

# IS THERE A NEED TO (UN)GENDER THE PAST?

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper is concerned with identifying and discussing how archaeologists may have engendered the past in unintended ways and produced versions of social relations that, in the course of searching for antagonistic gender relations, project our own (feminist) desires of equality, autonomy, and agency onto past societies. It is proposed that an adequate recognition of the different dimensions of gender may help us to differentiate cultural understandings of gender from the ideological use of gender categories to establish hierarchical social relations.*

## INTRODUCTION

Reviewing the feminist literature on archaeology, I came to realize how difficult it is to summarize and discuss the archaeological study of gender in a comprehensive and analytical way. The reason for this is the existence of a variety of approaches and understandings of just what the agenda for gender studies is, as well as what constitutes a feminist approach to the construction of archaeological knowledge. Although there have been a number of conferences, published volumes and journals dedicated to discussing

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research on gender, it seems that the feminist critiques of gender research (Balme & Beck, 1993; Brumfiel, 1992; Conkey, 1993; Conkey & Gero, 1997; Conkey & Williams, 1991; Gero, 1996; Hodder, 1997; Wylie, 1993) have had little effect on most work. Since 1984, when Conkey and Spector, in their seminal article, called for a feminist integration of gender studies in a field which had been largely dominated by a western, andocentric bias, archaeologists have incorporated (or not) feminist critiques in different ways, producing a very diverse body of research.

In reviewing this innovative archaeology, I have found it useful to distinguish between “gender archaeology” and “feminist archaeology”<sup>1</sup> (Conkey & Gero, 1997). *Gender archaeology* is represented by research concerned with identifying gender in the past and making females visible. *Feminist archaeology*, on the other hand, is represented mainly by theoretical approaches aimed at criticizing a western approach to science, and an emphasis on the “need to situate gender research within an explicitly feminist framework” (Conkey & Gero, 1997, p. 411). Feminists have also questioned whether it is appropriate to frame research on the basis of gender, thereby assuming gender rather than investigating it (Conkey, 1993). Additionally, both the assumptions that biological sex can be evaluated independently of cultural values and that gender is always useful for understanding past societies have been under scrutiny (Hodder, 1997).

Within the gender and feminist approaches, a number of different studies have been published, and, although they have focused on similar issues (e.g., division of labor, ideology, use of space, participation in rituals and ceremonies, exercise of power, and so forth), they have produced different accounts and explanations for past social behavior. Stemming in part from the difficulty in translating feminist theory into archaeological practice, differences between these two approaches are not always clear-cut. Some authors have gone so far as to describe them as irreconcilable. Roberts (1993, p. 20) observes, that “perhaps we have to separate the use of feminist theory to address issues of gender in the past from the use of feminist theory to reflect upon the construction of archaeological knowledge”. Her statement reveals the multifaceted character of feminist scholarship.

In archaeology, feminist thinking has not been unidirectional but has evolved in parallel ways; it started with a critique of the andocentric bias, it responded to that bias by finding women in the past, and finally, it turned to questioning the practice of inserting women into the past (Joyce & Claassen, 1997, p. 2; Wylie, 1991). Not all research, however, has reached the third level.

This paper is concerned with identifying and discussing the ways in which we have engendered the past in unintended ways by looking for women in

antagonistic gender relations, and projecting our own (feminist) desires of equality, autonomy, and agency onto past societies, thereby distorting past reality. I believe that the problem derives mainly from: (1) the fluidity of gender as it has been conceptualized, making it difficult to interpret its manifestations in the archaeological record; (2) the confusion between cultural constructs of gender roles and identities with the social and political use of these roles and identities to establish oppressive and hierarchical relations; and (3) the failure to acknowledge that social relations are permeated by values that establish various levels of hierarchy, present even in small-scale societies. Western ideas concerning agency, equality, and individualism have saturated archaeological research, projecting onto the past our anxieties and ideals pertaining to the relationship between individuals and society, and generating a misunderstanding of the past.

## **GENDER AND SOCIAL HIERARCHIES**

Owing to the western separation of social sciences into distinct disciplines, sociologists define gender as a social construct while anthropologists define gender as the cultural construct of sexual differences. These conceptualizations do not simply reflect different points of view on the same observable fact, but, I believe these conceptualizations reveal two different phenomena.

Gender as a *cultural* construct can be understood as the way a given culture makes sense of biological sexual differences. It refers to a limited number of categories of people (in general females and males, but see [Roscoe \(1991\)](#) for an example on third gender) as distinctive in their social roles and identities, encompassing the way a person is suppose to dress, to behave, to talk, to make use of sexuality, to engage in subsistence activities, to interact economically, and so forth. These aspects obviously vary from culture to culture and, from an anthropological point of view, comparing one culture to another is illustrative of the variability in human behavior.

Researching gender roles and identities within other cultures challenges ethnocentrism, and urges us to reflect on our own cultural values and behavior. This is the kind of study that has characterized most of the literature on gender, which I will call (after [Joyce & Claassen, 1997](#)) *womanist* studies. Although mainly focusing on females, that research has shown the possibility of locating women (and occasionally men, children, and elders) in the past, emphasizing cross-cultural variability and challenging common assumptions of gender roles as natural and associated with specific sexual characteristics ([Brumbach & Jarvenpa, 1997](#); [Claassen, 1997](#); [Claassen &](#)

Joyce, 1997; Costin, 1996; P. L. Crown, 2000; Derevenski, 2000; Moore & Scott, 1997). This research is important in showing how gender differs from sex, since cross-cultural variations in gender roles do not always follow variation in sexual characteristics. A few scholars have indeed questioned the female/male dichotomy, discussing evidence for other genders (Hollimon, 1997), as well as exploring aspects of homosexual behavior (Casella, 2000). Also see both Graham and Segal in this volume.

Gender as a *social* construct, on the other hand, refers to the way gender ideologies (constructed from cultural understandings of gender) are used to establish hierarchical and asymmetrical gender relations. Gender, as an aspect of social hierarchies, does not make much sense outside hierarchical, hegemonic settings. When two or more categories of people enjoy differential access, differential rights, and differential treatment solely on the basis of their gender, the existence of an explicit hierarchy between them can be identified. When the hierarchy is consistently established in favor of one gender – usually male – a clear pattern of gender dominance is established and it is likely to permeate all instances of social life.

Interestingly enough, gender hierarchies are likely to be more visible in societies where egalitarian ideals are prevalent. For example, in kinship or class societies, gender hierarchies, if they exist, are subordinated to genealogical or economic principles. In this sense, elite women may enjoy high status, power and freedom, and poor men are subordinated to them in the hierarchical ladder.

As a reaction to essentialist conceptions of women and men as well-bounded categories, scholars have stressed that gender relations are permeated by other variables such as age, class, race, and faction. In fact, there are studies showing that in some societies age and kinship are more important than gender in defining one's role and identity, as well as in defining hierarchy (see, e.g., Descola, 2001; Fisher, 2001; Oyewùmí, 1997). The same studies, however, show situations in which certain groups of females clearly lack agency. Can we conceive inexistence of gender hierarchies in contexts where some females have no agency? How can we frame an analysis of gender in contexts where hierarchical relations permeate many different instances of social life, surpassing gender differences? How can we deal with the fact that the female population is divided into many other categories, thus making gender diffuse? Acknowledging the complexity of gender roles and gender relations should not lead us to blur our investigation with a vast number of contingent variables that prevent us from a clear analysis. There is a need to frame gender in an analytically feasible and theoretically consistent way.

My intent in separating gender as a cultural construct (as roles and identity) from gender as a social phenomenon (use of gender ideology to establish social hierarchy) is related to the need for determining when (and how) hierarchy and bias are based on gender. This intention may find parallels in Wallerstein's (2003) call for reconciling structure and history, revitalizing a perspective that is quite peculiar to archaeology. This will allow us to (1) people the past with females and males that are as different from us as that reflect the many cultures in existence; and (2) locate in the past when and how gender was used to define and reinforce hierarchical, asymmetrical relations, especially, the conditions necessary for gender hierarchies to emerge and to be politically manipulated. Archaeology has much to contribute in presenting evidence for historical and cultural dynamics of gender hierarchies.

In order to decouple gender roles and identities from gender hierarchies, we must conceive of the division of labor as part of a cultural understanding, one that is not static, but dynamic, of gender roles. Therefore, gender roles may be used to establish hierarchy, in particular situations, where belonging to a certain gender category (or conversely not belonging to acceptable ones) will be sufficient reason for discrimination in the form of less pay, lack of respect, low income, as well as restricted access (Foucault's lack of power) to services, goods, places, and positions. This may take the form of discrimination against a group or an individual. Since such discrimination is historical, it has to be located within a historical process, thus denaturalizing its origins.

## **A LOOK AT THE LITERATURE ON GENDER**

Research on gender is well-represented by a number of edited volumes that show the engagement of several (mostly American and female) archaeologists in looking for gender as a way to illuminate our understanding of social relations in the past as well as rewriting prehistory within a feminist perspective (see, e.g., Claassen & Joyce, 1997; P. L. Crown, 2000; duCros & Smith, 1993; Gilchrist, 1999; Hays-Gilpin & Whitley, 1998; Nelson & Rosen-Ayalon, 2002; Sørensen, 2000; Sweely, 1999; R. P. Wright, 1996). Within these collections, there is a wide variety of approaches, which represent existing variability rather than some kind of collective understanding of feminist archaeology. P. Crown (2000, p. 22) for example, admits that, despite the growing literature on gender in archaeology "there is no single notion on what we are attempting to elicit from this research or how should we go about it".

Most of the papers agree there is a need to talk about gender, because when gender is not explicitly addressed common sense leads people to assume that men were the individuals who performed important actions (Conkey & Spector, 1984; Gero, 1988). For example, Joyce and Claassen (1997, p. 8), point out that the papers published under the title “Women in Prehistory” pose a “methodological and interpretive challenge to conventional assumptions”. The diversity of issues discussed in the papers shows how quickly and seriously female archaeologists challenged themselves to look for new readings of old problems (see Claassen (1997) for a review of pre-1994 work).

The papers in the collection “Gender and Archaeology”, for example, aimed at demonstrating the many ways in which feminist scholars changed archaeological agendas (R. P. Wright, 1996), by reviewing gender issues in the past and introducing new questions. According to Wright (*op. cit.* p. 3) the major premise of the book is the existence of many archaeologies of gender, not a single approach. In fact, in discussing technologies, production (Costin, 1996; R. Wright, 1996), and representations (Brumfiel, 1996; Joyce, 1996), the articles show how a gender perspective can be applied to different types of research, providing interesting new explanations for old problems. A chapter on the practice of archaeology in the classroom and the field shows also a concern with criticizing the bias in the profession (Gero, 1996; Romanowicz & Wright, 1996).

In areas better known archaeologically, the introduction of gender seems not to pose a threat to conventional understandings, and gender has been incorporated as another dimension of the analysis. For example, in the volume entitled “Women and Men in the Prehispanic Southwest”, the editor states that, since there was already a good synthesis in that area, a closer look at the gendered division of labor could lead to an assessment of effects that demographic and economic changes had on the lives of women and men, specifically on “their tasks, health, prestige, and power within the community” (P. Crown, 2000, p. 5). In the volume, the authors are concerned with the sexual division of labor and the “presence of gender hierarchies or gender asymmetries” (*op. cit.* p. 24). Here, the authors are studying middle-range societies – mostly single villages – and they take the opportunity to draw comparisons between different cultures. Although the inclusion of males in the analysis is welcome, a number of problems emerge from the focus on women and men as well-bounded categories. First, women and men are seen as distinct categories that have distinct (sometimes complimentary, sometimes divergent) interests. Second, concepts such as prestige, power, status, gender hierarchies, and negotiation of gender are used without criteria and simple associations between archaeological features, status, and gender are drawn freely.

Following another path, “Manifesting Power” represents a collection of papers that focus on the relationship between power and gender. However, instead of problematizing that relationship, the articles employ different conceptions of power, frequently interchanging concepts of power with status and economic autonomy. Sweely (1999, p. 11), for example, defines power as “the capacity of individuals to pursue goals”, focusing on individual capacity to negotiate power in social relations. In fact, she conceives power as depending on daily situations and “outside of a hierarchical, dominance-oriented framework” (Sweely, 1999, p. 1). Since most of the articles are concerned with demystifying the domestic-public dichotomy, they tend to demonstrate that the conventional division of labor, when it existed, did not lead to unequal relations. In this sense, there is an implicit agenda of picturing a past in which females, even when tied to domestic spheres, would have power and prestige. The problem present in many analyses derives from a feminist critique of the archaeological approach to the sexual division of labor. Conkey and Spector pointed out that archaeology had traditionally assumed that past activities were highly gendered and that male activities were more highly valued than female ones. Female archaeologists, then tried to “correct” the past, showing that though the division of labor was gendered, it did not imply asymmetrical values. As a result feminists projected the present onto the past (Balme & Beck, 1993).

One of the reasons examining gendered activities has been one of the favorite avenues for archaeological inquiry on gender, is the fact that artifacts (the material remains of ancient activities) are highly visible in the archaeological record. In this sense, feminist archaeologists began to explore the relationship between performed activities and gender aiming at not only locating females in the productive space, but also assessing the social and economic importance of women’s activities for social reproduction. However, unless the research is theoretically and methodologically consistent, there are a number of problems with that kind of approach. Conkey and Spector (1984), for example, call attention to the fact that while the gender division of labor may refer to the cultural association of a specific gender with a particular task, this does not preclude the possibility of the task being performed by another gender. It may be difficult to demonstrate the link between gender and activity without relying on some kind of ethnographic analogy. Moreover, generating conclusions on gender relations based on the division of labor requires taking into account a variety of factors within a historical perspective. While the gender aspect of the division of labor is related to cultural traditions, the relative status and economic importance of labor is determined by historical and sociopolitical processes.

As an example, Hegmon, Ortman, and Mobley-Tanaka (2000), in studying the organization of space and gendered activities affirms that “task groups, particularly if they are culturally recognized with architecturally defined spaces, may be an important source of power. At the same time, some women within task groups may be subject to the supervision of other women; thus although task groups may be sources of power, they may also impose limits on an individual’s autonomy” (*op. cit.* p. 49). It is evident here and in other chapters of the book (*Women and Men in the Prehispanic Southwest*) that the gendered division of labor is associated with levels of prestige, power, and status that the authors define, using no criteria other than their own. It is indeed possible that in many societies female labor was recognized as critical and as a source of status, but that is something that has to be demonstrated rather than assumed.

In an article suggestively entitled “Women’s Work, Space, and Status”, Julia Hendon (1997) discusses the gendered division of labor in a site occupied by Maya Elite in Copán, Honduras. Reasoning from iconography such as that displayed on figurines and pottery, Hendon concludes that the social division of labor was largely gendered, since women are depicted “spinning, weaving, maize grinding and food serving, while men are shown hunting or dressed as warriors” (Hendon, 1997, p. 37). Although men seems to be the primary figures in ritual performance, the author points out that women are clearly in culturally and economically important positions. They provide the material items necessary for rituals (such as textiles and food). The division of labor led to a division of space for work, but it did not cause segregation in the mortuary space, where adults of both sexes and children were buried together. Hendon concludes that differences between genders as depicted in their activities did not lead to differences in prestige and status. The emphasis on different types of work reveals gender complementarity and “parallel sources of political and social power for men and women” (*op. cit.* p. 45). Hendon explains that competition between elites led to the need for creating displays of power in which women and men worked together (developing complementary tasks) in order to guarantee the reproduction of the social system.

Without realizing it, Hendon shows that, since the goal was to promote social cohesion and stability, gender was not in fact a way of discriminating against a specific group. Consequently, her final conclusion – that control over textile production was possibly a source of power and wealth that would lead women to “act independently of men” (Hendon, 1997, p. 45) – makes no sense within social groups that do not segregate people on the basis of gender and where the goals are collective rather than factional. Hendon’s article is an example of how gendered tasks may lead archaeologists to use gender as a social category in understanding a society in which gender is not an important organizing principle of hierarchy.

There are many cases in which the “division of labor” problem is framed in a rather interesting and enlightening way. [Brumbach and Jarvenpa \(1997\)](#), for example, question the “Man the Hunter” and “Women the Gatherer” paradigm, in which there is a traditional and universal division of labor based mainly on men’s ability and strength for hunting and women’s immobility caused by pregnancy and child rearing (see also [Balme & Beck, 1993](#)). In doing ethnoarchaeological research among a Chipewyan community, the authors found that women participated in hunting as much as men did, but that they tended to hunt small animals within a short distance from the house, while men would spend more time searching for large animals far away from the village. As a consequence, women’s and men’s hunting activities would create different archaeological signatures: the discard of carcasses and tools belonging to women were found closer to the household, and men’s butchering sites would be located far away, thus making them more difficult to recognize archaeologically. Other research has also shown that the economic significance and consequences of hunting for the division of labor is more complex than commonly assumed; and that incorporating a gender perspective facilitates an understanding of this complexity ([Balme & Beck, 1993](#); [Kent, 1998](#); [Sassaman, 1992](#); [Szuter, 2000](#)).

In general, there is much to gain when the research is framed within a chronological perspective (e.g., demonstrating how particular historical conditions especially affected women’s labor). A case in point is [Brumfiel’s \(1991\)](#) study of how the advent of the Aztec rule in Mexico affected women’s workload and the organization of production. She contrasts iconographic imagery (women cooking and weaving) with evidence for specialization in production between sites. She found that although the dominant ideology placed much emphasis on women producing cloth and food within the household, the reality was that there was specialization of tasks and women were in fact working for the market in communal workshops. The archaeological record shows that with the rise of the Aztec state important changes were imposed on women’s mobility and workload, which were neither conveyed in the iconography nor documented by ethnohistoric sources.

## FEMINIST ARCHAEOLOGY

The feminist critique in archaeology had, in its beginnings, a major impact on the work of several female archaeologists who started questioning their own masculine bias in producing knowledge. It generated a search for females in the past, as research designs began to incorporate a gender component. As many authors have pointed out, just asking about women implies

questioning the most common assumptions of the framework that had been utilized (Wylie, 1993). It can be said, however, little of that work has generated novel theoretical approaches (Balme & Beck, 1993, p. 70), since it was produced only by reframing research questions.

In many instances, research on gender has distanced itself from feminist critique. The feminist approach to archaeology today has involved a critique of the way archaeologists practice science, how they do research (both theoretically and empirically), how they interpret results, and how the results are presented (Conkey & Gero, 1997). A feminist approach requires not only an acute criticism of established “facts of science” but also the ability to create novel and convincing explanations, particularly, since scrutiny over feminist construction of knowledge tend to be more severe than other constructions.

Archaeologists seem to look at feminism as a political endeavor, without realizing that the production of scientific knowledge is always political and historical (Balme & Beck, 1993). The study of gender has generated a subfield within archaeology, since it does not seem to be useful for most of the questions archaeologists want to ask. At the same time gender studies claim that a gender perspective can provide more accurate reconstructions of the past. They imply that situations in which gender was irrelevant have been mistakenly gendered. For this reason, it is necessary to reconcile gender studies and feminist theory, and thus provide a structural, historical framework for the study of gender.

## UNGENDERING THE PAST?

Research on gender has shown that, despite the ambiguity of the archaeological record and claims of the invisibility of social actors, it is possible to find females in the past, and it is important to identify the gender of social actors in order to construct a more truthful vision of the past as a correction for the largely andocentric prehistory inherited by archaeologists. It is a fact that the past was populated by biological females and biological males, people who differed from each other according to their age, ethnicity, faction, group affiliation, abilities, obligations, and so forth. We have learned that gender is visible whenever we start looking for it (Oyewùmí, 1997, p. 31), despite its irrelevance to most issues under investigation. In fact archaeologists have asked themselves about the usefulness and legitimacy of using gender categories to understand social behavior in the past.

One interesting example of possible problems related to using gender as an analytical category is the study of ceramic figurines. Female figurines found in a variety of agrarian societies were traditionally considered to

represent goddesses or objects used in fertility rites (Conkey, 1989; Ehrenberg, 1989; Roosevelt, 1988). The reason for that was the recurrence of figurines displaying protuberant bellies and breasts. During the last decade, however, a number of authors have criticized those assumptions, exploring the figurines in a different way. First they have noticed the great variability among the figurines, in terms of shapes, sizes, techniques of decoration, as well as the fact that they were not all female (Barstow, 1978). Alternative readings provide other explanations for their use including as toys, objects of domestic cults, and representations of individuals (Bailey, 1994; DeBoer, 1998). Moreover, authors have emphasized the importance of looking at the context in which figurines are found before suggesting interpretations.

Although the majority of figurines are in general females, it is also common to find male figurines or figurines without representation of biological sex, sometimes interpreted as a third gender. But what if the figurines did not represent gendered individuals, but something else? Some authors have now suggested that classifying figurines according to gender may have prevented us from discovering other possible information, such as those figurines may differ from one another primarily on the basis of age (Gvozdover, 1989; Marcus, 1998). The point Marcus makes illustrates well how our own systems of classification (based on our western categories) influence our reading of the past. In this case, using gender as a basis of differentiation would lead to a very different reading of the past than would using other categories such as age. Several authors have in fact questioned the importance of gender in organizing social relations. For example, Nelson, Glowacki, and Smith (2002) criticize the assumption that gender hierarchies are present in all state societies. They point to the case of the Silla State (Korean peninsula – 57 BC to 668 AD) where hierarchies were primarily built on the basis of genealogy (casts) and age. The abundant evidence for gender equality is believed to reflect the fact that the basic principle of organization was kinship.

In tribal or traditional societies, gender may be used to organize labor or ritual or to establish hierarchy. But when gender is not used as a social institution, when being male or female is not a prerequisite for belonging to exclusive social groups or for developing social roles, gender may not exist at all. In investigating traditional societies, any oppression, lack of power or agency that we perceive at the individual level cannot be evaluated on the basis of gender unless the social relationships are framed as such.

Oyewùmí, in “The Invention of Women” tries to demonstrate how gender as a western concept was used to understand a society (the Yoruba) which was not itself organized along gender lines. An apparent contradiction is the

fact that marriage is polygamous. Yet, it seems odd to us that a society that was highly hierarchical was presented to us as gender and oppression free. The Yoruba societies, as well as the caste system in India, are examples of hierarchical social arrangements among age groups or social groups where the well-being of the social group and its reproduction is the goal, not the self-realization of the individual. In western society, where freedom and individualism are supposed to be the norm, everything that may conspire against the desired equality is considered pernicious.

Dumont (1970) points out that humans are always valuing and ranking things and people among each other. It is known that in the so-called egalitarian societies, there are commonly castes or hierarchical groups even in the absence of economic inequality. Dumont believes our ideals of equality prevent us from understanding hierarchy while, at the same time, creating other types of inequality. "The fusion of equality and identity has become established at the level of common sense. This makes it possible to understand a serious and unexpected consequence of egalitarianism. In a universe in which men are conceived as no longer as hierarchically ranked in various social or cultural species, but as essentially equal and identical, the difference of nature and status between communities is sometimes reasserted in a disastrous way: it is then conceived as proceeding from somatic characteristics – which is racism" (Dumont, 1970, p. 16). In other words, in a democratic state, people tend to establish hierarchical relations based on race and gender, which can be more easily diluted into the system than patterns of dominance/subordination based on caste and age.

It seems that the feminist critique in archaeology has to go further in criticizing our own bias. Roberts (1993, p. 18) affirms that the paradox of gender is that it cannot afford to challenge the framework. For her the solution is to include gender "within the broader realm of social theory" where its importance would be "minimized and its potential appropriated". I do not think that gender as a category of analysis has to be abandoned or set aside in some instances. However, the excessive emphasis of gender as individual identity has to be abandoned in favor of more social, historical approaches. Gender as a category of analysis has to be reframed and investigated as a culturally meaningful concept that, within historical circumstances, may be used to justify hierarchical social relations. The dynamics of the culture and the historical processes constitute the milieu where the study of gender might find its place.

Based on the issues discussed above, it is worth envisioning an agenda for feminist studies in archaeology. I will delineate below some of the issues and strategies that I think are important.

- (1) Archaeologists will still want to show that the past was populated by women, men, and children, because “when gender is not explicit, it is assumed” (Conkey & Williams, 1991).
- (2) We may want to show that our current social arrangements (gender identity and gender roles) are not “natural”, but dependent on historical and cultural processes. We do not want to place our understanding of gender as more “evolved” than other peoples, but show that we have much to learn from other cultures. Especially, we may want to research the existence of other genders and different cultural and social understandings for homosexuality, in order to deconstruct feminine and masculine as “natural” gender categories.
- (3) We may want to improve the visibility of gender in the archaeological record, developing new methodological approaches.
- (4) We may want to question our own assumptions about gender. Although “bias is unavoidable and an important part of the interpretation” (Hodder, 1997), we may want to have some control over our own bias, at least to the point of having it explicitly assumed. As Roberts (1993, p. 16) has pointed out, “the ultimate aim of the incorporation of gender into archaeology is to produce less biased accounts of the past”. We should not, then, substitute male bias with feminist bias.
- (5) Finally, we may want to investigate how gender ideology and gender hierarchies are constituted, how they are manipulated, and how they change through time. A historical perspective provides the best background against which we can evaluate social relations, because it involves both process and change. Archaeology, as a discipline that studies processes of cultural change, is, indeed, well suited for this mission.

## NOTES

1. Conkey and Gero (1997, p. 423) establish a difference between archaeology of gender and gendered archaeology, where the latter would involve the “interrogation of archaeological inquiry”.

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backgrounds, whose enthusiasm and shamelessness in exposing their ideas enriched the debates enormously, transforming an academic course to an amazing intellectual experience. Although this paper was not discussed with them as much as I wished, I feel that my understanding of the importance of feminist theory for the development of social sciences and particularly archaeological theory and practice was definitely shaped in that warm environment.

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