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Historical Archaeology Outlook: A Latin American Perspective

ABSTRACT

This article begins with the history of historical archaeology as an American discipline spreading to the rest of the globe. It then considers that the discipline will develop more and more on peripheral areas, and that an Anglo-Saxon emphasis on capitalism and globalization will be challenged by cultural, even nationalist, subjects and perspectives, as these differences will play a growing role in 21st-century politics and academia. A Latin American approach is then proposed, stressing local issues and cultural specificities and such innovative concepts as transculturation and mixed societies. The archaeology of slavery and rebellion is emphasized. A comparative approach is a fertile strategy with which to explore the different ways Latin America material culture may be used to study exploitation and resistance in a process linked to identity building in different countries. The article then concludes by predicting that, from its origin as a “WASP” discipline, historical archaeology may really become the study of material culture relevant to people worldwide.

Introduction

It is not an easy task to figure out the destinies of anything over the next few decades and even less so in relation to a scholarly discipline, such as historical archaeology. However, it is tempting to forecast the main trends and issues of the discipline, especially considering a peripheral perspective. Historical archaeology started in the mid-20th century as a eulogy of the elites, but early on moved to include different perspectives and social groups in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Historical archaeology served for a while to consider the past from a top-down perspective, taking the elites and colonial powers as parameters. It then moved to other countries, still mostly English-speaking, developed countries. It took a while for the non-rich regions to take part in the discussion of the discipline in a less subordinate

role. For a while, it was mostly an imported discipline, trying to adapt models used to understand rich imperial and capitalist powers and employ them in poor colonized settings. In the last two decades this changed, as post-colonial approaches led to a reaction against the mere importation of interpretive models.

This trend toward the periphery will deepen in the future, as countries, such as China, India, Russia, and Brazil, will play a more important role worldwide. This is not to say that the established powers, notably English-speaking countries (the U.S., UK, Canada, Australia, and Ireland), will not continue to play a pivotal role. To the contrary, when what happened with earlier challenging powers, such as Germany, Japan, and Korea, is considered, it should be noted that all of them are still paying tribute to Anglo-Saxon academia. There is thus no illusion that a new orthodoxy coming from new powers will emerge, at least this is not what has happened recently, in the last two centuries, when Anglo-Saxon economy, politics, and scholarship has prevailed uncontested. Nevertheless, the rise of other powers will reshape the discipline, possibly in a couple of directions. First, it will be increasingly untenable to exclude peripheral approaches, as is still quite common. It is already the case that contributions from poor countries, such as Zimbabwe, Vietnam, and Bolivia, are almost absent from scholarly publications in English. The other probable change refers to the epistemological recognition of differences in approach. It is still quite common to look for global interpretive frameworks, such as capitalism, as the key to understanding material culture in modern (and postmodern) times. More and more often it is accepted that Chinese society is not the same as the American, as the Peruvian is not the Khmer, even if all of them are modern (or postmodern). This means that historical archaeology will pay ever more attention to a diversity of conditions and situations, as well as interpretive movements. Last, but not

least, public archaeology will prove more and more relevant in both epistemological and empirical ways. Archaeology will continue to be a scholarly discipline, but scholarship tends to coalesce with reaching out and interaction. Latin America may play a particularly relevant role in this, considering that the continent is in between the West and the rest. This position may be too optimistic, but Latin Americans are always optimists.

After this general discussion, it is high time to turn to a more detailed forecast. A diversity of approaches may emerge from different global and national situations. From our own Latin American point of view, different approaches will result from the divergent perspectives of Anglo-Saxons, prone to continue to emphasize capitalism as the key concept for understanding the material culture of modernity, in opposition to Europeans, Latin Americans, Asians, and Africans paying more attention to specificities and differences. This is due to the different situations in those areas. Capitalism will probably continue to shape identity issues in Anglo-Saxon countries, while in other parts of the world cultural, ethnic, and national differences will continue to play a pivotal role in understanding social life. This is translated in the way data are searched for, collected, and studied. A capitalist approach looks for global material culture, such as the spread of majolica, bottles, and everything else, understanding the world as an empire, in the sense used by Hardt and Negri (2001). For the rest of the world though, it will continue to be relevant to stress difference and material markers of difference, such as between Spanish and Portuguese towns in the New World, or different uses of pottery between Chinese and Vietnamese, or the different attire worn by Indians and Pakistanis since independence.

Archaeological data are not neutral; rather, they are built by archaeologists. The imperial/colonial divide will continue to oppose a global and capitalist approach to a national (or subnational) and cultural understanding of society and the material world. In this article, we stress the ways the global and local divide may play out in the near future in Latin America, focusing on the archaeology of repression and resistance, and on slavery

as interpreted archaeologically. All those processes are to be related neither only nor primarily to academia, but to specific historical and social conditions, as nation building and resistance to imperial movements are strengthened, despite growing global capital interaction or, perhaps, because of it. Even if peaceful cooperation prevails, and this is a big “if,” it will not obfuscate the divergent interests of nations and other subnational entities. The case of Latin America, studied in this article, is particularly revealing. Capitalism, globalization, and more and more intense international contacts will only increase in the next few decades. Therefore, archaeology will also be much more interconnected across national borders. However, divergent understandings in different countries and situations will continue and even become more distinct, considering what happened with Europe since the days of the 1952 European Coal and Steel Community, which was an international organization serving to unify European countries after World War II and would ultimately lead the way to the founding of the European Union. Ever more interaction led to ever more attention to differences. In the case of Latin America, the divide between Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries (and material culture) will continue, compounded by the continued divergent understanding of cityscapes and a whole material world. This article thus explores both the global and capitalist trends, and the more local and divergent understandings of material culture in historical times.

Latin America’s Contribution in the Next Decades: The Conceptual Setting

Latin America is a foreign concept, imported from France to refer to former Spanish, Portuguese, and French colonies south of the United States. It is, thus, grounded on a philological definition of Romance-language countries, although excluding Quebec and formerly French areas in the United States and Caribbean. It was invented by the French to justify their own intellectual influence in a wide area and to dispute British and American claims to the subcontinent. Latin America

is still a somewhat awkward concept in the countries themselves, even if for outsiders it is seen as an almost natural concept. For the French, but also for the Americans and the British, the main claimants, it is only too natural to coalesce a huge area under a convenient sobriquet. This is a most misleading stance, however, with consequences for the future of historical archaeology in the region. It is as if people in Brazil or Argentina would say that Scots and Britons, Basques and Catalans were really ... Europeans! It is, thus, a way of passing over differences to ease an outsider's understanding. The problem is that the comparison is not even. As we Latin Americans are not on top of the world, we cannot impose our own understanding onto others as the big economic powers did and still do.

Latin America is a foreign concept and successful in the area to a limited extent because it addresses the need to unify the region against imperial design and intervention. Still, there is not a single political entity uniting all so-called Latin American countries. There are, thus, several cleavages, starting with a cultural or philological one. This splits the countries in three groups: Spanish-, Portuguese-, and French- or Creole-speaking countries (or dependencies, such as French Guiana and American Puerto Rico). Then, each country is taken as a unique entity. Several countries would fit this understanding, such as Brazil, for its national identity is forged against non-Portuguese speakers, such as Spanish speakers, but also French, Dutch, and English speakers, marginally.

Readers will ask themselves what the purpose of all this conceptual discussion is. It is difficult, though, to understand our own stance on the future of the discipline without this epistemological discussion. It is epistemological, since we consider that the main divide in the discipline will be between universalism and localism. While the capitalist ethos of the Anglo-Saxon world will continue to stress the globalization and conflation of local material culture into a world system, local identities and differences will play a major countervailing role. These local identities refer not only to differences between nation states, but also inside nations, relating to ethnic, gendered, and many other identity affiliations. We are convinced this

will shape the discipline from the outside, even as it emerges from the fringes.

Local Issues, beyond Capitalism

Latin America—if this concept is valid—has produced a plethora of interpreters of social life beyond the capitalist understanding of humans as rational beings in search of the minimum effort and maximum results, in the so-called mini-max theory of the transcultural *Homo economicus*. The ideas of a couple of social theorists will suffice to understand the originality of Latin American scholarship, starting with Cuban polymath Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969), an intellectual who framed the anthropological discussion about the mixed features of human contact, contributing to understanding mixed Latin American societies, but also to the whole theoretical issue relating to culture contact. Ortiz was a keen observer of everyday life and the thousand ways people mix, and he proposed the concept of transculturation for interpreting cultural contact and the historical processes of intermeshed cultures in Latin America (Ortiz 1995:97–98).

Similar concepts were developed by other intellectuals, such as the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre. Still, mixing is only one of the original interpretive frameworks developed in Latin America that will be decisive for historical archaeology in the next few decades. Another one relates to spirituality or religiosity, a term difficult to understand in Europe and to dissociate from capitalism in the U.S. It is no coincidence that modern Latin American authors, such as Colombian Gabriel García Márquez, Argentine Jorge Luís Borges, and Brazilians, such as Machado de Assis and Jorge Amado, blur the distinction between reality and imagination. Recently, Marxist revolutionaries in Venezuela, such as President Maduro, stressed the spiritual presence of the late President Chávez in birds and underground images, in a conflation of the revolutionary hero and Jesus Christ. Magic is an objective part of Latin America, even for self-defined revolutionaries, not to mention a plethora of social and religious communities.

What are the consequences of all those interpretive moves for the future of historical

archaeology? First and foremost, we consider that the discipline will continue to try to understand the unique ways material culture was shaped by a mixed people with a variety of social values, not all of them limited to capitalism and the *Homo economicus* framework. This means that the differences between Spanish, Portuguese, and other material orders will continue to lure scholars interested in understanding how people settle differently in the two areas, opposing planned towns in Hispanic areas to medieval urban settings in Brazil. This is a major difference, but mostly historical archaeologists will try to compare differences in pottery and ceramic use and consumption, and to establish the ways people negotiated their social conflicts in the material realm (Funari and Senatore 2015). It is increasingly relevant to understand how native pottery was used and is still used in several places and circumstances, while in others imported wares play specific roles, not only in social distinction, in the sense used by Bourdieu (1998), but also in figuring out the magic of the natural and social world (as in the case of ex-voto offerings, to name just one material item).

The study of material oppression is also a particularly promising avenue for the next few decades, for several reasons, but especially because social inequalities are still huge in Latin America, and the struggle against them will continue to be at the heart of social concerns. In the following pages we examine some of these epistemological matters in a discussion of three of the most promising areas of research: the historical archaeology of slavery and rebellion, the archaeology of repression and resistance, and the archaeology of local identities.

Historical Archaeology of Slavery and Rebellion

In recent years, the archaeological study of slavery has expanded and diversified the approaches to this complex issue (Leone et al. 2005). It now includes the study of the processes of creation and changes in cultural identities, as well as the different ways resistance developed in the Americas (Singleton and Torres de Souza 2009). Dealing with the

processes of Africanization of the Americas (Knight 2010), there is an increased interest in studying material culture used throughout the slave system (Ferreira 2010). The main goals include understanding how material culture, such as architecture and other building structures, aimed at controlling slaves in plantations and beyond (Orser 1990; Epperson 2004).

The archaeology of slavery has a great potential in Latin America, especially in Brazil, where, from the start of Portuguese colonization in 1500 until emancipation in 1888, the slaves comprised the vast majority of the population in almost all regions (Karasch 2000). In Latin America, however, although the slave system has largely dominated, there are few studies conducted exploring the archaeology of slavery (Castaño 2000; Weik 2008). Two countries have distinguished themselves in the academic setting with seminal research: Argentina and Brazil. In Argentina, Daniel Schávelzon has been looking for the material evidences of the presence of Africans in Buenos Aires since the late 1990s, (Schávelzon 1999, 2002, 2003). In Brazil, the main research avenue has been in the study of the slave resistance. It has been possible to understand, for example, that the pipes manufactured by slaves were ethnic markers and represented, in their geometric and anthropomorphic symbolism, subtle forms of resistance and cultural self-representation (Agostini 1998).

The major focus, however, is on the sites where the slave resistance was more obvious and explicit: runaway settlements. The first excavations of maroon sites were carried out in Minas Gerais in the late 1970s. It has been the result of the efforts of Carlos Magno Guimarães and Anna Lucia Lanna (Guimarães and Lanna 1980; Guimarães 1990). In the early 1990s, maroon archaeology in Brazil gained visibility and international recognition thanks to the research conducted by Charles Orser, Jr., Pedro Paulo Funari, and Michael Rowlands at the Quilombo dos Palmares, located in the Serra da Barriga, Alagoas; see Ferreira (2015) for earlier literature. In the last two decades, these authors have interpreted the ethnic and multicultural plurality of Palmares and its meaning in terms of public archaeology (Funari 1991, 1995, 1996, 2007;

Orser 1992, 1993, 1994; Orser and Funari 2001; Funari and De Carvalho 2005, 2008).

Research diversification on maroon archaeology has opened the gates to an ongoing quest for a broader critical and politically committed archaeology. Palmares was visited again by Scott Joseph Allen (Allen 1998, 2000, 2001, 2006, 2008), and his interpretations focused special attention on ethnicity, gender, identity, and the diverse uses of the past in the present. Since the early 2000s, scholarly and social discussion of identity issues has been common in Brazil, as a series of policies aiming at diminishing social exclusion and inequalities was put into action. Since the 1990s, diversity has been a key legal framework in Brazil, leading to a multicultural approach to social life and fostering local identity building (Ferreira and Sanches 2011).

Maroons (that is, maroon descendants) benefited from such political developments—first and foremost from increasing legal protection for their lands, sometimes with the active assistance of archaeological and anthropological cultural resource management evaluations. Furthermore, the politics of gender and ethnic identity has been actively engaged in archaeological studies of maroon life; interpretations of Palmares have explored sexuality, polyandry, polygyny, and homoeroticism, among other issues (Funari and De Carvalho 2008). Archaeological research is, thus, not only in dialogue with anthropological and historical studies, but also, and most importantly, with social organizations and interest groups, such as feminists, gay-rights activists, African Brazilian religious groups, and, not least of all, maroon communities themselves (Carle 2005; Rosa 2009; Almeida 2012).

There has also been growing interest in comparative approaches, both in terms of interregional comparisons of maroons and in terms of relating maroon archaeology to the archaeology of slavery (Ferreira 2009, 2010, 2014). There is now a growing dialogue, not only between Brazilian archaeologists and American scholars, but also fellow Latin American archaeologists. There is also increased interest in collaborating with African specialists. South African Martin Hall has worked in cooperation with Brazilians

continuously from the early 1990s (Funari, Hall et al. 1999), and several other Africanists have also collaborated on a less-frequent basis. This increased focus on Africa is helpful, since a better understanding of African cultures, history, and archaeology is critical to our understanding of Palmares (Miller 1976) and maroons more broadly, but there is still plenty of work to do in this area of comparative research.

Cooperation between archaeologists within various Latin American countries has grown exponentially since the end of Cold War (1947–1989) and the democratization of most of the region. Despite the language barrier—Portuguese usually being considered very difficult for Spanish speakers—several common research initiatives have been undertaken. Brazilians have been cooperating with archaeologists from other countries and have had particularly active joint projects with Cubans (Funari and Domínguez 2005, 2006; Ferreira et al. 2006; Domínguez and Funari 2008; Ferreira and La Rosa 2015). These collaborations have been important in advancing the discussion of similarities and differences in maroon material culture from different regions, and also in contributing to theoretical debates about such concepts as miscegenation and transculturation. Interregional cooperation between scholars and practitioners has enriched the study of subjects including pottery variability, slave community life (Torres de Souza and Symanski 2009), identity processes (Agostini 2002), and multidisciplinary approaches toward the material culture of slaves (Agostini 2013; Ferreira and Funari 2015).

Cooperation with American archaeologists has also continued and increased, enabling the use of a diverse range of theoretical and empirical research strategies and approaches. On this point, we will discuss our current project at a series of sites in the south of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, where we are collaborating with Charles Orser, Jr., from Vanderbilt University. In effect, southern Rio Grande do Sul was a major slavery center. From the close of the 18th century, with the end of disputes between the Portuguese and Spanish crowns, the Portuguese founded colonies in Rio Grande do Sul. Later, on the

plains of the region, on the banks of several rivers, they established a series of plantations for the commercial production of beef jerky. The city of Pelotas had several dozen plantations in its countryside. These plantations furthered the emergence of an ostentatious elite and a rich urban center articulated with the import and export networks of the period. On average, each plantation had 60 slaves. As in other regions of the world, the slave system in the south of Rio Grande do Sul worked as an elite political strategy. Slaving facilitated both urbanization and political centralization, it underpinned the rise of an elite class, it channeled new trade wealth to the local societies, and it attracted a larger settled population.

The formation of maroon communities in the region was recurrent. The flight of slaves was constant. Escape routes even extended to Uruguay and Serra dos Tapes (the principal mountain chain in the region). Pelotas includes several maroon sites (Figure 1). These sites, and the beef-jerky plantations as well, offer the possibility to investigate

a number of pertinent themes, including the materiality of maroon life and the material culture of plantations, the relationships between collectivity and consumption, and the penetration of the foreign market into sites of overt contestation and into the beef-jerky plantations. At the narrowest frame of analysis, this research will provide the basic material and spatial information about their organization, the nature of their buildings and dependencies, as well as ideas about both the operative vectors of oppression and the slaves’ insurgency. At this level it should be possible to develop ideas about intrasite network relations and assess their symmetrical and asymmetrical features (Figure 1).

Archaeology of Repression and Resistance

Latin America suffered particularly during the heyday of the Cold War (1947–1989). The internal imbalances and contradictions during this time were compounded by the fertile ground of the East/West conflict. The results

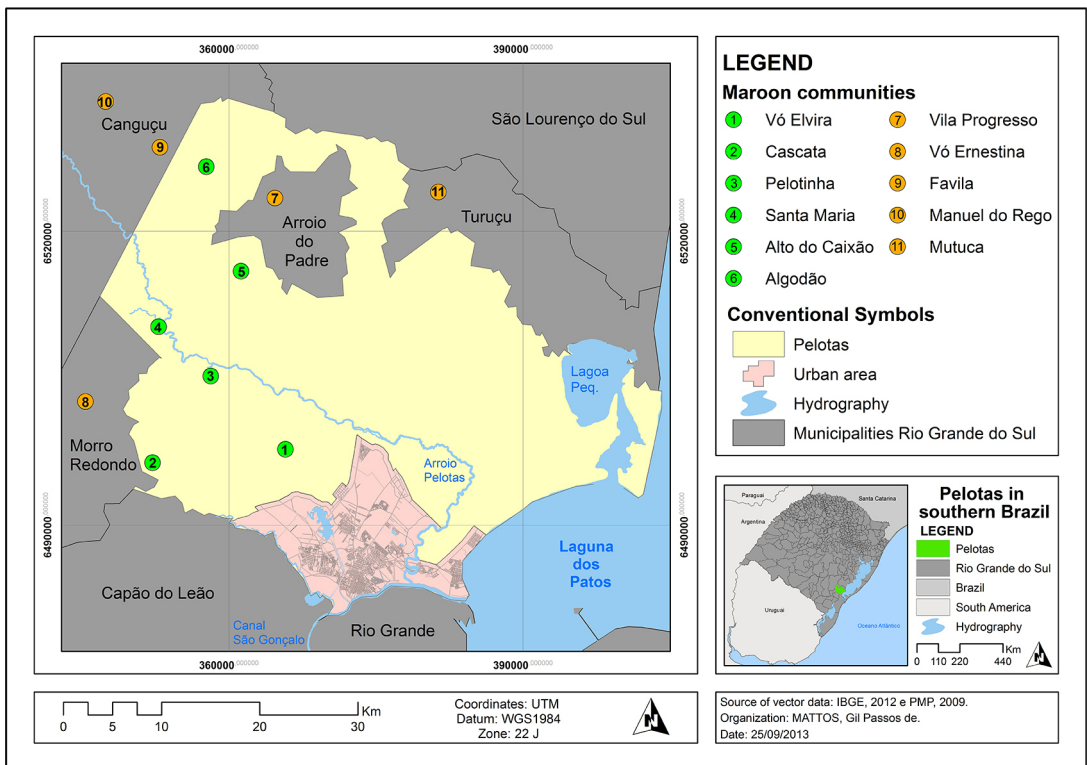


FIGURE 1. Maroon communities on Pelotas. (Map by Lúcio Menezes Ferreira, 2015.)

were civil wars, guerrilla conflicts, dictatorships, and endless internecine struggle. This meant that for several decades there were mass killings, detention camps, torture, and much more. All this started to change in the mid-1970s with the demise of dictatorships in Portugal, Spain, and Greece, and with the often unintended side effects in Latin America. With the demise of the Soviet bloc in 1989, Latin America witnessed an almost universal trend toward freedom of expression and recognition of diversity as a social value. The study of repression and the search for missing corpses, however, took a variety of routes, depending on the specificities within different countries. Argentina was and still is at the forefront of confronting the material heritage of dictatorship, while Chile and Brazil, on the other end of the spectrum, were and still are prone to avoid any serious attempt to address the concerns of those interested in uncovering the consequences of dictatorship.

It is thus easy to understand the future role of forensic historical archaeology in Latin America, as attested by the recently published volume, *Memories from Darkness: Archaeology of Repression and Resistance in Latin America* (Funari, Zarankin et al. 2009). The identification of missing people will be a major task for the next few decades, particularly as former acolytes of the dictatorial regimes die and will no longer be there to deny access to the bodies. It is perhaps difficult for people living in the U.S. or Britain to understand how complex it is to deal with a recent past of oppression and abuse of human rights, most of the time with the collaboration of archaeologists who gladly worked with dictatorships. Up to now, only Argentina had been able to set up an important scholarly team to study the subject, the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team, established as early as 1984, soon after the demise of military rule. Elsewhere, as other countries have lagged behind, the archaeological study of the subject is still in its infancy. Still, this is a most promising field, for it relates to Latin America's deepest concerns: social relations and emotional ties. Missing people are not perceived, most of the time and by most people, as a rational concern. In fact, they are not. There is no rational, capitalist reason

to be concerned with those who were killed and literally disappeared some time ago. The reason several people are concerned with the issue is not rational, but emotional or religious, if it is considered at a deeper level. The absence of funeral rites for the deceased is a most human concern, considering that some people would define humans as those who pay respect to dead people. However, this is not a concern in countries with a much larger number of missing people, such as Germany or France. The scars in Latin America are due to several reasons, not least the religious or sentimental perception that those missing people should not be ignored. We strongly believe that this most uncaptalist feature will shape historical archaeology in the next few decades.

The Emergence of Local Identities

Last but not least, we anticipate a huge interest in local identities as a main concern over the next few decades. Historical archaeology is always a product of social concerns, and, increasingly, people are interested in their own historical identities, be they ethnic, sexual, or otherwise. Material culture is a key element in all those interests. Gender archaeology will be more and more relevant, as women challenge patriarchy in most patriarchal societies, which still thrive in Latin America. Notably, even as archaeology has been a male preserve elsewhere, Latin American women have long played key roles in Brazilian archaeology and in other countries. Material culture of women is overwhelming in historical archaeology, considering that pottery had been a female preserve until industrial production. In the same vein, we anticipate that other gender-identity issues will gather momentum, including queer studies of material culture in the historical and recent past. It would be a natural consequence of the legislation in favor of equality under the law for women and homosexuals that the archaeological study of these areas will gain traction in the next few decades.

A more contentious issue relates to local identities. Since independence in the early 19th century, Hispanic Latin America has been prone to division and even warfare

within and between countries. Several wars were fought in the last 200 years, and one country, Panama, was born out of another independent country, Colombia, after a war in 1903. Several countries faced local claims for self-rule or independence, as in the case of Indian communities in several countries. In Brazil, there were several break-away wars just after independence in 1822, and local identities gained legal status since restoration of democracy in 1985 and devolution of powers to states, municipalities, and indigenous and maroon communities. All those moves indicate that the historical archaeology of maroons, but also of Indian communities and regions with identity claims, will prosper. A different subject, but related, is the study of excluded people, such as African Latin American material culture, and workers in general. Latin America has been characterized by massive income inequalities, but those imbalances have been challenged in the last quarter century, and this continuing trend may lead to more attention given by historical archaeologists to evidence of excluded and impoverished people of the past.

Conclusion

Our own understanding of the future of historical archaeology in Latin America may indicate how we consider the discipline will develop worldwide. We anticipate an increasing expansion of historical archaeology, so that it will address issues relevant for people in Asia and Africa, and this may change the discipline in big ways. When China and India embrace the archaeological study of the recent past, this will shift the discipline from being the study of the spread of European material culture worldwide to how modernity is a complex mix of old and new values, capitalist and noncapitalist, colonialist and local. Historical archaeology has all that is needed to become much more diversified, as it includes scholars and practitioners from different countries and cultural and social backgrounds. From its origin as a WASP discipline, historical archaeology may really become the study of material culture relevant to people worldwide. It may be a difficult path, with a variety of hurdles, but it will flourish and blossom for a much wider audience, inside and outside academia.

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