5. VERNACULAR COSMOPOLITANISM: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF UNIVERSALISTIC REASON
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Eïa pour ceux qui n’ont jamais rien inventé
pour ceux qui n’ont jamais rien exploré
pour ceux qui n’ont jamais rien dompté
mais ils s’abandonnent, saisis, à l’essence de toute chose
—Aimé Césaire (1956 [1939])

Throughout this chapter I argue that our concern for others, as archaeologists, has been caught up in the neoliberal rhetoric of development, which helps to maintain and justify, in the long term, the inequalities it purports to alleviate. Moreover, some archaeological preconceptions in the past and some research strategies in the present have helped, in a conscious or unconscious way, to construct indigenous communities as dispensable or improvable. Here I propose another sort of archaeological engagement, drawing upon the work of Žižek and Bhabha among others, which is both cosmopolitan and vernacular in its scope. This archaeology excavates the present in order to understand from within the destructive effects of globalization, modernism, and development, and it explores the genealogies of collaboration between the discipline and universalistic theories of progress. In so doing, it intends to provide a more radical critique of the modern world than it is usually offered in our field of research. The work presented here is a mixture of archaeology and ethnography that has been carried out in Ethiopia and Brazil.

The Archaeological Rhetoric of International Cooperation
I am suspicious of some community-oriented, multicultural, and multivocal archaeology that is being carried out nowadays. I am totally convinced that many archaeologists are truly serious in their concern for others, but it is hard not to see something of a fashionable
attitude behind many projects that purportedly pay attention to local communities. We should be helping people and collaborating with them without any specific interest in mind, but it seems hard for us to put our academic agendas aside. What I find compelling about a cosmopolitan practice is its statement that we have obligations and responsibilities with regard to others (Nussbaum 1996; Appiah 2006a). It is an ethic imperative of Kantian resonance, not a choice that we graciously make: there is nothing to boast about an obligation. Doing cosmopolitan archaeology ought to mean that we take for granted that others matter. However, even when we are doing humanitarian work, dialoguing with stakeholders, or reflecting upon the social consequences of our research, we have a very particular, although somewhat unconscious, academic interest in mind.

Slavoj Žižek is a scathing critic of the humanitarian activities that many scholars practice today: “Many Western academics cling to some humanitarian ritual . . . as the proof that, at the core of their being, they are not just cynical career-oriented individuals but human beings naively and sincerely trying to help others. However . . . what if this humanitarian activity is a fetish, a false distance that allows them to pursue their power struggles and ambitions with the clear conscience that they are not really ‘that,’ that their heart is ‘elsewhere’?” (Žižek 2004: 178–79). His critique is pertinent to archaeology, too. I distrust much engaged archaeology because it seems to be translated in the condescending language of charity, which entails a sense of superiority and an inability to see underlying structural problems. Again, Žižek (2004: 179) pitilessly attacks this attitude by saying that “the developed countries are constantly ‘helping’ the undeveloped (with aid, credits, etc.), thereby avoiding the key issue, namely, their complicity in and coreponsibility for the miserable situation of the undeveloped.” The way we help the people with whom we work, as archaeologists, recalls too much, too often that of other well-meant private or public agencies devoted to the promotion of welfare in third world nations. The vocabulary of many NGOs and some archaeologists unwittingly resonates with the (neo)colonial rhetoric of development.

It seems that there is some naïveté in the way public archaeology is often portrayed in specialized publications. Tales of archaeology and development generally end with a self-praise, both of the archaeological team and archaeology in general. It is possible to
detect a certain unabashed heroization of the discipline in this kind of discourse. Take an excerpt from a typical heroic archaeology: “In conclusion, the benefits from our contributions to public archaeology in a small Andean community have been fruitful for both local communities and archaeologists. . . . Such experiences place communities in positions to receive benefits (i.e., employment) from future archaeological projects and open the door to the possibility of economic development through tourism. . . . Thus, local communities and officials now have a better understanding concerning the process of archaeology, the important archaeological sites that exist on their land, and the need to protect them” (Duwe 2006: 6). Similar projects, couched in a comparable language, can be found during colonial times in different places of the world. A good example is that of Sir Henry Wellcome’s excavations in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (Addison 1951). Wellcome was an American millionaire who sponsored excavations and development projects in Sudan between 1910 and 1938. His excavations in the site of Jebel Moya gave work to hundreds of Sudanese peasants, whose training in “industrial habits” favored the transformation of their “wild spirit” into “more peaceful attitudes,” as Sir Henry noted (Abdel-Hamid 2000). He promoted a series of development projects in the area, including a model village, roads, new farming systems, forestation, training in diverse crafts, and health services. A mixture of paternalism and hard discipline characterized the whole enterprise. Wellcome was considered by archaeologists and politicians alike to be a true philanthropist and a “world benefactor.” His was a “loving and compassionate imperialism” (see the chapter by Scham, this volume) imposed on the locals without dialogue or consent.

The aim of bringing up this example is to reveal comparable agendas and rhetorics in colonial and modern (neocolonial) archaeologies: we find similar well-meant attitudes among archaeologists and a not much different self-heroization as saviors of an underdeveloped community. The real “thinliness” of the engagement is also very typical. I had the occasion to confirm that nothing is left of the development projects started by Wellcome in a visit to the place in January 2000. The most durable element is the monument that Sir Henry made to himself: the House of Boulders. Colonial and
neocolonial archaeologists work on the short term, on the surface. They rarely address structural problems and their projects are meant to fail (cf. also Hodder 2003: 65).

It is widely accepted now that community archaeology should start by acknowledging indigenous perceptions of history, instead of portraying Western science as the only way of engaging with the past (Y. Marshall 2002; Wobst 2005). This comes along with a wider awareness among social scientists involved in development projects of the relevance of local knowledge (Escobar 1994). However, when it comes to cooperation, it still has to be accepted that a thorough critique of the situation of that community (why things are the way they are) is necessary, too. Local knowledge, without an understanding of global historical processes and the overall political context, has little use. Otherwise, by focusing on temporary (mainly economic) remedies, we help, in the long run, to reinforce the image and the existence of the “other” as perpetually dependent and undeveloped. Andre Gunder Frank (1996: 24) admitted that development studies such as those he used to carry out were not part of the solution, but rather part of the problem, because they helped to deny “the real problem and the real solution, which lay in politics.” The apolitical rhetoric of cooperation implies that the problem is always with them (Bauman 2004: 43–44): they have the problem and lack the knowledge. Nongovernmental organizations, international agencies, and even archaeologists drop from the sky, as *dei ex machina*, with knowledge and solutions to the local problems (which are rarely local). A reflection on how our own archaeological practice and theory may be a problem, instead of a solution, is urgently needed.

My point is that our critique as engaged intellectuals can be more useful in the long term, as Bourdieu (2001: 37–38; 2004: 44–45) imputed, than our stopgap solutions as (bad) NGOs. Instead of interrogating the operations of international agencies and development policies, as anthropologists and sociologists have already done (among many others, J. Ferguson 1990; Escobar 1994; Chew and Denemark 1996; Arce and Long 2000; Edelman and Haugerud 2003), we have taken for granted that aid for development is the right thing to do, and we have uncritically followed the path of international agencies, putting plasters where open-heart surgery was needed. Thus, many cooperation works undertaken by archaeologists (and not only archaeologists) are at best temporary remedies,
in some cases applied without the consent of the victims: this is just papering over the cracks of global disorder. Archaeology endows us with a way of reasoning and reflecting upon the problems of humanity that is original and powerful: we work with material culture—development, the state, and modernity are about material culture, too—and with the long term—conflicts and problems in a given area are rarely new. It is up to us to make the most of our discipline to understand and criticize the world or keep being mediocre imitators of other specialists. Actually, some of the most thought-provoking and reflexive public archaeology has dealt seriously with the social and historical causes of present troubles (e.g., Leone 2005). I do not see why we should be doing something different in third world contexts (cf. M. Hall 2000). This, of course, does not preclude any other kind of more “practical” and direct help in heritage management or in any other field, but it is essential to problematize the figure of the archaeologist in the role of voluntary worker, the concept of development, and the idea of “cooperation” itself.

**Vernacular Cosmopolitanism: Archaeology on the Border**

Can cosmopolitanism be the answer to the colonial rhetoric of international cooperation and development? It might be, but probably not in the way many intellectuals have outlined cosmopolitanism. Wallerstein (1996: 124) thinks that the stance “citizen of the world” is deeply ambiguous: “It can be used just as easily to sustain privilege as to undermine it.” There are basically two kinds of cosmopolitans: the powerful and the disempowered, those who have chosen to live with others in different countries, and those who have been forced to do so (such as labor migrants and refugees) (Werbner 2006; Beck and Szaider 2006: 7–8). The people in the first group, in which those archaeologists working in foreign countries are to be included, are allowed to be cosmopolitans, because they (or their states and societies) have made the *kosmos* into their *polis*, the *orbs* into their *urbs* (Pollock 2000: 602). It is easy to be cosmopolitan when power is on one’s side.

Appiah’s theories (2006a) are a good example of the elite-centered, self-satisfied streak of cosmopolitanism (see other chapters in this volume for more positive readings of the author). The cosmopolitan experiences that inform much of his work are those of a member of a privileged Westernized upper class who feels as much at ease in a royal
palace in Kumasi as at Princeton University. Appiah states throughout his book that we have obligations and responsibilities to others, but they are “not monstrous or unreasonable. They do not require us to abandon our own lives. They entail . . . no heroism” (Appiah 2006a: 174). Not if heroism is understood in the neoliberal-individualist way criticized above. But when one thinks, for example, of all the activists who have lost their lives defending indigenous and peasant rights, Appiah’s statement cannot but sound outrageous.

To say that the world today does not require heroisms because we are much better off implies a sanction of global capitalism and the status quo. That is a kind of a comfortable cosmopolitanism that allows Western(ized) elites to keep their lifestyles and worldviews, while at the same time it appeases their consciences: “What would the world look like if people always spent their money to alleviate diarrhea in the Third World and never on a ticket to the opera?,” asks Appiah (2006a: 166). The answer is simple: a much better world indeed. I do not only find his ethical standpoint wanting, to say the least, but also the theoretical basis of his cosmopolitanism, which leaves the question of the “other” largely unproblematized—the same with Nussbaum’s (1996) romantic vision of difference. Slavoj Žižek’s recent essay on otherness is much more thought provoking. Drawing on a critical reading of Judaism, Levinas, and other sources, Žižek (2005: 140) emphasizes the “alien, traumatic kernel” that forever exists in the “inert, impenetrable, enigmatic presence” of “my Neighbor.” He goes beyond Levinas though by trying to grasp the “inhuman Otherness itself” (Žižek 2005: 160). However, this troubling engagement with the Neighbor does not restrict our “infinite responsibility” to the other. Both Levinas and Žižek stress the unboundedness of our responsibility, in striking contrast to Appiah’s complacent limitations.

Furthermore, Appiah (2006a: 109–13) espouses the fashionable theory among anthropologists today that globalism is not homogeneity, but leads to endless creativity (cf. Inda and Rosaldo 2002). This, again, overlooks global structural inequalities, long-term processes of oppression, and the real and traumatic impact that Western culture and politics exercise over the third world. The anthropologists of globalization dehistoricize the phenomenon and naturalize neoliberalism (see critiques in Graeber 2002; Edelman and
Haugeraud 2003; Žižek and Daly 2004: 139–66). This is the problem too with multiculturalism, which Appiah (2006a: 104–5) criticizes with regard to identity but reproduces in other ways—for example, by ethically leveling discrepant voices: victims and tyrants, rich and poor, master and slave. Archaeology, with its long-term historical standpoint and its focus on destruction and ruins, may offer counternarratives to the anthropologists’ positive view of globalization.

Although there are some general ideas in which I agree with Appiah and other cosmopolitans of the same breed, I find this cosmopolitanism flawed, yet not the idea of cosmopolitanism per se, which I consider a way of articulating a concern for others without couching it in universalistic or paternalistic terms. A qualified cosmopolitanism, as proposed by Homi Bhabha among others, could be a starting point.

Bhabha (2001: 42–43) defines a vernacular or marginal cosmopolitanism based upon three main points: 1) it is a cosmopolitanism that stops short of the transcendent human universal and provides an ethical entitlement to the sense of community; 2) it is conscious of the insufficiency of the self and the imperative of openness to the needs of others; and 3) it finds in the victims of progress the best promise for ethical regeneration. Vernacular cosmopolitanism is equivalent to Julia Kristeva’s (1997: 274) “cosmopolitanism of those who have been flayed.” Vernacular cosmopolitans, says Bhabha (Bhabha and Comaroff 2002: 24) “are the heirs of Walter Benjamin’s view of modernity, that every act of civilization is also an act of barbarism.”

I believe, with Bhabha, that it is possible to be committed to the specificity of the (traumatic) event and yet to be “linked to a transhistorical memory and solidarity.” The way this cosmopolitanism works is illustrated by Bhabha through a poem by Adrienne Rich, in which a repetitive first person recounts different tragedies occurring in different locales and times. The same procedure was used before by Aimé Césaire (1956: 39) when he wrote “I shall be a Jew-man / A Kaffir-man / a Hindu-from-Calcutta-man / a man-from-Harlem-who-hasn’t-got-the-vote.” According to Bhabha (2001: 44), “The ‘I’ that speaks [in Rich’s poem]—its place of enunciation—is iteratively and interrogatively staged. It is poised at the point at which, in recounting historical trauma, the incommensurable ‘localities’ of experience and memory bear witness, side by side, but there is no easy
ethical analogy or historical parallelism.” Rich’s work is presented as the “atlas of a
difficult world,” articulated in a series of traumatic juxtapositions. Vernacular
cosmopolitanism is to be more than in dialogic relation with the native or the domestic: it
is to be “on the border, in between, introducing the global-cosmopolitan ‘action at a
distance’ into the very grounds—now displaced—of the domestic” (Bhabha 2001: 48). It
also implies a critique of liberal individualism that excludes communities and individuals
that do not fit liberal secularism. It might be a way of challenging universalism. Žižek
notes that every universality is hegemonized or particularized, but there is a sort of
universality (as there is a sort of cosmopolitanism) that can be redeeming: it is the
universality of those who are “below us,” the neglected and outcast. It is a negative
universality to be opposed to Western universalism (Žižek and Daly 2004: 160).

My archaeological research in Ethiopia, Brazil, and Spain focuses on the effects of
globalization, modernity, development, and universalistic policies. That the local contexts
in which I work are not isolated, traditional, disengaged, or disconnected from larger
processes, as Lynn Meskell reminds in the introduction to this book, is more than obvious
in the communities where I work. In Ethiopia, I explore the archaeological remains of
Cooperazione Italiana, USAID, and interventionism by the Soviet Union (González-Ruibal
2006b). In Brazil, a railway funded by the World Bank crosses the rainforest where the
Awá hunter-gatherers live, through which tons of bauxite are transported, every two hours,
to the coast, and from there to Europe and the United States. The Awá, then, are hunter-
gatherers who share their space with the World Bank, the European Union, agribusiness,
aluminum industries, and illegal loggers. The peasants I work with in Galicia are
connected with diasporic communities in the United States, Germany, and Argentina
(González-Ruibal 2005). My research might be considered a sort of cosmopolitan
archaeology from a threefold point of view: it explores international engagements and the
application of universalistic policies; it is triggered by a true concern for others; and it
juxtaposes three different localities shaken by international forces. Brazil, Ethiopia, and
Spain are the poles of my own cosmopolitan agenda of action and research—they form my
own “atlas of a difficult world.” At the same time, my work is also a vernacular
undertaking, because it takes domesticity, culture, tradition, identity, and roots seriously into account.

The communities I work with share many points in common, but I make no attempt to even them out. As in the poems of Rich and Césaire, it is the juxtaposition of traumatic, singular experiences and their articulation with transhistorical memories and global troubles that interest me. I work on the border—the marginality of minority groups in third world countries, but I bring the border to my own homeland. By doing that, I dissolve the concentric circles that Martha Nussbaum (1996: 9) imagines emanating from one’s home and subvert her cosmopolitan hierarchy. As a matter of fact, I do not want to make all human beings more like my “fellow city-dwellers” (Nussbaum 1996: 9); on the contrary, as recommended by Said (1996: 514), I prefer to “annihilate my place,” which does not imply a rejection of primordial affects, but an elaboration of them (Said 1996: 515; also Kristeva 1997: 274). And, with Žižek (2005: 163), I am against the “ethical ‘gentrification’ of the neighbor” and the ethical leveling of the other. Nussbaum’s (1996: 13) statement that “politics . . . will be poorly done if each thinks herself equally responsible for all, rather than giving the immediate surroundings special attention and care” goes against the radical ethics proposed here, following Žižek’s (2005). If there is any hierarchy in our responsibilities toward others, it should be dictated by the urgency of the situation, not by national ties.

I am an archaeologist who works with living peoples, their material culture, and the remains of their contemporary past—a kind of research that may be labeled “archaeology of the present,” a term that tries to blend those interests in a meaningful way (González-Ruibal 2006a). In the rest of this chapter, I will deal with two of the areas in the atlas of the difficult world I have been mentioning—the most troubling ones: Brazil and Ethiopia. I will try to show what flawed notions of development and evolution, in part supported by an archaeological meta-narrative, have implied for the communities in which I work.

**Ethiopia: Development in Terra Nullius**

In my first trip to Sudan and Ethiopia, in January 2000, both countries were the poorest nations in the world according to the UN listing and both of them were at war. Armed
conflict and extreme poverty made those countries, at that time as well as today, very cosmopolitan countries—in a very particular way. International agencies and institutions, governmental and nongovernmental, large and small, American and European, populated then and populate today the tortured landscapes of the Horn of Africa.

The panorama is cosmopolitan too from an archaeological point of view. Sudan and Ethiopia host a sizeable community of Western researchers. Their agendas, however, are more universalistic than cosmopolitan. While cosmopolitanism implies a concern for others, for difference and diversity, universalistic archaeology has a Western interest camouflaged under the vocabulary of globalism—much like that of many international institutions. According to Beck and Sznajder (2006: 19) universalism “does not involve any requirement that would arouse curiosity or respect for what makes others different.” Archaeological research in Ethiopia is polarized around human origins and the state. Ethiopia usually hits international news for two issues: famine and human fossils. For different reasons, they both capture Western imaginations and create an image of the country as a barren land where early hominids once roamed and dispossessed humans die en masse today. For palaeoanthropologists, Ethiopia is an accident. They could well be doing the same work in Utah or Bavaria, if there were such wonderful sites there. Admittedly, they could not show the stunning photos of the jeep stuck in the sand, the beautiful (black) women smiling, or the fierce ancestral warrior with an AK-47. The epics of palaeoanthropological research in sub-Saharan Africa certainly deserve a good ethnography that is to be done some day. By now, we just have a romantic account from the point of view of those great gentlemen adventurers (for example, Johanson and Edey 1981; Kalb 2001). Palaeolithic specialists are barely interested in the (too parochial) history of the Horn of Africa because they aim higher: they want to reveal the Origins of (all) Humankind. The search for origins that bypass indigenous interests is certainly not something that affects Ethiopia alone (cf. Shepherd 2002; Wobst 2005: 25). In Ethiopia the situation is perhaps more poignant because the Euro-American search for origins takes place in one of the poorest nations in the world. The Afar pastoralists, who live in the area where most hominid fossils are found, kill each other for securing a waterhole for their herds (Ayalew Gebre 2004: 252–54) and their nomadism is more and more restricted by
development projects and the national park that occupies part of their traditional lands—which feature in the World Heritage list as the cradle of humankind. The state is striving to transform them into “‘law abiding,’ modernized and productive citizens” (Getachew Kassa 2004: 224). Meanwhile, archaeologists and physical anthropologists struggle for a new fragment of a yet older Australopithecus that might make it to the front page of *Science* or *Nature*.

The other important focus of attention by international scholars and institutions is Ethiopia’s history as a state. This includes the Aksumite civilization (early first millennium AD), the churches of the Middle Ages (Lalibela), and the castles of the Abyssinian court of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, based at the city of Gondar (figure 1). International interest for Aksum (Munro-Hay 1991) has been fostered for two main reasons: its outstanding monumentality and its connections with other parts of the world: Egypt, Greek, Rome, Yemen, and India. Later, the medieval and Gondarine periods are also marked by an outstanding architecture and art with obvious foreign resemblances: Gondar has been called the “Camelot of Africa” (Ramos and Boavida 2004). Ethiopia, then, is valued as are other third world nations for being a strategic crossroad, attractive for its hybrid nature. This vision of Ethiopia’s history is reflected on the World Heritage list. The Ethiopian sites that have been incorporated are mainly related to the origins of humankind (Awash and Omo valleys) or the history of the Abyssinian state as a unified and cosmopolitan nation (Aksum, Gondar, Lalibela). In incorporating such sites, the complexities and intricacies of Ethiopian history are lost, whether because they are bypassed wholesale (human evolution) or because only the state perspective is given. This has to be related to the colonialist, modernist bias of the concept of world heritage (Meskell 2005d: 128).

<Figure 1>

Modernity sanctions the role of the state and its works as progressive, and it considers nonstate societies as backward and anarchic. Archaeology has played an important role in justifying the works of the state and forgetting the people at its margins (Meskell 2005d: 130–32; Wobst 2005: 28). With Appiah (2001: 225), I am against “Africa as a fancied past of shared glories—the Africa of Diop and the ‘Egyptianists.’” I am, on the
contrary, with that of Aimé Césaire (1972: 23), in his (admittedly idealized) defense of the societies destroyed by imperialism. Instead of undermining the concepts of progress and cultural achievement developed by the Enlightenment, some pan-Africanism appropriated them and used them to strike back. The merit of these interpretations lay in bringing attention to the intellectual creativity of sub-Saharan peoples. At the same time, however, this means accepting the rules of the game as presented by those in power: cultural success is based on state polities, strong inequalities, wide (and usually unfair) economic networks, and large monuments and infrastructures, all of them made possible by social exploitation (Stahl 2004: 254–55). Other intellectuals, such as Aimé Césaire, have resorted to a more radical weapon of resistance: changing and challenging the rules of the game—the roots of colonial discourse—altogether. By praising “those who have invented nothing,” Césaire (1956) created a new structural metaphor that broke with Western assumptions of historical success. The same occurs with Clastres’s “societies against the state,” for whom failing to achieve “social complexity” is not a failure but a political act of resistance (Clastres 1989).

The project in which I have been involved in Ethiopia since 2001 is an alternative to prevailing universalistic approaches. It deals with communities at the border of the state, in an area lacking remains from the deepest past. I will refer here to the history of one of the groups that inhabit the borderland of Ethiopia, the Gumuz of Metekel. Metekel is located north of the Blue Nile, near the frontier between Sudan and Ethiopia. The annexation to Ethiopia was only completed around 1901 (Abdussamad 1999). Although originally conceived as an ethnoarchaeological project, our concern for the situation of the people with whom we worked led us to rethink our principles of engagement and reconsider our research under more cosmopolitan and postcolonial lines. What I will try to show here is that the Gumuz’s present situation of disempowerment with regard to national and international development projects is just the final step in a long history of dispossession and marginalization.

Since at least the middle of the first millennium AD the Gumuz have been considered *homines sacri*, in Agamben’s (1998: 71–80) apt terminology, a sort of humans liable to be massacred, enslaved, and deprived of their lands: “If someone kills the one
who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide,” says the Roman law. The killing of a *homo sacer* is a sort of banal death without the aura of a sacrifice—this is why Agamben rejects the concept of Holocaust for the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis. The existence of the *homo sacer* is bare life (*nuda vita*) at the will of sovereign power. The justification for the inferiority of the Gumuz resonates with other colonialisms elsewhere: they are heathen, flat-nosed, black, nomad, and uncivilized (Pankhurst 1977). Their land is a *terra nullius*, available for more industrious peasants, living in sedentary villages and worshipping the true god, or for capitalists involved in development projects.

It is very likely that the slave raids in this territory, along with expeditions in search of gold, were carried out already in the Aksumite period (Pankhurst 2001: 28–30). After the thirteenth century the documentation about the slave raids grows steadily and significantly reaches a peak during the period of splendor of the Abyssinian Kingdom, from the early seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth century. The Gumuz, pejoratively called Shankilla (“slave”), were captured and killed by the thousands during those centuries (Pankhurst 2001: 351–72). That the Shankilla were regarded as little better than animals is demonstrated by the hunting expeditions carried out in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth by noble Ethiopians, in which elephants were killed and Gumuz were captured (Abdussamad 1988). Slavery continued until the Second World War, when Fascist Italy put an end to it—and presented the achievement as a moral justification for the conquest of Ethiopia. The Italians, however, undertook most development projects in the heart of the country, leaving only military posts in lowland areas. Fascist rule in Ethiopia was organized on racist lines, and the Gumuz were too black and too primitive to be able to benefit from progress, unlike the Caucasian-looking highlanders (Amhara, Agaw). Over the centuries, the Gumuz were gradually expelled from their original territory and banished to the margins of their homeland, the least healthy and fertile lowland areas (Wolde-Selassie Abbute 2004a: map 8-11). Many Amhara and Agaw settlers came from the highlands, giving rise to the complex ethnicity of the area today. As a matter of fact, the process has not come to an end, and each year new families descend to the lowlands in search of new cultivable land, escaping from the wasteland in which the
Abyssinian plateau has been transformed by the feudal politics of the same state that built Gondar (Girma 1992).

Even today, the land of the Gumuz is somewhat perceived as a terra nullius by the state, the neighboring groups, and the West: they see it as an underpopulated territory that deserves better exploitation. We may think that the relegation of the Gumuz, based on their culture and race, is something of the distant past, with no effect in the present whatsoever. Yet ancient beliefs have not withered away. The journalist Alan Moorehead (2000 [1961]: 6) tells that the land of the Gumuz “is a country of conical grass huts and oppressive heat that creates a sort of woolliness in the mind, and of long, slow, uneventful days that have stunted human ambition from prehistoric times.” This racist perspective is still shared by many developmental agencies, missionaries, and sanctimonious, well-educated Westerners. The “woolliness in the mind” prevented the Gumuz from building splendid palaces that may deserve inclusion in the World Heritage list or even attention by archaeologists. Unambitious and uncreative, they have been unable to make history, and their lives have been condemned to the same hollow nothingness since the dawn of times. The land of the Gumuz is a great place for an ethnoarchaeologist, where he or she can see prehistory alive. Unfortunately for such prehistoric relics, “There was never any possibility that these undeveloped people would be left alone in their slow dull round existence,” states Moorehead (2000 [1961]: 9). When the author wrote that, slavery had ended two decades before, but new adversities were still to come for the Gumuz, this time from beyond the Horn of Africa in the shape of development policies. The treatment of the Gumuz and their land was going to be very much the same.

In 1985, as a late response to the terrible famine and drought that killed one million Ethiopians, the Communist state decided to establish a development program and resettlement scheme in the land of the Gumuz (Wolde-Selassie Abbute 2004a, 2004b). They were spared by the famine, as were most inhabitants from lowland areas, because their “primitive” swidden agriculture and egalitarian politics were much less aggressive to the environment and had not caused the large-scale deforestation of more “advanced” cultivation methods and political economies based on heavy taxation. The scheme—the so-called Tana-Beles Project—was developed in the Beles Valley, where 250,000 hectares of
land were to be occupied by 48 villages and several agricultural projects. Over 82,000 highlanders were displaced to the area (Wolde-Selassie Abbute 2004b: 76) and 73,000 hectares of tropical forest were cleared (Gebre Yntiso 2004: 92). The enterprise was made possible thanks to funds and technical assistance provided by the Italian government. Thousands of indigenous peoples were uprooted from their ancestral lands and banished to less fertile areas. Perhaps because the locals were not starving, nobody thought that they should receive any benefit from the development project. Thus, my Gumuz informants often complained that they did not have access to the health and education services offered to the newcomers or to free seeds and agricultural machinery. This embittered the relations between the Gumuz, the central state, and the highlanders, a situation that ended in overt ethnic conflict after the fall of the Communist regime in 1991.

The situation has improved with the implementation of federal policies that grant more political power to the indigenous inhabitants of Metekel (and disenfranchise the settlers). However, multicultural federalism has not helped the Gumuz as much as it could be expected to. At least in part, this is due to the terrible legacy of the Tana-Beles project. As we have had the occasion to see during our fieldwork, those Gumuz communities that are located around the premises of the development scheme suffer from acute social problems: violence within the community and between clans is widespread, with frequent killings and feuds; there is a high ratio of female suicide; traditional working parties and celebrations have given way to alcoholism; the authority of the elders seems undermined by youngsters whose new means of legitimation is the possession of automatic weapons (cf. also Wolde-Selassie Abbute 2004a: 111). Other problems brought by the new political situation, however, are not inherited. They are the result of the introduction of new modernist strategies under the sign of capitalism, which also considers the land a terra nullius. The new local elites are eager to develop their region at any price, usually to the detriment of their own inhabitants. Thus, agro-industries flourish, the Gumuz are still being displaced from their homeland, and deforestation increases every year (Wolde-Selassie Abbute 2004a: 126).

In March 2006, when we were looking for a village where we could carry out fieldwork, we discovered a huge deforested area, extending for dozens of kilometers along
the road. As we found out later, the deforestation was carried out by a Dutch multinational company that planned to cultivate oil palms for biodiesel in that area. It cut down eighty thousand hectares of tropical trees, expelled the local population, and brought in laborers from the neighboring villages, most of them highlanders recently settled in the area. Once again in their long history of abuse, the Gumuz have been decreed disposable and their lands stolen or rented for nothing. However, in macro-economic figures, this agribusiness project will appear as a sign of development and probably contribute a bit to the rise of the federal GDP. In a global level, the production of biodiesel—itself a dubious alternative energy—will be depicted as an eco-friendly solution to the fuel crisis.

My point is that, by being only concerned with glorious monumental pasts and the history of the state (preferably a well-bounded nation-state) as an evolutionary success (cf. the chapters by Lydon and Byrne, this volume), archaeologists and heritage managers are sanctioning the crude modernist vision of many development agencies. By studying the history and material culture of “those who have invented nothing,” another discourse, one that challenges evolutionism and concepts of progress, can be produced. The archaeology of Metekel is also about monuments, the state, and international contacts, as much as the castles of Gondar or the obelisks of Axum. The monuments of Metekel are not inherently different from those sanctioned by the World Heritage Organization or by the interests of Western archaeologists. The difference has to do with time only. The archaeological remains of Metekel are the ghostly ruins of the Tana-Beles project, which failed and was abandoned in 1991 (González-Ruibal 2006b), or the rusty carcasses of tanks and trucks ambushed on the road to Sudan during the last civil war. Archaeological sites are also the palaces built by slave traders, impressive brick buildings, now abandoned, boasting an incongruous solidity in a land of “conical grass huts and oppressive heat” (figure 2). The monuments of Metekel are trenches and arsenals constructed by fascist Italians, who dealt with this area as though it were an empty battlefield and protected the frontier with human waste: indigenous troops, askaris, because the life of an Italian soldier was too valuable to be lost in a terra nullius. Metekel, too, is a crossroad of civilizations. But this is the dark side of all cultural crossroads. The state, development, progress, history: from the border, things never look the same.
Brazil: Order and Progress

“The settler and pioneer have at bottom had justice on their side: this great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages,” said Theodore Roosevelt (quoted in Maybury-Lewis 2002: 45). Despite the years that have passed since that statement, the viewpoints and beliefs have not changed substantially: development projects for the progress of the nation-state trump indigenous communities everywhere in the world. In some cases, like Brazil, the means of exterminating squalid savages and getting hold of their lands have not changed much either. In chapter 4 of this volume, Lynn Meskell says that myths of emptiness have been vigorously dismantled in Australia and North America, but not in South Africa. Myths of emptiness are still very much at work in the Brazilian cultural and political imaginary, also, with terrible consequences.

The Awá or Guajá are a small group of hunter-gatherers, numbering around three hundred individuals, who inhabit the Amazonian forest in the state of Maranhão, Brazil (Cormier 2003b) (figure 3). Officially contacted by white Brazilians for the first time in the early 1970s, their population was dramatically reduced by that contact, which included the invasion of their land by impoverished peasants, loggers, and landlords, the spreading of diseases, and the development of colossal projects cofinanced by international institutions (Treece 1987). The Awá were by no means the only group affected by the arrival of “order and progress” at the southeastern edge of Amazonia. Other communities were heavily damaged, including the Tenetehara, Krikati, Ka’apor, Gaviões, and Ramko-Kamikrá (Coelho 1987; Treece 1987: 128–38). The work of progress here has been a “systematic history of erasure” (see chapter 4 by Meskell, this volume), with the difference, with respect to South Africa’s natural reservations, that erasure in Brazil has not been dictated for the preservation of nature, but for its more thorough exploitation. The Awá are a clear example of *hominès sacrès*. People only make sense if comprised within the concept of citizenship. The Indians are not citizens and they are considered legally minors, forever surveilled and protected by the National Indian Agency (FUNAI). Not being Brazilians,
they lay “outside the sanctioned universe of obligation” (Fein 1984: 11). “I have never been in Brazil,” To’o, an Awá Indian, told me during my first visit to his reservation, and he did not know how right he was. It is counter-cosmopolitanism that it is at work here.

< Figure 3>

Indians are the most disposable of all peoples. Some of the peasants who invaded the Awá forests in the 1970s and 1980s commented with astonishment, when they met with an Indian family, “They almost look like humans” (Elizabetha Beserra Coelho, personal communication 2005). The similarity was incomplete, sufficiently incomplete to unleash a genocide when the invaders gave the Indians infected clothes or poisoned food or simply shot at them (O’Dwyer 2000). Local politicians who agree with Roosevelt’s words and with a liberalism that grants rights to individuals alone (Ivison 2002) consider that a handful of savages should not be occupying thousands of hectares of primeval forest that could be developed and benefit much more people. Development has to come first by the slash-and-burn agriculture of miserable peasants, then by the large-scale cattle raising that takes hold of the land after the initial clearing. That is the normal evolution of things: savagery as represented by the indigenous hunters, barbarism in the shape of poor but hard-working laborers cutting down the jungle, and civilization brought by agribusiness, ranching, mining, and industry.

As in the case of the Gumuz presented above, we have to understand the disenfranchisement of the Awá in a long-term perspective. The contact between the Awá and the European colonizers probably started in the early seventeenth century, when the Portuguese conquered the coasts of Maranhão, previously settled by other European colonists (Cormier 2003b: 3). The Portuguese invaded indigenous lands, enslaved Indians, and brought about the dislocation of many communities. Several pandemics during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries decimated the native population of the region and seriously damaged the social fabric of several indigenous communities (Cormier 2003b: 5). It is probable that the Awá were a group of swidden agriculturalists who lost their knowledge of cultivation after their persecution and enslavement by the colonizers (Cormier 2003b: 4): the Awá would have turned to hunting and gathering in isolated forests to escape from whites. The Cabanagem civil war (1835–41), which wiped out entire
Indian groups in Brazil, has also been suggested as the motive for the “involution” of the Awá (Forline 1997: 30; also Méricio Pereira Gomes, quoted in O’Dwyer 2000: 34). Ironically, then, it was the white man’s development and progress that “underdeveloped” the Awá.

After a period in which news about the Awá come from a few casual encounters in which they were described as foragers (Nimuendajú 1949), the Awá suffered the massive encroachment of Brazilian society by the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. As with the territory of the Gumuz in Ethiopia, the Awá forests were considered “land without men for men without land” by the Brazilian state (Forline 1997: 16). We find again the concept of *terra nullius* used to the detriment of indigenous communities. The personal dramas of the Awá, chased and killed by the hundreds, their families broken and dispersed, amounted to a veritable genocide. Some individuals, isolated from their families after a confrontation with ranchers or peasants, trekked hundreds of kilometers alone for a decade or more. The resettlement program of the FUNAI was likewise traumatic. Out of ninety-one individuals settled in a village by the Indian agency in 1976 only twenty-five were alive in 1981. Most of them died due to an ill-advised vaccination campaign (O’Dwyer 2000: 69). The establishment of four FUNAI villages for the Awá was carried out with disregard to family and group ties.

Nonetheless, the implementation of the Grande Carajás project was the single most traumatic event for the local communities. It was devised to occupy an area similar to that of Britain and France combined and it consisted of several mining projects (iron, gold, and bauxite), roads, dams, and railways (figure 4). The two largest investors were the European Union and the World Bank. Even before the program began, contracts were signed with Italy, Japan, and Germany in order to provide around 30 million tons of iron for their steel industries (Treece 1987: 9). The Grande Carajás project was going to be the miracle solution to Brazil’s staggering foreign debt (Treece 1987: 13). The railway cut the rainforest in two, separated indigenous communities, and facilitated the arrival of peasants and illegal loggers en masse, whereas the production of iron required the rapid clearing of the forests to produce coal (Cormier 2003a: 125). This left the Indians without their
traditional resources and many were compelled to hunt horses and other domesticates in the ranches that had invaded their lands—and the ranchers killed the Indians.

<Figure 4>

The sad history of the Awá does not end here. They are now the owners of large forest reserves where nobody can enter without a permit issued by the FUNAI. The reality, however, is much different. During August 2006 we had the occasion to go with the police and the FUNAI in an operation to chase illegal loggers in one of the Awá reservations. The loggers had devastated the forest, besieging the Awá in less than one-tenth of their legal territory. Roads, bridges, and campsites crisscross the jungle. The rivers have been dammed up and the oldest and most valuable trees have been cut and sold. Many peasants have invaded the reserve and a large ranch owned by an absentee landlord occupies part of the Indian lands and part of a biological reserve. The Awá complain that game—their staple food—escapes from the sound of the chainsaws and tractors. However, the Companhia da Vale do Rio Doce, from the Grande Carajás project, has been paying royalties to the FUNAI for the damage caused to the Indians. The money has been used in turning the Awá into agriculturalists and in giving them clothes and other goods that push them a little bit away from savagery and closer to civilization.

What has archaeology and anthropology to do with this situation? Since the nineteenth century, both disciplines have contributed directly or indirectly to the portrayal of Indians in a way that legitimized development policies and the role of the state at the expense of the peoples that live in its margins.

As it has been proven, archaeology played a fundamental role in supporting the enterprise of the expanding Euro-American bourgeoisie (Trigger 1989). By constructing a unilinear tale of order and progress, archaeology helped to give intellectual grounding to colonialism, racism, and Western hegemony in general. In so doing, archaeology was not behaving differently from other sciences (Said 2003). Lubbock’s work (1865), which is just the most remarkable of a series of books comparing savages and prehistoric peoples, justified the expropriation of the premoderns by situating modern “primitives” in the lowest step of the ladder of progress and by displacing them to another time (Fabian 1983).
In the model of universalistic reason defended by nineteenth-century archaeology and anthropology, the savage was a *homo sacer*, an incomplete human, an “embryo of us” (Hernando Gonzalo 2006: 228).

The case of Brazilian archaeology has been studied by Ferreira (2005). He argues that the archaeology of Brazil during the imperial period (1840–99), with its evolutionist criteria, was a convenient tool in the work of “sieving” the indigenous “races” that would feature in the national image of the country to be transmitted to the imperial elites and to the civilized nations of the world. Thus, with data from archaeological excavations in shell mounds and tumuli, two different groups of Indians were produced by the archaeological imagination of the period: a civilized one and a savage one. The man-eating, indolent, and nomad hunter who lived amid rubbish heaps and produced no monument, art, or craft was ruled out, while the clean, hierarchical, and industrious mound-builder and skilled potter was incorporated into the myths of the national project (Ferreira 2005: 144). The practical effects of this kind of research were noticeable at that time: military colonies were built in which indolent natives, “surveilled and educated by soldiers and missionaries, could learn Portuguese, and the craft of the blacksmith, carpenter, shepherd and agriculturalist” (Ferreira 2005: 145). The nomad savage was transformed into the industrious one. These colonies hosted indigenous populations that would later mix with European immigrants thereby whitening the national race.

As I have pointed out above, this sort of unilinear archaeological thought is still pervasive in many Western minds, and it is certainly not restricted to the less enlightened citizens. In places like Brazil, a dangerous universalistic reasoning—a myth of progress—is still stronger and its practical outcomes are quite sinister. Thus, the Serviço de Proteção ao Índio (SPI, 1910–67) and the Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI, 1968 to the present), the national Indian agencies, inherited the imperial perspectives on the indigenous groups that were informed by anthropologists and archaeologists during the nineteenth century. The state posts that were theoretically conceived to protect native populations were in practice locales for the rapid assimilation of the Other into Brazilian culture through improvised strategies of social engineering (cf. Oliveira 1960). These usually involved the supply of Western material culture in the form of technical and moral
knowledge. The final goal was to transform the native into a citizen, even if a low-class one (a *camponês*: a peasant). Although the staff of the FUNAI had very few anthropologists on the payroll, that is not the case of private companies, such as the Companhia da Vale do Rio Doce, one of the most important ventures involved in the Grande Carajás project, which contracted anthropologists during the 1980s to assist “in identifying and attracting isolated groups of indigenous peoples to ease the stressful transition of contact through settlement” (Forline 1997: 17). Thence, if archaeology supported evolution from a theoretical standpoint, anthropologists played a major practical role in reordering the wild along progressive lines.

This modernist way of reasoning has also been incorporated, in a sense, by the World Heritage Organization. Brazil has seventeen places included on the World Heritage list (http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/br). The distribution is as follows: seven colonial cities (including Brasília), two Catholic monuments, seven natural reserves, and only one prehistoric site: Serra da Capivara, which has evidence of the earliest occupation of America (ca. 25,000 years old). The other seventeen sites on the tentative list have a similar bias, with several forests and colonial monuments. The conclusion is obvious: Brazil was a *terra nullius* when the Portuguese arrived there in 1500. Today, there is nature and there are the colonizers’ monuments. What about “those who have invented nothing”? What about the indigenous cultures that were populating—and still populate—Amazonia when the Europeans disembarked? Their existence is symbolically denied or they are romantically equated with nature. Like the indolent, nomadic hunter-gatherers in the imperial imagination, the Brazilian Aborigines are crossed out from the cultural heritage that deserves conservation and global respect.

That is the case with the Awá themselves. In a coffee-table book produced by the local government of Maranhão with images by a German photographer, the Awá feature along with dunes, monkeys, palm-trees, rivers, and even a few picturesque peasants (Knepper 2002). The title of the book is telling: *The Natural World of Maranhão*. Awá history, then, is at best natural history. The notion is shared by development agencies. Thus, for the Brazilian company Eletrobrás, “Indigenous communities represent one of the most complex environmental problems in the planning and implementation of
hydroelectric plants and transmission lines” (quoted in Viveiros de Castro and Andrade 1990: 1). Hunter-gatherers elsewhere are regarded in a similar way—the San, for example, are conceived as an extension of the fauna and flora in South Africa (Meskell and Weiss 2006: 94–95). This view of non-modern societies, and especially foragers, is not surprising, since it is espoused, more or less consciously, by many ethnoarchaeologists working within the sociobiology paradigm.

Ethnoarchaeology, once one of the cornerstones of processual archaeology (Binford 1983), and particularly the ethnoarchaeology of hunter-gatherers, is now largely dominated by bioarchaeologists or biological anthropologists who use their knowledge to understand early hominid behavior and the evolution of humankind (for example, Hawkes et al. 1997). As a matter of fact, they compare the behavior of living hunters with that of pre-sapiens hominids (such as *Homo habilis*). Palaeoanthropologists talk about human ecology with disregard to cultural practices, beliefs, and experiences, and although they assert that they are just interested in the biological side of humanity in general and not in culture, the reality is that when they compare the ecology of humans and primates or talk about adaptation and evolution (Brockman and Van Shaik 2005), they do not study lawyers or executives in Manhattan or Tokyo, but “primitives” living in the wild, those who have invented nothing and are, therefore, closer to nature than to culture: half-humans, half-monkeys. If we excavate the genealogy of this approach we will arrive at Lubbock’s works and that of many colonial minds of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth: *Among Pygmies and Gorillas*, for example, is the eloquent title of a book published by William, the prince of Sweden with the results of a *zoological* expedition to the Congo (William 1926). After the strong reflexive critique of cultural anthropology (Fabian 1983), the prolongation of nature into the “primitive man” established in the nineteenth century survives uninterrupted in some modern studies of ethnoarchaeology and human evolution. A symmetrical approach is needed to dissolve the divide between nature and culture: not only for non-moderns, but for all nature cultures—ours included (Latour 1993, 1999).

Archaeology, therefore, in the work of some of its practitioners, fails to recognize the achievements of those societies that do not create monuments (World Heritage Organization) and keeps producing an image of non-modern peoples as closer to nature
than to humankind (ethnoarchaeology), eliminating their cultural peculiarities and the sociopolitical context in favor of understanding the remote origins of all humankind. Should we be puzzled by the treatment given by development agencies to those same communities? Unwittingly, archaeology helps to reinforce counter-cosmopolitan, universalistic attitudes that restrict our obligations to others. Our obligations are to full human beings only.

**Conclusion: Digging the Present**

According to Appiah (2006a: 153), the real challenge for cosmopolitanism today is not “the belief that other people don’t matter at all; it’s the belief that they don’t matter very much.” In this chapter, I have dealt with two “non-modern” societies, the Awá in Brazil and the Gumuz in Ethiopia, that do not matter very much for the counter-cosmopolitans—international development agencies, multinationals, the state officials from the countries where they live, and some scholars. Smith and Wobst (2005: 393) have pointed out that an archaeology guided by indigenous peoples’ agendas has to engage with the present as much as with the past and has to focus on issues of importance to the survival of indigenous cultures (see also Meskell 2005b). This sort of archaeology, then, has to be vernacular cosmopolitan in spirit. This is why my work is less related to ethnoarchaeology or prehistoric archaeology than it used to be and more engaged with the archaeology of the present. I am not postulating the abandonment of prehistory—on the contrary, it is essential to the long-term understanding of situations as those described in this chapter. I am not for the end of ethnoarchaeology, either, although it needs to be refashioned in a much more postcolonial and cosmopolitan way (González-Ruibal 2006a).

Nonetheless, we must start digging the present as archaeologists and not just in a metaphorical way: we should excavate the devastation brought by a modernism that marginalizes, betrays, and in the worst case annihilates the communities with which we work. In doing that, we should frame the problems of the people whom we study in a long-term perspective—a task for which archaeology is especially well suited. This does not imply any primitivist or romanticized vision of the “native.” It is a purely cosmopolitan engagement that arises from a visceral concern for the lives of others. By excavating
literally or metaphorically the present, we will be acting as witnesses, bearing testimony of what has happened and is happening—an uncomfortable yet necessary activity. A thick cosmopolitanism, says Byrne (see the chapter by Byrne, this volume), requires history: archaeology can provide (deep) history to any cosmopolitan enterprise.

Finally, as has been advocated many times, we have to carry out a more reflexive practice, but in cosmopolitan not egotistic terms: what are the implications of our work as archaeologists for the communities with which we work? How does our intellectual construction of the locals—needy “little guys” (Graeber 2002) or undeveloped primitives—help to reinforce and shape all-powerful Western identities (Hernando Gonzalo 2006)? How can an archaeological discourse serve to perpetuate inequalities and justify neoliberal policies by portraying “locals” or “natives” in a certain way (Hodder 2003: 63–64; also the chapter by Benavides, this volume)? And, on the contrary, how can archaeology challenge accepted visions of native communities as undeveloped, criticize concepts of cooperation and progress, and counterattack ideas of globalizing processes as something inherently creative and positive? The answers will be given through the application of our archaeological sensibilities to the problems of a troubling present.

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