

HERITAGE AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION

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Given the volume of literature dealing with the ‘politics of the past’, it should come as no surprise that we have chosen to align these comments with the growing recognition that archaeological practice is affected by contemporary political affairs. In particular, our comments have much in common with recent, and strident, debates critiquing the instances in which heritage, archaeology, art and culture have been tactically mobilised to encourage national subjects to act in often harmful ways towards ‘the Other’. Yet while these critical reflections on the political uses of archaeology are certainly useful, we, like Gustafsson and Karlsson, take issue with an implicit limitation that lingers within them: that such debates can be confined to particular instances or episodes. By contrast, the bigger issue for us revolves around the significant hesitancy archaeologists have towards fully acknowledging that their own work is *in and of itself political*. For Gustafsson and Karlsson, who find themselves operating within an increasingly alarming political situation in Sweden, this reticence can no longer be confined to the purview of the archaeological theoretician; rather, it is an issue that should be exercising us all. With this, we wholeheartedly agree.

The Swedish context documented by Gustafsson and Karlsson is by no means unique. Indeed, it is in many ways influenced by dwindling support for multicultural policies evident across much of Europe, including within the Council of Europe but particularly pronounced in Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria and Britain, and as recent speeches by David Cameron, Angela Merkel and Nicholas Sarkozy attest. In their stead, policymakers have been busily developing a new orthodoxy that

touts ‘civic integration’, an approach that often amounts to an attempt to assimilate minority groups – particularly immigrants – into ‘mainstream’ society. Interestingly, as Joppke (2004:249) points out, this political retreat from multiculturalism is positioned within a timeframe that has also seen a simultaneous shift towards an ‘affirmation of one’s own culture’. Emerging policy has thus brought to the fore the increasingly familiar language of ‘shared values’ and ‘national cohesion’, along with insinuations of ‘Britishness’, ‘Frenchness’ or ‘Swedishness’, for example. Placed within this context, the reactions of the right-wing Sweden Democrats (SD) party, though unpleasant, no longer seem quite so surprising. Indeed, they share striking parallels with other right-wing parties in Europe, such as the British National Party (BNP), whose political agitations explicitly highlight heritage as a resource under threat of extinction due to immigration and multicultural policies. Like the SD, the BNP has coupled this with an apparent need to reprise cultural assimilation and ‘fight for Englishness’, both of which are illustrative of a much broader effort within European countries to re-nationalise their citizenship (Joppke 2010:12).

The policy shift evident in Sweden also strikes a chord with the Australian context, where the importance of challenging right-wing uses of the past is particularly familiar. The Australian ‘history wars’, fought in essence over the interpretation of early Australian history as one of ‘settlement’ or as ‘invasion’ of Aboriginal land, galvanised the disciplines of history and archaeology. Right-wing intellectuals found support in the conservative Prime Minister John Howard’s (1996–2007) challenge to what he called the ‘black armband’ view of history that sought to expose the legacies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century racism. The opening of the National Museum of Australia, to mark the Centenary of Federation in 2001, became the focus of these debates because of its apparent failure to provide a master narrative of ‘Australianness’ that championed the idea of the ‘progress’ of Australian ‘civilization’ (see Casey 2001:231 for further discussion). However, these challenges were publicly opposed and debated by an array of professional historians. While debate sparked by the history wars is still ongoing, these events reveal important lessons for the issues raised by Gustafsson and Karlsson. Most importantly, they reveal the importance of *publicly* debating disciplinary ideas and knowledge. Without publicly visible challenges to right-wing positions, the ideas and values that are thus exposed risk becoming assimilated into day-to-day cultural talk and policy as legitimate and reasonable. Public debates provide ammunition for right-wing positions to be challenged not only at public policy levels, but also in private arenas, such as the dinner table and work place. While it will of

course mean that left-wing and other positions are also open to public scrutiny this is not something to be feared. It is vital that critical disciplinary debate is made public to not only reveal, but also inform, public understanding about the political nature of interpreting heritage and the past. It is only with such an understanding that *mindful* public debate can be advanced.

As Gustafsson and Karlsson note a discussion is necessary, one that thinks through the strategies ‘needed for Swedish archaeology and heritage management in the contemporary political situation’, especially if they are to ‘defend the democratic, solidaristic and multicultural Swedish society’. For us, a clear way of developing this discussion is to introduce the work of Nancy Fraser and her ‘politics of recognition’. This seems to offer not just a remedy to the immediate problems facing archaeologists in Sweden, but the potential for a philosophical shake-up that may usefully unsettle archaeology’s claims to power and problematise its day-to-day encounters with users of the past. This is because any reading of Fraser’s work (1989, 2000, 2003) should serve as a reminder that heritage will always be a political resource, and any attempt to manage it must remain aware of the principle of ‘parity of participation’ (see Fraser 2007:27; see also Smith & Waterton 2009:78–81; Smith 2010 for discussion in the context of heritage/archaeology). What this means is that all participants are entitled to: (1) a distribution of material resources that works to ensure independence and voice; and (2) patterns of cultural value that ‘express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem’ (Fraser 2007:27). Within the political parameters specific to the Swedish context, this rendering of recognition removes opportunities for xenophobic claims as it precludes political instances in which any social group is characterised as less-than-full partners in society (after Fraser 2007).

Focussing more specifically upon the field of archaeology and the Swedish funding context, what Gustafsson and Karlsson have described is a situation in which a particular group of archaeologists – what they term ‘defenders of the antiquarian sector’s traditional aims and methods’ – has been granted greater academic standing and thus do not operate *on a par with their peers*. Their ability to control research resources and thus direct directions taken within archaeological research impedes parity and denies opportunity to those researchers concerned with less traditional questions. Here, the tension revolves around the *power to decide*. This particular axis of power also impacts upon the broader political terrain detailed by Gustafsson and Karlsson as it closes down many of the attempts made by researchers to interrogate the relationship between archaeology, politics and contemporary society. It is again at

this point that public debate becomes vital. The Australian history wars revealed, publicly, the extent to which certain sections or groups within disciplines benefited politically from maintaining certain intellectual positions. Disciplines and groups within them were revealed as active players in the politics of recognition. This scrutiny has not necessarily overturned the relations of power within those disciplines; however, this situation opens the door to the possibility of change. Certainly, it means that power and privilege can no longer be taken for granted and must be actively maintained and defended, which requires renegotiations and shifts in power.

There is one further point worth making about this issue. Below the threshold of ‘theorising’ and ‘politics’ lies the real world. Here, explicit articulations about ‘Swedishness’ and ‘our heritage’, espoused through the media and public policy, prompt *a responsiveness* in people. In other words, these political projects affect the way people see themselves and others and are thus not only entirely worthy of academic scrutiny, but also, ethically, demand that intellectuals develop opportunities for civic outreach and engagement.

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