

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,

must adhere to the guidelines established by national laws concerning Indigenous rights and international legislation – particularly the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization. This convention is arguably the most significant legal instrument available to Indigenous peoples in Latin America today. Engaging with Indigenous peoples is far from an innocuous endeavour. Our involvement should not be driven by academic trends or a desire for self-gratification. Instead, it should align with their struggles for the recognition of their identities, ancestral territories, heritage, resources and rights – struggles that are inherently political. Ultimately, this is the essence of interculturality: an ethical and political project aimed at decolonisation.

Jonas Monié-Nordin disagrees with the way I call for activism in archaeology. Whilst I value his challenging comments, I stand by my position, though some clarifications are in order. In Latin America today, militancy is not a metaphor but a form of engagement that does not imply armed resistance against the State. Rather, militancy represents a steadfast commitment to specific causes or projects – a commitment that extends far beyond rhetoric. It entails action, advocacy, solidarity and working collectively on the territory to defend these causes. In my paper, I argue that archaeology must embrace academic activism oriented towards social justice, equality, decolonisation and the emancipation of oppressed communities. Achieving this requires a transformation of archaeology itself. Perhaps my call comes across as overly vehement to Monié-Nordin, but I believe we must provoke change amongst those who claim to practice collaborative archaeology. Moreover, I believe it is essential to challenge our discipline because archaeology also suffers from anopticism. Many archaeologists fail to see the necessity of transforming archaeology into a political tool, or they outright reject the idea, choosing instead to pursue an innocuous, bourgeois endeavour captivated by the exotic. Some archaeologists deny the existence of original peoples, asserting that what they study belongs to a universal past – often a distant prehistoric past that, in their view, lacks any connection to contemporary groups. Consequently, they argue that Indigenous peoples have no legitimate claims over this heritage, including human remains, framing it instead as the shared heritage of humanity.

In her commentary, Chaparro raises concerns about the joint production of publications with Indigenous peoples. She argues that the co-production of academic works often perpetuates colonialist and paternalistic practices. I agree with Chaparro that, under the guise of adhering to ‘good professional practices’, some scholars have claimed to produce collaborative works whilst merely presenting their own perspectives and voices, appropriating the names and representation of Indigenous peoples (e.g. Nielsen, Calcina and Quispe 2007). Despite these failed attempts, I strongly believe that the time has come to cultivate authentic intercultural works and dialogues through meaningful processes of co-authoring and co-theorising with Indigenous peoples.

When I began engaging with various Indigenous organisations in Argentina many years ago – particularly the *Encuentro Nacional de Organizaciones Territoriales de Pueblos Originarios* (ENOTPO, or National Encounter of Territorial Organisations of Original Peoples), which was then the largest national organisation of its kind – their leaders and main representatives immediately emphasised that, in the current socio-historical context, Indigenous peoples, as political and rights-bearing subjects, spoke for themselves. For decades, a range of actors – including state bureaucrats, judges, lawyers, politicians, religious leaders, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and scientists – had appropriated Indigenous voices and representation. ENOTPO’s authorities and representatives underscored that Indigenous peoples are fully capable of, and entitled to, speaking and representing themselves in various arenas and forums through their own institutions, assemblies, authorities and spokespersons. They assert their right to manage their ancestral heritage and to discuss their patrimony and history on the basis of Indigenous knowledge systems and theoretical frameworks.

I have embraced this challenge by working interculturally and in consultation with Indigenous organisations to create academic spaces that amplify Indigenous voices and knowledges. One approach has been organising joint symposiums at academic conferences, where presentations

by archaeologists are interspersed with those produced and delivered by Indigenous representatives. Another has been co-authoring publications that give Indigenous narratives about their past and present, heritage and territories equal weight and prominence alongside archaeological interpretations of those same subjects (Acuto and Corimayo 2018; Flores and Acuto 2015, 2023; Huircapán, Jaramillo and Acuto 2017; Manzanelli and Velardez 2023). In addition, we work together to produce papers authored by Indigenous individuals or collectives in which they articulate their perspectives on their heritage, past and present (Acuto and Flores 2019; Toconas 2023). This reflects broader efforts across Latin America where Indigenous peoples are reclaiming their anthropology, history and heritage by crafting their own narratives, independent of external interpretations (e.g. Cayuqueo 2017; Guzmán Arroyo 2019; Huircapán 2019; Keme 2021; Ñanculef Huaiquinao 2016; Rivera Cusicanqui 2020; and see Indigenous authors in Leyva et al. 2015).

This type of work is significant for key reasons. First, these outputs support the internal dynamics of Indigenous organisations by being distributed amongst their members, thereby contributing to processes of self-recognition and the preservation and dissemination of Indigenous history, knowledges and theories about life and the territory. Second, Indigenous authorities use these materials as introductory tools in their interactions with various organisations – such as social movements, unions and state institutions – effectively presenting their ideas and positions.

Wilhelm Londoño's reflections provide a valuable complement to my paper. Like him, I assert that all Indigenous archaeology is inherently an anti-colonial and decolonial stance. I also agree on the importance of remaining reflexive and critical to avoid creating patronising multicultural 'collaborative archaeologies' born out of colonial guilt, academic trends or political correctness, which ultimately leave existing power structures and inequalities unchallenged. Furthermore, I also advocate for the development of intercultural archaeologies where the agenda, topics, concepts and narratives are not dictated by Western scholars but emerge from Indigenous voices, grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems, epistemologies and theories about life and the world, rooted in their territories. In this way, the pluriverse can begin to emerge, and hopefully be recognised and understood.

However, the search for Indigenous knowledges, theories and the pluriverse should not lead us into essentialist thinking. Indigenous peoples are contemporary collectives shaped by Western modernity, the State, national projects, international geopolitics and current technologies. They are political subjects embedded within the political structures of modern states. Indigenous peoples and movements engage with the State, and their goals often include advancing rights and public policies to support their struggles and projects. Many of these movements adopt pragmatic agendas, seeking not to dismantle the State or the concept of Latin America, but to transform them into intercultural and plurinational spaces.

It is crucial to avoid imposing our own academic agendas or our current fascination with ontologies onto the political interests and projects of Indigenous peoples. For many Indigenous territorial organisations, certain structures – what Londoño describes as 'the imperatives of modernity' – remain significant. Hegemonic groups seeking to delegitimise Indigenous peoples, communities and movements often invoke the argument of authenticity. When these groups fail to find what they consider 'authentic natives' – those strictly adhering to traditions, serving as environmental guardians or producing quaint crafts – they are quick to label them as fake 'Indians' or usurpers motivated by political or economic interests. As scholars, we must avoid falling into the same trap by assuming that the legitimate Indigenous organisations and movements are exclusively those striving for a complete transformation of modernity, its institutions and its geopolitics.

The cases described in this paper occurred within a different socio-political context – one in which values such as human rights, social justice, diversity, tolerance, ecological awareness, global community and multiculturalism were actively promoted by both the State and civil society. Nevertheless, this context is shifting rapidly in parts of Latin America and across the western world. Today, neo-reactionary, extreme right-wing governments, movements, political parties,

journalists and internet influencers openly disdain these values. In their libertarian, neo-reactionary vision, politics, democracy and the State are viewed as obstacles to their project of a depoliticised techno-feudal and techno-commercial utopia – a transhumanist future propelled by technological acceleration on a cosmic scale (Hui 2017a, 2017b).

I foresee two critical developments in the near future. First, to facilitate the unfettered advancement of transnational capital and enterprises seeking to exploit natural resources, Indigenous peoples are likely to lose their status as subjects of rights. This process is already underway in Argentina, where President Javier Milei's administration recently abolished (early December 2024) National Law 26,160 and its accompanying decree. These legal instruments had temporarily prevented the eviction of Indigenous communities from their lands until the state completed a comprehensive technical, juridical and cadastral survey of those territories. Indigenous organisations now anticipate a wave of eviction trials (<https://observatorioregionaldeddhypueblosindigenas.wordpress.com/2024/12/13/argentina-van-a-provocar-un-tsunami-de-desalojos-de-comunidades-indigenas/>). As I write these words, today (20 December 2024), President Milei has signed a decree initiating the dismantling of the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs, the state institution responsible for promoting and safeguarding Indigenous rights in Argentina.

Second, those who support and advocate for causes related to the promotion of rights, as well as social and ecological justice, will increasingly come under attack. This is already evident in Argentina and other parts of the world, where, for instance, solid scientific evidence about global warming is being challenged through the manipulation of emotions – a hallmark of post-truth strategies. In Argentina, science itself has become a target. The ruling party is drastically reducing state funding for scientific research. From the perspective of President Milei and his supporters, the only science of value is that which generates immediate economic returns. Social sciences and humanities are not only dismissed as economically irrelevant, but are also vilified as 'woke ideology' that must be eradicated to win the cultural battle being waged by neo-reactionary, extreme right-wing movements. These movements aim to eliminate what they perceive as the contemporary western world's evils and obstacles to achieving their vision of freedom: diversity, social justice, environmental justice, feminism, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ+ movements and others. If once archaeological knowledge was used to back up Indigenous claims before state institutions or in trials (see Acuto 2023), soon the authority of scientific knowledge will begin to be discredited, dismissed as ideologically biased. In this challenging context, it is imperative that we reevaluate and redefine our strategies.

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