ethical assumptions behind the concept of “archaeological stewardship” (Hamilakis 2003). Some archaeologists working with the army have defended the strict deontological code of the military and their efforts to protect heritage (Rush 2015). Emberling (2008) has argued that teaching soldiers about heritage is not the same as participating in secret counterinsurgency operations, as many anthropologists did in the 1960s and 1970s. The question remains, however, about the ethical responsibilities of scholars who collaborate with the military in a conflict largely regarded as an illegitimate war of aggression and the implications of such collaboration for future wars (Pollock 2016a, p. 218). Ethical dilemmas also affect those who worked in the exhumation of mass graves under the US occupation (Steele 2008, Congram 2015). Here one can argue that they were helping living people mourn their recent dead and attain closure, and therefore collaboration was better than not collaborating at all. Still, forensic work served to legitimize the invasion of Iraq by giving credence to the humanitarian claims of the enterprise (Congram 2015), and evidence provided by archaeologists could lead to death penalties (Blau 2009, p. 463).

Not less controversial is the role of archaeologists under dictatorial regimes. Attitudes go from accommodation to active collaboration (Arnold 1990, Funari 2003, Dezhamkhooy et al. 2015). Ethical questions here are manifold and often intractable and have to do with the activities conducted both during the dictatorship and afterwards (Funari 2003, Steinel 2015). To what extent should collaborators be purged or rehabilitated?

LOOTING AND SUBSISTENCE LOOTING

Looting and the antiquities trade have been among the main ethical concerns in the discipline and still are (Zimmerman et al. 2003, Vitelli & Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2006, Gill 2009, Field et al. 2016), in part because of increased clandestine digging in areas affected by war (Stone 2008). The traffic of antiquities has been the object of much research, and the responsibilities of archaeologists, museum curators, dealers, and collectors have been fleshed out in detail (Renfrew 2000, Brodie & Renfrew 2005). However, the debate has been expanded in recent years beyond artifacts and the illicit trade to take into account the sociopolitical context in which looting actually occurs. This expansion brings to the fore a new set of ethical dilemmas, which are concerned with the political economy of clandestine digging and its cultural framework. Regarding the first issue, looting in many cases is a mere subsistence practice (Matsuda 1998, Hollowell 2006, Hardy 2015): It allows people to eke out a living in adverse situations. This is particularly the case in conflict or postconflict scenarios. The fact that these conflicts have been often provoked by the West makes the moral high ground of Western academics more difficult to sustain (Hamilakis 2003, 2005, 2009; Pollock 2016a). On the other hand, several practitioners have been calling attention to vernacular practices of collecting that are perfectly sanctioned within specific cultures

(Hollowell 2006, Antoniadou 2009, Byrne 2014, Londoño 2016). From this perspective, ethical judgement based on deontological codes fails to accept that there are other ways of engaging with the materiality of the past (Holtorf 2005, Anderson & Rojas 2017). It also overlooks that archaeology has often created collections in illegitimate, if not illegal, ways: This is particularly the case with human remains (Shepherd 2015, Geller & Stojanowski 2017).

Recent calls have been made by archaeologists therefore to historicize the illicit/licit dichotomy that prevents us from understanding vernacular traditions and the unethical practices in which archaeology and the state have often engaged (Field et al. 2016). It is the state and its scientific apparatus that define the limits of the legal without any appreciation of alternative engagements with the past, which has led to situations in which the licit is unpopular and the illicit is socially accepted (Londoño 2016). The situation is now reversing itself; some state-sanctioned scientific and heritage activities are now being forbidden by indigenous groups (Gnecco 2013, Gnecco & Piñacué 2016). Those who problematize the licit/illicit note that they are not backing looting, but rather are trying to understand it (Field et al. 2016, p. 8). Indeed, it is important not to romanticize alternative practices simply because they are alternative. Indigenous and other local communities are not unaware of the workings of capitalism or global trends. In fact, nonarchaeological digging must be historicized, too: Whereas some cases are indeed rooted in ancestral traditions, others may be shaped largely by encroaching global capitalism and the emergence of regional antiquities markets (Byrne 2016). In addition, Antoniadou (2009) has argued that some illicit digging is driven by a desire for a more intimate, sensuous, and direct engagement with the past. Although these intentions may be genuine, much “traditional” digging is in fact conducted for mere greed, today as it was in the seventeenth century (Martín-Torres 2002). We should be cautious therefore in pitting rebellious, authentic diggers against authoritarian, self-interested archaeologists. The act of alienating collective goods for private use runs against the moral economy of many preindustrial communities (Wylie 2005, p. 53).

CONTRACT ARCHAEOLOGY

One of the factors that triggered the implementation of ethical regulations in US archaeology was the emergence of contract archaeology—often comprised within cultural resources management (CRM) (Lynott 1997). The same phenomenon has been a major driver for other codes, as in Central and Eastern Europe (Marciniak 2015). In recent years, there has been a backlash of criticism toward contract archaeology across Europe and the Americas. This criticism is varied in character: Whereas some see in it “collateral damage within the systematic application of neoliberal doxa” (Zorzin 2015a, p. 131), others describe it in more apocalyptic terms as a form of “disaster capitalism” or a “state crime” (Hutchings & La Salle 2015, 2017), a practice that legitimizes the worst of capitalist expansion and neocolonialism (Haber 2015a,b,c; Gnecco 2018, in this volume). The criticisms raised are concerned with the inability of this kind of archaeology to meet research standards, its participation in the unsustainable activities of predatory capitalism, and its lack of respect for local and indigenous communities (Gnecco 2018). In many places, archaeologists have collaborated on rescue projects that are part of aggressive development schemes. These cause the displacement of entire communities and the destruction of their livelihood and heritage and often elicit a strong response by local stakeholders (Kleinitz & Näser 2011, Ribeiro 2015). Contract archaeology as a profession has also been the target of ethical critique because it tends to alienate and deskill workers, who lose regional knowledge through constant movement and are overstretched, underpaid, and forced to work outside the ethical framework of the discipline (Gnecco & Dias 2015, Hamilakis 2015, Zorzin 2015a). The situation is not unique to archaeology: The relationship between subjectivity, temporality, and labor has been systematically undermined

by late capitalism (Sennett 2011). Contract archaeologists toil under similar conditions in many different countries, from Japan to Spain, where a liberal model of heritage management has been applied (McGuire 2008; Moya Maleno 2010; Ferris & Welch 2015; Marín Suárez & Parga Dans 2015; Zorzin 2015a,b).

Still, an ethical critique of development-led archaeology should be attentive to the nuances of the phenomenon. It is not the same in South America, where archaeologists are often complicit in the predatory economy of frontier capitalism that evicts and hypermarginalizes local communities and creates ecological havoc (Gnecco 2018; Haber 2015a,b,c), and in France, where preventive archaeology is largely conducted by a state agency (INRAP) that has a program of publication and outreach and whose staff works in acceptable conditions (Demoule 2012). Even in Latin America, there are cases of contract archaeologists working productively with local communities (Ferreira 2010, pp. 98–99), and professional archaeologists are often better paid than academics (Funari & Robrahn-González 2008, p. 20). Cases have even been reported of indigenous peoples reclaiming preventive archaeology being conducted in their territories prior to construction works (Silva 2015, pp. 194–95). Others have argued that contract archaeology provides opportunities for capacity building and heritage valorization in disadvantaged contexts (Chirikure 2014, King & Arthur 2014). Where predatory capitalism is stronger, however, it limits or even abolishes any heritage restrictions, as is the case in some African, South American, and Mediterranean countries (López Mazz 2015, Marín Suárez & Parga Dans 2015, González-Ruibal et al. 2018). Furthermore, whatever legitimacy capitalism may need from the past today it can obtain from other means that totally circumvent professional or academic archaeology, such as amateurs and the entertainment business (Alonso González 2016, Popa 2016), which can produce pasts that are easier to market and consume (Hall & Bombardella 2005, González-Ruibal et al. 2018). As Herrera (2015, p. 45) has remarked, the exploitation of monumentality by tourism “does not require a scientific narrative for successful mercantilisation.” In fact, contract archaeologists are not the only ones involved with capitalism in dubious ways, and neither is clearing the land for development the only capitalist activity in which archaeology participates (Ferris & Welch 2015). In fact, multinational corporations of suspect ethical credentials have provided funding for important archaeological initiatives, such as Shell for Çatal Höyük or Rio Tinto for WAC. Heritage, as is demonstrated in the next section, is another field in which archaeology and capitalism intersect.

HERITAGE

Heritage conservation has been at the forefront of ethical debates since the 1970s and has been a main concern of scholars at least since the time of early modern antiquarianism. However, discussions during the last two decades have shifted from the conservation of monuments to the social impact of heritage management, in line with the wider concern about the sociopolitical context of archaeology. One of the lines of critique has to do with the commoditization of the past and the role of archaeologists in it (Rowan & Baram 2004, Giraudo & Porter 2010). Thus, Olivier (2013, pp. 36–37) has criticized the active involvement of the discipline in the “society of spectacle” through the heritage industry—a part of the experience economy (Silberman 2007; Harrison 2013, p. 85). Although commoditization looks like a clear target for the ethical archaeologist, reality is murkier. Thus, one can debate whether all transformation of archaeological knowledge into commodities is necessarily wrong. Chirikure (2015), for instance, considers that putting archaeological information at the service of a local community that may exploit it as a tourist resource is not wrong but instead is an ethical way of giving back to the community. Is it ethical to avoid marketing the past, culture, or identity if doing so can help improve the living standards of a community? Is self-exoticization (Herrera 2015, p. 44) admissible in some situations? The

question has been raised in the context of the Brazilian favelas and ghetto tourism (Freire-Medeiros 2007), and it has no easy answers. Whatever the choice, archaeologists should ponder carefully the ethical and political consequences of their decisions. The line between economic improvement and a Faustian bargain is very thin indeed.

The effects of dominant notions of heritage and corresponding policies in local communities have been one of the main areas of research of critical practitioners (Hertzfeld 2006; Meskell 2011, 2013; Di Giovine 2015). Such impacts include forced removals, bans, or limitations on traditional practices (cultural and economic) and the symbolic delinking between past remains and present communities. Archaeologists play an important role here because their expert knowledge is mobilized to support heritage claims and policies that exclude alternative engagements with historical landscapes (Witmore 2013). Thus, notions of nature as something pristine and totally separated from culture or the past as removed from the present serve to deprive people from their rights to places (Meskell 2011), which are then put at the service of global tourism and national elites (Hertzfeld 2006, Giraudo & Porter 2010). Purported “universal value,” as defended by UNESCO and other international organizations, has also been criticized as a neocolonial idea, which works against local values and needs (Labadi 2013). Furthermore, such universal value (which is also key to “universal” or “encyclopedic” museums) has been traditionally in tune with Eurocentric and state-centric ideals, which tend to marginalize subaltern communities (Labadi 2013).

Critical heritage studies intend to redress this situation by emphasizing other engagements and alternative forms of heritage that go beyond Western, nationalist, and elitist notions of value (Smith 2006, Harrison 2013). This approach seems like a straightforward way to do virtuous archaeology, but things are not so clear-cut (González-Ruibal et al. 2018). One could argue that the dichotomies of expert/people, state/communities, authorized/nonauthorized heritage, etc., preclude in practice ethical discussion by clearly defining from the beginning who is wrong and who is right. Critical heritage studies run the risk of becoming checklists that must be filled out (participation, local initiative, multiple voices, alternative practices), much like ethical codes. Now that the multicultural paradigm is well established—as shown by the requirements of most large funding bodies—it would be necessary to make the ethical debate more complex by exploring the many shades of gray that are typical of controversies surrounding heritage. By granting uncontroversial moral authority to certain actors (identified with “the people”), we may lose our ability to remain critical (Nilsson Stutz 2013, Matsuda 2016).

POSTANTHROPOCENTRIC ETHICS

Ethical debates in archaeology have always dealt with people in the present or in the future, and yet new perspectives are problematizing this approach. They argue that the ethical commitment of archaeologists must be expanded to incorporate the past. The latter might seem to be well covered already by current ethics, but that is not necessarily the case. The past is a matter of concern only when it is relevant for the present or the future. Thus, stewardship is based on the idea that we must protect heritage to bequeath it to future generations; public archaeology is about contemporary engagements of people with archaeological remains, and demands by subaltern groups in relation to their past are driven by current concerns. Thus, Shepherd (2015) notes that the burials of Prestwich Street in Cape Town are a locus for present and future struggles of contemporary subaltern communities, rather than an end in themselves. One could argue, however, that archaeologists also have a responsibility to the people of the past, not just for what they can do for the present (Parker Pearson 1995, Moshenska 2009, Parker Pearson et al. 2011, Svestad 2013, Ion 2016, Renshaw & Powers 2016). Svestad (2013), discussing a Sámi reburial in Sweden, has criticized that the sensibilities of the dead had very little importance—they were

reburied in a Protestant funeral—and that they had been manipulated by their descendants with a contemporary political agenda in mind. Whether the latter is moral or immoral is open to debate, but it is unlikely that a purely ethical discussion will provide an acceptable answer. In any case, Parker Pearson (1995) has argued that we should respect the religious beliefs of the people of the past, as with Christian burials. While this proposition can be considered a categorical imperative, we should also be wary not to project modern sensitivities on the past. Thus, the disarticulation, displacement, and storage of bones in mass ossuaries have been common practice in Catholic countries for a very long time. One may question whether current concerns with mortuary remains in Europe have to do with past beliefs or with a contemporary abhorrence of death and organic decay.

Current ethical debates, under the influence of postanthropocentrism, have moved beyond human beings to question relations between humans and nonhuman animals and, more controversially, things. Multispecies archaeology (Boyd 2017, Birch 2018) problematizes the uniqueness of humanity, challenges modernist subjectivities, and pays more attention to the agency of plants and animals (including insects and bacteria) and their symbiotic relations with people. Ultimately, postanthropocentrism expands the field of ethical obligations by taking our companion species seriously and exposing the egotism of humanistic ethics (Webmoor & Witmore 2008), which are also strongly patriarchal (Braidotti 2013).

As for things, symmetrical archaeology carefully distinguished in origin between ethical and ontological symmetry. Thus, Webmoor & Witmore (2008, p. 61) insist that we must never confuse the analytical leveling implied in a symmetrical approach “with notions of axiological or ethical equivalence” (also Sørensen 2013, pp. 13–14). Still, the truth is that things have been progressively elevated to the category of new subalterns; we must learn to listen to, look after, and respect them in their radical otherness (Domańska 2006, Pétursdóttir 2012, Olsen & Pétursdóttir 2016; see critique in Fowles 2016). These things include not just living beings, but also rocks, artifacts, or garbage, to which notions of care and responsibility are extended (Olsen & Pétursdóttir 2016, p. 40). Pétursdóttir (2012) claims that artifacts must be cared for not only as extensions of humans, but in themselves, and proposes an ethics that respects the alterity of things as such. In that line, Olsen & Pétursdóttir (2016, p. 42) argue that marine debris must be tackled beyond concepts of “garbage, visual disturbance and ecological threat,” so as to show “concern for their voyages,” exploring how their “gathering and entanglement underpin alternative and less anthropocentric understandings of ‘care’.” This perspective draws inspiration from the philosophical work of Benso (2000) and Introna (2009), themselves influenced by the ethical reflections of Levinas (1987) and Lingis (1994). An ethics of things might sound outrageous to many, and it can be criticized on several grounds: for replacing human with (easier to handle) nonhuman subalterns (Fowles 2016); using very human affects to refer to things, which somehow runs against the purported respect for their otherness; and for its tendency to eschew the political dimension of human–things entanglements (Hodder 2014, Hodder & Lucas 2017). However, its value as a philosophical exploration should not be dismissed all too easily because, as Sørensen (2013, p. 14) notes, “polemic offers the potential to question ready-made normativity,” including “the commonsense, unqualified rejection of the ethical claims of nonhumans.” An ethics of things provides new insights into radical alterity and the notion of care and debunks paternalism, all of which hold value for the ethics adopted by indigenous and other subaltern archaeologies.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS: RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE ETHICAL TURN IN ARCHAEOLOGY

The ethical turn in archaeology reflects a wider engagement of the discipline with the world and a healthy self-criticism. Yet, at the same time, there are some dangers to the general embracing

of ethics. One is reducing the discussion not just to norms, as has often been criticized, but also to political correctness. Several authors have argued for a pragmatic ethics, which is self-reflexive, contextual, historical, and continuously in the making, but this position must be taken to its ultimate consequences. Ethics should not be used as a way of policing the discipline—the word “policy,” in fact, often turns up in ethical debates (Lynott 1997). An archaeology that takes ethics seriously should always be open to revising its principles and the consequences of its acts, irrespective of whether it is done as CRM or as collaborative work initiated by a local community. There should not be any kind of practice, theoretical paradigm, or group off-limits for ethical critique (Nilsson Stutz 2013, Svestad 2013). Here we need some consequential ethics that assesses the effects of behaviors that may be virtuous in theory and perfectly compliant with the highest ethical standards of the moment. As Haber (2015b, p. 102) has noted, “Colonialism does not need to exclude good intentions or good practice; on the contrary, it is more often than not that the colonial border is driven by good intentions of helping others.” A desire to help others, advocacy, collaboration, or activism should not be automatically considered as proof of ethical practice and therefore impervious to criticism.

In relation to this notion, there is the risk that moral authority ends up replacing reasoned arguments. It is important to remember here the words of Wylie (2003, p. 6): “[I]f you claim that an action or convention or practice is wrong . . . you must be prepared to give an account of the underlying assumptions—the premises—that justify your conclusion, both factual and normative. Ethics as a field of study and practice is, then, a matter of working out the reasons for prescriptive judgements at various levels of generality and practicality.” The field of ethics, like that of politics, is prone to manifestos. This is acceptable, provided that beyond the calls for action there are well-worked arguments and not just slogans. Yet, the fact is that much archaeological literature on ethics rarely mentions any philosophical work—be it Aristotle, Levinas, or indigenous ethical concepts—and the theoretical argumentation that supports ethical claims is often undeveloped. We do need a properly archaeological ethics, and we need a social archaeology that deals with pressing matters beyond the academy; however, it is important that ethics in archaeology is more than virtuous practitioners lecturing the sinners. In his critique of human rights discourse, Mutua (2001, p. 202) argues that much of it is “unidirectional and predictable, a black-and-white construction that pits good against evil.” A similar indictment can be made of archaeological ethics. Denunciations of the misdeeds of archaeology are still needed. However, it is necessary to move ahead and offer nuanced ethical explorations of complex situations, provide a more solid philosophical grounding to our discussions by drawing from the intellectual resources of our discipline and others, and engage with wider theoretical debates.

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