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Research Article

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On Class and Elitism in Archaeology

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Abstract: While archaeology is certainly a politically conscious discipline, with various members involved in political and activist movements, especially focusing on gender and race issues, little has been said, discussed, or done with regards to class and elitism. In fact, it seems that since the advent of postmodernity in the 1970s, class and elitism have become moot topics. The aim of this article is to reflect upon class-based discrimination and elitism in archaeology, first by tracing the changes they have undergone, especially during late capitalist times, and how class has become sublimated to fit the neoliberal agenda; second, the article focuses on several issues concerning class and elitism in the university context in general, and in archaeology in particular, and how these serve as barriers to those less wealthy and fortunate; third, this work highlights how these issues concerning class and elitism in archaeology then affect scientific discourse on one hand, which has become more technologically advanced, and consequently more expensive, and archaeological theory on the other, which in its hectic search for novelty has lost its capacity to truly contribute anything new to our understanding of past and present societies.

Keywords: class, elitism, network, labour, capital, barrier

1 Introduction

One of the most popular tropes in literature today is one we can only define as the "illusion of financial struggle." According to this trope, the protagonist of our story is described as a person going through some financial struggle, or in other words, as someone who is poor. This situation, however, proves to be an illusion as the story progresses – the protagonist finds that they do have access to comfortable amounts of capital. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by Rowling (1997), Harry Potter is introduced as a young boy living in squalor. Harry's livelihood depends on his aunt and uncle, Vernon and Petunia Dursley, who despise Harry and force him to sleep underneath the stairs in their home. On the occasion of his 11th birthday, Harry discovers that he is a wizard, and is whisked away to a world of magic, one where he discovers he is rich, since his parents left him a fortune in Gringotts, one of the wizarding world's banks. On a similar note, in *The Goldfinch* by Tartt (2013), our protagonist, the 13-year-old Theo Decker, is hit with hardship when his mother dies in a bombing while visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Fortunately for Theo, a school friend from a wealthy family openly welcomes him into their home, and Theo discovers that his mother had left some money for him, allowing him to conduct a business selling restored antiques some years later. Finally, in Naoise Dolan's novel *Exciting Times* (2020), Ava, an unassuming 22-year-old Irish girl travels from Dublin to Hong Kong to teach English. There, Ava struggles with the low salary and is forced to share a flat until she has saved enough money to afford a rent deposit. Luckily, this situation does not last long; Ava starts dating an Oxford-educated British banker who lets her stay in his apartment and provides for her.

This trope, one that is prevalent in western literature (i.e. North America, British, and Northern Europe), is one that reflects the desires of current times – the access to the privileges of the middle and upper class, such

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as higher education, travel, and high-brow culture, while still providing the illusion of the struggles of the lower class, which is expressed in literature through astringent prose and private *ennui*. When a novel is written and the protagonist is too privileged, the novel is considered too snob, elitist, and ultimately, unengaging to the average reader. Thus, literature has to denote poverty, but in an agreeable manner – as something not too bleak, which can affect everyone. As the writer Marlon James points out, there is a pressure to write novels that pander to the average reader, who in the western world is the middle class white woman (James, 2015)[1].

Archaeology, like literature, is not immune to the biases of class and the arbitrary desires of consumers (McGuire, 2008). Archaeology, as a commodified product, is something that requires capital to access (Hamilakis, 2007, 2015; Kehoe, 2007). So, much like literature, it must cater to the whims of capital, and this means creating a world where class is sublimated to fit the agenda of archaeologists. As archaeology gradually abandons nationalistic aspirations in favour of a global interconnected enterprise, it has become a project that favours those who have considerably more capital – not just economic capital, but social, symbolic, and cultural capital, to use Bourdieu's categories (1986). Access to archaeology, whether it is to high-ranking international publications, excavations in places like Greece, which are organised by British and North American schools, international scholarships and funding, access to conferences, many of which are too costly for most archaeologists to attend, and access to the latest and greatest technology and labs, has created new divides of the haves and the have nots. As Mike Savage points out with regards to new social class divides, there is much more to class today than just money – class is determined by consumption patterns and established social networks (Savage, 2015). In the emerging global archaeology of today, the discourse on social inequality has taken a postmodern form, focusing on gender and race issues, while setting aside the more reactionary discussion on poverty, state, ideology, revolution, and the commons. As Terry Eagleton very poignantly states, "the West is now bulging at the seams with political radicals whose ignorance of socialist traditions, not least their own, is certainly among other things the effect of postmodernist amnesia" (Eagleton, 1996, p. 22). This is not to say that race or gender issues are unimportant, but they are nevertheless part of a much larger class struggle that many have recklessly forgotten.

For the average westerner, it seems that class is a communist concept that does not reflect reality, as Margaret Thatcher argued in the 1980s. This line of reasoning was followed some years later, when John Mayor pronounced that Britain was no longer a class society. Similarly, John Prescott and Tony Blair claimed that people in Britain were all middle class now. Finally, not too long ago, Theresa May claimed that the United Kingdom was becoming a place that favours merit.

Several developments in the late twentieth century have fed into this reasoning, one of them being the establishment and strengthening of the global capitalist market. However, this awareness of globality has led to the perception that class operates primarily in terms of the Cold War era separation of First World, Second World, and Third World (Sauvy, 1986 [1952]), or more recently, in terms of the Global North and the Global South. According to this view, the working class is primarily located in places such as Asia, Africa, and South America, whereas the so-called "West" is composed of a working aristocracy (Nail, 2018; Žižek, 2021, p. 55). This has generated a very warped view of reality, one where the nuances of class distinction have become sublimated, that is to say, where poverty and wealth are seen as affecting everyone to varying degrees, with many conveniently forgetting that inherited networks, living in large and well-connected urban hubs, and knowing flawless English, are also sources of wealth and class distinction.

While much of our focus will be on North America and Western Europe, we must point out that nation-states and territories in general do not have the same value as they did in early twentieth century (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. xi). Capitalism today only uses the nation-state as the medium to record how money, commodities, and people flow around the globe – because capitalism has transcended national territories (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 31). In fact, it is impossible to follow the Three world system anymore, since the First world is in the Third, the Third is in the First, and the Second is nowhere to be found. What we have is an unending

1 In the same article, James, winner of the Booker Prize in 2015 for the novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, mentions how he disappointed many media outlets for having been raised within a middle-class context, instead of a lower class one.

process of differentiation and homogenisation of the globe, which territorialises and deterritorialises capital and labour on a constant basis (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. xiii).

In this sense, we must go beyond the traditional postmodern and postcolonial politics of difference, which have unsuccessfully tried to collapse the separation of the West and the Rest. The traditional Left of today is one that apparently cannot disconnect itself from sites of resistance outside the so-called "West" or "Global North," a Left that can only conceive political action when it is place-based, or in other words, when it conceives political subjects in terms of national or territorial sovereignties (Dirlik, 1999; Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 138). This type of political action is certainly important in local contexts, but completely ineffective against powers that do not claim any national or local stakes. Postcoloniality, for instance, has focused so strongly on the politics of race, difference, and territory, that it has become blind to the fact that new strategies of power have emerged. That is why theorists such as Anthony Appiah and Arif Dirlik have argued that postcolonial theorists have been complicit in helping the new global capitalism to emerge (Appiah, 1991, p. 348; Dirlik, 1998, p. 77). To put it more bluntly, "postcoloniality is also, like most things, a matter of class" (Ahmad, 1995, p. 16).

As a matter of class, poverty has many places in the world, including in the so-called "West." The lowest class in the West today are the precariat – a group of people that are invisible because they are looked down upon and often not even considered members of a specific class (Lawler, 2014, p. 142). Hidden behind walls of shame and stigma – these are people unable to rise above cycles of poverty and squalor, due to inherited debt, diseases, and addictions. Unlike the middle class, the precariat is unable to contribute to capital's valorisation (Žižek, 2021, p. 68). When work is available, the precariat is relegated to menial and short-term jobs, such as those in the fast-food industry, delivering for Amazon or Uber Eats, or stocking supermarket shelves (Standing, 2011). In the UK, for instance, even when working class people make it into middle class professions, they tend to earn an average of £6,800 less per year than their middle class counterparts (Hinsliff, 2017; Walker, 2017). The poverty of those stricken by drug epidemics, alcoholism, closure of factories, of all those living in the remnants of social housing in the outskirts of cities, that type of poverty has not only been willfully ignored, it has been demonised (Jones, 2016). In academic circles, archaeology included, that poverty has been relabelled as right-wing populism. Instead of trying to understand the struggles of the post-industrial lower classes and their hatred of academic elitism, academia reduces their condition to clichés concerning lack of education, not realizing that academia bars their access to education in the first place. On many occasions, the hatred of academia by the lower classes is warranted – academia remains an elitist and classist institution, one that favours the few who have been lucky enough to be born into capital, while ignoring the many who never do.

Classism and class-based elitism is much more than the prejudice or stereotyping of people according to social class because individuals do not display characteristics that are "class-like." Class characteristics are a social fabrication (Eagleton, 1996, p. 57). Classism and class-based elitism are the idea that societies form organically into classes and that given this process, the behaviours, the education, the ideologies, the culture, and the people of the upper classes are morally and intellectually superior to those below. Concomitantly, given the alleged superiority in culture and education of the upper classes, they should have preferential access and control over the forms of capital. Furthermore, within the late capitalist economic system, powered by neoliberal ideology, social and economic successes are viewed as commensurate to hard-work and intelligence. Following this logic, equality becomes perceived as a form of injustice (McGowan, 2017, p. 4).

In our discipline, for instance, an argument can be made that not just anyone can have a career as an archaeologist – archaeology can be difficult to master and perform adequately. However, the vast majority of difficulties in progressing in archaeology have nothing to do with archaeology as a practice – they have to do with capital and its access. More than anything, classism and class-based elitism in archaeology are built upon the belief that archaeology should be ranked, with those at the top (or centre if we think in terms of a network metaphor) more deserving of accolades and higher salaries, whereas those at the bottom deserving considerably less. Additionally, classism and class-based elitism express themselves in the belief that there should be economic, social, and cultural obstacles in the access of archaeology and its production. One would assume that a discipline like archaeology, a discipline famed for researching long-term history and that requires the contact with the non-specialist population on occasion, would rise to the challenge of displacing classism and elitism within its own cloisters, but unfortunately, archaeology has only done so ineptly and unenthusiastically. At times, it seems that archaeologists prefer that the discipline remains a classist and elitist enterprise, something that should be attainable only to a select few, rather than something available to the masses.

Classism and elitism concern more than just financial backgrounds and social and economic barriers – it is something that can be understood through a myriad of traces and clues that are irreducible to statistics. More than just an interpretation of quantitative data, it is important to paint a picture of a world where classism and elitism have become prevalent in new and subtle ways. Therefore, the aim of this study is threefold, first, it historicises how class developed in contemporary times in the western world, tracing the transformations that the lower, middle, and upper class have undergone in late capitalist times; second, this work will discuss the different ways archaeology creates class division in its structure, and how elitism is perpetuated in the discipline; and third, the work aims to identify how archaeology's class issues and its elitist structure end up shaping discourse, promoting certain lines of research and teaching instead of others.

2 The Sublimation of Class

Traditionally, the conception of class is based on Karl Marx's understanding of how groups of people connect to the economic structure (Marx, 1995 [1847], 1934 [1869]). The creation of a class society is above all a social process, one where people relate their experiences with one another, and articulate their identity and interests in relation to other social groups or classes. Given that class derives from social relationships, it is not an actual thing – the more one tries to isolate and capture it, the more difficult it becomes to understand (Thompson, 1966, p. 9). Central to Marx's notion of class, is the relationship of people to means of production and this can be analysed mathematically through conventional Marxist methods, by tracing how much labour power one must sell in order to obtain the means of life (Cohen, 1978, p. 73).

From a Marxist perspective, the relationship between people and means of production allows for a fairly straightforward division of society into the working class, also known as the proletarians, and the owners of the means of production, the bourgeoisie (Marx & Engels, 2012 [1848], p. 35). In addition to these two classes, a third one stands in between by virtue of neither selling labour power *per se*, such as the prole, nor by owning the means of production, and this class is known as the *petite* or petty bourgeoisie. Unlike the proletarians, who can sell their labour to a capitalist *en masse*, and the bourgeoisie, who have the capital to exploit vast amounts of labour-power, the petty bourgeoisie have means of self-employment, by selling the results of their labour directly, which they produce through artistic skills or other competences. In theory, the petty bourgeoisie should be considered closer to the proletariat, given that both are subject to exploitation by the ruling bourgeoisie, who buys their skills and labour, respectively; however, historically, the petty bourgeoisie has tended to align with bourgeoisie ideology, rather than with the workers (Marx, 1934 [1869]).

The proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie, and the bourgeoisie became the foundation of what we today still consider the hierarchical tripartite class system, which consists of the lower/working class, the middle class, and the upper class. For many decades since Marx, the hierarchical tripartite class-system did indeed reflect most of western society because the relationships between means of production, labour, and skills remained largely unchanged. However, the capitalist mode of production, which sustains the tripartite system, has developed some interesting features in the meanwhile. After World War II, the reorganisation of international relations, the liberation of the market through neoliberal ideology, and the process of decolonisation, gave way to a post-industrial society where the economy became considerably more flexible and fluid, and where capitalism manifested a purer and more distilled form (Mandel, 1975).

In the capitalist process, motion dictates that capital derived from surplus-value needs to be reinvested into production. As Marx pointed out, the capitalist needs money to be constantly circulating, which is what allows value to increase (1990, p. 254). This leads, however, to a contradiction in the system – the accumulation of capital inevitably leads to diminishing returns, which in turn produces a crisis of overaccumulation. In this process, capital and labour become idle and there is no way of bringing them together. Furthermore, the market becomes overrun with commodities, surplus capital that is not reinvested, and high-unemployment levels (Harvey, 1990, p. 181). In a way, this is what happened in the US in the 1930s and happened again after a short burst of productivity and capital accumulation in the postwar period.

In the 1930s, however, the economic structure of the US was not ready to handle a crisis of overaccumulation, but it was in the postwar period (Harvey, 1990, p. 182). In this latter period, overaccumulation crises were mitigated because politicians and economists openly promoted neoliberal ethical values, which allowed surplus to be flushed into a variety of markets (Harvey, 2007). This meant that economies around the world had to adopt a capitalist system that was considerably more fluid, adaptable, and expansive. This led to a transition from standard modes of accumulation to what David Harvey has called "flexible modes of accumulation" and the period we now call postmodernity (Harvey, 1990, p. 147). Underlying this transition is an economic process that, unlike previous economic transformations, has affected the entire world because flexible accumulation works best when the entire globe is interconnected (Jeffries, 2021).

The paradigmatic perception of the working class and its exploitation is usually large-scale industry, but large-scale industry has gradually broken down because of mechanisation and technological advancement. What has arisen in the meanwhile are small businesses and local investment, with cities becoming the centre of this transformed economic order. As Joseph Raban remarked in the 1970s, London has become a softer city, with entrepreneurs becoming a mainstay and gentrification a common occurrence (Raban, 1974). Naturally, in this brave new world, hierarchical principles of management were rapidly becoming redundant. When business becomes smaller and more flexible and trade becomes a process that occurs across the entire globe, economic hierarchies become more difficult to maintain, as well as the concept of the patriarch as the boss. What came to replace the hierarchy and the patriarch as the dominant metaphor for business and production was the *network* (Jeffries, 2021, p. 16). Looking into management literature in their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello noticed that there is a transition from structuring the corporation through hierarchical management in the 1960s to structuring it through heterarchical networks in the 1990s (2018, p. 70). In this latter period, everything that smacks of hierarchy is removed from management literature, and the standard ideology of corporate work is restructured to embrace flexibility, liberty, and authenticity.

Social identity underwent radical changes during this period, since a large part of the western population was not attached to a single place nor a single occupation anymore – two things that accorded ontological stability to people's identities in the past (Giddens, 1991). Every claim of "belonging" to something, especially claims of ethnic or cultural roots, became sacrificed in the name of fluidity – the only real identity is not having an identity at all (Lordon, 2015, pp. 39–48). This benefits capitalism, since exploitation is indifferent to political, juridical, or economic identities – capitalism actively aims to reduce people into interchangeable units of abstract labour (Robinson, 2019, p. 189). This is most evident in the expansion of the gig economy, an economy of task-based jobs that are on-demand, low-paid, and short-term. While gigs were a minor part of the global economy in most of the twentieth century, reserved for entertainment acts and salespeople, today, they are the backbone of modern economies. It is estimated that c. 25–32% of all adult population in the Unites States in 2017 were working on some gig job (Tan et al., 2021, p. 3), and this number increases every year (Standing, 2011, pp. 31–36). At face value, there are many jobs out there that seem secure, but many of them are gigs – delivery service, graphic design, video editing, customer support, accounting, teaching, research, and of course, contract archaeology (Hamilakis, 2015; Parga Dans, 2019; Zorzin, 2015). In the Western imaginary, gigs are assumed to be jobs for up-and-coming entrepreneurs, something to either do for a short time or as a side-hustle, but gigs have become the main sustenance for countless people. Rather than an economic issue, governments and large corporations have taken the gig population as a shadow workforce to be exploited – a faceless and nameless blob of labour-power.

That is why social class in the twenty-first century is more diverse than ever – a good part of the West is populated nowadays by people who deny any attachment to money, family, or nation, but what they do have is a connection to a network. Given the prevalence of the network as the metaphor of late capitalism, social class must be measured according to the social network of the individual – not just how many people one is connected to but also *who* they are connected to (Savage, 2015, p. 133). Furthermore, in a decentralised economy, it has become possible for people to put themselves into debt yet accumulate vast amounts of cultural and social capital, something that would allow them to rapidly bounce back into economic wealth, because social capital can be converted into money (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018, p. 362).

Another characteristic of our postmodern times is the constant acceleration (Agger, 2004; Duffy, 2009; Jeffries, 2021; Mackay & Avanessian, 2014; McGuire, 2008, pp. 5–6). Today, it has become impossible to comprehend time as a coherent narrative – all we have are micro-slices of present time (Fisher, 2009, p. 25). We have become enthralled by immediacy – today needs to be better, smarter, and faster than yesterday. To do this, we subject ourselves to constant reminders of progress – to-do lists, progress reports, growth charts, etc. Furthermore, as consumption becomes more diverse, it becomes necessary to cater new status signifiers in a world that changes very quickly. To differentiate themselves from the lower classes, the upper and middle class need access to cultural capital that is exclusively theirs. Once cultural capital becomes mainstream, it must be abandoned in favour of new forms of conspicuous consumption. Overall, the arbitrary desires undergirding consumerism follow a simple logic: the upper and middle class must have something that sets them apart from those perceived below them (Bourdieu, 1984; Veblen, 2007 [1899]). In former times, it might have been a brand of car, jewellery, fur coats, or antiques – but these have rapidly decreased in value. Competing production markets, like China, have made certain commodities readily accessible to larger segments of society, with the upper and middle class having to rely on other avenues of class distinction, such as an education, something that China cannot commodify as easily.

As postmodernism matures and becomes commonplace, leading to ever faster maelstroms of consumption, the motions of capital as described by Marx carry on unabated (Callinicos, 1989; Mandel, 1975). At face value, the fragmentation of the economic order during late capitalism might seem to have undermined capitalism at its very core, but it has done no such thing. Late capitalism has simply inaugurated a new form of submission to capital, one we happily conceive as liberated and authentic. The truth of the matter is, what was considered subversive and counter-cultural became embraced from the 1960s onwards, because capitalism has learned how to handle subversion, critique, and counter-cultural movements. That is why events like the May of 1968 and Occupy Wallstreet not only did not damage capitalism but they made capitalism stronger. This is because capitalism realised that all it needed to do is change its outward appearance, becoming whatever consumers desire. Thus, the middle and upper class fall into a seductive illusion that they are changing the world for the better. Capitalism has become in the second half of the twentieth century what Herbert Marcuse has called a "mechanics of conformity" (2002 [1964], p. xx). As Fredric Jameson and Stewart Jeffries point out, what might have appeared at the beginning as a movement of political, economic, and intellectual liberation has developed into nothing more than the false freedom of consumer choice, and the subjugation of society according to new codifications, puritanisms, and dogmas (Jameson, 1991, p. 266; Jeffries, 2021, pp. 7–8).

In this new fluid, open, and dynamic world, to use postmodern slogan words, class has been sublimated into something more palatable, more sanitised, and more gentrified. This has allowed politicians and most members of society to pretend that the class system has been dissolved, since consumer choice provides the illusion that poverty and wealth are just choices that are available to all. But the class structure can still be seen through the sheen of late capitalist logic, with wealth and poverty manifesting very differently than what we are accustomed to.

In the small world of archaeology, it is easy to fall prey to illusions and recognise where we stand in the chaos that is today's class system. As Mike Savage highlights, very few people are able to objectively view their economic lives in relation to others, since there are people with income ranging from 7,000€ to 250,000€ per year identifying themselves as middle class earners (Savage, 2015, pp. 60–63). This is to be expected – social class concerns much more than money nowadays. Classism and elitism today still operate in certain areas according to the old regime, one based on a hierarchical structure, where the lower classes are deprived and precluded from upward mobility. According to this view, society is a pyramid with the lower classes at the bottom, struggling to break through unending glass ceilings. Whereas an education could easily provide upward mobility for someone born in 1940, the same education has not provided the same privileges as those born after the 1970s (James, 2008), with some people now in worse conditions than their parents (Butler, 2020). In fact, in the new regime, the pyramid has transformed into a global network and privileges now also exist in terms of horizontal mobility (Fisher, 2009, p. 32). As Boltanski and Chiapello point out, autonomous mobility between different parts of the world and between different ideas has become the new currency (2018, p. 361). This has led to the paradoxical situation where loyalty to a region or institution, living in towns with poor transport, buying accommodation early in life, getting married and having children, have become grounds for discrimination, and consequently, sources of job insecurity (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018, p. 364; Sennett, 2000). In this new regime, being disconnected has become the main source of anxiety because exclusion now operates differently – it operates by keeping people in the margins of networks, limiting their access to hubs. This is the deception we live under – everyone, including the poor, are part of the network, which provides the illusion that everyone can move about – but the truth is only a few fortunate individuals are allowed to move freely within the network, and even fewer still are allowed access to the centre of the network. Thus, when we think of social obstacles, we should think in terms of how we limit access to hubs of capital, which in the case of archaeology are well-equipped universities, upscale conferences, exclusive journals, and exotic excavations.

While poverty does exist in archaeology, only a small fraction truly represents the working class. When members of this class manage to enter into archaeology and conclude their studies, they usually quit or end up as contract archaeologists – an alienating gig context, where workers are used for short periods and then discarded (Hamilakis, 2015, p. 727). Given their lack of inherited capital, they are precluded from progression in archaeology, which is why the majority of archaeologists who manage to proceed with a career in archaeology, especially the academic career, usually come from the middle class, a class that, to use Frederic Lordon's words (2014), willingly enslaves itself before capital.

3 The Perpetuation of Class-Based Elitism Within Archaeology

On a more general level, beyond archaeology, classism and elitism manifest more traditionally in the academic context, an old and old-fashioned institution that still holds onto outdated rituals and status symbols. After all, as David Graeber aptly notes, the university is "perhaps the only Western institution other than the Catholic Church and British monarchy that has survived in much the same form from the Middle Ages" (2004, p. 6), an observation which frankly says more about the University rather than the Church and Monarchy, two conservative institutions by definition. Events like graduations and the assignment of titles like "Doctor" serve not to help one identify oneself with their peers, but rather, to distinguish themselves from those who have not graduated. The university context is riddled with these rites of institution, allowing oneself to display their place in the class system (Bourdieu, 1991).

As a report from the Bank of Portugal shows, among the poorest families in Portugal, with parents who did not conclude the 9th grade, only 10% of these can put their child through college (Banco de Portugal, 2022). While these percentages vary across European countries, the general picture is one that demonstrates that it is primarily the middle and upper classes that have the social and economic capital to send their offspring on the journey towards higher education. This problem will only compound as university fees increase while salaries stagnate or even decline. In some cases, even when a member of the lower classes does make it into university, especially into very prestigious institutions, their working class background still works against them (Adeluwoye, 2019; Shott, 2005). Granted, not many systematic studies have been conducted that connect class and higher education, and we certainly have met members of the working class thriving in academia – but the prevailing picture is one that sees the university context heavily favouring the privileged strata of society (Binns, 2019).

But the issues do not stop there; proceeding with studies at the graduate and postgraduate level, and the toxic struggle to attain a lectureship or professorship, often reveals its own class biases as well. In a study conducted by Morgan et al. on the socio-economic background of faculty staff across universities in the United States, it was revealed that among them, 51.8% had at least one parent with a graduate degree and a whopping 22.2% had at least one parent with a PhD degree – by contrast, around the time when the faculty staff were born, only 6% of the general population held a graduate degree, and less than 1% had a PhD degree (Morgan et al., 2021). In the same study, at the time when the faculty staff were children, an analysis of income showed that the staff came from households with a median income 23.7% higher than the median across the entire United States, $73,000 vs $59,000 *per annum*. In archaeology, a study on the demographic dynamics of those who have published in the *American Journal of Archaeology*, conducted by Heath-Stout, Erny, and Nakassis (2023), has shown a very similar trend. As the study points out, authors in the *American Journal of Archaeology* who are US nationals come from families with more formal education than the American average – double the national average in 2020, 3.5 times more than the average in 1990, and almost ten times more than the average in 1960 (Heath-Stout, Erny, & Nakassis, 2023, p. 158). In short, academia is not some sort of blank slate, where every individual starts off on equal terms, with merit determining success. Many students start off with massive amounts of debt, which automatically limits their mobility right after graduation. Furthermore, merit, more often than not, goes unrewarded (Shott, 2005, 2022a).

For those with capital, the world might seem a truly meritocratic place because one is usually surrounded by peers of a similar background, but the truth is that meritocracy is a myth, one that favours the fortunate and hinders the unfortunate. In some cases, working class academics buy into this narrative, becoming some of its staunchest supporters, labelling anyone who could not make it less capable or less willing to make the necessary sacrifices. This has created a world of resentment, of winners and losers, making those who succeed look down on those who have not, and thus creating a more polarised world in the process, one fuelled by populist acrimony (Sandel, 2021). As Shott and others have shown, placements in the university context are heavily skewed, first towards those that are fortunate enough to be born into capital of all sorts, and second towards those who graduate from the Ivy Leagues and Russell Groups of the world (Clauset, Arbesman, & Larremore, 2015; Shott, 2022a).

This is just how class discrimination works in terms of the individual; on a much larger transnational scale, entire countries and parts of the world are precluded from producing archaeology in the same way as richer economies. For instance, new techniques such as aDNA and isotope analysis have become staples of current archaeological practice, and while no one denies their contribution to academic discourse, the fact that only a few can afford to conduct this kind of analyses creates an environment of differential access to scientific production. A good example of this trend could be seen in the allocation of research funds during the Horizon 2020 programme (2014–2020), which saw the three largest economies of Europe, United Kingdom, France, and Germany, receiving over 40% of the total funds, amounting to 22 billion euros, while countries like Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania combined received less than 1 billion (Schiermeier, 2020). An argument can be made that the top-funded countries were those that also contributed the most to the general budget of Horizon 2020, with some countries, such as France and Germany, having received less in funding than their initial contribution, but of course, this only means that there was already a very large disparity in resources reserved for research among European countries to begin with. In an ideal world or at least in the spirit of "European Solidarity," a notion so frequently invoked by European leaders (Guardian, 2022), some might have expected that richer countries might have supported financially poorer ones. However, not only is this far from the truth but also given the lack of infrastructure and capital, the possibility of conducting certain types of research is precluded in poorer European countries – if one wants to acquire skills and experience related to archaeological science, one is largely dependent on the richer European countries.

It is also in richer economies that we find the universities that usually fill the top places in world rankings. At the time of writing, the Times Higher Education ranks Oxford University in first, the California Institute of Technology and Harvard University tied for second, Stanford University in fourth, and Cambridge University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology tied in fifth place (Times Higher Education, 2022). With similar results, the Shanghai rankings have placed Harvard University in first, Stanford University in second, Massachusetts Institute of Technology in third, Cambridge University in fourth, and University of California, Berkeley in fifth (Shanghai Ranking, 2022). While all these universities are certainly some of the most reputable institutions in the world, these rankings tell us little concerning the quality of education and research across disparate departments. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for instance, is certainly well-known for its science departments but what does its reputation in the field of science say about its anthropology or history department? Another problem with these rankings is their arbitrary criteria of evaluation – the methodology of the Shanghai rankings for instance, favours institutions with *alumni* who have obtained Nobel prizes and publish in journals such as *Nature* and *Science*, but obviously, these criteria only reflect quality among the STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Economics, and Mathematics); they tell us nothing about the quality of their social science and humanities departments. Similarly, the Times Higher Education methodology ranks income and investment in research, which once again, automatically favours those countries who have the capital to invest in infrastructure for scientific research. This methodology also fails to recognise those countries that separate their teaching institutions and research institutions, such as Germany, which conducts most of its research either in private companies or through institutions that are not attached to universities, like Max Planck institutes. It is rather fascinating that these rankings have such an obsession with Nobels and citations, to the point where they constitute 90% of the total value for the Shanghai ranking, whereas the remaining 10% is the measurement of academic performance *per capita*. One would assume that higher education would be measured exactly by that: education and its quality in providing society with the elements it needs, such as lawyers, medics, journalists, architects, engineers, historians, and philosophers. But apparently not. As progressive politicians advocate for more accurate indicators of social and economic well-being (Fleurbaey, 2009; Osberg & Sharpe, 2002) and United Nations charts 17 goals for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015), the question as to why rankings measure universities on arbitrary brownie points instead of the ways they contribute towards the betterment and education of society remains a mystery.

Additionally, it is no surprise that North American and British universities top the rankings – these sustain themselves through hefty student fees. An obvious correlation can be obtained from this – students who can afford to attend these universities are upper class and when they graduate and progress in their career, they will do so within an upper class context because of their inherited economic and social capital, thus, when one analyses their socio-economic status shortly after graduation, they will exhibit fairly high-paying employment. The prestige associated with top universities operates on a self-sustaining circular economic logic – graduates from prestigious universities do well in life because they went to a prestigious university and these universities are prestigious because their graduates do well in life. To put it more bluntly, the Yales of the world will always do well in rankings because these rankings are measuring Yale-ness (Gladwell, 2011, cited in Shott, 2022b), while anyone else not "Yale-like" enough will inevitably come up short.

Some of the issues generated by classism and elitism have been addressed before in archaeology, since the 1980s, with feminist, gender, critical, and Marxist theory (Conkey & Spector, 1984; Gero, 1988, 1991; McGuire, 2008; Shanks & Tilley, 1992; Spector, 1993; Sweely, 1999), which pointed out the disparity in terms of power in the discipline, as well as the exclusion of certain voices in the production of archaeological discourse. More recently, calls have been made against the increasingly neoliberalist environment of archaeology (Brami et al., 2022, pp. 239–240), in activist movements such as anarchist archaeology (Angelbeck, Borck, & Sanger, 2018; Flexner & Gonzalez-Tennant, 2018; Morgan, 2015; Ribeiro, 2022), and also through the concept of "degrowth" (Flexner, 2020; Zorzin, 2021). While all these critiques address serious problems and have contributed interesting solutions to the social issues plaguing archaeology, most have failed to recognise the new forms of capitalist exploitation of recent decades (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018; Fisher, 2009; Hardt & Negri, 2000; Marazzi, 2011; Sennett, 2000). In the early twentieth century, discipline was imposed onto workers through external agents, i.e. the state, bosses, contracts, but in more recent times, discipline has become self-imposed through conditioning, that is, by subjecting oneself to "good work ethic" and "productivity" (Fisher, 2009; Han, 2015, p. 8; Hardt & Negri, 2000, pp. 22–23). In the network age of today, the figure of the "boss" has been watered down, with superiors mingling more often with workers. This has not led to less overall surveillance, but to more surveillance of oneself and one's own cohort. Given this situation, the separation of an individual's public space, the workspace, and their private space, the home, gradually dissolves. That is why people cannot escape work as easily anymore, and sources of enjoyment and escapism, such as video games, movies, or TV shows, stop becoming pleasurable, only to become numbing forms of lassitude (Fisher, 2009, p. 23; Han, 2015).

Given that late capitalism does not provide clear and identifiable external enemies, workers struggle to obtain class consciousness. But external enemies continue to exist nonetheless; they are just spread out, more diluted, irreducible to just "capitalism" or "neoliberalism," because they operate across vast networks. In earlier times, when class was easily distinguishable by its tripartite structure, archaeology expressed class-based discrimination and elitism in a fairly overt and clear manner – archaeology was not a real profession, but rather a passing fancy entertained primarily by the upper stratum of society. In this earlier context, archaeological elitism was expressed through long holidays in Egypt, Greece, and Italy, where the "Grand Tour" was frequently seen as a rite of passage for wealthy aristocrats. Back then, archaeological "experts" were patriarchs – middle-aged men at the top of the hierarchical structure, with big bellies and smoking pipes, saying something in ancient Greek or Latin for the entertainment of their guests and students.

While certain parts of the world still hold on to this outdated structure, the class-based discrimination and elitism of late capitalism is more covert and subtle because it is, in Marcuse's conception of western culture, one that is seductive and desired (2002 [1964]). To be successful in archaeology, all one needs to do is be smart and hard-working. At face value, this seems simple to achieve, but it is not – as it depends on very circumscribed meanings of "smart" and "hard-working." Being smart and hard-working today implies being dynamic, authentic, fluid, nomadic, fast, and cooperative (Žižek, 2006). The problem is that the type of labour that accommodates to these characteristics is filled with class-barriers and even within jobs that can be dynamic and cooperative, there are barriers as well. Stocking supermarket shelves and cleaning offices do not provide elbow room to be dynamic nor cooperative – there are no meetings, no new ideas, no flexibility, which is why these jobs are associated with the lower classes, as being unskilled, and to laziness. More than just an issue of upward mobility, success in late capitalist contexts is about being able to move within those networks that provide jobs that enable dynamism, cooperation, and authenticity, and classism and elitism are precisely the mechanisms by which you constrain the network to only include a select few.

With this in mind, classism and elitism can be recognised across multiple levels in archaeology. The more general is that which separates those who can afford to become archaeologists in the first place, and those who are unable to make it through college, or even school. On another level, there is the archaeology that is performed in contract archaeology and among county archaeologists, who are paid low-wages, often on short-term contracts (or even what is known as zero-hour contracts), and who are unable to publish or access the same conditions of production of those within the university context (Hamilakis, 2015, pp. 725–727). On this same level, you also find undergraduate and graduate students who work but often go unpaid or are underpaid, and haunt university departments for many years while trying to finish their degrees. Finally, within the university context, more levels appear throughout the academic career progression. On this level, you will find what has been called the "academic precariat" – the workhorse that keeps universities running, yet are under fixed, short-term, and low paid contracts, and are often stranded between employment and unemployment (Allmer, 2018; Bozzon, Murgia, Poggio, & Rapetti, 2017; Hartung et al., 2017; Herschberg, Benschop, & van den Brink, 2018). In this academic context, class-based elitism at a personal level is mainly materialised in three ways: participation in conferences, the single peer review process, and above all fieldwork.

Starting with the first one, no one of course denies that conferences hold a key role in the development of any scholar. Apart from presenting your work and getting invaluable feedback, experiencing new academic *stimuli* and generally staying on top of the latest developments in the different subfields of the discipline, conferences especially large ones, like the European Association of Archaeologists' annual meeting (EAA) or the Society for American Archaeology's (SAA) annual meeting, are unique opportunities to expand your networks. As archaeology moves towards flexible accumulation, one of the central elements for career progression has become networking – it is about who you know rather than what you know. By shaking hands with the right people, laughing on cue, and showing competence in front of heads of departments, conferences have become the place where careers are made. A *curriculum vitae* without a face, a voice, and a personality attached to it is never going to be as strong as one that does (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018, p. 362). It is not a lucky coincidence that many of the job interviews for American universities are held during the annual meeting of the SAA, one of the biggest if not the biggest conference in our discipline.

But as a space of social capital, conferences are usually prohibitively expensive, with only those that are either established or with secured funding able to cover the costs. For example, to attend the EAA annual conference in 2023 in Belfast, the fees were as follows: first, one must be a member of the EAA in order to attend and the membership fee is 95€ if based in a richer country, such as Germany, France, Japan, or United States (the full list is on their website), and 60€ for all the other countries; there are also lower membership rates for students, at 65€ and 50€, depending on which country you are based in, as well as reduced fees for retirees, at 70€ and 50€; as to the conference fees *per se*, the full fee for someone in a richer country goes from 200€ if one is registered prior to April 12th of 2023, but this price goes up to 230€ after this date, and to 260€ after the 12th of July 2023; those not based in richer countries pay 135€, 165€, and 195€, respectively; for students and retired members, there are discounted rates for the conference fees as well. Some gratitude must be shown towards the EAA organisation for discounted rates, especially in favour of students and those who are based in poorer economies; however, the *overall* costs of attending their conference remain quite high. At face value, the membership and conference fees of someone based in Germany, for instance, would be around 295–355€, depending on when they register, and respectively, around 195–255€ if you are based in somewhere like Portugal, and while a bit steep, this is certainly not unaffordable. The problem is having to attend the conference *on site*. At the time of writing, flights from Hamburg to Belfast range between 200 and 300€ and hotels cost an average of 120€ per night. All added up, the EAA conference would cost somewhere in the ballpark of 1,400€ for someone in Germany. While there are discounted rates for the conference for those in poorer economies, there is no such thing as discounted flight or hotel rates, which means that someone from Portugal would have to pay around 1,300€ if they want to attend the entire conference. Even if one follows very frugal budgeting, such as by staying in shared rooms in a hostel or by taking red-eye flights, it is hard to imagine anyone spending less than 1,000€ at the 2023 EAA annual conference, if they are travelling from outside the United Kingdom. And this is only taking the conference fees, flights, and hotel into account – not the meals, not the trips to the airport, nor the days of lost work.

Thus, it is hard to imagine how someone making 18,000€ or less per year could afford to attend the EAA annual conference. The covid-19 pandemic did introduce an element that has helped reduce the costs of participation at conferences, and that is digital platforms like Zoom. By making the conference of a hybrid format, with both onsite and online participation, more people from underrepresented economies have been able to be part of the EAA conference; however, this hybrid format is not exactly ideal. Online presentations are usually of lower quality, since most people do not have access to the best equipment – often, the video is of very low resolution and the sound is barely audible. Furthermore, although a hybrid conference incentivises broader participation, those online are still nevertheless barred from one of the most important aspects of the conference, which is networking. This two-tier participation, onsite and online, perpetuates the very class distinctions that hybrid conferences were supposed to overcome.

Classism and elitism are also perpetuated when it comes to publications. One of the currencies for employment has become the ability to publish articles in peer-reviewed high-ranking international journals. But like conferences, certain publishing venues carry exorbitant costs. For instance, the cost of an open access article in the *Journal of Archaeological Science* is $3,920, while in *the Journal of Archaeological Research*, it is $2,890. Open research, a publishing design that was initially conceived as a way of breaking down barriers and mitigating funding inequalities is in fact – in its current iteration – amplifying them. Open access is a great way of increasing your visibility and attract more funding to your research but not everybody can afford to pay the fees associated with this. Publishing houses have shifted the brunt of the costs to academics, who in turn have to rely on their institutions for funding. The whole model depends on people holding a permanent job in a well-funded institution, which is willing to cover these expenses. This means that over time it is these people that can make the most out of their projects, increasing their visibility through multiple outputs, applying for more funding, and thus perpetuating a state of constant inequality between projects funded by institutions in certain parts of the world over others.

Also, in terms of publication, the peer review model is designed as a quality filter – as the litmus test for determining what is or is not worthy of dissemination, but it does so only in a very imperfect manner, with many publishers and reviewers focusing more on "popular" topics and having established names attached to their papers, rather than actual quality. It is telling that in a recent study on issues that early career researchers currently face in academia, 34.8% said that they had encountered problems publishing in peer-reviewed journals. Several respondents also argued that they had been treated unfairly due to their status as early career researchers (Brami et al., 2022, p. 233). Consequently, what this study showed is a reality for a large number of archaeologists, a not-so-well-kept secret within the discipline. No matter the quality of the submitted paper, the name, status, affiliation, language, and writing style of its author(s) unavoidably influence the reviewers' decision. Not only that but in many cases, it also allows room for disrespectful and often demeaning behaviours as reviewers are protected by their anonymity. Once again, there is some strange circular economic logic sustaining the prestige of high-impact peer-reviewed journals. In a recent study, a finance paper was distributed among 3,300 scholars for peer review, under three different conditions: as authored by a Nobel Laureate, anonymised, or as authored by a lesser-known author. Of those who reviewed the version authored by the Nobel Laureate, 23% recommended rejection; when the paper was anonymised, 48% recommended rejection; and the version containing the name of a lesser-known author received 65% rejections (Huber et al., 2022).

The editors, the peer reviewers, and the publishing house that own the journal are all part of the same network, who often decide with little accountability which "voices" are worth to be heard.

The third field where elitism is prevalent in archaeology is fieldwork, arguably, one of the most invaluable experiences for archaeologists, closely related to career advancement. However, fair chances are far from guaranteed simply because people with more resources can afford to work for free for a prolonged time period, ultimately building a stronger CV, which will unequivocally increase their value in the job market. Hands-on excavation experience aside, international collaborative projects are an excellent chance for students from countries with fewer resources to familiarise themselves with new field techniques, otherwise not accessible to them, and of course, to establish a strong network, that is to say, to obtain data to research and to meet potential future thesis supervisors. However, the only way for disadvantaged students to take part in such an excavation is through one of two channels: either pay the participation fee which is frequently estimated at around a few thousands of euros or by knowing the "right" people. Subsequently, a large number of students are being excluded, especially from international collaborative projects, which typically have hefty prices for their field schools (Heath-Stout & Hannigan, 2020).

A case in point is the much-publicised Cambridge-led excavations in Keros, an excavation that has captured the imagination of both the academic community and the press (e.g. Renfrew, Philaniotou, Brodie, Gavalas, & Boyd, 2013, 2015, 2018). In their 2018 excavation, the participation cost was 4,000€ for 6 weeks (Archaeological Institute of America, 2018). As almost no Greek student was able to pay this, the excavation team largely consisted of British, American, and Australian students. Similar to this, the participants in the excavations at Olynthos in Northern Greece (e.g. Nevett et al., 2020) were primarily students from the English speaking world. More specifically, a look at the participants' list reveals that in 2019, only 5 out of the 52 participants at Olynthos were students at a Greek university (Olynthos Project, 2019). Similar data can also be drawn from Italy, where participants in the Gabii project (e.g. Banducci & Gallone, 2021; Gabii Project, 2022) were charged $5,600 for a month. However, it would be rushed and naive to turn this argument into a native students vs foreign ones as this false dichotomy overlooks a very important aspect of the issue at hand here. Fee-paying participants in these excavations are of similar socio-economic background no matter their nationality or the country in which they are based. This is simply because no student in part-time employment is able to take 1 or 2 months off work to participate in the excavations nor has the necessary funds to pay the participation fee and fund themselves at the same time.

The relationship between participation in conferences, the publication process, and fieldwork is therefore frequently perceived as a vicious cycle, as it is only a privileged few who can afford to take part in all three. In the longer run, these people get a head start which makes it very difficult for someone from a non-privileged background to catch up. Given this dire state of affairs, more often than not, the unsuccessful will blame themselves, inventing excuses such as not having worked hard enough or not having jumped on the current trend that is providing employment to others, making archaeology a spiteful, resentful, and just plain angry community. As years go by, this anger translates into ever-increasing levels of depression among scholars (Abbot, 2020; Evans, Bira, Gastelum, Weiss, & Vanderford, 2018; Levecque, Anseel, De Beuckelaer, Van der Heyden, & Gisle, 2017; Scarpis et al., 2022; Woolston, 2019), and resulting occasionally in depression's most insidious manifestation: suicide. More than just a complaint about work conditions, classism, and elitism in archaeology discloses a very alarming state of affairs – classism and elitism permeate every aspect of the discipline, conditioning our every action, from casual conversations between colleagues to the paradigmatic publications that shape the discipline.

4 From Archaeological Discourse as Scholarship to Archaeological Discourse as Prestige

The conditions underlying conferences, publishing, and fieldwork embody the global class-based and elitist structure in which we all live in. All of these material conditions end up affecting the discourse produced in archaeology. The matter of classism and elitism is not one just affecting the way archaeologists struggle in everyday life; it also affects the way we write.

The transition from modernity to postmodernity, which gained impetus from the 1960s onwards (Anderson, 1998; Harvey, 1990; Jeffries, 2021), witnessed the gradual rise of commodified scientific discourse. For example, for 125 years, the journal *Scientific American* was a weekly newspaper reporting on science and technology, with language accessible to large swathes of the population, including those untrained in science. But from the 1970s onwards, *Scientific American* developed a vocabulary more similar to that of scientific journals, becoming more inaccessible to those without a scientific education (Hayes, 1992, p. 739). Today, most of the discourse produced in an academic context, which fills countless journals, is largely inaccessible to the wider public. This is partly due to the emphasis on specialisation, something that archaeology is remarkably adept at doing – breaking down the archaeological past (and present) into discrete and operable fields of specialised knowledge, such as archaeobotanics, archaeogenetics, metallurgy, modelling, statistical archaeology, etc. This leads each specialisation to generate its own functional language, displayed in complex graphs and distribution maps, and texts filled with abbreviations, which convey the idea of legitimacy; that the specialised language has become officially "sanctioned" by the scientific community (Marcuse, 2002 [1964], pp. 97–98). Additionally, this reduces the amount of time required for writing – and less writing means more productivity. As Deleuze and Guattari state, "writing has never been capitalism's thing. Capitalism is profoundly illiterate" (1983, p. 243).

Publishing has become forms of high culture, which denote a separation of the specialist from the non-specialist. On its face, specialised languages can help with referencing and are more economical in terms of space during the publication process, but they also bar the non-specialist from understanding and producing scientific discourse of their own. In order to generate scientific discourse in this day and age, one has to progress through the expensive and competitive marathon of higher education, usually by completing a PhD and fighting to access the instruments of science. This is a recent phenomenon – as Jean-François Lyotard points out, nineteenth century and early twentieth century science was beholden to two principles, verification and falsification, respectively, and as long as there was a consensus with regards to these principles, one was doing science, since consensus was the basis of scientific truth (Lyotard, 1984, p. 24).

This is not to say that science was something that anyone could practice back in the nineteenth or early twentieth century, what is being said, however, is that just as the simpler class-structure of earlier times became more complex as the twentieth century went on, so too did the establishment of scientific proof and discourse. Technology has played a crucial role in this process. In the same way that technology altered factory conditions in the nineteenth century, by increasing production while minimizing the energy expended (Marx, 1990, p. 492), technology has had the exact same effect in science. Technology is nonetheless an *economic expenditure*, and only those with capital can afford it. No money means there is no proof, making scientific discourse a game of the rich, one where the wealthiest wins (Lyotard, 1984, p. 44).

As Tim Flohr Sørensen has pointed out, many of the conclusions reached by scientific projects in archaeology can also be achieved without the recourse to science (2017). In fact, in many cases, more conventional (and cheaper) methods, from standard typological analysis and good-old fashioned stratigraphic excavation, often reveal crucial information that many scientific and advanced modelling techniques overlook. Ironically, the gold-standard of the scientific method is the hypothetico-deductive approach, as argued in the early twentieth century by Popper (2002 [1935]). The hypothetico-deductive approach simply means that an empirical statement must be subject to falsification, or to keep it simple, a scientific explanation is one that can be proven false when tested against data (Popper, 2002 [1935], p. 19). This can be done in a wide variety of manners. Take for instance, the neolithisation of Northeast India – there are some explanations as to how and when the Neolithic developed or spread (Fuller, 2006), but most of this region remains underexplored, under-researched, and underfunded. The hypotheses that have already been established about the neolithisation can, however, be tested by survey and excavation, two activities that require low financial investment, and the radiocarbon dating of some samples, which is more expensive but not prohibitively so. This is exactly what is being done (e.g. Jamir, 2012). Surveying and excavation, and the sparse use of radiocarbon dating, are enough to test hypotheses, and it is the way archaeology is conducted in many parts of the world, but it is rare to see this parsimonious form of doing archaeology filling the upper echelons of scientific journals.

Despite the general idea that archaeogenetics, isotope analysis, and advanced computer-aided modelling are the standard-bearer of scientific archaeology (Kristiansen, 2014), the actual standard of science remains the hypothetico-deductive approach. Even more ironically, many of the projects involving modelling and genetics would technically not qualify as science, such as genomic mapping (e.g. Haak et al., 2015; Olalde et al., 2019), since these approaches do not challenge established scientific hypotheses; these projects are primarily *inductive*. Bear in mind that one is not critiquing the quality nor the importance that these projects and approaches bring to the table – what is being argued is that the use of advanced forms of modelling, and the study of genetic or isotopic material, are not necessarily more scientific than more conventional methods in archaeology, especially those requiring fewer financial expenditures. It is fair to say that scientific approaches used in archaeology are remarkably complex and very technologically advanced, that they require years of learning and training, and that only a very select few are competent enough to use these approaches. However, no matter how difficult or complex, these approaches do not necessarily translate into a more "scientific" archaeology, if we follow strict definitions of what science is supposed to be.

The underlying ideology sustaining the popularity of scientific techniques is not one that can claim that the archaeological sciences produce better, more reliable, or more scientific results. To claim as such is to take a moral stand – not an epistemological nor an empirical one. The morality is that of late capitalism – what the rise of the archaeological sciences have done is shift the practice of archaeology from a slow and deliberate affair to a fast and aggressive practice, one that caters to the short-term logic of today's economics (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018; Jeffries, 2021). A good part of archaeology remains sustained through local investment, whether it is the slow and deliberate excavations of a small Roman town, which can take up to 30 years of summer expeditions, or in ethnoarchaeology, where local communities require years of familiarisation. But this type of research has become harder to perpetuate and finance. As Cunningham and MacEachern (2016) argue, archaeological excellence has been defined by criteria of big and fast scientific production, which operate at high-costs but short periods (2–6 years), such as those financed through ERCs and Horizon Europe grants. Naturally, those with a humanities background, and those who operate on a local scale and slow study, cannot for the life of them justify spending millions on a project in such a short period, since their costs of production are considerably lower than those of archaeological scientists.

Given the exponential growth in archaeological literature powered by fast science (Sinclair, 2016), local and small-scale studies are being condemned to obscurity, gradually leaving the nuance and contextual understanding of past peoples to the wayside (Ribeiro, 2019; Riva & Grau Mira, 2022). What is becoming dominant, and the main currency of career progression, are incredibly generalist one-shot statements, such as "climate change led to the collapse of civilisations during the third millennium BCE" or "there were massive migrations into Europe from the Steppe during prehistory" (Ion, 2019, p. 11). Scientifically, the results of an excavation in India and the genomic mapping of Europe are subject to the same scientific standards and if both are performed accurately, then both have the same scientific value. In a colloquial sense, one can claim that some studies are more scientific than others, but in practice, if proper standards are followed, different types of approaches cannot necessarily be "more" or "less" scientific. Those terms are used to apply judgements of value on the information produced, which is why it is not surprising that the more capital is invested into an approach, the more "scientific" it is usually considered. But observing and recording a phenomenon with your own two eyes is no different from doing so through a microscope – the instrument does not magically grant more "scientific objectivity" simply because it cost a lot of money.

Naturally, this changes the discursive landscape of archaeology. The new economic logic of archaeology is as follows: archaeological sciences are favoured by the funding entities, because this type of archaeology has a quick and clear yet ineffective metric of quality that funding entities appreciate – citation counts (Chapman et al., 2019). In addition to that, through the sciences, one can operate under the fast-pace and short-term rationale of late capitalism. In the process, many high-impact publications are delivered over a short period of time, because funding is usually capped at 4, 5, or 6 years. Archaeologists will develop or lean into the sciences because funding helps advance their careers, and this in turn, is because archaeologists who have obtained grants will hire new scientific staff for the university in which they are based (the aforementioned members of the gig economy), but most importantly, because universities get to keep 20–30% of the funding through something called "overhead costs," included in what Marx called "prices of production" (Marx, 1991, p. 257).

Given that archaeological scientists are those who are most capable of obtaining large grants, those over 2,000,000€, and given that these can contribute to the expenses of universities via overhead costs, many jobs at universities are now going to archaeological scientists. Concomitantly, faculty staff gradually shifts towards a more scientific one, who in turn train the next generation of archaeological scientists. On one hand, it is great that more archaeologists are gaining employment via their capacity to command funding, on the other, it is unfortunate that this only happens by playing the capitalist game of selling one's own labour *and funding* to the university. This process has made archaeology go from its historical and anthropological roots, a *de facto* human science that was slow, deliberate, and most important of all, fairly *affordable*, into a neoliberal rat race.

At face value, none of this should be a problem. Certainly, new scientific technologies, the reliance on more technical language, and the increase in funding for large-scale projects, are all boons for our understanding of the past. The problem is, at the same time, they have made archaeology more exclusive and harder for archaeologists in poorer economies to access, that is to say, they have *created a new class-barrier of a global kind*, with only select countries able to afford the costs of analysing data scientifically and publishing in high-rank, international, science-based journals. Even within Europe, a fairly rich region all things considered, there are economies that have no access to labs and technology. Only a select number of universities provide infrastructure for isotope analysis, radiocarbon dating, and aDNA analysis, universities which are, of course, based in richer economies. In addition to this, there are the actual costs of conducting radiocarbon, isotope, and DNA analyses – which very few are able to afford. What this has done is create a neocolonial practice: that of poorer economies having to depend on richer economies in order to fund archaeological research and publish in high-ranking journals. To become a specialist in archaeological science requires emigrating to either North America or Northern and Central Europe. That is why nomadism has become a standard practice for career-progression in archaeology (Balaban, 2018; Brami et al., 2022, p. 232), but of course, this is easier said than done – a sick parent, a spouse who cannot leave, and/or a disability make migration incredibly challenging and stress-inducing. Furthermore, migration is an expenditure – initial capital is necessary to pay for rent (and deposit), food, furniture, etc. which automatically bars the lower classes from accessing this form of scientific nomadism.

Even archaeological theory is not free from the pervasive influence of class dynamics and elitism. Although theory does not express its classism through economic capital, it does so through *cultural* capital. As one of the authors argued some years ago, there is an obsession with coming up with the newest and sexiest theory, which more often than not, is nothing but rebranded and rehashed old ideas (see also Lindstrøm, 2015; Ribeiro, 2016). Alpha-males of each generation, that is, typically white, tenured, of mature age, and with a privileged socio-economic background, have to "dethrone" those of the past generation to assert their dominance within the field (Sherratt, 2011, p. 14). In other words, we need a constant flow of "new" theoretical concepts and methods, which will render everything conceived up to this point extremely outdated. The greatest irony is that in the constant search for novelty, archaeological theory has lost its capacity to actually do anything truly new. As Byung-Chul Han asserts, "a purely hectic rush produces nothing new. It reproduces and accelerates what is already available" (2015, p. 13). Thus, despite the constant reference to novelty, revolutions, turns, and manifestos that pervade archaeological theory, there is also a constant sameness and a sense of *déjà vu* – a machine that is always at work producing "newness" yet never manages to leave the same spot (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997 [1947], p. 134).

Take Marxist theory for instance – since the nineteenth century it has proven itself as the one of the most complete packages for understanding anthropological, economic, and social aspects of past and present societies (Harvey, 2018). Gidden's theory of structuration, Bourdieu's theory of practice, and Latour's actor-network-theory have all contributed to our understanding of social dynamics but in no way or form have these more recent theories managed to supersede Marxist theory, a theory that provides an understanding of social structures, practices, agency, and relations, in addition to economic, dialectical, and historical processes. Thus, we remain baffled as to why more recent but less comprehensive theories have been suggested as replacements to Marxist theory in archaeology (see McGuire, 2021a,b; Rosenswig, 2012). This very essay was only possible by observing social dynamics through a Marxist lens, in fact, every serious study of class dynamics in postmodern times is written from a Marxist perspective (e.g. Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018; Callinicos, 1989; Eagleton, 1996; Harvey, 1990; Jameson, 1991; Mandel, 1975).

Ideas, much like everything else in society today, have become commodified, and in the same way that one must have the latest iPhone or fashion accessory, archaeological theorists must have the latest idea, especially if one can attach a nice French-sounding name to give it high-brow legitimacy. Like the fast logic of archaeological science, theory has to be fast – as many papers and books on the "new" topic have to be written and published as quickly as possible. Given the pace at which new theories are introduced in archaeology, they often come attached with many mistakes and contradictions, and usually with very deep misunderstandings of the source material. Take for example the popularisation of the study of things "in themselves," a topic that has relied on traditional idealist philosophy, such as that of Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger, but also of more recent philosophical studies, such as those of Graham Harman and Ian Bogost (in archaeology see Edgeworth, 2016; Olsen, 2007, 2010; Pétursdóttir, 2017). Much of this research relies on the concept of "thing-in-itself," or "*Ding an sich*" in the original German, which has had very liberal readings in recent years, especially at the hands of Graham Harman (2016, 2017, see Wolfendale, 2014, for a very extensive critical perspective). As Svein Nielsen points out, those who have made use of this concept have probably not read Kant properly, since the way it has been referred to in archaeology bares any resemblance to how Kant discussed it (Nielsen, 2019).

In this, archaeological theory and science share similarities – what matters is going fast. Investing in the archaeology of a foreign country by learning its language and reading about its legacy is becoming a rarer occurrence – as Peter Sloterdijk argues with regards to new forms of globalisation, many things can enter into the circulation of commodities, such as jeeps, excavation tools, radiocarbon dates, but not languages: "for members of the fast classes, learning a language is one of the worst ordeals; it is like the Chinese water torture, where slowness is the soul of cruelty" (Sloterdijk, 2013, p. 260). In the same vein, learning Kant has become a challenge not dissimilar to learning a language, in that it takes too long to fully apprehend what Kant was trying to convey. The late capitalist learning processes have become desensitised to difficulty and slowness – Kant has to be wrapped up in the same manner as Tiktok videos, Amazon prime deliveries, and fast food – that is to say, as immediate gratification (Fisher, 2009, p. 24). The difficulty of Kant makes it slow, and for the fast archaeologist, taking too long is a cardinal sin, so one has to rely on quick and dirty interpretations of Kant's work, leading to very questionable theories.

Along the way, we lose tried and true theories, such as the basics of social theory (e.g. Durkheim, Weber, Parsons, Simmel), the basics of anthropological theory (e.g. Boas, Benedict, Radcliffe-Brown, Mauss, Malinowski, Geertz, Bloch), and the basics of historical theory (e.g. Hegel, Marx, Braudel, Collingwood, Ginzburg), because these are not the flavour of the month anymore. What emerges as replacements are usually revamped bastardisations, or theories so outlandish that they cannot be useful but to a very niche subset, usually a subset based in the university context. What we really need though are additions and improvements to the already existing body of theory and not a complete rejection of past approaches in favour of whatever is trendy nowadays. While archaeological science demarcates itself through money, technology, and ultra-specialised language, archaeological theory has done so through the use of very fanciful language and cryptic terminology, with some texts closer to poetry rather than what is traditionally considered scholarly production (see Hornborg 2017; Ion, 2018). Not only has this language created an elitist atmosphere, it has done little to help the lower classes, especially the Indigenous class it so often claims to support. As Beatriz Marín-Aguilera has pointed out, most of the recent archaeological theory has been *extractive*, that is to say, it has removed indigenous knowledge from its very context, and collected it, relativised it, depoliticised it, and re-framed it under Western influence (Marín-Aguilera, 2021). In general, archaeological theory has become something almost unrecognisable, with it gradually developing as an impoverished handmaiden of science on one hand, or on the other, something incredibly abstract and out-of-touch, something that is built from obscurantist and niche ideas that are only popular in very elitist and high-brow institutions. Much like science, this latter form of theory can be quite inaccessible, since it is taught almost exclusively in the UK, Scandinavia, and North America – places that archaeologists in poorer economies cannot always access.

In both cases, science and theory, the discourse generated is one undergirded by a class-based and elitist structure. This structure is not affecting or influencing archaeology; *it is archaeology*. This means that to "fix" the structure would require destroying archaeology itself. We have created a controlled market of knowledge – one that is carefully protected and which we disingenuously promote as diverse, open, and egalitarian

(Bourdieu, 1988, p. 126). It is precisely the opposite that is true: the knowledge produced today is remarkably constrained. To use Bourdieu's words: "[we set] limits to cultural needs and aspirations at the same time as encouraging ignorance of those limits, restricting people's vision of the world and canvassing their support for this mutilated vision, which leads people to perceive as universal, under the guise of "general education," an extremely singular culture" (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 99). There are countless forms of knowledge out there, from how to use a forklift to stack pallets, how to do bookkeeping for a doctor's office, how to recognise the conditions for cultivation of certain crops, how to set up a camera/microphone and the software to stream videogames online, how to reverse an 18-wheeler truck, how to adjust the iso, shutter, and aperture of a camera properly, how to fix a copy-machine, how to make sushi, how to memorise 90% of London's street and points-of-interest and drive to them, etc. These are all forms of knowledge, and from an ethical standpoint, hold no moral superiority or inferiority in relation to other forms, especially archaeological knowledge.

5 Dreams of a Better Future

We do realise that we might be preaching to the choir, that most of what we have said so far is patently obvious and does not bear repeating, and that this is ultimately condescending and patronizing to those who have fought hard to suppress elitism and classism within archaeology. However, archaeological literature, the practices employed, and everyday experience within the discipline demonstrate the opposite, that *the discipline is becoming more classist and elitist*, which leads us to believe that maybe not many people are aware of the class-based elitism plaguing archaeology.

It is easy to fall prey to the idea that archaeologists all suffer together and that the enemy is something that exists outside the discipline. In fairness, it is undeniable that things like billionaires, market fluctuations, political corruption, university administrators, decline in funding, etc. all have an effect on archaeology. But these things alone are not what give archaeology its shape – it is neither the political class nor university administrators who teach or write articles – it is archaeologists themselves.

When success does not come our way, we blame it on the workings of a system that transcends us, one that constrains and limits our full potential; when it does indeed come our way, we see success as a reflection of personal struggle, strong work ethic, and merit. We have become enamoured with the idea that we live a biography of progress and development, from rags to riches, from meekness to triumph, from local cultural wastelands to global cultural oases, and from lower class to upper class. Much like the waifs that have pervaded western literature, such as the protagonists of novels like *Harry Potter, The Goldfinch*, and *Exciting Times*, mentioned in the introduction, we see ourselves as having overcome class itself. But these personal biographies obfuscate a much more dire and appalling reality: that of a truly destitute working class, stuck in dead-end jobs, addictions, illness, and just overall torpor, a class we have failed to understand and attend to, a class we have demonised because their ideology does not align with our own. One of the central aims of Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1934 [1869]) was to critique the petty bourgeoisie for siding with the bourgeoisie instead of the proletariat. It is not surprising that this text remains relevant to this day, as does most of Marx and Engel's work.

Within archaeology, once we start climbing the ladder, we play the neoliberal commodity game, selling our labour to the highest bidder, and in the process create a staggered community marked by signs of prestige: citation counts, first-authorship in high-impact factor articles, excavations in exotic locations, guest lectures, titles and memberships, grants and scholarships, Ivy leagues and Russell groups, contributions to the media and public press, etc. The authors of the current work are not exempt from playing this game as well; we are not impartial bystanders observing from outside. In fact, this very work is only possible because we have started climbing the ladder, and of course, like most members of the archaeological community, we wish to climb further up. This raises another issue – there are no easy solutions to tackle classism and elitism. As Mark Fisher states, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (2009, p. 1). Thus, as biased observers, we believe that every suggestion for structural improvements will always be elite projection – a reflection of what we *personally believe* is best for the discipline. Change will never come by demanding that those vague entities known as “society,” the “economy,” or even “archaeology” adapt to what we want them to be. However, change can be more up-close and personal.

It is in our very actions that things should start (Agger, 2004, pp. 131–168) – from being more critically aware of personal privileges, whether it was financial help from parents or whether an academic appointment came via a favour from one head of department to another; it is also important to recognise the work being done in marginalised contexts, whether it is the small excavation performed by contract archaeologists on the side of a highway or the typological study of some obscure museum assemblage, instead of just focusing on the larger-than-life and heavily funded projects in Greece, Latin America, and Near East; instead of simply dismissing work because it fails to mimic the writing style you acquired in Stanford or Cambridge or because it ignored your favourite French philosopher, one should understand that this type of work just simply follows a different tradition and should not be penalised for that; also, one should pay attention to biases when conducting reviews or hiring new staff, not just by recognizing the plaudits accumulated by the candidate, but also understanding that time-gaps or low-paying jobs (e.g. working at McDonalds or in construction) are also a natural part of people’s lives, and that these gaps or dead-end jobs should not work against their chance of gaining employment. These, and countless other little habits, are the source of a better world. Will these small changes counteract centuries of classist and elitist build-up that sustains archaeology? Obviously not, but what they will do is create a discipline that is considerably less arrogant and more inclusive, one that we can certainly be less ashamed of.

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