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Rethinking Caribbean Archaeology: Towards an ethical position for a truly decolonial practice

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Abstract

Caribbean archaeology faces urgent ethical challenges rooted in colonial histories, global inequities, and local socio-political realities. This paper advances a decolonial framework for addressing these issues, grounded in best practices emerging from a workshop held in late 2023. Specifically, we: (1) summarize the key issues discussed, (2) present the goals of our network in tackling them, and (3) define our priorities for fostering ethical archaeological and heritage practices in the Caribbean. While many of these challenges resonate beyond the region, we argue that their resolution requires context-specific, Caribbean-oriented strategies. Our aim is not to provide a comprehensive catalogue of ethical issues and solutions, nor to imply that projects omitting the aspects we emphasize are inherently unethical. Rather, we seek to establish a foundation for sustained dialogue and debate on ethics in Caribbean archaeology, encouraging engagement among both local and international researchers. Although we acknowledge the vital role of communities in shaping archaeological practice, this paper reflects the disciplinary perspective of professional archaeologists, oriented toward fulfilling our ethical and social responsibilities to those communities. In doing so, we hope to contribute to a more equitable and contextually grounded archaeological practice in the Caribbean.

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Introduction

When the first European colonizers, representing the Spanish Empire, arrived in the Caribbean in 1492, they started a process of unprecedented cultural, social, and economic transformation that impacted the world (Gruzinski, 2012; Wallerstein, 2011 [1974]). Among the immediate changes made by the Spanish after encountering what, for them, was a newly discovered land, were the renaming of places and the conquering of their peoples. The year 1492 thus marked the beginning of the creation of the so-called “New World,” with its newly imagined territories and ethnicities. The inhabitants of these regions became known as Americans, Caribbeans, or whatever other “ethnicity” the invaders assigned to them (Amodio, 1993; Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992; Todorov, 2008). Centuries after the invasion of the Americas and the Caribbean region, we still refer to this continent and most of the islands by their colonial names. Even now, few people, inside and outside academia, remember or use the names the Indigenous people had for their (is)lands (e.g., Harley, 2001; Hauser & Hicks, 2007; Herrera Malatesta, 2022; Jean, 2019; Short, 2009; Tejera, 1976). Thinking about names is one way to recognise that the land has a history beyond the colonial one; it is a form of resistance to the colonial system, a system that is still largely in place in the Caribbean, in the form of - amongst others - capitalistic tourism, social injustice, corporations exploiting resources, lack of access to proper institutional structures, and ongoing racism against Asian, African, and Indigenous descendants (Ahlmán & Schroedl, 2019; Herrera Malatesta & Sony Jean, 2023; Jean, 2024; Pastrana et al., 2020; Sprague, 2020; Wekker, 2016).

Colonialism is a political, economic, and cultural system through which one group or nation asserts control over another territory and its people (Benavides, 2010; Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992). A fundamental aspect of this is that, through the process of categorization of the colonized land and people, the colonial power shapes the image of the “Other” in relation to itself (Said, 2002). Common forms of colonialism are the occupation of land by force; the extraction of resources; the imposition of institutions; the marginalization of local communities; and the erasure of local histories. In contrast, decolonization refers to the processes (political, philosophical, epistemological) through which people, societies, institutions, and disciplines seek to undo the legacy of colonialism (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018). From the available body of literature on this topic, we can identify that key aspects of a decolonial perspective are the restoration of local autonomy; centering Indigenous and Diasporic perspectives in global narratives; critically interrogating colonial power structures within academic disciplines and institutions; and ethical commitment to solidarity, reparative justice, and plurality of worldviews.

Thus, we agree with other scholars who put forward that the goal is not for a decolonization theory or theories, but rather for a decolonial *practice* (Lander, 2010; Rizvi, 2020; Smith, 2021; Stewart, 2020; Walsh & Mignolo, 2018; Winkler, 2024). In this sense, we begin from the premise that colonialism is not merely a political or economic project, but an essentially unethical system rooted in domination, dispossession, and epistemic violence. A decolonial archaeology must, therefore, be grounded in ethical accountability, in acknowledging past harms, and seeking to transform the structural conditions through which knowledge is produced and used. This paper is framed by this position.

The topic of colonialism and decolonization is still a subject of intense debate in Caribbean and world archaeology (e.g., Curtoni & Oliván, 2023; González-Ruibal, 2019; González-Tennant, 2014; Hamilakis, 2018; Lemos et al., 2025; Londoño-Díaz, 2020; Pagán Jiménez & Rodríguez Ramos, 2008; Rizvi, 2019; Shepherd et al., 2016). However, concrete and explicit ethical aspects of developing a decolonial archaeology have been considered only recently in global debates (e.g., Gnecco & Lippert, 2015; González-Ruibal, 2018; Haber & Shepherd, 2015; Hamilakis & Duke, 2007), and sparsely in Caribbean archaeology (Haviser, 2005; Louis-Charles et al., 2020; Mickleburgh, 2015; Ostapkowicz & Hanna, 2021b; Swogger, 2021). Yet, as Siegel (2011) has already argued, while some approaches to ethical standards have been proposed, their implementation is still a challenge in the region.

In this regard, this paper, a result of an open discussion among a group of (early career) Caribbean and Caribbeanist¹ archaeological scholars, aims to outline a position from which to concretely address ethical issues in Caribbean archaeology, bringing us closer to a decolonial practice. Without negating the diversity of people and histories in the region, we present our argument in as unified a way as possible. This is a response to current Caribbean archaeological dynamics based on colonialist approaches, where isolation and division are often disguised in empty discourses on diversity. We believe that Caribbean peoples and archaeologies have suffered a series of common unethical conditions and actions, and that encouraging ethical actions and unity is therefore an essential way to move forward.

The conversations that inspired this paper began with the development of a University Press of Florida edited volume (Fricke et al., 2026a), entitled “Ethics in Caribbean Archaeology: Past, Present, and Future”, which discusses ethical issues in the discipline from a primarily academic perspective. In November 2023, we held a hybrid workshop with the same title at the Lorentz Center (The Netherlands)², which was set up to allow interaction and collaboration between the authors of the homonymous edited volume. We aimed to help each other develop solutions to the most challenging problems we encountered in writing our volume chapters, and we also explored broader issues we had observed and experienced in Caribbean archaeology. For example, we discussed the trend among some researchers to label certain scholarly work as “decolonial”, while at the same time continuing colonialist practices (e.g., lack of involvement of local communities in research projects; swift abandonment of the archaeological materials left in the region by foreign researchers after finishing a project; lack of contribution towards the formal education of Caribbean students; and the uses and abuses of local archaeologists and talent). From these discussions, we laid the foundations for an informal network of ethically engaged researchers and identified priorities in the ethical development of archaeology in the region. We developed themes on the topic of ethics in Caribbean archaeology using Open Space Technology (a method for openly and inclusively identifying discussion topics, see Owen (2008) and expanded upon these in group discussions to identify specific problems and potential solutions. This paper presents our workshop discussions for a wider academic audience.

Here, we position ourselves as archaeologists seeking to develop a decolonial practice in the Caribbean through a series of best practices that address known ethical challenges. To do this, we set out the problems identified during the workshop, the goals of our network for addressing them, and our priorities for developing ethical archaeological and heritage practices in the Caribbean region. Many of these observations are not specific to the Caribbean, but nevertheless require Caribbean-oriented solutions (Fricke & Hoerman, 2022; Haviser & MacDonald, 2006; Jean & Herrera Malatesta, 2024). That is, they require solutions based on, for example, contexts where resources and expertise are scarce. A classic example of this is the storage of material culture. Several decades ago, Tilley (1989) highlighted the challenges related to the ever-growing archaeological collections in depots and museums in the UK. If this is a problem in a nation with far more resources than any Caribbean country, the challenges in the Caribbean are even more complex. Additionally, the field of Caribbean archaeology is a small one, introducing both advantages and disadvantages when attempting to reform archaeological practice.

We do not provide an extensive list of ethical challenges and their solutions here. Neither do we intend to label any specific research projects as unethical. Instead, the following paragraphs are the result of a specific conversation among a group of Caribbeanists and Caribbean-born researchers. Our main hope is that our observations, experiences, and current ideas will create a basis for future actions towards ethics in Caribbean archaeology. Further, while we recognize the critical role of communities in the development of archaeology, considering that nearly all authors are professional archaeologists or have ample experience working in professional archaeological environments, this paper is based on a disciplinary perspective specific to archaeology as an academic and professional field.

¹ This distinction comes from the difference between being an archaeologist from the Caribbean and being an archaeologist working on the Caribbean but from somewhere else.

² <https://www.lorentzcenter.nl/ethics-in-caribbean-archaeology-past-present-and-future.html>

The structure of this paper follows three main sections. First, in the “Generating Themes and Identifying Problems” section, we discuss key ethical concerns for Caribbean archaeology, divided into structural and individual perspectives. The second section, “Potential Solutions and Paths Forward – the Structural Scale,” focuses on the structural aspects of the themes, referring both to institutions and to networks of organizations. The third section, “Potential Solutions and Paths Forward – the Individual Scale,” focuses on how academics, professionals, and community members can address these ethical themes at the individual level. We close the paper by summarizing the discussion and outlining some next steps.

Identifying Problems and Generating Themes

During the Open Space Technology (OST) session (Figure 1), the workshop participants identified seventeen themes as essential for opening a debate about ethical challenges in the Caribbean region (Figure 2), sorting them into six umbrella groups. The themes are not necessarily an exhaustive list of ethical challenges, nor do they intend to assume that past and present research projects have not made substantial efforts to carry out archaeology ethically. Conversely, many professionals and organizations working in the Caribbean have made important contributions to archaeology and other disciplines³ (e.g., Boyce-Davies, 1994; Davis & Reilly, 2016; Flewellen et al., 2022; Gaede et al., 2022; Jean & Herrera Malatesta, 2024; Maldonado-Torres, 2012; Mickleburgh, 2015; Ostapkowicz & Hanna, 2021a; Sankatsing, 2016; Wynter, 2003).



Figure 1 - Activities during the OST session at the Lorentz Center (Images courtesy of the Lorentz Center).

One of the issues repeatedly highlighted in our workshop was the lack of transparency, communication, and community agency over archaeological data and materials during and after a research project. This applies to the collection, storage, curation, and analysis of archaeological materials (artifacts, ecofacts, and human and animal remains), as well as digital data generated from them, but also to the personal data of people involved in the research (students, volunteers, and interviewees). The data and material generated in archaeological research often come to one of two ends: either taken away and stored at institutions outside the Caribbean, where Caribbean people cannot access them, or left at local institutions without any accompanying financial or practical support. The pressure on storage in museums is a global problem. Still, it is exacerbated in the Caribbean by the limited (fiscal, legal, personnel) resources available for heritage institutions and by the hot, humid climate, which hastens the decay of archaeological remains (Mickleburgh, 2015). While this is, in policy terms, mainly the responsibility of national governments, we argue

³ For Caribbean groups working on ethically committed approaches, see, for example, Create Caribbean (<https://createcaribbean.org>), Digital Library of the Caribbean (<https://www.dloc.com/>), or the Caribbean Digital Scholarship Collective (<https://cdscollective.org/>).

that foreign projects have an ethical responsibility to assist Caribbean organizations in adequately storing new collections. The lack of consideration for storage solutions is part of a broader problem in the sustainability of archaeological projects – in most cases, when the funding period ends, the project ends with it. Therefore, meaningful engagement with communities and investment in local heritage are unsupported. Lastly, digitizing or digitalizing archaeological data has introduced new ethical problems that are seldom noticed or discussed inside or outside the discipline (Dennis, 2020; Morgan, 2022). For example, the current trend toward open science in academia is widely celebrated, but it is only ethical if stakeholders have consented to it (Herrera Malatesta, 2026; Richardson & Almansa-Sánchez, 2015). Furthermore, open-access databases could in some cases endanger national sovereignty and threaten archaeological sites (Carroll et al., 2020; Chase et al., 2020). This has been articulated in the CARE principles (Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, and Ethics), which build on the earlier FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) for data governance (Carroll et al., 2020).



Figure 2 - Topics generated in the OST session on 14th November 2023 and their assignment to six umbrella topics for further discussion by the workshop participants (Figure by Kathrin Nägele).

At this point, it is relevant to address our approach to community and community archaeology, and in the conclusion, we will discuss what we consider to be ethical community engagement. Contemporary anthropological scholarship has moved beyond viewing communities as static, homogeneous, or place-bound. Influenced by feminist, postcolonial, and decolonial critiques, scholars such as Andrea Cornwall, Nina Glick Schiller, Laurajane Smith, and Faye Harrison argue that communities are relational, internally diverse, and politically contested. In the Caribbean, where histories of displacement, resistance, and diaspora shape collective identities, any engagement with 'community' must recognize the fluidity, heterogeneity, and power dynamics that

structure who gets to speak, be heard, and be remembered (e.g., Cornwall, 2008; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Harrison, 2008; Smith & Waterton, 2009). In terms of the archaeological discipline, Thomas (2017) explains that the concept of community archaeology, when done from a grassroots perspective, has followed three main trends. First, the idea of 'archaeology by the people for the people'; second, the view of the wider public as a recipient (but not necessarily a creator) of information; and lastly, the recognition of voluntary or amateur archaeologists as valued historians and researchers, and their contributions to the academic discourse (Thomas, 2017).

In this sense, the exclusion of communities from every phase of research into their own heritage is an important ethical issue. Further, a lack of capacity building has meant that communities may not even know what precisely they are being cut out of. The increasing introduction of ethical guidelines in archaeological institutions is encouraging, but there is still room for improvement in this area specifically. Guidelines or codes of ethics focus on archaeologists; therefore, community members may not know about their existence or how to enforce them. Additionally, many researchers still engage with ethics as a box-checking exercise, while we should instead aim at ethical practices produced in dialogue with each specific community. In turn, it is rare for local communities to be involved in developing the ethical guidelines themselves (Fricke et al., 2026b). As a result, these guidelines may lack essential insights that are clear to community members but not to archaeologists. Most importantly, regarding personal data and its protection, research participants are often required to sign consent forms that are inappropriate for the cultural context and, therefore, inadequate for truly informing participants about what their participation entails. Archaeology and its practitioners need more transparency at local and regional levels; this transparency should not just be about disseminating research results, but also about how research is conducted.

A factor that archaeologists must also acknowledge more explicitly is that working with communities is not always a straightforward endeavor. Archaeologists, especially those who are not members of a particular local community, can easily encounter difficulties in fully understanding the community's nuances. In a way, as Pyburn (2011) stresses, for example, a perceived community might even be an archaeological construct. In addition, she warns that individuals, and archaeologists, may be part of more than one community at the same time. This complicates the definition of what a 'local community' is. Outsiders, i.e., people who are not part of a specific community, in their inability or reluctance to recognize relevant local or regional nuances, might easily misunderstand several communities to be one – a modern echo of early colonizers' attitudes to Indigenous peoples. This may result in failures to correctly understand who the appropriate community representatives are and in increased difficulties in making projects as inclusive and participatory as possible. Also, power imbalances, both between the different community groups and with the archaeologists involved, might easily go unrecognized by outsiders. To this point, we believe it is essential for research projects led by 'outsiders' to have the involvement of local researchers and/or organizations to better understand community nuances and to frame projects to meet local (historical) needs.

Another connecting line relates to the potential impacts of research results on stakeholder communities. During the workshop, we discussed how research can affect identity, land tenure, discrimination, and economic development. It is necessary to deeply understand the respective community to gauge how research could impact this community and its members. It is also an ethical problem when there is a gap between the research results and existing beliefs about heritage. In this case, it can be challenging to determine what should take precedence and whether the positive aspects balance out the negative impacts of the analysis. In some cases, multiple stakeholder groups with different beliefs, needs, and goals can make it impossible to reach a compromise that suits everyone. Occasionally, individuals or groups may espouse their own highly problematic viewpoints that cannot be incorporated into an ethical archaeology. To be fully inclusive, archaeologists may need to draw a line that causes specific individuals to withdraw their participation, necessitating a reflection on the circumstances acceptable for archaeologists and for community members.

Moreover, while hyperspecialization is, up to a point, a positive aspect in today's academia, community archaeology is not just a research avenue but is instead a social responsibility for all archaeologists. Researchers who strictly focus on their own specific interests and standards can hinder research and collaboration with community members. While it is inevitable that after a project ends, all (or most of) the resources and people involved are no longer present, alternatives to avoid a full stop on the project impact should be considered by the researchers and funding agencies, aiming at building capacity, so that local and national communities can deal with the materials and the narratives sustainably. Even though foreign researchers have invested millions in archaeological research in the Caribbean region, seldom have projects built capacity in the researched countries. Despite critics, the Nexus 1492 project, which ran between 2013 and 2019, has been one of the very few funding local Caribbean researchers to continue their education and obtain advanced degrees⁴. However, after a research project is finished, local researchers' activities are often limited by infrastructure and funding constraints. Hiring local researchers as project collaborators and staff members is a necessary first step towards real capacity building. While individual foreign researchers are not to be held accountable for these limitations in the Caribbean, research projects routinely pay overhead costs to the institutions where researchers work, and we suggest that a similar amount should be budgeted to the research agencies or ministries that support the research locally. A call for improved, long-term, structural funding from European and US research agencies could also improve this situation. An ethically oriented archaeology is also an archaeology that seeks social justice for the communities in the past and the present (Fricke & Hoerman, 2022; Herrera Malatesta & Sony Jean, 2023).

On a different note, we identified mental health as an important issue in Caribbean archaeology. The culture of overwork (admittedly worse in some countries than in others) does not encourage a good work/life balance and does not adequately consider people's caring responsibilities at home. Stressed people under pressure do not make the most empathic researchers. They also do not have time for a "slow archaeology" like that put forward by Flewelling et al. (2022). Scientists are expected to be tough and endure mistreatment – vulnerability is considered a weakness. This stereotype reflects the discipline's development in a patriarchal context where emotions (at least, the types of emotions that are typically feminized, such as empathy and sensitivity) are viewed as irrational. In reality, this is not the case – psychologists have known for a long time that humans find rational explanations to make sense of existing emotions (Kerr, 2021; Simon, 1967). Both communities and researchers need to consider emotions as important parts of our work.

Another issue arising from patriarchal structures is the problem of harassment in archaeological fieldwork, at conferences, and in other academic environments. Those who experience harassment (particularly from their senior academics, supervisors, bosses, etc.) are often too intimidated and afraid of the consequences to speak out⁵. There have been reports detailing situations where the management levels of academic institutions overlook student and staff complaints⁶. A lack of independent oversight leaves perpetrators free to continue their behaviour undisturbed. Developing codes of conduct for institutions and associations, and creating adequate entities to deal with complaints, are paramount for holding transgressors accountable⁷.

Indeed, prominent and influential personalities who dominate the discipline are a problem not exclusive to Caribbean archaeology or to academia, but in the archaeological system as a whole. This is because of their power over more junior archaeologists, their control of and access to funds

⁴ <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/nexus1492>.

⁵ An example of this is Routledge's withdrawal of the book edited by Pritchard and Edwards, "Sexual Misconduct in Academia: Informing an Ethics of Care in the University." For updates on this publication and the reasons for the withdrawal see: <https://newsroom.taylorandfrancisgroup.com/statement-on-sexual-misconduct-in-academia/>.

⁶ For examples, see this case at Harvard University: <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2020/5/29/harvard-anthropology-gender-issues> or this one at Leiden University: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/2024/05/advisory-report-on-unacceptable-behaviour-published>.

⁷ See e.g. Society of American Archaeology: <https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics>; and International Association for Caribbean Archaeology: <https://blogs.uoregon.edu/iaca/announcements>.

(including funds needed for publication in Open Access or high-ranking journals), or because they dominate and gatekeep local heritage narratives and access to heritage. These personalities can be found in academic and commercial settings, and in local heritage institutions in the Caribbean. Junior scholars, who often have more innovative approaches to archaeology that may depart from established trends, find it risky to contradict these individuals. Also, unethical behaviors by such personalities reflect badly on the other researchers in the discipline, as they are more visible compared to others who might be conducting more ethically oriented research. The reverse is also a problem, when these more influential individuals are more likely to receive approval for their work because they are comparatively well-known and well-connected. There is also the perennial problem of senior archaeologists taking credit for the work of their junior colleagues.

Another aspect of the academic and commercial system, particularly thorny in Caribbean archaeology, is publication, relating to the topic of data access discussed above. Academically, much focus is put on publishing in journals (in English) to cater to the requirements of funding agencies, leading to the neglect of the publication of solid fieldwork reports. This means that fundamental archaeological data are not disseminated and that information is kept from other researchers and from the public. This is unfortunate not only for data sovereignty reasons but also because, without adequate reporting of field data, there can be no accountability for archaeological interpretations. In a related problem, researchers seeking to incorporate local worldviews and approaches into their research are less likely to be able to publish in “high-impact” journals, meaning that truly engaged researchers may sometimes pay a career penalty for their efforts. Additionally, “high-impact” publications are often behind paywalls and are therefore inaccessible to anyone outside academia, including but not limited to community members, independent researchers, and commercial employees. Add to this the many hours of unpaid labor that researchers put into the peer review system and the fees that must be paid for Open Access content, and it is clear that the system of academic publishing is an ethically bankrupt one (Chalmers & Solomon, 2022; Collyer, 2018).

As illustrated above, the seventeen themes from the OST were sorted into six umbrella groups. The following discussion further organizes these six themes into two larger sections: Structural Scale and Individual Scale solutions.

Potential Solutions and Paths Forward – the Structural Scale

Many of the issues presented above have structural problems at their core. We refer here not only to the university, museum, or other heritage institution, but also to the larger networks of organizations providing funding and to governmental policy developers. As mentioned above, to develop truly ethical archaeological practice in the Caribbean, academic and commercial archaeological projects must have the time, space, and funds to build meaningful relationships with communities and to ensure their work has positive and sustainable impacts. This “slow” (Flewellen et al., 2022) and socially responsible archaeology (Herrera Malatesta & Sony Jean, 2023) needs to be built into the structure of our scientific funding bodies and national development strategies for it to have a significant effect. It is universities, funding bodies, heritage organizations, and governments that we should be targeting for this structural change, whilst continuing to work on these issues at the grassroots level⁸.

One system responsible for encouraging the development of ethical archaeology in the Caribbean is the local government. Local governments often do not dare to charge developers for archaeological research, out of fear of losing investments, but given that a lot of investors and developers are from either the US or Europe, they are used to paying for archaeology before development. Local governments thus need to ensure that their heritage mechanisms are robust

⁸ Examples of action taken at the local or community level, emphasizing a “bottom-up” approach, where self-organized entities mobilize to create social or political change, are abundant, especially regarding environmental and sustainability issues. This “grassroots activism” has provided successful outcomes on multiple issues, i.e. conservation, civil rights movements, gender-equality movements (see e.g., Burton 2004; Guerrón-Montero 2005; Mayka and Smith 2021; Morrow 1994).

enough to support academic and commercial archaeological projects. There should also be tangible consequences for breaking heritage laws – at the moment, even where heritage laws exist, they may not be adequately enforced. This would also pressure commercial companies and academics working in the Caribbean to take responsibility for the impacts of their research, and it would help to curtail the influence of powerful and influential personalities in local heritage institutions. Moreover, governments should ensure that heritage narratives are appropriately incorporated into the school curriculum.

Next, heritage organizations and institutions should ensure that harassment and other ethical violations at their events are appropriately investigated and that the necessary consequences are enacted to reduce the chances of the perpetrator(s) reoffending. A safe work environment also contributes to more effective and empathic researchers. Heritage institutions developing ethical guidelines should be prepared to update them every few years, include community members in their development and revision, and ensure that they cover not only classical archaeological research (i.e., fieldwork) but also other types of heritage research, such as oral history and museum studies.

Funding bodies should require project proposals to have a robust plan for both excavation and analysis, but also for community consultation, engagement, and the curation and archiving of archaeological materials and digital data. Open Access data requirements should not be applied in a blanket fashion, but instead should leave space for researchers to gauge the wishes of the stakeholder communities by providing alternatives (e.g., semi-open data - data accessible on request) to prevent harmful consequences for the communities. International funders should also introduce external panels that evaluate completed projects and use these evaluations to determine the future allocation of funds to researchers (for example, project leaders who create toxic work environments should not be eligible for further funding without considerable measures taken to ensure that mistakes are not repeated). Additionally, funding agencies and universities should provide structures to deal with the protection of whistleblowers and complainants. Funders should allow (and indeed encourage) parts of the budget to be allocated for investment in local heritage institutions, e.g. buying equipment and materials that will be donated at the end of the project, and supporting any relevant training. Finally, funders also need to allow for budget to be allocated to invest in Caribbean students who want to pursue an education in relevant fields and to acquire vocational heritage skills. These could be combined, for example, with paid research assistant roles in large projects.

Lastly, we propose that universities wishing to have a positive impact in the Caribbean region revisit their publication requirements for career advancement. The constant drive towards more publications, preferably in “high-impact”, English-language journals that are not Open Access, should be put aside in favor of fewer, more meaningful, Open Access, community-embedded, publications that may appear in languages other than English. While the primary users of research output are other researchers, the primary users of the stories that we create are the communities living in the regions we study. Therefore, research needs to be available to everyone who will use it. This is following global calls (Haelewaters et al., 2021) to have a gentler impact on our planet – growth is not infinitely sustainable in academia, as it is not in any other field (Raworth, 2018). Instead, we should opt for sustainable approaches that build (knowledge, relationships, networks, etc.) rather than extract, and stop treating archaeological materials and people as resources to be exploited. This would have the added benefit of forming researchers who are under less pressure to produce, can maintain a healthy work/life balance, and are able to give the appropriate empathic energy and concern to the communities in which they work and to the colleagues with whom they work. It would also help to create a balance between senior scholars with “high-impact” publications and junior scholars who may be more invested in community engagement. Additionally, there should be foreign language requirements for archaeologists wishing to work abroad, to be able to communicate with local communities and colleagues, but also to publish in languages besides English.

Finally, a degree or certificate in Caribbean archaeology needs to be created for people in the Caribbean who want to study archaeology but who have restricted financial possibilities.

Universities must invest in this as a way to nurture local archaeology. Such a degree can be remotely accessible and supported by various universities inside and outside the region. Collaborations between universities could spread the responsibility so that cost difficulties are mediated (for example, charging a fee for students from outside the Caribbean region to attend the same course). The University of the West Indies has already developed an MA course in Reparatory Justice in partnership with the University of Glasgow that provides a blueprint for what future such partnerships might look like (University of Glasgow, 2025). Currently, the attendees of the many successful youth archaeology projects in the Caribbean are often unable to enter a career in archaeology due to the lack of accessible and affordable university courses.

Potential Solutions and Paths Forward – the Individual Scale

Although individuals always need a support network and may be unable to make headway alone (hence the importance of the network we are building⁹), there are actions that individuals can independently take to move towards a more ethical Caribbean archaeology.

First, there are the fundamental issues of whether and how to do archaeological research at all. We, as archaeologists, should reflect on whether our research is desirable or even necessary in a given context. Next, archaeologists working in the Caribbean should consider whether they can answer their research questions using already excavated materials, rather than adding to the curatorial challenges faced by local institutions and unnecessarily disturbing the archaeological record - although it is also important to note here that legacy data has its own set of ethical considerations that need to be explicitly taken into account. This might also encourage focusing on sites genuinely threatened by essential building development or by environmental factors.

Second, archaeologists should ensure that their events and projects are safe spaces for all participants involved. Those developing projects or events in Caribbean archaeology can consider data ethics training (such as GDPR awareness for those areas falling under EU law), as well as anti-harassment or active bystander training, as an essential part of the necessary education for their event participants or project team. This gives those working in the field the necessary knowledge on how to tackle problems such as data sovereignty and harassment.

Third, when developing archaeological projects in the Caribbean, the sustainability of the project's impact on the region must be thoroughly considered. There should be a long-term commitment to local communities (which can be somewhat intangible, for example taking place online) and concrete investments in heritage infrastructure, such as material and professional support for curating institutions. Where curation is not possible or not desirable, reburial should be considered as a valid alternative.

Fourth, considering consultation and engagement with stakeholder communities from the conception of an archaeological study is paramount for appropriately allotting resources and time, including offering appropriate compensation and wages to collaborators and participants. True community consultation and engagement establishes meaningful relationships by involving communities in the development of the research questions to ensure beneficial outcomes. It is important to remember that giving to the community should not be a transaction or a compulsory step in the research to check the "ethically correct" box, but is instead a social responsibility. Researchers must take into account the cultural context of the communities they work with and adopt practices that go beyond standard university guidelines. To communicate research in an accessible way, Open Access publications can be a first step, but adapting the language to the respective audience can ensure communities benefit from the results. Avenues to think of are radio, social media, and news outlets – ideally communicated in the local language(s). Establishing lasting, meaningful collaborations and relationships with local researchers can ensure the effectiveness of community consultation and engagement strategies. Unfortunately, sustainability and community aspects of projects are sometimes considered less competitive by funding bodies, so there may need to be some creativity on the part of the applicant. Distributing funds flexibly can

⁹ The Coalition for Caribbean Archaeological Heritage (see www.cocah.net).

help to increase the scientific appeal of funding proposals, without compromising community collaboration, until funding bodies adjust their assessment criteria.

Finally, we should consider the working environment and working practices of archaeologists in academic and commercial spaces. The systemic pressure to produce has led to a culture of overworking that falls most heavily on early-career researchers. To encourage a healthy and safe working environment, senior archaeologists can help shift the culture by refusing to work beyond their contracted hours and by supporting junior researchers in maintaining their work/life balance. In archaeology in general, but most evidently in places with a colonial history, imbalances persist in the discipline between European and local institutions, and between more powerful (usually senior) researchers and early career scholars. To contribute to a more equitable future, archaeologists should consider employing intentional referencing strategies that foreground, for example, Caribbean scholars, early-career scholars, women scholars, LGBTQI+ scholars, scholars from ethnic minorities, and scholars from disadvantaged backgrounds, and prioritizing publications in languages besides English, where appropriate.

Outputs for the Future

While full of optimism, we realize that these issues are hard to address and that the solutions are complex to implement. However, we agree with Walsh and Mignolo (2018) when stating that decoloniality is a standpoint, a project, a practice, and a praxis. This is the commitment we want to convey in this position paper. We must start taking concrete actions to move forward to an ethically oriented archaeology and from there to a decolonial practice. Therefore, to take advantage of the momentum we were creating with the edited volume and the 2023 workshop, we decided to organize a second event in 2024 and expand the participant list to other colleagues not involved in the edited volume or in the first workshop. Based on the results of the first workshop, the second workshop had three main aims. First, to work towards the creation of a network of academics and non-academics who prioritize an ethically-oriented archaeology in the Caribbean. Second, to plan and create a virtual academic program that will allow Caribbean students to study archaeology and obtain a certificate. Third, to develop a digital means to disseminate archaeological information and attract young people to the discipline (for example, a social media presence). During the second workshop, we made concrete steps towards all three of these objectives, and the Coalition for Caribbean Archaeological Heritage (CoCAH) was established. This non-hierarchical and ethically-oriented organization will be a working group that supports professionals and members of the public interested in working towards the ethical development of the discipline. Our website is already active, and we encourage the reader to get in touch if you are interested in joining this collaborative network and making these concrete suggestions a reality in the Caribbean.

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The authors declare that they comply with the PCI rule of having no financial conflicts of interest in relation to the content of the article.

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