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A Social Inquiry on Theory in American Archaeology: Through the Lens on a Non-American Cultural Anthropologist

Mayo Buenafe

Abstract: The following article is the author's treatise on the imperative for explicit theoretical use in North American archaeological approaches and research by critically assessing the views of Michelle Hegmon's (2003:213-243) "Setting Theoretical Egos Aside: Issues and Theory in North American Archaeology" and Matthew Johnson's (2010:216-235) conclusions on the future of theory seen in Archaeological Theory: An Introduction, 2nd ed. This commentary discusses theory development in North American Archaeology as a discipline and advocates for the explicit use of theory in North American Archaeological research. A critical analysis of American archaeology is discussed through an assessment of common themes, the dynamics of key concepts, and the "fear" of post-modernism in North American archaeology theory and research. Examples of methodology and theory use in Philippines Archaeology is discussed in relation to North American Archaeology in terms of agency, materiality, and the dynamic nature of these key concepts when data is evaluated (e.g. materiality, evolution, and social organization). This study is a social inquiry on the current trend of North American archaeology being approach-explicit yet theory-implicit, and offers recommendations for the discipline to clearly define theoretical approaches as well as methodological frameworks to truly develop comprehensive and forthright research.

Introduction

The writer is speaking to you as a Filipino Anthropologist who was brought up in a predominantly Post-Modern and Marxist environment at her undergraduate university. This is due to the fact that the Philippines had been colonized by the Spanish for over 300 years (1521-1898), and had undergone American occupation for approximately 50 years (1898-1946); the latter country instilling the

foundation of academic institutions in Philippines (Evangelista 1969:98). The “father” of Philippine Anthropology, Henry Otley Beyer, was an American trained geologist who arrived in the Philippines in 1905 and took an interest in anthropological work (Dizon 1994:197). In 1898 he conducted archaeological explorations from burial caves prior to American occupation. In 1914 he founded and headed the department of anthropology in the University of the Philippines where he pioneered research regarding racial and cultural history of the country (Evangelista 1969:98-99). But from 1951-1983 more theoretical and methodological changes in Philippines archaeology was conducted, mainly pioneered by more Filipino archaeologists. This was due to the National Museum of the Philippines “slowly but surely taking control, direction and coordination of archaeological research in the country” (Ronquillo 1985:74).

With our country’s history in colonial assimilation and acculturation, and most early anthropological (and archaeological) research and discourse was established by non-Filipino scholars, my alma mater imbued in its pupils the need to deconstruct the dominant Western paradigms and re-define our identity in this discipline. We openly discussed how the history of anthropology (British Social Anthropology and American Cultural Anthropology) had its roots in studying the “noble savage” and “exotic” cultures of the “barbarians” or native/aboriginal communities they encountered, in order to aid the countries they were representing successfully colonize the “third world.” With an upbringing in this kind of academic institution which fostered criticism of theoretical paradigms and approaches, Filipino scholars were stimulated to be critical of those from Western world views in order to assess which of these theories are appropriate in the study of social phenomena in our country. Furthermore, my alma mater is located in a province where about one-third of the indigenous population of the Philippines resides. Therefore, incorporating the “native voice” and/or worldviews in culturally-appropriate studies is highly encouraged and openly advocated by most scholars in theory, concept, and application.

With that background, I was blessed with the opportunity to study at a US university for a Master’s degree in Anthropology; bringing this malleable mindset of paradigms, approaches, and worldviews, as well as an open mind to learn about new ways to apply other forms of theory by American anthropologists (archaeologists included). Throughout the duration of a course on the history and theory of archaeology, I observed how most US students did not openly proclaim theoretical perspectives that they applied to their research, as I

had been “brought up” to do. This was somewhat a minor culture shock, but also had to be framed within the context of the course. We were all learning about the history and use of theory in a class that mixed undergraduate and graduate students. Some may have had years of experience working in the field and producing research, some may be new to the field or just learning about theory use for the first time. Meanwhile, I also observed how many of my professors in the anthropology department held an evolutionary, behavioral, and/or gender based approach in class discussions. This was also another minor culture shock to encounter because I had been brought up with the belief that though these approaches have their merits, some of it is founded in a positivist paradigm - one that held its conceptual origins and application by labelling my ancestors as savages and barbarians. My professors are definitely reputable and experienced scholars, and their theoretical use is definitely framed within the context of each research they pursue. There was definitely a growing need for me to learn how to strip my own biases and expectations in order for learning and understanding to abound; and a course on the history and theory of North American Archaeology became one way to realize that.

Throughout the duration of undertaking Anthropology courses in US academia, I soon realized that though people held different views on how to interpret the past and its social phenomena (i.e. archaeology), it was our responsibility as anthropologists (and scholars) to critically study as many viewpoints as possible and acquiesce that there are multiple ways to attempt to understand past and present social phenomena. Theory becomes the tools or lens we take into the field of Anthropological social inquiry (literally and figuratively) to help us describe social phenomena. That is why, in this research, I would like to critically assess the nature of North American Archaeology by making this social inquiry - why is American archaeology approach-explicit and theory-implicit? Many of my archaeology classmates have experience in contractual work outside the academe; and the research they do does not necessarily require an explicit theory use in the conceptualization, implementation, and reporting of their work. While in the classroom, depending on your professor, explicit theory knowledge and use is expected of you when formulating research questions and projects. But in this research, I will address this social inquiry by assessing the themes of theoretical use in North American Archaeological research through major themes outlined by Hegmon’s (2003:213-243) ‘Setting Theoretical Egos Aside: Issues and Theory in North American Archaeology’ and Johnson’s (2010:216-235) Chapter 13 ‘Conclusion: The Future of Theory.’ My discussion is framed in the assessments of Hegmon’s article vis-à-vis Johnson’s views while

incorporating some examples on how Filipino Archaeologists utilize theory and how it is applied explicitly in their research. This commentary offers some critiques and recommendations in American archaeology's approach and application by describing some common themes in American archaeology based on those cited by the two authors; such as the dynamics of key concepts due to ontological applications with epistemological objectives, and the mélange of modernism due to the "fear" of post-modernism. This discussion will be restated in the conclusion of how, for a non-American anthropologist, American archaeology is approach explicit and theory implicit; and that this treatise recommends the explicit use of both.

Common Themes in American Archaeology: Perspectives and Application → Theory and Data

Common themes such as agency, materiality and theorizing in the field have been wrought with debates on which approach and perspective to utilize, but at the same time it has also developed avenues to articulate the similarities of shared concerns in archaeological theory and use (Johnson 2010:223). In Alfredo E. Evangelista's "The Philippines: Archaeology in the Philippines to 1950" (1969:97-104), the evolution of Archaeology in the Philippines at the end of the first half of the 20th century is divided into eras of political administration - Spanish Period (1521-1898), the American Period (1898-1946), and the Philippine Republic (1946-1950). The researcher mentions Evangelista's work to state that studying agency and materiality in the Philippines requires directly linking the historical and political context during that period to theory and methodology. "The current theories widely quoted in explaining the racial and cultural history of the Philippines are primarily those of Beyer" (Evangelista 1969:103). Most research done in this era (Spanish Occupation-1950) is highly ethnographic, and established by the works of non-Filipinos (i.e. Henry Otley Beyer). Therefore, the issue of agency or the location of the individual (in this case, the Filipino) in the archaeological record emphasizes that the past was not constructed by culture systems (i.e. processual archaeology) but by individuals – those who made them in the historical past, and by those (non-Filipino) researchers interpreting them as such.

Prior to the 1980s, most anthropological work in the Philippines was mainly on culture history, cultural chronology, and typology of prehistoric material cultures – a research trend in the US at that time and brought to the Philippines by American researchers such as Beyer. The methodology and theory that was utilized involved

tracing the unilineal development stages of cultural evolutionary theory or the inductive approach. This meant that artifacts were identified, collected, and sorted to fit into a chronological model (Dizon 1994:199). A scholar such as Karl L. Hutterer from the University of Michigan trained a number of students in the Philippines in the early 1980s whose research contribution to Philippine Archaeology is dubbed as 'The Michigan School.' This group of Filipino and non-Filipino scholars utilized a "New" Archaeology framework in the Philippines which studied the problem of complexity and chiefdom through deductive methods (i.e. mathematical and/or statistical models to interpret archaeological evidence) (Dizon 1994:202). The trend now in the Archaeology Division of the National Museum of the Philippines is to combine both inductive and deductive approaches to achieve objectives and address theoretical issues of Southeast Asian prehistory and archaeology (Dizon 1994:215).

Borrowing principles from post-modernist scholars such as Giddens, Foucault, and Bordieu, "agency" became the perpetuator of action to express and be manifested in material objects and sites. The agency has a recursive relationship to structure that is either enabling or prohibiting the actions of the agency. But this ideology has been criticized in its "overemphasis" of the individual as the agent and lacking in the "relational aspects of personhood" (Hegmon 2003:219) that also affects what a person does or does not do. Hegmon cites that other archaeologists have suggested that *practice* is different from agency and that the former is what should be studied by archaeologists since a "focus on practice...leads to a more dynamic and humanized picture of people's activities and of the relations among individuals, institutions, and structure" (Hegmon 2003:220). Explicit discussion on agency in North American Archaeology emphasizes the actions of leaders, leadership and role change, corporate/network models, etc. and implicitly is the ideology of agency in behavioral archaeology, gender, practice theory, agent-based modeling, etc. (Hegmon 2003:221).

Johnson also notes that agency is interconnected within Darwinian conceptions of individuals as organisms, co-evolutionary explanations between individual variation and cultural innovation, and how phenomenology plays into the discussion of human subjectivity (Johnson 2010:224). In the Philippines, Ronquillo discusses Philippine Terrestrial Archaeology from 1998-2001 (2003:98118) whose research lead to focused inquiries on cultural evolution. The fieldwork conducted in 1990 for the Batanes Archaeological Project excavated sites with "the Island Southeast Asian Neolithic in mind" (Ronquillo 2003:101) as the agency. This fieldwork included methodologies in archeology, linguistics, and ethnography to trace the Austronesian

expansion in order to reference the data/materials gathered. The reconstruction of archaeological phases and specification of factors that promote hunter gatherer/farmer relationships was a challenge that needed to be faced, because there was a need to incorporate agency (i.e. Southeast Asian Neolithic) and process (migrations through cultural diffusion of materials found). Though the impact of agency seems obvious, it has been critiqued in the archaeological record which draws data regarding the human past from phases, assemblages and cultures, aggregating and assimilating them into broader categories and processes; and not from the agent's actions that inevitably created, used, and disposed these archaeological materials (Johnson 2010:224).

This critique of agency brings us to the theme of materiality in American archaeology being an active, important, and complex aspect of culture (Johnson 2010:225). "Objects mediate social relationships, or 'materializes' them" (Johnson 2010:225) and is not just a passive reflection of the culture system. This view of materiality is contentious of Culture-History and New Archaeology's concept of materials (from the archaeological record) being aspects of culture or the culture system as representations, reflections or expressions and sources of data; but never the foci of interpretation (Johnson 2010:225). The interplay of agency and materiality is discussed in the 1992 Philippine excavations of the Kandingan Cave in Barangay Amoslog by describing the cultural relationships of shell midden, animal bone fragments, and the marine and brackish-estuarine environment to determine the cultural activities of the cave dwellers (Dizon 1994:206). Materiality has direct links with behavioral archaeology (i.e. functional/technological trends in material culture and its relationship with human behavior), selectionist archaeology (i.e. phenotypical characteristics or traits in material culture account for selection, persistence and transmission of material), and the prestige goods model assessments playing roles in social and political strategies (Hegmon 2003:223-224).

The last common thread in American archaeology is how theorizing is done in the field, and is described by Johnson as including the reflexive nature of fieldwork and artifact analyses (Johnson 2010:226). Hegmon (2003:214-218) describes how North American archaeologists mostly utilize three self-identified perspectives which follow the processual approach in archaeology: evolutionary ecology, behavioral archaeology, and Darwinian or selectionist archaeology. Those who follow these perspectives are often explicit to the particular perspective they are referring to, and there are some American universities that "specialize" in one of these perspectives to attract archaeologists/scholars who utilize the same perspectives in their approach to research. Hegmon describes an array of examples of how

these approaches are applied (Hegmon 2003:215). For example, evolutionary ecology is the perspective used by most human behavioral ecologists who study how humans cope with the environment; usually by those studying hunter-gatherers or small-scale horticulturalists. They also discuss social issues of sharing, status, and evolutionary fitness. Behavioral archaeology is studied by those attempting to explain behavior through meaning, rituals, complex societies, technological strategies, and accumulations research (Hegmon 2003:215-216). Lastly, Darwinian or selectionist archaeologists, use this approach almost exclusively/primarily by focusing on the “replicative success” of phenotype components or traits (i.e. if traits are functionally advantageous and increase reproductive success, it is subject to positive selection) (Hegmon 2003:216).

Hegmon describes how nowadays, not many American archaeologists associate themselves with one of these perspectives, but are actually explicitly combining or are open to both processual and post-processual/New Archaeology approaches (2003:216-217). She uses the term *processual-plus* to describe the array of approaches and perspectives that may combine and/or a manifestation of other perspectives’ approaches with a processual foundation; but do not necessarily adhere to the three self-identified perspectives exclusively. My commentary to this term she offers is based on a semantic dilemma and a theoretical cop-out. First of all, the term *processual-plus* may prove to be misleading because of the word processual, which in itself is a specific archaeological approach. Placing a “plus” at the end of this term may connote that all of those who do not exclusively and specifically associate themselves to behavioral ecology, evolutionary, or selectionist archaeology are all lumped into a processual form of archaeology with a “plus” or added feature of dabbling in other approaches. Simply put, the processual plus term semantically connotes that processual archaeology is used exclusively to be the foundation of *all* American archaeologists who also apply other perspectives in their approach. Insinuating this would be a theoretical cop-out because it is an over-simplification of American archaeology, and is biased towards only processual archaeology’s contribution.

Many have critiqued Hegmon’s analyses (Johnson 2010:223), but Johnson notes that Hegmon’s treatise to North American archaeology is important in its instigating constructive debates regarding theory use in 21st century North American archaeological research (Johnson 2010:223-224). Personally, this researcher tends to agree more with Johnson’s description of key developments in the last decade of American archaeology being expressed in theoretical questioning and exploration of field practice. Johnson’s text outlines

the debates regarding perspectives and approaches used in analyses and interpretation among archaeologists, which are not at all negative for the discipline. These debates may indeed add to constructively developing the archaeological discourse to one that is more relevant to current worldviews of social reality; as long as they do not remain just personal attacks on a scholar's credibility, of course. Johnson states that "a discipline can be defined not through its common ground but through its disagreements" (2010:223). The discipline has to debate and criticize the perspectives and approaches of one another, and doing this does not insinuate an immoral development of academic discourse. It is simply the dynamic nature of science, knowledge, and social inquiry.

A classic example of how this reflexive approach to theory in the field is seen in Ian Hodder's work at the Neolithic site at Çatalhöyük, Turkey which Johnson cites (2010:227). The 'reflexive excavation methodology' included the keeping of site diaries, discussing and questioning appropriate strategies, attempting to open and be inclusive to different interests at the site, and site archives were developed through relational databases and web-based material for open and accessible data (Johnson 2010:227). It was Hodder who wanted to move away from constant debating of analyzing and interpreting subject and object (Johnson 2010:227), but this may prove to be easier said than done. One explanation for this struggle to convene conflicting interests of archaeologists to study a particular subject or object can be seen in the next section.

Dynamic key concepts: epistemological objectives, ontological applications

This researcher's perception on American archaeologists' views on materiality is that though the past is and can be studied through an epistemological objective (i.e. the study of the source of knowledge), the reconstruction of the past through material remains is an ontological interpretation (i.e. the study of being or becoming of something). Unlike other "hard science" disciplines like physics, biology, or chemistry, in the social sciences there is no exclusive source of reference knowledge to draw empirical evidence from. This fact hits home in trying to identify the corpus of archaeological knowledge. My archaeology professor in the US, Dr. LuAnn Wandsnider, has tried to compensate this notion with the BORKs or body of reference knowledge (1997:10) to draw from in aiding the interpretation of sites and artifacts. Finding the source of knowledge and its validity in describing the past is an epistemological objective in American

archaeology, but its application in fieldwork approaches and analyses tends to try to prescribe what the past was – an ontological application. Johnson does not agree that archaeology should be headed this way and states that “theory should be an attempt to classify and comprehend the difficulties and contradictions on working within a particular context” (Johnson 2010:231). I agree that theory should be used in the context of the social phenomenon that is being analyzed, and not simply drawn out of a hat or implicitly laden in explicitly identified approaches. Nevertheless, discernment and knowledgeable defense of theory-use within particular contexts is a skill that should constantly be honed by any social or natural scientist.

Particular concepts in American archaeology have changed in terms of its definition and application as an *implicit* way for archaeologists to utilize theory within the context of the explicit approaches they are employing. Hegmon describes that the word *evolution* has itself evolved in the context of moving away from descriptions of causal mechanisms or sequences that equate these as cultural evolution and culture change (2003:225). Hegmon discusses how the concept of evolution has led to a more “sophisticated” understanding of the term in the sense that it is a theoretical concept which does not always mean that change is unilineal nor unidirectional. Application of the dynamic use of evolution is seen in describing complexity, concepts of cycling, and not automatically considering that all aspects of culture change are “evolutionary.”

The phrase *social organization* is also another term that is no longer viewed as a static state of a social organization in a particular time and place, but a deeper analysis of dynamic aspects of social relations. Kinship, a major focus in the study of social organization, is no longer viewed as a classification of social organization but as an organizational strategy; similar to other political organizations, corporations, and networks (Hegmon 2003:226). Ronquillo (1985:80) notes that from 1974-1976, ethnoarchaeological studies in the Philippines shaped the focus on relationships between social organization (non-material culture) and configurations in material culture. Specifically, the research conducted by Bion Griffin and his wife Agnes Estioko-Griffin on the Agta Negritos of Northern Luzon helped understand the lives of hunters in tropical environments (Griffin and Estioko-Griffin 1978:34-43). Philippines underwater archaeological sites of shipwrecks re-shape what previous ethnohistorical accounts have suggested about maritime culture and trade in the protohistory of the Philippines. The trading of foreign luxury goods (i.e. ceramics) in of the 15th and 16th century connote the political complexity of that period since ethnohistorical and

archaeological data suggest that “Philippine chiefs competed and attempted to procure new sources of status-enhancing wealth” (Dizon 2003:19) which resulted in an increase of inter-polity competition, expansionism, and structural complexity in the coastal trading polities of Jolo, Manila, Cebu, and Cotabato (Dizon 2003:19-20).

The dynamics of power and the concept of heterarchy are new ways in which social organization has been applied in American archeology. Hegmon (2003:226-230) also describes the changing uses of defining other terminologies such as types shifting to dimensions; particularistic explanations based on migration and diffusion toward a focus on the movement of people and spread of traits; and cultures as not just adaptive systems but also as a strategy. Also, rituals are no longer just integrating social relationships but the context and content of the ritual can also be a viable form of simultaneous competition and cooperation. The term model is used now to describe a particular case and modeling to refer to dynamic relations (e.g. agent-based modeling, complexity theory). Lastly, the concept of environment is no longer utilized as a mere backdrop of where humans lived, but being an agent itself with natural and cultural components.

The Philippine archaeological research methodology trend in the 1970s can be described in the work of Fox and Peralta regarding the Cabalwanian industry (Paleolithic artifacts from Cagayan Valley) which mainly takes from the Culture-History research period of the US. They blatantly state that their approach is mainly concerned with a description of the actual assemblages (i.e. tool types) in relation to its function, and independent from “*speculations about its use*” (emphasis added, Fox and Peralta 1974:110; Mijares 1999:12-13). Descriptive analysis of morphology is a methodological trait of the Culture-History research period in American archaeology, which was also utilized by Philippine archaeologists in the 1970s. Mijares, a Philippine archaeologist, states that the struggle between description and prescription of analyzing archaeological remains is highly subjected to the orientation of the school of thought dominant during that generation of scholars (Mijares 1999:20). He suggests that in the study of lithic materials, new methodologies or approaches are now being utilized because of the availability of new forms of technology. For example, he notes that microscopic examination reveals distinctive polishes, striation, and damage scars which show diagnostic micro-wear patterns and can lead to speculations on how the materials were used. This can be implemented in low-power analysis (the examination of edge damage caused by mechanical stress) and high-power analysis (examine alterations or micro polishes which develop through use as a result of working activities) which is currently being done in

experimental archaeology (Mijares 1999:20). Also, combined methodologies from other disciplines during archaeological surveying like interviews and utilizing a GPS system/tracker is also being done in Philippine archaeological research. Specifically, the excavations conducted by Grace Barretto-Tesoro, Fredeliza Campos and Anna Pineda on pre-hispanic burials in southeastern Batangas involved showing an “archaeological kit” to the people interviewed. This kit included artifacts such as porcelain fragments and potsherds and shown to ask informants if they had recalled seeing items like these in the area and the findings of earlier excavations. With the GPS system, this team took note of the site name, site accession number, site type, exact location of site (sitio, barangay, municipality), coordinates, elevation, property owners, informants, surface finds, description of the area, topography, recorders, and other remarks (Barretto-Tesoro, et al 2009:26). These new methods are brought about by the accessibility to new forms of technology for analyses which may be taken from other disciplines (i.e. geology, etc.), thereby dynamically re-interpreting “old interpretations” and methodologies with new epistemological and ontological implications for theory use in archaeology.

All in all, the changing definition and application of “basic” terminology used in archaeology (and in the social sciences in general) is shifting to being applied more selectively to fit within the context of the specific time and place that is being studied. The dynamic nature of concepts is an integral aspect of theoretical development, because culture itself is dynamic – even if you are studying the past. Archaeologists have epistemological objectives in describing and interpreting the past, but since there is no defined and exclusive corpus of archaeological knowledge, this attempt is often applied with an ontological lens (Hegmon 2003:230). This is not necessarily a good or bad thing, but to resolve this would be to focus on an attempt at description and *not* a prescription of data (Johnson 2010:231).

Mélange of Modernism, “Fear” of Post-Modernism

I have come to the realization that the more recent publications by American archaeologists I read, the more it became subtly apparent that they did not want to explicitly proclaim the theoretical framework they utilized in order to justify their discussions. As mentioned in the beginning of this commentary, my academic upbringing in the Philippines trained social scientists to come up with research proposals that *must contain both a conceptual and theoretical framework*. These were displayed as two separate flowcharts or diagrams/figures that demonstrate the logistics of your discussion. The

conceptual framework would showcase the variables in your research and how it would be operationalized. The theoretical framework are the concepts and approaches of *other theories* that you will utilize in your discussion of the data; acting as a structure or outline of your discussion being justified by applicable theories (yes, it was encouraged that we utilize and “combine” more than one theory). Not many institutions require this from students when they write their thesis proposals (most only require a conceptual framework), and this may be the reason I have an automatic mind-set that all research should *explicitly* showcase their conceptual and theoretical framework. I did not see this in many American archaeologist publications. This may be due to an association that when a researcher explicitly proclaims theory in a research, this would equate to prescribing data, as opposed to describing it - which Johnson warns that archaeologists must not do (Johnson 2010:231).

I beg to differ. The use of explicit theories in research does *not* prescribe data, but is an *attempt* to describe data. Grace Baretto-Tesoro's study (2003) on prestige value of burial goods in the Philippines utilizes Post-Modernism in her attempt to measure prestige value in burial goods. She admits that “value assigned to burial goods is most of the time from the value system of the researcher [even if] the value systems of past cultures were most likely different from that of the researcher” (Baretto-Tesoro 2003:299). With that admittance of a researcher's bias in interpretation and analyses, she proceeds with her study by proposing to showcase the different systems of interpretation - ethnographic analogy and an archaeological perspective. She utilizes *cultural meaning* as a factor in trying to measure the prestige value in burial goods, even if she admits that it may be subjective. She defends her use of this factor by stating that the values attached to cultural materials are dependent on the cultures from which it derived and the prestige it may or may not have symbolized (i.e. ethnographic analogy). But in terms of an archaeological perspective, she looks at the cultural meaning of a prestige good in terms of its utilitarian and non-utilitarian function (Baretto-Tesoro 2003:301-302). From this example we can see that theories provide us with a lens in which to view social phenomena, and many of us are in possession of different types of lens when we go to the field and when we start writing about our research. I believe that the analogy of different theories being different types of tools in your tool box as a more appropriate metaphor when relaying the importance of being theory *and* approach explicit. One theory may act as a screw driver and another theory may be a monkey wrench, while another may seem like a sledge hammer. When you get to the field and try to describe the social reality and encounter the conflicts/problem

statement of your research, you will use specific tools for specific scenarios – a screw driver when a screw needs to be loosened or fastened, a monkey wrench when a *bolt* needs to be loosened or fastened, and a sledge hammer when you need to demolish a wall. Each theory has a specific specialization or focus when attempting to describe a social phenomenon. So what is important for any scholar to hone as a skill is how well they can justify their description of social phenomena by using specific tools/theories in their approach and analyses/discussion.

Many American archaeologists would consider these comments as a post-modern view of theory, and I would not try to negate them. The descriptions provided are a representation of my reality or narrative on theory-use in a local scale (i.e. how I used theory in my undergraduate institution). This viewpoint deconstructs the dominant paradigm of American archaeology upholding more Modernist views (according to Hegmon 2003:232), but remains open to utilizing more than one interpretation of “reality.” Hegmon states that in the case of North American archaeology, “not postmodern” equates to modern (Hegmon 2003:232). Modernism is “based on the belief that the world is knowable through reason and that reason advances knowledge, knowledge enables science, and science serves the liberatory aims of society” (Hegmon 2003:231). This modernist view is unclaimed explicitly by most American archaeologists even if it is quite explicit in structural, critical, gender, and most processual and post-processual approaches. This researcher is not merely trying to convince readers to uphold post-modern thought and inquiry, but rather to drive my assessment home - that American archaeology is avoiding the explicit use of theory in their research. This may be due to fear of “theory wars” (Johnson 2010:218) or the struggle of thought and activity in the mind of every archaeologist (Johnson 2010:228).

Hegmon states that there is relatively little mention of general theories (e.g. modernist, post-modern, structural-functionalist, Marxist, etc.) by most American archaeologists, even if archaeological approaches draw from an array of general theories (as explained in Hegmon’s processual-plus and the applications of it from the three self-identified perspectives) (Hegmon 2003:231). So why is theory implicit and approaches explicit in American archaeology? I propose that this is due to a gut attachment to empiricism with an epistemological objective (i.e. to understand the nature and source of knowledge) that is applied in ontological discussion (i.e. studying the becoming or being). But if these are framed with an explicit mentioning of theory use, this would somehow instigate “theory wars” and/or struggle over thought and activity (Johnson 2010:228).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The dynamic nature of theoretical disunity is not cause for misunderstanding because it serves as a catalyst for critically developing new ways to study social phenomena – and is that not what scientific disciplines are supposed to do (critically develop new ways to study social phenomena, that is)? Johnson states that “data and theory have to be understood as part of a larger whole in which the nature of one cannot be understood without the other” (Johnson 2010:217). He goes as far as to say “all archaeologists are theorists, whether we like it or not” (2010:220), and I agree with him entirely. Throughout this commentary, my goal has not been to point out the flaws in theory use by American archaeologists, but to reference American archaeologists (i.e. Hegmon and Johnson) to promote the explicit use of theory in research and in the field. Without theory, we would be clueless in how to systematically and critically study social phenomena. Social phenomenon is a loaded word. It can mean something very specific or something so general when studying humans through time and space; leaving most in an over-whelmed state if they did not have theories to equip them with tools to analyze each aspect of a problem statement and offer an attempted description, not prescription, of the phenomenon. Johnson states that archaeologists have the choice in asserting any theoretical paradigm, but they must be prepared to be interrogated about the basis of their position and be able to provide detailed knowledge of the material (Johnson 2010:232). I, as a commentator, scholar, researcher, and anthropologist urge American archaeologists to do the same. The examples of theory use in Philippines Archaeology described throughout this paper (and surely other parts of the world) prove that it can be done honestly and knowledgeably. Theoretical discussions enable the development of any field of social inquiry; that is why I suggest that American archaeologies be explicit in their use of *both* theory and approach for the sake of their discipline, country, and themselves. It would make for more critically-informed and courageous scholars, as well as comprehensive and forthright research.

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