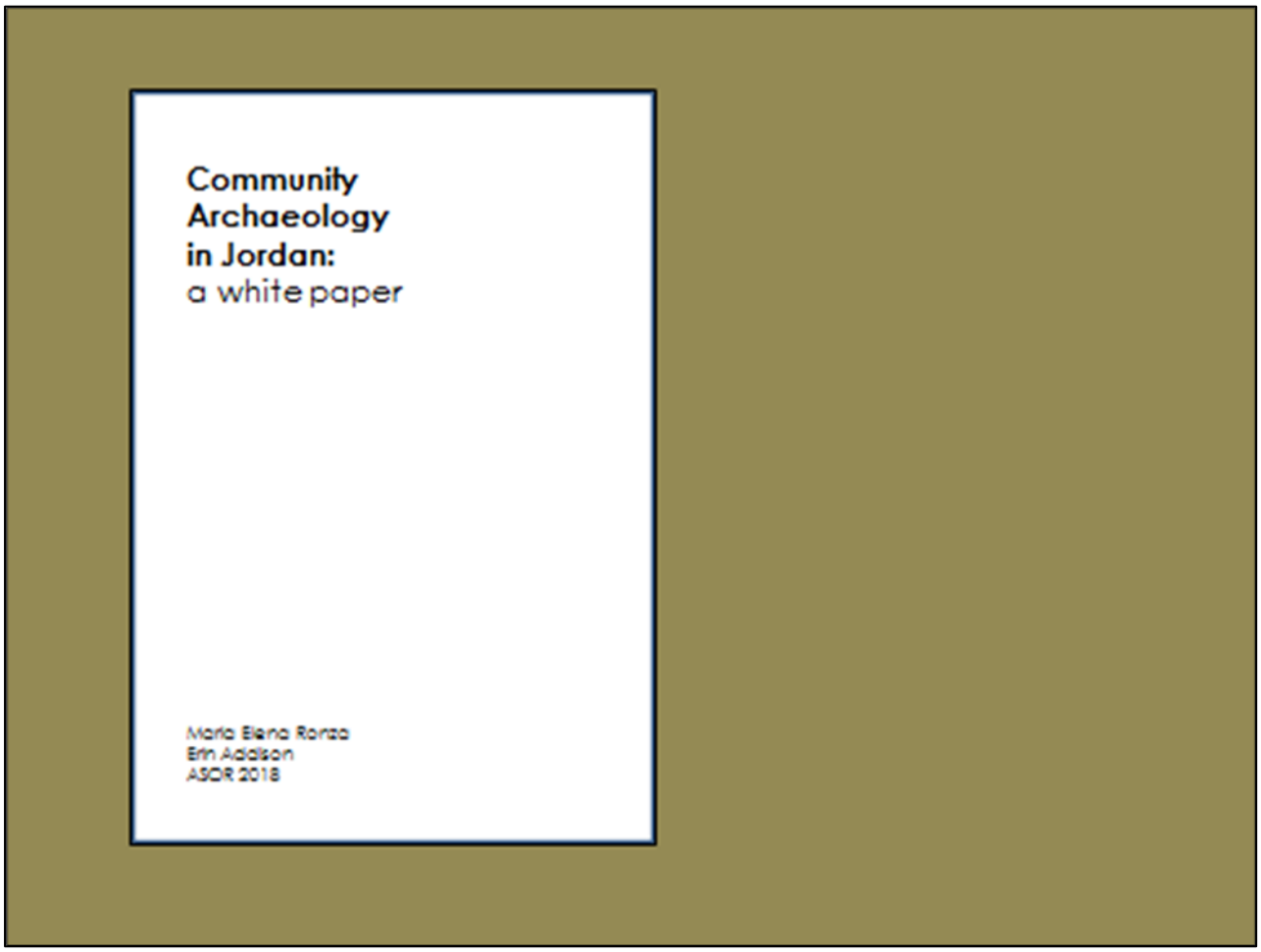
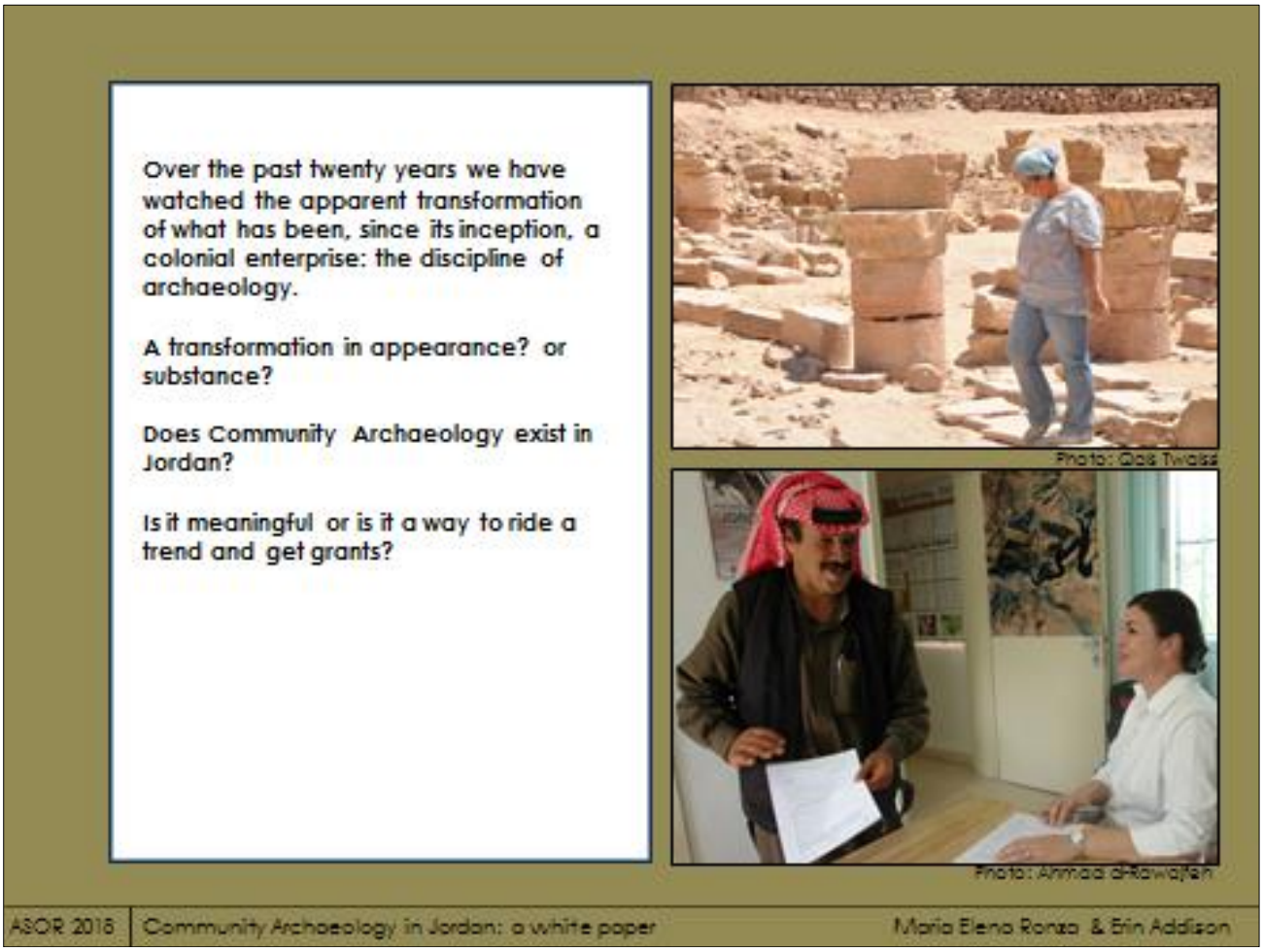
The following paper is a transcript of the Powerpoint slide presentation delivered by Maria Elena Ronza at the 2018 meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research in Denver, CO. The paper and presentation were authored by Erin Addison and Elena Ronza.



Good afternoon.
I'd like to start by saying that this paper is not meant to be a "J'accuse" as much as it is a "mea culpa."

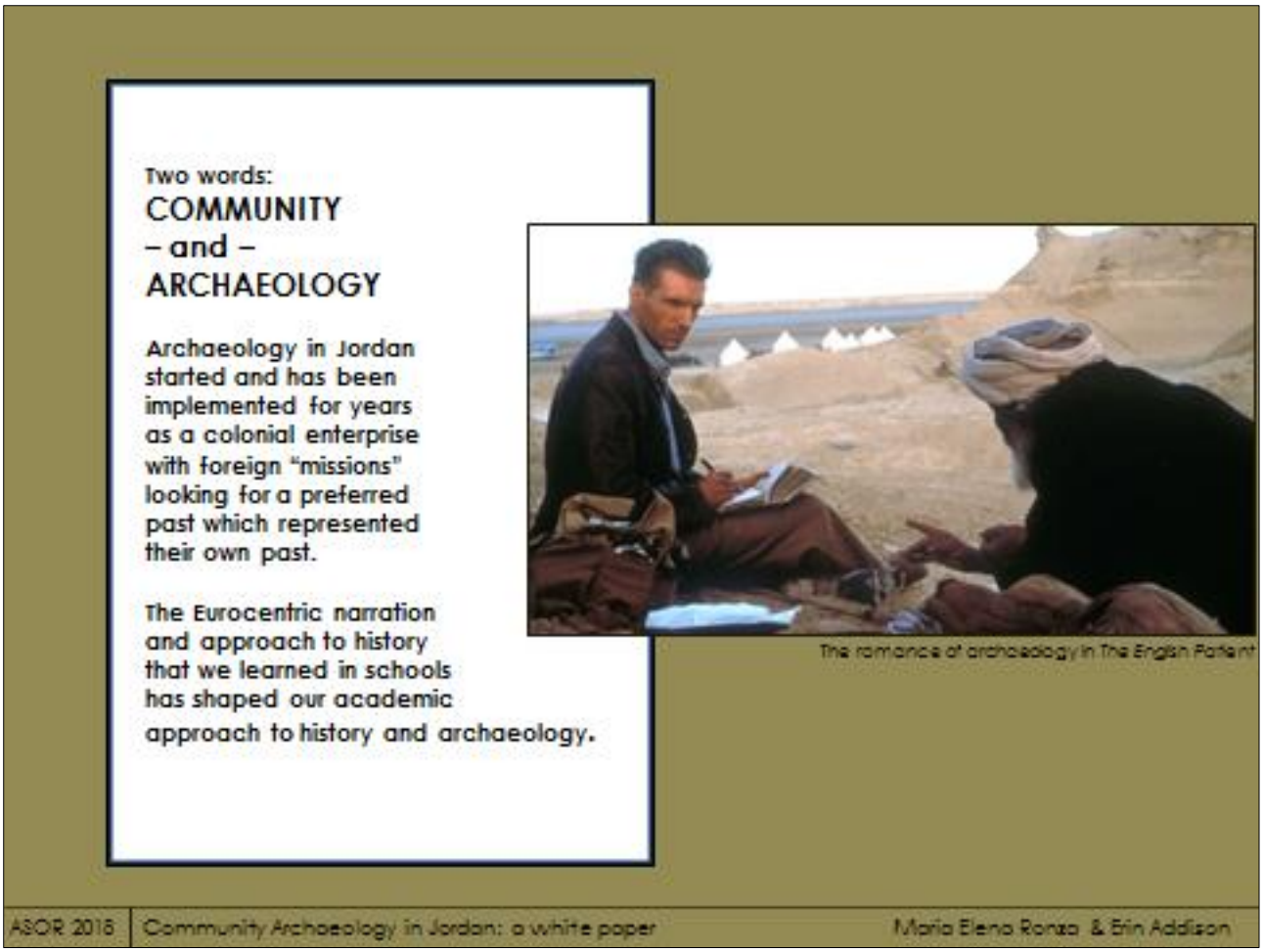
The time has come to trigger some discussion about the persistence of the colonial legacy in archaeology in Jordan. Obviously this is one aspect of a larger issue in the development community that is beyond the scope of this paper today.

Both Dr. Addison and myself have been working in Jordan for the past twenty years and we have witnessed the transformation in the appearance of what has been, since its inception, a colonial enterprise: archaeology.



"A transformation in the appearance," but unfortunately not in the substance.
Within the past thirty years community archaeology worldwide has worked to address ethical concerns raised by the colonial nature of traditional archaeological "missions." At the particularly challenging political, historical and cultural conjuncture we are living in – and perhaps *especially* in Jordan and the "Middle East" – the values and practices expressed in community archaeology have become an ethical and moral imperative.

Though a relatively new approach, the pioneering days of community archaeology are over and it is now a discipline of its own. Unsurprisingly, this discipline itself can be wielded as means of preserving our preferred past – not as a genuine capacity building exercise redounding toward empowering the community or local institutions. Very few projects are locally sustainable – either economically or in terms of procedures and adherence to local existing legislation.



We are interested in two words here: COMMUNITY – and –ARCHAEOLOGY.
Let's begin with archaeology

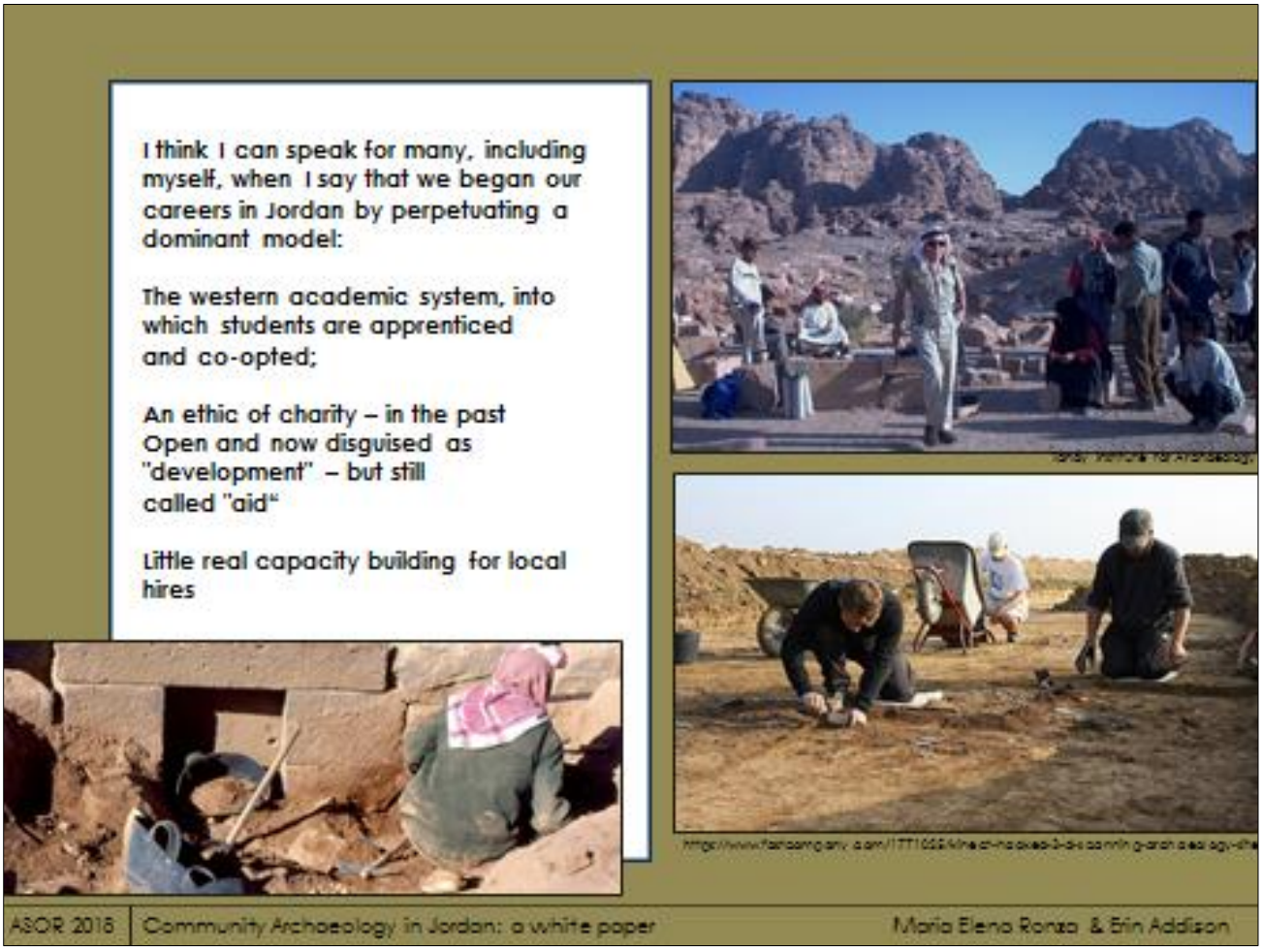
Archaeology, particularly in southwest Asia (the "Middle" or "Near East"), has until recently been quite forthrightly a colonial enterprise implemented by foreigners, mostly Europeans and North Americans. Well before the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was established, this was a landscape mined largely for elements constituting the narrative of the Biblical or "Classical" past. Even now the narrative of the region foregrounds the magnificent narration of empires, vs. the minor narration of a local culture which observes and adapts to their great march.

In a quite pragmatic way archaeology still tends, with notable exceptions, to be conducted as a colonial enterprise: foreign professionals invest time and money in extracting raw data, then return to their institutions to process and add value to it, to build their own careers (if not fortunes). The western academic system rewards these intellectual entrepreneurs for mentoring a new generation of foreign professionals, who apprentice, often for very low wages, in order to enter the guild and perpetuate the system.

Still today interpretations of sites overwhelmingly prefer to narrate a particular segment of past, without reference to more recent or locally centered narratives – including those of communities surrounding the site.

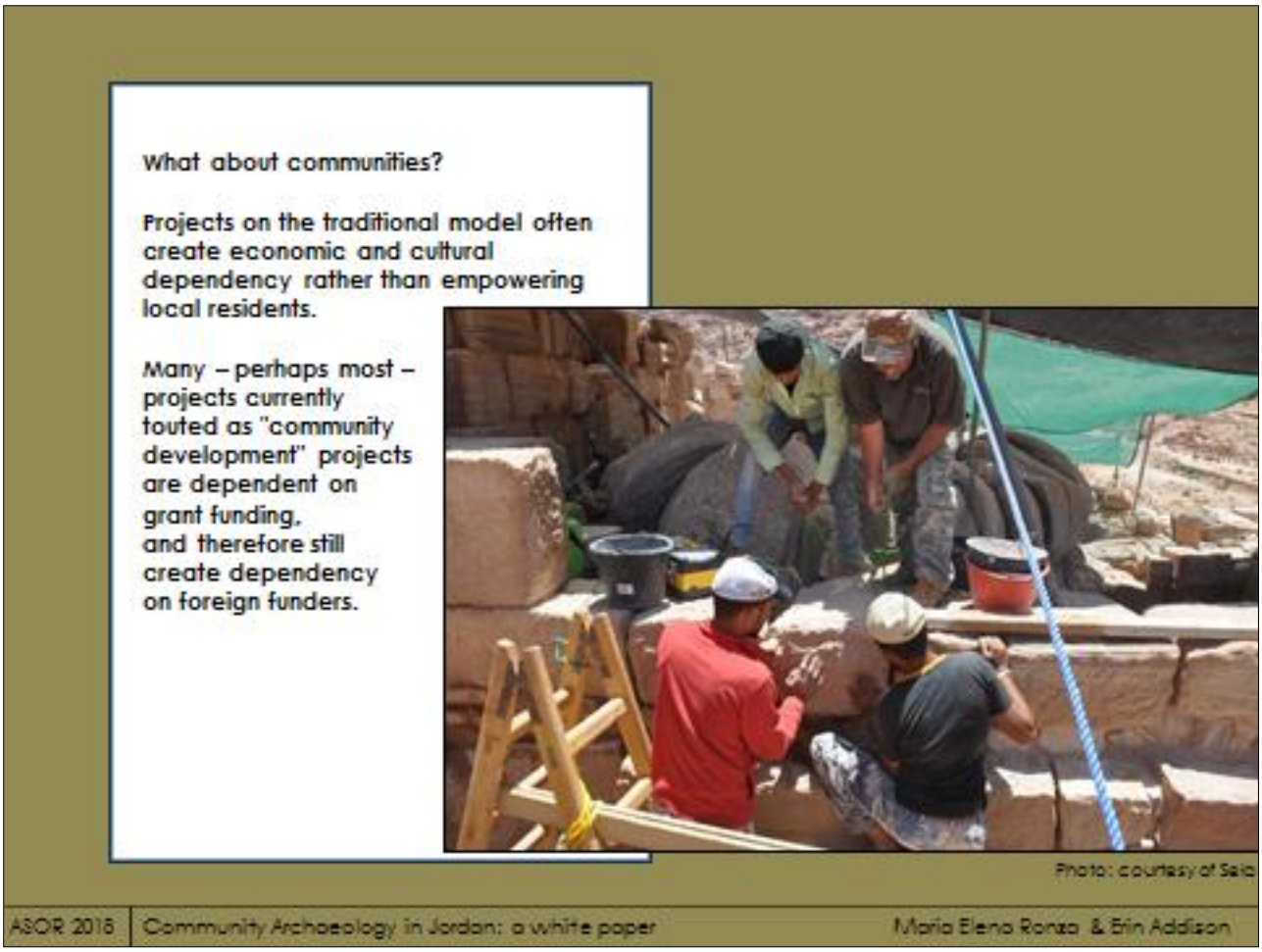
For decades, however, a broader critique of historiography and the rising interest in exploring and narrating not only the history of the empires, but also the history of resilience of the local populations, has underscored the fact that there are many possible narrations of the past. Thanks to an increasing number of ethnographic projects focusing on community narratives, the academic world has become more and more aware of the relativity of history and of its continuity into the present, of

how a preferred Euro-centric narrative of the past has dominated the historic narration for many years, and of how local perspective of the past has been too often ignored.



I think I can speak for many, including myself, when I say that we began our careers in Jordan by perpetuating this dominant model.

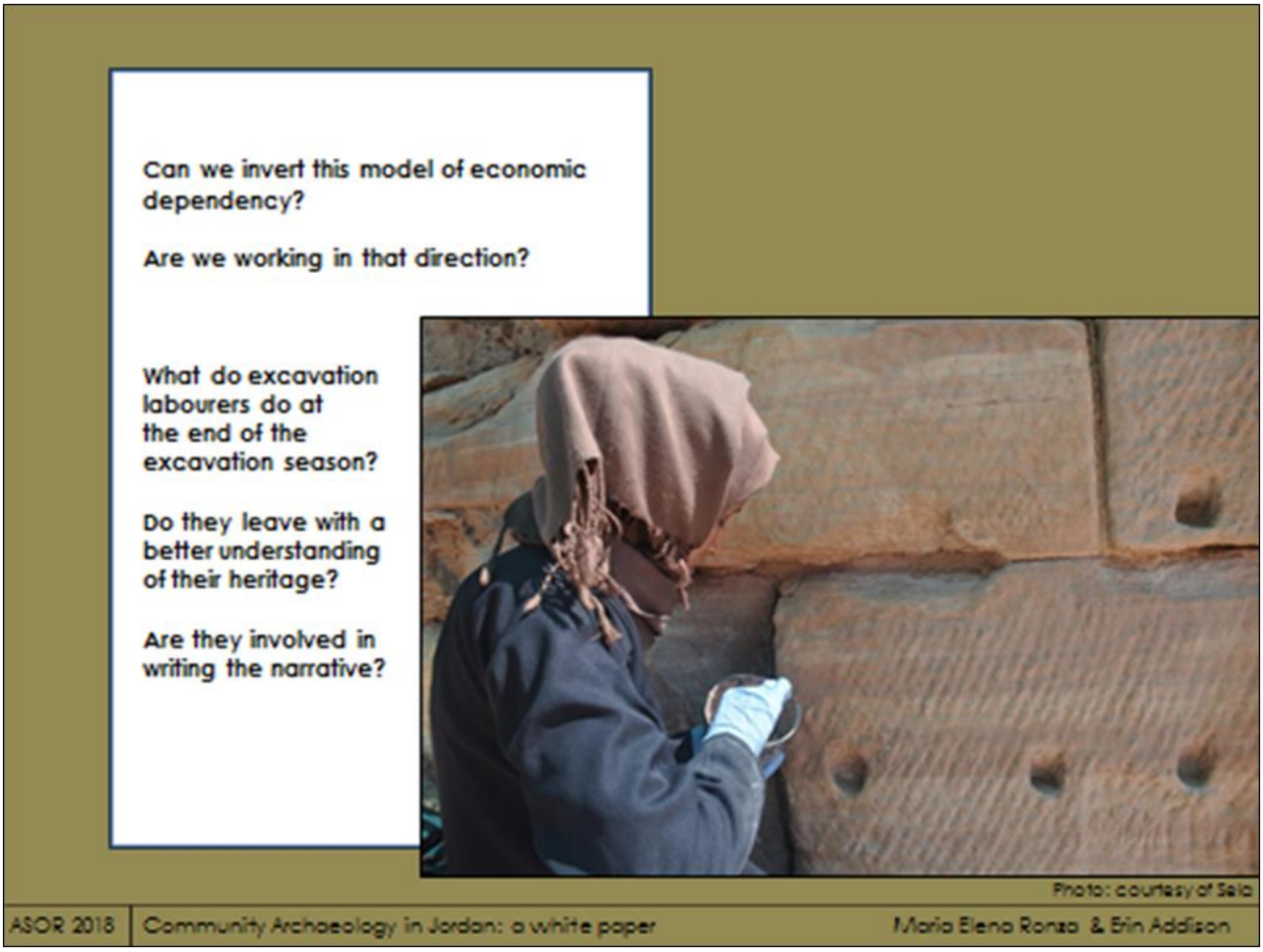
Projects often create economic and cultural dependency without empowering local residents either to advocate for themselves or to build sustainable income generated by cultural heritage management. By creating and fueling a culture of welfarism, such projects deepen the gap between "donors" and "beneficiaries," resulting in a situation in which no one acts as a genuine stakeholder. Foreign-led excavations and cultural heritage projects are *in fact* pivotal stakeholders in the archaeological scene in Jordan – indeed significantly responsible for the *status quo* – and as such we do need to fulfill our obligations and more responsibly partner with locals. Too often foreigners working in Jordan are totally detached from the complex realities of the state and community in which their sites are situated. Too often the opportunity to grasp local voices, to become ambassadors of the communities with whom we have worked for years and even decades is missed and lost.



And now what about communities?

Community archaeology has been a prevailing trend worldwide for at least two decades. It is defined and labeled in different ways across various kinds of projects and in different countries, but it is built on one common feature: the centrality of local communities. Community archaeology aims at involving and re-engaging locals with their own past and alternative narratives for the target site.

Put another way, community archaeology does not prefer one particular narrative over that of the host community's, but aims to enrich the available narratives.



Two levels of colonial behavior might be summarized:

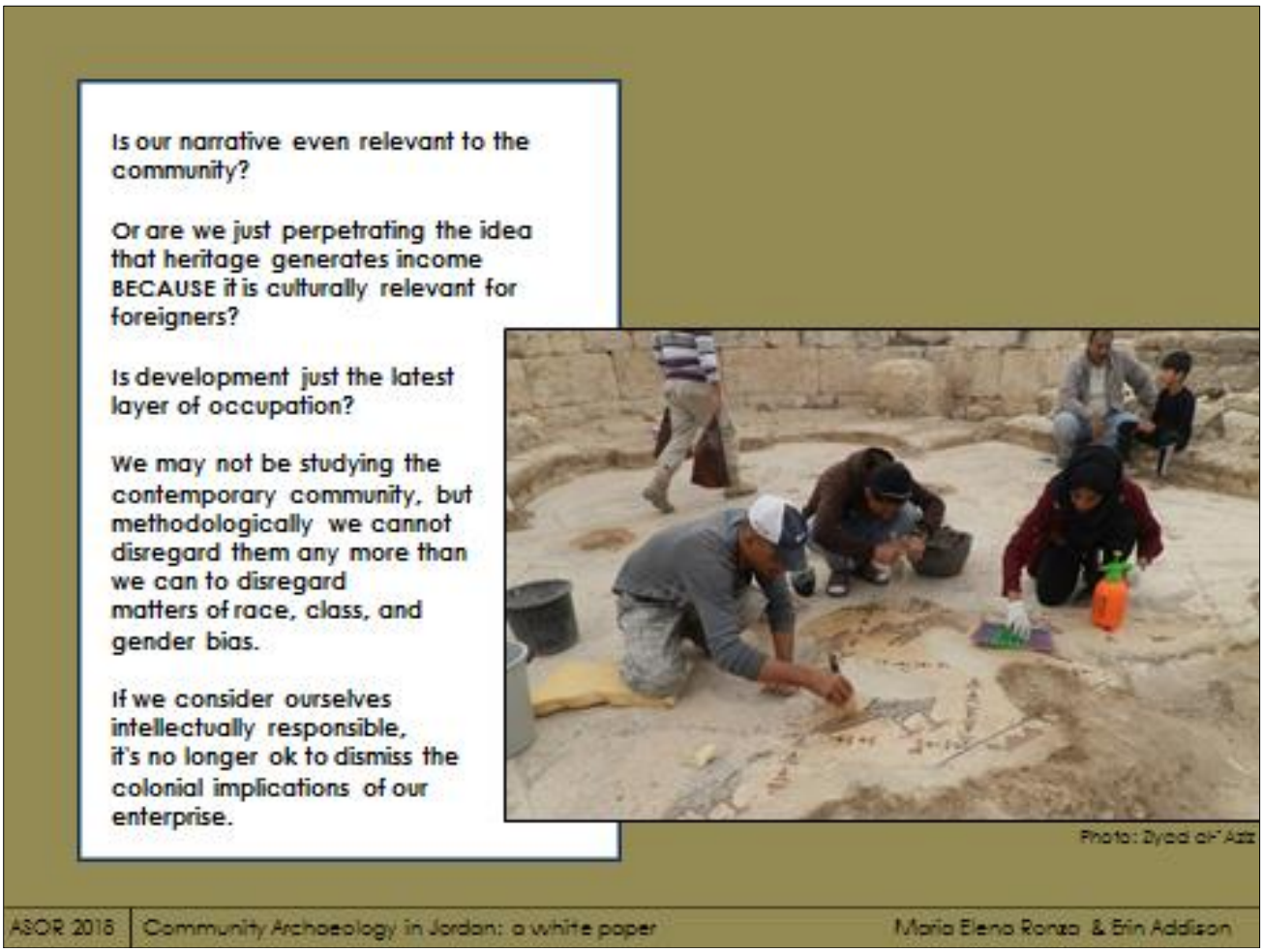
- Outright exploitation, which is what we do when we hire people for menial labor at scandalously low wages and/or fail to adhere to labor law.
- On a subtler level, we engage in the venerable practice of patronage. Benevolent patronage is often well-intended, but it creates dependence – exactly as less-well intended patronage has throughout the history of colonialism.

Benevolent patronage – what I am going to call charity – includes:

- grant funding that does not accrue to economic sustainability (i.e., once it is spent the source of income dries up)
- gifts and favors that occur outside rational legal and institutional structures (for example – paying for an emergency room visit after an accident instead of buying work accident insurance for workers)
- accepting lower performance standards for locals (or not expecting them to perform at all)

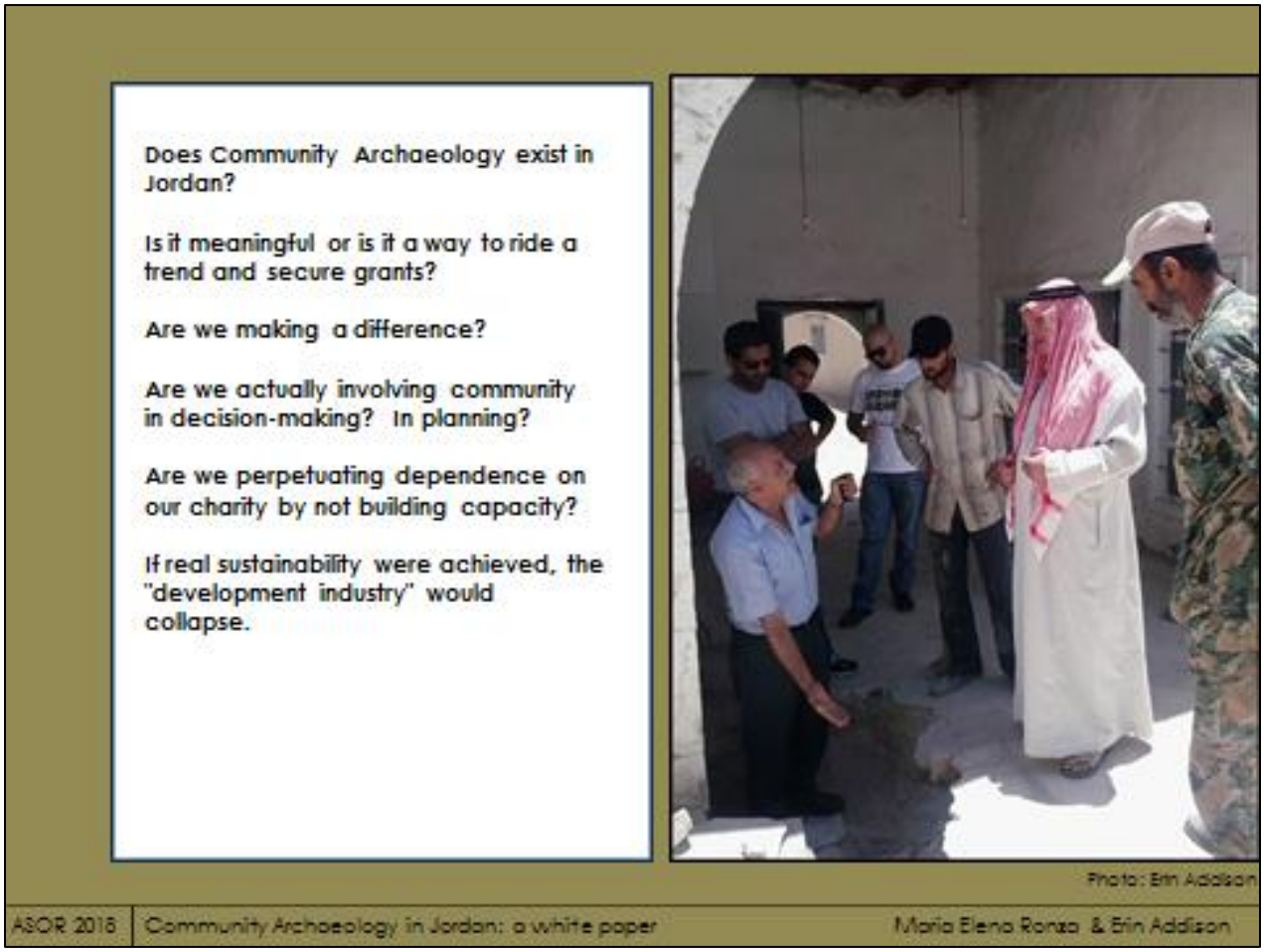
This sort of charity is nested in the larger patronage system of the "aid industry" or what is commonly referred to as "donor culture." In this context project targets are purposefully set low so that the recipient institution can meet them without stretching themselves – and frequently this means that tougher sustainability and capacity building goals are scrapped. This is, by the way, the routine advice of monitoring and evaluation experts who work with foreign donors.

We are defining economic sustainability as the financial break-even point – the ability of an organization, whether an NGO or company, to pay salaries, overhead and taxes without reliance on grant monies.



Is our narrative even relevant for the community? Or are we just perpetrating the idea that heritage generates income BECAUSE it is culturally relevant for foreigners?

We may not be studying the contemporary community, but methodologically we cannot disregard them any more than we can disregard matters of race, class, and gender bias. If we consider ourselves intellectually responsible, it's no longer ok to dismiss the colonial implications of our enterprise.



Here are questions we should be asking ourselves:

Does Community Archaeology exist in Jordan?

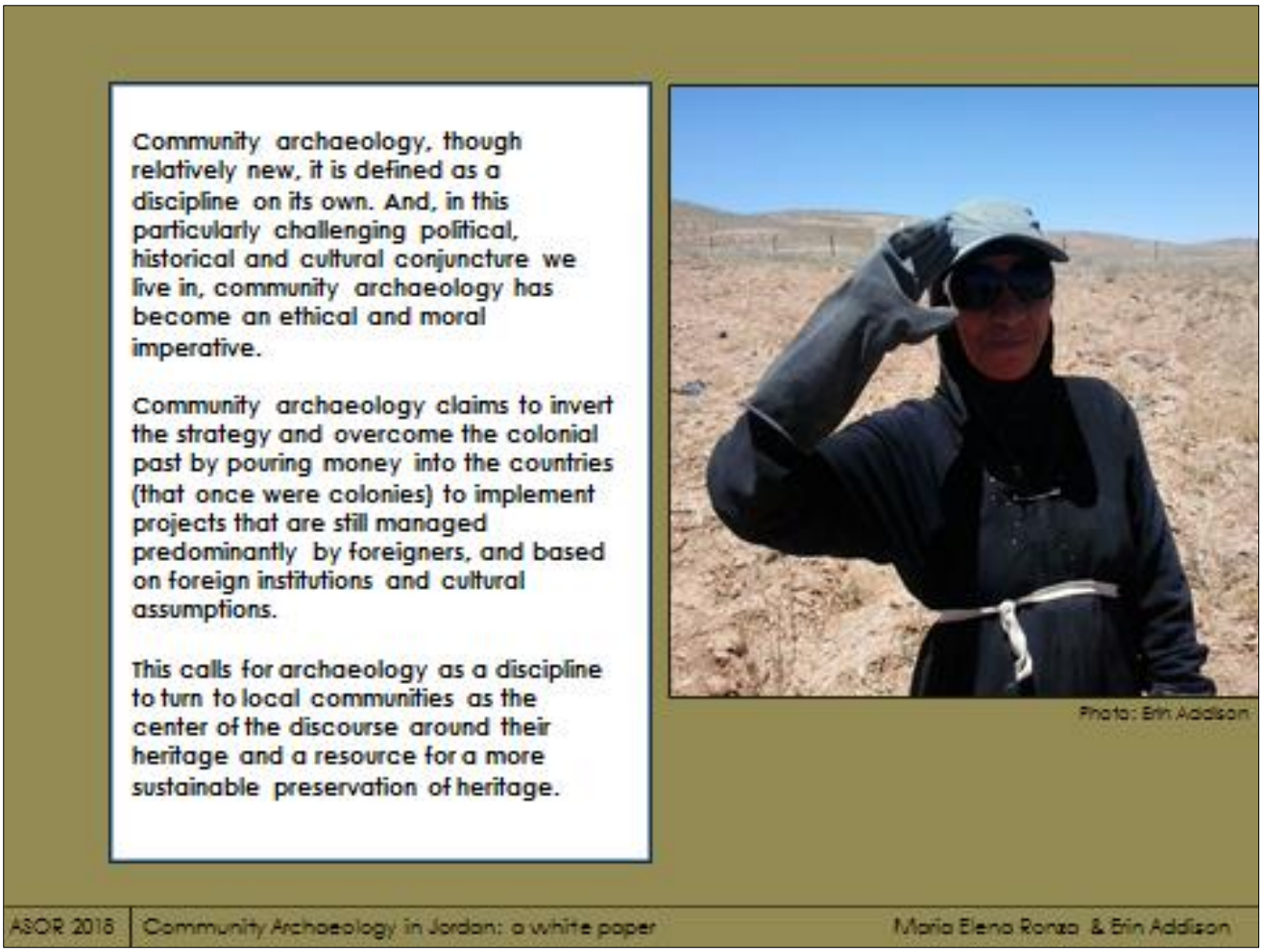
Is it meaningful or is it a way to ride a trend and secure grants?

Are we making a difference?

Are we actually involving community in decision-making? In planning?

And most important, if real sustainability were achieved, the "development industry" would collapse?

So is substance changing or we are just rephrasing and reinterpreting the same charity system?



Community archaeology is inverting the yet existing trend of attempting to overcome the colonial past by pouring money into the countries (that once were colonies) to implement projects that are still managed predominantly by foreigners, and based on foreign institutions and cultural assumptions.

The pioneering days of community archaeology are over and, in this particularly challenging political, historical and cultural conjuncture we live in, community archaeology has become an ethical and moral imperative.

[At this point the presenter, Eng. Ronza, opened the floor for discussion]

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