Theoretical Approaches to Bioarchaeology: The View from Across the Pond

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Introduction

The importance of human remains for reconstructing past lifeways has been a key focus of study in archaeology for many years. The explicit theorization of these remains, however, as the physiological embodiment of social processes, and integration with social theory has been a more recent endeavour. The remit of this chapter is to provide an 'international perspective' on the role and impact of theory in bioarchaeology. In the context of this book it is worth first addressing what an 'international perspective' might mean. Is it an outsider perspective on the theoretical developments in bioarchaeology in North America – are we to hold up a mirror from across the pond? Or address the impact of theory on the practice of bioarchaeology within our own countries of origin (UK and France)? This chapter will attempt to do a little of both.

In the UK, bioarchaeology is theoretically and methodologically closely aligned to North America; bound by a common language, with scholars attending the same academic conferences and publishing in the same journals. A UK-based international perspective may therefore provide little more than an echo chamber. To help navigate away from this, the second author's contribution provides a perspective from France, a country which has forged a distinctive path in terms of bioarchaeological theory and practice. Whilst predominantly UK-focused, this chapter will draw upon the personal experiences and perspectives of the respective authors regarding the integration of bioarchaeology and social theory over the last 20 years. In order to address the impact of social theory in bioarchaeology, we will also include an examination of institutional structures within our

respective countries and the impact that these have had on the creation of knowledge in terms of exposure to, and reception of, social theory.

Some key theoretical developments within bioarchaeology were initiated in the UK and France, such as John Robb's (2002) research on osteobiographies and body-centred theory (e.g., Robb and Harris 2013), Sofaer's (2006) *The Body as Material Culture*, and chapters in Gowland and Knüsel's (2006) *Social Archaeology of Funerary Remains*. This research proved to be influential in North America and has contributed towards the shift in interpretive approach and the types of questions addressed by bioarchaeologists (Knudson and Stojanowski 2009; Agarwal and Glencross 2011). Likewise, in France, Henri Duday's (2006, 2009) innovative approach to recording skeletal remains and the differentiation between cultural and natural taphonomic processes acting on the body has also proven extremely significant for social bioarchaeology.

Arguably, it has been scholars in North America who have most enthusiastically embraced these new approaches and who have since been at the forefront of integrating theory and bioarchaeology. This is evidenced in the numerous edited volumes on bioarchaeology and social theory published in North America over the last decade (e.g., Knudson and Stojanowski, 2009; Agarwal and Glencross, 2011; Mant and Holland, 2019). Titles from the prolific Springer series, *Bioarchaeology and Social Theory* showcase just how far the subject has developed (e.g., Tilley and Schrenk, 2016; Geller, 2017; Stone, 2018). Over the last 20 years, theory has gone from being a fringe interest in bioarchaeology to (almost) mainstream practice. That said, it is apparent that most integrated social bioarchaeology appears within edited and single-authored books rather than journals. Perhaps journal publishing, particularly at the scientific end of the spectrum, demands a more formulaic, data-centric, or methods-based approach to be considered worthy of publication. It is possible that science journals are less comfortable in accepting what might be perceived as more speculative social theory. If so,

this is unfortunate, because it means that some of the more interesting and potentially ground-breaking work is reaching smaller audiences. There are also issues of interdisciplinarity. Whilst we are encouraged to conduct interdisciplinary research, the resulting manuscripts do not always sit well within any one specialist journal. Arguably the more theoretical papers fall foul of this. It also means that whilst journals may be at the cutting edge of bioarchaeological method, they are not always pushing the boundaries of bioarchaeological theory.

The impact of factors other than pure academic endeavour that surround publishing practices are worth considering too. In the UK, the Research Excellence Framework, which determines Departmental rankings in relation to research, as well as the distribution of some government funding to universities has influenced academic publishing behaviour. In other countries, the chasing of publication metrics also affects academic behaviour and can be explicitly linked to career progression. In such instances, science journals may be targeted because they have higher Impact Factors than theoretical journals. Such frameworks and metrics are important to individuals and institutions, but they do not passively measure academic value. They dictate behaviour and perceptions of what *is* valuable, and this has a tangible impact on research: the tail is decidedly wagging the dog.

France and Britain are geographically very close, but there is considerable distance in terms of theoretical and interpretive approaches to bioarchaeology. Language barriers and different academic traditions have resulted in less integration and communication between these two countries than within the anglophone world. In this discussion of the impact of theory in bioarchaeology, we will discuss our personal experiences and observations in the UK and France respectively. The first author will additionally discuss the student experience of theory in bioarchaeological teaching, including some challenges to consider. The reception and practice of

social theory by recent and current bioarchaeology students is important to address given that they are the next generation of scholars who will dictate the direction of travel for the discipline.

Bioarchaeology and Social Theory in the UK (Rebecca Gowland)

I have been working in bioarchaeology for over 20 years and have taught and supervised many MSc and PhD students. The following perspective represents my experiences and personal viewpoint regarding the impact of theory on the discipline and may not necessarily resonate with those of other scholars within the UK or beyond.

As a student in the 1990s, I was profoundly aware of the pernicious gulf within archaeology between scientific practice and social theory. This was a period when the post-processual approach was in full swing, and gender archaeology was emerging as a powerful force for change, alongside social constructionism, phenomenology, structuration theory, and so forth. Many of my fellow PhD students were spending long hours grappling with Merleau-Ponty, Foucault and Bourdieu: it was an exciting time to be engaged in archaeological theory. Yet, I felt excluded from this world, sometimes actively so, because I was characterised as a 'scientist' and therefore 'atheoretical'. Indeed, this was a period in the UK in which it was deemed unfashionable to be a scientist in archaeology – processualism was dead and lab coats no longer *de rigour*. Within this emergent post-processualist environment the skeleton was regarded as a static and universal entity; representing a series of dry biological facts, with little perceived relevance for addressing important social imperatives in the past. Indeed, within this prevailing constructivist view, the biological body was rendered as irrelevant: if identity is socially constructed and fluid then why bother with biology? This antipathy between interpretive archaeology and bioarchaeology was not one-sided. When I broached the subject of archaeological theory with my fellow bioarchaeologists (professors and peers alike), I was

often met with a response along the lines of 'urgh, I hate theory': the science/theory divide was firmly entrenched and mutually reinforced.

Prior to the 1980s there had been a long tradition of neglecting archaeological skeletal remains within the UK. Despite the pioneering efforts of UK-based human bone specialists from the 1960s, including Calvin Wells and Don Brothwell, published analyses of human remains within cemetery reports were often perfunctory and generally relegated to appendices. Often skeletal information was separated from contextual data in such a way that it was difficult to re-connect the two. Discussion chapters within cemetery reports during this time were predominantly concerned with artefactual interpretations, and the integration of skeletal evidence was often conspicuously absent. From the 1990s in the UK, the advent of specialist MSc courses in osteoarchaeology and palaeopathology (taught by influential scholars such as Andrew Chamberlain, Charlotte Roberts, Mike Parker Pearson, Chris Knüsel and Holger Schutkowski) resulted in the in-depth training of a new generation of scholars. This training profoundly influenced the practice of bioarchaeology in both the commercial and academic spheres. Consequently, over the last two decades there has been a slow creep towards the increasing integration and contextualisation of human skeletal remains within cemetery reports and more generally towards a social bioarchaeology.

The effects of these developments were not, however, yet in place by the 1990s, which was a period of deep divisions between interpretive and scientific archaeology. Post-processualism was, in part, a reaction against New Archaeology's drive for scientific objectivity and universality. Bioarchaeology's emphasis on large-scale 'big picture' analyses and hypothesis testing had little in common with an approach that focused on the culturally situated specificity and symbolism of the archaeological record. The concept of embodiment and embodied identity emerged as a prominent theme in archaeology during the late 1990s and 2000s, through the work of scholars such as Lynn Meskell

(1999) and Rosemary Joyce (2005). The growing interest in embodiment provided a useful route for re-focusing and re-engaging with the corporeal body.

As many eminent scholars within the broader social sciences have identified, the science/social theory distinction stems from a long tradition of sub-disciplinary divisions within academia. The conception of the body as separate from the mind/soul has ancient antecedents; as far back as Hippocrates and Aristotle (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987). This separation was reinforced during the 16th century by Descartes: '*Cogito, ergo sum'*. This Cartesian distinction has dominated the Western scientific approach and within this schema the corporeal body is conceptualised as ahistorical and acultural. Within archaeology, these structural divisions meant that theoretical or interpretive archaeology was concerned with the mind (the thoughts, feelings and motivations of people in the past), whilst bioarchaeology was restricted to matters of biology. Since the 1990s these divisions have been increasingly questioned, particularly within feminist discourse (e.g., Schiebinger, 1986, 2004; Laqueur, 1990; Spannier, 1995; Butler, 1993). Scholars have highlighted the fact that the biological body has an inherent sociality to it because it is moulded by social forces and performs actively in social discourse. In the 1990s sociologists such as Turner (1984, 1991) and Shilling (1993) insisted on the significance of corporeality in social interactions. They argued that while social constructionism was useful for reconceptualising aspects of identity as fluid and open to interpretation, identities were mediated and performed through a physical body. Shilling (1993) was a driving force in the re-introduction of corporeality – the flesh, blood and bones– back into social theory.

When I was a PhD student in the late 1990s, Chris Shilling's work had a key influence on my interpretations of bioarchaeology; he provided theoretical clarity regarding the body as simultaneously cultural and biological. In 1998 I organised a Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG)

session in Cardiff entitled *Thinking through the Body*, which included many of those (then UK-based) scholars that are prominent within social bioarchaeology today (e.g., John Robb, Joanna Sofaer and Chris Knüsel). This session was scheduled on the last morning of the conference and in a small room, far from the main centre of conference activity –clearly marginalized. The contributions to this session were inspiring and tapped into the awakening of social theory within bioarchaeology. This and two subsequent conference sessions co-organised with Chris Knüsel (BABAO 2002 in Sheffield and the EAA 2003 in Lille) led to the publication of *Social Archaeology of Funerary Remains* in 2006. In the interim, social bioarchaeology was developing and coalescing into a stronger force on both sides of the Atlantic. At the SAA in 2003 Pamela Geller and Rachel Scott organised a session entitled "*Embodying Identity: The Bioarchaeological Contribution*", including the aforementioned UK participants, as well as numerous North American scholars engaged in the integration of social theory and bioarchaeology. Nowadays, there are numerous sessions at each of the major anthropology and archaeology conferences that seek to link bioarchaeological theory and method in innovative ways to address novel questions about the past.

One of the notable shifts precipitated by this new theoretical direction has been the increasing acceptance of the case study approach with its focus on individual's as oppose to populations. Osteobiographies developed from being a largely descriptive tool (e.g., Saul, 1972) to the more theoretically informed, interpretive tool utilised by Robb (2002), who explicitly theorized the body as an archive of an individual's life experiences. The case-study approach was already emergent at this time, in particular in relation to studies of care in the past (e.g., Knüsel, 1999). In more recent years the osteobiographical approach has proliferated, particularly so in respect to applications of Lorna Tilley's (2011, 2015) *Bioarchaeology of Care*. Case studies are no longer considered the 'poor relation' to large-scale, population level studies and there is a growing acknowledgement of the important and complementary knowledge gleaned from detailed studies of individuals. Another

interesting and important theoretical shift over the last decade, which has so far been led by American scholars, is the increasing interrogation of the nature of our anatomical collections and the construction/production of bioarchaeological knowledge. This research addresses ethical concerns regarding the provenance and lives of those entering anatomical collections and reflects on the position of bioarchaeologists as potential participants in the perpetuation of structural violence against ethnic minorities and marginalised groups. This is powerful and important research that forces the bioarchaeological community to confront difficult truths about the history of the discipline and reflect on our current practice (Watkins, 2018; Nystrom, 2019).

As a consequence of the theoretical developments over the last 20 years and the activities of a number of emerging and established bioarchaeologists, a socially and theoretically informed bioarchaeology has gained considerable traction. This approach has since proven particularly influential with numerous younger scholars, many of whom have embraced and developed these perspectives still further. A new generation are conceptualising and exploring past worlds through the body using innovative new methodological techniques and theoretical perspectives (showcased in the preceding chapters).

Bioarchaeology and Social Theory in France (Sacha Kacki)

The study of human skeletal remains in France followed a different path than in North America and the UK. Previously known as physical anthropology (*anthropologie physique*), 'biological anthropology' (*anthropobiologie* or *anthropologie biologique*) emerged in France during the second half of the 19th century, under the impetus of Paul Broca, a medical specialist in neuroanatomy (Blanckaert, 2009). Its original purpose was to assess physical characteristics of human populations and to reconstruct the human lineage (human palaeontology) by focusing largely on skeletal remains

from prehistoric periods (i.e., Palaeolithic and Neolithic). Cultural anthropology, with its interest in the social and cultural aspects of human societies, developed separately from physical anthropology in the first decades of the 20th century (Conklin, 2013). Despite the efforts of sociologist Marcel Mauss and physical anthropologist Paul Rivet (first director of the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris) in the 1920s and 1930s to create a unified discipline of 'anthropology', cultural and biological anthropology have since remained separate disciplines. Archaeology, which grew from roots in classics and history, developed along a parallel trajectory, rarely interacting with biological anthropology. This separation remains in the French academic system today, with most biological anthropologists working in biological anthropology and prehistory departments attached to science universities, rather than archaeology departments (Knüsel and Maureille, 2018).

These disciplinary distinctions and separate developmental trajectories have strongly shaped the theoretical framework and practice in human skeletal studies. With its origins in geology and palaeontology, French biological anthropology is more strongly influenced by the natural sciences in terms of research questions and conceptual approaches rather than by sociocultural and archaeological theories. Up to the 1990s, French scholars were mostly engaged in fossil hominid studies (e.g., Hublin et al., 1996; Tillier, 1999) and in methodological developments in age and sex assessment (e.g., Brůžek, 1991; Schmitt, 2001), palaeodemography (e.g., Bocquet-Appel and Masset, 1982; Sellier, 1996), and so forth. At that time, few academics tackled questions of the social dimensions of human skeletal remains, and therefore did not engage much with social theories. Even French sociologists and philosophers such as Durkheim, Mauss, Bourdieu and Foucault have been paradoxically less influential to French scholars than to British and American bioarchaeologists (Knüsel, 2010; Pereira, 2013). As a student in the early 2000s, I was not taught their work in any of the biological anthropology courses I studied, and these generally included little, if any, reference to social theories. At that time, the term 'bioarchaeology' (*bioarchéologie*) was not even used in

France, except to refer to the reconstruction of palaeoenvironments based on the analysis of plant and animal remains. Social bioarchaeology, as a conceptual research framework, started to infiltrate the French scholarly landscape no more than 15 years ago, and due to long-established and deeply entrenched differences in thought and approach, it is still not fully embraced by the scientific community to this day.

Probably one of the major contributions of French scholars to social bioarchaeology lies in the development of new excavation and recording methods to decipher mortuary identity and past social processes surrounding death and burial. Long before the term 'bioarchaeology' was used in France, Henri Duday introduced an innovative approach for analysing and interpreting graves, known as field anthropology (*anthropologie de terrain*), or archaeothanatology (*archéothanatologie*) as it is now more commonly known (Boulestin and Duday, 2005). Archaeothanatology represents a holistic and dynamic approach to burial analysis, the purpose of which is to differentiate between cultural and taphonomic processes acting on the body, based on the thorough recording of the skeletal elements and their relationships to the burial features and graves inclusions (Duday et al., 1990; Duday, 2006, 2009). Through detailed analysis of the position of skeletal elements and the deviation from the original position of the corpse, it allows the observer to infer the presence of grave architecture (e.g., coffins, shrouds, baskets), to assess the cause of disarticulation (taphonomic disturbance, post-depositional human manipulation or secondary burial), and to distinguish between simultaneous and successive deposition of corpses (e.g., Castex and Blaizot, 2017; Castex et al., 2014; Rottier, 2016). As it is primarily concerned with human anatomy and the way in which a body decomposes, archaeothanatology has completely changed the approach to mortuary contexts in French archaeology, with biological anthropologists being routinely employed in excavations from the 1980s onwards in both the academic and commercial sectors. Moreover, because archaeothanatology aims to decipher cultural processes and emphasizes a close connection between

human remains, their archaeological context and the behaviours of the living groups, it has integrated more social theory than other domains of biological anthropology. Sociological and ethnological works such as Hertz's (1907) *Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort*, van Gennep's (1909) *Les rites de passage* and Thomas' (1985) *Rites de mort : pour la paix des vivants* have been particularly influential in the construction of the theoretical interpretative framework of archaeothanatology (Boulestin and Duday, 2005; Pereira, 2013). With its solid theoretical foundations and well-established methods, archaeothanatology is now part of the 'bioarchaeological toolkit' well beyond France's borders (Baker and Agarwal ,2017; Knüsel and Maureille, 2018).

In recent years, French scholars have also engaged in other aspects of bioarchaeology that focus on life history and the embodiment of social processes. Gender studies, in particular, have gained some traction, as exemplified by recent works on the sexual division of labour in prehistoric Europe (Villotte et al., 2010; Villotte and Knüsel, 2014), as well as an ongoing, ambitious research programme on gender relations in the Neolithic (NEOGENRE project, PI: Aline Thomas). More generally, there is a trend towards increased interest in the skeletal manifestations of social organisation and inequality, which materialize through various studies on differences in health and nutritional status between contrasting social groups (e.g., Kacki and Villotte, 2006; Herrscher, 2017). Paralleling the situation in the UK, the osteobiographical approach has also proliferated over the past two decades, with studies including topics as diverse as the social experience of disability in past populations (e.g., Delattre and Sallem, 2009), child abuse (e.g., Blondiaux et al., 2002) and the life histories of remarkable individuals (e.g., Kacki et al., 2018).

At the present time, social bioarchaeology is undergoing a faster development in France than ever before. This has been a consequence of the diversification of research interests amongst the new

generation of scholars and the globalization of the academic landscape, which has resulted in an increasing number of overseas scholars joining French universities – including influential bioarchaeologists such as Chris Knüsel. This rapid development has heralded the progressive integration of more social theory in studies by French scholars. However, due to long-established differences in scholarly traditions, there remains a clear demarcation between France and other countries in terms of bioarchaeological practice and interpretative frameworks. While American and British scholars tend toward theories and hypothesis-testing to explain phenomena (Knüsel, 2010), French scholars favour an observational and comparison-based approach to detect patterns, and eventually use these patterns to propose models of the organisation and functioning of past societies.

From the above, it is apparent that each scholarly tradition has something to learn from the other and the current trend towards greater communication across language and academic boundaries has shown the reciprocal value of doing so. Exchange student programmes between universities in France and the UK are likely to accelerate this process further amongst the next generation of bioarchaeologists.

Teaching Social Bioarchaeology in the UK (Rebecca Gowland)

When teaching MSc students (from Europe, North America and beyond) over the last two decades, the extent of theoretical content within our main bioarchaeology degree programmes is sometimes surprising to them. We teach theory and practice together in our osteology classes and then have further courses which build on this integration in relation to specific themes. For example, when discussing sex determination in the skeleton, the relationship between the expression of sexually dimorphic features and different cultural performance and practice of gender are important to

consider in tandem. Additionally, it is explained to students that the methods we use in bioarchaeology are produced within particular cultural understandings of identity; for example while skeletons within any given sample express a spectrum of masculine and feminine traits, we are compelled to conform to the dualistic male/female categorization to derive meaning that fits within our world view (see Geller, 2008, 2017). While we strive to apply our methods in an objective and standardized way, it is important for students to acknowledge and experience (through hands-on work with lots of skeletal collections) the extent of human skeletal variation and the influence of society on bodily characteristics. Bodies are messy and unruly; they do not always subscribe to? discrete subdivisions; their dimensions and morphology do not readily lend themselves to systematic, universally applicable methods (Gowland and Thompson, in press).

Many students are initially most 'comfortable' with the methodological and 'purer' biological aspects of bioarchaeological work. For the purposes of this chapter, I canvassed the current and recent graduate students undertaking the MSc Palaeopathology at Durham University, UK, about their experiences of social theory and bioarchaeology. A repeated refrain from these students was that their undergraduate degrees often taught social theory in a way that was too abstract, such that the relevance for skeletal analysis was not always clear. Many of the examples below are from students who were undergraduates in the USA, therefore it is important to be clear that their criticisms are not reflective of all universities and I know of many inspirational professors who successfully teach theory and practice in North America.

One student who had previously been an undergraduate in the USA found that classes at this institution "*emphasised a complex theoretical framework in which to first view social processes, without an equal emphasis on data-driven examples, making both the theory and meaning in the data inaccessible in many contexts*". She goes on to state that the lack of clear application and use of

"*opaque language*" in the teaching of social theory resulted in feelings of intellectual "*shame*": "*if we don't understand or were unable to conceptualise, we felt we didn't possess the intellectual capacity to do so*". These experiences were very off-putting for her. These sentiments were echoed by another student who likewise found that her undergraduate experience "*focused on the theories of cultural anthropology but never acknowledged how those same social theories impacted other fields of anthropology*". The decontextualization of theory likewise meant that for her the relevance was lost: "*I struggled through Foucault, never really caring about it*". Now she writes: "*I think it's incredibly important to acknowledge these historical and theoretical social frameworks when dealing with the dead, because without them all we have are lists of lesions and a pile of boxes. We have nothing worth discussing*". Similar sentiments were expressed repeatedly by others and I will include a quote at length from another student who writes: *"As an American [undergraduate] student attending a liberal arts college, I absolutely dreaded going to anthropological theory courses. To me, these courses were designed to present esoteric thought experiments that had no bearing on my future work. Theory courses were their own entity, so separate from research courses that I failed to see the connection. The result of this separation was that I distanced myself from theory and from incorporating relevant theories into my work. It was not until halfway through my graduate degree that I realized we had been practicing theory and method together in each of our modules. And further, that I found this teaching style to be essential. In these classes, theoretical ideas were presented to support our practice of bioarchaeology, not to stand alone and remain untouched. Everything we discussed was directly, tangibly related to our course material and personal research. This brand of theory was a tool for organizing thoughts and for thinking broadly, for understanding the difficult history of the field and for appreciating the complexities of the material we study*."

Other students had expected a certain level of theory within our graduate degree programme and felt that they wanted even more theory. Another student still felt that there was a disconnect between social theory and bioarchaeological data. She writes: "*Personally, I found the integration of social theory and bioarchaeology really difficult to get my head around, especially how to use it*

appropriately within the field. As an anthropologist by undergraduate training, the social theory and models were familiar and easily understood. However, the difficulty for me was how this translates to the paleopathology field specifically." This is a difficulty that is reflected in academic publishing, in which theoretical narratives are often not convincingly integrated with the bioarchaeological data. Finally, there were those students who felt that they were most proficient at the analytical aspects of bioarchaeology and less adept at the social theory.

There are clear pedagogical benefits to integrating social theory and practice in bioarchaeological teaching. In my experience, and as the above quotes testify, it is only when theory and practice are taught in concert that students (most but not all) will respond positively and embrace them as a united whole. There will always be students who lean towards a more formulaic, scientific approach. And that is fine too. Social bioarchaeology introduces shades of grey into what seems at face value to be an objective enterprise and that is not always comfortable. Of course, these shades were always there; they have simply been more explicitly acknowledged and theorized in recent years (Gowland and Thompson, in press). Even for those students who do not wish to pursue social theory explicitly in bioarchaeology, it is important for them to have an underlying awareness of the issues, so that their interpretations of the data are sufficiently nuanced. The pitfalls of a theoretical vacuum are starkly apparent in some publications at the 'harder science' end of bioarchaeology, such as aDNA analysis, which have in some instances been criticised for presenting a biologically deterministic view of the past that can have politically dangerous ramifications in the present (Gowland and Thompson ,2013, Hakenbeck, 2019).

Conclusion

Social theory has undoubtedly impacted bioarchaeological teaching and research within the UK and France, although to differing extents and at different tempos. Through ongoing academic interactions with North America and the proliferation and communication of ideas via conferences and publications it will continue to progress. There are significant differences, however, between the teaching and practice of bioarchaeology within the UK, France and North America that have affected the reception and practice of social theory. Some of these differences stem from variation in the structure of academia and degree programmes between the countries, deriving from their distinct academic roots and traditions. Within France and the USA this seems to have resulted in a more explicit separation in the teaching of social theory and bioarchaeology. In the UK Archaeology is not subsumed within Anthropology Departments, it remains a distinct discipline, and students have less flexibility to choose multiple classes outside of their department. There are pros and cons to this structure, with the obvious disadvantages being less intensive exposure to multiple disciplines and a need for the student to know what they want to specialise in at an early stage of their academic career. The advantages are that students have intensive, focused training in the discipline and exposure to broader theoretical concepts, which is by necessity integrated with the data. Another key difference between the UK, France and the USA with respect to social theory is the differing political and cultural imperatives surrounding bioarchaeological analysis. In the USA, the role of skeletal collections as a source of structural violence against indigenous peoples and other minority or vulnerable groups has dramatically influenced recent theory and practice (Watkins, 2018).

Academic institutions are inherently conservative; their structures lag behind disciplinary innovation and this influences how social theory is taught and researched. The traditional separation between science and social theory is embedded within institutional structures and can become an obstacle to learning and to change. This is apparent in the experiences of the students outlined above but can also be seen in publications. Even those publications that engage with social theory, often fall short

of a convincing application to the bioarchaeological sphere. Bioarchaeology is part of a broader shift occurring within other disciplines over the course of the last 20 years, one that seeks to break down the boundaries between the body and society. The body is a social product and bioarchaeologists are uniquely placed to examine the impact and interplay between cultural change and bodies over a deep time perspective.

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