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The need for a non-militant indigenous historical archaeology in Latin America and beyond. Response to Felix Acuto

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Indigenous archaeology and archaeology of Indigeneity are paramount in the contemporary world. We certainly need more of it across the archaeological scale and across the archaeological globe. Archaeology's unhealthy attachment to colonialism, colonial administration and imperialism keeps on affecting our discipline on all levels. It is therefore encouraging to read Felix Acuto's call for an engaged and activist Indigenous archaeology of Latin America. It is certainly needed, but depressing to learn about the recurrent atrocities against Indigenous peoples in Argentina.

The Indigenous Americans are still there, in Calchaquí the region discussed by Acuto, in the rest of Argentina and in the rest of America. The critique of the idea of the 'vanishing Indian' and of the perceived acculturated Indigenous peoples put afore by, for example, Patricia Rubertone in 2000 and Rae Gould in 2013 (just to present some examples), are sadly still needed, still equally important, and not only in America. From a global perspective, western colonialism has led, and as shown in Acuto's paper, is still leading to physical and cultural extermination.

Even in such fortunate regions as Scandinavia, the physical eviction and forced move of the Sámi people in combination with 'enlightened theories' of recent migration of Sámi to central Scandinavia has led to what Emily Dale calls 'anopticism', the systemic act of not seeing (Dale 2019). Indigenous peoples are simply not considered nor seen when it comes to rights to their own land, their heritage and their own history. An example showing that anopticism is a global problem, not only Argentinian or American, is the infamous reply by the CEO of a mining company on the concern of the effects on the Sámi living close to the proposed extraction site in northern Sweden in 2013, in which he asked, 'What local people?' (Persson et al. 2017).

The role of words and concepts

From Acuto's paper it is evident that a more engaged Indigenous archaeology is needed and with that a development of methods. In his paper Acuto calls for engaged intercultural, instead of multi-cultural, archaeology. Multi-culturality holds a neo-liberal hierarchical undertone and should, according to Acuto, be replaced with the more inclusive concept of interculturality (p. 7–10). The latter has a decolonising meaning in contrast to the more top-down concept of multi-culturality. Acuto also calls for an archaeology that is activist and that serves communities' needs.

These are interesting and relevant points, but do they lead to a more inclusive archaeology? Doesn't it rather risk creating conflict and division amongst the relatively few archaeologists that actually care? As part of his credo Acuto states that 'Latin American Indigenous Archaeology *must*

be approached as an activist endeavour' (p. 13, my emphasis). I agree with this wish, but I do not agree with the *must*. As stated in the paper, it would be great if there were more activist archaeologists, but we cannot order our colleagues, only point out the importance of an activist approach. Sometimes non-activist archaeologist are equally important. Acuto's determination is followed at the end of the paper with call for a *militant* archaeology (p. 26). I do not think that Acuto is suggesting that archaeologists should arm ourselves with guns, but his (our) antagonists probably will. Would that be good for the debate? For archaeology? For the Indigenous peoples? One thing history has taught us is to keep civility and not apply violence, not even as a metaphor.

Indigenous archaeology, death of prehistory and historical archaeology

The situation in many countries in Latin America, specifically in Argentina, is unique with its level of not only epistemic, but also physical, violence. Systematic land grabbing, theft of heritage, looting of historic sites and appropriation of Indigenous material and immaterial heritage are a day-to-day experience of many people around the globe. There is a clear need for Indigenous archaeologies and archaeology engaged in Indigenous issues.

There are archaeologies of Indigeneity all over the world and in some places they are more successful than others. Canada and Norway are probably better than Russia and the USA, but in Argentina, landgrabbers shoot at and kill Indigenous inhabitants to take control of the land and with that, the history. From a European vantage point, the situation exemplified by Acuto is humbling and prompts the question: what can we do for you, what can archaeology do? Archaeological solidarity needs to expand, but how this will be done is too big a question for this short comment. Working inside our own infrastructures, such as ICOM and WAC, may, however, present paths to take.

Acuto's important call also reveals an (understandable) lack of confidence in the global institutions and regulations of archaeology (p. 9). The World Archaeology Congress' order of conduct may not solve the concrete conflicts where militant landowners kill people and steal their land and history, but could surely put pressure on regional and national politics. International conventions such as WAC, ICOM and UNDRIP have the potential of success if they unite with historical archaeology, and that will have more potential than the militant prehistoric archaeology proposed by here.

Acuto presents two cases which provide the beginning of an answer on what is to be done: the archaeologist can and should engage in the support of Indigenous rights. And we have the qualifications to do that through unlocking archaeological secrets – making archaeology relevant – and methods that engage and are accessible beyond seriation and typology (e.g. p. 15). Here Acuto criticises an archaeology that is constrained in its own past and unwilling to develop. I say it is an archaeology that is stuck in the juxtaposition between prehistoric and historic archaeology; an archaeology of the elite, neither relevant nor accessible for the Indigenous groups of Argentina.

A way forward for the archaeological practices demonstrated by Acuto is an application of a triangulation perspective through the study of documentary, material and depictive sources, that is, historical archaeology. Acuto points out that Indigenous Americans, are, if even acknowledged, only supposed to have existed in the past, in a distant prehistory (p. 3), and that the connections between past and present are broken. 'They have vanished' – the people without history (Wolf 1982) have been turned into a people of the past without a present, and certainly without a future. Historical archaeology tells us different.

From what it sounds like, Argentinian archaeologists need to start practicing historical archaeology and accept the 'death of prehistory' (see Schmidt and Mrozowski eds 2013). Schmidt and Mrozowski's ground-breaking critique of the notion of prehistory has served archaeology in both non-European and European regions (especially in North America), and points to the colonially biased notion of prehistory as being in opposition to history and historical archaeology and their

embedded futures. There are, according to deep traditions in American archaeology, peoples with history and peoples without. The former are primarily of white European descent, whereas the latter, the Indigenous peoples, may have a prehistory and sometimes are perceived as remaining in this prehistoric state, but with no present and no future (Schmidt and Mrozowski 2013:1–29; see also Wolf 1982).

Historical archaeology has an emancipatory potential and an emancipatory practice. The study of material, written and oral records in combination with visual sources creates an archaeology that intervenes and interacts in society, in contrast to the often obscure, remote and sometimes fetish-based prehistoric archaeology, as Acuto himself acknowledges (p. 3–4). The deep historic presence (and claims thereof) of the Indigenous groups presented by Acuto would certainly have been strengthened by analysing and acknowledging the written record of the colonisers, but also the written counternarrative, the written record of the Indigenous peoples themselves, such as notes, petitions, toponyms and court claims. Evidently this also includes oral traditions.

A critic may say that this is an aspect of practicing Indigenous archaeology – the supposed lack of written sources – but this is a presumption based on the concept of Indigenous peoples being prehistoric, not as living in the present, and it is most often an exaggeration. There are written sources, we only need to decolonise them (which need not be an easy thing). The same goes for the visual culture relevant to the region and the people of study. The adding of the historical archaeological perspective through written and visual sources is not only about writing a thick cultural history, but also about mustering the whole force of an emancipatory and intersectional archaeology.

The need for a balanced activist historical archaeology in present society

The present has turned into a frightening place. Neo-fascism, right wing populism and anti-democratic movements are gaining ground. They control or influence governments in Argentina, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Sweden, the USA, and many more countries, and in growing numbers across the globe. Archaeology needs to resist, but not with militant or absolutist means. Concepts such as neo-liberal, bourgeois (p. 3) and political correctness, albeit occasionally relevant, do not help. Rather, these concepts may estrange the author and the archaeologists from the bigger world. I do want to emphasise that I truly support Acuto's call, but I cannot avoid feeling a sense of being overwhelmed by the mere mass of words. There is a definite risk of estranging people through the many 'musts' and 'shoulds', despite all good intentions.

Where Acuto looks for Marxist tradition in praxis studies referencing, amongst others, Randall H McGuire's call for political actions, the reader might wonder whether Marxist tradition, despite its huge societal importance and its more traditional structuralist take, has ever done much good for Indigenous, feminist or intersectional archaeology? An engaged archaeology should perhaps be less normative, less absolute and more seeking, more postulant and more open to the unexpected.

Instead of Acuto's wish for a 'militant' and activist archaeology, I suggest archaeology should open up, include and interact with other academic disciplines and other perspectives. We need to take archaeology out into the field (as proposed by Acuto) and collaborate in showing that the Indigenous past is not only tangible and visible in the landscape, but also in the archives and in museum collections. It is then, when we pursue all three angles of the triangle of historical archaeology, that we have a greater chance of mustering the full potential of archaeology and turning it into an Indigenous historical archaeology.

Historical archaeology can be applied as a liberating process but it cannot literally save people from men with guns. It can, perhaps to a higher degree than other archaeologies, provide us with tools; it can arm the archaeologist in a non-militant sense. I propose that instead of propagating division and disunion (e.g. p. 10), a new *Front Populaire* in Indigenous, inclusive and collaborative

historical archaeology should be formed, where we work together rather than propose that there is only right way to do things.

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Indigenous archaeology in Latin America. Towards an engaged, activist and intercultural archaeology

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I would like to start this reply by addressing the comments by Gabriela Chaparro and Jamir Tiatoshi. While their remarks mainly foreground their own research trajectories, I treat them as useful contexts for the questions at stake and as opportunities to clarify the scope and implications of my argument.

The relationship we should establish with Indigenous peoples goes beyond respect, dialogue, trust, mutual learning, goodwill, good academic practices or friendship. I am particularly uncomfortable with the term 'collaboration', as it strikes me as ambiguous and overly broad, encompassing a range of projects and approaches – many of them contradictory or devoid of political engagement. Collaboration has seemingly become a fashionable term amongst certain archaeologists, aligning with the multiculturalist trends promoted by western states and societies since the late 20th century, aimed at fostering more inclusive and pluralistic archaeological projects. I am also uneasy with perspectives such as those of Argentinian archaeologist Alejandro Haber, who describes his relationship with Indigenous peoples as rooted in conversation and friendship (Haber 2013). Such approaches risk positioning non-Indigenous actors perilously close to appropriating Indigenous voices and representation.

From my work with Indigenous territorial organisations over the years, I have learned that the two principal axes guiding our relationship with Indigenous peoples should be rights and political engagement. Archaeologists working in Latin America, or those coming to work in this region,