

What are the unique bodily experiences of archaeologists involved on-site and reconstructing the past?

This question is a little bit tricky to answer. Sometimes I think archaeology can help us see the world with a different light (not only archaeology but every other discipline too). Archaeology provides us with different sets of “glasses” to see reality in different ways. Not only does the discipline that we study give pairs of “perspective glasses”, but our own background also participates in the way we perceive reality as well, even our own emotions, recent experiences can change the way we perceive an archaeological site, for example.

Sometimes I’ve been in the UK, looking at a site, and because I’m feeling homesick, I start to think on-site how many of the people that were found there were experiencing nostalgia for their homes, are all of them native to that place, did they feel like not belonging there, where they understood or ostracised? How would they feel of someone grabbing their things and the animals and plants in their surroundings for future possible research? How they would feel of ending in a bag titled “SITE 001 – Human”.

It is hard to think that someone in the future could find my remains, and create a whole interpretation of what my life was based on only my remains..., would they know I’m Mexican? Would they analyse my DNA and create a reconstruction of what I might look like? Would their interpretation be taken as objective truth? Is the archaeologist who found me going to be able to see the nuances of my personality just by looking at my bones? My inorganic belongings? Would they know I felt nostalgic every day I was far from home?

How are the diverse bodies of archaeologists – especially women, black and indigenous individuals, gender non-conforming people, people with disabilities, people on contested sites or war zones – accounted for?

I think we are overlooked most of the time. If we’re included in a conversation, the conditions do not allow us to participate in it, but to see it. It is thought that our presence in any academic setting counts as inclusion, but we don’t have a way to participate horizontally in it (Lack of agency). Putting myself as an example, whenever I’m in a reading group, where we discuss theory, I need to first translate what I’m about to say, then realize that some of the concepts that come from my cosmovision are not translatable, then if I mispronounce something, people observe you as not capable enough. Another observation is whenever Indigenous epistemology inclusion is talked about: People are aware of its presence, but because there is no English translation, there is this fear of not translating their theory well. So recognition is preferred to the labour of translating and including their voices. Recognition > Inclusion (Unfortunately...)

What can our understanding of the diverse bodily experiences of archaeological sites today bring to our capacity to reconstruct more nuanced worlds in the past?

I think mainly, to be aware that our perception is already biased (because of our context, cosmovision, emotions and intersections), and we should be open to multiple possibilities at the same time whenever we are doing our archaeological interpretations.

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