Buzon, in her article “A Bioarchaeology perspective on Egyptian Colonialism in Nubia during the New Kingdom,” focused primarily on examining human skeletal remains from Tombos to elucidate the ethnicity, biology, and health of these individuals. In line with many of the other articles we have been reading, Buzon aims to further demystify the imperial role of Egypt in Nubia by focusing primarily on ethnicity. In her study, Buzon uses a sample size of 100 from Tombos and then chooses a control group of 1,287 from both Egyptian and Nubian populations for comparison. Buzon divided these sites into four categories based on “ethnic indicators”: (1) Egyptian, (2) Nubian, (3) Other, and (4) Tombos

Her first hypothesis regards biological relationships and cultural effects of Egyptian-Nubian interaction at Tombos. By using craniometric differences, Buzon hopes to determine if these groups of people are physically different and if so, the extent of difference. The results indicated that for both males and females, Egyptians have greater facial height and more narrow cranial breadth, while Nubians tend to have lower facial heights and wider cranial breadth. The ‘other’ group and Tombos were mixed, but tend toward the Nubians. Further testing showed that Egyptian males and females from Abydos, Sheikh Ali, Memphis, and Qurna (all ‘in Egypt’) were classified as greater than 75% Egyptian. This consistency with location was more present in Egyptian sites than in Nubian, C-Group, and Kerman sites, which where comparatively 40-50% “Nubian.”

Next Buzon looked at the heath and disease of the individuals buried at Tombos to explore the effects of what might have been an Egyptian conquest and socio-political transition on the population. One comparative difference at Tombos was the presence of lesions on children that indicate they died when having the lesions. Buzon attributes this anomaly to infections from contaminated water sources. All other conditions, such as stress patterns, arthritis, and injury, are comparable to the other sites. Buzon, along with other scholars, takes this evidence to suggest that the New Kingdom occupation in Nubia was positive and provided mutual benefits.

Buzon concludes by interpreting this data as meaning that Tombos contains more than just Egyptian colonists. And in fact, she classifies the two types of “Egyptian” individuals who be buried in Nubia: (1) Biological Nubians from local populations who had been egyptianised, and (2) recent immigrants from Egypt. Buzon summates that the population buried at Tombos most likely consisted of local Nubians and immigrant Egyptians. Additionally, she states, “the intersection of ethnic and biological identities confirms that cultural identity is fluid and dynamic” (181).

Before jumping into a larger my larger question of ethnicity and identity, I’d like to question the legitimacy of using a bioarchaeological approach to make cultural comparisons. When I began reading the article, I was reminded of pre-civil rights era physical anthropology, which used such cranial measurements to suggest that people of African descent were more primitive when compared to white populations. I can understand looking at differences in physical characteristics, but what accusations can you really draw from this evidence? I would say very little. Evidence that shows populations shared physical traits does not in my mind mean anything more than shared genetic material. It seemed to me that Buzon was conflating biology with ethnicity.

This brings me to my larger question; how is ethnicity defined? While reading Buzon I continually noted that I felt like she was making all of her determinations as too stark; things were either “Egyptian” or “Nubian” and the areas in between were discounted[[1]](#footnote-0). It wasn’t until the very end of her article that she states, “the intersection of ethnic and biological identities confirms that cultural identity is fluid and dynamic” (108). I am glad I read this article before the Lizka because I found Lizka’s definition of ethnicity to be helpful in unpacking some of the problems I had with Buzon. Lizka classifies ethnicity as something that “does not reflect how identity is actually constructed and expressed in human societies” (160). Additionally, she continues to expand on the fluid and dynamic nature that Buzon only briefly notes at the end of her article; ethnicity is situational, people can identity with multiple ethnicities, it is not intrinsically correlated with other cultural traits, and it cannot be determined by any one category of material culture.

So, in reexamining Buzon after using Lizka, I found Buzon’s classification of “ethnic indicators” fallible for making claims about ethnicity. She cites these indicators as burial style, architecture, and grave goods and uses them in determining her control groups. By using Lizka’s definition, it seems to suggest that no archaeological evidence may exist to make it possible to ethnicity. This has lead me to question what we can say about differences in populations based on material evidence and is similar to the discussions we have been having about borders. If anything, Buzon’s article, especially after reading Lizka, sheds light on the complexities surrounding, biological identity, culture, and ethnicity. I would pose the question to the class of where do these classifications overlap and what kind of evidence characterizes their differences?

1. Perhaps statistical tests like the ones Buzon used in her article and ones we saw last week in Wendy Anderson’s dissertation have this limiting effect. By being forced to place data into categories that must fundamentally be different they account for the complexities and overlaps that might have existed [↑](#footnote-ref-0)