

reconstructed parts of the site, while Antoine Poidebard, an early exponent of aerial archaeology, mapped the desert landscape from above. Technocratic programmes like those outlined above reinforce a sense of superiority for Westerners in cultural and technical matters. Bell (2015, xiii) described such interventions as ‘vast schemes for the government of the universe’. However, as history reminds us, those claiming to bring knowledge and civilization are often ultimately the destroyers, looters and beneficiaries of other people’s pasts.

Hijacking ISIS, whether in copying the Palmyrene arch or having a Russian orchestra play in the Roman amphitheater (Plets 2017; Meskell 2018), reflects the enormous desire of foreign states, international bodies, academics and entrepreneurs to triumph. Some of these efforts have ultimately backfired. In Florence, the IDA had purportedly forged a ‘true global symbol of the triumph of co-operation over conflict, optimism over despair, and human ingenuity over senseless destruction’. Stobiecka enumerates such quests, often shrouded in a military lexicon, where technology fights back: ‘3D printers can help undo the destruction of ISIS.’ The same was true with Bamiyan. The motivations are reflective of deep desires by the international community to rewrite history and tell a story of success, rather than the failures of heritage agencies like UNESCO (Isakhan and Meskell 2019). Furthermore, a kind of fatigue has developed around the Syrian humanitarian crisis: thus it is easier to fixate on monumental loss than on the ongoing plight of people. Although well intentioned, such virtual efforts reside in Stobiecka’s ‘exclusive zone set by archaeologists, art historians, conservators’ (p. 124). In the main, they reveal our ignorance of regional events and disciplinary histories. She recommends that archaeologists ‘resign from the digital armoury’ (p. 124).

While sympathetic to Stobiecka’s arguments, I remain wary of the academic industry that continues to flourish around Palmyra. Yes, the archaeological adventurism and opportunism of the early 20th century have been refashioned into new forms of international technocratic expertise. But in fetishizing the arch, and indeed its copies, we also risk participating in the same discourses that are being critiqued. More sobering still is that the topics that scholars formulate (and seek to have funded) have simply been recalibrated to the insidious practice of ‘crisis chasing’ (Cabot 2019). The crisis is about salvage, albeit our own, since what is unfolding in Syria and Iraq has inevitably saved and spawned myriad institutions, foundations, digital start-ups, initiatives and research, with a new mission and moral charge. Perhaps now we should be considering whether we are creating ever more hostages to fortune.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> See <http://digitalarchaeology.org.uk/people>.

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# ‘Violent care’? A response to Lynn Meskell and Trinidad Rico

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I would like to thank Lynn Meskell and Trinidad Rico for their thoughtful, reflection-provoking and articulate responses, in which they have expanded on a number of interesting points that I had

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not fully addressed or had only partly included in my original piece. They directed my attention to various aspects of critical heritage studies, as well as many challenges that emerge for heritage in the 21st century. This response will be divided into four sections addressing their comments: (1) the status of the replica, (2) Syria and the Syrians, (3) digital archeology and its academic setting, (4) ‘archaeodiplomacy’. In place of offering a conclusion to the discussion, I hope to mark possible departure points for future reflection on critical heritage studies.

Lynn Meskell writes about the display of the replica in Florence – the ‘dangerous and delicate work of art’ (p. 127) that cannot be touched and interacted with was placed next to Renaissance masterpieces. The list of funding institutions could be seen as a way to legitimize the status of the replica as an artwork. In their definition of artwork, Arthur Danto and Hans Belting indeed suggest that this status must be given by institutions (museums, galleries, academics, art critics). However, this particular ‘masterpiece’ looks rather odd within the context of politically engaged and activist art created today. Standing, rather, as a technological ‘workshop exercise’, not really informed by artistic inquiry, it does not have the agentive and emancipatory value characteristic of many projects related to heritage and conflict in Syria. Art historian Chad Elias (2019) discusses the artworks by Moreshin Allahyari, Nora Al-Badri and Jan Nikolai Nelles. In her long-term Digital Colonialism project, Allahyari often refers to the Syrian arch, and uses the same technologies as the Institute for Digital Archaeology, but her artistic practice is informed by emphatic and sensitizing inquiries, by questions concerning the ownership of heritage, which is apparently openly accessible.

For Allahyari,

a replica of Palmyra’s arch in Trafalgar Square becomes a symptom of *violent care*: the unique and precious object that is rescued when so much is deemed disposable. For any Western institution to focus on the reconstruction of the rare and special while other Western institutions have wrought the destruction of the everyday is violent care (Allahyari 2019, my emphasis).

In Digital Colonialism, Allahyari also refers to the case of Nefertiti’s bust displayed in the Neues Museum. This artefact happened to be the leading theme for another artistic intervention at the intersection of heritage and post-colonial aftermaths. Nora Al-Badri and Jan Nikolai Nelles’s ‘digital piracy’ (Elias 2019, 690) of Nefertiti’s sculpture was another attempt to show how universal heritage is copyrighted by Western institutions. Artists entered the room with the precious artefact and scanned it. With ‘The other Nefertiti’, Al-Badri and Nelles wanted to ‘activate the artefact, inspire a critical re-assessment of today’s conditions and to overcome the colonial notion of possession in Germany’.<sup>1</sup>

These projects unveil the messiness of heritage and its problematic entanglements. In confrontation with these engaged artworks, how can the copy be seen as an artwork? If we uphold its status as an artwork, then I postulate that the Syrian arch replica is like the works from 19th-century workshops, producing polished, sanitized, perfect copies of antiquity; or it might be an artwork if we relate it to surrealism: out of space, out of context, using military metaphors and showing obscure interest in war and violence (Taussig 2007; Elias 2012). Finally, it might be an artwork if we consider Las Vegas-style copies of monuments as artworks (cf. Holtorf 2010).

Trinidad Rico pointed out that I missed Syrian voices in my narrative. I would welcome bibliographic recommendations written from the Syrian perspective. I am well aware that the included press articles from the Syrian Arab News Agency and the *Middle East monitor*, as well as the quoted and commented paper by Nour A. Munawar (2017), may not adequately represent the complexity of Syrian viewpoints. Munawar urges that time is crucial to discuss heritage in Syria: ‘The rapid clean-up of and rebuilding plans for damaged Syrian heritage sites could themselves erase the traces and narratives of war and violence, which ultimately ignores the fact

that the destruction of heritage can be considered to be part of the lifecycle of any archaeological site' (Munawar 2019, 142).

This brings me to a broader question related to neo-colonial issues emerging from this study: what is overlooked by global academia? There may well be papers presenting insider views from Syria, but they are not published in anglophone journals quickly enough. The causes lie in the structure of academia under the neo-capitalist regimes. Where a native speaker can (simply) write a paper, others deal with translation and/or proofreading, often requiring time-consuming procedures and without adequate financial support. As a result, papers are published two or three years after they are ready, when their contents may no longer seem relevant or novel. It comes rather as a surprise than as frustration that those realities are not taken into account.

This issue could be stretched also to the discussion on digital archaeology. The neo-capitalist (and fast-science – Cunningham and MacEachern 2016) framework under which digital labs are funded and supported shapes the managerial approach accurately diagnosed by Rico (2017). I sympathize with her recognition of, and myself support, approaches like punk archaeology in digital practice (Caraher 2019). Similar conclusions about the practices of saving heritage with digital methods are presented by Meskell. Agreeing with Caraher, I would emphasize that 'digitization is an alternative to destruction in the context of field practice, but it is not the same as the creation of meaningful pasts' (Caraher 2019, 379). Rico's accurate and sober diagnosis and Meskell's erudite reference to the history of archaeology bring me to another issue that emerges on the margins of our discussion: the way digital archaeology is sponsored by universities, national funds, grant programmes and crowdsourcing dictates its fast pace. Given the often immediate results of digital practices, funding agendas accelerate further development of digital works. Creating more and more data (as in the case of the Million Image Database that was used to create the model of the arch), speed becomes a priority. Collaboration with an IT department is often more profitable than showing methodological sensibility and well-prepared theoretical framework. This race to produce begins at universities, where students are encouraged to 'go digital' without proper preparation in (critical) heritage studies. The recent interest in 'archaeologies of the heart' (Supernant *et al.* 2020) and 'the archaeology of care' (Caraher 2019; Oma 2018) reflects the imbalance that has appeared among the different speeds of research in academia.

Finally, both Meskell and Rico situate their comments within ongoing debates over the political position of heritage scholars. Rico recommends the grounded and well-argued research path and Meskell warns about excessive writing on Palmyra that may end up 'participating in the same discourses that are being critiqued' (p. 128). While I agree that it is difficult to navigate the slippery ground of current politics, I also recognize the need for looking at things closely and from different perspectives and backgrounds. Facing the war of images and war of objects, we should not be passive. I acknowledge the position of scholars coming from imperial countries, as I am well aware of the possible attitudes represented by researchers from disturbing borderlands (perfectly exemplified by Eastern Europe, which has experienced multiple forms of cultural coding, for being both a perpetrator and a victim throughout the centuries). Nevertheless, I think that resistance informed by sensitizing questions and deep self-reflection might be a way to avoid 'flourishing around Palmyra'. In Polish, we have the word *współczucie*, where *współ-* means 'with', and *czucie* is 'to feel', 'feeling'. The English translation would be 'compassion' or 'empathy', but can we rather 'feel with'?

This kind of attitude is easily traced in contemporary art. In 2017, the Polish artist Agnieszka Kalinowska presented an artwork, *Heavy Water* (Stobiecka, forthcoming). It consisted of dozens of clay vessels decorated with the 'migrant sign' (a symbol known from the warning signs installed at the borders of the US and Mexico between 1987 and 1990). The jugs were replicas of water vessels found during archaeological excavations in Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Syria. Referring to archaeological studies, Kalinowska showed the current migration crisis as part of a pattern in human history.<sup>2</sup> The work addressed Polish attitudes towards Syrian immigrants, which at the time were being widely discussed in the international media (Leszczyński 2015). The

Polish government refused to take in refugees from Syria. Kalinowska's idea was that people would take the vessels home. In this sense, she wanted to go against state politics and make a symbolic gesture about welcoming the artefacts that represented refugees.

Perhaps, then, it should be mainly artists who discuss the tragedies of war and speculate on how the Palmyrene arch's replica should be done? By creating a rupture, disarticulating and repurposing (Bailey 2018), maybe they can find a new way for digital archaeology and heritage studies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See the project website at <https://aksioma.org/the.other.nefertiti> (accessed 1 August 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Another example that might be mentioned is the work of Ai Weiwei, who presented a grand exhibition at the Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf, where he displayed *Odyssey*, a contemporary migrant story. Vases and walls were filled with terrifying scenes of migrating families, groups and individuals.

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