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Indigenous Archaeology as Decolonizing Practice

SONYA ATALAY

COLONIAL HISTORY, WESTERN LENS

Archaeology includes the study of artifacts and other aspects of material culture but is more importantly about people—understanding people's daily lives, their sense of place in the world, the food they ate, their art, their spirituality, and their political and social organization. In piecing together multiple lines of evidence, including written documents, oral histories, analytical data from artifacts and ecofacts, and a range of regional and local environmental evidence, archaeologists attempt to write the stories of the past. Stated simply, archaeology is one of many tools utilized for understanding the past. However, when placed in its proper historical context, it is clear that the discipline of archaeology was built around and relies upon Western knowledge systems and methodologies, and its practice has a strongly colonial history.¹ Many archaeologists have come to recognize that archaeology is based on, and generally reflects, the values of Western cultures.² In privileging the material, scientific, observable world over the spiritual, experiential, and unquantifiable aspects of archaeological sites, ancient peoples, and artifacts, archaeological practice demonstrates that it is solidly grounded in Western ways of categorizing, knowing, and interpreting the world.

However, as Indigenous and local groups around the world have demonstrated, it is not only archaeologists who feel stewardship responsibilities toward archaeological materials and locations—many groups have rights and responsibilities to the human and material remains and to the knowledge, memories, and spiritual power that are intimately tied with the places and materials studied by archaeologists. Prior to European colonization, communities were able to act as stewards over their

own cultural resources and history—examining, remembering, teaching, learning, and protecting their own heritage. In North America, as in many places around the globe, all of that changed abruptly when colonization began and the wealthy elites from Europe and newly settled Americans began to exercise their curiosity over the materials beneath their feet in the “New World.”³ While disease, quests for land, warfare, and forced religion were decimating Native people and disrupting their daily lives and practices, antiquarians and anthropologists were gathering the remains of the dead and dying—including their bodies, skulls, sacred materials, and items of everyday use—for study and placement in museums around the world.⁴

While one of the most far-reaching acts of cultural, spiritual and physical genocide was being perpetuated on the Indigenous people of North America, archaeologists and anthropologists began to take on the role of cultural and historical stewards, using the methods of their own Western cultures to examine, analyze, write, and teach about Indigenous lifeways and heritage.⁵ The colonization of North America involved actions and responses of many individuals and was part of a complex process. Native people responded to this disruption in their ability to control their cultural resources, history, and heritage in a variety of ways—some buried sacred items; others sold them in an effort to feed their families; still others gave up their traditional spiritual practices to embrace Christianity. However, through all of this, Indigenous people remained; their survival demonstrates their ability to simultaneously both adapt to and change Western cultural practices, both in the past and the present.

Efforts have been made to understand the complexities involved in the development of anthropology, archaeology, and museum collections. In resistance to simplistic bad/good, colonizer/colonized, perpetrator/victim dichotomies, these studies often include a discussion of the positive intentions of Western scholars to collect and save remnants of a dying “race,” offering “products of their time” arguments as explanation and reason for behaviors such as robbing graves, plundering battlegrounds for human skulls, and collecting, studying, and storing body parts against the will and desires of Native populations.⁶ Yet if we are to take serious the effort of moving beyond the colonial past toward further positive growth and more ethical and just practices in fields such as archaeology, it is necessary that contemporary practitioners of the discipline not ignore the effect of past practices by placing the acts in a historical context that

works to excuse them. Rather, archaeologists might take a more reflexive approach and contextualize the present situation by tracing archaeologists' (and physical anthropologists') current position of power to both colonization and the historical reality of the egregious acts that led to the collections held by museums, universities, and historical societies internationally. The colonial past is not distinct from today's realities and practices, as the precedents that were set continue to define structures for heritage management practices and have powerful continuing implications for Indigenous peoples in North America and elsewhere precisely because they disrupted the self-determination and sovereignty of Indigenous populations with respect to their abilities to govern and practice their own traditional forms of cultural resource management.

Tammy Lau and Terry Hoover wrote in the online finding aid for the Michigan Archaeological Society (MAS) records that "although the MAS, as a whole, is extremely interested in Native Americans and the indigenous cultures of early Michigan, it is doubtful that a Native American has ever been a member of the MAS."⁷ This is not only the case within the MAS but is also the circumstance generally in North American archaeology and in research conducted globally. Research is most often conducted by those outside the group being studied, meaning that the cultural heritage and history of most Native nations is now written and interpreted by those who are "others" in one way or another—ethnically, socio-economically, politically, spiritually, and so on. Any number of variables might be involved in the distance between those being studied and those conducting the research. The right of Native communities as sovereign nations to control and manage their own heritage has been significantly disrupted. Until recently, this was nearly always the case for archaeological research, which continued to be carried out using a Western lens to interpret, write, and teach the past of others, even though many of those being studied had living descendants who maintained a cultural connection to and held responsibility for the ancestors and remains under archaeological investigation. As the materials and places under archaeological study retain meaning, importance, power, and sacredness in the present for the descendants and relatives of those who created them, the struggle with the disruptive and damaging effects of colonization and the resulting distancing from the past by imposed standards and practices of Western cultural resource management strategies continues in many communities around the globe.

With this contextualization, it is clear that in practice, archaeology is much more than simply a tool for understanding the past: archaeological practice and the knowledge it produces are part of the history and heritage of living people and have complex contemporary implications and relevance for those people in daily life. This is true for many communities around the world but is particularly relevant for Indigenous and colonized groups, as it is predominantly scholars from Western cultures and worldviews who have held the political, social, and economic power to study, interpret, write, and teach about Indigenous pasts, viewing them from within a Western framework or “lens,” to create knowledge for consumption by Western public and scholarly audiences.⁸

Where does this leave the methods and concepts of Indigenous and colonized people in regard to archaeology and their traditional forms of historical knowledge production and reproduction, their methods of history education, and their sense of the past and of management of their own cultural resources and heritage? What are the processes and ethics by which one group gains and retains the power to exercise stewardship of, control, speak for, or write the past of others? And how can we create a counter-discourse to such processes? Does archaeology necessarily involve appropriation of the cultural and intellectual property of others and imposing upon it a Western epistemology and worldview? If not, how is an Indigenous archaeology, or any other non-Western archaeology, different from that of mainstream practice? To address such questions, must we be left in a state of postmodern relativism that claims all views of the past are equally valid? And if not, who decides which knowledge and interpretations are good/accepted/exhibited/taught and which are bad/dismissed/ignored/silenced? What are the wider implications of these issues in the globalized world of the twenty-first century? A decolonizing archaeology begins with such questions.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have begun to examine and discuss these topics, beginning with a critical recognition of the colonial lens through which archaeological interpretations have been built.⁹ In examining this history and bringing it to the foreground, these scholars are creating a counter-discourse to the Western ways and colonial and imperialist practices of the past and are working to find new paths for a decolonized archaeological practice—one that is first and foremost “with, for, and by” Indigenous people.¹⁰ Within an increasingly globalized and multicultural world, it is no surprise that important directions

of social science and humanities research now involve postcolonial studies, decolonizing methodologies, the ethics of conducting research, public benefits and access to research, and the ownership of knowledge (e.g., intellectual property rights). This article examines Indigenous archaeology and the methods and theories associated with its practice and how it contributes to a much-needed dialogue that looks beyond the long-held Western way of viewing archaeology, the past, and heritage. This is only a start in the process of moving forward in the discipline of archaeology toward considering and integrating the multiple ways in which people conceive of, study, and manage the past and heritage. I attempt to provide a brief introduction to some of the ways in which this newly forming field of Indigenous archaeology plays a role in helping Indigenous communities recover knowledge and traditions as well as in working to counter efforts of intellectual and spiritual colonization while also contributing significantly to a broader project of global decolonization. I examine the influence of Indigenous activists and scholars, as well as the role of postmodernism, in building the area of Indigenous archaeology scholarship and practice, and I propose one view of its potential contribution for other local, colonial, and postcolonial communities.

If our goal is to decolonize archaeology, we must then continue to explore ways to create an ethical and socially just practice of archaeological research—one that is in synch with and contributes to the goals, aims, hopes, and curiosities of the communities whose past and heritage are under study, using methods and practices that are harmonious with their own worldviews, traditional knowledges, and lifeways. I believe this can be accomplished and that in working toward this goal we are responsible not only for critiquing past practices but also for building a path toward a better future for our communities and future generations to benefit from and improve upon. With this in mind, some preliminary practices, theories, and methodologies for a decolonized archaeology that might be used to move beyond critique are offered at the end of this article.

DISTANCE OF TIME, DISTANCE OF WORLDVIEW

One often hears archaeology described as being primarily concerned with a study of the unknown, of what has been lost or buried.¹¹ The “lost” pasts that archaeologists seek to uncover are often distanced from them by time, culture, or both. In studying the past, archaeologists uti-

lize the contemporary lens of their time to study “others.” Thus, from its earliest beginnings, there has been a sense of “othering” involved in archaeological research that is based upon a quest for knowledge and understanding about those distanced from the present day by time (e.g., studying people and cultures from *prehistoric* times, who are worthy of study because their lifeways are different and unknown).

Through the process of colonization, westerners gained the power to study not only those distant from themselves by time but also the pasts of others who were distant from themselves culturally, and often geographically—those who had been subjected to colonial rule around the globe. In these colonial contexts, the othering by archaeologists not only entails the distance of time but also involves distance based on another, more cultural dimension, as it has created a power imbalance that allowed Western archaeologists to study the past lifeways of those who are not their own ancestors. Archaeologists have utilized Western epistemologies to view the practices and lifeways of others, many of whom held a very different worldview that operated on a different set of ontological and epistemological principles, and this research was also carried out for the benefit of Western scholars, was (re)produced using Western methods of recording history (external from people, held in books, for purchase), and was taught in Western institutions of higher learning or sold to Western public audiences.

ARCHAEOLOGY FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC?

In North America during the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, in what has been described as the time of collectors and antiquarians, those interested in archaeology were predominantly wealthy, educated elite who explored the past and collected artifacts out of curiosity or for monetary gain with little knowledge or concern for scientific methodology.¹² At this time in both Europe and North America, the common consensus was that the civilizations of the day were the result of evolutionary progress. However, not all members of society were deemed to be at the same stage of evolutionary progress. As Bruce G. Trigger states in his review of the history of archaeology,

Large numbers of middle-class people, whose economic and political power was increasing as a result of the Industrial Revolution,

were pleased to view themselves as a wave of progress that was inherent in human nature and perhaps in the very constitution of the universe. White Americans were happy to share this optimistic view but were not prepared to extend it to embrace the native people whose lands they were seizing.¹³

The European population in North America thus held an interest in Native American monuments and artifacts, and collectors and antiquarians were funded by the wealthy to explore these sites. The works published by antiquarians were for the middle- and upper-class European settlers who were interested in understanding the history of the land they had recently seized. As Trigger describes it, “The American public were anxious that their continent should have its own history to rival that of Europe and hence were intrigued by these finds, just as they were to be intrigued by John L. Stephens’ discovery of lost Maya cities in the jungles of Central America in the 1840s.”¹⁴

The settler population’s middle class and elite held an overall fascination and curiosity about the monuments and remains found in their “New World,” and this was not limited to the earthen mounds of the eastern and midwestern regions of the country but also included an extreme interest in the monuments and cultures further south in Mexico and Central America. Public curiosity was satisfied with books such as the published accounts and drawings by J. L. Stephens and Frederick Catherwood, which depict Mayan temples and monuments found during explorations of Central America.¹⁵ These books and others like them, which were written for the literate European colonial audience and explored the remains of Indigenous civilizations, became best sellers and had wide public appeal.

Expeditions such as Thomas Jefferson’s 1784 excavation of the Rivanna River Valley in Virginia aimed to satisfy curiosity surrounding the well-known mound builder controversy. The results of these explorations were of public interest among middle-class, educated Europeans and Americans, primarily because many of them did not believe local Native peoples to be capable of building such large-scale earthworks and their construction was thus considered mysterious. However, Jefferson’s excavation illustrates clearly that the audience for early archaeological work in North America certainly did not include Native American groups. Jefferson, often referred to as the “Father of American Archaeology,” de-

scribes the reasons for his interest in the Native American burial mound and his desire to determine who built these tremendous earthworks:

That they were repositories of the dead, has been obvious to all: but on what particular occasion constructed, was matter of doubt. . . . There being one of these in my neighbourhood, I wished to satisfy myself whether any, and which of these opinions were just. For this purpose I determined to open and examine it thoroughly.¹⁶

Jefferson goes on to describe in detail the human remains that he found there:

The skulls [*sic*] were so tender, that they generally fell to pieces on being touched. The other bones were stronger. There were some teeth which were judged to be smaller than those of an adult; a skull [*sic*], which, on a light view, appeared to be that of an infant, but it fell to pieces on being taken out, so as to prevent satisfactory examination; a rib, and a fragment of the under-jaw of a person about half-grown; another rib of an infant; and part of the jaw of a child, which had not yet cut its teeth. This last furnishing the most decisive proof of the burial of children here, I was particular in my attention to it.¹⁷

The motivation for Jefferson's grave robbing was his own curiosity and his desire to answer a research question that was mysterious to himself and other non-Indigenous locals, who had no long standing connection with the area. It was clear to Jefferson that these burial mounds were at the very least quite important to the local Native people. In reference to the burial mounds and their importance to local tribal groups, Jefferson writes:

on whatever occasion they may have been made, they are of considerable notoriety among the Indians: for a party passing, about thirty years ago, through the part of the country where this barrow is, went through the woods directly to it, without any instructions or enquiry, and having staid about it some time, with expressions which were construed to be those of sorrow, they returned to the high road, which they had left about half a dozen miles to pay this visit, and pursued their journey.¹⁸

It is clear from Jefferson's account that he knew the importance of these mounds to some Native groups but that the desires and motiva-

tions of local Native nations were not his motivation or concern. Jefferson was certainly not alone in his views and lack of interest for creating an archaeology that included the concerns of a Native American audience, as similar practices continued as sites were excavated and bodies continued to be exhumed for the next two hundred years. The editor's notes for the section of Jefferson's work quoted earlier state that "as an amateur archaeologist, among the very earliest on the North American continent, Jefferson anticipated by a century the aims and methods of modern archaeological science."¹⁹ This practice of excluding Native peoples from the audience of archaeological inquiry was common from the earliest beginnings of American archaeology and continued until resistance from Indigenous groups began in the 1960s and forced the discipline to reexamine its methods and interactions with Native American communities.

WHO OWNS OUR PAST? INDIGENOUS ACTION
TO DECOLONIZE ARCHAEOLOGY

In the 1960s Indigenous people globally began publicly voicing criticisms over the excavation, collection, and display of their cultural and ancestral remains by professional and amateur archaeologists. In his 1969 book *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Vine Deloria Jr. brought to written text some of the sentiments, anger, and outrage that had been felt and voiced for many years in Indian country about the exploitation of Native people by anthropologists. In 1971 Maria Pearson fought for the reburial of the remains of a Native woman found in a pioneer cemetery in Iowa. She pointed out the discriminatory practices that had been followed when the majority of the remains from the cemetery were reburied, while the Native woman's remains were not. Eventually Pearson won that battle and the remains were reburied.²⁰ In the years that followed, the American Indian Movement and other community activists staged protests at excavation sites and at roadside attractions where one could pay to see Native American ancestral remains, unburied and on display.²¹ Protests by Native American activists over these types of injustices with regard to the treatment of ancestral remains forced archaeologists in North America to take notice and address the concerns of Indigenous peoples over archaeological research and practices. There is now a growing literature

of academic publications, documentaries, and popular books describing activism around reburial and repatriation, which demonstrates the critical role that Native American activism played in bringing about legislative changes and dramatic shifts in archaeological practices.²²

During this time, and in large response to the critiques and activism described earlier, archaeologists began to think critically about their right to control the material culture of the Indigenous past. Archaeologists along with other scholars and activists organized a number of conferences, discussions, debates, and publications that addressed issues of reburial and repatriation.²³ The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) began paying greater concern to issues of ethics and social responsibility in archaeology and by 1991 had researched and adopted a code of ethics that included a statement on collaboration and reburial.²⁴ Through this research and resultant publications, the colonial nature of archaeology as it had been practiced around the globe became more apparent, and a growing literature now exists demonstrating the specific ways in which the discipline of archaeology was closely tied with the project of colonization in North America and elsewhere.²⁵

Over the past thirty years Native people and other Indigenous groups globally have been increasingly vocal about their desire to maintain control over their own heritage. As a result, debates over who owns the past, human remains, and material culture and who has the power to speak for and write the stories of the past have all played a prominent role in archaeology. In this long and fierce battle for control over Indigenous ancestral and cultural remains and heritage, there has been a mix of responses from archaeologists—some positive, others negative. Those who responded positively to these debates worked with Native leaders to bring about a number of changes that were part of the early steps taken internally toward decolonizing the discipline.²⁶ These changes included working with Native peoples to develop reburial and repatriation legislation (e.g., the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act [NAGPRA] and the National Museum of the American Indian [NMAI] legislation); establishing scholarship funds and training opportunities to increase the numbers of Indigenous people in archaeology; developing consultation and collaboration between archaeologists and descendant communities and stakeholders; further development of ethics guidelines; and the rise of intellectual and cultural property research. These

debates have moved archaeological practice in positive, new directions toward creating a discipline that is sensitive to, and harmonious with, the concerns and goals of Indigenous peoples and descendant populations.

The decolonization of archaeological practice has also been influenced by the changing demographics of the United States and the increase in diversity at institutions of higher education.²⁷ As the ethnic and cultural diversity of the United States and its institutions of higher learning increases and a greater number of Indigenous people and others familiar with the effects of colonization on their culture and communities enter the academy, the topic of archaeology's colonial lineage continues to move further to the foreground, creating a diverse critical mass, of sorts, of those interested in changing aspects of the practice of archaeology. In terms of Indigenous people, the situation in the United States is similar to that found among Indigenous groups globally, where very few Indigenous people are archaeologists, although a majority of the archaeology under examination in many regions are sites used by, lived in, and created by the ancestors of living Indigenous populations. Following the leadership of community activists and scholars in other disciplines, a large number of Indigenous people continue to commit themselves to reclaiming ancestors and repatriation struggles. To facilitate these struggles, some have received training and advanced degrees in archaeology. Others have found archaeology to be a useful part of understanding tribal histories and recovering Indigenous traditions. As a result, there are a growing number of Indigenous people who have careers, in one form or another, in archaeology, and the influence of these Native leaders, who often view themselves as Indigenous activists working to change the discipline of archaeology from within, is now capable of having a profound effect on the direction of archaeological methods, theories, practice, and ethics.

THE ROLE OF POSTMODERN THEORY IN ARCHAEOLOGY

As critiques by Native Americans and other Indigenous populations globally on the injustices of research practices that did not benefit them and exploited their ancestral and material remains were building, postmodernism was taking hold in the academy. Postmodern thought made its way into archaeology through a theoretical approach called postprocessualism.²⁸ Rather than one coherent theoretical and methodological

approach, postprocessual thought in archaeology includes a number of approaches that have in common a reaction to and critique of the earlier dominant paradigm of processualism, which relied strongly on positivist approaches to the past with the goal of understanding the processes of human behavior.²⁹ Among other things, postprocessualism brought debates over self-reflexivity, multi-vocality, social context of archaeology, ethics, and multiple interpretations to the minds of archaeologists globally, particularly those educated or practicing in North America, Europe, and other Western contexts.³⁰ Debates between supporters of these two paradigms continue today, but one of the outcomes of these discussions has been the realization by many archaeologists that there are multiple ways of seeing, interpreting, and understanding the past, and attempts to grapple with issues of objectivity and subjectivity remain a critical topic of inquiry. It was the influence of postmodern thought, and an environment of self-reflexivity brought forward by postprocessual critiques, that led to the recognition that archaeology, like history, is strongly influenced by the social and political context of the time. A large body of literature began to be developed addressing these issues and providing examples as to how research and writing about the past is a product of the time in which it is produced; archaeological data are theory laden; and the knowledge produced by archaeologists reflects aspects of the cultural context in which it is created.³¹ Included in this literature is research related to the colonial nature of archaeology and the Western worldview inherent in most archaeological examinations and interpretations.

Although great strides have been made toward bringing this knowledge out of the silent background, much work remains to be done to ensure that this is foregrounded and part of the reproduction of knowledge (i.e., teaching) for the next generation of scholars as well as to the general public, who constitute the informed, voting citizenry of powerful Western nations. The recent controversy over “The Ancient One” is evidence for the important work that remains in terms of educating the average American citizen, as well as the media, from which most people gain their information, with regard to the effects of colonization on interpretations about knowledge production and reproduction in topics of archaeology, the past, history, and heritage.³²

As a result of Indigenous activism, which raised public and academic consciousness of the injustices that Native People were experiencing as a direct result of archaeological research, and the simultaneous introduc-

tion of postmodern thought into archaeological theory in the form of postprocessual critiques, the colonial nature of archaeology and the level to which archaeological knowledge remains steeped in Western ways of knowing are slowly becoming apparent and accepted by archaeologists. It was in this environment that Indigenous archaeology began, in an effort to create understanding of the differences between Western and Indigenous ways of approaching human remains, sacred sites, and cultural materials and of the highly charged political, social, and spiritual ramifications of these differences. I argue that the historical context and level of Indigenous social consciousness that gave birth to Indigenous archaeology, as well the knowledge and experience it brings from Indigenous people who have a long-term and painful experience with struggles involving colonization, make it an excellent avenue through which we might envision and build a decolonized archaeology.

BUILDING AN INDIGENOUS ARCHAEOLOGY

The theoretical and methodological tenets and practices of Indigenous archaeology are currently being defined. The concepts and practices it professes have not been clearly defined, but rather are in the process of being articulated, with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars contributing to its development. In my own view, Indigenous archaeology includes research that critiques and deconstructs Western archaeological practice as well as research that works toward recovering and investigating Indigenous experiences, practices, and traditional knowledge systems.³³ George Nicholas has referred to Indigenous archaeology as, “archaeology with, for, and by” Indigenous people.³⁴ I agree with Nicholas that an Indigenous archaeology should be engaged in conducting research that is beneficial and valuable for descendent communities, and I advocate such research to be carried out in full collaboration with community members, elders, and spiritual and cultural leaders. However, I argue that Indigenous archaeology is not only for and by Indigenous people but has wider implications and relevance outside of Indigenous communities. In my view Indigenous archaeology provides a model for archaeological practice that can be applied globally as it calls for and provides a methodology for collaboration of descendent communities and stakeholders around the world.

It is critical to make a distinction here between consultation, which is

currently required as part of the NAGPRA legislation, and collaboration. Unlike collaboration, consultation does *not* necessarily allow for Indigenous people to play an active role in the *entire* research process, including research design, grant writing and funding processes, analysis and interpretation of results, production of reports, and sharing of research results in a culturally effective way with community members.³⁵ A growing number of scholars have been exploring collaborative methodologies and putting forth models for effective means of determining what is applicable and valuable in any particular community and their methods for carrying out such research.³⁶ Such research is quite valuable, and I believe this is an area that requires a great deal of further exploration and investigation among Indigenous archaeologists in order to further develop effective methodologies. Whatever models are put forth, it seems clear that there will not be one definitive solution for effective collaborative practice but that each circumstance will require its own unique strategy. Some of the challenges to be faced in this area include how to determine the appropriate collaborative partners in each community, how to face the challenges of working with diverse groups within each community (who may each have different desires and aspirations in terms of research plans and agendas), how to fund collaborative projects, and issues of intellectual property rights—to name only a few. In my own research, I have found the participatory research and popular education model of Paolo Freire to be one worthy of further exploration, and I discuss this topic in greater detail later in this article. However, beyond a Freirian approach, there are a number of potential collaborative methodologies to be explored—each with challenges to be faced—but it is clear that any models of collaborative research must involve descendent communities and explore the methods and practices they see as culturally relevant and appropriate.

Beyond the issue of collaboration, identity and place are two of the issues related to Indigenous archaeology that I'd like to address here briefly—questions of who does, or can do, it and where is it carried out seem critical to address. While I agree that Indigenous archaeology is something that must involve Indigenous people, scholars as well as elders, tribal historians, community members, spiritual leaders, and other stakeholders, I argue that Indigenous archaeology is not simply archaeology done by or involving Indigenous people. One need not be an Indigenous person to engage in the practice of Indigenous archaeology—it

does not include such essentialist qualities. Archaeology on Indigenous land, conducted by Native people without a critical gaze that includes collaboration, Indigenous epistemologies, and Native conceptions of the past, history, and time or that neglects to question the role of research in the community would simply replicate the dominant archaeological paradigm. Such a noncritical archaeology would be part of an imperialist practice, one that disperses the methods of the mainstream (American and British archaeology) to the “other.”³⁷

It may be the case that Indigenous people who become archaeologists will choose a nation-centered research agenda, one in which they focus on questions of interest to their own community. Some might view such an approach negatively, taking it to be part of a nationalist or revivalist project; however, I would disagree with this assessment and argue that a desire among Indigenous archaeologists to study the “self” is not part of a state-sponsored nationalism but rather part of a larger decolonizing project to develop counter-discourse. As part of a decolonizing practice, Indigenous archaeologists aim to challenge to the master narrative and attempt to de-center standard archaeological practice, to bring back to Indigenous people the power to set the agenda for their own heritage, to ask the questions, to determine what is excavated, and to remain involved in interpretations and dissemination of knowledge that reflect their own traditional methods of cultural resource management. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, such a research agenda might also include pointing out the power relations involved in mainstream archaeological practice and bringing the imbalance of power to the foreground.

Indigenous archaeology exists and is growing today because Indigenous people, marginalized and victimized by the early development and ongoing daily practice of anthropology, archaeology, and other social sciences, are finding ways to create counter-discourse that speaks back to the power of colonialist and imperialist interpretations of the past. This research is situated to work from the place of the “local,” among the elders and people in our communities—to acknowledge their critiques of exploitative research practices, to name them, and deconstruct them. Our research may then examine ways of regaining lost traditions and use those to move beyond critique of Western archaeological practices to offer a positive plan of forward movement toward a more ethical practice that takes seriously the concern of Indigenous people with

regard to their own heritage. Indigenous archaeology is thus part of a decolonizing process that aims to improve upon problematic aspects of mainstream archaeological practices by incorporating Indigenous concepts and knowledge forms.

Audre Lorde writes that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” and truthfully, some Indigenous activists might agree with this stance, arguing that archaeology (and archaeologists) are part of the problem of an ongoing colonization in Indigenous communities—a problem that must be tackled and dismantled by halting all archaeological research.³⁸ However, I disagree and would argue that although mainstream archaeology requires critical reflection and considerable change in order to become decolonized, this work is beneficial for Indigenous communities because it will bring about positive and effective change from within the discipline that will result in a powerful research tool from which Indigenous people, and others around the globe, can benefit. A decolonized archaeology can play a critical beneficial role in the recovery of many other precolonization Indigenous practices that, as Angela Cavender Wilson points out, once adapted to our contemporary world, can be important for our health and well-being.³⁹ Some of these include foodways and harvesting, spiritual practices and ceremonial knowledge, methods of education and reproduction of knowledge, and land use and conservation practices. However, I agree with Cavender Wilson that not all topics and areas of research are appropriate for investigation by outsiders, and the topics of research and emphasis for developing projects that seek to recover Indigenous practices and concepts must be those thought worthy and appropriate for sharing by Indigenous communities.⁴⁰

CENTERING INDIGENOUS CONCEPTS

In my own work, I have found it helpful to investigate the postcolonial concept of “de-centering.” De-centering involves moving concepts from the margin to the center. In terms of archaeological research, I’ve found it useful to de-center certain dominant Western concepts relating to the linear and departmentalized view of time, systems of production and reproduction of knowledge, and the role of research in society. In bringing to the center of archaeological theory some of the concepts held by Indigenous people about the past, traditional ways of teaching about his-

tory, heritage, and ancestral remains, and the role and responsibilities of research knowledge for communities, we would be in a position to begin envisioning a very different type of archaeological practice—one that emphasizes ethics and social justice for a wider, more diverse audience. However, we must ask the question, if in working to de-center some of the problematic aspects of Western archaeological practice, are we then advocating for destroying one power structure (a Western one) to simply replace it with another, Indigenous-centered one? I ask this question because of a recent dialogue I had on this topic in which by suggesting the de-centering of Western concepts in order to center Indigenous views, I was labeled a “colonist,” someone who was doing nothing different than what Western scholars had done before me (i.e., forcing my Indigenous worldview onto others). In response to such an argument I feel it is critical that we think carefully about what it is that we *are* calling for in decolonizing archaeology, and other Western-dominated forms of discourse and practice (history, museums, sociology, etc.). In addressing this issue, I argue as both Abiola Irele and Peter R. Schmidt have that we must sometimes use the master’s tools (in this case critique and academic scholarship) to create a counter-discourse to Western approaches that have consistently worked to destroy or silence our Indigenous ways of knowing.⁴¹

There are numerous concepts and areas of traditional Indigenous knowledge that deserve further attention and research as part of Indigenous archaeology and a wider decolonizing archaeological practice. I offer here one example of de-centering that seems critical in an Indigenous archaeology—the Anishinaabe concept of *gikinawaabi*.⁴² *Gikinawaabi* is an Anishinaabe concept that describes the passing or reproduction of knowledge, through experience, from elder to younger generations. It relies on the oral tradition and on practice, in daily life. After exploring the implications and practices of this concept in past and contemporary Anishinaabe life, I argue that *gikinawaabi* is a concept that should be centered in an Indigenous archaeology, particularly for what it implies about the communal access to knowledge.

In Ojibwe culture, while certain people have greater access to some forms of knowledge than others, there remains a sense that knowledge, particularly that related to our history, is shared by the community. It is not stored externally, in books on shelves, but is *internal*—held inside the people themselves. Knowledge of this sort might be put in the care of

certain individuals whose responsibility it is to exercise knowledge stewardship in protecting and passing on that knowledge. Yet, it is of critical importance that tribal history be for the community, not something external from them. It is passed from elders to youth, via the oral tradition through face-to-face interactions and in daily life practice.

If archaeology is to take a lesson from *gikinawaabi* practices, then archaeological collaboration with Indigenous and local communities must become standard practice, as questions of ownership and stewardship of cultural property in the form of historical knowledge, access to it, and the processes by which it is reproduced in the community are brought to the center. Although this concept is from an Ojibwe tradition and holds particular relevance and importance in that cultural context, I argue that it is also an example of the way in which traditional Indigenous knowledge holds wisdom and relevance for the larger global community of which it is a part. In this way, *gikinawaabi* as a centered and central part of mainstream archaeological practice holds important implications for the theory, methods, and practice of archaeology globally, outside of Ojibwe, Native North American, or Indigenous settings. It has relevance for an ethical and decolonized practice globally, which brings history back into the hands, hearts, and minds of a wider audience of diverse stakeholders, descendant communities, and publics. Borrowing from Ojibwe literary scholar, Gerald Vizenor's poetical description, it allows for an archaeologist as a teller of stories to "relume the diverse memories of the visual past into the experiences and metaphors of the present" as "original eruptions of time."⁴³ Thus, archaeologists become critically engaged storytellers of sorts, who might utilize a range of scientific methods for examination yet retain an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the importance of the past in the present and the ethical implications of practice that entails. In the approach I am advocating for, Indigenous forms of science, history, and heritage management would be researched and then blended with Western concepts to produce Indigenous archaeology methods, theories, and practices that are ethical and socially just and put forward as models of a decolonized archaeology.

POPULAR EDUCATION AS *GIKINAWAABI* IN PRACTICE

Paolo Freire's work on participatory research and popular education is an excellent model for putting *gikinawaabi* concepts into practice.⁴⁴

Freire began participatory research and popular education movements by working in solidarity with oppressed groups in Brazil to increase their rights and political power through literacy education. He calls for research designs based on what oppressed groups want to examine—in a practice driven by their questions, to produce knowledge that is shared by and useful for them. His concepts of popular education and participatory research hold incredible potential for Indigenous archaeological research and will certainly help to address the challenge of collaboration and engagement with diverse Indigenous communities.

One of the critical points from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is that well-intentioned individuals, who are often part of the oppressor group, put themselves in the position of trying to save the oppressed by imposing their own research questions, ideals, and methods upon the oppressed group. This is a particularly sensitive area in Native American and other colonized and heavily researched communities, where people have been the subjects of far too many exploitative research agendas, many of which were well intentioned. Collaborative research, particularly with the methods of participatory action research, offers a way for oppressed groups and, as Freire puts it, those who are in true solidarity with them to struggle for equality and the ability to take an active role in effective change and improvement in their own communities. The work of Freire, and others who follow the Freirian model, has influenced my approach to Indigenous archaeology by bringing to the forefront questions about the integration of research and education and the role of research as an emancipatory process that democratizes knowledge.

The concept of sharing archaeological knowledge with a range of publics is not new for archaeology. The Society for American Archaeology (SAA), the Canadian Archaeology Association (CAA), and other national and international professional archaeology organizations have a long history of outreach and public education.⁴⁵ However, from an Indigenous archaeological perspective, and particularly using the *gikinawaabi* concept, there is a conflict between standard “outreach” and the concepts of communal sharing of knowledge about the past. Currently, archaeological public education often entails the unidirectional design of imparting research findings to a willing public audience through public lectures, popular books, or an onsite “public” day. This is based on the problematic concept of “us” (archaeologists) giving “them” (the other) answers to questions chosen by the researcher. In bringing to the center the con-

cept of *gikinawaabi*, archaeologists are faced with the questions, Whom is the research for? Who benefits and how? Using Freirian concepts, an Indigenous archaeology calls for research that is done for the community, in a true collaborative effort with them, including research design, final interpretations, and dissemination of that knowledge through culturally sensitive pedagogical models.

Another important issue that we must face with the current approach of archaeological public outreach and education, and one which is also relevant with the SAA statement of ethics, is that Indigenous and descendant groups are seen as only one of many interested publics.⁴⁶ Unlike the ethics statements of the World Archaeological Congress and the Australian Archaeological Society, the statement of ethics of the SAA currently does not acknowledge the primacy of Indigenous and descendant groups' interests in the archaeological record related to their own heritage.⁴⁷ This is something that must be changed, and using a *gikinawaabi*-centered approach would help to do so by bringing Indigenous and other descendant groups to the center when addressing sites, landscapes, materials, and ancestral remains that are part of their heritage and for which they feel the responsibility of care and knowledge stewardship. In many cases, this is a stewardship role that Indigenous communities are willing to share with archaeologists but one that must include the primacy of Indigenous stewardship that colonization forcefully removed.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS: TRADITIONAL INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE TO TRANSFORM RESEARCH

Part of the practice of decolonizing archaeology is to research Indigenous traditional knowledge and practices and to utilize them, as Caven-der Wilson describes, "for the benefit of all humanity."⁴⁸ There is a great deal of knowledge and wisdom in these practices and teachings that has the power to benefit our own Indigenous communities as well as others globally. Traditional Indigenous knowledge holds in it a wisdom, some of which is appropriate to share and can help to build strength for other communities. Thus a decolonizing archaeology must take as one of its goals the work of bringing these concepts to the academy and working toward their legitimization in areas of research that have a dramatic impact on Indigenous people globally, such as archaeology. Beyond that, we must also engage in the struggle to put these concepts into practice in

our own scholarship, producing models that those working with descendent groups around the globe can follow.

Integral to this work is the realization and acknowledgement that Western ways of knowing are not in any way superior or natural—they are produced and reproduced through daily practice. As such, these ways of knowing and understanding the world can be disrupted, changed, and improved upon. As all aspects of human life and culture, knowledge and practices associated with its production and reproduction are not static but are constantly changing. Through Indigenous archaeology research as part of a global decolonizing practice, it is possible to find effective ways to regain our traditional knowledge, epistemologies, and practices and bring that knowledge, when appropriate for sharing outside of Native contexts, to the fore. Currently, one value system and standard is used—one that views Western science, theories, and methods as the standard and goal with the aim of producing knowledge truths. Decolonizing archaeology entails researching alternative ways of viewing the past, history, and heritage and working to see that these are viewed as valuable and legitimate ways of seeing. Some might utilize the resulting methods and theories in Indigenous communities, while others see the value of incorporating certain aspects into archaeological practice more broadly, as part of a wider project of global decolonization.

Thus Indigenous archaeology is not marginal in its applicability but rather has implications for mainstream archaeological practice globally. It offers the potential of bringing to archaeology a more ethical and engaged practice, one that is more inclusive and rich without sacrificing the rigor and knowledge production capacity that make it such a powerful tool for understanding and creating knowledge of the past.

CONCLUSION: MOVING BEYOND WESTERN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE

Archaeological methods of analysis, research directions, and theoretical approaches have changed dramatically since the early days of the discipline, and today archaeological research topics relate to various aspects of cultural heritage, representation, and identity that overlap with fields such as ethnic studies, cultural anthropology, art and art history, heritage studies, history, and museums studies. Research and teaching within archaeology is multi-disciplinary and involves methods and analytical

techniques related to chemistry, ecology, biology, botany, statistics, geology, geography, and many others. Since it looks at a range of cultures globally and with a deep historical trajectory, archaeology also has the potential to play a critical role in helping us to understand multi-culturalism, identity, colonization, and decolonization. It has the ability to provide alternative views of the master narrative and to tell histories that might otherwise be silenced.⁴⁹ When done properly, archaeological training and education can broadly improve students' critical thinking skills and expose them to the complexity and nuances inherent in issues of heritage, reburial and repatriation, research ethics, intellectual and cultural property concerns, and decolonization practices—issues that are critical for Indigenous communities globally.

In this article I have offered several examples of where work has been done and where it remains to be done toward decolonizing archaeology and bringing it more closely to its full potential as a socially just tool of knowledge (re)production. The aim has been to put forth a model that might be used as a stepping stone, not something that should be duplicated everywhere, but something that should be contemplated and further developed as archaeologists work in true collaboration with Indigenous, descendant, and local groups worldwide. Part of this effort will involve examination of the ways in which archaeologists and Indigenous peoples might work together to shape a shared future and an exploration of core issues that include the following: Who benefits from archaeological research? Is the Western, scientific approach to archaeological theory and method necessarily the “best” way of interpreting the past? What are the practical ramifications of archaeological research for the Indigenous peoples, for whom the “artifacts” of archaeology are a living heritage?

I argue that if archaeologists and Indigenous people are to be successful stewards of the archaeological record, we must begin to explore ways of moving beyond posturings that pit science against religion or polarize interests of Indigenous people against archaeologists, and I advocate for a collaborative approach that blends the strengths of Western archaeological science with the knowledge and epistemologies of Indigenous peoples to create a set of theories and practices for an ethically informed study of the past, history, and heritage. Indigenous groups and archaeologists have shared interests—the exploitation of mounds and earthworks in the Midwest or the return of archaeological materials held by university secret societies (such as the University of Michigan's *Michigamua* or

Princeton's Skull and Bones Society), and these are logical places to begin exploring ways of building future methods and theories.⁵⁰

A decolonizing archaeology must include topics such as the social construction of cultural heritage, concerns over revitalization of tradition and Indigenous knowledge, issues of ownership and authority, cultural and intellectual property, and the history and role of museums, collections and collecting. We must ask questions such as, What does it mean to have ones history, story, or knowledge examined, interpreted, and displayed by “outsiders”? Who has access to this knowledge? Who has the right to examine it, to write about it? Who owns the imagery, symbols, and knowledge of a cultural, social, or ethnic group, and who controls how that is used? Who has the right to interpret it, speak about it, display it, profit from it?

It is equally critical that we continue to put forth models to change and rebuild methods, theory, and practice in archaeology. This requires thinking carefully about what we would like to see. How would we like archaeological research to be conducted? Are we calling for the replacement of the Western, scientific practice of archaeology with an Indigenous one, or should we advocate for a blending of these and other ways of knowing/viewing/interpreting the past (as I have advocated for in this article)? It seems that the only way forward is to engage with a range of “other” concepts about history, culture, heritage, and the past in order to produce new ideas and a new direction—a direction that starts with the people, situated locally with primacy given to descendant communities, while also considering the interests of other stakeholders and publics. Indigenous archaeology is thus part of a wider project of decolonizing and democratizing knowledge production in archaeology and the social sciences more broadly. It has the potential to bring to archaeology a model for sustainable research practice that has global applicability in the twenty-first century and for many generations to come.

NOTES

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munities need archaeologists and the important and difficult work that we do; and finally Theo Mendoza (and all of the BB6) for their unending support during these challenging times of change. Ni kani gana.

1. The terms “Western” and “Indigenous” are used throughout this article to denote very broad, general groups of people and communities, each of which in itself encompasses a great deal of complexity and diversity of views. While I assume that the reader is aware of the categories that I refer to, I want to be clear that by using these broad categorizations in an attempt to present this argument from a general perspective, I do not intend to insinuate that either term refers to a monolithic, homogenous group with rigid and clearly defined epistemologies and worldviews, but rather each includes a great deal of diversity.

2. See, e.g., Mann, *Native Americans*; Thomas, *Skull Wars*; Trigger, *History of Archaeological Thought*; Watkins, *Indigenous Archaeology*.

3. For a background on early excavations of burial mounds and collecting practices in the United States, see Thomas, *Skull Wars*, particularly chapter 6 (52–63) and Chapter 12 (123–132), and Mann, *Native Americans*, particularly chapters 1–2 (5–104).

4. Mihesuah’s edited volume *Repatriation Reader* provides a range of perspectives on contemporary issues of repatriation. See Riding-In, “Our Dead Are Never Forgotten,” for an excellent historical overview and Echo-Hawk and Echo-Hawk, *Battlefields and Burial Grounds* for a brief introduction to the struggles of Native communities to reclaim their dead. Thomas, *Skull Wars* provides a more general overview of the growth of museum collections through excavation and salvage anthropology and the contemporary effects of those practices.

5. For a discussion on the extent of this genocide see Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust*.

6. In his book *Ishi’s Brain*, Orin Starn attempts to strike a balance in his presentation of the treatment of Ishi and does not present the salvage anthropology of the day as simply a product of the times. See also Clifford, “Looking Several Ways,” for further discussion on this issue.

7. Michigan Historical Collections, finding aid for Michigan Archaeological Society Records, 1924–1991, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Accessed February 1, 2005.

8. For further information on the typical public archaeology and museum going audience see Allen, “Reaching the Hidden Audience”; Ramos and Duganne, “Exploring Public Perceptions”; and White, “Archaeology and Tourism.”

9. See Colley, *Uncovering Australia*, 171–190; Layton, *Who Needs the Past?*; McGuire, “Why Have Archaeologists?” 74–78; Nicholas and Andrews, *At a Crossroads*; Patterson, *Toward a Social History*; Schmidt and Patterson, *Making Alternative Histories*.

10. Nicholas, "Education and Empowerment," 85.
11. E.g. Bourbon, *Lost Cities of the Mayas*; McNaspy and Blanch, *Lost Cities of Paraguay*; O'Connor, *Lost Cities of the Ancient Southeast*.
12. Trigger, *History of Archaeological Thought*, 27–72.
13. Trigger, *History of Archaeological Thought*, 109.
14. Trigger, *History of Archaeological Thought*, 105.
15. Stephens, 1969 (1841) #141; Stephens, 1973 (original 1843) #140; both illustrated by Frederick Catherwood.
16. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 97.
17. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 99.
18. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 100.
19. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 281.
20. Echo-Hawk and Echo-Hawk, *Battlefields and Burial Grounds*, 32.
21. For accounts of protests, see, e.g., Echo-Hawk and Echo-Hawk, *Battlefields and Burial Grounds*, 31–40; Riffe, "Who Owns the Past"; and Thomas, *Skull Wars*, 198–208.
22. See Bray, *Future of the Past*; Dongoske, *Working Together*; Mihesuah, *Repatriation Reader*; Swidler and Society for American Archaeology, *Native Americans and Archaeologists*; Thomas, *Skull Wars*; Watkins, *Indigenous Archaeology*.
23. See sources from the previous note; also see Biolsi and Zimmerman, *Indians and Anthropologists*.
24. See the Society of American Archaeology ethics statement: <http://www.saa.org/aboutSAA/committees/ethics/principles.html>.
25. See Colley, *Uncovering Australia*; Harrison and Williamson, *After Captain Cook*; Mann, *Native Americans*; Thomas, *Skull Wars*; Watkins, "Archaeological Ethics." See also L. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, for the colonial nature of archaeology in broader research context.
26. E.g., Zimmerman, "A New and Different Archaeology?"; McGuire, "Why Have Archaeologists?"; Layton, *Conflict in the Archaeology*; Layton, *Who Needs the Past?*; Ferguson, Anyon, and Ladd, "Representation of Indian Bodies."
27. See Hodder, "Postprocessual Archaeology"; Hodder, *Reading the Past*; Preucel et al, *Processual and Postprocessual Archaeologies*; also see Trigger, *History of Archaeological Thought*, for an in depth description of this history.
28. Trigger, *History of Archaeological Thought*, chapters 8–9.
29. See Gathercole, Lowenthal, and NetLibrary, *Politics of the Past*; Hodder, *Archaeological Process*; Hodder, "Introduction"; Hodder, "Postprocessual Archaeology"; Kehoe, *Land of Prehistory*; Layton, *Conflict in the Archaeology*; Layton, *Who Needs the Past?*; Martin and Wodak, *Re/Reading the Past*; Preucel and Hodder, *Contemporary Archaeology in Theory*; Preucel et al, *Processual and*

Postprocessual Archaeologies; Whitley, *Reader in Archaeological Theory*; Zimmerman, Vitelli, and Hollowell-Zimmer, *Ethical Issues in Archaeology*.

30. See, e.g., Gathercole, Lowenthal, and NetLibrary, *Politics of the Past*; Hodder, *Interpreting Archaeology*; Kohl and Fawcett, *Nationalism*.

32. For information about the “Ancient One” controversy, see Smith and Burke, “In the Spirit of the Code”; Thomas, *Skull Wars*; Watkins, “Archaeological Ethics”; Zimmerman and Echo-Hawk, “Beyond Racism.”

33. In the way I use the term throughout this article, “Western archaeology” includes the very broad range of methodological approaches currently part of mainstream practice in the United States and elsewhere and involves aspects of both processual and postprocessual theoretical approaches. As referred to in this article, Western archaeology generally is based on, or relies upon, the tenets of the scientific method and aims to bring multiple lines of evidence together to create rich, textured, and accurate accounts of past lifeways.

34. Nicholas, “Education and Empowerment,” 85.

35. Forsman, “Cultural Resource Management,” 2–3.

36. For some interesting examples, see Foster and Croes, “Tribal-Archaeological Cooperative Agreement”; Lightfoot et al, “The Metini Village Project”; Nicholas, “Education and Empowerment”; Nicholas and Andrews, *At a Crossroads*; Robinson, “Shampoo Archaeology.”

37. For a description of imperialist archaeology see Trigger, “Alternative Archaeologies.”

38. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 112.

39. Cavender Wilson, “Reclaiming Our Humanity,” 83–84

40. Cavender Wilson, “Reclaiming Our Humanity,” 83.

41. See Irele, “African Scholar,” and Schmidt, “Using Archaeology” (both discussed in Schmidt and Patterson, *Making Alternative Histories*, 24).

42. Chippewa is synonymous with Ojibwe, and both describe one segment of a larger, tri-partite group with common kinship ties. The general name for the group is Anishinaabe, which is now the common name we use to refer to ourselves.

43. Vizenor, *People Named the Chippewa*.

44. Freire, *Education*; Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

45. SAA public education information is available online at <http://www.saa.org/pubedu/index.html>; see also the framing of public outreach and education in the ethics statement of the CAA, online at <http://www.canadianarchaeology.com/conduct.lasso>.

46. SAA ethics statement, online at <http://www.saa.org/aboutSAA/committees/ethics/principles.html>.

47. World Archaeological Congress First Code of Ethics, online at <http://www.wac.uct.ac.za/archive/content/vermillion.accord.html>; Australian Archaeological Association Code of Ethics, online at <http://www.australianarchaeologicalassociation.com.au/codeofethics.php>.
48. Cavender Wilson, "Reclaiming Our Humanity," 75.
49. For examples, see Schmidt and Patterson, *Making Alternative Histories*.
50. For university secret societies, see Maggard, "Michigamua Office"; Millegan, *Fleshing out Skull and Bones*; Robbins, *Secrets of the Tomb*.

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