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# Against reactionary populism: Towards a new public archaeology

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## Introduction

From Brazil to the United Kingdom, 2016 was a critical year in global politics. The panorama changed so dramatically and so fast, that it will surely have a long-lasting impact in archaeology, anthropology and related fields. Heritage, ethics and the way we relate to the public will all be affected in one way or another. In this article we reflect critically on the phenomenon of reactionary populism and how it affects the practice and theory of archaeology. By reactionary populism we understand a political form that is anti-liberal in terms of identity politics (multiculturalism, abortion, minority rights, religion, etc.) but ultimately liberal regarding economic policies. It is characterized by exacerbated nationalism, racism, xenophobia, the defence of male privilege, anti-elitism in discourse, though not in practice, and anti-intellectualism (see critiques in Žižek 2006; Brass 2017). In the last instance, as Judith Butler states in a recent interview, it wants “to restore an earlier state of society, driven by nostalgia or a perceived loss of privilege”<sup>1</sup>. Our intention here is to problematize commonly-held ideas about archaeology and heritage that have shaped the field during the last three decades. We argue that the liberal, multivocal model of the social sciences and the humanities is no longer a viable option and ask our colleagues to embrace an archaeology that is ready to intervene in wider public debates not limited to issues of heritage matters or of local relevance, is not afraid of defending in the public arena its expert knowledge, and is committed to reflective, critical teaching.

The triumph of Donald Trump on the US presidential elections of November 2016, only six months after Brexit, set off the political alarms. However, reactionary populism had been

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.zeit.de/kultur/2016-10/judith-butler-donald-trump-populism-interview/seite-2>

advancing steadily in large parts of the world, particularly after the global financial crisis of 2008. In Europe, France, Austria, the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark and Germany have seen the rise of extreme right parties, whereas in Poland and Hungary authoritarianism has risen to power. The situation is not different in other latitudes: Colombians voted "no" in a referendum on a much awaited peace agreement to put an end to a war lasting 50 years. In Argentina, ultra-liberal Mauricio Macri won the elections in November 2015 and ended 13 years of leftist governments in the country. In Brazil, a group of corrupt right-wing politicians toppled down a social-democratic president, Dilma Rousseff, with the support of important sectors of Brazilian society.

We argue that many social archaeologists (and cultural anthropologists) have promoted an agenda during the last decades that have left us politically and theoretically disempowered. By social archaeology we understand all archaeologies concerned with the interface between the discipline and society, including public, community and indigenous archaeologies, and heritage studies (Merriman 2004; Smith and Wobst 2004; Smith 2006). In particular, we take issue with critical heritage studies (Harrison 2013; Waterton and Smith 2010), which have acquired a position of dominance in most research exploring the relations between society and heritage. While we share the social aspirations of our colleagues, we part ways in our diagnostic of the situation and the proposed solutions. As stated in the foundational manifesto of the Association of the Critical Heritage Studies (ACHS)<sup>2</sup>, members of the association examine the relations of power that are at work in the production and management of heritage. It is argued that heritage has been shaped by nationalism, imperialism, cultural elitism, racism, classism, and the fetishizing of expert knowledge, all of which has left outside a large part of the world population. To reverse this situation ACHS encourages the participation of people and communities that to date have been excluded from the creation and management of heritage. But who are the people and in what exactly are we inviting them to participate?

## **Are the People of Archaeology “The People”?**

We surmise that the approach proposed by mainstream public archaeology and critical heritage studies is not satisfactory among other things because the People cannot be directly equated with the people with whom archaeologists work and who are usually identified with specific social groups, often, but not always, in a position of subalternity. Unfortunately, there has not been sufficient reflection on the subjects of social archaeology and critical heritage management. Who is the public, who is indigenous, who is a subaltern, who are “People” are questions that have only been superficially addressed. All too often, archaeologists have contented themselves with simplified images of society. Communities have been equated with specific groups defined by gender, ethnicity, race or sexual orientation, and described almost invariably in positive, almost epic, terms (Brass 2017). This had led to dichotomies which have become hegemonic, namely, between authorized and official versus non-authorized and informal heritage, or top-down versus bottom-up initiatives (Smith 2006). Authorized, top-down archaeology and heritage are described as authoritarian and conservative, their opposite as spontaneous and democratic.

Archaeologists have thus been expected to be always with the People, understand their needs and advocate their cause (Atalay et al. 2014). This has often lead to the assumption that every person, every community, can spontaneously reclaim their heritage. Gramsci, however, would put us on the alert as to what the spontaneity of the People actually means. He explained that in modern societies hegemonic projects tend to be presented as bottom-up and as the result of

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.criticalheritagestudies.org/history/>

social negotiation and consensus. Thus, we have helped communities throughout the world to understand and to “master” their own linear views of time and to have “a past”; we have taught them that their past belongs to them as heritage, that heritage is part of their identity with an intrinsic value, and, more recently, that the universality of heritage makes it a good tourist product. We have considered that heritage is universal and good and that the People have it by default.

In sum, we have invented the People that we needed. A People that might challenge old-fashioned perspectives of heritage and archaeology and may even ban access to this or that site or reclaim such and such things, but not a People that lacks a notion of heritage, is not interested in the past, questions democratic values or resists multiculturalism. As Žižek (2002: 542) perceptively wrote “We can go on making our small choices, ‘reinventing ourselves’, on condition that these choices do not disturb the social and ideological balance”. In a recent paper, Severin Fowles (2016) criticized the neomaterial turn arguing that archaeologists have found in things the perfect subject: one that does not dissent, lacks a proper voice, and complies with the archaeologist’s longing for empowering the subdued masses. Fowles, however, overlooks the fact that some archaeologists and heritage scholars are also quite comfortable working with The People under the hegemonic multicultural framework (hegemonic so far: things might change with the reactionary backlash). They are comfortable at least with some of them: homeless, Afro-descendants, indigenous peoples, working classes, immigrants. They are perfect subjects also, because they match very well the ethical-political imagination of both the liberal and Marxist practitioner. However, many people that could be easily labelled subalterns (for being economically marginalized, for instance, or belonging to the working classes) or at least as members of the People, actually seem intent into disappointing archaeologists by behaving in the wrong way: being as greedy as the ideal capitalist, patriarchal, xenophobic, uninterested in the past, etc. Yet about these unruly subalterns we hear little.

At work here there is an idealization of community and heritage: capitalism, exploitation and predation are always seen as *exterior* to the People, who will challenge these external enemies when they gather together—but each community (homeless, Cherokee, African-American, LGBTQ, etc.) on its own. This fragmentation of struggles (each subaltern community with its micro-fight) does not necessarily lead to greater social cohesion and political awareness, but rather to a generalization of the scapegoat culture, so dear to reactionary populisms (Žižek 2006). Social networks and new media have further exacerbated this problem: as an experiment by The Washington Post proved during the American elections, new forms of communication, such as the Internet or cable TV, have not only increased the fragmentation of struggles, but also of worldviews. Thus, as a member of a group (i.e. liberal, white, Western academics) one can be totally unaware of what other groups (i.e. unemployed citizens of small US mid-West towns) think, consume as news and react to<sup>3</sup>. The prioritization of the community as both the analytical focus of research and the locus of activism is, in fact, politically problematic. Rose (1999, 188), for instance, has shown that the ethics and politics of “governing through community” rationalizes the community as the appropriate locus for tackling social problems such as welfare, architecture, police, psychology or crime, thus leading to a wicked confluence: the state retreats; local self-responsibility and autonomy increases. This is very much in tune with the neoliberal politics of privatization and social atomization.

Communities—the units in which The People are decomposed these days—are diverse, fragmented and complex. Some are progressive, some are not; some are cohesive, others are ridden by internecine conflicts. As Gaston Gordillo (2014, 257) has noted, the disposition of many working people “are multifaceted and contextual, and cannot be neatly encapsulated within a ‘counter-hegemonic’ collective positioning”. However, archaeologists and heritage

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<sup>3</sup> <http://graphics.wsj.com/blue-feed-red-feed/> Accessed 15 June 2017

practitioners have often transferred the qualities of the critical, enlightened subaltern (such as politicized indigenous groups or class-conscious working classes) to every community with which they work and, in the last instance, to the People as a whole—and here we understand, though this is hardly stated in any work of social archaeology, that the People are the non-elites, so between 70% and 95% of the population of any country. Almost everything that is popular, bottom-up and local is thus celebrated.

This is what we call, following Ramón Grosfoguel (2008), “epistemic populism”, which means that what the People say is right because it is the People who say it. What makes a statement true is not the logical consistency of the statement, but who utters it. This obviously resonates with the notion of post-truth, which has become popular after the 2016 debacle, but forgets the intricacies of the very old relationship between truth and power as exposed by Foucault. Before the new wave of reactionary populism, epistemic populism had become hegemonic in social archaeology and heritage studies (e.g. Waterton and Smith 2010; Byrne 2014; Graham and Schofield 2014; Atalay et al. 2014), to the point that it has become anathema to criticize it: a critique to the paradigm is seen as a critique to the People and as elitism.

What we argue here is that epistemic populism is not the solution to engage with society. First, it misrepresents the complexity of The People, by being blind to every social group that does not tally well with our progressive values. Second, the use of the language of multivocality and multiculturalism reveals an uncanny alignment with post-political neoliberalism or, more specifically, with what Nancy Fraser (January 2, 2017) has called “progressive neoliberalism” (that is, progressive politics reduced to political correctness). Our Latin American colleagues are well aware of this: multicultural archaeology goes hand in hand with capitalist endeavours and the interests of the nation-state (Shepherd and Haber, 2011). Multicultural archaeology endorses a form of ethical cosmopolitanism that tolerates difference, promotes alternative symbols and their public representation, but silences narratives and practices that truly escape the neoliberal logic (Gnecco 2015). A third problem is that multivocal and multicultural archaeologies reconstruct the transcendental subject: the one who speaks is the one who matters. This leaves outside those who do not or cannot speak or be heard (Spivak 1988), while at the same time limits emancipatory politics to the right to narrate (Žižek 2004: 547-548). Elections around the globe during the last few years, however, have shaken the certainties of epistemic populism and its alliance with multiculturalism.

## **Three things we have learnt from the reactionary onslaught**

There are three main lessons that can be drawn from the advance of reactionary populism across the world. First, we have learnt that mere and more liberalism is not enough to face this political phenomenon. Liberal archaeology, anthropology and the humanities and social sciences more generally are defenceless against Mr. Trump, the French National Front or Golden Dawn, the ultranationalist Greek party. Liberal archaeology has been incorporating more subjects into the hegemonic project of global liberalism *symbolically*, that is, by allowing them to co-participate in the production, staging and consumption of cultural identities and heritage experiences. However, neoliberalism has failed to incorporate these same subjects to the *material* wealth capitalism promised, especially after the 2008 economic crisis: it has provided symbols, but no jobs.

If archaeology emerged as a discipline of the bourgeoisie and for the bourgeoisie with the Industrial Revolution (Trigger 1989), social archaeologies and the heritage industry thrived in the context of the multicultural, liberal democracies of the last three decades. However, we have transitioned from the *proletariat* to the *precariat*—a precariat that is engulfing even the archaeological profession (McGuire 2008: 98-138; Cleary et al. 2014). The times of the

superfluous individual have come, that is, an individual who is not even exploited but merely *excluded* from the system. Capitalism is a system based as much on exclusion as on symbolic subjection and material attachment. The problem is that the system is less and less capable of counting on subjects shaped by stable experiences of work, discipline, education and processes of valorization (Sennett 1998), which is the framework under which archaeology and heritage made sense. What do we have to offer, as archaeologists, to the denizens of the decaying towns of the US Midwest? Or the impoverished, racially-segregated suburbs of European metropolises? What these other marginalized collectives think about archaeology and heritage—the people who vote for Le Pen, for instance— has been rarely examined, but for all that we know they care little, if at all, unlike the other communities with whom we usually work. Producing more narratives, encouraging communities to participate in our projects or revaluing local heritage will not stop the reactionary wave.

The reactionary ideology of right-wing populism is based on a scapegoat culture predicated upon fear and hatred of the Other and it preys on communities ravaged by economic crisis and social disarray. Liberal archaeology, suffused with epistemic populism, does not provide us with the political or intellectual weapons necessary to face what is coming: the coalition of predatory capitalism and reactionary populism. However, the critique of reactionary populism should not make us oblivious of its roots: neoliberalism and its socioeconomic consequences that have given rise to social discontent, exclusion and inequality. It does not matter if reactionaries lose ground (as with the 2017 Dutch and French elections): the tendency seems unstoppable because the neoliberal alternative will just feed them. The critique of neoliberalism is therefore as urgent as ever

Another thing that we may learn from the current political situation is that archaeologists are perhaps not as fearsome agents of Empire as we thought, even if some of them have collaborated eagerly with it. In the commercial sector, some archaeologists wonder: what is it going to happen with Cultural Resource Management (CRM) if the ultraconservative right applies its policies? A not unlikely scenario is that the US joins the club of Brazil, Peru, Greece or Spain, where the right and its lobbies have drastically undercut the requirements for conducting cultural impact assessment. The material remains of the past, living traditions and the environment can often be destroyed with little or no consultation (of either external experts or local communities) in the pursuit of ever-growing profit. Despite what some argue (e.g., Hutchings and La Salle 2015), predatory capitalism does not really need archaeologists, simply because it does not need legitimizing narratives: that was the outdated project of nationalism and archaeologists are not even needed for that anymore (see Popa 2016). It only needs the likes of Messrs. Trump, Temer or Macri, who are willing to lift all obstacles in its way.

But perhaps the most important thing that we have learnt is that there were other marginalized collectives out there who were not self-assertive indigenous communities, liberal African-Americans, class-conscious industrial workers or homeless interested in documenting their lives. These other subalterns are white trash and they claim to be the (long forsaken) People: a neo-Nazi journal stated, referring to Mr. Trump's victory, that "The Working Class Won the Election"<sup>4</sup>. The working class was supposed to be our People. With immigrants, indigenous and other groups, they were supposed to be the bottom-up producers of non-authorized heritage. But, again, do we even know or ask ourselves how much do they care or know about heritage or archaeology? Something seems to have gone terribly wrong and we have not seen it coming. Whether we like it or not, the truth is that part of the far-right constituency is made of low-class voters who felt betrayed by the neoliberal order—the same that kindly accedes to ethical cosmopolitanism, harmless cultural diversity, LGBTQ rights and even immigrant heritage (Fraser 2017). These are people who are poor, uneducated, long-term unemployed, often drug-addicts,

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<sup>4</sup> <http://nationalvanguard.org/2016/11/the-working-class-won-the-election/>

whose only way of eking out a living is joining the army or getting subsidies, and who live in depressed environments, without the help of the community ties and social identity that guarantee some measure of ontological security to other subalterns—i.e., they are the superfluous people (superfluous for capital).

We knew beforehand, of course, that bad subalterns did exist, but they were identified with sectors of the People gone rogue: the best example would be immigrants turned jihadists through experiences of social marginalization and racism. But now we have found out that there were other rogue subalterns. And they are much more powerful politically (because they are many). They are as poor, disempowered and culturally disoriented as second-generation immigrants in a Belgian *banlieu*, but they are also white, xenophobic and racist. They are ignorant and they are angry. These common folks are probably not so much interested in rewriting history. It is not an issue of representation and storytelling that is at stake—the kind of issue that archaeologists like because they are good at it. It is political economy and a redefinition of class and identity. Social archaeologists and heritage students, alas, have little to offer in this situation. They may document the relentless suppression of various forms of alterity, whose pace will increase in the coming years, and compensate this destructive process through the form of symbolic restitution that cultural heritage provides, but this will just satisfy the cultural needs of the liberal and educated middle classes. They may also help out transforming into heritage those economic sectors that will be shattered by the advance of unbridled capitalism: as we know, whenever an economic activity disappears, a museum is open in its place to showcase that same activity. But this will hardly appease those losers of global capitalism who opted for reactionary populism.

### Three things we can do

We are not defeatists. We do not think that the situation is hopeless. Quite the contrary, we believe that archaeology has the opportunity to redefine its relation with society. But this will only be possible if we get rid of epistemic populism. We need to face social reality as it is: complex and often ugly. Complex in that communities are extremely diverse and not always progressive. We cannot divide society into the bad (the elite), the good (the little guys and the scholars who work with them) and the ugly (scholars and professionals at the service of hegemony). Sometimes the wretched of the Earth side with the bad. Eastern and southern Europe, Africa and Latin America have a well researched and repeated genealogy of communities that do not behave “properly”, do not vote “correctly” or defend the “right” ideas, instead supporting dictatorships and oligarchies, or engaging in ethnic and political cleansing. Perhaps for this reason we are not so surprised for the election of Mr. Trump or Brexit. Perhaps for this reason also some of us have never embraced eagerly critical heritage studies and considered that the epistemic populism that is inherent to them can hardly address our problems. But rejecting it, of course, is not enough. We are not suggesting that we have to relapse into old-fashioned academic authoritarianism and treat people as if they were minors who have to be reprimanded. We have neither to “bow to populism nor retreat to a readerly position that is ultimately a refusal to engage” (Pluciennik 2015: 80). In our view, a socially-committed archaeology can do three things:

First, *we need an archaeology that provokes the People*, instead of flattering them (Sloterdijk 2001); this means a discipline that tells things that are uncomfortable and even against the flow, that problematizes and complicates narratives, histories, identities. We need an archaeology involved in historical explanation and not just lively storytelling or hyper-specific archaeometric analyses. Telling uncomfortable truths to those who are already convinced and ready to listen (our usual audiences) is not enough: we need to engage those who are on the antipodes of (even) liberal thinking. We must abandon our comfort zones and be ready to get battered in

dirty fights. Provocation and community-work may not be good partners, but then public archaeology should not be limited to community archaeology. Community engagement is still enormously important, but is not enough. The public is bigger than the community. To serve the interest of “the people as a whole” (one of the meanings of “public”), archaeologists have to perform critical public interventions that go beyond the local sphere and create social links and support collective action (McGuire 2008: 39-46) without reifying closed communities and identities. In that, historians, philosophers and sociologists provide good role models: they have often played a crucial public role without being attached to a specific community (Guldi and Armitage 2014). In fact, the effectiveness of their work lies precisely in their independence.

Second, *we need an archaeology that teaches*. We need a critical and transformative pedagogy that teaches about archaeology but also uses archaeology to teach (Bartoy 2012). This pedagogical archaeology—which learns in the process of educating—converses with social movements, communities, and institutions but is not necessarily attached to specific localities or groups. Education has lost prominence among social archaeologists lately and is absent from some manifestos (see various examples in Atalay et al. 2014). Collaboration with local communities, which is the current hegemonic model of our relationship with society, requires a symmetry between actors that is at odds with the very idea of teaching, which presupposes a teacher and a pupil, a provider and a receiver of knowledge. Admittedly, teaching by archaeologists is totally out of place in many non-Western (indigenous) contexts, where archaeologists have indeed more to learn than to teach. But it is direly needed in many others.

Since the early 1980s, we have grown accustomed to deconstruct our truths, to criticize the Enlightenment, reason and of modernity. Yet relativizing objectivity and deconstructing disciplines are probably things that reactionary populists are ready to celebrate: they will see in that further proof of our weakness and futility. We defend that we have to reconstruct a new objectivity, even if we know that this is impossible to attain (Criado-Boado, 2001). This new and critical objectivity should be at the base of our teaching. If we relinquish teaching, if we only encourage others, we will become more and more useless as social scientists: we may end up as mere facilitators, social media managers or entertainers, while others will do our work in our place. And we might not like it.

We have to teach not because we want everybody to see the world with the eyes of an archaeologist so as to further our own agendas (Holtorf 2007). We should not see the interests of archaeology and the interests of common people as in a perpetual struggle. To understand, manifest and (often) preserve the traces of the past is in the interest of society, even if it is not immediately obvious to everybody (as the construction of a parking lot or a hospital is). The fact that it is not immediately obvious is what makes teaching necessary in the first place. However, the idea is not to convince people that heritage is universal and good and everybody has it, as we have always done (both conservative practitioners and critical heritage researchers do: what changes is what is considered heritage).

Instead, we believe that archaeologists, as social scientists, have unique tools to understand the world critically. Against prejudice, racism and xenophobia, it is social critique that we need more urgently. We have all too often relinquished epistemic authority, but it is not too late to regain it. Not the artificial authority of our academic position, but the authority provided by knowledge, skill and experience that, as anarchism has taught us, people tend to respect (Angelbeck and Grier 2012: 552). This authority we will regain not by waving our titles, but by reformulating the relationships and values that connect the discipline and the public. We cannot therefore simply rely on positivistic scientific rhetoric. We need to build trust on the discipline and on our role as social agents (Alonso González 2016), who produce knowledge that is not reducible to mere subjective practices (Criado-Boado 2001). Bruno Latour (2013) can be useful here, when he tackles the question of how to construct non-patronizing authoritative scientific discourses in a context of public distrust. As with any other scientific discipline, the reinforcement of the

epistemic authority of archaeology would require an “appeal to the institution of science, rather than science. It is a question of trust, not of certainty. Certainty is epistemological, the institution of science requires much more” (Latour 2013: 3). We will achieve the credibility, reputation and legitimacy that build trust by doing our best job as archaeologists, not by flattering the masses.

Third, we do not need to go against heritage; rather, we need *an archaeology that escapes the 'heritage crusade'*. Lowenthal (1996) developed this concept to illustrate the way in which heritage had shifted from being a preoccupation of some cultured elites, to become a major popular pursuit in recent decades. Enlisting ourselves in this crusade may mean to be ready to do almost anything to please audiences—a Spanish project has recently proposed to put Pokemons in museums and heritage sites as a way to attract the public<sup>5</sup>. Heritage evicts historicity to valorize the symbolic aspects of cultural processes. Seeing heritage as a social construction has been a crucial move of critical heritage studies, but it leaves untouched the definition of the category of heritage, and the reasons for the need for transforming things, people and cultural processes into heritage. The gist of the heritage crusade under capitalism is value, which is simultaneously symbolic and economic. However, cultural and economic aspects are usually regarded as separate: the former fall into the realm of ethics, while the latter are naturalized as part of the normal state of affairs. Social archaeologists and critical heritage scholars normally deal with cultural and ethical aspects, and criticize the commodification of heritage. In accepting the separation between economy and culture, however, they fall prey to a specifically Western capitalist paradox described by Gilles Dauvé: “Equality of rights alongside social inequality”.

The heritage crusade has a lot to do with the increasing pressure of neoliberal mandates in institutions to make science ‘useful’. This has been part of the general crisis of the humanities and their apparent lack of usability. This crisis only arrived after the natural sciences surrendered to State and company-sponsored demands for usefulness, productivity and applicability, which were fulfilled through the alliance of science, technology and industry that won the Second World War. Archaeology as a producer of knowledge about the past was not in the best position to meet such demands. A practical solution, however, came with the recasting of the discipline as a producer of heritage. But there is a problem here: as in the case of CRM, the truth is that capital does not need us for promoting heritage as a commodity. After all, archaeologists are not the best at producing economic value: others do this better than us: here is the reason for the economic crisis of commercial archaeology and its lack of capacity for creating new sustainable economic activities (Schlanger 2010). Instead, consider the economically successful (and invented) sites of Puma Punku in Bolivia, the Pyramids of Güimar in the Canary Islands, or the historically-themed resorts of South Africa (Hall and Bombardella 2005), but also of the prevalence of pseudoarchaeological narratives in (real) and relevant sites such as Tiwanaku in Bolivia and the TV show *Stone Me*, a sort of Stone Age Big Brother. As producers of economic value through heritage, we are largely irrelevant to global capitalism; as producers of symbolic value through multivocality and multiculturalism, we are politically harmless.

Thus, we need to start thinking not in terms of heritage (either hegemonic or alternative, top-down or bottom up), but in overcoming the dichotomies between critical and practical or applied heritage, and thinking outside heritage altogether. This does not mean being anti-heritage in any essentialist fashion, as if we were opposing heritage ontologically (supporting its erasure and rejecting preservation policies) or epistemologically (relinquishing the concept and its analytic potential from scholarly debate). Far from it. Two decades ago already, Lowenthal (1998: 100) described (and criticized) the “anti-heritage animus” permeating much of the theoretical corpus of heritage studies. Similarly, Winter (2013) has recently criticized anti-heritage attitudes within critical heritage studies, reclaiming the positive aspects of heritage and

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.elmundo.es/cataluna/2016/09/01/57c7f51f22601d9e6d8b45a1.html> Accessed 15 June 2017.

the need to collaborate with CRM and non-academic heritage practitioners facing the risk of disciplinary isolation. But this ethical and normative assertion (heritage is or can be good) is depoliticizing and does not help explain our current situation and the dilemmas and contradictions pervading the heritage concept itself. We are not naïve: avoiding a problem does not make the problem disappear. Similarly, doing away with heritage (physically or conceptually) changes nothing. Changing something requires a critical conceptual engagement with heritage that must be paralleled with a transformative practice that goes beyond it. This implies exploring ways in which history and memory can bypass the capitalist-modernist logic underpinning the conceptualization and practice of heritage. This includes not only non-Western practices but also folk traditions in the West that have been hitherto hijacked by reactionaries (Hamilakis 2011).

Released from the anxieties of practical usefulness, economic performance, immediate applicability, and popular acceptance to which heritage management subjects us, we can move beyond self-deprecation, recover self-confidence, and reclaim archaeology as a critical form of knowledge production, capable of intervening in pressing social issues with an original insight (González-Ruibal 2013). Provocation, engagement and education, rather than flattering and collaboration, should become the new key concepts guiding our relationship with society, or at least with those sectors of society that have remained beyond our radar.

**To conclude:** we have to make archaeology political again. This might put us in uncomfortable positions, but we must engage with reactionary populism face to face and tackle its underlying political, social and economic problems, if we wish to be helpful in stopping its growth. Simultaneously, we must stop flirting with progressive neoliberalism and go beyond those issues of identity, ethics and narrative that have occupied the political imagination of archaeology for three decades. We need to go back to the hard core of politics—radical dissent, conflict, inequality—and reconstruct archaeology as a public engaged practice to make it a truly critical voice in the global stage.

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