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THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE: INCORPORATING GENDER, CHILDHOOD AND IDENTITY IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

We discuss the important role of the feminist critique in bringing awareness to gender, childhood, and identity research, and in giving voice to the perspectives of underrepresented groups. As a case study of ancient social lives and gender, we discuss a range of Marajoara identity markers interpreted through the study of ceramic *tangas* (female pubic coverings) from Marajó Island in the Brazilian Amazon (A.D. 400-1400). There, *tangas* were made and used by women as a material representation of social position, gender, and individual identity. We argue that identity constitutes a fundamentally important aspect of archaeological research, and that the strongest case studies in identity are those that encompass a variety of gendered inferences to understand social lives of the past.

Palavras-chave: Feminist theory and archaeology; Gender and identity studies; Marajoara Ceramic *Tangas*.

RESUMO

Neste artigo, discutimos o importante papel da crítica feminista na conscientização de pesquisas relacionadas aos estudos de gênero, infância e identidade, e em vocalizar as perspectivas de grupos pouco representados. Como um estudo de caso sobre gênero e vidas sociais antigas, discutimos uma série de marcadores de identidade Marajoara interpretados através do estudo das *tangas* cerâmicas (coberturas púbicas femininas) na Ilha de Marajó, na Amazônia brasileira (400-1400 A.D.). Estes artefatos foram feitos e usados por mulheres como uma representação material de posição social, gênero e identidade individual. Argumentamos que identidade constitui um aspecto importante e fundamental na pesquisa arqueológica, e que seus mais sólidos estudos de caso constituem aqueles que abrangem uma variedade de inferências sobre gênero para compreender as vidas sociais no passado.

Keywords: Teoria feminista e arqueologia; Estudos de gênero e identidade; *Tangas* cerâmicas Marajoara.

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we first discuss the importance of feminism and post-processual archaeology in bringing awareness to gender, childhood, and identity studies. We argue that identity constitutes a fundamentally important aspect of archaeological research, and we use ceramic analysis from Marajó Island in the Brazilian Amazon (Figure 1) as a practical example of the theoretical-methodological relevance of such studies. On Marajó Island, large chiefdoms of complex, densely populated societies were established during what is known as the Marajoara phase of the Amazon Polychrome Tradition, which grew and expanded from c. A.D. 400 to 1400. As a case study, we discuss Marajoara ceramic thongs or female pubic coverings, known as *tangas* (Figures 2 and 3). These objects, when understood in their domestic and production contexts, speak to daily life and many aspects of ancient identities related to gender, age, and social status (BARRETO, 2004; SCHAAN, 2001, 2003, 2008).

Drawing on the third-wave feminist approach (e.g., BRUMFIEL, 1992; CONKEY & GERO, 1991), we argue that identity studies are more meaningful when they encompass many different markers of identity, such as social status, age, and sexuality. The construction and negotiation of multifaceted identities is one of the defining universal characteristics of humans (VARIEN & POTTER, 2008:15) and, arguably, the most important if material culture is taken as the primary indicator of identity maintenance in the past. Identities are composed of situationally and temporally fluid embodiments of culturally unstable elements of personhood, such as ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and faction, to name a few (BRUMFIEL, 1992). These elements vary in visibility depending upon: the scale of the observation; the perspective of the observer; and most importantly, the context of the archaeological record that is being analyzed. The explicit study of identity has become important to archaeologists seeking to make their works more inclusive of the aspects of identities that today are often situated in opposition to the majority (MESKELL, 2007).

GENDER RESEARCH

Gender studies emerged from the political and academic feminist movements of the late 1970s and early 1980s (VOSS, 2007:128). With its maturity, the movement achieved popularity and a high degree of legitimacy by the early 1990s. The feminist movement and gender studies were initially embraced by the post-processual archaeologists of the 1980s. They argued that gender studies would help combat the effects of contemporary sexism on archaeological interpretation, and, at the same time, provide meaningful new information about the history of gender relations and social identity (VOSS, 2007:125).

As Mary Baker (1997:188) poignantly observed, “we treat as fact the assumption that the material we find was used by men, we have faith that men were there, while women must be found.” We would add that the same applies to children and elders as well. To elucidate this problem, Diane Gifford-Gonzales (1993) studied the illustrated representations of Cro-Magnon societies by 88 artists found in publications accessible to the public and in college textbooks. The messages of the illustrations were clear; prime-age men are the main agents with action roles, while women are delegated to background tasks, such as scraping hides and tending babies. Women, more often than men, are displayed in submissive postures: bending over, kneeling, sitting, squatting, or reclining. Elders and children rarely appear as actors engaging in activities, and the illustrations primarily focus on active men hunting, carrying meat home, conducting rituals, and manufacturing art and tools.

The illustrations exemplify the biases of the “Man the Hunter” perspective (edited by LEE & DEVORE, 1968), which over-emphasizes the role that men played in prehistoric societies as the providers of food. They reflect dominant biases of the societies within which many researchers lived, and in which we continue to live today. Such theories were pioneered by Charles Darwin (1889:565), who argued that “man has ultimately become superior to woman.” As a critique of this androcentric perspective, Sally Linton published a paper in 1971 entitled “Woman the Gatherer.” Linton suggested that the gathering activities of women were in fact the most important contribution to human evolution. She offered a pioneering example of the significance of women’s role in prehistory, which had been neglected, twisted, and underestimated due to the dominant androcentric biases of anthropology.

Addressing the issues concerning the gendered division of labor in both the Man the Hunter and Women the Gatherer theoretical perspectives, Mary Stange (1997) critiques how scholars have been influenced by the present, projecting their modern beliefs and behaviors into the past indiscriminately. Stange argues that both perspectives have oversimplified the past by taking complex issues and offering singular solutions (e.g., men hunted large game mammals while women gathered wild foods). Such theories often ignore, contradict, or attempt to circumvent the test of archaeological evidence. For example, ethnographic studies by Agnes Estioko-Griffin & P. Bion Griffin (1981), and Andrew Noss & Barry Hewlett (2001) demonstrate that hunting, including the taking of large game, is not a universally male activity — women and children hunt among the Agta of the Philippines and the Aka forest foragers (“pygmies”) in Central Africa respectively. If it is now widely accepted that women and children fished, trapped, and hunted, why is it that they are not considered to be food contributors? Conversely, even though it is accepted that men had roles in food gathering, researchers often constrain their definitions by suggesting strict, pseudo-evolutionarily based divisions of labor across great time spans and territories. Recognizing the dilemmas concerning gender and economic activities, many scholars argue that the division of labor within societies is much more fluid than previously acknowledged and certainly varies greatly through time and circumstance, as well as between and within cultural groups (e.g., DAHLBERG, 1981; KELLY, 1995; STANGE, 1997).

Moreover, the concepts of man and woman are problematic, being socially and culturally constructed in each particular society on the basis of a continuum of possibilities, and therefore, gender needs to be understood apart from biological sex dichotomies (JOYCE, 1992). Further, gender is not something that is acquired by individuals when they are born, as individuals construct their identities through a lifetime. Gender is the amalgam of social roles attributed to individuals throughout their lives, which is experienced in specific contexts (LIMA, 2003; SCHAAN, 2001:27). For example, among native North American societies living in the Plains region, there is extensive documentation of a category of gender colloquially referred to as *berdache*, a distinct third gender of individuals with male genitalia who adopt certain aspects of occupation and dress that are associated with women among the Arikara, Mandan, Hisatsa, Pawnee, and most divisions of the Sioux (HOLLIMON, 2001:180-181). There is also a fourth gender documented among Plains groups (e.g., Cheyenne, Crow, Blackfoot, Pend d’Oreille) held by biologically female persons who have one or more of the following behavioral characteristics: inclusion in war parties as armed combatants, participation in male-dominated subsistence activities, occasional and/or partial cross-dressing, refusal to marry men, and sexual activity with women (HOLLIMON, 2001:181).

CHILDHOOD RESEARCH

In addition to addressing the invisibility of women in archaeological interpretations, the feminist critique also raised questions about the near absence of children in archaeological studies (NEUBAUER, 2016:968). Archaeologists have long assumed children to be invisible agents in their research. Children were either unimportant, non-agentive, or impossible to address. However, we know that children and sub-adults represent a major component of social groups, both in number and influence. It should be expected then that they played a role in the creation of the archaeological record, even though we as archaeologists struggle to identify and interpret their impact in the material record (BAXTER, 2005:10, 2008:162). For example, to date, the skeletal remains of more than 500 Neanderthal individuals are known, and surprisingly about half of them are children (STAPERT, 2007:17). Yet, with the exception of a few studies (*e.g.*, HAWCROFT & DENNELL, 2000; STAPERT, 2007; TILLIER, 2011), there is a paucity of literature regarding Neanderthal children and sub-adults that extends into Paleolithic times (SHEA, 2006).

Like gender, the concepts of what constitutes a child and the experience of childhood are cultural constructs that vary greatly between and within societies. Recognizing that “children” and “childhood” are cultural constructs requires that we break down our western conceptions that define children as incomplete beings shaped by adults. The same western notion of the child led many researchers to use age-based categories to describe human developmental stages. Although relevant, this developmental trajectory likely varies significantly between societies, and we must also understand children in their own cultural context (BAXTER, 2005). As an example, the Inuit hunter-gatherers conceive of a child as a “small adult.” A newborn is not considered an entirely new or unique individual; he or she receives the name of a person who had died recently, and with that the attributes of the previous owner(s) of the name (PARK, 1998:271). Inuit children are presumed to be socially whole and adults only need to guide and direct them (GUEMPLE, 1988:134).

Likewise, Jane Baxter (2005) emphasizes children as social actors and critiques interpretations of their socialization as being a simple transmission of cultural knowledge from adults to children in a unilateral process. Instead, she understands socialization as a dialog where “cultural knowledge is not simply unilaterally transmitted but is shaped and negotiated through interactions between members of families and communities” (BAXTER, 2005:24). Baxter’s (2005:24) concept of socialization “defines adults and children as social actors who have unique perceptions of the world and have the power to shape and be shaped by their interactions.” Considering children as social and cultural actors allows us to understand that they are capable of making important decisions, to effectively contribute to their families, communities and societies, and were contributors in the creation of the archaeological record.

IDENTITY RESEARCH

Identity studies were also underrepresented in archaeological research until the 1970-80s, when feminist and post-processual approaches brought an awareness to the perspectives of underrepresented groups. As a way of overcoming the biases of first-wave feminists, who focused primarily on the importance of women in the archaeological record, third-wave feminism positioned gender in relation to other identity markers such as age, ethnicity, class, inequality, and sexuality (BRUMFIEL, 1992; MESKELL, 2002:283).

Identities are multiply constructed and, according to Lynn Meskell (2002:279-280), “refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities.” Thus, the strongest case studies in identity are those that encompass a multitude of gendered inferences to understand social lives in the past. Following this perspective, many intensive studies of gender, childhood, sexuality, ethnicity, class inequality, status, and queer theory have been undertaken (e.g., ARNOLD, 2007; ARTHUR, 2002; CROSS, 2007; FINLAY, 2015; HÖGBERG, 2008; REEDER, 2000; TORRES-ROUFF, 2002; WEISMANTEL, 2004; WURST, 2010).

Processual archaeologists, however, have traditionally based their interpretations around what is known as the ecosystemic approach. The large scale of observation used in the ecosystems approach though has limited progress in the analysis of social change arising from internal social negotiation, often lending too much importance to macro-scalar cultural-adaptive systems. Such large scales of analysis tend to distort changes resulting from the meaningful actions and ideas of agents and social actors at the scale of daily life, leading to an overestimation of the impact of external forces of change in comparison to the ground-level internal forces. Archaeology’s historical reliance on systemic analysis has led to the invisibility of gender and minority groups for these same reasons (BRUMFIEL, 1992).

Few studies of prehistory demonstrate a concern with past ethnic groups, likely because most archaeologists consider ethnicity to be self-defined, and therefore, only accessible when supplemented by written records (JONES, 2010:302-305). Sian Jones (2010), however, describes ethnic identity as a dynamic, contested, ambiguous, and multi-layered phenomenon that changes in different contexts of social interaction. Jones instead refers to the “praxis of ethnicity,” and emphasizes the relationship between a person’s consciousness of ethnicity and their socio-cultural context. In this way, the production and consumption of different styles of material culture are related to an individual’s social context and historical experiences, which define the characterization of and differences among ethnic identities. This approach to ethnicity accounts for both the large- and small-scale social relations in which thoughts are embedded and actions carried out. Siân Jones’s (2010) theoretical praxis of ethnicity framework offers a reference for the study of ethnic identities in the past, and for identifying other markers of identity through the study of the material culture of daily activities practiced in both historic and prehistoric contexts.

A RECIPE FOR IDENTITY: NEW INSIGHTS FROM CERAMIC ANALYSIS

Although we come from a behavioral tradition that holds as a value the belief that all is potentially knowable (SKIBO & SCHIFFER, 2008:20), we also accept that the extent to which we can explore questions of identity is limited by the range of evidences and theoretical tools at our disposal. Sites where material culture is sparse seem to constrain our ability to answer specific questions, as do excavations where the documentation is poor, or where the preconceptions of an archaeologist are so ingrained that a reexamination of their finds from another viewpoint is difficult or impossible. Such constraints should not, however, limit the development and exploration of new theoretical questions related to the nuanced aspects of identity that superficially appear to be out of our reach. By constructing new methods and perspectives at the theoretical level, archaeologists have the potential to reap more from the material record, thus expanding the range of questions and interpretations that we can offer from the limited vantage of our material observations. Until now, we have called for a consideration of identity at the metaphysical stage of knowledge

production and interpretation, but archaeological research also benefits from a consideration of the importance of identity at the more practical methodological level. Ceramic analysis offers a perfect example of the potential growth that can emerge from the interplay between method and theory in the study of identity.

Pottery was once seen as having limited value beyond its use in stylistic seriation. Under the examination of processual archaeologists, the range of information attainable from ceramics expanded to include chemical and petrographic evidence, which were largely used for sourcing materials and to study the modes of production. Behavioral archaeologists further expanded the field through the development of methods for studying the patterns of wear that result from constant human manipulation (SCHIFFER, 1975; SKIBO, 1992, 2013), thus emphasizing the roles that people played, as well as revealing household scale insights into cooking methods, vessel usage, and cuisine more broadly. Today, pottery, and its context in a landscape or household, informs such diverse identity-laden topics as the gendered division of labor (WRIGHT, 1991); status (ARTHUR, 2002; NEUPERT, 2000); heterarchical and informal power relations (METCALFE *et al.*, 2009); cuisine practice at the family, group, state, and national levels (HASTORF, 1991, 2003); and as a result of methodological advances that allow researchers to extract and date ever smaller samples of lipids, ceramics can be pulverized to reveal traces of the very foods that were cooked within them (BARKER *et al.*, 2012; EVERSLED *et al.*, 2002; HERON *et al.*, 1991; SKIBO *et al.*, 2009, 2016). The same lipids can be radiocarbon dated with accuracy besting charcoal and plant samples (STOTT *et al.*, 2003). These examples are not intended to simply exalt the merits of technological advances, but to show how materials that once were considered sterile have gained new meaning through the interplay between discussions in the debates of identity and methodological considerations of identity.

Advances in methods and theory feed back in to the study of materials, revealing new insights that can be interpreted to explain aspects of identity. To researchers, such as our selves, the benefits of advances in the theoretical interpretation of ceramics cannot be understated. As one of the most common forms of archaeologically excavated material culture, sherds of ceramic cookware are a direct link to the everyday production of identity at the household or community level (JAMIESON, 2005:228). In their definition of themselves, individuals and groups place a high importance on cuisine (BRAY, 2003a:3, 2003b) and cookware is the medium through which many cuisine choices are performed.

The materials that archaeologists study are fertile grounds for explorations of identity when researchers expand their questions to include the meaningful aspects of identity construction. These theoretical explorations of identity should include alternative viewpoints and self-reflection, to account for the diverse extent to which issues of identity extend, as well as to more explicitly define our own participation in the creation of knowledge. Ideally, the democratization of knowledge production will lead to more objective and open discussion of identities, past and present. In this way, archaeology has the potential to become more socially responsible and appeal to a wider audience.

Case Study: Marajoara *Tangas*

As a case study, we discuss research into Marajoara *tangas* (e.g., BARRETO, 2004; PROUS, 2013; PROUS & LIMA, 2011; SCHAAN, 1997, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2010), which are ceramic thongs or female pubic coverings found in elite Marajoara female burials, and in household contexts at elite mounds. The *tangas* are triangular and

concave in shape, and some were decorated (Figure 2) while others were left plain (Figure 3).

On Marajó Island (Figure 1), in the Brazilian Amazon, large chiefdoms emerged at A.D. 400, during a period typified by the construction of dams, retention ponds, and mounds. These monuments functioned to control natural resources and fish production. The cultural changes during the Marajoara phase (c. A.D. 400 to 1400) appear to be connected with the construction of mound features and a change in subsistence strategies, which was tied to the intensification of social complexity on the island. Taking advantage of the situation, small groups managed to control the resources and lived on privileged mounds where their ancestors had been interred, along with suites of their burial goods. Ceremonies took place on the mounds, accompanied by ceramic workshops for the production of both domestic and ceremonial pottery. The sophisticated Marajoara ceremonial ceramics represent the political and religious values of the emergent elite (SCHAAN, 2003:38).

Figure 1 - Location of Marajó Island in the Brazilian Amazon.



In addition to functioning as efficient hydraulic systems, the mounds also served a myriad of other purposes. They were burial grounds where ancestors were interred in ceramic urns, they featured public spaces and ceremonial centers, and housed elite residential complexes that would be safe during the annual flooding season (ERICKSON, 2010:114). The mounds further represented visible monumental features that required a great mobilization of labor to build and maintain. They symbolize the social appropriation of space by organizing and materializing social boundaries and relationships. Monuments associate a group with a place and are experienced by large audiences. They can also represent the power and authority of the ruling class, and may

have functioned to legitimize their rule. Ritual events were often conducted on the mounds, presumably by elites, or by agents and institutions under elite supervision (DEMARRAIS *et al.*, 1996:18-19). In such a context, material culture might have been consciously utilized by some social groups to reinforce hierarchies and privileged access rights to natural and cultural resources.

The Marajoara political economy was largely based on two economic activities: fishing and the production of ceramics. Marajoara ceramic decorative motifs frequently emphasize female sexual organs, including on the ceramics buried with males. Female figures are represented on most of the Marajoara ceremonial pottery, depicting associations between women, snakes, and ancestors (SCHAAN, 2003, 2008). The Marajoara religious system was based on the worship of ancestors, and perhaps their ceramics speak of an important role that female ancestors played in sacred contexts (SCHAAN, 2003, 2008).

The ceremonial mounds contained abundant workshop waste from the production of both ceremonial and domestic pottery, which had been manufactured in household contexts. In the same area, children's ceramic toys, *tanga* sherds, and remains of ceramic production have been recovered (SCHAAN, 2003, 2008). Because Marajoara *tangas* are not found in the context of smaller habitation mounds, Denise Schaan (2003) suggests that they were associated exclusively with elite women and were an item of high social status. The ceramics of the elite mounds seem to have been made primarily by women at the household level for self-consumption. This is evidenced by a correlation between *tangas* and the ceramic waste of their production in the same area. There are variations in *tanga* styles and shapes from different elite mounds of the same chiefdoms, which indicate diversity in their localized production and technological history (SCHAAN, 2003, 2008). It is likely that to learn the local methods of producing their own *tangas*, elite women would have spent considerable time and resources acquiring the necessary skills to produce the valuable status-imbued objects. Moreover, Amazonian pottery in general are often well decorated, denoting that they represented an important medium for the circulation and reproduction of information and knowledge (BARRETO & OLIVEIRA, 2016:53).

There are two general types of Marajoara *tangas*: decorated and non-decorated. Decorated *tangas* (Figure 2) have geometric decorative motifs in red over a surface painted white. Although the use of black in Marajoara funerary urns is widespread, the color is never used on *tangas* (PROUS, 2013:818). The non-decorated *tangas* (Figure 3) are painted red and polished, resulting in a bright and vibrant finish. In addition, André Prous & Angelo P. Lima (2011) identified three general *tanga* shapes (Figure 4). Shape 1 (Figure 4) is a triangle that is slightly wider (12-15cm) than its length (9-13cm), with a thickness of 4-6mm. Shape 2 (Figure 4) is much broader (14-20cm) than its length, and exhibits two pointed side wings. Shape 3 (Figure 4) is rare, and is rounded with a height (11-13cm) equal to its width (PROUS, 2013:818). Experiments conducted with adult females by André Prous (2013:823) suggest that, due to their morphologies, *tangas* could not be used by adult men, and confirmed that shapes 1 and 2 (Figure 4) exactly cover the female pubis and allow "the normal movements and exigencies of everyday life." It is important to note that each *tanga* was uniquely decorated and made to a different size, shape, and curvature. The fact that *tangas* were bespoke and custom-made for their users indicates that the artifacts represent features of individual and social identities (BARRETO, 2004; PROUS & LIMA, 2011; SCHAAN, 2003). It is also relevant to note that not every *tanga* was made to be worn. There are at least four known miniature examples (less than 10cm wide), perhaps intended as children's toys (PROUS, 2013:826).

Figure 2 - Example of a decorated Marajoara *tanga* with geometric motifs in red over a white painted surface, measuring 12cm in length and 15cm wide (based on BARRETO, 2004:20, Figure 20).



Illustration by Fernanda Neubauer

Figure 3 - Example of a non-decorated Marajoara *tanga* that is red and polished, measuring 13.5cm in length and 19cm wide (based on BARRETO, 2004:22, Figure 19).

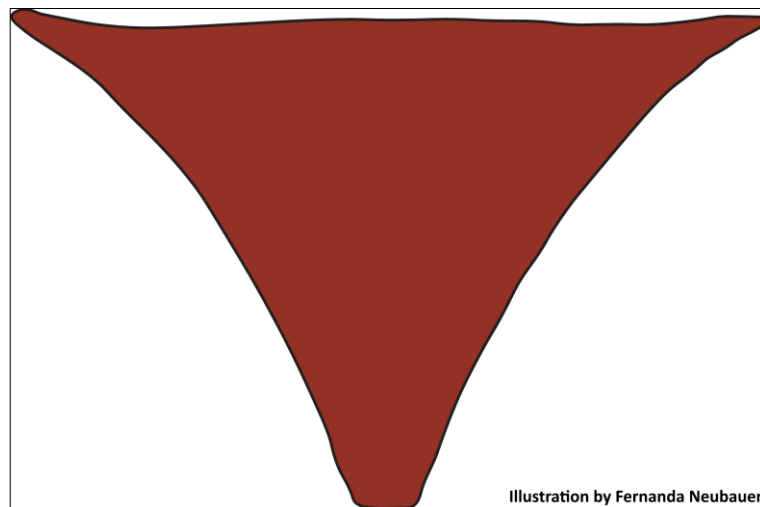


Illustration by Fernanda Neubauer

Figure 4 -Representations of the three general *tanga* shapes (based on PROUS & LIMA, 2011:235, Figure 2).

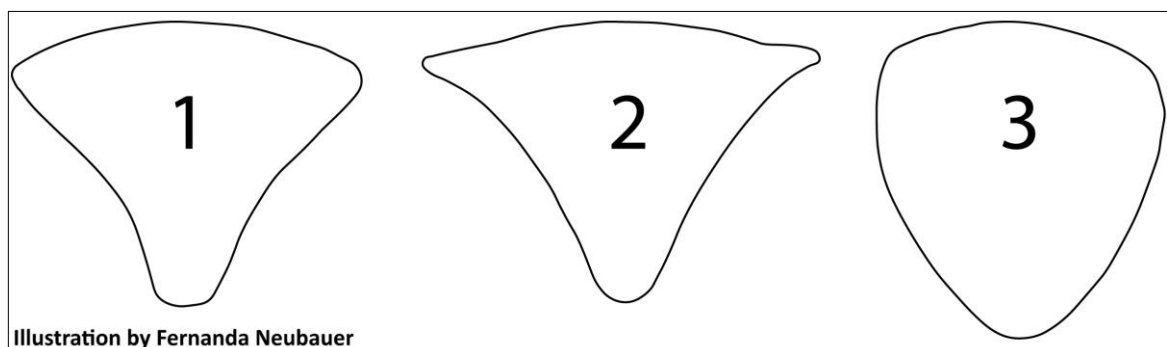


Illustration by Fernanda Neubauer

Tanga designs have been interpreted to infer differing levels of female social positions, based largely on the appearance or lack of decoration. The visually simple red *tangas* (Figure 3) were larger in size and in curvature, and were more common (BARRETO, 2004; SCHAAN, 2003). Based on this morphological trend, and because they were recovered in greater numbers, Denise Schaan (2003:36) suggests that the plain red *tangas* were used by older and/or married women, while the smaller and more ornately decorated *tangas* (Figure 2) were used by women of a lower hierarchy, perhaps younger women and girls. There is a third type of *tanga* that is much less common and only found in burial contexts. This *tanga* type is painted in a light beige or orange color, and is plainer even than the red *tangas* and is also polished without decorative motifs. These *tangas* were apparently specifically made for funerary contexts (SCHAAN, 2003).

The internal faces of decorated *tangas* do not display decoration, except for a peripheral band measuring between 0.5 and 1.5cm in the same color as the external painting (PROUS & LIMA, 2011:236). Denise Schaan (2003:37) studied *tanga* iconography and observed variations in decorative patterns on different exterior sections of the *tangas* (Figure 2). She identified five decorative fields, three of which were the most common and covered the majority of the *tangas'* surface. The first field is a strip along the upper portion of the *tanga* that possibly indicated age and gender, due to the fact that the central symbol is similar to Amazonian representations of the female sexual organ depicted on urns and statuettes. Its meaning then may be related to gender and sexuality.

The second field is represented by the skin of the mythological snake apparent in numerous Marajoara ceremonial objects. The snake symbol is often associated with Marajoara objects related to women, such as *tangas* and pottery vessels. The symbol is also frequently found in female burials, however, the majority of all ceremonial ceramics included representations of female figures, even upon the funerary urns buried with males. The representation depicts breasts, pubic triangles, and uteri (the latter represented by circles). Often these sexual markers are represented in bolder colors, such as red. Sometimes, in place of the uterus symbol, other creatures are represented in the belly of a female figure as an allusion to pregnancy (BARRETO, 2004; SCHAAN, 2001, 2003).

In Amazonian mythology, the snake is generally depicted as a female being (SCHAAN, 2003). It is likely that the representation in various Marajoara pottery of decorative motifs similar to the snake's skin have a connection to the mythological story of obtaining decorative patterns by means of an ancestral serpent, as it is quite common in South American mythology (SCHAAN, 1997:166). For example, the Wauja from the *Alto Xingu*, in the Brazilian state of *Mato Grosso*, explain the origin of their pottery as follows: in ancient times decorated pots that sang emerged from the Batovi River, brought on the back of the snake-canoe *Kamalu Hai*. From this primordial view, the Wauja learned to make all types of painted pots and began reproducing them using clay defecated by the giant snake along the river (BARRETO & OLIVEIRA, 2016:54). As discussed by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1985), many South American myths also relate birds and pottery as gifts bestowed by gods, which are linked to the beginning of time and the formation of the culture.

One of the most common and recurrent themes among Marajoara pottery are anthropomorphic figures with serpent arms. This composition, where bodies of animals make up parts of human bodies, has been interpreted as alluding to trances and shamanistic transformations (BARRETO, 2009; BARRETO & OLIVEIRA, 2016; SCHAAN, 1997). The repetition and combination of geometric motifs on Marajoara *tangas* resemble graphic designs that are still reproduced by Amazonian indigenous

groups, in shamanistic rituals associated with hallucinogenic trances (BARRETO, 2004:17; SCHAAN, 1997:167-168). The recurrence of themes, such as the serpent, in regional variants of the Polychrome style, may indicate the sharing of a specific symbolic language, perhaps linked to a strategy of territorial legitimization and/or identity, and a shared ontology (OLIVEIRA, 2016:381). Therefore, the recurrence of themes may be linked to the sharing of a symbolic repertoire in the region, which legitimates territorial boundaries, privileged positions and/or domains of certain groups (OLIVEIRA, 2015:248).

The third decorative field seen on *tangas* is much more diverse, and might contain information about cultural affiliations or individual identity (SCHAAN, 2003). The degrees of decorative variations make each *tanga* relatively unique, transmitting information about specific social identities (such as lineage, village, or house) and individual identities (gender and age) (BARRETO, 2004:17). Taken together, the symbols communicated a complex depiction of a particular female's social statuses at a given time in her life.

Tangas are a frequently occurring artifact in the elite mounds, indicating that they were in common use among women of status, and were probably not strictly limited to ritual contexts (SCHAAN, 2003:35). The *tangas* had three holes, one in each extremity measuring generally between 1.8 and 2cm in diameter, where a cord would pass to attach them to the body. Heavy patterns of wear around the holes suggest that they were used often (PROUS & LIMA, 2011:246). For example, of the 252 *tangas* analyzed by Denise Schaan (1997:134), 99% (N. 161 of 163) of non-decorated and 92% (N. 82 of 89) of decorated *tangas* exhibited use-wear. Wear on the lower hole is often visible upon the internal face, while wear to the upper holes is visible on both the interior and exterior faces (PROUS & LIMA, 2011:246-247). Surrounding the upper holes are grooves where cords had been pulled in the direction of the hips (PROUS, 2013:823), presumably to attach the *tangas* to the body. In addition, André Prous & A. Pessoa Lima (2011:247-248) observed wear on the lower portion of the interior face of both decorated and non-decorated *tangas*, possibly due to contact with bodily sweat and/or acidic secretions. As items of personal decoration and vestment, their complex iconographic system communicated information about social status, gender, age, and group membership (DEMARRAIS *et al.*, 1996:18). Therefore, *tanga* decoration was meaningfully designed to symbolize individual identities within the broader social group (SCHAAN, 2003).

In sum, *tangas* were bespoke, custom made for their users like tailored ceramic clothing, and their iconographic symbols and designs would be understood by people who could "read" their messages. Therefore, *tangas*, used and made by elite women, contained symbols and designs that represented individual and social identities in an iconographic language that was recognized by other members of the society. Moreover, the predominance of female representations in Marajoara iconography denotes the importance of female ancestry and a relationship between females, snakes and ancestors, within a greater religious system based on ancestor worship (SCHAAN, 2003:40, 2008:354). However, Denise Schaan (2003:40, 2008:354) cautions that this does not necessarily mean that women were more important in Marajoara society or that they held more power relative to other gendered groups. Instead, it appears that, although gender was important, the social differences and separations between elites and non-elites was the most important aspect of the Marajoara social organization.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this paper, we have analyzed the role that the feminist critique has played in giving voice to the perspectives of underrepresented groups. We have given examples of ways in which feminist theory has improved the range of questions that archaeologists can ask of ancient identities, childhood, and gender. As a case study of ancient social lives and gender, we discussed a range of Marajoara identity markers through the study of their *tangas*. These ceramic artifacts were made and used by women as a material representation of social position, gender, and individual identity.

Archaeologists are becoming increasingly aware that by studying peoples' daily life at smallest scales, they might more effectively bring social actors and their identities to the foreground, instead of regarding them as the lowest common denominator of larger-than-life systems (e.g., DE LUCIA, 2010; GILCHRIST, 1999; KAMP, 2001; KOHUT, 2011; SHARPE & GELDER, 2006). Following this perspective, we recognize that relationships are individually negotiated, and are both impacted by and have an impact on the lived experiences of individual people. In this way, we also appreciate that people were capable of meaningful action and were not seemingly autonomous cogs, as may be implied by larger-scale ecosystemic approaches (KNAPP & DOMMELEN, 2008).

As advocated by third-wave feminist archaeologists, gender studies are more meaningful when they encompass many different markers of identity. In appreciating the praxis of ethnicity, archaeologists can potentially identify not only ethnicity in historical and prehistorical contexts but also other embodiments of identity such as gender, social status, and class, to name a few. Explorations of identity must be self-aware, because it has been shown that the identity of the modern majority is often reflected in interpretations of researchers who have not taken steps to critique their underlying assumptions and culturally specific biases (BRUMFIEL, 1992; CONKEY, 2007; CONKEY & GERO, 1997; GILCHRIST, 1999; JONES, 2007). Most archaeologists today operate in societies that have emerged from historically androcentric-misogynistic empires, with traditions of writing that reflect the values of these empires. These problems have plagued the sciences since their inception. In the case of archaeology, the majority has traditionally consisted of white, wealthy (as opposed to poor), heterosexual males from powerful nations with colonial histories. This has led to characterizations of the past reflecting features of this identity (CONKEY & SPECTOR, 1984).

Some examples of common reoccurring themes stemming from an uncritical perspective include: a strict man/woman gender dichotomy; androcentrism ranging from minor to extreme representations of male superiority in terms of strength, political expertise, activity, wealth accumulation, and influence; top heavy, hierarchically-structured representations of political economies; "whiteness" as a norm or baseline for comparisons; capitalist cost-benefit analyses of traditional lives, from collective action and religion to the distribution of wealth; the ranking of finds according to their subjectively imposed importance; the nucleated structuring of households based on heterosexual couples; and social roles based upon modern stereotypes that subconsciously reflect racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, and sexism. While such assumptions may be invisible to the non-critical researchers who created them, and by whom they are consumed, the messages that they contain are often clear and offensive to minority audiences (FEDIGAN, 1986).

To control and problematize these canonized Western assumptions, critical theorists have called for the inclusion of different perspectives in reconstructions of social roles (VOSS, 2007). In this sense, the feminist movement urges to include the

viewpoints of indigenous and minority groups in order to make progress towards the scientific decolonization of the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology, in terms of their political practice and engagement (e.g., see volume organized by SACCHI & GRAMKOW, 2012). By calling upon the theoretical traditions of feminist and other critical theories, archaeologists can potentially include the viewpoints of the “silent other,” “Those of Little Note,” as they have been relegated in the historical literature (SCOTT, 1994).

In addition to expanding their theoretical approach to the interpretation of material culture, archaeologists have found it beneficial to include the viewpoints of indigenous and minority groups who have a superior understanding of the issues of identity politics and the repercussions of archaeology’s colonial heritage (MESKELL, 2002; ROWLANDS, 2007). By identifying with the minority and seeking to embody their perspective, researchers stand a chance at overcoming the limitations of their own preconceptions becoming implicitly embedded in their works. This is especially relevant to practicing researchers who fit the archetype of a traditional archaeologist, but wish to overcome its constraint on the narratives that they produce. Although no one can completely overcome the deeply embedded psychological norms of their viewpoint in society, attempts can be made to limit the extent of one’s subjectivity.

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