

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND POLITICS IN PALESTINE: AN OUTSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

The region of the so-called "Bible lands" has awakened the interest of the Western world for a long time. Its religious appeal has always been highlighted, but Western advances in this region have had, historically, a political character. Through a peripheral perspective, I have attempted to discuss how scientific research in the region fits into a plot that involves nationalism, the construction of identities, and imperialism, emphasizing the conflicts and contradictions present in the history of archeological research in Palestine [1].

During the 1980s, with the proposed "post-modern" approaches, the works of archaeologists, anthropologists, historians were interpreted as political, considering that writing history is always a political act, even if one says the opposite [2]. As a field of discourse, post-processual archaeology brought other themes to archaeology along with different ways of interpreting old ones. In general, the positive, homogeneous, normative and descriptive history, without problems lost space and the conflict came to focus. The ways past was used to justify political endeavours like nationalism, racism, and sexism became a constant worry.

In Brazil, this is particularly relevant, considering that "[...] *the absence of a certain classical tradition seems to have contributed to the development of a historiography less compromised with identitary and national values*" [3]. So, through a peripheral point of view, I study the history of archaeological researches in Palestine stressing the uses - ancient and modern - of the past to legitimise glorious pasts and claims on land, and other topics derived from that as the correlation made between material culture and faith, the women in Biblical Archaeology.

Especially since the end of the 18th century, the search for the a noble and glorious past turned the European imperial powers to Ancient Rome and Greece, but also to Palestine as they saw themselves as spiritual heirs of the "Holy Land". As the region was under the Ottoman rule till the end of the World War I, scientific research, according to Silberman [4], was used as "[...] *a subtle means of western penetration*

*and competition in one of the most strategic areas of the world."* Several Research Societies were founded in Europe and later in Jerusalem acting as 'scientific factories'.

As a result, through legal means or even through illicit practices, 'relics' from the Holy Land were taken to Europe to be displayed in museums "[...] *to serve as a reference point of excellence against which to measure the progress of 'men' and nations*" [5].

After 1948, the recently created State of Israel attempted to control the excavations as an exercise of national sovereignty. Jordanian authorities, on the other hand, made an effort to build "*a strong discourse on the Christian geography and history of its territory as connected to the Bible*" citing Maffi [6]. For their part, Arab countries proposed 'counter-histories' to the Israeli narrative questioning their way of justifying their right to the land.

Nowadays, the protection of cultural heritage in the area faces some challenges not only because of the conflicts in the region. The antiquities trade to Europe resulted in "*distancing [physically] the past from the living Near Eastern population*" [7], leading to other problem: "*locals involved in antiquity dealing regard their own heritage - not as a cultural asset to be seized by them - but as pertinent to others, to be sold to others; as belonging to others.*" Today the illegal market is the alternative found by the locals for unemployment and as these antiquities are sold for a much lower price, it is profitable only because it is done massively [8].

My MA research is still in its early stages and aims at proposing a different view of the history of archaeology in Palestine to the Brazilian public, especially from a Brazilian perspective, which means away from tradition, in a less compromised way. Besides, as a woman dealing with an essentially Androcentric field of inquiry as it is archaeology, I try to discuss the visibility or the invisibility of women participating in Biblical Archaeology, stressing the often neglected feminine role in the discipline [9]. All those issues are linked to several layers of conflict, in relation to political, gender and other issues.

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[1] I use Palestine to refer to the area that was previously known as Palestine during colonial rule and now comprises the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

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