

Decolonizing Bioarchaeology: An Autoethnographic Reflection

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ABSTRACT: Bioarchaeology, as it operates within the disciplines of archaeological consulting and academia, carries with it colonial undertones of scientific positivism that perpetuate certain scientific biases if gone unchallenged. These colonial biases in scientific exploration (e.g. whether or not to excavate ancestral remains, the treatment of ancestral remains post excavation, the research questions addressing ancestral human remains, and the source of the research questions) serve to erode relationships between the bioarchaeologist and the Indigenous communities whose duty it is to be stewards of ancestral remains. To challenge these colonial biases, we must first identify them. Autoethnography – a reflexive study of personal and professional experiences – can identify certain colonial biases of the bioarchaeologist. Analytical autoethnography – the contribution reflection has to the greater body of anthropological theory – can help improve the process of bioarchaeology, or decolonize bioarchaeology, by involving First Nations more completely in bioarchaeological processes.

KEYWORDS: autoethnography, bioarchaeology, museums, repatriation

Introduction

This manuscript is a reflective look at my own experiences as a bioarchaeologist within the disciplines of consulting archaeology and academia in British Columbia (BC). The intent of these reflections is to encourage dialogues between bioarchaeologists, and more importantly, between bioarchaeologists and Indigenous populations on how bioarchaeology has been performed and can be performed among consulting archaeologist and academics in places with a colonial past. I am aware that my experiences reflect only a small view of bioarchaeology and does not account for those disciplines that are actively improving the practice of bioarchaeology within such places. It is in fact the existence of these practices, as evidence that rebuilding broken relationships between archaeology or bioarchaeology and Indigenous communities does serve to improve the research questions being asked that prompted

this manuscript. I feel it is necessary to identify certain ideas and practices that could be detrimental to building relationships with Indigenous communities who have been, and continue to be, negatively impacted by colonialism, when performing bioarchaeology. I must also mention that by doing so, it is not my intention to vilify the disciplines I reflect on in this manuscript. By challenging bioarchaeological ideas and practices that inadvertently or unintentionally recreate colonial divisions between the scientist and the object of study, in this case people, we come one step closer to changing those ideas and practices for the better. As change becomes more prominent, relationships can become stronger between the scientist and the subject, hopefully to a point where they are reciprocal. The exercise of reflecting and interpreting my own experiences was conducted using an autoethnographical approach.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a reflexive study of the ethnographer's experiences and subjectivity to highlight cultural and social realities hidden by the ethnographic method of silent observation (Marechal 2010; May 2011). It employs the researcher's own experiences as the ethnographic data. Autoethnography is a response to the crisis of representation in ethnography: critiques of ethnographical representation of "the other" from a privileged Western perspectives and debates over the legitimacy of the "native voice" from indigenous ethnographers (Atkinson et al. 1999; Chang 2008; Marcus and Fischer 1999; May 2011). In ethnographies of the past and, some argue, of the present, the object of study becomes exoticized through the ethnographer's position of objective observation and interpretation of "the other" through typically Western scientific, analytical, and philosophical lenses (Ellis et al. 2011; Marcus and Fischer 1999). The argument against this traditional method of ethnography is that exoticized observations generate misrepresentations of "the other" due to the observer's cultural and interpretive biases. The postmodern critique of ethnographies that misrepresent "the other" question whether Western anthropologists have the legitimate cultural knowledge, and therefore the authority, to represent "the other" academically, and to generalize the social realities that come from those observations (Ellis et al. 2011; Marcus and Fischer 1999). The postmodern critiques of ethnographic research insist that ethnographies should be multi-vocal, self-reflexive, experimental, and self-critical, focusing on the moment of ethnographic research and on the stories told (Atkinson et al. 1999).

In contrast to traditional ethnography, autoethnography focuses the observer's "attention on the relationship of the self to the world that is investigated" (Dunphinee 2010:806) and by doing so conveys the informant's otherwise silent voice and perspective in the account of the observation (Doloriert and Sambrook 2012). It is also a tool for exploring the mundane and the events or actions that could be taken for granted, thereby allowing for a theoretical or analytical movement into hegemonic discourses (Doloriert and Sambrook 2012). The practice of "autoethnography" as opposed to artful "story

telling" adds a layer of scholarship and legitimacy to the histories or narratives being shared (Dunphinee 2010). The goal of autoethnography is not to "become a detached spectator" (Ellis and Bochner 2006:431) but to be an active participant in the narrative. Autoethnography brings ethnography back to itself reflexively by shifting the ethnographer's position of observation away from "the distanced and detached observer and toward the embrace of intimate involvement, engagement, and embodied participation" (Ellis and Bochner 2006:433-4), in what Marcus and Fisher (1999:111) describes as "repatriating anthropology."

For qualitative analyst Arthur Bochner, autoethnography is more than just a change in the ethnographic methodology; it is also a movement away from traditional theorizing within the discipline of anthropology towards a practice of narrative inquiry. Bochner's shift to narrative inquiry is derived from a reaction to "the excesses and limitations of theory-driven, empiricist social science" (2005:55). According to Bochner, the practice of theorizing, in any social science discipline, does not get to the details of human experience – this is accomplished better through narrative. Narratives are aids to understanding larger questions of what connects us as a collective humanity and what distinguish us as individuals. "The narrative inquiry is a response to ... a desire to do meaningful work" (Bochner 2005:55) but meaningful to whom: the anthropologist; other people; the world? How does Bochner's atheoretical approach to autoethnography further the discipline of anthropology and our understanding of humanity and culture in a way that is not provided by other literary formats?

I argue that, if autoethnography is producing meaningful work, the benefits must be reflected in the discipline: autoethnography must contribute to the comprehension and evolution of anthropological theory. Other authors echo my sentiments in their critiques of autoethnography as "being unrepresentative and lacking objectivity" (Marechal 2010:47). Atkinson and colleagues (1999) have emphasized that although autoethnography incorporates theories and philosophies of epistemology and postmodernism, it should be executed within a scientific

methodological framework: formulating a research question, collecting data, controlling for biases, and evaluating that data. Without a base in positivism, autoethnographies becomes stories for stories' sake rather than a means of using the knowledge gleaned from those stories to further the understanding of humanity, culture, and society. Ethnography "has never been a stable entity" as Atkinson and colleagues (1999:466) describe it. It constantly re-evaluates itself and continually seeks hidden voices for developing a holistic understanding of culture and society. However, the current argument is that the benefits of autoethnography: repositioning the observer to de-exoticize "the other," outweighs its limited contributions to the body of anthropological theory (Ellis and Bochner 2006).

If autoethnography is a useful ethnographic method, can it be applied as an analytical tool in other fields of anthropology such as bioarchaeology? Although bioarchaeological methods are rooted in positivism, there is a demand within the scientific method to control biases either within the data or within the researcher. Autoethnography could be the means to identify the researcher's hidden biases that limit bioarchaeological research design or interpretation. There is a movement to expand the body of bioarchaeology theory: exploring ideas of gender, materiality, social meaning, life histories and lived experiences of individuals to create "social bioarchaeology" (Barrett and Blakey 2011; Hollimon 2011; Littleton 2011; Roberts 2011; Sofaer 2006, 2011; Stutz 2008). Autoethnography has the potential to contribute to the development of these and other social bioarchaeological theories by bringing the lived experiences of the researcher into the interpretation of human osteology and archaeology as a kind of phenomenological approach. I will attempt to demonstrate how autoethnography can uncover colonial biases of bioarchaeology, not in the methods used, but in the way Western scientific pursuits are positioned over the desires and rights of descendant or heritage communities to hold autonomy over their ancestral remains, by examining my experiences as a colonial biased bioarchaeologist. With many bioarchaeologists involved in the social vs. scientific debate over repatriation, autoethnography can delve

deeper into uncovering how archaeological excavation and repatriation of ancestral human remains affect descendent or heritage communities and how excavation and repatriation affect relationships between Indigenous communities and the scientific community studying the remains (Buikstra 2006; Turner and Andrushko 2011; Ubelaker and Grant, 1989). This introspection will also seek to find a way forward for bioarchaeologists and Indigenous communities to first negotiate colonial biases and second seek to find common ground within their differing perspectives.

I find Anderson's (2006) description of analytical autoethnography to be the most compelling and useful autoethnographical method not only for contributing to the body of anthropological theory but also for its application to other fields of anthropology such as bioarchaeology. I will use his criteria in the analysis of my experience repatriating ancestral human remains in British Columbia. According to Anderson (2006), an analytic autoethnographic method involves five criteria: first, the researcher must be a complete member of the group under study. I fit this first criterion as a bioarchaeologist who has participated in repatriations. Second, the researcher must participate in analytic reflexivity. The readers will judge my success in this for themselves. Third, the researcher's self must be visible in the narrative. As these are my narratives, I will be visible in them. Fourth, there must be a dialogue with other informants beyond the self. It is difficult for me to meet this criterion fully. While I will be introducing dialogues with others, because this is a retrospective autoethnography, these dialogues will be a reconstruction from memory rather than a reproduction of what was said. Finally, the autoethnography must be committed to theoretical analysis. This will occur in the discussion section of this manuscript. To borrow from Marcus and Fischer (1999), this manuscript will attempt to "repatriate" an anthropological retrospective into bioarchaeology through the experiences of a bioarchaeologist involved in the excavation and repatriation of ancestral remains from specific examples within two different disciplines of archaeology in British Columbia, Canada, with the intent to highlight colonial biases.

Bioarchaeology

Bioarchaeological Methods

Bioarchaeology, or the study of ancestral remains in an archeological context, is an important field for understanding not only how individuals and populations lived and died in the past, but also for understanding large scale events in human history (e.g. war, migration) and societal behaviours (e.g. treatment of diseases, death) (Buikstra 2006; Sofaer 1996, 2011; Ubelaker and Grant 1989). There are presently many methods used to study ancestral remains directly that reveal different kinds of information about deceased individuals. These analyses are largely broken down into either rudimentary or more detailed, and sometimes destructive, studies of ancestral remains, which are used by two disciplines of bioarchaeology: archaeological consulting and academia.

Bioarchaeological analysis at a rudimentary level involves inventorying all bone elements recovered, determining the minimum number of individuals present, assessing their age and sex, and documenting and describing cultural modifications, morphological variants, non-metric traits, and pathologies (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994). This level of analysis is useful for developing a basic mortuary profile or demographic of the population, and for determining whether there are patterns of disease or activity among sexes or across age groups. An experienced bioarchaeologist can perform this level of analysis quickly in the field with minimal equipment. Archaeological consulting typically stops at the rudimentary level of bioarchaeological analysis.

Academic institutions also conduct rudimentary levels of analysis, but are generally better equipped for and employ more detailed levels of bioarchaeological analysis that include osteometric measurements, pathology diagnoses (as opposed to description and documentation), high-resolution tooth casts for scanning electron microscopy, and radiography. This level of analysis is useful for understanding the specific life-history of an individual including relative health (periods of disease and healing), traumatic events, and/or physical activity, which provide insight into individual biocultural behaviours (Joyce 2005;

Ortner 2003; Pearson and Buikstra 2006; Sofaer 2006; Tung 2012). Bioarchaeological analyses that require destructive testing such as ancient DNA studies, stable isotope analysis, histology, and cross-sectional geometry can provide specific information for analyses of biodistance, diet, and disease, which can tell us about the movement of an individual or populations across landscapes. Bioarchaeology has the potential to uncover complex individual and population histories that can tell us about migration, gendered behaviours, social practices, or interpersonal conflicts.

One could generalize that archaeological consulting and academia, could have different perspectives as to whose needs should take precedence, the scientists' or the community's, with regards to ancestral remains, not because of the limitations or facilitations placed on them by the methods they use, but because of the proximity these disciplines have to descendant communities who encourage archaeologists and bioarchaeologists to engage in self-reflexive practices that identify colonial internal biases. The result of this self-reflection is the creation of different sets of bioarchaeological practices and points of view regarding the importance of bioarchaeology within these organizations. I have had the opportunity and pleasure of working in both archaeological consulting and academia in a bioarchaeological capacity and have noted how these organizations generate different perceptions as to how to practice bioarchaeology and its importance in BC archaeology.

Drawing from my own knowledge, interpretations, and documented descriptions where possible I will outline how archaeological consulting and academia view the importance of bioarchaeology in BC archaeology differently, how First Nation perspectives are integrated into the practice of bioarchaeology within the two disciplines, and what bioarchaeological perspectives have emerged within the disciplines based on their practices. The indigenous and bioarchaeological perspectives presented are reconstructed narratives based on discussions, interactions, and experiences I have had with other people. The use of quotation marks in the following sections will indicate dialogue rather than direct quotations.

Why Bioarchaeology?

Within consulting archaeology, First Nations representatives and the archaeologists agree to the protocol for treatment of ancestral remains prior to excavation. In effect, the communities likely descended from the remains largely determine the extent, or absence of bioarchaeological analysis. As First Nations in BC began asserting political and territorial sovereignty on the lands modified by development and archaeology, it prompted a change to the province's Heritage Conservation Act (HCA) requiring consultation with First Nations in the design and implementation of archaeological excavations (Budhwa 2005; Nicholas 2006). Although the Act does not recognize First Nations as owners of archaeological material, the 1994 amendment prompted a greater mandate among consulting archaeologists to involve indigenous communities in the process of consulting archaeology (Klassen 2008). This mandate not only changed the way consulting archaeology was practiced and mediated in BC but it also changed the way bioarchaeology was practiced in the industry.

Prior to the mandated change, consulting archaeologists followed several different practices when faced with ancestral remains. During archaeological impact assessment, excavations or archaeological surveys, ancestral human remains were noted, mapped, and removed from their location to be analysed at an academic institution (Condrashoff 1971; Mitchell 1967; Sanger 1962). Occasionally arrangements were made with local First Nation communities to return the ancestral remains to the place they were excavated from after rudimentary analysis (Cybulski 1975; Eldridge, 1978; Johnson Fladmark 1973). Other archaeologists left the ancestral remains *in situ* (in the original place) and conducted a minimal analysis (Howe 1981; Lawhead 1980). After 1995, more and more archaeological reports describe remains either being left *in situ* with no osteological analysis conducted or left *in situ* with minimal analysis (analysis of Provincial Archaeological Reports conducted for a report on repatriations in British Columbia, results not yet published). Few archaeological excavations that encountered ancestral material post-1994 recovered the material for osteological analysis and even fewer retained the material after analysis was com-

plete. The majority of ancestral remains excavated for analysis were returned to the location they were recovered from by the time the reports were written.

The change in bioarchaeological practices in BC consulting archaeology post 1994 is most likely the result of involving First Nation communities in archaeological projects who could then communicate their preferred treatment of ancestral remains at archaeological sites. Indigenous involvement at the level of excavation provided an opportunity for information sharing between descendant or heritage communities and the archaeologists and bioarchaeologists. Consequently, bioarchaeologists were more sympathetic to the desires of First Nation communities regarding the treatment of ancestral remains. The precedent set by archaeological consultants of involving Indigenous peoples in the recovery of ancestral remains means the wellbeing of the ancestors are back again in the control of the descendants.

In museums or academic institutions, bioarchaeologists have less direct contact with the interests of local First Nation communities and are less likely to experience the impact colonial biases have on descendants. I do recognize that some academic and museum institutions incorporate the interests of Indigenous communities into the design and outcome of research projects, but these are rare and by no means as prevalent as it is in consulting archaeology in BC. The result is there is a more diffused transfer of knowledge and information from Indigenous communities to the bioarchaeologists that may or may not have a direct impact on the practice of bioarchaeology in museums or academia. One example of how the interests of local First Nations communities have addressed colonial bioarchaeological biases is in repatriation.

In the wake of the Native American Graves Protection Act (NAGPRA) that passed in the USA in 1990, American museums (except for the Smithsonian Institution) were legally obligated to take inventories of their collection of ancestral remains and provide them to Indigenous groups from whose lands the material was excavated (Buikstra 2006; Ubelaker 2006). Because American museum collections were now visible to Indigenous groups, repatriation requests were made quickly. In response

to NAGPRA, Canadian academic institutions began the movement to reclaim Indigenous culture and history (Ewing 2011; Walker 2000). Canadian museums and academic institutions were called upon to prepare their curated human remains for repatriation. Generally speaking, rudimentary analysis and non-destructive testing including photography, radiography, casting, and osteometrics made up the extent of osteological analysis prior to repatriation. Some bioarchaeologists, particularly those who do not have direct exposure to the desires or experiences of descendant communities before, during, or after the repatriation process, feel that reburial of ancestral remains after only a rudimentary analysis, without ancient DNA or isotopic data, which are destructive techniques, is extremely limiting (Buikstra 2006). They position the scientific colonial biases over the experiences of descendant communities as colonized and marginalized people. As a scientist and a colonizer, I can understand the reasons for this positioning but at the same time I also see the dangers such a position can have when trying to develop meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities. The study of ancestral remains in BC and North America in general can provide insight into the history of early human occupation and migration into the continent and identify the impact colonialism has had on the physical stress, disease prevalence, the relative health of the skeletal body of Indigenous communities (Ubelaker and Grant 1989). However, until bioarchaeologists are exposed to the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous communities, they cannot identify the colonial biases surrounding the pursuit of bioarchaeological knowledge at the expense of Indigenous skeletal bodies, or against the wishes of descendant communities.

Special agreements between First Nations and bioarchaeologists have permitted destructive testing of ancestral remains for ancient DNA and stable isotope analysis, however, these are rare and stem from longstanding relationships between the particular Indigenous community who control access to the remains and the bioarchaeologist (Cybulski et al. 2007). Engaging in meaningful investigations of their ancestors and life-histories, is an example of what can happen when control of ancestral remains

is turned over to descendant communities. In other areas, Indigenous communities and academic institutions agreed that the institutions could become stewards of ancestral remains if they followed cultural protocols for storing and studying ancestral remains. By creating strong relationships with descendant communities, bioarchaeologists in academic settings may experience the transfer of knowledge experienced by consulting bioarchaeologists to challenge colonial biases.

First Nations Perspectives

The experiences I have had connecting with First Nation perspectives and learning about cultural practices particularly concerning the treatment of and behaviours around ancestral remains began with my first archaeological field school in 1998. From the moment I learned about archaeology and archaeological perspectives, I realized the interconnectedness of archaeology and First Nation perspectives on ancestral remains. This could only have been accomplished because of the political environment in which I began my bioarchaeological career, in the wake of the precedence set after HCA and NAGPRA. I have experienced only a handful of First Nations perspectives that I will endeavour to synthesize in this section of the manuscript. These accounts by no means represent a general perspective on ancestral remains by First Nations, but they are the perspectives I am familiar with and are the ones that have influenced my point of view of ancestral remains as a bioarchaeologist.

There is a connection between the living and the ancestors that reaffirms the First Nation connection to place, time, and to all others. Ubelaker and Grant (1989) write that the spiritual connection of living descendants and ancestral remains continues to be strong after hundreds and even thousands of years. I have witnessed this connection myself while working on a large archaeological project where human remains were encountered. We had representatives from seven different First Nations communities participate as archaeologists and as liaisons to their community regarding our activities and finds. When the human remains were uncovered, a medicine woman came to perform a brushing off ceremony for

the whole crew and a food burning ceremony for the ancestors. The brushing off ceremony was to remove spirits who might have attached themselves to the living and the food offering was performed because it is the duty of the living to care for the remains of the ancestors and to show respect for the ancestors who have been physically and spiritually disturbed by the archaeological excavation. One could say that spiritual connections were being made between the living and the ancestors, as one of the crew began dreaming about an unknown boy child after she encountered the remains of a young individual from the site. Another example of the connections between the living and the dead (or between the dead and the living) was in the half-hearted jocular explanations for why three women from the crew became pregnant during the excavation. Although no one seriously contended that the women who became pregnant were carrying the spirits of the ancestors they encountered (or who encountered the women), there seemed to be an unspoken worry behind each joker's eyes that the site might be spiritually potent.

Connections were established between the living (both native and non-native) and the dead initially through the physical unearthing of human remains from the earth and then spiritually through historical memory and memory making. For the crew of First Nations, the presence of the ancestors reaffirmed their historical memory of deep antiquity to the place we were all standing in. These memories were enacted in the dreams of some individuals and in the songs learned by each new generation, played out for us all to witness. For the non-native crew (and I speak mostly for myself), the presence of the ancestral remains brought forward my awareness of colonial memory. New memories were also being created, however, that superseded any negative historical memories. Jokes, mutual teasing, spiritual discussions, shared ritual enactments, and knowledge exchange helped to bridge the divide between two distinct reactions to ancestral remains. The dead made possible a new connection between the living people surrounding them, new memories to be made of that place, and new perceptions toward them through an exchange of knowledge.

In repatriation ceremonies I have witnessed the strong emotional connection living First Nations have with the ancestral remains being repatriated. During one intimate repatriation ceremony involving the Nicomen, descendants were visibly moved, in tears, and overcome with emotion at the reunion with their ancestors. It was explained to me (I cannot remember the source, but the message was received) that First Nations do not distinguish between ancestors who have died recently and ancestors who died millennia ago. Time does not erode connectivity; time reaffirms connections. Familial ties are created, maintained, and validated through the connection with the land or the territory. Because these ancestors were removed from an area within their territory, they are Nicomen ancestors, and should be subjected to the cultural protocols warranted by the Nicomen.

Bioarchaeological Perspectives

My bioarchaeological perspectives have been created through my experiences and reflections as an undergraduate student, a laboratory technician in the Archaeology Department at Simon Fraser University, a consulting archaeologist, and a graduate student. I am equipped with osteological and technological knowledge to document ancestral remains adequately and a theoretical reflection that recognizes the historical particularism of my situation. I am a white academic who has been in a position of fiduciary caretaker for ancestral remains unearthed prior to the incorporation of First Nations communities in decision-making processes. However, my ethnographical perspective and sociological self benefited most from my involvement in the practice of consulting archaeology and repatriation. Out of these influences I hope to be a voice for an increased understanding of the phenomenological aspect of bioarchaeology in both the academic and archaeology consulting organizations, particularly when the perspectives of the bioarchaeologists clash with those of descendant communities.

My own personal frame of mind when conducting an analysis of ancestral remains, be it radiography, photography, or inventory can be described as peaceful, quiet, and often apologetic. I could have said, "I am always respectful of the remains" as I have heard most other human osteologists say, but I am often

struck by the question “what does that actually mean?” As one might suppose, these mean different things to different people. For some, being “respectful” means they would treat the remains as well as any other specimen they have encountered. They are careful and precise as they handle, document, and measure the specimen, and this is in fact behaving in a “respectful” manner from a bioarchaeological perspective because they are not abusing the specimen – knocking it about or letting it fall off the table and break.

For many Indigenous communities the simple fact that remains are in a museum is enough to be considered disrespectful treatment of the ancestors (Ubelaker and Grant 1989). To keep ancestral remains in a cardboard box without cedar, ochre, smudging, or ritual feeding is to deny the ancestors their cultural rights and perpetuates the scientific and colonial dominion over Indigenous bodies. Some academic institutions have attempted to change the colonial structure of museums and osteological storage by incorporating cultural practices of ancestral stewardship, by such things as routine smudging of the osteological storage room, laying cedar bows in the boxes of remains, wrapping remains in blankets, or placing the remains in cedar boxes.

I therefore do not say, “I am respectful of the remains,” which I do in a bioarchaeological perspective, but cannot guarantee in a First Nations perspective as much as I would like to. When I am working with ancestral remains, I often find myself humming or playing music softly to not only quiet my mind for the task but also to create a peaceful environment in which to work. If I do accidentally bump or drop a bone I cringe and apologize aloud. I am confessing this with the confidence that the reader will not think less of me for doing so, accidents happen, and it would be irresponsible of me to make you think otherwise in this narrative. I prefer talking aloud or thinking aloud, in a quiet voice, because it keeps me calm and I feel it keeps the energy in the room calm. Upon reflection, “the energy in the room” is quite a Western way of saying “spirits.” For better or worse, I do believe in “energy” or “spirits,” but not in a Cowardly Lion mantra kind of way, placating evil “spooks”; or provoking spirits to “show themselves” as in the TV show *Ghost Adventures*, but as

a recognition that all things are energy and energy can be changed and exchanged between objects. My attempt at negotiating between Western science and an undefined spirituality that I am happy with influences my perspective and behaviour as a bioarchaeologist.

I found myself confronted with my perception of “energy” during the preparations for the Nicomen repatriation. The preparation consisted of a visit from a medicine woman and her brother to inform and prepare the remains spiritually for reburial. The introductions and interactions between the lab manager (my boss), the medicine woman, her brother, and me were very polite, cordial, and pleasant. The diligence of the medicine woman’s brother to memorize our names – “Scottish Heather and the River Shannon” – humbled me. I am notoriously poor at remembering names, and embarrassed when I must ask someone’s name several times before I remember it. I have since forgotten both of their names, and probably did not commit them to memory at our first meeting. However, I remember their faces, manners, and more importantly their contribution to my perception of the relationships between bioarchaeologists and descendant communities during repatriation. Particularly because many of our perceptions and opinions differed.

Our interactions consisted of the medicine women contacting the spirits of the ancestors by holding a portion of the remains in her hand. She proceeded to identify the remains as male, female, parent, child, as my boss and I went through the skeletal inventory. Looking back on this interaction between spiritual medium and scientist I am glad and somewhat surprised that her exchanges were received congenially and not with more resistance. I had heard stories after the fact where conflicts were felt between scientist and medium during similar events. I use the term “felt” because repatriation ceremonies are treated with such respect from both parties that I do not think anyone would engage in a verbal disagreement with beliefs. However, I am sure that both parties felt internal arguments, comments, or contradictions when confronted with ideas, terms, or perspectives that differ from our own. For example, the medium and the scientist were respectful of each

other's opinions regarding the identity of the ancestors. However, I confess my scientific curiosity was piqued and I wanted to see how the two methods of identifying individuals compared to each other, not in the sense that one method could "correctly identify" the individuals while the other could not, but rather what were the incidences of individuals being similarly identified between the two methods. However, I realized the impolitic implications of such a request, because I believed that I would offend the non-scientist if I requested a scientific comparison of her gift to my method (even though I thought it would be good fun), so I kept quiet.

I held my tongue in one other instance where the medicine woman began to tell me of her experience communing with ancestral remains and came across an alien skull among them, which caught me completely off guard. At the time, my inner scientist recalled details of cranial head shaping on the Northwest Coast, hydrocephaly (water in the brain) that expands and misshapes the skull of infants, other random pathologies that affect the shape of the skull and facial bones, and even natural distortion of the skull from the pressure of the burial environment that would discredit her perception. Not to mention the scores of unlikely scenarios that would compel an alien to become comingled with human remains. Again, I felt it would be discourteous to recite these aloud to her. So instead, I quieted my inner scientist, quelled the childhood fears of aliens from watching too many science fiction movies at a tender and impressionable age, and looked down at my inventory sheet and said "Oh yes? That's interesting." This interaction made me the most uncomfortable, and it was completely unrelated to the repatriation process.

Perhaps it was because she had inadvertently struck a nerve that triggered my deepest and most persistent fear. Alternatively, perhaps it was because out of all the insights she seemed to share with us, this one was the one I could not validate either scientifically or spiritually. I am quite open-minded when it comes to spirits, mediums, and unexplained insight, more so than is probably tolerated among the scientific community. I have had my own experience as a consulting archaeologist while working alone and in the same room as ancestral remains

who were treated according to the cultural protocols of the First Nation representatives - wrapped in blankets and covered with cedar. I "heard" heavy breathing in my left ear. I could have explained the phenomenon as some trick of my own overactive imagination or some kind of pressure buildup and release my ear, but instead I chose to attribute it to something supernatural. Nevertheless, for whatever reason I cannot scientifically argue for the possibility of extraterrestrial lifeforms contacting humans. And yet, I can freely admit to playing music and talking aloud to "energy" that no one has perceived but me when I probably should be describing my own biochemical reactions to stress or other psychosomatic phenomena. If I was as afraid of spirits as I am of aliens, would it shape my perception of working with ancestral remains differently? Would it be accurate to say that both positive and negative experiences shape bioarchaeological perceptions? Is it because I have experienced First Nations spirituality in conjunction with archaeological scholarship that I perceive these concepts concurrently and positively? Naturally, this is anecdotal, but it is important to question the creation of perceptions among bioarchaeologists in relation to ancestral remains in order to influence processes that contribute to anthropological theory.

Repatriation is a path for academia to develop relationships with Indigenous communities. It forces the two groups together and provides the arena for political struggles to occur. Now this sounds particularly combative and violent, and I do not mean it in a negative way, but some kind of challenge must be made (i.e. challenging colonial mind frames) in order to make the confrontation meaningful (confrontation between scientific and cultural perceptions). Now I certainly do not feel that all repatriation events are or need to be confrontational, but negotiations are always a factor and there is usually a champion. In the situation of repatriation, there can be different kinds of champion. Descendant communities who have successfully repatriated ancestral remains curated across the Western world throughout the centuries are certainly champions. Less politically mobile communities who manage to locate and repatriate a handful of their ancestors are champions. Academic institutions that have voluntarily contacted com-

munities and initiated repatriation are champions. Communities who come together to make academic institutions stewards of ancestral remains and successfully outline and implement cultural and research protocols make champions of both parties. Ultimately, the path to dialogue between parties must be engaged in order to learn from one another and allow differing opinions to meet somewhere in the middle.

My perceptions of repatriation have two sources. I have participated in two repatriation ceremonies that were both quite different in size, political motive, and connection with the repatriation process. My first repatriation ceremony was SFU's involvement with the national and international call from the Haida to repatriate all ancestral remains excavated and removed from Haida Gwaii. The ceremony at SFU was very large and involved a lot of planning not so much from the Archaeology Department but from the University itself. The entire university was welcome to the event, which was a showcase of Haida culture, tradition, and above all, political sovereignty, over the repatriated materials. I do not really remember much from the event. I snuck in late because I had work duties to finish before heading over to the event with my supervisor. There were speeches, songs, and dances that I did not really get an opportunity to see or hear. I recognized that this event was important for the Haida people to convey their political strength and cultural sovereignty over the materials being repatriated to an audience largely made up of colonizers. The message was a clear and important one, however, they were speaking largely to those who were already supporters of their movement. The attendees did not need much convincing that this was the right thing to do and for me, the pomp and ceremony of the event only succeeded in reminding me of my colonial past, polishing up the already lustrous yoke that is the "white man's burden." I came away from that event with a kind of cheerful depression. I was glad I could be a part of a larger structure of reconciliation in some small way, however, I was burdened by the thought of how much further colonizers and First Nations had to travel to change these feelings of obligated political positioning in both dominant and submissive poses. At least most of us seem to be on this road together.

The second repatriation ceremony I attended was vastly different from the Haida repatriation. The Nicomen repatriation, which I was greatly involved with, was far more intimate, personal, and emotive. This repatriation event occurred in a small room in the Archaeology Department. The event was more intimate and only those people who worked directly on or in connection with the repatriation attended the event: the chair of the department, my supervisor, me, and of course the Nicomen representatives. Before the Nicomen were expected to arrive, I remember the small meeting my supervisor and I had together. She, in a quiet voice, relayed to me some instructions about what I could do while she and the department chair spoke directly with the representatives. The Archaeology Department had provided some light refreshments for the event as the Nicomen representatives were traveling a great distance for the repatriation. She asked would I make sure the elders had something to eat and drink, that they were comfortable and provided for.

I remember being a bit nervous - with the memory of the Haida repatriation running through my mind, I did not know what to expect for this one. I also remember the other departmental participants started to get nervous when the scheduled time for the Nicomen representatives to arrive came and then went. Phone calls were being made, no one could be reached, and all I could do was watch people scurry around while I helped by not getting in their way. Finally, one truck full of representatives arrived. I do not really remember the reason why they were late, but I remember one of the representatives coming into the Archaeology Department, apologized for being late, and said something about "Indian time." The second carload of representatives was still to come. When they arrived, we began. The emotions of the Nicomen representatives were expressed openly - sadness, grief, relief - and although I did not feel quite prepared for it, the informality of the proceedings put me more at ease and quelled my nervousness, so I could react in a calmer way to offer tissues, a chair, a glass of water. I offered my sympathies in stillness in the far corner of the room, head bowed, hands folded: a quiet witness to the events that unfolded before me.

Discussion

The perceptions my experiences in the disciplines of consulting archaeology and repatriation have created, outline a disconnect between bioarchaeological scientific biases and the perspectives of descendant Indigenous communities towards ancestral remains. This disconnect might be more apparent among academic institutions that do not have direct associations with descendant Indigenous groups. Without direct contact with Indigenous perceptions, bioarchaeologists will not have the opportunity to engage with their own Western scientific and colonial point of reference. By turning the gaze inward bioarchaeologists can begin to position themselves away from the seat of authority to develop a dialogue between themselves and descendant communities. Bioarchaeologists within consulting archaeology can build positive relationships with First Nation communities because of the close connections made by having First Nations representation at during the archaeological process. Even before an excavation is underway, bioarchaeologists and First Nations can discuss what to do when ancestral remains are found, whether to excavate or not, what the cultural protocols should be during and post-excavation, and what kinds of analyses would communities most like to be performed. This kind of early relationship building, if done collaboratively, makes room for communities to exercise their autonomy over the ancestors found. At a deeper level, if the relationship building with consulting bioarchaeologist is executed with the understanding that communities have authority over ancestral remains, First Nations autonomy is not only exercised, but also legitimized. Archaeologists and bioarchaeologists need to be understanding of the situation that a community can and should declare their autonomy over the treatment and analysis of ancestral remains at the expense of “scientific interests” because it is their right to do so. Bioarchaeologists are also anthropologists because we study people directly, and as such, we should be compelled to evaluate critically the behaviours and perceptions of our discipline that are taken for granted especially when operating in a colonial environment.

Recognizing Indigenous authority over ancestral human remains is a direct challenge to the academic

authority of bioarchaeologists. My experience is that many practicing archaeologists and academics are afraid that handing that authority over fully will end the study of ancestral remains in BC or limit it more than it is already. However, I think the challenge is necessary to refocus the biological and scientific perception of human remains towards a more phenomenological realization that ancestors physically tie people to the landscape through time in the eyes of descendant communities. People transformed by colonialism should receive the most thoughtfully reflexive opinions and actions from their colonizer compatriots, especially if those colonizers have embedded themselves in the anthropological discipline. Bioarchaeologists in academia are willing to engage with the autonomy of Indigenous peoples when repatriation of ancestral remains is requested; however, this is often the only interactions academic bioarchaeologists will have with the wishes of Indigenous communities regarding their ancestors. There are a few incidences of successful interactions between academic bioarchaeologists and Indigenous communities, which resulted in a change in the way ancestral remains are stored in repositories, providing access for regular cleansing of the area and for offerings to the ancestors. However, disciplines can take this relationship further by requesting cultural protocols from communities for handling the remains when not in storage. The practice of following cultural protocols help to demonstrate outwardly a respect for ancestral remains, focuses the mind of the bioarchaeologist on their task, or situates oneself spiritually in a place of calmness.

Another way to demonstrate outwardly a respect for ancestral remains is by elevating their current precedence within academia. Requests for repatriation tend to be the major incentive for bioarchaeological analysis and documentation within academia and osteological collections devoid of community activism tend to fall to a low priority within institutions with limited funding. Often, when osteological collections are not a priority, analysis and documentation are delayed for a very long time or the analytical process is limited to documentation only. By elevating the academic perception of ancestral remains from “material” to agents of connectivity as propagated by

Indigenous perception, analysis and documentation could take on a different level of importance, to facilitate repatriations quickly when requested. Better still, academia could instigate communication with Indigenous communities requesting the community's recommendations, insights, or involvement with their ancestors. This might result in a repatriation request or in an agreement of stewardship, but ultimately the decision must come from communities, and institutions should invite them to the table if the communities are not already seeking them out.

Bioarchaeological theory is developing roots in social theory as "social bioarchaeology." This is advantageous because it brings together social-anthropological theory and bioarchaeological methods to provide a biocultural understanding of ancestral remains. The structure of positivism is essential to generate reproducible methods in all archaeological, bioarchaeological, and even anthropological methods, because objectivity and rigorous data collection form the basis for logical interpretations and reproducible methods allow for the comparison between results. However, a more critical stance of a positivistic bioarchaeology should address "why" bioarchaeological studies take place and who will benefit from the knowledge collected, particularly when working within a colonial environment. Bioarchaeology can be colonial when the goals of scientific discovery are obtained at the expense and imposition of Indigenous communities, creating an imbalance of power. Addressing why bioarchaeology should be done and who benefits from the data in either the context of consulting archeology or an academic-led excavation could generate decolonizing forms of bioarchaeology by inviting Indigenous communities to determine the research goals that would interest them. Decolonizing bioarchaeology would require the engagement and involvement of descendent communities in multiple stages of bioarchaeology, from generating pertinent research questions that reflect what communities wish to know about their ancestors, to incorporating Indigenous cultural protocols into the pre-, during, and post-excavation processes. Engaging in bioarchaeology in this way will confront certain colonial biases regarding the practice of studying ancestral

remains and how it awakens structural violences and social suffering among descendant communities (Kleinman 1997).

Archaeological and bioarchaeological approaches in both consulting archaeology and academia should carefully consider the vulnerabilities created by the structural violence and social suffering of Indigenous people in not only BC but also elsewhere in other colonial contexts. Colonial bioarchaeology can take on many incarnations and degrees depending on the political autonomy of the descendant community and the bioarchaeological protocols of the consulting company or the academic institution. However, decolonized bioarchaeology can be demonstrable by including descendant communities in decisions made in all aspects concerning ancestral remains. I feel that BC has attempted decolonizing approaches to bioarchaeology with varying degrees of success in both consulting, and academic processes of bioarchaeology, but I also believe that a stronger commitment can be made to make room for Indigenous perspectives particularly where those perspectives negate those of bioarchaeologists. It is vital to bring communities into the anthropological, archaeological, and bioarchaeological processes to help shape the perspectives of the anthropologist in sympathy to the communities under study, and by doing so challenge the scientific positivism that determines bioarchaeological practices in colonial environments. Decolonizing bioarchaeology is how trust could be rebuilt between bioarchaeologists and descendant communities who were, and are, marginalized by colonial bioarchaeology, allowing both sides to learn from each other and to contribute to the growth of the human experience.

Conclusion

I have reflected that bioarchaeology can be at times colonial or nonreflexive to the scientific biases that drive the study of ancestral remains. Scientific biases combined with the fear that consultation with descendant communities will limit or negate bioarchaeological analysis drives this idea of colonial bioarchaeology. However, the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives regarding the study of ancestral remains can not only build a bridge between scientific and Indigenous perspectives but influence

the practice of bioarchaeology in colonial environments positively by generating decolonizing forms of bioarchaeology through a willingness to demonstrate First Nations cultural protocols regarding ancestral remains and by actively communicating with descendant communities. Bioarchaeological and Indigenous perspectives must come together to delve deeper into bioarchaeological questions that would not only benefit First Nations but also benefit the understanding of humanity. I am confident that as archaeological and bioarchaeological perspectives are decolonized in BC we will see more integration of First Nations cultural protocols in bioarchaeological practices and contribute new bioarchaeological knowledge and theories.

This has been an account of one researcher's experiences at a single academic institution and at a single archaeological consulting firm in BC. It is not my intention to suggest that all disciplines operate in the ways I have presented, or that I am the only bioarchaeologists to have ever had the feelings I have just shared. My intention was to use my experiences as examples of how my perceptions have been shaped within these very specific situations, and that others facing similar situations could benefit from the reflections I have shared. For those individual bioarchaeologist and disciplines that have already reached similar conclusions as I have, and are actively engaging in practices of decolonizing bioarchaeology, I hope this reflection could serve as an act of solidarity to those who place decolonizing bioarchaeology in the forefront on their research.

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