

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 focus on the archaeological record, conservation and scientific standards, which are behind most deontological codes, has 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 which are related with archaeology's greater involvement with contemporary communities, political controversies and social demands, including ethical responses to the indigenous critique, the benefits and risks of applied archaeology, the responsibilities of archaeologists in conflict and post-conflict situations, vernacular digging and collecting practices, development-led archaeology, heritage and the ethics of things.

Keywords

Indigenous archaeology, cultural heritage, looting, CRM, applied archaeology, post-anthropocentrism

Introduction: Beyond the code

Ethics have been playing an increasingly prominent role in archaeology since the mid-1980s. The notion of rupture (Wylie 2003: 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 is 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 post-processual paradigm, they were forced to take living people seriously and expand the scope of archaeological ethics, from mere objects to human beings. This meant that they had to face the same problems and questions of cultural anthropologists (Wylie 2005: 47). The 1980s and 1990s were a period of ethical ruptures that has to 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. They 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 deals with 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: 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 20th 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 and Scarre 2006; Sørensen 2013; Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2017). 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 toward things, which cannot be easily translated into norms.

The relations between politics and ethics have been contentious: the latter have 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 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 should we use the terms 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 deals with issues of equality, enfranchisement, conflict, power asymmetries, social justice, political economy and capitalism, all of which is closer to political than ethical concerns (e.g. Hamilakis and Duke 2007; Gnecco 2015; Haber and 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: 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 and Sheperd 2015) or “political ethics” (Hamilakis 2007).

In the present review, a diversity of ethical issues will be explored, giving precedence to political and philosophical perspectives. What they all have in common is their suspiciousness toward deontological codes, which centered much of the discussion during the

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

Indigenous archaeologies and the decolonization of ethics

Ethics in archaeology largely emerged as a response to the multicultural challenge (Gnecco 2015: 2). Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants and other subaltern communities (such as the LGBTQ collective) became more vocal from the 1980s 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 and 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 in itself has led to important debates, revolving around notions of identity and descent among other issues (Watkins 2005; Nilsson Stutz 2013). Here I would like to 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 and Ferguson 2008; Murray 2011), not only in indigenous archaeology but also in other contexts, as part of community projects (Little and Shackel 2007). However, it is not an unequivocal way to ethical research. Some 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: 49). The collaborative ethos is often expressed in paternalistic undertones, redolent of the ideology of development. True collaboration, it has been argued, requires the “un-disciplining” 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. As opposed to this, Grosso proposes other forms of collaboration based on an excess of hospitality, which is characteristic of indigenous Andean societies (and of many nonmodern societies across the world). This hospitality without boundaries resonates with some Western philosophy: it can be found in the Jewish-inspired ethics of Levinas (1987), 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 with collaboration. The multicultural framework in which indigenous and other collaborative archaeologies are based work with limited idea of diversity that can be articulated through multivocality (Gnecco 2015; Curtoni 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 into 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 in what the thing is, to start with (Gnecco 2015: 15). Wylie (2005: 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 and Ross 2015: 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 (El-Haj 2001; Bshara 2016: 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. Who claims indigeneity is crucial. In Europe, the concept has served oppressive purposes and has justified the marginalization (and extermination) of Roma, Jews and recent immigrants (Tarlow 2001: 252; Nilsson Stutz 2013: 178). The presence of large immigrant populations in Europe challenge, in fact, conservative

assumptions of aboriginality which have guided archaeology and heritage management until recently (Holtorf 2009). With the refugee crisis and growing negative attitudes towards newcomers have made the ethical dilemmas of non-indigenous populations ever more pressing (Hamilakis 2016). Tarlow (2001: 252) has suggested using concepts such as “subaltern” or “non-dominant”, 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: 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 and 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, it is consequential ethics that are needed, because initiatives that are virtuous in theory can bring disaster in practice, as has been criticized of development projects (Escobar 1995). Haber (2015: 102-103), for instance, remarks the social disruption brought about by “community development”, which turns archaeological sites into tourist destinations. Giraudo and 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 2012). This includes what have been called “usable pasts” (Lane 2011): archaeological studies that address the problems and challenges that face contemporary communities and governments (Lane 2011: 14). This kind of archaeological approach may look, for instance, at environmental degradation or climate change through palaeoenvironmental data. However, even the best-intentioned research may have serious consequences: Herrera (2015: 46-48) has shown that the

reintroduction of pre-Columbian agricultural systems in the Andes has largely failed due 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 naturalizes violence as inevitable (Harrod and Martin 2013: 7), and the same happens with studies on resilience and adaptation in long-term perspective, 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: 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 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 them (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 and Moshenska 2015). Here we have to distinguish the archaeological investigation of 20th and 21st 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 the disappeared during the dictatorship (Doretti and Fondebrider 2001). Archaeologists have since worked with anthropologists and forensic scientists in many countries, both in areas of ongoing conflict (Ferllini 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 and Joyce 2015), including those arising from complex interactions between different 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 only allowed to work toward the

identification of the victims of human rights violations and not investigate evidence related to the crimes themselves (Tuller 2015). This poses 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, genocide or where the lack of a master narrative has prevented closure (González-Ruibal et al. 2015). Critical ethical questions have to do with the respect due to unique experiences of suffering (Pollock 2016b), the exposure of perpetrators (Bernbeck and 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). Post-conflict narratives and heritage resources 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 and Zarankin 2015).

As for the role of archaeologists in war, a recent review by Susan Pollock (2016a) covers much ground, so it will be 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 not collaboration) with the military (Hamilakis 2003; 2009; Starzman 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 military have defended the strict deontological code of the military and their efforts to protect heritage (Rush 2015). It has also been argued that it is not the same teaching soldiers about heritage and participating in secret counterinsurgency operations, as many anthropologists did in the 1960s and 1970s (Emberling 2008). The question remains, however, of 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: 218). Ethical dilemmas also affect those who worked in the exhumation of mass graves under the US occupation (Steele 2008; Congram 2015). Here it can be argued that they were helping living people mourn their recent dead and attaining 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: 463).

Not less controversial is the role of archaeologists under dictatorial regimes. Attitudes go from accommodation to active collaboration (Arnold 1990; Funari 2003; Dezharkhooy et al. 2015). Ethical questions here are manifold and often intractable and have to do both with the activities conducted 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 has been one of the main ethical concerns in the discipline and still is (Zimmerman et al. 2003; Vitelli and Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2006; Gill 2009; Field et al. 2016), in part due to 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 and Renfrew 2005). However, the debate has been expanded in recent years beyond artefacts and the illicit trade to take into account the sociopolitical context in which looting actually occurs. This brings to the fore a new set of ethical dilemmas, which have to do with the political economy of clandestine digging and its cultural framework. Regarding the first issue, looting in many cases is a mere subsistence practice (Hollowell 2006; Matsuda 1998; Hardy 2015): it allows people to eke out a living in adverse situations. This is particularly the case in conflict or post-conflict scenarios, with the aggravating circumstance that wars have been often unleashed by Western powers (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 (Antoniadou 2009; Byrne 2014; Hollowell 2006; 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 and Rojas 2017). Moreover, it overlooks the fact that archaeology has often created collections in illegitimate, if not illegal, ways: this is particularly the case with human remains (Shepherd 2015; Geller and Stojanowski 2017).

There have been recent calls 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 incurred (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. This has led to situations in which the licit is unpopular and the illicit socially accepted (Londoño 2016). The situation is now reversing with some State-sanctioned scientific and heritage activities now being forbidden by indigenous groups (Gnecco 2013; Gnecco and Piñacué 2016). Those who problematize the licit/illicit note that they are not

backing looting, but rather trying to understand it (Field et al. 2016: 8). Indeed, it is important not to romanticize alternative practices for the fact of being alternative. Indigenous and other local communities are not unaware of the workings of capitalism or global trends. In fact, non-archaeological digging has to be historicized too: while some cases are indeed rooted in ancestral traditions, others may be largely shaped by encroaching global capitalism and the emergence of regional antiquities markets (Byrne 2016). Also, it has been argued that some illicit digging is driven by a desire for a more intimate, sensuous and direct engagement with the past (Antoniadou 2009). While this is true, so it is that much “traditional” digging is in fact conducted for mere greed, today as in the 17th century (Martín-Torres 2002). We should be cautious therefore with 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 pre-industrial communities (Wylie 2005: 53).

Contract archaeology

One of the reasons that triggered ethical regulations in the discipline in the United States had to do with the emergence of contract archaeology—often comprised within Cultural Resources Management or CRM (Lynott 1997). The same phenomenon has been a major drive 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: 131), others describe it in more apocalyptic terms as a form of “disaster capitalism” or a “state crime” (Hutchings and Lasalle 2015, 2017), a practice that legitimizes the worst of capitalist expansion and neocolonialism (Haber 2015a, b; Gnecco this volume). The criticisms that are raised have to do with the inability of such 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 this volume;). In many places, archaeologists have collaborated in 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 and Nässer 2011; Ribeiro 2015). Contract archaeology as a profession has been also the target of ethical critique, as 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 (Zorzin 2015a; Gnecco and Dias 2015; Hamilakis 2015). The situation is not unique of archaeology: the relationship between subjectivity, temporality and labor has been

systematically undermined by late capitalism (Sennet 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 2010; Marín and Parga Dans 2015; Ferris and Welch 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 this volume, Haber 2015a, b), and in France, where preventive archaeology is conducted by a state agency (INRAP) which 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: 98-99) and professional archaeologists are often better paid than academics (Funari and Robrahn-González 2008: 20). Cases have even been reported of indigenous peoples reclaiming preventive archaeology being conducted in their territories prior to construction works (Silva 2015: 194-195). Others have argued that contract archaeology provides opportunities for capacity building and heritage valorization in disadvantaged contexts (Chirikure 2014; King and 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 (Marín and Parga Dans 2015; López Mazz 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 (Popa 2015; Alonso González 2016), which can produce pasts that are easier to market and consume (Hall and Bombardella 2005; González-Ruibal et al. 2018). As Herrera (2015: 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 and Welch 2015). In fact multinational corporations of dubious ethical credentials have provided funding for important archaeological initiatives, such as Shell for Çatal Höyük or Rio Tinto for WAC. Heritage, as we will now see, 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 with 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 and Baram 2004; Giraudo and Porter 2010). Thus, Laurent Olivier (2011: 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: 85). Although commoditization looks like a clear target for the ethical archaeologist, reality is murkier. Thus, it can be debated whether all transformation of archaeological knowledge into commodities is necessarily wrong. Shrader-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 actually an ethical way of giving back to the community. Is it ethical to avoid marketing the past, culture or identity if it can help improving the living standards of a community? Is self-exoticization (Herrera 2015: 60) 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 (Meskell 2011, 2013; Hertzfeld 2006; 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, as their expert knowledge is mobilized to support heritage claims and policies that exclude alternative engagements with historical landscapes. 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; Witmore 2013), which are then put at the service of global tourism and national elites (Hertzfeld 2006; Giraudo and 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 “encyclopaedic” 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 seems like a straightforward way to do virtuous archaeology, but things are not so clear-cut (González-Ruibal et al. 2018). It can be argued that the dichotomies expert/people, State/communities, authorized/non-authorized 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 being checklists that have to be filled (participation, local initiative, multiple voices, alternative practices), very 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 grey 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).

Post-anthropocentric ethics

Ethical debates in archaeology have always dealt with people in the present or in the future. Yet new post-anthropocentric perspectives are problematizing this. They argue that the ethical commitment of archaeologists has to be expanded to incorporate both things and the past. The latter might seem already well covered by current ethics, but it is not necessarily the case, because the past is not a matter of concern qua past, but inasmuch as it is relevant for the present or the future. Thus, stewardship is based on the idea that we have to 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 is driven by current concerns. Thus, Shepherd (2015) notes that the burials of Prestwitch Street in Cape Town are a locus for present and future struggles of contemporary subaltern communities, rather than an end in themselves. Yet it can be argued that archaeologists have a responsibility also to the people of the past, not just for what they can do to the present (Parker Pearson 1995; Moshenska 2009; Parker Pearson et al. 2011; Svestad 2013; Renshaw and Powers 2016; Ion 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 question, but it is unlikely that a purely ethical discussion will provide an acceptable answer. In any case, it has been argued that we should respect the religious beliefs of the people of the past, as with Christian burials (Parker Pearson 1995). While this can be considered a categorical imperative, we should also be wary of not projecting modern sensitivities to 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. It can be questioned 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 post-anthropocentrism, have moved beyond human beings to question relations between humans and non-human 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, post-anthropocentrism expands the field of ethical obligations by taking our companion species seriously and exposing the egotism of humanistic ethics (Webmoor and 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 and Witmore (2008: 61) insist in that we must never confuse the analytical levelling implied in a symmetrical approach “with notions of axiological or ethical equivalence” (also Sørensen 2013: 13-14). Still, the truth is that things have been progressively elevated to the category of new subalterns, whom we have to learn to listen, look after and respect in their radical otherness (Domańska 2006; Pétursdóttir 2012, Olsen and Pétursdóttir 2016; see critique in Fowles 2016). These things include not just living beings, but also rocks, artefacts or garbage, to which notions of care and responsibility are extended (Olsen and Pétursdóttir 2016: 40). Pétursdóttir (2012) claims that artefacts have to be cared for not only as extensions of humans, but in themselves, and proposes an ethics that makes justice to the alterity of things as such. In that line, Olsen and Pétursdóttir (2016: 42) argue that marine debris has to 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 Silvia Benso (2000) and Lucas Introna (2009), themselves influenced by the ethical reflections of Emmanuele Levinas (1987) and Alphonso 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) non-human subalterns (Fowles 2016); using very human affects to refer to things, which somehow runs against the purported respect of their otherness, and for its tendency to eschew the political dimension of human-things entanglements (Hodder 2014, Hodder and Lucas 2016). However, its value as a philosophical exploration should not be dismissed all too easily, because as Sørensen (2013: 14) notes “polemic offers the potential to

question ready-made normativity”, including “the commonsense, unqualified rejection of the ethical claims of non-humans”. An ethics of things provides new insights into radical alterity and the notion of care and debunks paternalism, all of which holds 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 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 has to 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 revise 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. Because, as Alejandro Haber (2015: 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, there is the risk that moral authority ends up replacing reasoned arguments. It is important to remember here the words of Allison Wylie (2003: 6): “if 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 all right, 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 mention any philosophical work—be it Aristotle, Levinas or indigenous philosophical concepts—and the theoretical argumentation that support ethical claims is often undeveloped. We do need a properly archaeological ethics and we need

a social archaeology that deals with pressing matters beyond academy, but it is important that ethics in archaeology is more than virtuous practitioners lecturing the sinners. In his critique of human rights discourse, Makaw Mutua (2001: 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. But it is necessary to move ahead and offer nuanced ethical explorations of complex situations, provide a more solid philosophical grounding to our discussions, drawing from the intellectual resources of our discipline and others, and engage with wider theoretical debates.

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