

It's not all about archaeology

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As the authors of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies manifesto (Campbell & Smith 2011), there are aspects of the debate piece by González-Ruibal *et al.* (above) that we have no trouble agreeing with, but we take issue with other elements. This paper sets up far too many straw people, based on a limited engagement with the archaeological and heritage studies literature. At its heart, and despite the radical rhetoric, González-Ruibal *et al.*'s paper is another defence of archaeological expertise by archaeologists, based on a dubious equation of reactionary politics with communities and the popular.

We think that their criticisms are actually based on a traditional discomfort with how the Critical Heritage Studies (CHS) movement—which draws on a very wide range of disciplinary inspirations—downplays the role of experts and expertise in general. Archaeologists have long dined out on claims to expertise (Smith 2004), and some of them do not like being reduced to the status of just another interest group, one among the many that draws on the past as a resource in the present. Calls for a more political archaeology are long standing. The problem with a politicised archaeology is the need to establish what it is and what it might do, and to make it in some sense programmatic; this paper fails to do so.

The most problematic element of this paper is the rather odd characterisation of 'the People', and an unwarranted castigation of how CHS and 'social archaeologists' fetishise 'communities'. There is an extensive literature on working with communities that recognises their political diversity while offering nuanced and politically engaged analyses (e.g. Smith & Waterton 2009; Little & Shackel 2014; IPinCH 2016; Schmidt & Pikirayi 2016). Indeed, we note that Waterton and Smith's (2010) article, while cited disapprovingly by González-Ruibal *et al.*, makes similar points to those made in their article about the politics of the term community.

We find it odd that there are claims made at various points that indigenous, working class and Eastern European communities are not well served by what González-Ruibal *et al.* state is a model of community that fixes identity to some desired and romantic ideal. It is interesting to note that all three of these communities make political claims framed by a reference to the past, and this is not by definition 'reactionary populism' (also see Smith & Campbell 2017). Indeed, the authors' claim (above) that what "these marginalised communities think about archaeology and heritage has rarely been examined" leaves us stunned, as there is a substantive body of research on heritage and social memory in these areas.

So, what can we possibly do about these three things: provoking, teaching and avoiding the heritage crusade? Yes, we need to provoke, but we need to do so with a clear

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acknowledgement of our own political agendas. In terms of teaching, we must not reassert the authority of expertise, as Kalela (2012: 71) suggests in relation to history, as “Only arrogance and privilege denies those who do not have academic training the status of ‘real’ historians: it is argument not authority that counts”. Teaching is, in short, a two-way street, and invoking the power to speak for those whose voices are silenced, as proposed by González-Ruibal *et al.*, seems a strange path to travel to end up re-asserting the authority to ‘teach’.

Finally, invoking the reactionary arguments of Lowenthal (1996), and Winter’s (2013) unhelpful downplaying of the ‘critical’ in CHS, again seems a strange response. Lowenthal’s critique of the ‘heritage crusade’ is a call to arms against what he views as the problematic use of heritage by non-experts. Heritage is used in many ways to support both progressive and conservative politics; there is an extensive corpus of literature in response to the Association of Critical Heritage Studies conferences, published in the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, that offers nuanced and empirical evidence taking us beyond Lowenthal’s now dated characterisation. Any engagement with reactionary populism needs not fear the ‘popular’, as doing so sets up heritage as a straw person. Rather, it should take direct issue with the political agendas at play. As Stuart Hall (1979) observed, the right has been better at mobilising popular issues than the left. We suggest that readers look closer at Kalela’s (2012) argument about the role of expertise in dealing with the popular consumption of the past. He argues that forms of expertise should not hold a privileged position, but they do offer a range of skills and techniques, and an epistemological rigour, that can be useful in engaging with popular understandings of history. Yet, as Kalela also stresses, historians retain a long-standing discomfort in dealing with popular uses of the past; Gonzalez-Ruibal *et al.* reveal the same emotional discomfort, and this hopelessly compromises their position.

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