

Dara Shore

Subsisting and Co-Existing: An Analysis and Client-Based Strategy for Addressing Subsistence Digging

At the crux of any discussion of illegal trafficking in cultural property lies the question of how antiquities move from the ground to the black market. However, prevailing discourse on looting frequently collapses the complexity of the social and economic conditions under which cultural objects enter the illicit artifact trade. Indeed, the existence of subsistence digging has all too often been ignored or misrepresented by archaeologists, museologists, and specialists in cultural property law alike. By more closely examining the causes and effects of subsistence digging, a client-based mitigation strategy can be formed.

Within the confines of this paper, subsistence digging will be defined as the routine, clandestine excavation of artifacts by members of the communities surrounding the zone of excavation, performed as a last resort for the purpose of monetary compensation. While seemingly straightforward, this definition synthesizes several other conceptions of subsistence digging. Indeed, the precise definition of what subsistence digging is has varied considerably since the term's invention. As such, it will be necessary to critically examine all aspects of the prevailing conceptualizations of subsistence digging in order to contextualize the reactions to this practice, as well as how the subsistence diggers themselves are viewed.

Although subsistence digging involves the removal of artifacts from their archaeological contexts without supervision by trained archaeologists or other cultural property professionals, there is an ongoing debate over whether this practice should be referred to as a form of looting. Indeed, among practitioners of cultural property law, it is common for little distinction to be drawn between the looting of antiquities by opportunistic treasure hunters, the theft or destruction of cultural property during times of war and instability, and the excavation of artifacts as a means of obtaining necessary funds (Borodkin 1995, 378-379; Hollowell-Zimmer 2003, 45). As others have argued, however, framing subsistence digging as a variety of looting

ignores the differences in motivation between subsistence diggers and others engaged in the illicit transfer of cultural property to the black market, which characterizes economically marginalized communities as inherently criminal (Brodie 2010, 262; Matsuda 1998, 90). Indeed, both this definition and earlier classifications of subsistence digging as a form of “commercial archaeology” place primacy on the objects being excavated, rather than on the people engaged in the act of excavation (Heath 1973, 259). However, even those definitions of subsistence digging that do center on the experiences of the subsistence diggers are not without flaws.

The term “subsistence digging” was coined by archaeologist David Staley in 1993 to describe the activities of the indigenous residents of St. Lawrence Island, Alaska (Kaiser 1993, 347). As conceived by Staley, the term was meant to emphasize the use of clandestine artifact sales as a means of supplementing a subsistence-based lifestyle (Staley 1993, 348). While this focus on the economic realities that face subsistence diggers on a daily basis has helped to direct discourse on the subject away from the criminalization of resourceful survival strategies, it is frequently applied both too generally and with too much specificity.

By focusing on the subsistence aspect of subsistence digging, the archaeological definition of this practice ignores the existence of such groups as Italian *tombaroli* who, although not necessarily traditional subsistence farmers, engage in the excavation and sale of artifacts as an economic last resort in much the same manner as the residents of St. Lawrence Island (Brodie 2006, 5; Coe 1993, 283; Ruiz 2000, 37). This artificial distinction frequently engenders a fragmented approach to mitigating issues of clandestine local excavation, preventing communication and collaboration across continents by members of the cultural heritage sphere.

Conversely, the use of subsistence digging as a banner term to refer to all such self-directed excavators also runs the risk of eliding culturally-bound articulations of the relationship

between living people and the artifacts used by their ancestors. For example, in much of Central America, a subsistence digger is traditionally referred to as a *huechero*, a term derived from an indigenous species of burrowing armadillo, while in parts of South America the prevailing term, *huaquero*, derives from the Quechua name for the ancient sites and artifacts that are the target of the diggers in question (Coe 1993, 273; Matsuda 1998, 95; Matsuda 2005, 256). The former term centers on the act of digging and categorizes *huecherismo* as a profession, while the latter term focuses on the nature of the material being excavated, yet labeling both practices “subsistence digging” only directs attention to the physical mechanisms of clandestine excavation, reducing opportunities for cultural heritage advocates to develop culturally-sensitive ways of addressing these practices. The definition of subsistence digging used in this paper has been constructed so as to avoid these conceptual drawbacks and focus attention on both the rationale of the subsistence diggers and the socio-cultural processes that surround the act of subsistence digging. It is to these larger processes that a discussion of the impacts of subsistence digging now turns.

Despite the culturally specific differences in how subsistence digging is defined, the overall mechanisms by which it manifests are fairly similar throughout the world. While the exact circumstances vary by location, there are several constant motivating factors for engaging in subsistence digging. In some cases, this practice occurs as a result of seasonal lulls in subsistence cycles, with the money exchanged for the excavated artifacts serving as a kind of “bumper crop” or a mined resource that supplements meager agricultural returns (Heath 1973, 263; Matsuda 1998, 91). Alternately, subsistence digging can be employed as a year-round means of maintaining enough resources for survival when no other options for employment are available, either due to unequal governmental distribution of resources that prevent marginalized communities from accessing adequate nutrition or transportation, or due to prevailing economic

depression within one or more areas of a given nation (Matsuda 1998, 90). Occasionally, subsistence digging is used as an emergency measure to quickly raise funds to address a natural disaster, such as a famine or an earthquake (Blomster, personal communication). Regardless of the specific circumstances, the motivations behind subsistence digging all share one trait in common: it is a practice born out of economic desperation, and one that quickly ceases once greater economic opportunities are introduced into a digging community (Hollowell 2006b, 123). Similarly, while the particularities of how the digging itself is organized vary geographically, the overall mechanisms by which the excavated artifacts change hands can be generalized.

The path travelled by an artifact from its excavation by a subsistence digger to its purchase by a collector can be broken down into three major sections. The first of these sections directly pertains to the subsistence diggers. In this part of the process, artifacts are excavated by subsistence diggers living in and around the areas where these materials were deposited in antiquity. This digging can either be done on an individual or family basis, as is the case on St. Lawrence Island, or it can be a strictly regimented process that is maintained by a hierarchical local organization with designated excavators, guards, and overseers (Hollowell 2006b, 122; Matsuda 2005, 257). After the artifacts have been gathered, they are transferred into the custody of a middleman, often a traveling agent from outside the subsistence diggers' community or ethnic group who will subsequently bring the materials to a larger urban area to introduce into the art market as part of the second step in the process (Kersel 2006, 190; Matsuda 1998, 92). It is here that the first monetary exchange in the process takes place, as well as the first of many economic injustices that directly result from the continued practice of subsistence digging.

While subsistence digging may be executed on a long-term basis, with seasonal digging cycles persisting from year to year, the practice itself is not economically viable for the diggers

(Brodie 2010, 262). Almost universally, the communities engaging in subsistence digging are paid a paltry amount for the recovered artifacts by middlemen, who then sell the artifacts for considerable profit on the art market (Kersel 2006, 190). Additionally, when the excavation process is heavily regimented, it is often the case that overseers collude with middlemen to retain the majority of this small compensation for themselves, depriving the excavators of the remuneration necessary for them to provide for both their own basic needs and those of their families (Matsuda 2005, 257-258). Furthermore, the loss of diggers' compensation that stems from this systemic corruption pales in the face of the unequal exchanges that characterize the third step in the process. Once the artifacts have been sold by the middlemen, they then enter into the process' third phase, during which they cycle through sellers of increasingly high repute and legitimacy until they are purchased by a collector, all the while accruing greater monetary value, including doubling in price with each subsequent transaction, until the cycle of exploitation begins anew (Brodie 2010, 264; Hollowell 2006b, 105; Kersel 2006, 191-193).

To put this process of exchanges in perspective, it will be necessary to discuss a few of the monetary realities of the trade in artifacts procured through subsistence digging. Due to the illegal nature of subsistence digging, few accounts of the specific monetary amounts that change hands throughout the process exist. However, from what information is available, several shocking figures are produced. Some of the earliest economic analyses of subsistence digging, conducted in Costa Rica in the early 1970s, reveal that in comparison to the wages that could be earned through legal migrant farm work, engaging in subsistence digging doubled the monthly amount otherwise made by a digger, and nearly tripled the wages earned by a dig overseer or foreman (Heath 1973, 262). In the ensuing four decades, rates of corporate land eviction – and, in tandem, the percentage of the population in Costa Rica and its neighboring countries that must

turn to itinerant farming as a means of subsistence – have increased exponentially, spurring increasing numbers of the rural population of South and Central America to engage in subsistence digging (Matsuda 2005, 258). Indeed, even in other parts of the world, this trend shows no sign of slowing. A quarter century after Heath's study, Mexican farmers had to choose between earning US\$0.20 a day through commercial farming, or making between 10 and 70 times that daily amount from subsistence digging, depending on the nature of the artifacts unearthed (Matsuda 1998, 88). However, although these figures may initially appear to illustrate that subsistence diggers regularly earn substantial profits from their activities, by situating their wages in the larger context of the underground art market, an entirely different picture emerges.

While a purely monetary comparison between the amounts earned through legal farming versus subsistence digging would seem to clearly favor the latter option, the nature of the information currently available to cultural property investigators complicates this matter considerably. Many population estimates pertaining to subsistence digging do not differentiate between the often significant variations in income among the hierarchies of an organized digging operation. For example, it would be entirely incorrect to suppose that the US\$500,000 generated by the underground antiquities trade in Costa Rica between 1968 and 1969 was evenly spread among the 1% of its 1.6 million inhabitants engaged in subsistence digging, proportions paralleled elsewhere in South and Central America in more recent years (Coe 1993, 273; Heath 1973, 260; Matsuda 1998, 91). This figure ignores the uneven distribution of revenue that results in diggers earning under US\$3 a day, while foremen earn upwards of US\$130 for a single artifact sale to a middleman (Heath 1973, 262).

Furthermore, these estimates, which continue to dominate economic discussions of subsistence digging today, operate under the unquestioned assumption that the initial price paid

by a middleman to a digger or overseer remains constant, whereas in actuality, the market demand for a particular type of artifact can significantly impact the amount earned by any given digging operation (Heath 1973, 262-263). Finally, the equally common tactic of discussing the total amount generated by subsistence digging in a geographic area frequently inflates perceptions of how much an individual earns from engaging in this practice (Brodie 2010, 262; Heath 1973, 261): even in regions such as St. Lawrence Island, where digging is unregimented and each individual is free to dig and sell artifacts without having to go through a middleman, aggregate earnings of US\$1.5 million equate to well under US\$1000 when distributed among each of the digging residents in the population (Hollowell 2006b, 105). In summation, current modes of assessing the economic impact of subsistence digging fail to capture the complexities of the tiered monetary transactions that form the underground antiquities market. Yet, despite the fundamentally exploitative wages directly paid to subsistence diggers by their overseers and the infinitesimal fraction of the artifacts' final price the diggers receive, the process of subsistence digging has only grown more prevalent with time. In order to understand the persistence of this practice, it will be necessary to examine the differing value systems surrounding the excavated artifacts held by subsistence diggers, collectors, and "legitimate" stakeholders in the field of cultural property protection.

Any examination of the economic and cultural impacts of subsistence digging must be filtered through the ways these impacts are conceptualized by differing groups of stakeholders. Indeed, a practice castigated as little more than illicit treasure hunting by one group may be regarded as a necessary and cherished part of life by another (Throsby 2001, 27). It is crucial for those engaged in the protection of cultural property to understand how a single process can simultaneously be described as having a positive value or negative cost by different parties.

For the diggers, the cultural and economic impacts of subsistence digging are overwhelmingly positive in value, particularly when this value is economic in nature. Despite the uneven distribution of wages that favor overseers, middlemen, and underground art dealers over excavators, the amount of income received from the direct act of subsistence digging exceeds that earned for an equivalent time engaged in legal agrarian labor (Heath 1973, 263). Moreover, subsistence digging provides equivalent opportunities for economic rewards and a far lower risk of physical danger and long-term incarceration when compared to the illegal trade in narcotics (Borodkin 1995, 278). Finally, the ever-present possibility of excavating a particularly sought-after artifact and “striking it rich” serves as a frequent motivator for subsistence diggers to continue engaging in yearly excavation cycles on and around their own land (Heath 1973, 262). While these economic benefits are substantial, they are not the only positive valuations of subsistence digging held by communities engaged in digging. Perhaps even more critical to this practice’s longevity is its high degree of cultural value.

Discussions of subsistence digging that couch the practice in purely economic terms often flatten the complex cultural relationship that diggers have with the artifacts they excavate. Although the precise nature of this relationship varies considerably with the location where the digging occurs, several commonalities emerge. In regions with a high degree of cultural continuity between antiquity and the present, such as St. Lawrence Island, the act of subsistence digging is viewed as a means of communicating with one’s ancestors (Hollowell 2006b, 122; Staley 1993, 352-353). Within this community, the process of finding and determining the monetary valuation of a given artifact becomes a way of mediating one’s heritage and gaining control over how others interact with the material components of a living culture (*ibid.*). Thus, rather than a cultural disruption, subsistence digging is regarded as a method of preserving

cultural connections across thousands of years of existence, accruing not only economic value, but social and historical value as well (Throsby 2001, 29).

Similar valuations can be found throughout Central and South America. Throughout parts of Belize, southern Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, subsistence diggers view their activities as representations of their relationships with their ancestors (Matsuda 1998, 91). In these regions, however, the agency inherent in the act of subsistence digging is vested not in the digger, but in the ancestor who originally deposited the artifact being excavated: any recovered antiquities are treated as gifts left by ancestors for their descendants to find in order to stave off starvation and ensure the continuation of the diggers' family lines (Matsuda 1998, 88, 92; Matsuda 2005, 261). Here, the economic and historical value of subsistence digging is bolstered by an additional layer of spiritual value that increases veneration and respect of the diggers' ancient predecessors (Throsby 2001, 29). Throughout the Americas, subsistence digging grants marginalized communities control over economic and cultural capital to which they would not otherwise have access (Brodie 2010, 266). Even when cultural continuity between antiquity and the present is far more tenuous, this socio-cultural value system is upheld with equal fervor to its more obvious economic valuation.

Although many communities in both the Eastern and Western hemispheres view subsistence digging as a valuable way of communing with their ancestors, strong links between the past and the present are not always available to impoverished communities. For example, many of Mexico's indigenous ethnic groups have been subjected to centuries of governmental exclusion from national cultural narratives, resulting in dissociation between existing communities and past modes of cultural expression: believing the archaeological remains of their cultures to have no social value, members of these communities engage in subsistence digging as

a means of gaining legitimacy via economic valuations (Blomster, personal interview; Mourato and Mazzanti 2002, 53-54.). This enforced loss of control over objects of cultural patrimony is exacerbated by state cultural property laws which vest ownership of all archaeological materials in the national government (Blomster, personal interview; Heath 1973, 260). By engaging in subsistence digging, many members of such communities characterize their actions as a form of soft resistance against an uncaring government that seeks to keep both the economic and social benefits of archaeological antiquities for itself (Matsuda 2005, 263; Rao and Walton 2004, 26). Similar viewpoints persist in Italy, where impoverished *tombaroli* frame their illicit excavations as acts of protest against nationalized archaeological excavations that siphon economic returns away from marginalized areas and towards national centers (Migliore 1991, 164-165). That this cultural value system is placed in direct opposition to that maintained by “legitimate” overseers of cultural property illustrates the enormity of the gap in how subsistence digging’s impacts have been characterized by these two parties.

On the part of many archaeologists, museologists, national authorities, and other cultural property professionals, the economic and cultural impacts that are valued positively by subsistence diggers are universally defined as negative costs. Rather than a means of maintaining a living wage, the funds generated by subsistence digging are regarded as an immeasurable net loss for the licit art market. The millions of dollars that circulate in the underground antiquities market not only represent capital that could instead be supporting legal forms of art dealership, but also fundamentally alter the nature of the material being traded (Mourato and Mazzanti 2002, 53). When kept within the bounds of legal transactions, antiquities and other archaeological artifacts function as cultural assets that can be consumed by multiple parties on a nonexclusive basis (*ibid.*). However, in the underground market, the antiquities trade removes countless

artifacts from circulation, rendering them into assets that are privately and exclusively consumed by illicit sellers and unscrupulous collectors alike (Brodie 2010, 268; Mourato and Mazzanti 2002, 54). Furthermore, because the demand for illegally-excavated antiquities by collectors is part of the luxury market, while subsistence diggers sell these artifacts to meet their own utility demands, there is no viable incentive to halt the flow of materials generated by subsistence digging and the underground art trade (Brodie 2010, 272; Coe 1993, 288; Hollowell 2006b, 121). From the perspective of national and international authorities, every transaction relating to subsistence digging only feeds into the ever expanding illegal market.

While the economic repercussions of subsistence digging are substantial, monetary impact is not the most frequently discussed factor in the prevailing condemnation of this practice. Ironically, archaeologists, museologists, and other cultural property specialists often employ the same systems of cultural valuation used by subsistence diggers. For this former group, the process of subsistence digging is not presented as a cultural gain within one community, but instead as a loss of humanity's cultural knowledge (Matsuda 2005, 263-264). Consequently, subsistence diggers are characterized as greedy plunderers willing to spurn efforts at national property protection, desecrate the archaeological record, and prevent the study of the past by those who know the most about it – namely, archaeologists (Haber and Gnecco 2007, 397; Hollowell-Zimmer 2003, 47, 49; Matsuda 1998, 89).

According to many archaeologists, by funneling newly-discovered artifacts into the underground market, subsistence diggers actively prevent members of a global public from learning more about ancient cultures. This global public includes the subsistence diggers themselves, as many detractors of the practice also lament how the sale of cultural artifacts distances subaltern communities from their cultural heritage, even though the parallel processes

of artifact removal by national governments and academic excavations are not subject to these admonishments (Hollowell 2006b, 105-106; Matsuda 1998, 89, 91; Matsuda 2005, 264).

Ultimately, this rhetoric derives from conflicting conceptualizations of artifacts as either global cultural property or culturally-owned patrimony (Brodie 2010, 267-269). While an extended discussion of how these differing definitions have been used over the past few decades is outside the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that they reveal almost diametrically opposing views on which stakeholder groups should be regarded as having legitimate control over the artifacts excavated through subsistence digging (Matsuda 1998, 94). These viewpoints determine how the impacts of this practice are valued. Given these differences in valuation, it is not surprising that current legal approaches to addressing subsistence digging have been less than effective.

The earliest accounts of subsistence digging date to late nineteenth and early twentieth century South America, and in many respects, the history of this practice parallels the development of laws meant to protect cultural property (Matsuda 2005, 256). Although it is not feasible to provide an exhaustive description of every legal approach to addressing subsistence digging, a general overview of prevailing trends in cultural property law will prove beneficial.

Cultural property laws pertaining to subsistence digging can be grouped into two categories: protections and penalties. Protective laws are meant to prevent the spread of subsistence digging, while legal penalties are designed to punish those already engaged in the trafficking of materials obtained through subsistence digging. Within individual countries, the majority of active protective laws center on nationalizing all archaeological materials recovered within the borders of the state. Such laws prevail in South and Central America and Western Europe, including Italy (Blomster, personal interview; Borodkin 195, 382; Heath 1973, 260; Migliore 1991, 163). In tandem with these protective national laws are often legal penalties that

threaten incarceration for individuals found guilty of illegally trafficking in antiquities, and subsistence diggers often face the brunt of such laws (Blomster, personal interview; Matsuda 2005, 263). Even countries, such as the United States, that do not lay claim to all artifacts found within its borders employ legal penalties such as the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), which imposes a system of fines on those engaged in looting (Hicks 2006, 133). These national laws, while strict, are compounded by the presence of several international agreements on cultural property.

In addition to national cultural property laws, subsistence diggers are subject to a host of international laws as well. Among the most expansive of these laws is the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property of 1970, a protective measure that provides a framework for ratifying nations to outlaw the sale of illegally-obtained antiquities (Borodkin 1995, 381; Hicks 2006, 135-136). Furthermore, the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects mirrors the system of penalties enacted in the United States under ARPA in a manner meant to supplement the shortcomings of the UNESCO Convention (Borodkin 1995, 382; Hicks 2006, 134). Finally, in 2007, the International Law Association drafted its Principles for Cooperation in the Mutual Protection and Transfer of Cultural Material, which serves as a form of “soft law” that sets standards for the protection of cultural property (Nafzinger 2007, 149, 162; Paterson 2005, 70). Unfortunately, while each of these laws appears suited for success on paper, in practice they have done little to curb the incidence of subsistence digging.

Although comprehensive in scope, the efficacy of currently active national and international cultural property laws has been fairly low, and their failure to stem the tide of subsistence digging can be attributed to several factors. Among the most common criticisms of

these laws is that their expansive scale renders them nearly impossible to enforce, with few national governments possessing the personnel or financial resources to regularly police all areas of the country in which subsistence digging or illicit antiquities trading may be occurring (Borodkin 1995, 382; Brodie 2010, 267; Migliore 1991, 163). Even when they are enforced, international anti-export laws nearly universally target the buyers and late-stage sellers of antiquities, by which time the subsistence diggers are no longer meaningfully associated with the transaction in question (Borodkin 1995, 388-389). These laws' lack of strict enforcement drastically reduces any incentives to obey on the part of subsistence diggers.

Furthermore, perhaps because they are often drafted by individuals outside the field of cultural property protection, these laws are frequently far too simplistic in their articulation of antiquities trafficking (Paterson 2005, 67). These laws often employ false dichotomies, such as that between "artifact-rich" and "artifact-poor" countries, which flatten the geometries of power that characterize the complex relations between excavators, buyers, and sellers of artifacts within a given nation (Paterson 2005, 71). Another such artificial distinction is that between "source nations" and "artifact buyers," a division that privileges state ownership of cultural property while ignoring ongoing demands for ownership made by the indigenous communities that most frequently turn to subsistence digging (Kersel 2006, 190; Paterson 2005, 68). Most egregiously, these laws all primarily focus on protecting the objects of cultural patrimony, rather than on protecting the ownership rights of the communities from which they were excavated in such a manner as to prevent their illicit movement through the underground market (Paterson 2005, 70). This object focus underscores a fundamental lack of understanding of how to meaningfully and sustainably reduce the frequency of subsistence digging (Paterson 2005, 72). Unsurprisingly, non-legal approaches suggested by many archaeologists have been similarly ineffective.

As a means of supplementing the attempts of hard and soft laws to reduce the frequency of subsistence digging-based artifact trafficking, many archaeologists have proposed solutions to this issue, few of which seem likely to produce long-term results. Paralleling many of the soft laws maintained by international law organizations, such recommendations tend to advocate for a model of cultural property co-ownership between indigenous communities and the state, yet contain language that clearly reveals the belief that the national government is the ultimate arbiter of how to care for excavated material (Nafzinger 2007, 162-165; Paterson 2005, 68, 73). Others have suggested that it would be more beneficial for states to engage in periodic auctions of cultural property as a means of reducing black market demand, but this model offers no practical incentives for the reduction of subsistence digging, and is similarly centered on the actions of national governments to the exclusion of the desires of source communities (Borodkin 1995, 390-392; Staley 1993, 351-352). All too often, archaeologists merely suggest international support of national cultural property ownership laws, as though such a practice would meaningfully improve the lives of marginalized communities and serve as an incentive to cease subsistence digging (Borodkin 1995, 388; Kersel 2006, 198). In all of these cases, the proposed suggestions are both too general, preventing the adoption of culturally-relevant mitigation strategies, and too focused on imputing and protecting the agency of objects while reducing the agency of the source communities engaged in subsistence digging. It is past due that a workable solution to the issue of subsistence digging is implemented.

In the face of the ineffective strategies proposed by archaeologists and cultural law professionals, it would appear as though the means to reduce rates of subsistence digging must come from the museological field. Unfortunately, the above-mentioned groups' prevailing lack of receptiveness to museum-based solutions reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the

nature of museological practice (Haber and Gnecco 2007, 408; Lowenthal 2005, 393, 397, and 404). However, a new model is suggested that already has proven results to its name.

This new proposed strategy for reducing the frequency of subsistence digging involves a client-based model of archaeological advocacy. Within the museum field this model is hardly new; indeed, it has been widely employed for several decades (Doering 1999, 4; ICOM 2005, 2). The client-based model is one of three approaches to museology that parallel current perspectives on cultural property: under a stranger-based model, museums and cultural property professionals have a responsibility to protect the object from an intrusive public; while in a guest-based model, museums and cultural property organizations use their position of legitimacy and authority to educate the ignorant members of the public on the true meaning of cultural materials (Doering 1999, 1). Under a client-based approach, however, museums assume a service role to meet the needs of its clients, rather than dictating what those needs should be (*ibid.*). When employed to address subsistence digging, this approach will achieve two main goals.

Pursuing a client-based archaeological approach to subsistence digging mitigation will have ramifications on both the process of archaeological excavation and the museum-based storage of any excavated materials. In contrast to the model under which the majority of archaeological excavation is conducted at present, under a client-based approach, the research questions that archaeologists will answer through their excavations will be formulated with significant input from members of the associated source communities, and the excavation will proceed as a partnership between this community and the archaeologists (Doering 1999, 4; Haber and Gnecco 2007, 400; Hollowell 2006a, 78-79; Hollowell-Zimmer 2003, 53; Onuki 2007, 114). By approaching the process of archaeology from a position in which both the archaeologists and the members of the source community have an equal stake in the results of excavation, a

sustainable system of archaeological investigation that is both locally and globally meaningful can be created (Green, Green, and Neves 2003, 377; Hollowell 2006a, 88; Matsuda 2005, 264; Rao and Walton 2004, 8-9). In order for this system to be successful, however, the intangible benefits to the source communities must be supplemented by tangible returns as well.

A client-based approach to archaeological excavation requires not only undertaking excavations for locally-relevant purposes, but also understanding and addressing the economic impact of archaeological work on local communities. For far too many decades, archaeologists have used the academic framing of excavations as a means to either exclude members of source communities from archaeological work or, when these communities are acknowledged, to exploit them for free manual labor without any prior consultation (Atwood 2004, 36; Hollowell 2006a, 69; Matsuda 1998, 93-94). In order for long-term partnerships between archaeologists and source communities to be forged, it will be necessary to provide the members of these communities with economic incentives to participate in archaeological excavations. It has been occasionally suggested that, when creating budgetary proposals for their fieldwork, archaeologists should allocate enough funds to fairly pay local workers for performing the act of excavation (Brodie 2010, 271; Hollowell 2006a, 82; Matsuda 1998, 94). Indeed, while this approach has been infrequently utilized, it has demonstrated that the wages involved provide an attractive alternative to the payment that would otherwise come from engaging in subsistence digging (Staley 193, 353). In addition to using archaeological means, the museum field also presents another opportunity to stem the tide of subsistence digging by vesting economic and cultural control over artifacts in source communities.

Beyond conducting archaeological excavations that allow source communities to pursue positive economic alternatives to subsistence digging, the client-based approach must also make

use of the systems of cultural valuation surrounding antiquities. It has long been understood that, even in impoverished areas, communities are willing to trade a measure of their economic capital for a significant increase in social capital, and are even more amenable to measures that increase both forms of capital (Mourato and Mazzanti 2002, 63). Perhaps the best means of accomplishing this dual increase is to implement a system of co-ownership for archaeological materials, by which source communities and national governments have equal claim to cultural property (Brodie 2010, 270; Hollowell 2006a, 92). Under this system of co-ownership, archaeologists would utilize their position as agents working alongside both groups to advocate for local systems of artifact possession and museological display, rather than maintaining a solely national system of cultural property control (Blomster, personal interview; Paterson 2005, 69; Rao and Walton 2004, 25). Nascent efforts at implementing such a system have already proven wildly successful.

The benefits of co-owned local museums are numerous. At their most pragmatic, these museums can function as considerable draws for tourist revenue, funneling more consistent funds into marginalized communities than would be available from the exploitive payment practices of subsistence digging (Blomster, personal interview). Even more critically, the increase in economic and social capital that comes from governmentally-acknowledged local ownership of cultural property contributes to several long-term methods of mitigating the frequency of subsistence digging. Visible display of local artifact ownership has been shown to drastically increase community interest in archaeological heritage, particularly in areas that have otherwise been excluded from prevailing cultural narratives. For example, in parts of Oaxaca, Mexico where pilot community-managed museums have been built in partnership with INAH, the national ministry of cultural property, local residents have remarked to archaeologists that

prior to the opening of such initiative, “[we] didn’t know the Mixtec [a cultural group that flourished in the area in antiquity] *did* anything- [we] thought it was just the Aztec and the Maya [sic]” (Blomster, personal interview). The museum not only displayed cultural artifacts within this community, but it also allowed its members to learn more about their heritage and take measures, such as reviving ancient place-glyphs, to protect this new source of local pride (*ibid.*).

Similar initiatives have been observed throughout Central and South America, most notably in Peru (Hollowell 2006a, 83; Onuki 2007, 111-113): After the opening of a co-managed local museum, residents of the town of Úcupe not only began to look after the artifacts displayed, but also formed patrol groups to stop individuals engaged in subsistence digs (Atwood 2004, 230-231). What was previously a necessary source of income has now been redefined as an affront to the preservation of local heritage (Atwood 2004, 238; Onuki 2007, 103). Most importantly, as these connections with the past are forged, increased control over local heritage inspires future generations to serve as stewards of cultural property, creating systems of long-term preservation through short and mid-term strategies for archaeological advocacy (Green, Green, and Neves 2003, 380; Haber and Gnecco 2007, 403-404; Rao and Walton 2004, 24).

Given the successes of the client-based approach, it may perhaps seem surprising that this methodology is not more widespread. However, for cultural property specialists wishing to engage in this process, there is a significant barrier to entry: not only is intimate knowledge of local relations with cultural property required, but so is an understanding of the larger socio-economic contexts surrounding each community (Atwood 2004, 232). Interested parties must reinvent the proverbial wheel each time they wish to begin such an enterprise, largely because of the ignorance of such museological initiatives by cultural property professionals. By codifying this previously *ad hoc* system of client-based approaches to mitigating subsistence digging, these

barriers to entry will be reduced, spurring increasing numbers of community partnerships worldwide (Rao and Walton 2004, 3).

While this approach holds much promise for the future, it is not guaranteed to completely stop subsistence digging. One potential issue with this approach is that its success is heavily dependent on the prevailing culture of the region where it is implemented: in areas such as St. Lawrence Island, in which there is an established culture of digging, offers of archaeological partnership have done little to reduce rates of self-directed subsistence digging (Hollowell-Zimmer 2003, 51). Additionally, should funds to maintain community-managed museums run dry, as is increasingly becoming the case in Oaxaca, the reduction in tourist-generated revenue will likely spur increased subsistence digging, particularly in cases where partnerships during excavation have provided communities with more efficient digging techniques (Blomster, personal interview; Hollowell 2006a, 86; Onuki 2007, 110).

Ultimately, the only guaranteed solution to the problem of subsistence digging would require massive shifts in the economic and social balance of power in affected areas, shifts that would bring more lucrative sources of income and greater access to resources than that gained by subsistence digging (Brodie 2006, 5; Brodie 2010, 271). Even so, without the global assessment of community cultural property stewardship that can be actuated through the client-based approach, it will be impossible to determine the best course of action to address the persistence of subsistence digging.

Current conceptions of subsistence digging expose a fundamental lack of understanding of the greater economic and cultural contexts behind this phenomenon. But by engaging in client-based partnerships with source communities, cultural property professionals can begin to address this issue in a sustainable manner that is meaningful to all parties involved.

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