Archaeology, Identity and the Right to Culture. Anthropological perspectives on repatriation

Nilsson Stutz, Liv

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Anthropological perspectives on repatriation

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The debate concerning repatriation and reburial is attracting increasing attention in Sweden. While most archaeologists today understand the importance of repatriation and the arguments underlying the claim, the process is not completely unproblematic and certainly not in all cases. This article explores some tendencies within the international debate about repatriation, and frames them within a more general discussion about human rights, the right to culture, and the role of cultural heritage within this debate. Through a critical approach to the debate, it is argued that archaeology needs to be a more active party in the negotiations.

Liv Nilsson Stutz, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Lund University, Box 117, SE-221 00 Lund, Sweden.

"I think that it is unpleasant that our ancestors are still being used for racial biological research." It is Thursday January 25, 2007, and Swedish Radio is interviewing a Sami cultural worker about her opinions concerning the call for repatriation of Sami remains from museums and collections in Sweden, a claim recently supported by the Swedish Sami Parliament. It is time, they argue, for these remains to return to their original communities and be given a lasting burial. Another recent and much publicized case of repatriation of human remains occurred at Lund University in 2005, when the Jewish congregation in Malmö demanded that the remains of a Jewish man, Levin Dombrowsky, whose skull had become part of the university collections in 1879, be transferred to them for burial (Orrenius 2005). Demands like these have been common in other parts of the world for decades, as minority populations and indigenous groups claim the right to their cultural heritage and the remains of their ancestors. In Sweden this debate has not yet influenced archaeological and museum practice in the same systematic way, but the increasing demands from groups both within Sweden and abroad (as illustrated by the repatriation of Aboriginal human remains to Australia in 2004, and a totem pole to the Haisla in Canada in 2006, both from the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm) indicate that this is about to change.

Today the right to one's cultural heritage is perceived by many to be a fundamental human right. So why is it that some archaeologists still hesitate to embrace the idea of repatriation and reburial? Is it only an objection to the fact that we lose our authority over the interpretation of the material and the control of access to data? In this article I argue that, while this is often a literal bone of contention, the reservations go beyond this immediate concern and relate to the larger questions of the role and responsibility of archaeology in the contemporary world. The purpose of this discussion is not to undermine repatriation as a phenomenon, but to point to elements within the process of repatriation that indicate new ways in which the past is used for identity production, and which we, as scholars, have a responsibility to critically examine. By discussing the basis for the reservations among the archaeological and anthropological communities, I hope to add nuances to the image of archaeology and anthropology in the debate and contribute to a basis for an understanding of this perspective among the other stakeholders.

THE BURDEN OF OUR PAST IN A CHANGING WORLD

The statement made in the interview quoted above is in many ways characteristic for the ongoing debate about repatriation, and it illustrates some of the challenges that archaeology and anthropology are facing as we engage in this debate. It expresses both genuine hurt and emotional distress as it relates to the past, and simultaneously, it also reveals a fair amount of ignorance and prejudice among other stakeholders and the public concerning archaeological and anthropological research. Here, archaeologists and biological anthropologists often have to confront the negative and stereotypical view many other stakeholders have of them, and which is mainly based on their very dark history. It is not uncommon that archaeologists and anthropologists are ridiculed in the debate, or that they are called "grave robbers" or "looters" (Spriggs 1990; Mihesuah 1996a; Riding In 2000:106; Riding In *et al*. 2004). At other times the critique is less virulent and more constructive but still reproduces what many of us in the field would regard as a dated view of archaeology (see e.g. Watkins 2005). As strange as it may sound to Swedish archaeologists today, archaeology is in many places seen as a threat to living and dynamic indigenous cultures. Joe Watkins has noted that Native American Indians and even some archaeologists have "cast a blanket of cultural insensitivity over all archaeologists" (Watkins 2000:69). Beyond the most apparent caricatures, the widespread mistrust of archaeology and anthropology is a reality that we have to be aware of (Forsman 1997; Zimmerman 1997).

It is important to underscore here that this critique and mistrust is, from a historical perspective, to a great extent deserved. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries in particular, archaeology and anthropology were an integral part of the colonialist project in many parts of the world (Lowenthal 1990; Thomas 2000; Fine Dare 2002; Fforde *et al*. 2002; Fforde 2004 etc.). The destructive effects that the collecting of human remains and cultural heritage had on the

cultures from which they were taken is well documented. Moreover, as a parallel movement in Europe (and elsewhere), nationalism heavily influenced archaeological practice to glorify the past and establish a historical link of past-present continuity (Dietler 1994; Kohl and Fawcett 1995; Atkinson *et al*. 1996; Gillberg & Karlsson 1996; Olsen 2001; see also contributions in Kohl & Fawcett 1995; Díaz-Andreu & Champion 1996; Meskell 1998; Kane 2003). The role of archaeology and anthropology in both these enterprises – the nationalist and the colonialist projects – can be understood by their link to modernity. Bjørnar Olsen (2001:43) has discussed how modernity came to entail "two seemingly conflicting philosophical positions" by combining a stress on rationality and progress with a romantic nostalgia for the past. Archaeology embodied both. He argues that the changes brought about by modernity, including the erosion of fundamental "traditional" cultural and social certainties, created a sense of loss – a sense that something important was slipping away and had to be preserved and rescued. "To preserve the past became part of preserving the present, of preserving our own identity" (Olsen 2001:43). This eagerness to preserve something that was slipping away motivated the sometimes very destructive collecting of the cultural heritage of increasingly marginalized indigenous and rural communities as modern society expanded, whether in the colonial or nationalist context. Archaeologists, ethnographers, anatomists and others collected items from what they perceived as cultures destined to disappear. This project of preservation, often associated with an ideal of "purified spatial identities", became closely associated with archaeology, biological anthropology and museum technologies (Olsen 2001:44). In the colonial context "the other" was identified with the indigenous, which was simultaneously exoticized and defined as inferior. In the nationalist context, on the other hand, the majority population was established as indigenous while "the other" was identified as an intruder, and minorities such as Jews, Roma, Sami etc. were seen as impure elements that threatened or disturbed the continuous histories of the nation (see e.g. Isaksson 2001; Olsen 2001; Schanche 2002; Sellevold 2002; Catomeris 2004; Ljungström 2004; Hagerman 2006). While the colonialist and nationalist projects differ in many ways – including the interpretation identification and positioning of indigenousness – they both share a process in which the dominating political power withheld the right to define the roles and produce the narrative called history. This worldview, influenced by a mélange of nationalism and colonialism and a simultaneous exoticizing and dehumanizing of the "other", was by no means restricted to anthropology; it had a place in all of society, from the intellectual circles of science, literature and art to popular conceptions. But anthropology and archaeology are intimately associated with these practices since they were instrumental in lending a scientific aura and legitimization to the ideology.

Unfortunately, the images of what archaeology and anthropology are today have not been as successfully communicated as the strong and shameful images of what our predecessors did 100 years ago. These still shade perceptions of our

disciplines, especially among indigenous groups and minorities, who once were the victims of this horrendous history (this critique can also be seen outside of the repatriation debate; see Tierney 2000; Hagerman 2006). This explains how it is possible for a cultural worker in Sweden to believe that racial biological research is still carried out in Sweden today. Our inability to communicate with people outside of the profession is now taking its toll in negotiations about repatriation. We have to start with building a trust that we, in our ignorance, might have thought was already established.

Today the world is changing. The colonial and nationalist systems are gradually giving way to a postcolonial world. The general trend toward globalization has created new identities. On the one hand we can see a tendency toward homo-genization where shared cultural references are created, and on the other a fragmentation with the creation of multicultural societies, hybrid cultures and diaspora cultures, and as part of this a strengthening of local and regional identity (Hylland Eriksen 1997:50pp; Eriksson *et al.* 2005: 40). The emancipatory trend among minorities and indigenous communities can be seen as an expression of both these developments. While there is a clear emphasis on the local and traditional history, culture, identity etc., the various groups also draw strength and inspiration through the identification with other groups in other places that share the same experience.

This new situation has led to different and sometimes contradictory uses of the past. On the one hand, we see an academic intellectual approach that celebrates diversity and emphasizes the need to bring to the fore previously oppressed voices. It is in this process that the support for claims by indigenous populations, women, minorities etc. within academia can be understood. From this perspective, repatria-tion of cultural heritage becomes a crucial component of this struggle for self-definition. Repatriation is not only about returning objects and human remains, but also restoring the dignity of people and their culture and past. Contemporary archaeology and anthropology also reflect this development. The awareness of our dark past and of the production of knowledge that followed from it has been integrated within the disciplines both as historiography and changes in the methodology. Over the past 20 years, theoretical developments within archaeology have emphasized the subjectivity of the process of interpretation. This has resulted in a call for an archaeology that is more inclusive and open to multivocality. There has also been an increasing tendency to give voice to groups that have been marginalized by previous research; this has developed into strong subfields such as gender and queer archaeology, and within this current development we also see how indigenous voices more successfully are claiming their place within the field. But the enforcement of new kinds of identities can also be seen in a strategic focus maintained by political structures. For example, the emphasis on prehistoric and early historic regional and trans-national identities resonates with the contemporary politics of the European Union, which aims to produce new references for European identity (Dietler 1994; Dennell 1996:29pp; Pluciennik

1996:52). Parallel to this movement, which either celebrates diversity and hybridity or reinforces regional ties across the boundaries of the national state, we see a resurgence of a nostalgic notion of past cultural identities. In Europe this manifests itself in the return of nationalism and even xenophobia on the political arena. Just as modernity brought about an interest in the past that was slipping away, so does the current geopolitical situation. And while there might be a difference in the power structures in place, it is possible to see similar tendencies manifest themselves within the preservation efforts on behalf of indigenous cultures. Archaeology is particularly sensitive to being caught up in these complex and even contradictory political currents. Repatriation of cultural heritage is a part of this movement, and it is with reference to these complex issues, rather than to the simplified notions of access to data, that we need to reserve the right to remain critical of all kinds of appropriation of the past. This does *not* mean that repatriation is always problematic, or even worse, wrong. However, the challenge is to strike a reasonable balance between people's basic human right to their past and identity, and the potential abuse of this past and this identity to the detriment of others.

REPATRIATION, RIGHTS AND CULTURE
In order to clarify the connections between repatriation and the politics of identity, it is important to examine in greater detail the politics of what in the anthropological literature is called *"right to culture"* (Cowan *et al*. 2001:8pp). The call for repatriation of cultural items and human remains on behalf of indigenous groups and minorities can be understood within a more general movement toward self-determination. The right to one's patrimony, in the form of cultural heritage and history, is crucial in this process and has become a mark of equality in today's world (Barkan 2002:16p), on equal footing with other human rights. The central place for history and cultural heritage in processes of identity can be explained by the fact that it is the connection to the past that situates and contextualizes this identity within an already defined world (Friedman 1994:117p). The motivations to claim control over cultural heritage and history are complex and variable. In many cases items are repatriated to become a part of living traditions and/or revitalization efforts, but besides the physical control of the items, the ideological and symbolic component of the transfer of control and ownership cannot be overestimated. The process is not only a practical arrangement of transfer of ownership, but also an act of recognition and respect for the culture from which these items were taken. While the act transfers something material, it also transfers something intangible: respect and dignity and the tools for self-definition, which can be linked to what Charles Taylor calls the politics of recognition (Tayor 1992). Drawing on Fanon (1995), Taylor recognizes that since identity is shaped by other people's recognition or absence of recognition, the right to self-determination can be seen as a fundamental human right, and self-determination as the foundation of liberation (for more details, see also Eriksson *et al*. 2005:41). "The background premise in these demands is that recognition forges identity" (Taylor 1992:66).

When applied to archaeology and anthropology this would mean that it is only through the revision of the histories written by past archaeologists and anthropologists, and through a release of control over the cultural heritage and the human remains, that freedom and liberation from the colonial past can be obtained. Some authors even argue that claims to the right to culture have increasingly replaced struggles for political and economic equality, which have been abandoned in disillusion with the lack of progress (Fraser 1997:2, quoted in Cowan *et al.* 2001:2). But while it is clear that every people should have the right to self-determination, it should also be underlined here that the right to culture is not a new idea. It can be found as a strong component of Romanticism and its expression in the European nationalist movements in the 19th century, the same tendencies that so strongly shaped the archaeology and anthropology at the time and that are now being rejected by the discipline. There is thus an interesting contradiction wedged into the concept of right to culture and its expression in repatriation, which raises questions for the archaeologist. The risk of abuse that we so clearly see in retrospect is present even today. Thomas Hylland Eriksen has argued:

> In recent years 'culture' and 'cultural identity' have become important tools for the achievement of political legitimacy and influence in many otherwise very different societies – from Bolivia to Siberia. It is used by political leaders of hegemonic majorities as well as by spokesmen of weak minorities. (...) 'Cultural pleas' are, in other words, put to very different political uses. (Eriksen 1997:54)

Jane Cowan and colleagues make a similar observation:

> Invocations of culture have seemingly become inseparable from the language of resistance. However, the political implications of such claims cannot be generalized because culture may be called upon to legitimize reactionary projects as easily as progressive ones. (Cowan *et al.* 2001:10)

This indicates that the principle in itself is problematic, and while it cannot be rejected, it must be examined critically and possibly on a case-by-case basis.

When claims to culture are expressed in claims for repatriation, this sometimes abstract discussion concerning rights and culture becomes very concrete and tangible. In the remainder of this section I will discuss more in detail how repatriation and reburial articulates with the right to culture, and how the right to culture is expressed in that movement.

The pivotal role of past-present continuity
In most parts of the world repatriation is not legally regulated, and there is no legally binding document that regulates it on an international level. In the United States, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) from 1990 regulates the transfer of ownership of certain cultural items including human remains to federally recognized Native American Tribes, Alaskan villages

and Hawaiian corporations (for details see Nilsson Stutz in press), but in most countries repatriation is based on the goodwill of the museum or institution that curates the remains. The basis for any claim – whether regulated by law or not – is affiliation, i.e. that a living population today can prove some kind of connection to the items to be repatriated. The nature of the connection can vary and arguments for affiliation can be based on ties of kinship, culture, history, geography etc. The underlying principle is that cultural heritage belongs to the people that once produced it. This is an interesting and potentially problematic aspect of repatriation for several reasons. First of all, it highlights the phenomenon of past-present continuity as both a need (in the sense that it contributes to creating a sense of identity) and a tool for the process itself. In other words, affiliation to past cultural items and human remains must be presented as an argument in order to rightfully claim them for repatriation, at the same time as the notion of an affiliation to material remains from the past is what establishes the link to the past and creates a sense of identity in the more intangible sense. Moreover, it collides with the idea that cultural heritage belongs to all of humanity, an idea that is fundamental for contemporary archaeological and ethnological research and for museum curation, an idea that has strongly developed in reaction to private collecting.

The difficulty of determining affiliation varies greatly. In some cases the process is regarded as relatively simple. For example, when a direct descendant demands the remains of a relative for burial, the claim for past-present continuity is fairly solid; and the same is true with regard to an item that was stolen from one's family in the past, that was unrightfully disposed of by somebody, or that was looted from a burial. Affiliation that goes beyond immediate kinship and ownership is also often established and is then based on the notion that a group existed in the past, and that the same group exists today and has the right to control the material remains of its past. But from an archaeological point of view, and especially with a long time perspective, it is also clear that these connections can become difficult to establish beyond a reasonable doubt. The Kennewick case, where a collective of scientists and a group of five Native American tribes disputed the affiliation of the 9,600-year-old remains of a human being, illustrates the dilemma (Gerstenblith 2002; Owsley & Jantz 2002). While the Kennewick litigation focused on the access to the remains for scientific study, other cases might pit one indigenous community against another, as several groups may argue that they are the rightful descendants of the past people who produced a certain object. The question for the archaeologist must then be: what standards should be applied when negotiating with other stakeholders? In the Kennewick case, the arguments presented on behalf of the scientific community were based on scientific theories, while the Native American tribes seeking reburial rejected these arguments as irrelevant and instead argued from their tradition, that they always had been present in this region. Here, the scientific community had to face a very different world-view, as a scientific understanding was forced to confront a traditional creationist understanding. The case was finally settled to the advantage of the scientists in a

federal court. It is important here to underline that there is a tension within science as well, and this tension is expressed very clearly in the repatriation debate. On the one hand, there is unfortunately still a view that disregards or understates the human and emotional dimension and prioritizes scientific results and interpretation over human rights and needs. On the other, there is a radically different and deeply humanistic view, which argues that we need to understand humanity within a global perspective and which sees a danger in the appropriation of the remains of the past, and the interpretation of the past, by any particular group, ethnicity, nation etc. Both of these can express hesitation over repatriation, though for fundamentally different reasons, and they both reserve the right to critically examine the argument of past-present continuity. Moreover, in the concrete case of repatriation, authorities might be put in a position of choosing between different traditional and/or creationist views of the past on behalf of different groups of minorities, views that may have concrete implications for rights to land, water etc. Here, the scientific understanding might become important as a factor in negotiating and pleading the different cases. In the Kennewick case this became especially clear when a third stakeholder also claimed the right to the remains, namely Stephen McNallen from the Asatrú Folk Assembly, an organized group of believers in Asatrú, which is a self-proclaimed "ethnic religion native to Northen Europe" (Gardell 2003:258). This claim was based on an assessment by a scientist that the remains exhibited "Caucasian" traits. If, McNallen argued, this was indeed the remains of a "white man", then it might as well be his ancestor, and this ancestor might have been on the American continent before the Native Americans. While the claim by McNallen seems absurd, it is important to underscore that it was not based on right-to-culture reasoning that differed greatly from that of the local tribes. Mattias Gardell, who has studied the pagan revival in the United States, points out that there are theories developed by Asatrúers and Native Americans together that advocate a Norse origin for several Native American traditions (Gardell 2003:149), and even if this may be a very marginal phen-omenon, it is nevertheless present. The Kennewick case remains important because it shows that, if we as archaeologists and anthropologists want to be able to protest claims like those made by McNallen, we have to make sure that we do not undermine our authority by remaining uncritical when the claims come from groups whose cause we sympathize with – including the five local Indian tribes who also claimed the remains.

The right to difference
Another central component of the discourse relates to the right to be different. The repatriation process can become a strategy to extricate oneself from the dominating culture and establish a self-centered autonomy (Friedman 1994:132). In a world where colonialism and globalization bring change and destabilize traditional systems, one response has been to reject the world outside and reinforce the notion of cultural continuity. This strategy, which Charles Taylor has called a

politics of difference, builds on a politics of universal dignity, but at least in part it rejects the principle of universal equality, since it tends to gloss over difference and force assimilation and thereby threaten cultural specificity (Taylor 1992:38p). To defend one's distinctiveness becomes the only strategy to maintain one's cultural identity. This ideology brings us, according to Taylor, toward a state where difference and particularity are maintained and cherished (Taylor 1992:40). Ironically, while this movement situates itself within the struggle for the rights to traditional culture, the rights of minorities etc., the discourse tends to reproduce an old-fashioned view of culture, which is often seen as "the shared customs and worldview of a *particular* group or kind of people" (Cowan *et al*. 2001:2), a notion that has been abandoned by anthropology since it reproduces a stereotypical and static view of "the other".

In the repatriation debate this right to difference is most commonly expressed as a rejection of science and scholars in general, and archaeology and archaeologists in particular. Archaeology is rejected as useless (e.g., White Deer 1997). This rejection expresses a mix of emotions, ranging from a deep connection to a traditional understanding of one's past to an outrage against how archaeologists and anthropologists have treated people in the past. While these positions are understandable, I would argue that the rejection of archaeology is a problem for both the academic community and the other stakeholders, and as archaeologists it is our responsibility to object to it. If we as archaeologists agree that archaeology is useless and that we have nothing to offer to the understanding of the past, there is no justification for us to continue to do archaeology. While most of us believe that archaeology is important – not just for us personally, but also for humanity through its perspectives on the history of a shared humanity, and on change and continuity across time and space – we probably need to become better at articulating this to others. The repatriation process offers an opportunity to voice and communicate these beliefs and values, but unfortunately the response from academia has too often limited itself to "useful scientific facts," which has only reinforced the notion of archaeology as an irrelevant science for the people whose past we study. But besides the interests of archaeology as a discipline, it is important to recognize that the rejection of the discipline also may constitute a dilemma for the minorities themselves. There are multiple examples where archaeology has been used to build cases for the land and water rights of indigenous peoples. Without the recognition of the value of an independent archaeological assessment of the situation, the case would be impossible to make. Similarly, a rejection of archaeology and anthropology would make it possible for McNallen to claim and win the right to rebury the remains from Kennewick in a situation where the political support for him was strong enough. Another situation that illustrates this dilemma can be found in contemporary Israel, where ultra-orthodox rabbis today hold the right to determine whether or not the remains from the Neolithic and onward are Jewish and therefore should be reburied. In this kind of situation, archaeologists run the risk – despite their will and better judgment – of participating

in a redefinition of history, and ultimately in the oppression of other groups, both historic and contemporary.

Essentialism – strategic and ontic

Finally, in the repatriation debate it is not uncommon to come across essentialism. Cowan and colleagues have pointed out that, in the debate regarding cultural claims in general, culturalist claims "may be only slightly more sophisticated versions of ethno-nationalism and may represent what has been called a strategic essentialism" (Cowan *et al*. 1997:10; see also Eriksson *et al*. 2005:43). Essentialism was the basis of Eurocentric racism in the 19th century and is founded on the idea that every people has an essence – a certain way of being, certain abilities and certain sensitivities – and it thus mixes culture and biology and presents the link between them as completely obvious and common sense. In the postcolonial era there have been a number of reactions to this. Most commonly it has been rejected, for example through the research in biological anthropology which has been able to demonstrate that the concept of race in human populations simply is irrelevant since humans show variability along a continuum rather than within definable categories or types. Another reaction has been to maintain the idea of essentialism but reverse the value system. An example of this is Négritude, a movement that celebrated the supposed "essence" or "personality" of the African person (Sédar Senghor 1970).

A recent development of essentialism is that it has abandoned the biological basis. Racial hierarchies have been replaced by an emphasis on cultural difference (Eriksson *et al*. 2005:42). Within this framework, culture is understood as a natural entity that has to be preserved from the destruction brought about by mixing with other cultures or assimilation. The presence of essentialism can be felt in the postcolonial discourse that makes sweeping statements about indigenous people in general. An example of this, from the repatriation debate, can be found in Susan Harjo's account of how Native Americans differ from Europeans in their respect for the dead, a view she formed after seeing Shakespeare's Hamlet:

> They don't have respect for people and places for the dead unless they knew them, otherwise it is a big joke about worms crawling around. The stuff of humour for ten year olds. It really taught me that people from European cultures don't have the same sensibilities as we had. (Harjo 2004:179)

This kind of dichotomization creates an artificial boundary between the West and indigenous societies, and it completely glosses over the variability within these two defined groups. It also produces a difference that makes understanding and connection across the defining line more difficult to achieve.

Seen in the light of the past, and the crimes committed by modernizing colonialist nation states against indigenous peoples, it is easy to sympathize with the claims of right to culture. The reproduction of a dichotomy between indigenous peoples and the West, based on essentialism, provides a way to frame the problem.

Many argue that it is acceptable to essentialize something that you know is more complex as long as you do so in order to make your voice heard, and many activists from, or working on behalf of, indigenous groups use this strategy (Cowan *et al*. 1997:10). This is what is sometimes called "strategic essentialism" – a form of essentialism that is only used to achieve a political or social goal, as opposed to ontic essentialism, which designates a true belief in the concept. Sometimes the essentialist definitions used may even be strictly practical, as in cases where it is necessary to use such arguments to maintain land-use rights within legal systems that require clearly defined categories (Cowan *et al*. 1997:19). But the problem with the acceptance of strategic essentialism is that it only differs from ontic essentialism in *intent*, which is almost impossible to distinguish; and whatever the intent, it still produces the same result (Eriksson *et al*. 2005). Olsen has pointed to the fact that the use of strategic essentialism can be to the detriment of the indigenous group itself since it tends to "reinforce a reactionary museum image so long forced upon them by outside scholars and politicians (...). It attributes to them an unchanging essence, freezing them forever as always-the-same 'traditional societies'" (Olsen 2002:50). For the indigenous population, this obviously creates a dilemma that is related to how they chose to situate themselves in the contemporary, often changing society – a dilemma they share on some level with everybody else. The challenge for archaeology here is not to prescribe a solution to this problem, but rather to reserve the right to reflect critically and openly over how the past and the material remains of the past are used and abused by different stakeholders in this process.

Repatriation as a concrete case to claim the right to culture
Repatriation is clearly a process at the nexus of the debates concerning the right to culture and the right to difference. The discussion so far has been rather abstract, but one of the reasons the repatriation of cultural heritage and human remains is such an interesting dilemma is that it involves a very concrete process of transfer of ownership that draws in all of the above-mentioned abstract notions. Through claims to the material remains of the past, previously marginalized and oppressed peoples gain control over their history, their self-determination, and the process of their identity production. This is without a doubt an important and valuable step toward democracy and equality. However, as I have outlined above, being in the center of this complex process, repatriation also shows a tendency to incorporate some problematic aspects of this movement, and I have especially emphasized the nexus relating to the right to culture, the right to difference, and the components of essentialism. The benefits and the dangers are both very real and very tangible.

In contemporary archaeology there is a lively discussion about multivocality. As opposed to many other debates relating to this theme, repatriation is very concrete. The process literally regulates the ownership, and by extension, the interpretation of the material remains. But it also differs from the debate about multivocality in another crucial sense: it involves an unambiguous decision on

affiliation, which in the great majority of cases is irreversible. This very concrete element is very clear in the legislative domain, since the few existing legal instruments that have now been formulated around this issue have brought the discussion down from general sweeping ideas about the right to self-determination and the importance of multivocality, to a level of practical implementation. This step, from ideal conditions to concrete and complicated reality, makes it impossible to treat concepts like cultural affiliation as ambiguous complexities. Another interesting component of the repatriation debate is that it is scholars who are on the "villainous" side in the negotiations; it is anthropologists (mainly archaeologists, biological anthropologists and museum curators) who are representing the establishment and "the West", which for many of us is an unfamiliar and unwanted role to take on. In the debate about repatriation – and perhaps the debate concerning human remains in particular – the arguments presented on behalf of the scientific community tend to be limited to the preservation of data sources. However, to my mind, the problem does not stop there. The battle is not about who *owns* this material, but about responsibility for how it is used. Science offers one way of seeing and understanding the world, and this view can sometimes be important. It is often welcome when it can reinforce claims on behalf of indigenous groups, but should it not be simply seen as universally valuable in and of itself? Most importantly, anthropologists who are familiar with processes of identification, including the use and abuse of the past – not least by our own predecessors who were also driven by notions of the right to culture, past-present continuity and essentialism – may find it difficult not to object when they see similar tendencies manifest themselves in the voices of indigenous or minority stakeholders. In some cases where there is a law that strongly regulates the process, as in the case of NAGPRA in the United States, it may be tempting to hide behind it and leave the problems of cultural connections unsolved while following judicial formulations that allow archaeologists and bureaucrats to make a decision that is perceived as unproblematic. But while we obviously must follow and respect the law, we must not let the intellectual debate be replaced by bureaucracy. This is precisely why we must remain very active in the debates regarding how repatriation cases should be handled in Sweden in the future.

SWEDEN AT A CRUCIAL THRESHOLD

As the debate on repatriation in Sweden intensifies in step with the increasing domestic and international claims, we find ourselves at a crucial threshold. It is very likely that the decisions taken at this point will guide future policy, and it is therefore very important that we allow for this discussion to explore all aspects of the issue. This will probably take time. While several Swedish archaeologists and anthropologists have been familiar with the issues of repatriation for years (Iregren & Redin 1995; Iregren 2002; Mulk 2002; Zachrisson 2002; Ojala in press etc.) many others are facing the challenge for the first time.

When looking at the current situation in Sweden from an international per-

spective, it is clear that it holds both similarities and differences, and this is important to recognize since we can learn from the experiences made elsewhere. The two recent Swedish cases referred to in the beginning of this article – the call for repatriation of Sami cultural items and human remains, and the burial of the remains of Levin Dombrowsky – both resonate, in different ways, with the debate on an international level. The Sami case is in many ways comparable to that of the Native Americans in the United States. The experience of being a colonized indigenous people is shared, and it is reasonable to expect that the claims for repatriation among the Sami today draw inspiration from, among others, the rather successful Native American experience. The call for repatriation and reburial of the human remains in particular is understandable when considering the racist history of especially biological anthropology in the region (Schanche 2002). The arguments for repatriation and reburial are based on the right to self-determination, but also on the right to difference and on past-present continuity. While the historical cases may be rather easy to determine for the Sami, the prehistoric situation may be more difficult to clarify. The scientific debate about the prehistory of the Baltic region in general is constantly evolving, and it would be unfortunate if the repatriation debate were to force the research in any specific direction. Drawing on cases like Kennewick, it is not impossible to imagine such a scenario, and we must be prepared for the debate. In the case of Levin Dombrowsky, the arguments for reburial were mainly religious and can to a certain extent be compared to the situation in contemporary Israel mentioned above. The argument was also based on the notion of the right to difference as well as on a certain amount of essentialism, since it was assumed that this particular individual would have wanted a Jewish burial on the basis that he was from an ethnically Jewish family. In both cases we see how repatriation is a process that canalizes deep emotion and in the best of cases leads to the healing of old wounds. However, it is also clear that the process, for better or worse, is a political process that reproduces a sense of community that marks a separation from the rest of society.

Regarding a different discussion, Mark Pluciennik has underscored that the idea of the politically situated archaeologist comes with a responsibility: "archaeologists may have to accept not only plurality, but also the concept of responsibility" (Pluciennik 1996:53). He continues: "If there is a broad consensus that archaeologists and anthropologists are inevitably politically situated and produce historically specific interpretations, then one corollary is that archaeologists should also bear responsibility for those interpretations" (Pluciennik 1996:53). My understanding of this, and seen in the concrete case of repatriation, is that we as archaeologists must accept different opinions and interpretations and enter negotiations with an open mind, but in these negotiations it is our responsibility to present our interests and concerns from an archaeological position. Unfortunately, so far a great deal of the scientific interests and concerns voiced in the debate has focused on the loss of data. Instead, I want to argue that our main concern – drawing on the recognition of the crimes committed by our predecessors – must

be to defend the right to problematize all kinds of appropriation of the past. This does not mean that we should always object to repatriation, but it means we have to take responsibility for the interpretations which form the basis for repatriation, and which ultimately are also reinforced by repatriation. This entails an active role in the negotiations, where we voice our position. To ignore this responsibility would be a betrayal, not only of archaeology, but also of the democratic process and ultimately of the interests of the other stakeholders.

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