



Theory & Methodology

**Postcolonial Archaeologies:
Working in Gaza**

What is Postcolonialism?

- Postcolonialism = after colonialism
- A reaction to dominant western narratives
- Challenges predominantly western, male, upper class voice that dominated academic discourse in 19th & early 20th century



Katharine Woolley & Sheikh
Hamoudi Ibn Ibrahim sorting
finds, Ur

What is Postcolonialism?

- Colonialism: language of domination, subjugation, oppression
- A academic response to colonialism, initially on the part of the colonized
 - How ‘the “west” attempts systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference & value of the “non-West”’ (Ghandi 1998: 15)



Postcolonialism

- Questions & evaluates the effects of imperialist views in (post)colonial societies
- Theory developed to examine literature, culture, political history of the former European colonies
 - Assesses effects of empire, exploitation, subordination & looks at the relationship between the coloniser & colonised
 - Highlights the oppression of the colonized:
 - Gives the colonised a voice & recognizes their **agency**



Moain Sadeq at Tell Ruqeish,
Gaza

Postcolonialism: Theory

- Cultural hybridity: key concept for archaeologists
- Stresses importance of the middle ground or third space
 - Places where people & ideas meet & mix
 - A marginal & ambiguous place
- Emphasises the interdependence of the coloniser & colonised
- Inherent purity & originality of cultures is untenable
 - Cultural contact inevitably means cultural mix

Cultural Hybridity

- Explores “the creation of new **transcultural forms** within the contact zone produced by colonisation” (Ashcroft *et al.* 2007: 118)
- Construction of a new identity & new social practices in a contact zone
- More than a simple fusion of colonial & indigenous features:
 - Social practice involving active social agents



Thutmose III cone, al-Moghraqa

Postcolonial Theory

- Postcolonialism focuses on the **local** context, the **diversity** of local cultures & their **agency**
- What does this mean for archaeological interpretation & practice?
- Application of **hybridity** to archaeological interpretation
- Archaeology has become more political engaged



Tell Sannam, Gaza

Archaeological Implications?

- Archaeologists prioritise freedom to research & excavate wherever they want
- Interested in metanarratives
- Prioritise issues of “world heritage”
- Less concerned with local histories & alternative voices of the past
- Current political situation in Syria, Libya & Iraq:
 - & archaeological responses



Noël Siver working in Gaza

Practising Archaeology in a Postcolonial Context

- Fieldwork at al-Moghraqa, late 1990s: MB-LB site
- Anglo-Palestinian team:
 - Who created & directed the narrative?
 - Who practised the archaeology?
- Funding:
 - UK
 - Palestine (local businessman)
 - UN

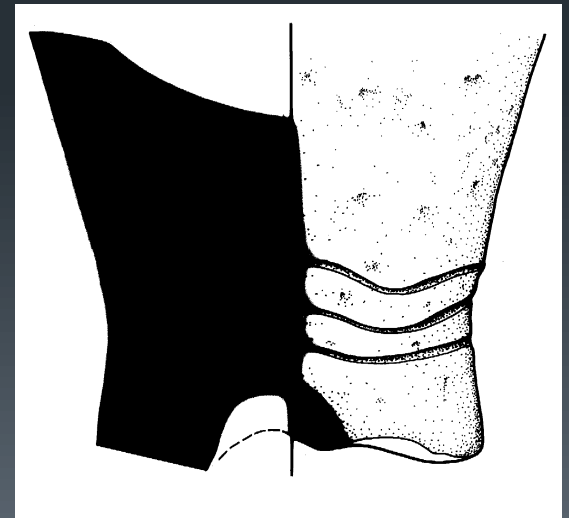
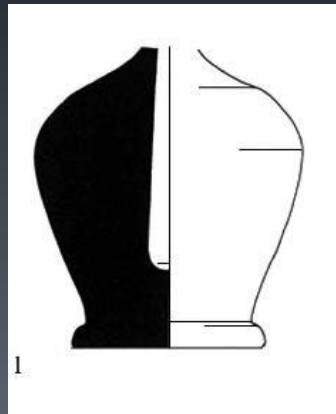


Fieldwork at al-Mogrhaqa



Practising Archaeology in a Postcolonial Context

- Interpretation of finds
- Handling of finds
- Where are they now?
- Whose responsibility?



Practising Archaeology in a Postcolonial Context

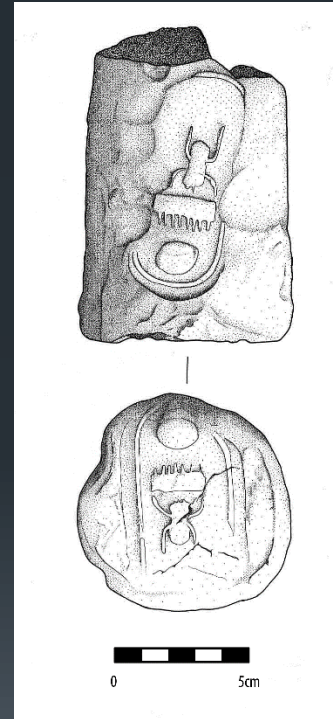
- Dissemination of knowledge / knowledge transfer:
 - Archaeological community
 - Local Palestinian community
- Who creates & articulates the knowledge?
- Was this a priority for Gaza in the 1990s?



British Council, Gaza

Postcolonial Interpretations

- Gaza as a middle space & cultural hybridity
 - “...cultural mixture is the effect of the practice of mixed origins” (Friedman 1995: 84)
- Examining how Egyptian objects are incorporated within a new cultural setting:
 - Repurposing of objects in new social praxis
 - Reworking of objects to create new & hybrid forms
- “What is significant about the adoption of alien objects – as of alien ideas – is not the fact that they are adopted, but the way they are culturally redefined & put to use” (Kopytoff 1986: 67)



Cones, al-Moghraqa



Clay coffins, Deir el-Balah

Summary

- Postcolonial theory is (or should be) integral to our practice of archaeology (& history) in the Mediterranean, Near & Middle East (& beyond)
- We need to consider our colonial baggage before we even consider working with someone else's archaeology
- How should we manage & articulate archaeological practice in these areas?
- How should we interpret the archaeology:
 - Potentialities of working with hybridity as an interpretative tool