

PAMELA L. GELLER AND MIRANDA K. STOCKETT (eds). *Feminist Anthropology: Past, Present, and Future*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. Pp. 248. ISBN: 978-0-8122-2005-6.

This collection of articles presents and discusses feminist approaches in archaeology, biological anthropology and sociocultural anthropology. The emphasis turns out to be, however, on the first two fields, archaeology especially, in which most of the contributors specialize.

In their introduction, Miranda Stockett and Pamela Geller use the notion of ‘waves’ to describe the history and the present of feminist analysis. In the early twentieth century ‘first wave feminism’ (in Anglo-American contexts) was defined by political activism that sought expanded civil, educational and employment rights for women. ‘Second wave feminism’, since the 1970s, extended its concerns beyond the political arena to address academic and intellectual issues. In anthropology this bred criticism of the prevalent androcentrism in research and gave rise to studies that highlighted women’s position in societies, often relying on assumptions of universal female subjugation to patriarchal ideology and control. Sex as a universal biological essence was analytically distinguished from gender as a cultural construct. What is thought of as ‘third wave feminism’ builds on the criticism of second wave feminism’s universalistic claims, its perceived tendency to naturalize sex and analytically emphasise gender over sex, and its dichotomous view of gender (man : woman). Partly inspired by queer theories and by scholars such as Judith Butler, Thomas Laqueur and Michel Foucault, third wave feminism underscores the idea that sex, sexuality and gender are all socioculturally constructed categories rather than natural ones; that is, categories created through discourse, representation and repetitive performance. Rather than two sexes and genders, a multiplicity of, and variability in, sexual, gender and other identities are assumed in third wave feminism. Moreover, gender—the category emphasised by second wave feminists—is now thought of only as one component in identity construction, and the focus has shifted to how identity is formed in the intersection of several variables, such as age, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, religion, class and gender. In their introduction, Stockett and Geller repeat several times that the main interest in contemporary feminism is in identity, variability and difference, and conclude by advocating a “feminist-inspired project that does not focus exclusively on categories of women, gender, or sex, but more broadly on difference and identity (...) Ultimately, it is the interpretive search for identities and differences that enriches our understanding of human experience.” (pp. 18–19) In her foreword to the book, Louise Lamphere (p. xv) writes on similar lines, advocating an intersectional approach and placing a “Foucauldian analysis of power and individual agency at the centre of the construction of difference and identity”.

These two first texts of the book provoke several perplexed questions in a reader, such as: Why exactly should we foreground questions of differences and identities in research, and how exactly does such a focus enhance our understanding of ‘human experience’? The emphasis on ‘experienced differences’, ‘identities’, and ‘individual agency’ seems to postulate methodological individualism to the detriment of contextual understanding. Focus on individuals tackling their intersectional, multiple and potential identities might resonate with Western researchers’ own concerns, but how does it enhance our understanding of cultures and societies—our own and others—where all that ‘human experience’ takes place?

Furthermore, deconstruction of categories by focusing on their internal distinctions and contradictions is not particularly new; post-modernism (and its critiques) has been around for quite some time already. Does not the deconstruction of 'sex' and 'gender' here only lead to the reification and fetishisation of the proposed categories 'identity' and 'difference'? And finally, why should an approach focussing on all kinds of variability without any particular interest in sex and gender differences be called feminist at all?

The eleven chapters that follow offer a diversity of views and materials to be digested in seeking answers to these and many other questions. The chapter by Henrietta Moore in particular, and the concluding chapter by Alison Wylie, could be read as including indirect commentary on the introductory views. In her lucid way Moore (pp. 23, 41) states that "ambiguity and plurality are the new forms of essentialism (...) [and the] pretheoretical assumptions" in social sciences. She finds resonance in such academic models with the demands of the political economic order—global capitalism in particular—and the concurrent popular imagination that champions the politics of individualistic choice and "self as a vocation" (p. 34). Doubting if such proximity to the surrounding social reality and ideologies solves any analytical or political problems, Moore advocates more critical distance to common sense categories. She writes (p. 42): "Because academic theories and popular discourses always contaminate each other (...) we need both to deconstruct and to maintain the analytic categories—like gender—that help us to historicize and analyze that process of contamination". Comparably, Wylie (p. 171) notes, among other things, that in refocusing attention on fluidity, contingency, and particularity, researchers should not lose sight of systemic structures of social differentiation.

Many of the chapters bring diverse and interesting substance to the idea and category of difference, however. In many cases the interest is not in fact in difference as an individual identity problem but in difference as non-normative ways of living and non-normative research questions. Implicit but prevalent androcentric and heteronormative presumptions and interpretations are excavated and new perspectives and questions posed. Dana Walrath credits the feminist approach for its emphasis on the contextuality of all forms of knowledge, which is in stark contrast to her field's—paleoanthropology's—search for universal biobehavioral truths. She reminds us that theories of human evolution usually combine extremely fragmentary empirical evidence (gathered from extant species) with storytelling that fills in the gaps and that is often guided by the prevalent social ideology and norms, which science thus helps to naturalize. One such persistent story is the hypothesis of male activity and female passivity in human evolution. Walrath discusses theories claiming that evolutionary processes, such as bipedal locomotion and increasing brain size, have led to women's birthing problems. These theories were adopted by biomedical practice and consequently contributed to the medicalization of childbirth. In Walrath's view, this 'birthing problem' was, however, culturally rather than biologically created. In her own research she approaches this question differently: rather than seeking a 'cultural' solution to a 'natural' problem, she chooses to study biological means of adaptation to the challenges brought by evolution. Her initial results show that a gradual increase in female body size has helped adaptation to childbirth and that it is a gene on the X chromosome that modulates female and male body sizes and their differences. This is an interesting example of how posing different questions and methods to the conventional ones can bring new insights that, in this case, challenge the conventional evolutionary story by also attributing a 'biological agency' to females.

Some of the chapters address and criticize the persistent heteronormative bias in theories. According to Thomas Dowson (pp. 94–95), many anthropologists are nowadays quick to point to androcentric biases, whereas heterosexist biases often go unnoticed. In this regard, he thinks queer theory is ahead of much of the feminist research. For instance, in reconstructing prehistoric communities, archaeologists tend to impose modern, Western notions of the nuclear family unit and in that way present and legitimize an idealized and conservative notion of the family. Evelyn Blackwood explores anthropology's role in creating and sustaining heteronormative marriage and family by discussing the research on matrifocal societies in the Afro-Caribbean region and among the matrilineal Minangkabau in West Sumatra, Indonesia. She exposes the prevalent tendency in the anthropological discourse to define such societies in terms of problems and poverty. What seems to be the real problem, however, is the fact that such household and kinship constitution deviates from the one familiar to the interpreters; that is, a social unit formed around a heterosexual conjugal unit, and the husband of such a unit in particular. Consequently, matrifocal societies and woman-headed households are frequently described by negation and with negative vocabulary, for instance, by focussing on the 'missing man' and 'weak marriage'. Thus, oddly, the trope of the "dominant heterosexual man" (p. 74) remains the key for defining social formations even where it is not a norm. Such description is flawed and does not do justice either to the women around whom such units form or to the many men who are attached to such units as kinsmen and friends, or as husbands who are not (even expected to be) the focal points or the decision makers of the units.

Elizabeth Perry and James Potter employ Judith Butler's ideas of gender performativity and Julia Kristeva's concept of 'the abject' to analyze gender in the archaeological context of the Ancestral Puebloan communities of the North American Southwest. They suggest that significant changes took place in the Puebloan representation and performance of gender at around A.D. 1300. *Kivas*, rooms that women used for grinding corn, were transformed into ceremonial sites for exclusively male activities, such as rituals and weaving. The largely male-dominated ritual sphere appears to have formalized, and status competition among households through communal feasting intensified. With these changes, women's grinding labour apparently shifted out into public, plaza spaces and its volume increased. The village was considered a family, and the leader, although observably male, was referred to as 'mother of the village'. In Perry and Potter's view (p. 121), the labelling of a male leader as mother (which they suppose is a post-1300 development) sets the "materiality of sex in conflict with the performance of gender" and thus "destabilizes oppositional gender norms". The authors assert (p. 121) that "the construction of gender norms (...) cannot so thoroughly occupy the field of gender possibilities as to preclude the existence of bodies that are unintelligible by the dominant cultural logic. The male-female dichotomy is continually reproduced, yet abjections of these representations leak from the system". Perry and Potter assume that the gender system shifted, even though they also say (p. 121) that the "specific conceptual metaphors of gender construction prior to 1300 are not known". What I find missing, at least in this particular article, is any evidence for its authors' strong assumption that gender norms were strictly oppositional and gender mutability 'unintelligible' in these societies prior to 1300. Gender flexibility such as men taking female roles and vice versa in rituals and sometimes in more mundane life is found in ethnographies from diverse regions of the world. It would be interesting to know more

specifically what in this case legitimizes viewing such a phenomenon as an abjection or a deviation from gender norms or a transformation of gender norms. Why can it not be interpreted as a reproduction of a dualistic and complementary gender system that allows transgending and flexibility in the sex of 'gender performers' in certain contexts and positions?

Rosemary Joyce, too, discusses Butler's ideas and how her notion of gender performativity can be applied in archaeological research—not at first sight an easy task, but she finds Butler's notion of 'citationality' an especially amenable tool for investigating and interpreting how, for instance, representations of bodies in material objects cited and mediated prior practices of gender. Rather than representing some predetermined universals of sex, they served probably as a means of both discipline and innovation. Susan Kus deals with comparable issues of how to read the symbolism of material objects and bodies of past societies. She sees middle-level theory and research as the strength of archaeology and as its most important contribution to anthropology. She emphasises "radical empirism" (p. 111): the reading of a culture's "poetic economy" (p. 114) by interpreting the iconic and indexical references in its mundane materials and technology. The small examples drawn from her research on the Betsileo marriage ceremony in Madagascar illuminate her ideas well and simultaneously represent a sympathetic, poetic and well-argued reading of another culture.

Three chapters of the book (by Julia Hendon, Ann Kakaliouras, and Sarah Nelson) discuss how to apply feminist perspectives in teaching archaeology and biological anthropology. In addition to the substance of teaching, the chapters include interesting discussion on the pedagogy of teaching and what Kakaliouras (p. 147) calls "feminist pedagogy". By this she means the creation of a classroom space where students are encouraged to question singular and authoritative views, both in popular discourse and in their own academic field. Both Kakaliouras and Hendon give some detailed examples of how their students learn to interrogate their own cultural lenses that inform their understanding of human evolution and how they simultaneously learn to differentiate fact from opinion and recognize the relationship between questions, evidence and interpretation. Nelson notes that not only is the personal political, but the professional is political, too. It is important to tackle the idealized, biased and normative popular assumptions about evolution and biological and social difference in research, in the classroom, but also—as importantly—in the general public domain.

The diversity of the current perspectives, topics and methods makes it impossible to address feminist anthropology as a unitary approach. However, after reading this book, rather than unintelligible cacophony, one is left with a sense that within the diversity there are some shared themes or perspectives that stand out and justify talking about a feminist perspective. For instance, what first seemed like a post-modernist, fragmenting and individualizing focus on difference and variability, turned out to be, in most of the chapters, an interesting interrogation into the normative assumptions in research and the consequent study of different, non-normative social formations and ways of living. In this regard, the theoretical and programmatic outline that the introduction lays out is a bit detached from the content of the chapters. What furthermore unites many authors of this book is a critical attitude to their own practice as researchers and teachers as well as to their discipline's academic norms and theoretical truths posed as authoritative. There is a strong, underlying awareness that academic knowledge, practice and institutions are always also political,

even while the focus in most of the chapters is on epistemological and scholarly issues. Moreover, a commitment to social change and alleviation of different kinds of discrimination, within and beyond academia, is mentioned by several writers. This mission includes the task of tackling the dominant narratives: for instance, that of human evolution as constituted out of active men/male, passive women/female, heterosexual couples and nuclear families, which persistently continues to circulate as “folk epistemology” (Wylie, p. 172) despite much counterevidence within science. Yet, as Nelson (pp. 164–165) notes, politics should never override the quest for scientific truths, and we should be careful not to saddle past (or other) societies with what science knows or believes today. Thus, while it is now fashionable to question and ridicule the idea of a binary sex and gender system as a universal and ahistorical given, in many societies sexes are and have been named by the shape of a newborn’s genitals, and gendered according to cultural ideas.

The title of this publication is overly ambitious and hides its primary focus on archaeology. The introduction outlines a feminist approach that focuses on intersectional identities made up of many other components in addition to gender. The question of how gender relates to or intersects with other kinds of differences and how this could be theorized is not, however, addressed in the introduction or the individual chapters. Nevertheless, the book is a very thought-provoking collection of articles that makes the reader want to learn more about the facts and the debate concerning human evolution. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in, as well as suspicious of, a feminist approach, as its richness and diversity will certainly inspire the reader. Additionally, this is a good introduction to more complex ideas about human evolution than those offered by the popular folk models, and as such should also interest journalists, lay people and social scientists enthused about applying evolutionary approach without having studied it.

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