

New subjectivities: capitalism, colonial subject and archaeologist

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If any one person is to be emblematic of the dilemmas of historical archaeology today, there is surely no better than Leonidas Posada Gaviria, the material man of later nineteenth century Bogotá who “made a fortune by supplying to the modernized needs and gentrified tastes of his fellow citizens”. Felipe Gaitán-Ammann paints a provocative word picture of this champion of the world of things: “as Leonidas Posada Gaviria’s life unfolds before our eyes, the city of Bogotá reveals to us as a complex heterotopic space in which politically decolonized agents succeeded in manipulating the strings of the capitalist system so as to reproduce conditions of coloniality through pre-capitalist forms of inequality and social interaction”.

On the other side of town, give or take a few decades, a water cistern had fallen into disuse and was accumulating rubbish at the Quinta de Bolivar, preserving “colorful debris of coarse lead-glazed earthenwares, medicine flasks, wine bottles, piles of faunal remains, and the first archaeological toothbrush excavated in Colombia”. How can the connection with the life of Posada Gaviria be made, and given meaning? What do the ceramics found in a water cistern on an estate combined with the biography of a merchant running a glass and dinnerware shop on a commercial street in Bogotá reveal about capitalism and colonialism that is not already known? And why the toothbrush?

There is a richness in these encounters with the past that is itself exotic, and a world away from the austere measurement of clay tobacco pipe fragments and musket shot that defined an earlier historical archaeology.

Chapter 14: New Subjectivities: Capitalist, Colonial Subject and Archaeologist

The Archaeology of Capitalism in Colonial Contexts: Postcolonial Historical Archaeologies, edited by Sarah Croucher and Lindsay Weiss

Martin Hall
University of Salford

If any one person is to be emblematic of the dilemmas of historical archaeology today, there is surely no better than Leonidas Posada Gaviria, the material man of later nineteenth century Bogotá who “made a fortune by supplying to the modernized needs and gentrified tastes of his fellow citizens”. Felipe Gaitán-Ammann paints a provocative word picture of this champion of the world of things: “as Leonidas Posada Gaviria’s life unfolds before our eyes, the city of Bogotá reveals to us as a complex heterotopic space in which politically decolonized agents succeeded in manipulating the strings of the capitalist system so as to reproduce conditions of coloniality through pre-capitalist forms of inequality and social interaction” (Gaitán-Ammann, this volume).

On the other side of town, give or take a few decades, a water cistern had fallen into disuse and was accumulating rubbish at the Quinta de Bolívar, preserving “colorful debris of coarse lead-glazed earthenwares, medicine flasks, wine bottles, piles of faunal remains, and the first archaeological toothbrush excavated in Colombia”. How can the connection with the life of Posada Gaviria be made, and given meaning? What do the ceramics found in a water cistern on an estate combined with the biography of a merchant running a glass and dinnerware shop on a commercial street in Bogotá reveal about capitalism and colonialism that is not already known? And why the toothbrush?

There is a richness in these encounters with the past that is itself exotic, and a world away from the austere measurement of clay tobacco pipe fragments and musket shot that defined an earlier historical archaeology. Such are the possibilities for an archaeology of Jamaican markets, mapped out by Mark Hauser, in which ceramics could be used to ply between the inventiveness of their makers, situated in local networks of exchange within an oppressive plantation regime of control, and the global system of distribution, in which cargoes of slaves and of commodities crossed each others paths across the Atlantic (Hauser, this volume). Or an archaeology of the Russian-American Company, which ruled Alaska from 1799 until 1867, and which extracted exotic goods of high value in Europe through various regimes of exploitation and forced labour that can be traced through their material remnants (Crowell, this volume). Or the archaeology of change in the late Ottoman Empire mapped out in settlement design in Transjordan (Carroll, this volume). Or the archaeology of colonialism in nineteenth century Australia, as indigenous communities encounter colonial settlers at remote sheep stations (Patterson, this volume). Or, again, the encounter on the Californian coast in 1579 between the

wrecked crew of the *San Agustín* and the Coast Miwok, who may have taken the Spanish as the dead returned and appropriated the Asian porcelains from the wreck for use in Kuksu – Ghost Dance – ceremonies (Russell, this volume).

But with this heady travelogue comes an unease. As the spotlight pans from Colombia to Jamaica to Transjordan to California to Australia to Alaska, is this perhaps a spectacle of the exotic performed for the benefit of us, its participants? And here Audrey Horning serves as our conscience, asking after James Deetz whether a good deal of historical archaeology is not just ‘the most expensive way in the world of finding out what we already know’ (Horning, this volume).

Recasting Horning’s critique, is the exchange of reports from the field not itself a sumptuary activity through which a professional elite extends and reproduces its reputational capital? (see Appadurai 1986 on sumptuary value; David 1998 on the circulation of reputational value in academic life). Is perhaps the way in which information from far-away places is brought back to the center of the contemporary capitalist world to be woven into theory and redistributed and resold in high priced journals not an equivalent to exporting peanuts from Senegal to make industrial lubricants in Europe in order to manufacture the commodities which are then sold back to the Senegalese (Richard, this volume)? Leonidas Posada Gaviria understood the money to be made through the sale and circulation of elite goods, and became rich. Perhaps, had he lived a century later, he would have made a good archaeologist.

There are three ways of avoiding the sumptuary allure of the past, and the particular value of the papers in this collection is the way in which they demonstrate the value of each of them. The first is through a deep grounding in the evidence, allowing its fissures and contradictions to challenge the assumed and presumed. The second is through an engagement with theory, plying between the abstract and the empirical to advance interpretation. The third is through engagement – taking a stand and making explicit the inevitable connection between the present and the past.



François Richard’s chapter provides a thoughtful response to Audrey Horning’s challenge to the value of what we all do. Richard sees the importance of evidence – “the ‘dense circuitry’ of people, spaces, and things” - as historicizing the ways in which power is configured in subjecting people to particular regimes (in this context, colonialism) and also in “coming to occupy a particular understanding of oneself and mode of consciousness”. There is value in this dual engagement with evidence, directed at understanding both the subjectivity of the colonial subject and the subjectivity of the contemporary interpreter: “placing colonial experiences in conversation with postcolonial conditions may help us survey the problem-space of colonial history with fresh eyes and instruments, in ways that locate salient historical questions *because of their enduring resonance in the present*” (Richard, this volume, original emphasis).

Similarly, Lynda Carroll's close study of a small part of the Jordanian landscape at Wadi Hisban allows "for new discourses to help explore the daily lives of Ottoman subjects who lived under the shadow of the state ... local interactions between state and subjects, as they both engaged in and challenged processes of capitalism and colonialism". During the nineteenth century, land use reforms had attempted to transform "primitive" Badu pastoralists into "productive subjects of the state". But settlement patterns revealed a history differing from the formal transcript: "the model of changing settlement, and the construction of large farms, has been thus far been constructed based on top down models of change, initiation from the policies of the state through colonial attitudes, or as the result of capitalist exploitation through the investments of merchant settlers. Throughout this discourse, Bedu remain largely passive recipients of both of these global structures. However, at Qasr Hisban, the natural and built landscapes provide an alternative story" (Carroll, this volume).

Aron Crowell demonstrates the qualities of thick description in his account of the traces of Russian colonialism in the material world of Alaska, "blue Orthodox domes" that "float above scores of southern Alaskan villages from Kodiak to the Yukon River" and identity that "is perpetuated in Russian family names, loan words, foods, and customs such as Christmas season "starring" processions and New Year celebrations ... The comingling of Russian and indigenous blood and culture laid the foundation for a complexly-layered contemporary ethnicity that echoes the "double consciousness" of indigenous Latin America". Crowell's interpretation of the evidence suggests a complex set of circumstances for which "archaeology is positioned to generate unique insights into social and cultural change among these overlooked strata of colonial society, where creolization unfolded through the daily interaction of men and women, colonizers and indigenes" (Crowell, this volume).

Sarah Croucher provides a similar examples from her fieldwork in Islamic Africa. She is forced out of the conventional frame of European capitalist/colonial interpretations by the simple necessities of working within a different cosmological orbit. Her work is a deep engagement with the materiality of the East African coast, running from Sofala in Mozambique to Mogadishu in Somalia. Here, it "is impossible to slot capitalist relations into any single 'type' of capitalism. We cannot say that colonial powers on Zanzibar were merchant capitalists and therefore place all cultural iterations of capitalism as analogous to those of 17th century European merchants ... Likewise, we cannot take the dominant mode of capitalism in Europe at the time as the 'core' of capitalism, and dismiss cultural practices embedded within capitalist modes on Zanzibar as simply a reaction in a 'periphery', where capitalism is an external force and unchanged by Zanzibari practices ... The cultural exchanges which traversed the commodity chain are perhaps as important to note as the economic relations and it is in these that we see the particularities of the manner in which understandings of capitalism on Zanzibar were shaped by the particular cultural context of the island, and the way in which the practices of Zanzibaris were also integral to the shaping of the wider capitalist world" (Croucher, this volume).

Thick description, of course, engages continually with theory, and to deny theory is just another theoretical view of the world. There are two theoretical strands that run through the papers in this collection; abstracted, they give us a sense of the current frontier of the discipline as it pushes on into the jungle of the yet-to-be-understood. The first strand can be termed “material expressions”, and the second, “places of transgression”.

Matthew Palus introduces the notion of material expression by taking us into the twentieth century sewers of Annapolis. His case is both simple and compelling – that we can “see” government at work (governability) through the fabric of public utilities: “towards the end of the 19th century, the city government of Annapolis extended its authority over urban infrastructure in new ways. The installation and management of sewer and water infrastructure became a new governmental function. Through these technologies the city government regulated the conduct of its citizens more intensively, and the regulation of conduct, exemplified here in the promotion of public health, connects the historical modernization of government in Annapolis with the modernization of its infrastructure” (Palus, this volume).

There is a significant opportunity here for urban comparison of a large scale. For example, there can be an immediate cross-reference to nineteenth century Cape Town, where a newly emerged landlord class, enriched from the compensation that came with the end of slavery and seeking maximum rentals with minimum investment, clashed with the merchant classes of Empire, who sought public investment in municipal improvement. This political struggle was expressed in the case for and against water utilities and provision for sewage disposal, with the factions cast respectively as the “Dirty Party” and the “Clean Party” (Bickford Smith 1995).

One way of sharpening these explorations of material expression is to think of objects as being ascribed qualities of authenticity (Hall 2006). Whether Zanzibari ceramic sets, Alaskan religious icons or American sewers, these systems of things grant durability to meaning and map out social orders: trade connections, reciprocal obligations, common identity, civic order. This is what the Coast Miwok saw in 1579 when the *San Agustín* washed ashore – the dead had returned for a fleeting visit, leaving behind them a cargo of objects that were the authentic embodiment of their presence, and which could be circulated for years to come as a part of the Ghost Dance ceremonies (Russell, this volume).

The second theoretical strand - places of transgression – gives the concept of material expression a more explicitly spatial dimension and directs attention to opposition, suppression and subversion as ways of understanding the structures of dominant orders. This approach now has a respectable lineage in historical archaeology that tracks back to critiques of the totalizing structuralist and normative approaches of the 1970s and 1980s (see Leone 1988 and Hall 1992 for early critiques). It is nicely framed by François Richard in his essay on Francophone West African colonialism. Contact zones in Senegal, Richard writes, are places “where the technologies and forms of authority of the colonial state met previously existing structures of power as well as the cultural senses

and sensibilities of African populations, where different domains of materiality clashed or interlocked It is in this mosaic of familiar places and strange spaces – agricultural fields, stretches of landscapes, villages, market centers, administrative posts – that colonial capital flows converged on local worlds of cultural intimacy, where rural Africans reasoned with, contested, and compromised the reason of state (*raison d'état*) and logic of the market” (Richard, this volume).

For his part, Alistair Patterson uses two case studies of pastoralism to explore colonial contact and creolization in Australia. His aim is to get deeper into what has often been assumed to be a simple conflict, driven by economic interests, and to do this by adding “some texture to a binary perception that arises from examining the interface between two different cultures in contact”. Patterson shows how Strangeways Springs in Central Australia was in part built on foundations of indigenous labor and knowledge, while in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, the archaeological record provides information on the organization of the pastoral domain. “An implication of these studies is that indigenous agency, often overlooked or hidden in colonial overviews, is potentially available in other ways -- meeting the challenge of understanding those ‘people without history’ Europeans encountered across the world” (Patterson, this volume).

Lynda Carroll’s study of changing settlement patterns in Transjordan, Mark Hauser’s discussion of Caribbean markets and Lindsay Weiss’s work on nineteenth century South African diamond fields show how this line of interpretation continues to open up our understanding of the past.

Carroll’s focus is on the late Ottoman Empire and the ways in which large-scale agriculture sought to displace Bedouin nomadism. By looking at the architecture of settlement she can suggest how the dominant intent of the commercially oriented farmers – many of them absentee landlords – was subverted by resilient nomadic communities who persisted in using opportunities for cultural survival. There were, for example, particular opportunities in the caves that are characteristic of the desert landscape: “in Transjordan, caves dot the landscape of Transjordan. Throughout the Ottoman period, caves were used for storage, for housing animals, and even as domestic spaces. These were often used as permanent features of the landscape around which tribal migrations were tethered to, through the course of their cyclical migrations... caves in Transjordan often became clandestine spaces, to provide activity areas that remained outside of the view of the state. The mobility of Bedu, especially before the Tanzimat, made it easy to circumvent state monitoring efforts. The use of caves, along with their ability to move camp, were part of a strategy used to under represent produce, hide taxable livestock, or even hide potential conscripts” (Carroll, this volume).

Hauser skillfully uses the documentary evidence and faint material traces to show how markets in pre-emancipation Jamaica may have violated the aspirations of plantation owners and colonial officials to maintain total control. Coarse earthenware pots – yabbas – were distributed by street marketers, or higglers: “market activity undertaken by higglers embodied the local economy, in that the trade was one of island-produced goods and the islands’ shores circumscribed the flow of the commodities. The higglers

themselves were also local, in that they had mastered the various physical and economic geographies of Jamaica. They could move seamlessly between plantation and city and between provision ground and market”: “for the enslaved, circumscribed by the obligations of laboring on plantation grounds six days a week, the distances traversed by higglers were great. Conversely, for the planters who did not know the provision ground trails or the unwritten rules of the informal trade, the higglers' knowledge was equally "esoteric." Such knowledge made a higgler a potentially dangerous sort of person who could control the market and pass information outside the gaze of the planter”. This gives the capitalist relations of the market a dual function; markets “provided the infrastructure that enabled planters to have enslaved Africans use their own labor to feed and fend for themselves. Second they created the infrastructure through which the loosely linked network of higglers and markets not only circulated goods, but also perhaps information. The markets provided a space for information to be passed, solidarities to be built, and social action to be orchestrated” (Hauser, this volume).

This is the classic carnivalesque of Bakhtin (1984). As such, it also allows the possibilities in the critiques of Bakhtin's work; that a delimited space such as market (allowed on specified days and in a bounded place) may in reality be within the frame of Foucault's panopticon; that the controlled opportunity for the colonial subject to let off steam and to believe there was an opportunity for resistance was in itself part of the processes of control (Stallybrass and White 1986).

Lindsay Weiss's work with the diamond fields provides a model instance of the ways in which material assemblages from places of transgression can be used in direct interpretation of social and political life, illuminating that which is beyond the reach of verbal evidence. She shows how the early days of the diamond rush created spaces in which established orders broke down and “accelerated the blurring of the traditional Victorian registers of class, race and gender (to some degree a rather unsurprising state of affairs for a city literally “honeycombed with cesspool”, traversed by roving dogs, flies and with the approaching roads practically lined with rotting animal carcasses” (Weiss, this volume).

Weiss sees the particular archaeological potential in the places that offered housing to the transitory population of the early diamond field: “no space condensed or seemed to speed up the social confusion quite as much as the suburban canteens and hotels, which ringed the diggings”. This is expressed in the material assemblage from one such place, an assemblage from the early phase of the hotel which “ typifies no one set of cultural practices monolithically, but would seem to represent many diverse and travel-contingent needs, as well as a good deal of trade and service improvisations. This sort of social hybridity ... in which local economies, informal trade, barter, negotiation of wage labor and other such interactions were ongoing and pervasive (these activities went on day and night as many traversed the roads at all hours), suggest the broader culture of a mobile and hybrid community” (Weiss, this volume).

Thus the material assemblage challenges the verbal evidence and reveals some of the dimensions of transgression: “over the 1880s and 1890s, a distinct shift comes to be

perceptible in hotel advertisements which increasingly stress the potentially individuated nature of the amenities, so, while including reference to the somewhat common *table d'hôte* service, ads would emphasize “table d'hôte with *separate tables*” ... and also listing special rates for “private suppers” ... Taking the fact that drinking and eating had constituted, in many important respects, the core of the incipient sociality that defined the early Diamond Fields these seemingly minor or subtle shifts in the collective ambience of the hotel and canteen space indicate profound changes in the way that social fluidity was expressed which, in turn, had very direct implications for the way that exchange could be undertaken at such locales. The business practices at hotels on the Diamond Fields had come to revolve mainly around (more licit) profit motives and professionalized service rather than operating from any motive or belief in an informal family style in which the inner transactions of the hotel were readily observable or available to customers” (Weiss, this volume).

Cases such as these clearly show the iterative power of theory, as we move between particular circumstances and abstracted principles. Horning, though, adds a vital rider, the danger of slipping into a totalizing narrative that collapses all accounts of colonialism into a common set of uniform terms: “for those of us engaged in comparative analysis ... there is one overarching caution that must be acknowledged: To know the archaeology of inequality and oppression in one part of the modern world is not to know it in another, except in the most superficial of fashions. In the case of Northern Ireland, the ability of surprising insights to emerge from seemingly familiar landscapes is surely a more powerful tool of engagement than assertions equating ‘Irish peasants’ with enslaved African Americans, an abstract equation as likely to confuse or alienate contemporary Northern Irish of both traditions as it would offend the descendants of those millions of Africans who endured the Middle Passage, the horrors of enslavement, and centuries of race-based discrimination” (Horning, this volume).



Finally, and to return to the niggling question asked by Audrey Horning, is there any point to all of this? To put this another way, what is the connection between the past and the present? Do the studies in this collection serve in a tournament of value in which the prizes are research grants, appointments and – ultimately – tenure? Or is the point rather the relationship between these constructed pasts and the present?

In raising this issue, Horning makes clear the importance of “positionality”, of the stand taken by the interpreter of the past: “the need for self-reflexivity and an explicit ethical position is a necessity for responsible archaeology in a postcolonial, post-modern age, yet I’ve always hoped that my own position was obvious in the questions I ask. I want to prioritize other people’s stories over my own, but accept that as a kind of self-justifying subterfuge suggestive of a latent attachment to scientific objectivity exacerbated by an over-developed (Western?) sense of privacy. It is a question of balance- if we employ personal narrative, we run the risk of further privileging the author’s voice while exposing individual agendas” (Horning, this volume).

Bent Flyvbjerg addresses the question of positionality through his provocative concept of “situational ethics”: “the objective is to balance instrumental rationality with value-rationality by increasing the capacity of individuals, organisations and society to think and act in value-rational terms ... researchers ... take their point of departure in their attitude to the situation in the society being studied. They seek to ensure that such an attitude is not based on idiosyncratic morality or personal preferences, but instead on a common view among a specific reference group to which the researchers refer” (Flyvbjerg 2001: 130. See also Hall 2005).

For Horning, this translates into a clear agenda: “the archaeology I conduct in Northern Ireland specifically focuses upon early modern British expansion. I am interested in examining late medieval Irish life and the subsequent interactions between the Irish and the (mainly) English and Scots who settled in Ireland as part of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century processes of plantation. I do so in full recognition that this period and these interactions remain contested and constitute the root of the dichotomous historical memories that gave rise to the Troubles and which continue to structure everyday life. I believe that a better understanding of the complexities of the early modern period in Ireland, which includes a consideration of the entwined forces of capitalism and colonialism, can provoke and enhance understanding between today’s two traditions and contribute to the construction of some form of shared, peaceful future” (Horning, this volume).

Alistair Patterson similarly demonstrates the richness of an awareness of positionality in the reflective anecdote with which he ends his chapter. Planning fieldwork in central Northern Territory with Murphy Kennedy, a Warumungu elder, Patterson recalls that “we discussed which archaeological sites to target. While I was interested in the early contact-era sites, Murphy had radically different interests. Murphy and his family had identified the importance of a “walk-off” site -- this was a campsite where in the 1970s the local community had lived after they left the local pastoral station in the era of equal rights for Aboriginal workers ... Murphy thought we should record the archaeology at the site, which we did. Some interesting discoveries from that investigation related to site formation processes; but I suspect what was most important -- not so much as scientific research but more as political and social action -- was the use of archaeology to examine material aspects of *recent life* in what was a clearly landscape where power was in flux -- long held notions of land ownership, Aboriginal people in Australia, and the environment were changing, and these sites were physical expressions of a time when race and racism, history, and reconciliation, were big issues. They still are” (Patterson, this volume).

Running through all of these chapters is a consistent critique of colonialism and economic forms, and the dangers of totalizing interpretations that deny the valency of agency and local context. Taken together, they hover at the edge of a theory of our own, an archaeologist Baudrillard or Bourdieu or Bhabha who can pull together the strands into a theory of non-verbal representation of meaning. They lurk in the wings of the contemporary political stage, criticizing capitalism and implying the connection with today’s world of goods, laying bare colonialism and almost making the connection with the new empire of our own times.

In this, their authors both survey where we are now, and anticipate where we may go next. Like Leonidas Posada Gaviria, they survey the heterotopic space of the world of ideas, knowing the potential of material culture but wondering just how to extract its full value.



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