Research Article

Can Archaeology be a Form of Colonialism? Exploring the Implications of the Actor-Network Theory

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the long-lasting impact of colonialism in archaeology through the lens of actor-network theory (ANT). It investigates how historical and contemporary power dynamics, particularly those based on Eurocentrism, continue to influence archaeological practices and knowledge production. Besides human actors, the study also emphasizes the importance of nonhuman actors, such as tools, technologies, and data, in reinforcing these asymmetrical power dynamics. Using qualitative research methods, the paper investigates how colonial powers historically dominated the field and how these practices continue to this day. A detailed literature review demonstrates that the dominance of Western narratives in archaeology frequently marginalizes local perspectives and knowledge. The paper advocates for a more collaborative and egalitarian approach to archaeological research, emphasizing the value of community involvement and knowledge co-curation. It implies that using ANT can help uncover and mitigate colonial influences by emphasizing the complex networks of human and non-human interactions that underpin archaeological practices. The study's findings advocate for a reevaluation of research methodologies in archaeology to ensure more equitable and inclusive knowledge production, fostering a better understanding of past and present cultural dynamics. Future implications include the possibility of more equitable power distributions in the field, as well as the promotion of ethical research practices that value and incorporate local voices and expertise.

Keywords: Actor-Network Theory; Archeology; Colonialism; Technology; Network Knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeology has the remarkable ability to uncover the past and resurrect long-forgotten civilizations. However, the historical effects of colonialism that have influenced the field should also be noted. In Cambodia, for example, mastering French is essential for gaining a thorough understanding of ancient Khmer history. This is because French scholars wielded significant power during the colonial period, and their language reflects that dominance. French scholars have conducted extensive research on the Khmer civilization, prompting the Khmer to consider the usefulness of this information. Are resources, literature, and even artefacts readily available for Cambodians to learn about their own history? Is it possible to return these objects to their country of origin, or can the Khmer work together to create initiatives that recognise Cambodia's rightful ownership?

This power imbalance extends beyond physical resources and affects many aspects of life. Archaeological knowledge may contain inherent inequalities. Individuals in Cambodia find it difficult to challenge interpretations that contradict their own local knowledge and beliefs due to a lack of resources and training. This raises a larger concern which is the dominance of Western viewpoints in archaeology. This dominance goes beyond historical encounters with colonialism and has a long-term impact thanks to previous networks of knowledge production, technology, and resources. This study investigates the hypothesis using actor-network theory (ANT). ANT investigates the complex relationships between humans and non-human elements, such as artefacts and texts, in a dynamic process. Examining these networks allows us to better understand their role in perpetuating

Eurocentrism and colonial influences on archaeological knowledge (Durepos & Mills, 2012). Science and technology studies have applied ANT to illuminate how material factors shape societies. ANT emphasises the importance of incorporating physical objects and encouraging collaboration in the knowledge-creation process (Wickramasinghe, Tatnall, & Bali, 2010). This approach emphasizes the importance of recognising the interrelationships between all individuals involved in archaeological work, including humans and non-human entities (Law, 1992). Nevertheless, archaeology prioritizes Western narratives and approaches because of its deep roots in Western tradition (Durepos & Mills, 2012). Unfortunately, when it comes to data, technology, and resource management, we frequently overlook local perspectives and knowledge. Several ongoing that may imply colonial aspects of archaeology can be observed, including restricted access to archives, unequal resource distribution, and the practice of conducting research with minimal local involvement, also known as parachuted research.

This study aims to uncover hidden networks, often assumed to be unquestioned, and investigate their role in perpetuating unequal power dynamics and exerting control over knowledge production. By closely examining these networks, the article hopes to contribute to greater fairness and inclusivity in archaeology. When generating archaeological knowledge, it is critical to emphasize the importance of ethical research, encourage greater local involvement, and take into account a diverse range of perspectives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review section examines ANT and how it can be used to reveal the long-term consequences of colonialism in archaeology. Although ANT has its roots in STS, it offers a unique perspective on the complex relationships between individuals and non-human entities that can shape or be used to explain the process of knowledge creation in archaeology. The literature review is conducted to determine whether any previous research has looked into the value of ANT in analysing historical narratives and highlighting the impact of non-human elements such as artefacts and technologies. Nonetheless, more research is needed to better understand how ANT can be used to investigate archaeology's complex process of knowledge creation, particularly the current power imbalances that favour Western perspectives.

To begin with, according to Law (1992), ANT has its roots in science and technology. Scientists applied this theory to society by observing complex networks based on lab testing and prior experience (Law, 1992). Van Oyen (2015) elaborates on this concept, stating that ANT is based on societal material formations, which means it contributes materially to the formation of social ties and networks, as well as reality as we know it. For instance, although knowledge is abstract, its construction requires tangible materials like paper, pens, skills, collaborators, and presentations (Van Oyen, 2015). Mol (2010) emphasises that, while ANT employs the term "actor," it encompasses both human and non-human entities, highlighting society as a pattern of diversely integrated materials. Law (1992) goes on to explain how humans, other beings, and materials interact with one another, beginning with small steps that gradually formalise into networks. For example, while thoughts themselves are not expensive, preserving them over time necessitates the use of materials such as pens and paper (Law, 1992). Law (1992), Van Oyen (2015), and Mol (2010) argue that actors eventually produce something tangible via a web of complex networks. However, Law (1992), Van Oyen (2015), and Mol (2010) observe that the normalisation and simplification of the final product make it easier to embrace and ignore the intricate networks that created it. For example, a well-functioning phone is taken for granted until it breaks, revealing the network of materials and technicians that support it. Despite providing a broad overview, the authors do not examine how these networks can suppress or dominate different groups, nor do they explain the asymmetrical power relationships in archaeology.

ANT, which originated in STS, emphasises the interconnectedness of human and non-human "actors" in shaping social realities (Latour, 2005). Latour (1996) offers a comprehensive analysis, highlighting that the manufacturing process involves a supply and production chain, between the human and non-human actors, that necessitates the use of materials as well as the organization and structuring of the workflow. Murdoch (1997) agrees, emphasising that no single actor or technology drives the network; rather, both human and non-human actors collaborate to produce an end product. According to Rydin (2017), the stability and resilience of these networks are critical to their long-term viability and visibility, reflecting social issues and trends such as the pursuit of power or innovation. These actors can range from individuals and institutions to technologies, materials, and even ideas. These actors interact and associate to form complex networks that influence knowledge production and social order. Latour (1996, 2005), Murdoch (1997) and Rydin (2017) justify each actor's role in forming society, producing knowledge, and wielding political power. However, the literature lacks detail on how these networks can influence the power dominance of one group over another, or how they can justify their

superiority through knowledge production and the enduring social order of today which is a gap to be filled. It is crucial to remember that the goal of ANT is not to study the final product but rather the intricate web of interactions and relationships between the actors and actants that make up the final product, or the "blackbox" that lies behind the established final result (de Oliveira Garcia, Gava, Tonelli, & Brito, 2018). This study illustrates that the outcome remains flexible when human and non-human actors collaborate to produce a final product. Consequently, individuals possessing advanced knowledge and access to technology could craft a narrative that subjectively resonates with their personal experiences (de Oliveira Garcia et al., 2018). Archaeology, a discipline that specialises in writing historical and archaeological texts, will use this type of story to explain the persistence of unequal relationships, which is the article's goal and was not specified in the literature above.

According to Latour (2017), the goal of ANT is to highlight networks that influence social theory, delving beneath the surface to understand network formation on a case-by-case basis. According to Latour (1999), ANT aims to illustrate effects, trace them, and generate new ideas rather than provide causation or systematic explanations. He clarifies that a network of actors must execute and produce an idea or interest (Latour, 1999). Archaeology uses this inquiry to explain why asymmetrical power dynamics still dominate the current perception of history, particularly the history of the colonised. ANT challenges traditional historical research methods that rely solely on human agency by fostering a more nuanced understanding of the construction of knowledge about the past by acknowledging nonhuman actors. Archaeological artefacts, archival documents, and even excavation tools can all be considered actors influencing historical interpretations. Uncovering complex networks in archaeology and history is difficult due to time constraints and the inability to participate in past social interactions. Archaeology is the study of material remains in order to reconstruct or showcase the past. With much work left to archaeologists and historians, it is unclear whether expert discoveries should be considered final. If the past is considered unchangeable based solely on archaeologists' findings, this human-centric approach raises concerns about various interpretations. The author emphasises the importance of accounting for multiple factors or networks that influence archaeological findings, advocating for a multipolar perspective.

Wickramasinghe et al. (2010) argue that historical knowledge should not be viewed as an end product explained by a single expert but rather as the result of a vast network of knowledge hidden behind the discovery. They question the outcome of archaeological discoveries, claiming that knowledge of history is possible through network convergence (Wickramasinghe et al., 2010). According to this viewpoint, the production of knowledge in archaeology involves multiple actors and networks, both human and non-human, and is influenced by political tendencies and superiority. These are the points that this article will expand upon. Wickramasinghe et al. (2010) argue against viewing historical knowledge as a fixed "end product." ANT provides a framework for deconstructing this end product by tracing the networks of actors who contribute to its creation. This enables a more critical examination of possible biases and power structures embedded in historical narratives. Penny, Hall, Evans and Polkinghorne (2019) agree proposing multiple versions of history via a case study. For example, while the Khmer Empire's capital shift in the late 13th century is frequently associated with war, new research from Flinders University links it to climate change and irrigation system damage. Differences in actor networks and their resilience influence the formation of knowledge (Penny et al., 2019). In the context of historical knowledge production, it is critical to move beyond human-centred approaches and consider non-human factors that shape history. Historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, engineers, archivists, paper, computers, tools, and builders collaborate to create history (Durepos & Mills, 2012). According to Müller (2015), these human and non-human interactions result in the punctuation of knowledge history, implying acceptance in society and normalisation, which hides or ignores potential influences such as politics. Durepos and Mills (2012) argue that understanding hidden agendas or political power in history and archaeology requires questioning the knowledge production process and identifying leaders, beneficiaries, and biases. Herszberg (2022) advocates for a multidisciplinary approach to studying the past, emphasising the interconnectedness of many human and non-human networks in order to gain a comprehensive understanding.

Although the literature review provides a thorough explanation, the authors' focus is on understanding network relations in general, as well as how networks work in archaeology and their asymmetrical power. This article elaborates on these concepts, presenting ANT as a flexible and adaptable method that underscores the intricate portrayal of the historical past as a process of knowledge creation, still shaped by knowledge, technology, and material resources of Western dominance. This study builds on previous research and will provide a more focused examination of ANT and its potential for investigating the Blackbox, as well as its long-term influence in archaeology, which has resulted in unequal and dominant knowledge of the West over the rest. This research aims to contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the past by deconstructing historical knowledge and examining power dynamics within networks.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative research methods, specifically Actor-Network Theory (ANT), to look at how former colonial powers influenced and continue to shape archaeology from their perspective. The goal is to show that the dominance of colonial power in the post-colonial period is an ongoing issue in archaeology and to investigate potential solutions. The study will use a desk-based methodology that includes document analysis and a literature review. Data will be gathered from academic journals and other forms of literature. Document analysis will be the primary method used to investigate how different actors contribute to Eurocentric biases in archaeology. Document analysis will entail reviewing historical and contemporary documents, such as research publications and archival materials, in order to trace the evolution of archaeological practices and colonial powers while forming a trend and pattern. The literature review will focus on existing research on ANT, the superiority of the former coloniser, and archaeology in order to lay a theoretical foundation and identify knowledge gaps. ANT will be used to visualise the interactions between human and non-human actors in archaeological practices, such as researchers, institutions, tools, and artefacts. The analysis will look for patterns in knowledge production, resource allocation, and the portrayal of colonial narratives. Using ANT, the study hopes to reveal the hidden networks that support Western dominance in archaeology and advocate for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of history.

RESULTS

Building on the knowledge from a literature review on ANT and its application to the production of archaeological knowledge, this study investigates the long-term impact of colonialism on archaeological research. The literature review such as Law (1992), Van Oyen (2015), Mol (2010), Latour (1996), Murdoch (1997) and Wickramasinghe et al. (2010) highlights the persistence of historical power imbalances in networks that generate knowledge. With this, the findings in this study will examine how Western institutions maintain their dominant position in archaeological research by controlling data, tools, and archives. This dominance hinders local archaeologists in developing countries from conducting independent and accurate research, resulting in a biased understanding of the past which will be examined below.

Data and Technology Accessibility

Archaeology, being what it is, is based on data - the remains of the past that have been carefully collected to piece together historical stories. This data, however (Krupa & Grimm, 2021), serves a dual purpose. It not only imparts knowledge, but it also creates a space in which power dynamics and colonial legacies remain dominant (Krupa & Grimm, 2021). In this section, the study will look at the various aspects of archaeological data and how it can be accessed. In addition, the study will also discuss how ANT can help explain the hidden inequalities that exist in archaeological research, despite being mistaken for its objectivity. The long-standing influence of Western scholarship in scientific publications has had a substantial impact on archaeological data (Dauchy, Martyn, Musson, Pihlajamäki, & Wijffels, 2017). During colonial expeditions, explorers would frequently not only collect artefacts but also learn from and collaborate with the locals to gain knowledge. Unfortunately, these local contributions were frequently overlooked or completely ignored, as Western researchers claimed sole responsibility for the data and their subsequent publications (Piphal, Sonetra, & Sotheavin, 2023). This highlights the unequal distribution of power in data collection, in which the dominant group influences the story by limiting the availability of information obtained from the marginalised group's territory. The situation in Cambodia is an excellent example of this problem. The French colonial rulers conducted extensive archaeological surveys and excavations, collecting detailed information on Khmer temples and artefacts (Davis, 2011). However, much of this data is now stored in archives in France, far from its original location (Piphal et al., 2023). These are important questions because they address how accessible something is and who owns it. How can Cambodian researchers effectively study their own cultural heritage if the primary data is located outside of the country's borders?

Furthermore, intellectual property laws may limit the availability of data. It has been observed that patenting archaeological techniques analyses or results can create barriers for researchers from developing countries who may lack the necessary funds to access this knowledge (Krupa & Grimm, 2021). This perpetuates former colonial powers' dominance over information, effectively preventing host nation researchers from accessing data stored on what was once their own land. In these instances, ANT's framework helps to understand the power imbalance by revealing the intricate network of individuals and organisations involved in data production and protection.

In addition, the resource and capability challenges faced by the developing nation hinder its ability to conduct research, collect data, and analyse it. As a result, it is unable to do so independently. Haber (2016) found that technology, financial resources, and capacity all have a significant impact on data accessibility. The former coloniser, who frequently has access to advanced tools and analytical equipment, can collect and analyse data,

influencing interpretations in a Eurocentric direction, whether intentionally or unintentionally. However, local researchers may face barriers to accessing these resources, limiting their ability to actively contribute to knowledge generation (Haber, 2016). Additionally, Portable XRF analyzers, with their advanced technology, play an important role in the analysis of archaeological materials. However, researchers in developing countries face additional challenges due to the high cost of equipment and the necessary training to use it (Pilaar Birch & Szpak, 2022; Piphal et al., 2023). The problem extends beyond high-end technology. In developing countries, even simple excavation tools can be difficult to find. Relying on imported brushes, trowels, and other specialised equipment has been shown to cause delays and disrupt workflows (Carvalho & Agosto, 2023; Piphal et al., 2023). This minor impediment appears to reflect a larger disparity in infrastructure and resources, which is the result of historical power imbalances.

On the other hand, even though these countries may have access to certain technology, its effectiveness can be reduced due to challenges with collaboration, expertise, and maintenance/calibration of technology. This can lead to the generation of inaccurate or unusable data. It is important to mention that this does not mean that technology should be completely excluded from developing countries. Yet, it is worth mentioning that the limitations and potential blackbox underscore the intricate web of factors that contribute to unequal data access and interpretation. Identifying archaeological research's hidden components is an important consideration when looking at data accessibility from an ANT standpoint. ANT has illuminated the power dynamics that continue to influence data accessibility, interpretation control, and the order of preference of historical narratives. Specifically, technological disparities restrict access to sophisticated instruments and technologies in developing nations, making independent research difficult. This difference emphasises the Western organisations' great influence in data analysis and historical interpretation of the past of others.

Archives and Ownership

Data accessibility extends beyond its physical form and encompasses the realm of archives. Stoler (2002) emphasises the significant role that these repositories play in controlling and providing access to knowledge in the field of archaeology, particularly in relation to the effects of colonisation. Archives often provide valuable historical context, which is not typically found in raw data. Some parts of the archive documents will discuss the past involvement and excavations conducted by colonial powers in colonised territories (Andrew & Neath, 2018).

Here, the matter of ownership takes on great significance. Legislation or restrictions enacted by the former colonisers can impose restrictions on researchers from the host nation when it comes to accessing these archives, effectively hindering their ability to gain insights into their own history (Marcellin & Ascoli, 2010). Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge that this matter extends beyond mere documents. Interestingly, the former colonisers often retain possession of cultural artefacts. There are important ethical considerations surrounding the repatriation of these artefacts and the question of rightful ownership.

Adding privately held collections further complicates the matter. According to a study by Cisneros et al. (2022), the legal protections provided to private owners, some of whom may have acquired artefacts through questionable means, pose challenges for researchers seeking access to them. It is often argued that former colonies may lack the infrastructure and expertise required to adequately preserve these artefacts (Krupa & Grimm, 2021). This argument, however, promotes the idea that Western institutions bear the sole responsibility for safeguarding cultural heritage, perpetuating an unjust power dynamic within the field of archaeology.

ANT enables an examination of archive management and ownership, revealing the elements that influence the availability of historical information. Foreign archives, private ownership structures, and other non-human entities uphold the influence of previous colonisers on the development and storing of historical records. Gaining a deep understanding of these dynamics is essential for effectively addressing the long-lasting effects of colonialism on archaeological research. These ethical concerns surrounding archives include Western institutions' ownership and control of cultural artifacts and information raises ethical issues. The hesitancy to return these items or provide access to archives for local researchers demonstrates the ongoing existence of colonial mindsets.

Parachute Science

As previously stated, the management of data and archives is just one aspect of how colonialism continues to influence archaeology. Within this section, the study delves into the notion of "parachute science" and how it reveals imbalances in power dynamics within the field. Parachute science involves researchers from developed countries conducting archaeological research in developing nations. They have access to state-of-the-art technology and ample financial resources, enabling them to collect data and samples in partnership with local researchers (Odeny & Bosurgi, 2022). However, the distribution of power is frequently unequal. The researchers studying parachutes frequently overlook the valuable insights and contributions of local experts in the field (Odeny & Bosurgi, 2022). This not only diminishes the value of local researchers' contributions but also fosters an

adversarial mindset, suppressing local voices and perspectives.

The significance of parachute science cannot be overstated. Local researchers face challenges in conducting further research or confirming findings due to limited access to collected data, including physical samples which already been sent abroad (Pilaar Birch & Szpak, 2022). Furthermore, funding structures often prioritise foreign researchers, limiting opportunities for local archaeologists to assume leadership positions or participate in collaborative projects (Piphal et al., 2023). This further undermines the knowledge and experience of local experts and perpetuates the notion that researchers from the Western world are more capable of understanding history.

Examining this situation through the perspective of ANT can provide valuable insights into the power dynamics at play. Examining the various individuals, technology, funding, and samples in archaeology reveals the presence of imbalanced relationships that impact the production of knowledge (Raja et al., 2022). The perspectives of local researchers often get overshadowed by the presence of foreign researchers, who bring with them their advanced equipment and their way of methodologies. As an illustration, it is often misunderstood that Cambodians departed from Angkor Wat following its decline in the 13th century. This misunderstanding perfectly exemplifies the issue (Heng, Phon, & Heng, 2020). Despite the presence of evident Buddhist activity in the area, foreign interpretations often overlook the perspectives of the local community. Highlighting the significance of collaboration and integrating the insights of local communities is crucial when interpreting archaeological discoveries.

Parachute science goes beyond ignoring local contributions to fuel an imbalanced power dynamic in archaeology, where Western researchers wield enormous influence in shaping narratives about the past. To achieve the desired transformation or to advocate for a more equitable contribution from the locals, it is critical to foster fairer collaborations. Recognising the value of local researchers is critical in the shared pursuit of historical understanding, rather than dismissing them as mere assistants. The impact of Parachute Science, particularly the practice of conducting research without local collaboration, undermines the capacity of local researchers and perpetuates a one-sided narrative, which the public frequently misinterprets as final while ignoring the potential blackbox of the complex network and relationships behind. This practice also affects the growth of a robust, community-driven archaeological community.

Western Dominance Interpretations

The field of archaeology has been significantly shaped by the historical development of Western knowledge production, particularly since the 18th century. This relentless curiosity about the "other" fueled a system where Western researchers, armed with cutting-edge technology and ample resources, embarked on research expeditions – often without actively involving local populations in meaningful collaboration. Regrettably, the inclination to examine history from a singular viewpoint has led to a restricted comprehension of the past, as it frequently neglects to take into account the perspectives and cultural backgrounds of the individuals who experienced it firsthand.

Archaeological research is a pursuit that lacks objectivity. The process of data collection, interpretation, and publication is often obscured by a complex web of power dynamics. ANT helps to gain a better understanding of this "black box" by revealing the various individuals and entities involved, including both human and non-human elements. Various actors are involved in archaeological sites and research, including researchers, funding agencies, the data itself, technology, and even the cultural context. Throughout history, Western institutions have exerted a significant influence due to their advanced technology and abundant resources. As a result, Western perspectives on the past often hold the influence. There are multiple ways to observe this Western dominance while the local researchers encounter significant obstacles when it comes to actively engaging in research projects. These challenges could arise from their restricted access to data, tools, and funding (Krupa & Grimm, 2021). The practice of parachute science, where researchers from other countries conduct research with limited involvement from local collaborators and then leave with the results, perpetuates the marginalisation of local researchers' perspectives and contributions (Odeny & Bosurgi, 2022). Furthermore, Western interpretations often overlook the significance of local knowledge and cultural context. It has been highlighted by Heng et al. (2020) that this can lead to narratives of the past that are inaccurate or incomplete.

The consequences of these unequal power dynamics have far-reaching effects. There is a sense of disconnection among many local communities from their own heritage, and the production of knowledge is still heavily influenced by Western perspectives. This phenomenon, as some scholars have described it, has the unfortunate consequence of suppressing the viewpoints of local individuals and perpetuating a narrow and biased understanding of historical events (Durepos & Mills, 2012).

There are various factors that contribute to the imbalanced power dynamics present in this production of history. It is worth mentioning that the subject of study is not the ancestor of the Western researcher. This can

lead to a cultural and temporal disconnect, making it difficult to accurately interpret the findings (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge that over time, the influence of colonisers' biases can gradually distort the perception of history (Durepos & Mills, 2012). It is important to take into account the significance of the physical distance, physically and culturally, between Western researchers and archaeological sites. The distance between objects and their original context can lead to uncertainties regarding the reliability of interpretations (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). It is crucial to take into account the significant cultural background that accompanies these objects in order to ensure accuracy.

The seemingly objective process can be deconstructed using an ANT framework, revealing the hidden impact on archaeological knowledge. Human researchers are not the only actors involved in this research. They also include the material elements being studied, such as ancient tools, technologies, and objects. These non-human elements are not passive observers but active participants in the knowledge-creation process (Durepos & Mills, 2012). Understanding the past is heavily reliant on these materials, as their presence or absence significantly impacts the narratives shared. Recognising that Western researchers have little inherent advantages over local populations is critical. It is essential to recognise that individuals may have personal agendas and biases, which must be considered to ensure transparency in the interpretation process. By analysing and dissecting these power dynamics, the study believes that it can help offer a better understanding of the past. This allows the study to examine various points of view while also preventing the spread of false or misleading information. Producing archaeological knowledge is far from simple and fraught with complexities. It has become evident that the unjust power dynamics in archaeological interpretations have been distorted for a significant period of time. This distortion can be attributed to various factors, such as the influence of Western dominance, the impact of time and distance, and the involvement of non-human materials. Drawing an inference from ANT, it is important to note and promote a more comprehensive and morally conscious archaeology that values and takes into account different viewpoints and perspectives to enrich the understanding of history. The prevalence of Western interpretations may lead to a distorted understanding of historical events. This emphasises the significance of incorporating local viewpoints to create a more thorough and accurate historical narrative.

DISCUSSION

The preceding sections have laid bare the enduring influence of colonial legacies and Eurocentrism in shaping archaeological knowledge production. The following section will synthesize the key arguments and propose a framework for moving forward, drawing upon the insights offered by ANT.

Towards a More Equitable and Ethical Archaeology

To move forward, it is important to gradually dismantle these power structures and adopt a fair and morally sound approach to archaeological research. ANT provides valuable insights. Recognizing and appreciating the significance of each individual involved fosters a collaborative environment where local communities actively participate in knowledge creation, rather than merely serving as study subjects (Piphal et al., 2023).

Several important modifications are necessary. It is of utmost importance to collaborate in order to enhance the accessibility of resources for local researchers (Adebisi, 2023). These initiatives encompass data-sharing agreements, skill-building programmes, and the establishment of infrastructure to facilitate local research projects (Piphal et al., 2023). Moreover, fostering collaboration is crucial as a substitute for the antiquated parachute science model. It is important to acknowledge the valuable contributions of local researchers in archaeological projects, treating them as co-authors rather than mere assistants (Raja et al., 2022). In addition, involving local communities in the development of research priorities is of utmost importance. This guarantees the consideration of their concerns and priorities in the formulation of research questions.

Transparency, Repatriation, and a Multi-Vocal Approach

When it comes to establishing trust between researchers and communities, prioritising transparency is crucial. It is important to have transparent and straightforward discussions about our research objectives, methods, and findings (Masenya, 2022). It is important to engage local communities in both the research process and the sharing of knowledge (Herszberg, 2022). When discussing findings, it is important to consider the specific circumstances and cultural aspects of the local community. These explanations may not always align with traditional Western scientific perspectives. In order to foster a more inclusive approach to archaeology, it is essential to acknowledge the diverse perspectives and methods of understanding and learning (Bruchac, 2020).

Repatriation is also a significant concern. Museums and archives across the Western world still preserve a multitude of cultural artefacts. The period of colonial rule is responsible for this result (Krupa & Grimm, 2021). Ensuring the physical and digital return of these materials to their rightful places is crucial. This not only helps

people regain their sense of ownership but also enables local communities to protect and maintain their unique cultural heritage.

Archaeology should also be open to a diverse range of academics from different backgrounds. Incorporating indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, and other forms of local expertise into the research process is crucial (Cruz, 2023). Embracing and valuing diversity enables us to develop a more profound and comprehensive grasp of history. The ongoing process of challenging Western dominance in archaeology is a significant endeavour. Understanding the impact of power dynamics in the field, fostering collaboration, and giving local communities the authority to make decisions can contribute to dismantling the lasting consequences of colonialism. The insights offered by ANT present a valuable framework for this undertaking. By recognising the valuable contributions and diverse roles of all individuals involved in the creation of archaeological knowledge, the study hopes to provide a future in the field that is fair, morally sound, and inclusive.

CONCLUSION

In summary, archaeology is a discipline that seeks to study or uncover the past. Western societies, who have established themselves as experts in the field, primarily drive the current production and reproduction of knowledge. This dominance has resulted in global acceptance of Western-produced knowledge, overshadowing the complex processes and networks that enabled its creation. This article employs ANT to uncover and explain the complex networks that underpin the dominance of Western narratives in archaeology. The study identifies several key findings, including Western institutions' control over significant portions of archaeological data and advanced technological resources, which limits the ability of local researchers in developing countries to conduct independent and accurate research. Furthermore, Western archives and museums still house many cultural artefacts and documents from former colonies, raising ethical concerns and perpetuating colonial imbalances by limiting access for local researchers. The widespread practice of parachute science, in which foreign researchers conduct studies in developing countries without meaningful local collaboration, challenges the development of local archaeological expertise and perpetuates a biased narrative. Furthermore, Western interpretations of archaeological data frequently dominate, resulting in distorted perceptions of historical events. Inclusive research methodologies that incorporate local knowledge are required to produce more accurate historical narratives. These findings demonstrate how colonial legacies persist in archaeology. The study proposes several solutions to address these issues and move towards a more equitable approach. Encouraging meaningful collaboration between local and foreign researchers can result in more balanced research outcomes, and allowing local researchers to lead or co-lead projects is critical. Improving access to advanced tools and technologies in developing countries can help level the playing field, but this requires investments in local capacity and infrastructure. Western institutions should consider repatriating cultural artefacts and making archives available to local researchers, which would help to correct historical imbalances and support local research. Adopting research methodologies that incorporate local knowledge and perspectives can lead to more accurate and comprehensive historical narratives, which is consistent with ANT's principles of emphasising the interconnectedness of human and non-human actors in knowledge production. By addressing these issues, archaeology can move towards a more inclusive and equitable future in which diverse voices contribute to a deeper understanding of history. The study also acknowledges its limitations, most notably its reliance on document analysis and the constraints of a desk-based approach. Future research could benefit from fieldwork and direct engagement with local communities in order to validate and expand on these findings. All in all, this article has highlighted the continued dominance of Western narratives in archaeology, as well as the significant challenges that local archaeologists face when accessing and interpreting their cultural heritage. By taking a more collaborative and inclusive approach, archaeology can begin to address these disparities and progress towards a more equitable and comprehensive understanding of history.

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