

Envisioning Decolonial Futures

through archaeology



Keynote: Yannis Hamilakis

A Decolonial Archaeology of Refusal, Care, and Repair

The discussion on decolonization is now everywhere, and yet we should not lose sight of the fact that this quest comes out of decades-long debates and clashes which were not without cost for the people involved. Furthermore, we owe it to the broader social movements, from the struggles of indigenous peoples worldwide to the Black Lives Matter and their predecessors, that this conversation has now become mainstream. While this provides grounds of hope, there is a danger that this move (or perhaps this movement) can be seen as a trendy fad, a window dressing while carrying on business as usual. Cooption by the establishment is one possible danger; the other is trivialization, fatigue, and swift abandonment in favour of the next, more recent and more appealing concept. How can we avoid such dangers? The principle that decolonization is not a metaphor, that it should involve substantive material and structural changes and transformations, must be our starting point. But this is not enough. Based on the conviction that decoloniality should be grounded on social justice, I will discuss and propose three concepts which may prove useful in our efforts to build a decolonial archaeology: refusal, care, and repair. All three have been in circulation for some time now in various disciplines from anthropology to design, but the engagement of archaeologists with them has been rather limited. I will sketch out the contours of these concepts and their relevance to a decolonial archaeology, and I will discuss two on-going projects of mine which will illustrate some of my points: the first is the archaeological ethnography of contemporary migration on the island of Lesbos; and the second is the undoing of the monumental racecraft that has produced the Acropolis of Athens as a monument of (and to) racialized western modernity.

Zoom link: <https://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/events/conferences-and-workshops/envisioning-decolonial-futures>



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