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Toward a politicised interpretation ethic in African archaeology

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Following the Foucauldian, post-colonial and archaeological post-processual critiques of knowledge construction and more recent calls for a political ethic in archaeology, this paper furthers this discussion by advocating the introduction of a ‘politicised interpretation publication ethic’ in African archaeology. This is a response to a survey of recent African archaeology publications that suggests that ethics and politics continue to be removed from archaeological interpretation. The archaeology-as-science ethic is subsequently critiqued through a brief review of two famous African archaeology examples: the controversy over Great Zimbabwe and the practice of archaeology in apartheid period South Africa. Finally, the problematic archaeology-as-science ethic in pre-genocide Rwanda is outlined and the ethical creation of archaeology today in a post-genocide situation considered as the paper moves toward a discussion of what a ‘politicised interpretation publication ethic’ might look like in contemporary African archaeology.

Keywords: Ethics; politics; Rwanda; Africa; archaeology

À la suite des critiques de la construction de la connaissance qui ont été offertes par les écoles Foucauldianes, post-coloniales, et post-processuelles, et des appels faits récemment en faveur de l’existence d’une éthique politique en archéologie, cet article poursuit la discussion en préconisant l’introduction d’une éthique de publication en archéologie africaine qui inclue une dimension d’interprétation politisée. Ceci est une réponse à une analyse de publications récentes en archéologie africaine, qui indique que l’éthique et la politique continuent à être excisées des interprétations archéologiques. Nous soumettons l’éthique de l’« archéologie en tant que science » à une critique à travers l’examen rapide de deux exemples célèbres, la controverse Zimbabwe et l’archéologie en Afrique du Sud pendant la période de l’apartheid. Enfin, en considérant l’apparence que pourrait prendre en archéologie africaine contemporaine une éthique de publication ayant une dimension d’interprétation politisée, nous décrivons l’éthique problématique de l’« archéologie en tant que science » au Rwanda dans la période antérieure au génocide de 1994, et la création éthique de l’archéologie au Rwanda dans l’ère post-génocide.

Introduction

A common-sense approach toward archaeological ethics might suggest that archaeological interpretation should be based on the facts, and the facts alone, and should not be swayed by the political biases of the author(s) of the interpretation or the wider contemporary political context in which it is authored. Indeed, it might be suggested that a depoliticised interpretation ethic is entirely ethically sound. For example, in terms of social impact, it can claim to simply represent the situation as it is without directly

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seeking to affect social change. In addition, it can claim to fulfil a professional ethic because it provides protection to the author in terms of his relationship with the audience, as any social change that does result cannot be made the author's responsibility if the interpretation was self-evident due to the facts at hand. Furthermore, it conforms to a scientific ethic, a parent of this approach, which requires data to be free from bias so that they can contribute most cleanly to the ultimate scientific project, that is to know and understand the universe, past, present and future, as a rational, testable entity.

However, any presentation of archaeological interpretations that makes such claims is illusory, deluded, disingenuous, or simply ignorant of the swathes cut through any notion of objective knowledge creation by Foucauldian discourse analysis (Foucault 1991, 1980, 2002), post-colonial theory (cf. Said 1978) and, with regard to archaeology, related critiques of processualism in the 1980s and 1990s (Shanks and Tilley 1987). The compelling outcome of these analyses is that everything is political, even supposedly objective action. Thus, we cannot hope to understand knowledge creation without observing how it acts as a subjective form of power generation, negotiation, maintenance and contestation. Indeed for archaeology, Shanks and Tilley's (1987) explanation of the Four Fold-Hermeneutic presented a model, albeit a hyper-relative one, through which archaeology may be understood as one of the most politically subjective interpretative 'scientific' disciplines in existence.

This introduction might be considered an unnecessary revival of the old and tired object-subject debate between positivists and constructivists that in archaeology should have been consigned to theoretical history books a long time ago, having already been thoroughly explored and positively acted upon. However, it unfortunately retains relevance due to the overwhelming predominance of depoliticised archaeological interpretations that explicitly seek apolitical isolation, despite this goal having been shown to be illusory. Indeed, while archaeologists appear aware of the politics of the past in the present, typically this is not undertaken when publishing primary interpretations as though interpretation were self-evident and can be understood and consumed abstracted from historical and contemporary political surroundings.

Although there are many positive exceptions to this negative characterisation, and your published work or your favourite works may be among these, it is the rule and not the deviation that remains a problem. Thus, this characterisation and its significance are explored here with reference to the ongoing battle to generate a political ethic in world archaeology (cf. Hamilakis 2007) and the depoliticised nature of African archaeology more specifically. Drawing inspiration from Hall's (2005) critique of the depolitical and unethical archaeology-as-science approach in apartheid-era South Africa, alongside the comparable politics of interpretation at the southern African site of Great Zimbabwe (Fontein 2006), this paper considers the legacy of the archaeology-as-science ethic in pre-genocide Rwanda and the possibility there for a more ethical post-genocide archaeology. In response, I suggest that a more politically engaged discipline may be achieved if it is tasked with employing a politicised publication ethic that requires archaeologists to contextualise politically all primary interpretations as they are reported.

A political ethic in archaeology

'It seems that for some, the word *politics* in archaeology is becoming again a dirty word, something to be avoided, something that contaminates, biases and distorts the primary archaeological principles and duties' (Hamilakis 2007: 24, emphasis in the original).

Criticisms regarding the attempted depoliticisation of archaeology and calls for a political ethic are not new. Indeed, these more recent calls are based on much earlier developments in social and archaeological theory. However, none of these developments has yet led to the creation of a politically engaged discipline that satisfies concerns regarding primary interpretation and contemporary relevance, perhaps because there is a consistent and problematic lack of reference to the politics of interpretation and related ethics.

Over the past decade Hamilakis (2003, 2007) has made repeated demands for a political ethic in archaeology. These calls were initially stimulated by archaeological involvement in military planning to protect remains during the Second Gulf War of 2003 (see Stone 2009), a situation Hamilakis (2003) suggests placed concern for the record above that for human life. In response, Hamilakis (2003) problematised the constructed nature of the archaeological record, challenged the universal stewardship ideology underpinning the discipline and highlighted instead the need for archaeologists to employ a political ethic that privileges concern for the living. More recently, he has also detailed a manifesto for a political ethic, which recognises archaeology is more politically alert today than it once was, in terms of awareness of the subjectivity of the record and identity issues (cf. Meskell 2002), but identifies a failure to translate this into a politically engaged ethical agenda (Hamilakis 2007).

This failure, Hamilakis (2007: 27, 24) suggests, is a result of the proliferation of depoliticising ethical codes that are founded on objectivist, positivist, universal aims, through adherence to which archaeologists may ‘abrogate themselves of ... responsibilities towards the present and towards the living’ (for a similar position see also Meskell and Pels 2005). Said otherwise, Hamilakis (2007: 24) believes that ethics are being employed to save archaeologists from politics instead of making them more engaged with it. Nevertheless, Hamilakis (2007: 22) remains supportive of ethical codes where these are reflexive and dynamic enough to identify and challenge difficult and sidelined issues of archaeological practice. Moreover, he rightly points out that few practical alternatives have been offered to replace ethical codes (see also Hall 2005 for a discussion of the relevance of ethical codes for non-archaeological others who seek professional transparency and accountability).

In response, Hamilakis (2007: 32) proposes a consensus-based, social justice platform for a political ethic based on the challenging of ‘power dynamics, asymmetries and inequalities’, the taking of stances in ‘battle grounds and conflicts’, the recognition and exploration of alternative archaeologies and the striving for ‘social justice and an end to all discrimination and inequality’. Hamilakis (2007: 33–35) suggests that those who subscribe to this position should concern themselves with: the ‘genealogy of archaeology as a capitalist device of western modernity’ and how that came about; the normalisation of the conservation ethic; ‘depoliticised ethical stances’ on major archaeological issues such as repatriation, reburial and other Indigenous issues; the political economy of archaeology in academia, museums and the heritage sector; and the political role of all communities, including Indigenous ones, by analysing macro- to micro-power relations.

However, despite his ideological platform, Hamilakis’ (2007) agenda does not mention anything regarding the contemporary political contextualisation of interpretation. Instead, his agenda regards internalised scrutiny of archaeology as a locus of power without providing a means by which archaeologists may become politically engaged, and thus relevant, beyond the academy. This is something of a problem if, as Hamilakis (2007: 26 citing Foucault 1980), states this agenda should generate ‘ethics that take sides, that recognise the contingency and historicity of human action, the nexus that links knowledge and power and produces specific “regimes of truth”’. Indeed, how are archaeologists who

subscribe to this manifesto to ‘take sides’ ‘in battlegrounds and conflicts’ if they only look inwardly in terms of critiquing archaeology as a locus of power?

This problem was also encountered by proponents of the post-processual critique that emerged in the 1980s and gained ground throughout the 1990s in response to the purported objectivism and positivism of earlier processual approaches (Shanks and Tilley 1987). In summary, this critique identified the inherent political subjectivity of the archaeological record and of archaeologists themselves as political actors and thus called for archaeologists to shake off illusory aims of absolute scientific objectivity and become explicitly politically active. However, although there was cause for optimism at the start of the twenty-first century as Indigenous, feminist, Marxist and ‘community’ orientated archaeologies became more common (Meskell 2002), this remained a failed, or at least incomplete, project. As Meskell (2002: 293) noted, ‘though some have been active in critiquing the metanarratives of Western scholarship, the micronarratives of scientific method often go unchecked.’ Furthermore, as Smith (2004: 44) has argued, there was a failure to translate post-processual reflections into an externalised politicised practice instead of the more frequent internalised self-referential navel-gazing. In addition, because post-processualism does not sufficiently engage with the wider political context of archaeology, it does not fully satisfy the needs of a post-colonial archaeology (Shepherd 2002a). Indeed, although prominent exceptions do exist, such as Meskell and Pels’ (2005) *Embedding Ethics*, Meskell’s (2009) *Cosmopolitan Archaeologies* and other calls for politically active (e.g. Starzman 2008) and post-colonial (Schmidt 2009) archaeologies, these remain exceptions amid a sea of illusory scientific depoliticisation. Furthermore, these exceptions typically present political reflections as heritage concerns abstracted from primary interpretation, which is published elsewhere, inadvertently furthering the idea that interpretation may exist in isolation from politics.

Thus, before adopting Hamilakis’ (2007) manifesto, it is necessary to ask why this well-established post-processual political perspective has not already delivered a sufficiently politicised archaeology. Indeed, the political ‘genealogy’ of archaeological history (Trigger 1989) is already central to university teaching, while critical heritage studies has been problematising the political economy of heritage, the conservation ethic and simplistic notions of community, alongside archaeological repatriation, reburial and Indigenous issues more generally, for some time now (Byrne 1991; Smith 2004; Harrison 2012).

As a response to this anomaly, perhaps the failure to produce a politically engaged archaeology reflects a failure to employ a mechanism that would require all archaeologists to engage publicly with their role as political actors in a way that is not abstracted from their work as archaeological interpreters. Indeed, while Hamilakis (2007) recognises the lack of practical alternatives to ethical codes and thus promotes a reflexive ethical code-like agenda, he does not offer a practical mechanism whereby this political agenda may become attached to the offerings of most archaeologists. Thus, although my preference is for a situated and embedded ethics that is not code-dependent (cf. Meskell and Pels 2005; Hall 2005; Giblin *in press a*), it appears that in the absence of a politically proactive archaeology ethical codes that tackle this issue are a necessity.

Indeed, despite awareness that narratives are subjective, archaeologists regularly fail to engage publicly with the subjectivity of their archaeological ‘facts’, as demonstrated by the submission of papers to scientific journals without any political discussion as though data can be understood in isolation from the surrounding world. However, as Staiff (2013) has recently described in relation to heritage interpretation, all facts are interpretations, they are all representations of things that do exist but they are not those things themselves, and thus even facts are subjective political constructions no matter

how testable we consider them. Consequently, as Hamilakis (2007: 23) reminds us ‘the record does not exist’, it is an interpretation in itself.

Ethical codes

It is not surprising that interpretation politics are rarely considered when archaeologists, as academic and professional institutional members, are encouraged to abrogate reflexive social responsibility through adherence to static institutional ethical codes that make little reference to interpretation or politics (cf. Meskell and Pels 2005; Hamilakis 2007; Moshenska 2008). For example, the Society for American Archaeology’s (SAA) (1996) *Principles of Archaeological Ethics* considers a range of issues including stewardship, accountability, commercialisation, public education and outreach, intellectual property, public reporting and publication, records and preservation, training and resources, but, as noted by Hamilakis (2007), makes no mention of politics. In addition, although it does include a publication ethic, this only refers to the need to publish and not to the content that is published. Similarly, references to interpretation only regard public dissemination, including the commercialisation of non-publicly interpreted materials and the improved communication of archaeological interpretations, and not the manner in which it is constructed.

In contrast, the World Archaeological Congress’s (WAC) 1990 *First Code of Ethics*, which is based on concern for Indigenous peoples, does make more explicit reference to the possibility of alternative, Indigenous, interpretations. However, WAC’s definition of ‘indigenous’ is not a literal but a political one and thus does not include all local peoples, something that, had it been done, might have promoted the embedding of all archaeologies within their specific political contexts (Giblin 2012). Instead, WAC set up a ‘traditional’ versus ‘scientific’ opposition, whereby it appears that ethical issues only exist when claims of Indigenous ownership might conflict with an ideal objective interpretation.

Like the SAA, the Society of Africanist Archaeologists (SAfA) (2006) includes in its ethical code concerns over issues of stewardship and cultural heritage, accountability, public education and outreach, professional standards, intellectual property, commercialisation, records and preservation and the responsible use of documents, knowledge and collections. However, issues of politics and/or interpretation are again absent, with the exception of commercialisation concerns.

The contemporary depoliticisation of African archaeology

Maintaining the Foucauldian approach, African archaeology may be regarded a collection of political acts. However, given the prominent political history of archaeological thought as it relates to Africa (cf. Robertshaw 1990; Shepherd 2002b; Giblin 2013a), within which explicitly processual approaches to later periods were rare, whereas post-processual ethnoarchaeological approaches grew markedly from the 1980s (Hodder 1982), we might also expect contemporary African archaeology to be practised in an overtly political manner. Yet, despite this history, depoliticised interpretation remains pronounced in African archaeology.

This claim is based on a survey of all publications published online from 2010 to June 2013 (hereafter referred to as ‘the present’) in three prominent African Archaeology peer-reviewed journals: the *Journal of African Archaeology* (JAA), *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* (Azania), and *The African Archaeological Review* (AAR). This survey

identified a total of 124 original research papers, few of which engaged explicitly with contemporary politics in the manner that would fulfil a political publication ethic as set out here. Of those that most clearly engaged with contemporary politics, two were separate self-identifying heritage papers (di Lernia and Gallenero 2011; Masele 2012), while five others were part of an *AAR* heritage special edition (Arazi 2011; Bennet and Barker 2011; Diamitani 2011; Mire 2011; Stig-Sørensen and Evans 2011). However, rather than presenting primary archaeological interpretation alongside their political reflections, these papers typically refer to the management and use of archaeological ‘resources’ by non-archaeological others. Some papers do discuss politics alongside primary interpretation, but these are confined to past socio-political formations (e.g. Ashley 2010; Badenhorst 2010; Iles 2013) and did not concern contemporary politics. Furthermore, these papers typically concern remains dated to the last 3000 years, while for earlier periods even ancient politics are absent (e.g. Olszewski *et al.* 2011; Sharon 2011; Shipton 2011). Less frequently, some papers considered the political history of archaeological interpretation alongside primary interpretation (e.g. de la Rosa *et al.* 2010), but again this was not extended to a consideration of the contemporary political context of archaeological production.

Other exceptions exist where the potential contemporary significance of archaeological interpretation is considered but there is either a lack of explicit political positioning or of primary interpretation. For example, Davies (2012) has considered the potential positive environmental impact of a useable past in northwestern Kenya but without reference to contemporary politics, while Schmidt and Karega-Munene (2010) and Esterhuysen (2012) thoroughly engage with the issue of politics and the relevance of archaeology but not alongside primary archaeological interpretation. Indeed, of all the original papers surveyed here, only two fit a basic politicised-interpretation-publication-ethic whereby contemporary politics are explicitly considered alongside primary archaeological interpretation: Pole’s (2010) study of iron working in Ghana and Biagetti *et al.*’s (2013) research regarding Libya. Within this survey two papers that I co-authored deserve similar criticism: one uses minimal contemporary data to introduce an ethnoarchaeological study (Giblin and Kigongo 2011), while the other very briefly considers the contemporary political significance of interpreting violence in the present (Giblin *et al.* 2010).

The problem becomes even more pronounced when we consider ethics. For example, an online search for research and review papers that included the word ‘ethic’ (designed to also include references to ‘ethics’ and ‘ethical’ issues) identified only nine papers from *AAR*’s 30 volumes (1983 to the present), four from *Azania*’s 48 volumes (1966 to the present), and three papers from *JAA*’s ten volumes (2003 to the present). Those that came from the surveyed period (2010 to the present) included two original papers that referred to politicised ethics but did not involve primary archaeological interpretation (Schmidt and Karega-Munene 2010; Esterhuysen 2012), one review and one commentary paper, from the same special edition, that referred to the ethics of using genetic information to inform complementary historical linguistic and archaeological studies (Robertshaw 2012; Schoenbrun 2012) and just two papers that presented concern for ethics alongside primary archaeological interpretation regarding studies of food production (Parsons 2011) and human remains (Voogt and Francigny 2012).

Thus, despite the many exceptions that may fall outside this survey, it appears that many archaeologists working in Africa consider ethics and politics to be distinct from the production of archaeological interpretations. To clarify, I am not suggesting that those publishing in African archaeology papers are heartless positivists without thought for

social impact, instead I am arguing that this thought is not expressed and reflected upon through explicit political positioning in published work within primary archaeological reports. Consequently, where political relevance is discussed it takes place in separate book chapters and journal articles, which contributes to the conceptual separation of archaeology and politics and the consumption of data without politically contextualised interpretative parameters.

‘Non-political’ ethical choices and African archaeology

As already stated, the attempted depoliticisation of African archaeology is surprising given its prominent political history. Indeed, its political underpinnings are well-rehearsed (e.g. Robertshaw 1990; Shepherd 2002b; Lane 2011; Giblin 2013b): from its arrival via European colonialism and its supportive ideological exchange with that project to its involvement with growing nationalist emancipatory concerns regarding the reappropriation of African pasts (Giblin *in press a*) and the ongoing post-colonial creation of an African Renaissance (Meskell 2012). Furthermore, depoliticisation is also surprising considering the historical relationship between the archaeology-as-science ethic and colonially constructed ethno-racial divisions and oppression in Africa, as discussed below with regard to Great Zimbabwe and apartheid-era South Africa.

Great Zimbabwe

The dispute over whether Great Zimbabwe is of local African origin or is the result of earlier colonising forces is now a null point, its local origin having been widely accepted since the employment of scientific archaeological techniques in the earlier twentieth-century (Fontein 2006). However, this historical controversy continues to provide the discipline with a prime example of how scientific archaeology can supposedly challenge politically loaded debates to present unambiguous archaeological ‘truths’. The story proceeds as thus: *archaeologists who were blinded by colonial racist ideologies, which suggested that Africans could have produced nothing of cultural significance without non-African influence, attributed Great Zimbabwe to the Queen of Sheba, King Solomon or the Phoenicians.* However, following the employment of increasingly objective archaeological excavation practices, by archaeologists such as Caton-Thompson (1931), the local origins of Great Zimbabwe were eventually scientifically proven.

But, if this story is spun slightly differently it is also an example of the inherently political nature of interpretation whereby even supposedly non-political approaches can, with the benefit of hindsight, be shown to be political with political consequences. For example, despite presenting findings that had the potential to ignite a new agenda that promoted African accomplishments by rejecting the hypothesis of an external origin, Caton-Thompson (1931: 103) instead denigrated the site as the work of a ‘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.’ Indeed, it appears that although she could not avoid the clear stratigraphic relationships that proved the local origins of Great Zimbabwe, nor did she avoid the colonial racist ideologies of the time in her interpretation. Consequently, the option of celebrating Great Zimbabwe as a local precolonial African cultural accomplishment was not taken up until much later with the rise of nationalist groups in the 1950s and 1960s (Fontein 2006).

Apartheid South Africa

The events that led to the ‘disinviting’ in 1985 of South African and Namibian archaeologists from what was to become the first World Archaeological Congress (WAC) as a protest against apartheid present another example whereby even supposedly non-political choices can be viewed with hindsight to be political with significant political consequences. As Hamilakis (2007: 19) notes, the creation of WAC in the anti-apartheid climate of the mid-1980s ‘signified a rare moment when a broader socio-political movement...resulted in a fundamental change in the disciplinary culture of archaeology.’ As a result, ‘WAC was founded on the assumption that archaeology cannot be divorced from the broader political climate and that values of equality and social justice should be at the centre of archaeological thinking and practice’ (Hamilakis 2007: 19).

However, the approximately 400 academics who boycotted the 1986 Southampton conference and the funding bodies that withdrew their support from it clearly did not agree (Tobias 1985; Ucko 1990) and the politicisation of this event remains a divisive topic even today. Indeed, although WAC took a political route, others were opposed to this action at the time and argued that non-political action was more ethical because the politicised alternative would harm academic freedom of speech and because politics had no place in an objective archaeology. Furthermore, this position was one that many archaeologists in southern Africa held even before the WAC controversy. For example, at the meeting of the Southern African Association of Archaeologists in Botswana in 1983, the majority of delegates refused to condemn apartheid (Shepherd 2002b: 201), not because they supported the National Party government in South Africa, but because they felt that politics had no place in the pursuit of knowledge and that the resolution was thus unethical (Hall 2005).

However,

‘in failing to acknowledge that the creation of new knowledge in South African archaeology was the result of a play of interests and resources with political consequences, those opposing the motion were obfuscating the issue through an indefensible claim for context-free, absolute ways of knowing about the past; it was their position [thus] that was unethical’ (Hall 2005: 191).

Hall (2005: 193) further suggests that archaeology’s continuing failure to engage politically in South Africa led to its scientific ghettoisation and growing public irrelevance in the post-apartheid era. Indeed, although this issue has been taken up by the Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists (ASAPA) through the adoption of a Transformation Charter (Ndlovu 2009; Smith 2009; Esterhuysen 2012), archaeology in South Africa still receives criticism for having failed to deliver post-apartheid transformation within the discipline (see Ndlovu this issue).

Archaeology in pre- and post-genocide Rwanda

The famous cases discussed above can be compared with the less well known but no less significant case of archaeology-as-science in pre-genocide Rwanda and the contemporary dilemma regarding if and how to conduct archaeological research there, considering both the negative legacy of past archaeological work and the present government’s strictly enforced official historical narrative. This section thus reiterates the historical problems associated with archaeology-as-science ethic in Africa while also advancing this debate by providing a practical problematisation of the political interpretation ethic and the need to choose sides.

Pre-genocide Rwanda

The negative legacy of previous archaeological creations reflects the employment of an archaeology-as-science ethic during colonial and post-colonial rule in Rwanda that furthered the colonial ethno-racial division of Rwandan society, a division that ultimately led to genocide in the late twentieth century. Indeed, in the absence of an emergent nationalist archaeology, the archaeology-as-science ethic persisted from the mid-twentieth century until increasing violence in the country led to the temporary cessation of all archaeological research there in the late 1980s.

Archaeological research during this period focused on the supposedly objective exploration of a presumed ethno-racial pre-colonial tripartite division between Twa, Tutsi and Hutu, which reflected and replicated the earlier Belgian colonial construction of Rwandan society (Hiernaux and Maquet 1960; Nenquin 1967; Van Grunderbeek *et al.* 1983; Van Noten 1983; Van Grunderbeek 1988, 1992; Desmedt 1991; see also Stewart 1993 for a review of these archaeological approaches).

For example, Hiernaux and Maquet (1960: 20) associated twisted-string roulette decorated pottery from the past thousand years with Hutu ethnicity based on the identification of this pottery alongside a single 'short' skeletal example, a notion that was reasserted by Nenquin's (1967: 283–287) later work in which he also attributed Hutu identity to archaeological remains through skull measurements. In addition, although Van Noten (1983: 30, 63) expressed concern over the one-to-one association of ceramics with ethnic types, he repeated the ethno-racial migration model in his explanation for the population mix of contemporary Rwanda and suggested that the Hutu had migrated from the north during 'l'âge du fer ancien', thereby indirectly relating Hutu ethnicity to Urewe ceramics from this period. While Van Grunderbeek (1992) and her colleagues (Van Grunderbeek *et al.* 1983) also avoided making one-to-one ethno-racial ceramic associations, they too nevertheless engaged in ethno-racial profiling by uncritically repeating oral histories that suggested that the Tutsi arrived in Rwanda in the early second millennium AD bringing long-horned cattle with them (Van Grunderbeek *et al.* 1983: 52). However, the most pronounced ethno-racial archaeological model from the pre-genocide period was the framework developed by Desmedt (1991), which explicitly fitted archaeological ceramic distribution from the past 3000 years with the colonially constructed tripartite ethno-racial migration model.

Thus, despite adopting an archaeology-as-science ethic, these archaeologies undertook the interpretation of pre-colonial remains through a colonial lens as either belonging to one ethnicity or another based on a set of colonially constructed ethno-racial stereotypes that reproduced earlier ethno-racial notions of Rwandan society (Giblin 2010), as illustrated by Hiernaux's physiological surveys (Figure 1).

The archaeological reinforcement of these flawed ethno-racial categories (Mamdani 2002) may now be considered problematic given their exploitation to fuel the 1994 genocide. However, ethno-racial differences were also exploited in Rwanda when these archaeologies were being produced. For example, from the 1959 'Hutu Revolution' until the end of the 1994 genocide, the ethno-racial model was repeatedly used against the Tutsi population in political propaganda to justify its eviction and massacre as ethnographically different late-comers (Mamdani 2002; Eltringham 2004). By not employing a political ethic, these archaeologies therefore failed to engage with the contemporary political context in which they were undertaken and unwittingly lent support to, or at least failed to challenge, the genocidal policies of some Hutu politicians at the time and since. Indeed, although political contextualisation and positioning might not have created

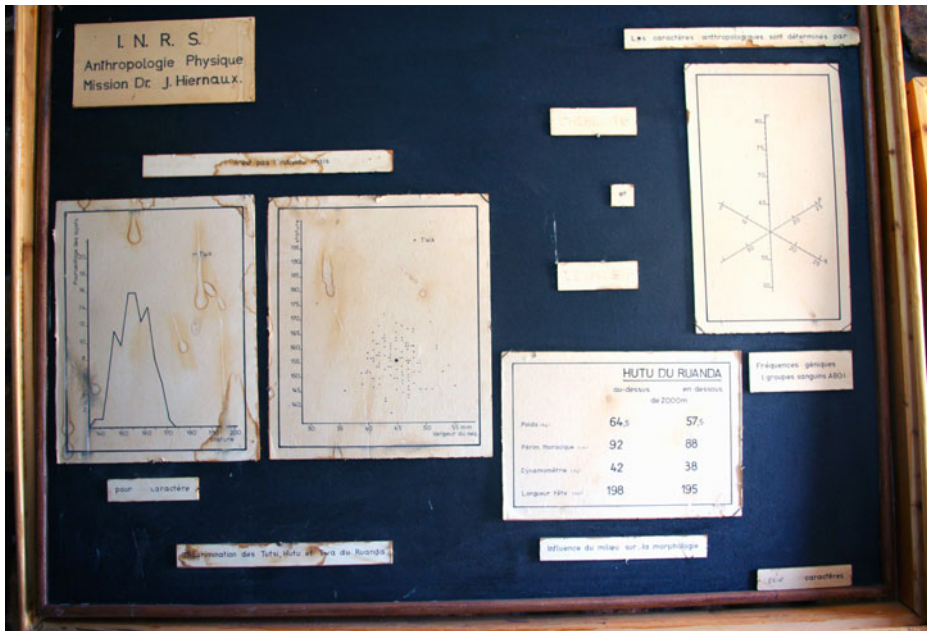


Figure 1. Photograph of Hiernaux's anthropological exhibit at the now closed museum of the Institut National de Recherche Scientifique (INRS) in Huye (previously Butare), Rwanda, showing the results of his physiological surveys of Tutsi and Hutu populations.

archaeologies that challenged genocidal propaganda, it would at least have explicitly tied these archaeological interpretations to the situated politics of the individuals and institutions concerned. Instead, these archaeologies now exist as scientific 'truths' in Rwandan university libraries and elsewhere.

The contemporary dilemma

The suggestion I make, then, is to reject the archaeology-as-science-ethic. However, while this approach may begin to make archaeologists more responsible for their political choices, it does not resolve the problem of choices having potentially negative political legacies (see Giblin *in press b* for a similar discussion).

For example, with respect to post-genocide Rwanda, concern persists over the culpability of previous archaeological creations in past violence and the potential for new archaeological interpretations to contribute toward future violence. However, this concern is not confined to the reproduction of now out-dated and overly simplistic ethno-racial Hutu, Tutsi and Twa identities in the pre-colonial past (Mamdani 2002; Newbury 2009). Instead, the issue regards any archaeological interpretations that contradict or even conform to the present government's legally enforced historical, purportedly nationally unifying, narrative. In brief, this can be summarised as follows:

- The official narrative presents pre-colonial Rwanda as a utopian state with no internal conflict, within which Hutu, Tutsi and Twa identities were fluid subsistence terms and not ethnicities. However, when Europeans arrived at the end of the nineteenth century they misunderstood these categories and interpreted them as different races or ethnicities, the presence of which together in Rwanda

could be explained through the Hamitic Hypothesis, which suggested that the Tutsi were the racially superior late-comer minority and thus worthy of privilege.

- These constructed ethno-racial categories were then made permanent by the imposition of ethnic identity cards attributed according to arbitrary qualifications that arbitrarily split families into different ethnic groups. Furthermore, following the ending of Belgian colonial rule, these ethno-racial categories were not rejected, but instead recycled by the majority Hutu government to campaign for the eviction of the colonial Tutsi, a campaign that ultimately led to the 1994 genocide.
- Consequently, the post-genocide government prohibited the terms Hutu, Tutsi and Twa and replaced these with a single Rwandan national identity to foster peace and reconciliation (see Giblin 2012 for a more detailed account):

This is thus a narrative that both encourages new archaeological research as a means to challenge colonial constructions and attempts to restrict interpretations to those that conform to the government's account, making all interpretation potentially problematic. For example, the negative pre-genocide archaeological history can be contrasted with the potential positive impact of new research in post-genocide Rwanda. That is, archaeology represents one of the only means to access, explore and reconstruct the pre-colonial Rwandan past in order to challenge the divisive colonially constructed ethno-racial interpretation of Rwandan society, a mantra common to earlier nationalist archaeological ethics elsewhere in Africa (Giblin 2012). However, the nationalist ethic is also problematic if, as many allege, post-conflict nation-building in Rwanda has not created equality but has instead continued colonial policies of ethnic oppression and favouritism. Archaeological deconstruction of ethnic identities may therefore aid the government's masking of contemporary ethnic inequalities. But then, conversely, is it ethical potentially to undermine the nationalist ethic and the laudable attempts of a government to foster post-conflict unity through the creation of a unifying, non-ethnically defined past (see Robertshaw 1996 for a comparable dilemma from Uganda)?

Simply employing a political ethic does not therefore necessarily mean that an ethically 'correct' path will be chosen, i.e. one with the benefit of consensus through hindsight. Indeed, any or all of the above perspectives may be 'proven' to be problematic ones in the future. Said otherwise, what is a correct political ethic approach to archaeological interpretation when challenging the ethno-racial colonial construction of Rwandan society can be framed as rampant revisionism, which sides with the current government's oppression of freedom of speech and quashing of political opposition to its rule? However, while the investigation of potential ethnic difference might appear an ethical response to the plight of those who feel that their political voice is suppressed in contemporary Rwanda, it is illegal and conflicts with those post-genocide unification policies that have preserved peace and generated substantial development since 1994.

One possible response would again be to separate politics from archaeology and withdraw into an academic comfort zone in which dry archaeological narratives are produced from even drier archaeological remains in the hope that concern for 'the record' is enough. However, given my earlier critique of the archaeology-as-science ethic this argument cannot be sustained. An alternative response would be to question the ethics of working in Rwanda, but this would involve abandoning Hamilakis' (2007) social justice platform and thus also be unethical.

Toward a politicised interpretation ethic

The question that continues to emerge from this debate is therefore how to choose a political path as part of a politicised interpretation ethic that, with the benefit of consensus through hindsight, will prove to be an eternally ethically correct route? In response, the short, and perhaps obvious, answer to this question is that we cannot.

For example, with hindsight it is possible to consider a more palatable, by contemporary standards, politically ethical archaeological interpretation of Great Zimbabwe during the colonial period, or of South African archaeology during apartheid, or of pre-colonial Rwanda during the colonial and post-colonial periods. However, without the benefit of hindsight, or future sight, the Rwandan post-genocide case is a reminder that we cannot be sure what will prove to be the 'correct' social justice path. Indeed, it seems reasonable to assume that early archaeologists in Africa with a colonial ethic believed that they too were being ethical by investigating the pasts of colonised peoples for their shared 'betterment'. Similarly, those who adopted an archaeology-as-science-ethic in the above examples probably believed this to be the ethically correct position because it did not conflict with external politics.

Thus, no single ethical code can hope to direct individuals to make eternally 'correct' political choices. However, as argued here, depoliticisation of archaeology and archaeological ethical codes is a fallacy and codes must therefore engage archaeologists with their political existence. In response to this problem, I support Hamilakis' (2007) call for a political ethic by making a practical proposal to include a politicised-publication-interpretation-ethic within ethical codes that forces archaeologists to express and reflect upon the contemporary political circumstances and social consequences of their archaeological interpretations in all their publications. However, in contrast to Hamilakis' non-relativist position, in practice what is proposed here is that no particular political position would be enshrined in an ethical code. Instead, codes would include a requirement to state explicitly the perceived socio-political relevance of archaeological interpretations. This practice, I suggest, will lead to a more uncomfortable, but also more politically ethical, archaeology as the way in which archaeologists support or challenge accepted power relations is made explicit (cf. Moshenska 2008).

To illustrate this point I should like to return to the debate that first stimulated Hamilakis' (2007) manifesto, that is the involvement of three prominent archaeologists in military planning for the 2003 Allied invasion of Iraq. In summary, based on a perception that concern for 'the record' was placed over concern for human life, Hamilakis (2003) suggested that if these archaeologists had employed a political ethic regarding this decision they would not have chosen to involve themselves in this work. In response, Stone (2009), as one of the accused, eventually published an account of the personal and practical, emotional and political, internal and external, wrangling involved in his decision to take part in such a process.

Although this example does not include primary interpretation, it is a pertinent illustration of how the employment of a politicised publication ethic may produce two very different, yet nevertheless very compelling, political perspectives. The importance of these papers here, therefore, is not whether either put forward a more ethically correct position, but simply that they made their political positions known through authorship. However, as I have argued throughout this paper, simply publishing personal political opinions is only a small step toward a politicised publication ethic. Instead, what is also needed is the political contextualisation and positioning of all archaeological interpretation.

The adoption of explicit interpretative political positioning in primary publications may appear idealistic and unworkable. However, this is only a call to renew the findings of the post-processual critique with the addition of a mechanism to force archaeologists to maintain that position and not to continue to slip into an illusory depoliticised state. Furthermore, although such an approach will cause dissonance because every political choice will be situated within a contextualised network of political concerns, including those of individual archaeologists, creating a spectrum of subtly different perspectives, this is not a hyper-relative ethic. Instead, by forcing archaeologists to be politically explicit, the complexity of ethical stances may be better judged by archaeologists themselves at the time of writing and by consensus with critical hindsight. In addition, a politicised-interpretation-publication-ethic may generate greater relevance for African archaeology as it directs its external political usage, a major concern since it often lacks relevance due to its colonial legacy and its contemporary economic cost in socio-political contexts that have more pressing concerns (Schmidt 2009; Schmidt and Karega-Munene 2010).

In response

As suggested earlier, the criticisms that I present here are ones that should also be levelled at my own primary data publications that have been published without contemporary political contextualisation. Indeed, this paper too presents plenty of ethics and politics but no primary research data and so could also be subject to the same critique. However, I have recently begun to put my thoughts into practice and to publish primary data alongside political positioning. Thus, at the request of a reviewer, this brief section has been inserted to provide some practical reflections on this endeavour.

The two papers that I have chosen include the respective ceramic and zooarchaeological reports from my doctoral research in Rwanda. The first has now been published in *AAR* (Giblin 2013b), while the second (Giblin and Reid) is currently under review with *JAA*, two of the journals that I surveyed earlier in this critique. Both papers use new bodies of archaeological evidence to challenge the ethno-racial migration model of Rwandan society and contextualise these within the framework of contemporary Rwanda and the reintroduction of secondary school history teaching in Rwanda in recent years.

I have not yet received reviews for the second paper, but that for the first suggests that strong feelings exist both for and against a political approach in African archaeology. Indeed, in addition to one extremely negative response, which suggested that politics and data should never meet, more measured reviews all noted the awkward fit between politics and data in the publication. This is certainly a challenge, and one that is not easily solved but must nevertheless be persisted with as alternative traditions of reporting primary data in African archaeology are developed.

A further criticism, which might easily be directed at both papers, is that they can hardly be considered to be developing a social justice platform if they are not read outside academia. However, short of tweeting them to President Paul Kagame (@PaulKagame) and the Government of Rwanda (@RwandaGov), which I have done (@johngiblin), there are few ways to deliver published archaeological research to Rwanda's political élite, and audience access also remains an issue for more grassroots stakeholders who are also unlikely to read such publications.

Nevertheless, this paper is not about community or public archaeology, regarding the issue of community outreach, but considers that, as well as engaging with audiences outside our discipline through different means of dissemination, we must

also look at how we construct archaeology internally through our publications and the interpretative ethics inherent to them. Indeed, if we are to engage better with other non-archaeological audiences, to make ourselves more relevant, we could do worse than start at home.

In summary, although I may be proved wrong with future reviews, my experience so far is that most reviewers and editors are willing to take a chance with a political ethic. Thus, what is needed now is a mechanism through which archaeologists are at least encouraged, if not compelled, to publish primary data alongside some contemporary political contextualisation.

Some concluding thoughts

As Martin Hall suggests below with regard to the interpretation of ‘recent’ periods, **it is hard to argue that African archaeology is not a political practice** with a political legacy and potential contemporary and future political consequences:

‘working with Iron Age materials – the last 2,000 years or so of a history then largely unwritten, and the patrimony of the majority of black South Africans — did make me realize that this sort of archaeology is always — and inevitably — political in nature ... I found it difficult to understand — and still do so — how colleagues can argue that archaeological interpretation is “above politics”’ (Lucas 2006: 57–58).

However, whether we research recent or deep pasts these will always relate to contemporary politics because they are all culturally produced in the present. We are all contemporary archaeologists.

For example, the recent and ongoing construction of an African Renaissance by some African political leaders and academics (Fontein 2006; Meskell 2012) does not just involve the promotion of more recent pre-colonial kingdoms, but extends back to the very beginning to include Africa as the ‘cradle of humanity’. Contemporary archaeological interpretations of early humans do not therefore only sit within ongoing academic debates, but also exist within this contemporary political context. Furthermore, they exist at the end of a growing historical and theoretical trajectory along which ideas such as the ‘cradle of humanity’ were once used to naturalise and primitivise African populations. Consequently, when studied and interpreted in the present even the earliest periods have a political context that may be explored in writing.

In the absence of politically proactive archaeologists, the forward movement of this political agenda will require archaeological organisations to include such an ethic in their codes and will need journal editors to question the absence of political contextualisation and positioning alongside primary interpretation. If an archaeologist considers that a politicised-interpretation-publication-ethic does not apply to them, because their archaeology has no contemporary political relevance and thus no social consequences, once they are forced to make that statement in print, in the current ‘impact’ obsessed academic climate, I hope and expect they would be made to rethink their research focus and to become politically engaged.

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