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THE POLITICS OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN AFRICA

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■ **Abstract** “Africa is various,” writes Kwame Anthony Appiah in defiance of the Eurocentric myth of a unitary and unchanging continent. The politics of archaeology in Africa has been no less marked by variety. Yet, underlying this multiplicity of historical experience are a number of common themes and ideas. This review traces the engagement between archaeology and politics in Africa through an exploration of these common themes: first, as a colonial science in the context of European conquest and the subjugation of African people and territories; second, in the context of colonial administration and the growth of settler populations; third, in the context of resistance to colonialism and a developing African nationalism; and fourth, in a postcolonial context, among whose challenges have been the growing illicit trade in antiquities originating in Africa, and (in the past two decades) the decline in direct funding for departments of archaeology in universities and museums.

INTRODUCTION: A NOTE ON METHOD

“Africa is various,” writes Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992) in defiance of the Eurocentric myth of a unitary and unchanging continent. The politics of archaeology in Africa has been no less marked by variety. From the *savants* who accompanied Napoleon’s army of conquest in Egypt to the fiercely nationalist archaeologists of Africa’s independence, from the overtly colonialist agendas of early researchers to contemporary debates over human origins and racial diversification, and from projects of excavation aimed at uncovering the glories of indigenous states to those aimed at recalling the horrors of slavery, archaeologists have been implicated directly in political struggles and debates. As we might expect from a discipline that takes as its province of concern nothing less than the narrative of human origins and the coming into being of culture and society, such sites of political identification span the range of issues of race, culture, and identity, and have placed archaeologically constructed knowledge in relation to phenomena of colonialism, nationalism, apartheid, slavery, and neocolonialism.

Yet, for all of this web of political association and implication, references to the politics of archaeology in Africa are remarkably few and far between. In fact, as a subject for a review essay “the politics of archaeology in Africa” hardly exists—or

if it does, it sits beneath the horizon of visibility of normal academic methods. The reasons for this are interesting but lie outside of the purview of this article. Briefly put, they have to do, in the first place, with the nature of the colonial sciences at large, heavily invested as they were in a particular version of naturalized knowledge. In the second place, the reasons have to do with the influence of the new archaeology. In its concern to remake archaeology as a positivist science, it had specifically rejected the notion that knowledge is constructed within cultural, political, and economic contexts. More recently, one of the central concerns of postprocessual archaeologies has been to show the “constructedness”—and by extension, the inescapably political nature—of archaeological work, writing, and practice (Bapty & Yates 1990, Hodder 1994, Shanks & Tilley 1987a,b).

From a methodological point of view this has entailed, on my part, a heavier hand than is usual for a review article of this nature, in that the major work has entailed what can best be described as reading *through* texts to arrive at their buried political content and context. In general, the works reviewed here fall into three categories. The first group are works that are not recognized by their authors as being political in nature, but that reveal aspects of the social, economic, and intellectual contexts of archaeological practice or that reveal details that, with hindsight, appear political. The second category are works commenting on issues—for example, the illicit trade in African antiquities or the crisis of resources in African archaeology—which I understand to be political in nature. The third category consists of the small number of works dealing directly with the politics of archaeological practice. These, in turn, fall into two groups. The first are works dealing with intradisciplinary politics, such as competition for resources, access to research opportunities, and contested research agendas. The second are works dealing with broader political contexts, for example, the implication of archaeology in projects of memory and identity, processes of nation-building, bids for reparations or retribution, and so on.

With some important exceptions, most of this final category of works are more recent and have tended to be found in a small number of key sites. The *African Archaeological Review* has through the 1990s provided an important forum for discussing the politics of archaeological practice. A key work in what follows is Robertshaw's impressive volume (1990a), which remains the most comprehensive drawing-together of the historiography of African archaeology to date. A disproportionate amount of what follows is focused on the archaeology of Southern Africa, for three reasons. First, this is the region with which I am most familiar. Because a comprehensive account is impossible in a short review of this nature, some more specific kind of focus is inevitable. The second reason is that Southern Africa has one of the best-documented traditions of archaeological practice on the continent. The third is that this has been a particularly acute site of political contestation. In the mid-1980s events in South Africa pitched the world archaeology movement into a crisis that split the International Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences (IUPPS). To the extent that Southern Africa has functioned as a microcosm and a development *in extremis* of the politics of archaeology in Africa, it forms an appropriate case study.

POINTS OF REFERENCE

Given the poorly mapped nature of the terrain, it seems advisable to establish some cardinal points at the outset. I adopt—with reservations—Trigger's useful typology of forms of archaeological practice. Trigger (1984) divides the disciplinary field into a number of "alternative archaeologies," each determined by its position in and orientation toward a global division of wealth and power. The particular world historical processes he identifies as being determining in this regard are those of nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism. Each gives rise to a kind of archaeological practice, in its shadow, which replicates its dominant relations, shares its distinctive features, and repeats its style of operation and practice.

Thus nationalist archaeologies tend to glorify a national past and encourage a spirit of unity and cooperation. Colonialist archaeologies tend to denigrate native societies by representing them as static and lacking in the initiative to develop without external stimuli. In this way they attempt to legitimate various colonial projects. Imperialist archaeologies are archaeologies "with a world mission." They aim to influence the development of archaeology far beyond the borders of countries in which they arise. Historically, imperialist archaeologies have been associated with a handful of states that have enjoyed a disproportionate political and economic influence. In the case of the development of archaeology in Africa, these have been the states of Europe with colonial holdings on the continent. Beginning in the 1960s, the United States has emerged as the dominant metropolitan influence on archaeology in Africa, especially in the more high-profile fields (human origins research, Egyptology, the development of state societies in West Africa).

Trigger's typology has been taken up and reasserted by archaeologists working within Africa (Hall 1990, Holl 1990, Shepherd 1998) and has also been challenged (Deacon 1990, Kense 1990, Robertshaw 1990b). Trigger has, himself, reiterated his typology of forms in the specific context of the development of archaeology in Africa (1990). European archaeology has recently focused on nationalism as a formative context in the development of the discipline in Europe (Atkinson et al. 1996, Diaz-Andreu & Champion 1996, Kohl & Fawcett 1995). In the case of African archaeology, I understand colonialism and its associated processes to provide the dominant formative contexts in the development of the discipline, while at the same time recognizing nationalism as a moving force in anticolonial and postcolonial archaeologies.

As to the place of archaeology within a broader project of knowledge construction, insofar as archaeology took place in colonial contexts, a substantial body of literature has been collected under the heading of postcolonial studies (Bhabha 1994, Said 1978, Said 1993, Spivak 1987). For the purposes of this review I take some points of reference from the work of Mary Louise Pratt. Pratt (1992) establishes the origins of this project of knowledge construction in a post-Linnaean "systematizing of nature," conducted in terms of "a new kind of Eurocentred planetary consciousness": "Blanketing the surface of the globe, it specified plants and animals in visual terms as discrete entities, subsuming and reassembling then

in a finite, totalizing order of European making" (p. 38). This "project of natural history determined many sorts of social and signifying practices," including, eventually, archaeology itself. In order to distinguish it from more direct forms of appropriation, Pratt terms this project the "anti-conquest."

In Pratt's reading, the agents of the anti-conquest, those men of science who followed on the heels of military expeditions in the newly conquered territories, were possessed of a curious innocence. She understands this in terms of the explicit valorization of these new projects of knowledge construction. Armed with the examples of their forebears, and with the light of science in their eyes, they sallied forth to encounter colonial landscapes and native societies. In the case of archaeology, this enabled practitioners to excavate sacred sites, compete for the skeletons of newly deceased indigenous persons, and export the cultural treasures of Africa—all in terms of a normative definition of scientific practice. If, on the one hand, the effect of the anti-conquest was to displace local and indigenous systems of knowledge, on the other hand it served to "underwrite colonial appropriation" (p. 53). Archaeology appears not so much as a neutral means to the "discovery" of pre-existing histories buried in colonial landscapes, as a discipline actively constructing archaeological pasts over and against local and indigenous conceptions of past times.

What are the particular nodes of contestation and points of friction in the disciplinary landscape within which archaeology operates in Africa? In a first approach they appear as follows: First, the archaeology of Africa has, historically, been carried out by non-indigenous practitioners, for whom African landscapes figure as exotic, and African people and cultures figure as "Others." Second, archaeology frequently relies on intrusive methodologies that destroy sites and sacred places in the process of investigation. Third, the field of the past has assumed a special significance for anticolonial and postcolonial movements and commentators. Fourth, excavation is a material practice that involves archaeologists in relations of work and may result in goods of a high intrinsic value, which tend to circulate in parallel networks of exchange. Fifth, archaeology undertakes the investigation of cultural practices and products that may be protected by rites, observances, and cultural values of secrecy and intimacy. Finally, archaeology is part of a broader project of knowledge production that was unequal in its inception and by-and-large remains so today. For an African archaeologist unable to get into the field for lack of spare parts for her vehicle, without access to current journals, and denied advancement because her own political beliefs lie outside of those of the ruling party, archaeology is less a disinterested science than a directly political pursuit tied to rates of exchange, the policies of the International Monetary Fund, and the mechanics of patronage and survival.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND COLONIALISM

Archaeology, both as a discipline and as an idea, was introduced into Africa as part of the process of colonial expansion itself. A curiosity about antecedents and a sense of history as it is represented in the material objects of the past seems to be fairly general to human societies around the world. Pierre de Maret (1990), for example,

reports “a devotion to the past” among the majority of sub-Saharan African peoples. This interest extends to the material relics of the past: “oral traditions provide numerous examples of a relationship between material relics of the past and the history of a people” (p. 111). Nevertheless, the particular methodologies, paradigms, procedures, and protocols of reportage and display that make up the discipline of archaeology—as opposed to these informal or folk archaeologies—have their origins in a particular conjunction of historical and intellectual contexts in the societies of northwestern Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These include the Enlightenment, the rise of capitalist production, and not least, colonialism itself. The newly constituted discipline of archaeology figured in a complex nexus: a new valuation of the material object associated with the development of capitalist production; a curiosity about antecedents and a new faith in the scientific method; and an alertness to the diversity of human culture and experience revealed in the course of colonial expansion (Tilley 1990; Trigger 1981, 1989). Its export to other parts of the world took place as part of a more general transfer of goods, technologies, and ideas.

On the ground, in the colonial states in Africa, the relation between colonialism and the development of archaeology could hardly have been more direct. Many of the first archaeological practitioners were themselves employees of the colonial state. Augustin Holl (1990) writes that the earliest research reports dealing with archaeological information on West Africa were published between 1870 and 1900:

At that time, the colonial powers were engaged in surveying their new territories; powerful expeditions were often organized. Many expeditions headed by army officers crossed the Sahara from the north to the south . . . and from the west to the east, from Dakar to Djibouti. In this process of “pacification,” the participants recorded various kinds of information about peoples, languages, customs, geography, geology, traditions and archaeological finds. Thus, it is logical enough that the earliest archaeological reports from West Africa were written by army and medical officers, school teachers and priests. (p. 298)

This was a process in which influence worked in both directions, and Holl notes, “Many of the people who actively participated in colonialism played an important role in the emergence of French archaeology as a self-contained discipline” (p. 298). De Barros (1990) writes of Francophone West Africa in the years 1900–1940: “During this period, archaeology was conducted by colonial administrators, military officers, civil servants and technical personnel (usually geologists). . . . Artefact collections were primarily surface finds obtained during military, scientific and mining expeditions or those accidentally uncovered during various colonial construction projects” (p. 158).

In writing about the archaeology of Central Africa, de Maret (1990) notes, “The Tervuren archives . . . attest to the passion for the collection of lithic artefacts and one is struck by the knowledge of prehistory and its specialist vocabulary shown by the officials of the Independent state, as well as by businessmen, engineers and servicemen” (p. 114). Bernard Fagg, one of the formative figures

in Nigerian archaeology, began his career as Assistant District Officer with the Nigerian Administrative Service. His first excavation at Rop Rock Shelter took place in 1944 during his leave from colonial administration (Kense 1990). Finally, Peter Sheppard (1990) titles his account of the development of North African archaeology “Soldiers and Bureaucrats: The Early History of Prehistoric Archaeology in the Maghreb.”

Archaeology appears in this context as one of the forms of scientific enquiry that mediated the encounter between the agents of colonialism and audiences back home, and the unfamiliar people, cultures, and territories with which they came into contact. The relation between archaeology and colonialism was the relation between knowledge and power. On the one hand the political and economic processes of colonialism served to open up new territories for inspection; on the other hand, archaeology provided a powerful form of legitimation for the colonial project itself.

DISCIPLINING ARCHAEOLOGY

Beginning in the 1920s—and in some cases, slightly before—archaeology in Africa increasingly fell into the hands of trained professionals working within institutionalized contexts. They brought a sense of order and systematization to archaeology, founded professional bodies, and established the institutional spaces within which the discipline was to be practiced. In 1923 the South African-born archaeologist John Goodwin returned from Cambridge to take up a post at the University of Cape Town. In a series of presentations and publications over the next few years, he proposed a local typology of the Stone Age and an indigenous nomenclature, which have since become standard in sub-Saharan Africa (Goodwin 1958, Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929, Malan 1970). In roughly the same period, Louis Leakey began his own research in Kenya.

Yet, if the emergent discipline of archaeology situated its own project close to the centers of colonial power in Africa, then the details of this relation, as well as the position of individual archaeologists, were more complex than a first reading might allow. De Maret (1990), for example, notes that virtually all the archaeologists who worked in the Congo trained at the Free University of Brussels, rather than the traditionally more conservative Catholic University of Louvain: “As this division was not linked to the existence of courses, it seems to indicate that a propensity for African archaeology corresponded to a certain liberal philosophy” (p. 134). It becomes important to specify more closely the positions in which African archaeologists found themselves, as well as the allegiances and ideas that structured their political relationships.

With the professionalization of archaeology in Africa, an important tension emerges between the archaeological metropolises in Europe and their offshoot archaeologies in the colonies. John Goodwin, who himself suffered the divided loyalties of the settler and expatriate, was to have his material whisked away from under his nose by his Cambridge mentor Myles Burkitt, who rushed his own book

into print (Burkitt 1928) a year before Goodwin & van Riet Lowe's *The Stone Age Cultures of South Africa*. Philip Tobias (1978) reports that an important side-light of the first Pan-African Congress on Prehistory, held in Nairobi in 1947, was the visit to the Transvaal of Le Gros Clark, Professor of Anatomy at Oxford, to view the fossil collections. His independent verification of the *Australopithecus* material opened the door to a reappraisal of the African early hominids and won for Dart, Broom, and others the recognition they had been denied for two decades.

In a much-reported incident at the 1929 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Johannesburg, Gertrude Caton Thompson took on settler opinion and the local archaeological establishment by proclaiming the "essentially African" nature of Great Zimbabwe (Hall 1996). Yet, as Hall points out, the grounds on which she did so are instructive. Caton Thompson follows Randall-MacIver in seeing the "Zimbabwe Culture" as not up to much. She writes (1931): "The architecture at Zimbabwe, imitative apparently of a daub prototype, strikes me as essentially the product of an infantile mind, a pre-logical mind, a mind which having discovered the way of making or doing a thing goes on childishly repeating the performance regardless of incongruity" (p. 103). Great Zimbabwe could be African because it was insufficiently developed to be European.

Even as they pioneered a new terminology for the Stone Age, Goodwin & van Riet Lowe (1929) remained convinced that they were working in a part of the world that had been an evolutionary cul-de-sac, or as they put it, "a pocket from which nothing tangible returns" (p. 3). In their account, the Sahara acted as a barrier preventing the movement of cultures from south to north, but allowing "higher" cultures to pass from Europe into Africa. This was a period when Goodwin reportedly funded his field trips from his lecturer's salary. Intellectually bold and passionately committed, these archaeologists remain typical of their time, as Deacon (1990) notes, in regarding their archaeological subjects as "helpless recipients of successive waves of innovation from Europe, the font of knowledge and invention" (p. 46).

This precise conjunction, with its mix of paternalism and sentimentality, and its instinctual deference to the metropole, is nicely captured in an editorial from *Antiquity* on "The Training of Archaeologists," reprinted in the *Southern African Archaeological Bulletin* (Goodwin 1947). It begins by drawing attention to the "crying need in the sphere of archaeology all over the world, and particularly to those still quite extensive regions which are under British Government." It talks of the need to create posts in archaeology in the Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, Kenya, and Nigeria; and of the need to train local practitioners to fill them:

But one might go even further back, emphasizing the fact that "new" countries are only new to us Europeans; they have had their own history which can only be discovered and recreated by digging and other archaeological techniques, which we can and should teach them. . . . Under proper direction, primitive peoples can do archaeological work. (p. 97)

ARCHAEOLOGY AND NATIONALISM

If colonialist archaeologies frequently denigrated the achievements of native societies, then nationalist archaeologies have tended to do the opposite. A generalized concern with past times has played an important role in nationalist and anticolonial rhetoric and practice in Africa. According to the anti-apartheid activist and articulator of Black Consciousness, Steve Biko (1978), "colonialism is never satisfied with having the native in his grip but, by some strange logic, it must turn to the past and disfigure and distort it" (p. 95). In an essay called "We Blacks," he comments, "A people without a positive history is like a vehicle without an engine" (p. 29). In the words of Chinweizu (1987), "the colonialist history of Africa was composed as a song of disorientation. . . . The false image of Africa it concocted was a paralysing bullet for our souls. If we are to rouse ourselves from the induced paralysis, we have to counter the image, change that song, draw up a correct map" (p. 75).

Frantz Fanon (1967), perhaps the most eloquent of anticolonial writers, comments, "While the politicians situate their action in actual present-day events, men of culture take their stand in the field of history" (p. 168). He writes of "the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond the self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others" (p. 169).

Perhaps the best archaeological expression of this imperative is to be found in the work of the Senegalese intellectual, Cheikh Anta Diop (1974, 1979, 1981, 1989, 1996). Diop is concerned to claim ancient Egypt for African scholarship and African cultural history. In a more controversial aspect of his work he asserts that the Nile Valley was the point of origin for a range of African peoples, from the Fulani to the Zulu, and he uses archaeological evidence to trace their migration routes. Although the work of Diop has been widely criticized, Martin Hall (1996) writes that it "has been highly effective in demolishing the tenets of colonial histories of Africa" (p. 37). He notes that the recent interest in Martin Bernal's work has served to focus attention back on Negritude historians like Diop (Bernal 1991).

More problematic are those nationalist archaeologies that have cast off all restraints in terms of submitting to a body of evidence. Few sites have been as subject to the claims of competing nationalisms as has Great Zimbabwe. Despite an established body of credible archaeological work at Great Zimbabwe stretching back to the beginning of the century (Caton Thompson 1931, MacIver 1906, Robinson et al. 1961), the period of the Rhodesian Front regime in the 1960s and 1970s saw the resurgence of a settler nationalist historiography, whose cornerstone was the notion of the exotic origins of the site. Garlake (1982) writes, "Several publications appeared branding Zimbabwe's archaeologists as, at best, misguided tools of politically motivated enemies of the state and, more probably, traitorous agents of a world-wide conspiracy of subversion" (p. 11)—most notably works by Bruwer (1965) and Gayre (1972).

Ken Mafuka's short work, *Dzimbahwe; Life and Politics in the Golden Age 1100–1500 AD* (1983), was written as a riposte to a colonialist historiography

of Great Zimbabwe. It is methodologically innovative in using oral sources to complement the archaeological evidence; however, this approach is undone when he allows his imagination to take wings. He writes that below the level of the king in the ancient state there was "an almost equal society," bound together by the exchange of gifts. This was "a socialistic spirit at its best" (p. 31). In one passage he is concerned to show "how despite all the hardships associated with such monumental building, the inhabitants of Great Zimbabwe had moments of pleasure. Indeed, it is amazing how the Zimbabweans, with very little material resources, were capable of infinite happiness. They had such a sense of humour that they were capable of deriving laughter from the most barren of circumstances. This is a heritage which should be the envy of the human race" (p. 24).

ARCHAEOLOGY AND APARTHEID

Conventional accounts of the relationship between archaeology and apartheid in South Africa tend to take one of two possible tacks. Either they regard archaeology as fundamentally apolitical in nature and safely distanced from the political facts of apartheid (Deacon 1986, 1990; Sampson 1988); or they paint a picture of the discipline as an unsung partner in the resistance against the regime. For example, in 1986, when the organizers of a meeting of the IUPPS imposed a ban on South African and Namibian participants, Thurston Shaw (Ucko 1990) wrote: "It is sad that this means excluding courageous South Africans who, by their work, have indeed helped to undermine the theoretical basis of apartheid. Such scholars are, as it were, underground resistance fighters" (p. 84).

In fact, the relationship between archaeology and apartheid in South Africa was a good deal more ambiguous than such an account suggests. At the center of this relationship stands a paradox: How a discipline working with politically explosive material could, on the one hand, be generously supported by an authoritarian state whose security it might be understood to threaten; and, on the other hand, how it could be ignored by anti-apartheid activists and African nationalists. For, *contra* Biko and Fanon, the compelling body of archaeological work on precolonial African societies that existed by the early 1970s was bypassed almost in its entirety by liberation movements in South Africa and abroad.

The fortunes of archaeology under apartheid describe an interesting path. In the 1930s and 1940s South African archaeology was established under the political patronage of Jan Smuts, sometime prime minister and head of the more moderate United Party. In 1935 he intervened personally to establish the Bureau of Archaeology, later to become the Archaeological Survey, under the direction of Peter van Riet Lowe. When D. F. Malan's Afrikaner nationalists swept to power in 1948 on an apartheid ticket, the archaeological establishment was wrong-footed. The new government rescinded an invitation initially extended by Smuts to hold the second Pan-African Congress in South Africa. A series of editorials from the period, penned by Goodwin (1950a,b), show how keenly the loss of official patronage was felt: "We have the materials, we have the will, we have the men; we

only lack the essential support of our own Government in this particular instance" (p. 2). In crucial respects the discipline, which tended to be Anglophile and keyed into the transnational network of the British Empire, found itself at odds with the parochialism of Afrikaner nationalist politics. In a bitter jibe, Goodwin writes: "There is no further news of the Second Pan-African Congress on Prehistory, due to be held in 1951. Dr L. S. B. Leakey's brilliant inspiration seems to have been well ahead of its times. Perhaps (at the pace of the ox) we shall have reached an adequate cultural level in 2051 AD, to follow Kenya's brave lead" (p. 42).

Lean years followed. Goodwin died in 1959 and was replaced by Ray Inskeep in what was still the only university-based position in archaeology in the country. Shortly afterwards the Archaeological Survey was closed as a government department. However, in the late 1960s the discipline began a period of exponential growth, linked to increased government spending on museums and universities. Deacon (1990) reports that by 1970 there were six university posts and ten museum posts in archaeology in South Africa, and by 1987 this had risen to a combined total of nearly 60 posts. The re-emergence of archaeology coincided with a period of rapid growth in the South African economy, when an archaeological service was seen as part of the essential cultural apparatus of a modernizing state. Henceforth, the apartheid government would be in the unusual position of generously supporting a discipline whose major work lay in unmasking the extent of black cultural achievement.

In a pair of papers written in the 1980s, Martin Hall (1984, 1990) sets out to address this paradox. He begins with a firm assertion of the inescapably political nature of African archaeology: "In those countries where the archaeology of the colonized is practised by the descendants of the colonizers, the study of the past must have a political dimension" (1984, p. 455). He captures the ambiguously situated position of colonialist archaeology: "while many archaeologists were opposed to the use of history and prehistory for the justification of white nationalistic policies, most are probably also opposed to black nationalism, which threatens existing social and economic orders and therefore the institutions from which archaeological research is conducted" (1984, p. 462). He suggests that successive researchers accommodated this contradiction in one of two ways: "by avoiding the contested ground and researching less controversial periods of antiquity, or by retreating into highly technical analysis which effectively excluded all but the acolytes of the profession" (1990, p. 63). Thus, for example, John Schofield formulated and used typological categories that "were sanitized by numeration; labels such as "NC2D," "ST1," and "NT1" were hardly likely to affront the settler consciousness" (1990, p. 64). Contemporary Iron Age studies in South Africa saw "the tight parcelling of archaeological information in a technical form that made it unintelligible beyond the profession." In place of the technically difficult and deliberately obscure archaeological material, the Black Consciousness movement resorted to "an abstract, utopian vision of the precolonial past" (1990, p. 73).

In the postapartheid period these ambiguities have translated into something of a crisis of purpose in South African archaeology. Writing in the late 1990s,

Hall (1997) reports that “at the very time they should be expanding their horizons, museums are facing unprecedented budget cuts. . . . Fewer students than ever before are choosing courses in archaeology at South African universities, and fewer still are electing to major in the subject. . . . Fewer archaeologists than ever before are applying for research grants from government agencies” (p. 6).

THE CRISIS OF RESOURCES IN AFRICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

For many African countries, the sense of optimism that accompanied independence and the two development decades of the 1960s and 1970s gave way to increasing indebtedness and despondency in the 1980s and, in the 1990s, a sense of active crisis. Colin Leys (1994) notes that per capita incomes have been falling at a rate of over 2% a year since 1980, “and there is no obvious prospect that this will be reversed in the foreseeable future” (p. 34). Africa’s debt is now the highest in the world as a proportion of GDP. Over the past two decades the social and economic crises attendant on the catastrophic HIV/AIDS pandemic have been added to the list of the continent’s burdens (Medical Research Council 2001).

For the practice of archaeology in Africa this has been felt as a crisis of resources. After a hopeful start in the 1960s and 1970s, the past decade has seen the shrinking of indigenous archaeologies in Africa. Merrick Posnansky (1993) documents the “collapse” of West African archaeology following the economic downturn of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The decade of the 1960s dawned as an era of hope and pride: “Universities, museums, ministries of culture, and antiquities services figured strongly in the development plans of the newly emerging states.” In Nigeria “every state scrambled to have both a university and a museum” (p. 143). In the early 1970s several departments of archaeology in Nigeria were conducting research and training, and there was a flourishing department in Ghana, with smaller research units in Abidjan and Dakar. The collapse that followed as national funds were withdrawn was traumatic:

Archaeologists in Ghana and Nigeria lost their capacity to travel into the field. Projects could rarely be sustained. Key faculty, both African and expatriate, sought jobs outside the country, and graduates sent for overseas training never returned. . . . Opportunities for long-term student participation in field research dissipated. Few books came into the libraries and virtually none arrived in university bookstores. (p. 148)

In Ghana, salaries declined to one fiftieth of their 1960s levels in real terms. In Benin, salaries for archaeologists were up to six months in arrears.

Over the past decade the *African Archaeological Review* has performed a useful service in opening its pages to accounts by African archaeologists of the challenges they face in everyday practice. One of the first of these is Francis Musonda’s “African Archaeology: Looking Forward” (1990), written as a companion piece to Thurston Shaw’s “African Archaeology: Looking Back and Looking Forward” (1989). Musonda notes of the archaeological scene in Southern Africa:

Political turbulence, coupled with the depressed world economy, has played a major part in the decline of archaeological activity. The “brain drain” syndrome continues unabated. . . . University departments continue to be starved of lecturers and teaching materials, while museums continue to suffer from lack of adequate conservation and storage facilities, and publication of research findings is often granted even less priority. (p. 12)

He quotes a revealing statistic in connection with the lack of direct funding for established researchers in Africa: “Obtaining funding for archaeological projects is one of the most frustrating exercises that a young archaeologist has to undertake . . . More than ninety percent of research funds that have been given to African archaeologists have been disbursed during the course of training” (p. 12). In an editorial headed “Involvement and Relevance” (1990), the editors of the *AAR* underline the significance of this figure: “Dr. Musonda . . . suggests that many of his contemporaries are effectively ignored by overseas sponsors once their post-graduate training is complete. . . . In effect, this is a form of neo-colonial exploitation” (p. 1).

Karega-Munene (1996) reports that archaeologists in Kenya have resorted to moonlighting in the face of declining salaries: “Virtually every archaeologist working in this country holds a full-time job plus one or more part-time jobs” (p. 88). In the same volume, Kusimba reports of “Archaeology in African Museums” (1996) that “Many museum professionals have gone to the university to teach, changed professions, or sought employment in the West. On a recent visit to one museum, I found that many junior museum staff were dealing with the rising inflation by skipping lunch and walking to and from work to their residences” (p. 166).

“CULTURAL PUPPET ON A STRING”

The underdevelopment of indigenous archaeologies in Africa has taken place as a result of more than simply a shortage of cash or the fact that archaeological services are tied to the macro-economic fortunes of the countries in which they operate. Crucially, it has also come about as the result of the lack of control by African archaeologists of research agendas and priorities. Posnansky (1993) notes that foreign-led archaeological expeditions have continued through the period of crisis but have brought their own problems: “All too frequently many of the foreign researchers have been graduate students working with limited funds themselves, using but not always replacing scarce fieldwork equipment and exporting their finds abroad for study” (p. 149). The result is that although “We certainly now know much more about West Africa’s past than [sic] we did a quarter of a century ago, we have paid a price in sites not conserved and an awareness by the wrong groups, for the wrong reasons, of the intrinsic value of the cultural patrimony” (p. 150)—a statement that demands careful unpacking.

One of the places to do this is through a key debate that ran in the mid-1990s on the issue of “Who sets the agenda in African archaeology?” The publication of the debate in question is disjointed, but holds up if we follow the issues. At the 1994 meeting of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists (SAFA, formerly known as

the Society of Africanist Archaeologists in America) at the University of Indiana, a round-table discussion was held on the topic of "African Archaeology in the 21st Century." One expression of this discussion in print was an exchange published in the AAR under the heading of "The Future of African Archaeology," whose chief distinction is the fact that most of the correspondents are based in North America.

A more immediate response was published in the *West African Journal of Archaeology* by Bassey Andah, A. Adande, C. A. Folorunso, and Obare Bagoda (1994), under the heading of "African Archaeology in the 21st Century; Or, Africa, Cultural Puppet on a String?" Their complaint is that a body, which they describe as a "well meaning Africanist association based in the United States, and whose members are mostly Europeans and Americans" (p. 153), should be setting out to chart the future of African archaeology. They write of a "second colonization" in this regard. In a statement that takes us to the nub of the conflict between funding and control, they write: "Yes there is the problem of adequate funding but much more important is the establishment of the right (truly African) cultural perspective as the basis for training all students—Africans and non-Africans who genuinely want to understand Africa as against wanting to impose their own cultural purview on African peoples and materials" (p. 157).

THE WORLD ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONGRESS

At the 1983 meeting of the Southern African Association of Archaeologists in Gaborone, delegates from Mozambique tabled a motion seeking the condemnation by the Association of apartheid and other forms of discrimination (Hall 1990). The apartheid government was at that time sponsoring a covert war against the democratically elected regime in Mozambique. The majority of the delegates at the Association meeting were South African, and although they may have opposed the racial policies of the South African government, "they had little taste for the explicit involvement of their discipline in the political arena" (p. 75). The motion was never put to the vote, and delegates from Mozambique and Zimbabwe resigned from the Association in protest.

This set in motion a series of events that led to the disinviting of South African and Namibian archaeologists from a meeting of the IUPPS scheduled for Southampton in 1986, in line with the academic boycott against the South African regime then in place. The events around the first World Archaeological Congress constitute the most sharply fought political crisis in world archaeology in recent times—and, perhaps appropriately, the issue of contention was the relationship between archaeology and apartheid. The figure at the center of events, Peter Ucko, describes the split that developed in the international body of archaeologists, a split that persists to this day (Ucko 1990). In the event, the principled stand taken by the organizers of the World Archaeological Congress was to be richly exonerated by developments in the early 1990s, and the political transformation in South Africa. In a pleasing turn of the wheel, the fourth World Archaeological Congress was held in Cape Town in 1999.

ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY

For some time, Africa has attracted attention as a site of ethnoarchaeological research, but as we might expect for a continent in which notions of primitiveness and progress have been defined through the processes of colonialism, the field has been sharply divided. Once again, the debate is usefully summarized by the AAR. In volume one, John Atherton (1983) writes enthusiastically of what he calls “living archaeology” in Africa. He writes, “In many areas of Africa, Western influence on material culture remains very limited and much information can be gleaned by the participant-observer” (p. 77); and he continues “While information is lost with the passing of each African elder, it is still possible in most parts of Africa to preserve an enormous amount of data pertinent to traditional material culture” (p. 93).

Atherton’s paper and others like it prompted an editorial response by David Phillipson (1989). He writes that archaeologists of Africa rightly pay attention to details of the lifestyles and beliefs of contemporary African societies, but herein “lies an insidious danger. . . . The opinions of such scholars are still all too often expressed in terms of a timeless, almost mythical, status quo which ignores the major economic and social changes that have taken place in many parts of Africa during recent decades.” This leads them to “present such attempted reconstructions of traditional practices in the present tense, often tied to ‘tribal’ designations.” Phillipson writes that “we should banish the ‘ethnographic present’ as intangible, misleading and, above all, past” (p. 1).

In an equally trenchant critique of ethnoarchaeology published in the succeeding volume of the AAR, E. Kofi Agorsah (1990) notes: “Africa has been designated the laboratory or testing ground for ethnoarchaeological ideas that have been generated elsewhere” (p. 191). He usefully problematizes the notion of ethnicity itself: rather than being a timeless construct, he emphasizes its “fluidity and multidimensionality.” He writes that ethnoarchaeology in Africa needs to be “rescued from the obsessive study of only the so-called foraging groups” and should take as its subject “both modern and traditional societies” (p. 203).

PLUNDERING THE PAST

The period of the late 1990s saw the publication of two works with similar titles. Peter Schmidt and Roderick McIntosh’s volume, *Plundering Africa’s Past* (1996b), is based on the 1993 Carter Lectures at the Centre for African Studies at the University of Florida. Thurston Shaw’s paper, “The Contemporary Plundering of Africa’s Past” (1997), was originally given as a lecture at the Royal African Society. Shaw writes that “in the last 20 years, in the course of changing fashions in the art world, wealthy European and American collectors have increasingly moved in on the African field and have been prepared to pay fantastic sums for the things they lust after” (p. 1). The two works tell a tale of illegal excavations, the looting of national monuments, the theft of antiquities from museum collections in Africa (often with the complicity of the museum staff), shady deals by collectors in the West, and the gallery owners, antiques journals, and scientific facilities that assist them.

What alarms contributors is that a trade that one associates with nineteenth-century tomb robbers and the depredations of colonial “collectors” shows no signs of abating, but in fact is on the increase. Michel Brent (1996), a journalist who conducted a six-month investigation into the trade, notes the irony “that it is precisely at the moment when the African peoples have begun to acquire their independence—during the 1960s and 1970s—and thus begun to hold their heads high, to hope in the future, that this clandestine traffic of antique objects developed and took on such huge proportions” (p. 76). A further alarming feature is the active involvement of many Africans in the stripping of their patrimony. Schmidt & McIntosh (1996a) write that one of the key “obstacles to developing a local sense of pride and immediate identification with the objects of the past is the absence of a historical imagination that ties the living and sometimes diverse populations to those who came before them” (p. 10). This is matched by a reciprocal problem of representation in the West: “African cultures have never been viewed as animating and informing such objects but simply as the place from which such objects are harvested” (p. 8).

They see these as instances of a larger issue: Who defines cultural heritage?

What are the power relations that come into play in defining what is culturally important and what is not? What would induce those who feel they are powerless to make the effort to preserve artifacts or sites? (p. 10)

ARCHAEOLOGY AS SPECTACLE

A significant feature of the recontextualization of archaeological practice in Africa in the period roughly coinciding with the development of postprocessual archaeologies in the West has been the emergence of new forms of consumption and display linking explicitly archaeological themes and narratives to dominant forms of representation in theme parks, leisure complexes, and shopping malls. Martin Hall (1995) describes the so-called “Lost City,” an ambitious hotel complex with an archaeological theme constructed in the apartheid “homeland” of Boputhatswana. Designed by the California-based resort designers Wimberley, Allison, Tong and Goo, the resort, which has been modeled to resemble an incompletely reconstructed archaeological ruin, represents an interesting conflation of the patina of antiquity with a kind of postmodern glitz.

The scale of the complex is staggering. It has 338 rooms for guests, restaurants, cinemas, a casino, and a “massive water park open to 5000 day trippers.” The special effects that form an integral part of the architecture are “imported from Hollywood,” and include a nightly volcanic eruption during which the carved stone “Bridge of Time” rumbles and shakes, the eyes of a stone leopard sitting high above the bridge flash, and steam issues from between the rocks nearby. Architectural features include the King’s tower, and the “Kong Gates” of the city, surmounted by a stone gorilla.

Hall’s attention in the paper is taken by the narrative that frames the hotel complex, and which contextualizes it in a popular imagery of Africa, the “Legend of the Lost City.” This is a wholly spurious tale of an ancient civilization founded

by a wandering tribe from the North, which is destroyed by an earthquake and rebuilt some “three hundred centuries” later in its present form. Far from being an innocent romantic tale, or “a Californian fantasy,” the Legend of the Lost City “is a master narrative that structures a cultural politics of Africa.” Hall writes: “The rebirth of the Legend in the glitz and ersatz of the modern pleasure-palace takes the old ideology of colonialism into the twenty-first century” (p. 181).

ARCHAEOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT

Where do we look to construct a map of the future? There are a number of current issues and debates to which we might look in plotting future trends in the politics of archaeology in Africa. The practice and discourse of heritage resource management have become established in Africa over the past two decades, and a lively debate exists around perceptions of cultural heritage, the management of archaeological collections and resources, and the development of indigenous management models (Abungu & Abungu 1998, Kibunjia 1997, Macamo 1996, Ndoro & Pwiti 2001, Pwiti 1997, Pwiti & Ndoro 1999, van Schalkwyk 1996). African archaeology has tended to be a recipient rather than an initiator of archaeological theory, but this has been challenged by a small but significant number of works (Andah 1995, Andah & Bagodo 1993, Hall 2000, Kinahan 1995, Schmidt 1996). The role played by archaeology in education has long been recognized, and there exists both an established and a recent debate in the field (Esterhuysen & Smith 1998, Gawe & Meli 1990, Hinz 1990, Mazel & Stewart 1987, Nzewunwa 1990, Pwiti 1994, Sinclair 1990, Smith 1983, Wandibba 1990). In Southern Africa, as elsewhere, there has been a turn toward reappraising collection practices involving human body parts and skeletal material (Legassick & Rassool 1999, Morris 1996). An interest in the African past has long been a feature of the politics of the African diaspora (Gates 1999). Recent works have examined the archaeology of the African diaspora (Agorsah 1996) and the special place held by ancient Egypt in the Afrocentric movement (Roth 1998).

However, if there is a single strand that takes us into the future, then it is the notion of development. M. Adebisi Sowunmi (1998) writes of the need for a “human dimension” in African archaeology. The notion of relevance becomes a watchword. If the first stage of a postcolonial African archaeology involved the celebration of indigenous achievement and the bolstering of national pride, then we need to move to a second stage in which we demonstrate the discipline’s relevance to development issues. This will involve “a radical enlargement of . . . [the] paradigm and operational framework” of archaeologists working in Africa (p. 166). A commitment to social ecology and action research, and a new conception of the role of ethnoarchaeology, are seen as routes toward making archaeology “a vehicle for enhancing our quality of life and promoting development and self-reliance” (p. 165).

Fekri Hassan makes a similar point in “African Archaeology: The Call of the Future” (Hassan 1999). African archaeology needs to take its place in a globalized world as “a means to economic development and trans-national education” (p. 393). He writes: “The motivation to study archaeology of many archaeologists working

in Africa and elsewhere is grounded in a much deeper level than that of current political agendas. . . . Objects of the past legitimize and inform the present; they provide a visible, durable cultural map of transient human affairs." Colonialism and the disappointments of the postcolonial era were painful to experience,

but we must look beyond the agony and the anger to new vistas of actions that cannot wait. We should not build on the ruins, engaging in a futile dialogue with ghosts. We must instead examine our own historical experience in order to chart a new future grounded in a long-term view of the past and situated on human experiences in different contexts. (p. 398)

CONCLUSION: CENTER AND PERIPHERY

The key issue for practitioners in Africa remains the manner in which they negotiate a place in a globalized field of archaeological pursuit. This is not a new imperative, but the continuation of an historically established relation. From its earliest days African archaeology functioned as part of a transnational network of knowledge production and exchange, and from the earliest days the terms of this exchange have been unequal. This remains generally true, whether with regard to the illicit trade in antiquities, the dynamics of publication, and the market in archaeology graduates, or the setting of research agendas and the way in which Africa has figured in a broader politics of representation. The political challenge for archaeologists in Africa lies in posing the kinds of questions, and developing the forms of practice and the kinds of understandings of our own place and purpose, which begin to tilt this relation in the other direction.

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