
**GENDER in AFRICAN
PREHISTORY**

I dedicate this book to my nephews and nieces—Danny, Lauren, Sammy, and Julia Kent. I hope that by understanding gender in the past, they will be able to better understand gender today and in their futures, regardless of its cultural construction in Western society.

Susan Kent

GENDER in AFRICAN PREHISTORY

**Edited by
Susan Kent**



A division of Sage Publications, Inc.
Walnut Creek • London • New Delhi

Copyright 1998 by AltaMira Press, a Division of Sage Publications, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

For information address:

AltaMira Press
A Division of Sage Publications, Inc.
1630 North Main Street, Suite 367
Walnut Creek, CA 94596
explore@altamira.sagepub.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU
United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
M-32 Market
Greater Kailash 1
New Delhi 110 048
India

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gender in African prehistory / edited by Susan Kent.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN: 978-0-7619-8968-4

1. Sex role—Africa. 2. Prehistoric peoples—Africa. 3. Africa—Antiquities.

4. Archaeology—Africa. I. Kent, Susan, 1952—

GN861.G46 1998

305.3'096—dc21

97-33728

CIP

98 99 00 01 02 03 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Production by Labrecque Publishing Services

Editorial Management by Joanna Ebenstein

Cover Design by Joanna Ebenstein

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

- Chapter 1** Gender and Prehistory in Africa
Susan Kent

PERSPECTIVES OF GENDER FROM THE AFRICAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

- Chapter 2** Resolving the Past: Gender in the Stone Age Archaeological Record of the
Western Cape
John Parkington
- Chapter 3** Invisible Gender—Invisible Foragers: Southern African Hunter-Gatherer Spatial
Patterning and the Archaeological Record
Susan Kent
- Chapter 4** The Invisible Meat Providers: Women in the Stone Age of South Africa
Lyn Wadley
- Chapter 5** Just a Formality: The Presence of Fancy Projectile Points in a Basic Tool
Assemblage
Joanna Casey
- Chapter 6** Social Variability Among Holocene Saharan Groups: How to Recognize Gender
Barbara Barich
- Chapter 7** Gender and Early Pastoralists in East Africa
Diane Gifford-Gonzalez
- Chapter 8** Reading Gender in the Ancient Iron Technology of Africa
Peter Schmidt
- Chapter 9** Gendered Technologies and Gendered Activities in the Interlacustrine Early Iron
Age
Rachel MacLean
- Chapter 10** Engendered Spaces Bodily Practices in the Iron Age of Southern African
Paul Lane
- Chapter 11** Men and Women in a Market Economy: Gender and Craft Production in West
Central Ghana c. 1775–1995
Ann B. Stahl and Maria das Dores Cruz
- Daughters of Cattle: The Significance of Herding in the Growth of Complex

- Chapter 12** Societies in Southern Africa Between the 10th and 15th Centuries AD
Alinah Segobye
-
- Chapter 13** A Consideration of Gender Relations in the Late Iron Age “Sotho” Sequence of the Western Highveld, South Africa
Simon Hall

COMMENTARIES AND PERSPECTIVES

- Chapter 14** Toward an Archaeology of Gender in Africa
Fekri Hassan
- Chapter 15** Views of Gender in African Prehistory from a Middle Eastern Perspective
Ofer Bar-Yosef and Anna Belfer-Cohen
- Chapter 16** Reflections on Gender Studies in African and Asian Archaeology
Sarah Milledge Nelson

Bibliography

About the Authors

Index

■ *Part One* ■

Introduction

Gender and Prehistory in Africa

Gender in archaeology has become a fashionable topic, a decade later than when it was first popular in cultural anthropology. This is almost two decades after gender research became common in other social science disciplines. Environmental reconstructions, however, remain popular and have been emphasized in archaeology over the past 30 to 40 years. Many archaeologists spend their time studying paleoenvironments and extant environments, in contrast to studying sharing, gender stratification, and other facets of culture (e.g., Erlandson 1994; Kelley 1995). Although environments, depending on one's theoretical orientation, may affect culture, they are not themselves culture. Environments may be modified by humans, yet they are not created by them in the sense that culture is. Culture, on the other hand, is not only created and perpetuated by humans, it is also modified by them. *Gender in African Prehistory* is a book about past cultures. Some of its authors present more environmental data than others, but each chapter deals primarily with how gender is expressed in the archaeological record and why patterns change through time.

As a result of the emphasis on environmental reconstructions over the past three or four decades, we archaeologists have come a long way in determining paleoenvironmental factors on both the macro- and microscopic levels. Had we spent as much time, money, and effort on studying gender and sociopolitical organization, we probably would have as much knowledge about prehistoric gender relations as we currently have about ancient environments. *Gender in African Prehistory* is the first book that exclusively attempts to examine gender using the African archaeological record. While the geographical region covered in this volume is limited to Africa, the time periods, the topic of gender, the methods, and the theoretical orientations are not limited to that continent.

Why Gender?

While the sex of individuals is a basic biological division among humans, gender is the cultural construction of that division. That is, humans use their conceptions of gender to define and categorize the biological sexes. Individuals understand and legitimize their perceptions of sex through the conceptualization of gender and gender relations. Gender is imbued in almost every facet of culture found in all modern human societies (we cannot be sure about archaic humans or earlier hominids). Although recognized by most archaeologists as an important organizing principle of culture, gender has historically not been well studied in archaeology. However, the situation is changing with the publication of a variety of books that examine gender (e.g., Claassen 1991; Claassen and Joyce 1999; Gero and Conkey 1991; Nelson 1997; Walde and Willows 1991; Wright 1996). With few exceptions, some including authors in this book, the lack of focus on gender is particularly noticeable in the research of African prehistory. Archaeology in Africa has concentrated more on reconstructing paleoenvironments, locating and understanding the earliest hominids, analyzing faunal remains and lithic artifacts, and studying the exploitation of economic resources. The dearth of gender research

again with the exception of many of the following authors, seems particularly conspicuous when compared to archaeology conducted on other continents. *Gender in African Prehistory* attempts to fill this void. The book provides methods and theories for delineating and discussing prehistoric gender relations while understanding their change through time, endeavors that are relevant to all geographical areas and time periods.

Gender is defined here as the interaction between females and males as constructed by culture. Women and men are viewed as reacting to and interacting with one another, even in those societies with complementary and nonoverlapping gender divisions of labor. To some anthropologists gender means women. However, women today and in prehistory never operated in isolation from men. They often are facets of culture that exclude one sex, like secret societies or the use of space, but even those are in response to how men and women interact overall. Often such exclusion is important in defining separate gender roles; that is, they are a reaction to one another. In fact, femininity can best be understood in opposition to masculinity and vice versa. Thus, the activities of both men and women are essential to the understanding of gender and, when possible, both are examined in the following chapters. For some authors, it was necessary that they revise basic assumptions concerning the role of each sex in the activities that contributed to the archaeological record before analyzing site data (e.g. Segobye, [Chapter 12](#)). For others, data already collected had to be reanalyzed in light of questions concerning gender (Stahl and Cruz, [Chapter 11](#)). These new analyses and revised thinking made writing the chapters a stimulating challenge, leading the authors to think in new directions. Thus, the book was exciting to write and, I hope, is exciting to read.

Gender in African Prehistory includes sites ranging geographically from Egypt to South Africa and from Ghana to Tanzania. Time periods discussed vary from the Stone Age (Parkington, [Chapter 2](#); Kent, [Chapter 3](#); Wadley, [Chapter 4](#); Casey, [Chapter 5](#); and Barich, [Chapter 6](#)) to the period just prior to colonialization (Stahl and Cruz, [Chapter 11](#); Hall, [Chapter 13](#)). Its authors approach the study of gender from a variety of theoretical orientations, ranging from processualism to postmodernism, political economy, and feminist criticism. I believe that the inclusion of multiple theoretic perspectives promotes a more holistic view of gender than any one view can provide by itself.

Congruent with emphasizing the importance of multiple ways of viewing the past, four distinguished archaeologists discuss the implications of the chapters. The four enhance the book by approaching the topic from very different backgrounds. Hassan ([Chapter 14](#)) is an African archaeologist whose research experience spans the period from prehistoric, relatively noncomplex societies to the most complex society on the African continent, the ancient Egyptian civilization. He examines sociopolitical, cognitive, and environmental change through time. Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen ([Chapter 15](#)) work in the contiguous Middle East. They study change through different time periods, concentrating on Mesolithic Natufians and the following Neolithic period. They bring a perspective from an adjacent culture area, along with an interest in gender studies, the transition to sedentism, and the shift to agriculture. The research areas of Nelson ([Chapter 16](#)) include women and power in Asian prehistory, particularly Korea and China, in addition to the North American Southwest. Her work focuses on gender and sociopolitical organization in complex societies, and her feminist orientation adds an important dimension from which to view the various chapters. The diverse expertise of these authors allows them to present varied and insightful commentaries that, together with the other chapters, complete the book.

While 20th-century archaeology has emphasized function, physical environment/ecology, and materialism, I predict that the 21st century will focus more on holistic approaches to the study of past societies that explicitly integrate gender with sociopolitical organization and other facets of culture (also see Hassan, [Chapter 14](#)). Such a shift in inquiry will provide a more full and realistic view of the

past. It will be a time of examining data in new ways without forsaking empirical verification, as well as a time of emphasizing culture over the physical environment while not ignoring the basic constraints imposed by the environment. Moreover, the 21st century will be a time of gaining important insights by incorporating the diversity of cross-cultural data into archaeological explanations and understandings without resorting to the problematic use of analogies (noted also by Hassan, [Chapter 14](#)). The exploration of gender in African prehistory by the contributors to this book represents a beginning from which to embark on the challenge of 21st-century archaeology.

Why Not Just Women?

Gender is the cultural overlay that determines who are included in the categories girls, women, and “feminine” and in their male counterparts, boys, men, and “masculine.” That is, gender defines what means to be a woman or a man in a particular society and the kind of behavior and thought that is considered to be feminine or masculine. Gender likewise determines whether there are more than two genders present. The possibility of more than two genders with only two biological sexes and the presence of institutionalized homosexuality in some societies underscore the fact that biology has little to do with gender beyond creating a fundamental division (though MacLean, [Chapter 13](#), attributes biological reasons for certain gendered activities). It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand women without also understanding men. The fact that most earlier archaeology did neglect women led to misconceptions not only of women, but also of men and gender in general. Because my definition of gender includes both women and men interacting and/or reacting to one another, I encouraged this volume’s authors to include discussions of both, as is exemplified by most of the following chapters.

Perhaps the most common mistake resulting from studies that emphasize one sex over the other is perpetuating a stereotyped view of gender, one often based on Western precepts. No one sex is more important to know about than the other. I think it is relatively safe to say that in all societies both sexes contribute to the archaeological record in one way or another. Therefore it is important to study both.

Gender As Culture

I find it paradoxical that while many archaeologists see gender as a cultural construct (Joyce and Claassen 1997, and others), a number of archaeologists perceive gender relations and roles as universal in nature, that is, as biological rather than cultural. Although men in prehistory are often viewed as prominent in social, religious, economic, and political affairs, Damm (1991) cautions archaeologists against assuming that because “men are dominant in the present day society, they are portrayed as dominant also in the past, usually by both men and women.”

The underlying theoretical orientation of an archaeologist influences the interpretations of gender in the archaeological record. Interpretations depend on an individual’s assumptions and perceptions of gender in the present. To examine just one example in detail, Hayden (1992b:35) states that he does not understand how some women can question the universality of the sexual division of labor or why some try to deny its presence: “there is little general doubt that this patterning of gender behavior [man the hunter and woman the gatherer] is the expression of a fundamental principle of organization of hunter/gatherer societies . . .” and this provides “some of the best foundations that can be hoped for

modeling prehistoric gender behavior.” He also writes that “shell, bone or horn crafts [are] exclusive performed by men in traditional societies the world over” and that there is “an almost universal role of women scraping and preparing hides in societies without specialists” (1992:35). Therefore, Hayden concludes that it is valid to assume that lithic tools, such as handaxes and bifaces, “should be primarily and perhaps exclusively associated with male tasks” (1992b:35). Moreover, such patterns “may even imply that the cross-cultural preponderance of hunter/gatherer males in public forums and in dealings with non-local groups may be an extension of the division of labor . . .” (Hayden 1992b:35). The question is, how valid are these statements? Do all societies have tasks, space, and tools that are exclusively male or female? For those who answer yes, the opposition of women and men is taken as the natural order, one with deep biological roots (Maurer 1991).

Some archaeologists think that gender is basically isomorphic among cultures (as an example, women are equated with house interior and private, as contrasted with men, who are exterior and public; Pearson and Richards 1994). Cross-culturally, men are perceived as seeking power in most facets of culture, economic wealth, and political or public influence. Others believe that women cross-culturally are viewed as domestic, subordinate to men, and culturally conservative (Moore 1994; Nelson 1997). As noted in Gifford-Gonzalez’s [Chapter 7](#), men are assumed to be the agents responsible for technologically or aesthetically complex artifacts (including lithics and ceramics), for technological breakthroughs, or for change in sociopolitical organization. Gifford-Gonzalez contends that most models of pastoral societies perceive women’s work as only marginally important, if that much, to production, trade, and social life. She states that in pastoralist societies, anthropologists tend to report what the men do—and what the men do is what is defined as important. But, if gender is cultural construction, by definition it cannot be universal because it must vary by culture, just as kinship and political organizations vary.

I suggest that gender is one of the organizing devices of culture, along with age and kinship. Therefore, concepts of gender and gender interaction should be as diverse as are the different cultural interpretations of kinship known ethnographically. Other archaeologists see gender as a means for societies to organize sexuality (e.g., Claassen 1992a). However, gender in some societies has little or nothing to do with sexuality or even with the biological sexes. Sexuality permeates gender in Western and other cultures, but I question its universality as a function of gender. If culture specifies which categories and attributes define each gender, then prehistoric and historic conceptions of gender must be seen within the perspective of a diverse array of cultures. Although not accepted by all archaeologists, most cross-cultural research demonstrates the cultural variability of gender in opposition to universal gender roles (Kent 1984, 1990a, in press). Perhaps unintentionally, some researchers perceive men and women, maleness and femaleness, as reflections of Western cultural norms (Kent in press; Moore 1994). Such a perspective stereotypes gender in accordance with the images of Western conceptions of male and female behavior. This is why some archaeologists have criticized attempts to examine gender prehistorically and particularly cross-culturally (e.g., Conkey and Spector 1984). We know that archaeologists who claim that only or even primarily men hunt and make lithic or shell tools are incorrect, as noted by Costin (1996). Cross-cultural studies elucidate the fascinating diversity of gender roles currently present, and no doubt the range was even more diverse prehistorically before the encroachment of Western society.

Highly egalitarian, mobile foragers can be characterized as having an extremely flexible gender division of labor in which both sexes can or do participate in conducting various tasks (Barnard and Widlok 1996; Guenther 1996; Kent 1996a). For example, Agta and Chipewyan women hunt big game using the same weapons as men (Estioko-Griffin and Griffin 1981; Brumbach and Jarvenpa 1997). Tiwi women also regularly hunt and when they were girls were taught hunting skills along with the

boys (Goodale 1971). Basarwa (Bushmen, San) women routinely engage in manufacturing shell craft ~~women in some Basarwa groups regularly trap and hunt small animals, both men and women cook~~ meat and wild plants, both butcher and distribute meat, and men scrape and prepare hides and clothing, though not exclusively (Kent 1993b, 1995, 1996b, n.d.). Another example is Chipewyan female hunters who own their own knives (Brumbach and Jarvenpa 1997:30). At least some of the lithic bifaces archaeologists uncover were probably used as knives in the past (Brumbach and Jarvenpa 1997:30). Men regularly collect wild plants in many highly egalitarian societies. Lee (1971) calculated that as much as 40 percent, or almost half, of all gathering is done by Basarwa men. It is ironic that the Basarwa, often considered to be the archetypical hunter-gatherers past or present, undermine many universalist assumptions.

As a result of universal assumptions about gender, lithics (except for scrapers) are often defined as males' tools, and grinding stones as females' (see Gero 1991). This is patently not true, for grinding stones are also used by men in many cultures to grind nonfood plants and minerals (Bruhns 1991). Men also weave and make pottery in a number of societies around the world (Rice 1991; Bruhns 1991). I believe it is better to be a little more indefinite about examining gender in prehistory than it is to use inaccurate or biased inferences. Similar universal gender convictions are not held solely by male archaeologists, but are promoted also by women who were taught by men to use Western idealized stereotypes of gender.

Some ethnoarchaeologists and ethnographers do not recognize the impact of restricting their informants to only males or to only females. Others fail to take into account the biases male Western ethnographers, explorers, and colonialists had about gender, biases that unintentionally influenced their interpretations of non-Western societies. These biases have perpetuated the myth of stereotypical and rigid divisions of labor cross-culturally (Lane 1994–1995). For example, male Westerners perceived matrilineal Navajo men as the important actors in decision making. During contact and beyond, male North American government officials would not consider asking a woman for permission to go on her land, or to make a decision about her herd of animals. In many societies with varying amounts of egalitarianism, men from patriarchal societies forced indigenous men to be the public spokesperson for a group, to make decisions that were binding for the group, and to interact with foreigners by simply not talking to women nor taking what women said as important (as occurred at Kutse, Botswana, where I work). No wonder there is a widespread assumption that men are leaders, represent public consensus, and so on! Westerners and men from other patriarchal societies did not allow the women to have such roles. Stereotyped behaviors are still being forced onto non-Western societies. For example, Western AID agencies in some developing countries are introducing wage-earning development projects that separate male and female work that is incongruous with the indigenous culture. Western-inspired development programs implemented among the Basarwa, for example, often unintentionally emphasize or exclude one sex, depending on whether the program centers on wild plants or animal products (Kent 1995). By providing differential access to wage-earning projects, the programs foster a rigid gender division that undermines the Basarwa flexible division of labor while mirroring Western gender stereotypes.

Biased Concepts of Gender

Because one's own culture seems innate or "normal," both male and female researchers sometimes are not aware that they are applying Western gender concepts to non-Western societies. Particularly misleading is the use of historical records written mostly by men and later read by male or female

anthropologists who do not take into account the profound effects of contact and culture change. Anthropologists or colonial officials often strengthen male leadership, status, and economic position within local patriarchal societies by making laws or policies that enhance men's ability to control resources and to dominate women, simply by making laws or policies that parallel Western customs (Lane 1994–1995:58). Several anthropologists (Gifford-Gonzalez, [Chapter 7](#); Stahl and Cruz, [Chapter 11](#); Nelson, [Chapter 16](#); Fratt 1991) have discussed the distortions in the ethnographic record written mostly by Western males who exclusively or primarily talked to male informants. Claassen (1997:7) notes that many gender studies conducted in North America, and particularly those concerned with Plains archaeology, “assume that historic sex roles were present in the past.” Once archaeologists assume this, they also assume that gender is universal and unchanging. The extreme impact of cultural change in indigenous populations brought about by Westerners profoundly altered most facets of culture, including gender. Westerners gave indigenous men political, social, and economic resources and power while basically ignoring the women (see Fratt 1991; Prezzano 1997:9498). The increase in hostilities brought about by Westerners' intervention with non-Western societies also often elevated male prestige through increased warfare.

Prezzano (1997) recognizes the fallacy of accepting historic accounts of gender at face value. She writes that “The influx of disease and trade goods significantly altered the [Iroquois] political base and extra-village activities in the colonial period and are thus poor indicators of the traditional place of household [and gender] politics in fueling change [through time] in sociopolitical organization” (1997:98). Using contemporary accounts of non-Western societies ahistorically or out of the context of cross-cultural research distorts our understanding of the past. However, we cannot dismiss all historic and ethnographic observations of non-Western cultures; doing so would undermine our understanding of non-Western societies, past or present. We need to critically evaluate the validity of observations before accepting them. We need to ask who made the observations, why, and how.

A different type of fallacy has also originated from the uncritical use of data. Some anthropologists contend that contemporary hunter-gatherer societies are not valid for examining models of foraging behavior because the group does not live up to the anthropologists' conceptions of what a specific society “should” look or act like (e.g., Wilmsen 1989; Wilmsen and Denbow 1990). Does the presence of a few trade goods at a site imply that a society has forsaken its cultural autonomy to imitate a culture seen by archaeologists as superior because of its use of domesticates or more complex sociopolitical organization? Consider the erroneous interpretations a future archaeologist would make about the number of objects made in Asia that late 20th-century North Americans possess. Using a similar line of reasoning as that espoused by Wilmsen and Denbow (1990) and others who claim that the Basarwa have not been culturally autonomous for centuries, if not millennia, it might be concluded that North Americans adopted Asian cultural beliefs out of envy of Asia's superior high technology and the opportunity to gain access to Japanese-designed cars, televisions, VCRs, and the like. We should not assume that throughout prehistory most small-scale societies were envious of more sociopolitically complex societies with a higher level of technology. Such societies may have traded together, but small-scale groups were not necessarily interested in abandoning their culture for that of the newcomers. Archaeologists need to be aware of the assumptions behind arguments they posit as valid for the past, such as Wilmsen and Denbow's (1990) view of migrating Bantu-speaking pastoralists seducing and dominating indigenous hunter-gatherer populations circa 2,000 years ago in southern Africa.

We also need to test the reliability of observations to ensure that they are not idiosyncratic and therefore misleading to infer as valid for a group. An example is Nisa, an unusual Ju/'hoansi woman whose life and beliefs do not represent that of other Ju/'hoansi women (for example, she trapped and

hunted, Shostak 1981). Whereas women in other Basarwa groups can and routinely do trap and hunt small animals, Ju/'hoansi women do not (Kent n.d.). Because of Nisa's nonrepresentative ideas of Ju/'hoansi culture, she is not an appropriate source of knowledge about hunting among Ju/'hoansi women. Single informant accounts of their culture are useful only in combination with interviews and observations of other members of the group. Whatever the gender of the ethnographer, it is crucial to interview both females *and* males during fieldwork. Men may not perceive women the same way that women do and vice versa (also see Lane, [Chapter 10](#)).

As Lane ([Chapter 10](#)) states, forms of gender representation that are present today in Western and non-Western societies are not necessarily accurate portrayals of past social realities. This makes it essential that we view ethnographic and ethnohistorical observations critically and contextually, taking into account the change of a culture through time. We can explore the factors that encourage or discourage specific gender conceptions and behavior, such as the relationship between gender equality and the amount of egalitarianism and hierarchies present in a culture, without resorting to simplistic ethnographic analogies. Analogies presume that certain behaviors were present in the same way in the past as today, whereas ethnoarchaeological modeling only assumes that relationships structure behavior similarly, such as the relationship among sociopolitical complexity, gender segregation of space, and material culture.

My experiences in Africa provide one illustration of how to take into account both culture change through time as well as male-dominated interpretations of societies. In 1987, when I first went to the Kalahari there was only one known community of full-time foragers still exclusively using traditional hunting weapons and techniques (Tari Madondo, National Museum and Art Gallery of Botswana: 1990 personal communication). They continued this way of life because of historical circumstances. To facilitate my study of culture change in the Kalahari (focusing on the impact of sedentarization), I read widely comparative ethnographies written by both males and females in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. During those decades various groups of Basarwa, mostly Ju/'hoansi and G/wi, were still primarily hunters and gatherers (Draper 1975a, 1976; Lee 1968, 1969, 1972, 1979, 1982; Marshall 1976; Silberbauer 1981). I examined the more recent research conducted among these same Basarwa groups, in order to understand how aspects of culture change, including sedentarization, affected them (Draper and Cashdan 1988; Draper and Kranichfeld 1990; Lee 1993b). I then compared my own observations with those of the other ethnographers.

Draper (1975a,b, 1992) recorded pronounced differences between women's autonomy and status among nomadic and sedentary Ju/'hoansi. The drop in women's authority and prestige was attributed to the shift to sedentism, along with some influence from neighboring patriarchal Herero Bantu speakers with whom they were closely interacting. I studied gender among the Kutse Basarwa (composed of G/wi and G//ana), in some cases asking similar interview questions as had Draper. My observations and interview answers were quite different from Draper's. They were more similar to descriptions of nomadic full-time hunter-gatherers than to the initial sedentary Ju/'hoansi group (Kent 1995). My work indicated that sedentism by itself does not cause gender inequality. Instead, aggregation, particularly when combined with sedentism, is the culprit (Kent 1995, n.d.a). This finding has profound implications for the study of the origins of gender inequality in the past and offers an example of using the ethnographic record critically and contextually while providing archaeologically relevant information for model-building and testing.

My research suggests that gender segregation of activities varies by cultures' sociopolitical organization (Kent 1990a, 1996a, in press). Costin (1996:134) also suggests that the segregation of production either by men or by women is associated with complex societies where gender differences are usually pronounced and segregated. She found that craft specialization in complex societies

often gender specific, but not necessarily conducted by women. According to Costin (1996:121) cross-cultural studies of craft production in complex societies show that “the actual allocation of tasks remarkably idiosyncratic when considered on a worldwide basis.” Others, such as Nelson (Chapter 16), believe that gender differentiation and stratification are not necessarily associated with sociopolitical complexity, though not all the authors writing in this volume concur (e.g., Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen, Chapter 15). Discovering the underlying factors that influence gender equality in the past and present is one of the most exciting projects facing archaeologists. Failing to acknowledge the diversity in gender relations will only hamper our attempts to understand equality and comprehend why changes occur through time and space.

Most archaeologists would agree that subsistence, architecture, mobility patterns, and sociopolitical organization, as examples, are variable through time. However, these same archaeologists sometimes see gender as timeless. The tiresome dichotomy of “man the hunter; woman the gatherer” has been used to model prehistoric gender relations, as noted in the following chapter. We know that culture forms an integrated whole or system. We also know that gender is culturally constructed. If other parts of culture change through time, then surely so must gender. For example, returning to the historic period of North America, many Native Americans’ behavior and material culture changed radically. If these facets of culture changed, then gender also must have at least been impacted. The historic record can be best used to test how much and in which way gender relations changed in various prehistoric societies. Historic views of gender also allow archaeologists to develop non-Western-centric models of gender that can be used to understand archaeological patterning. This is what I try to do in Chapter 3, what Schmidt does in Chapter 8, and what Hall does in Chapter 13.

If we want to understand culture change, we need to understand the social dynamics of both sexes. Even in the most patriarchal, patrilineal, patrilocal societies known historically or today, men do not necessarily contribute significantly more to the archaeological record than women, nor are women in any way unimportant. In patriarchal societies, men expend much energy and resources to maintain their hierarchies, economic sources, purity, and status that, from their perspective, allow them to control women. Thus women are as important as men in understanding any society, past or present. In theory, if women were not present, patriarchal societies would not have to segment their architecture to cloister them, maintain their own differentiated space, have elaborate secret rituals, need tools that only they can use, defend against or create feuding and warfare over women, and so on. In my opinion, and probably that of most readers, the key is to study men and women *together*.

In sum, there currently is much evidence disproving the idea that all societies organize males and females similarly—that is, not all societies emphasize the differences between the sexes or rank them hierarchically in terms of power, dominance, domesticity, status, and so on. Archaeologists who assume that a rigid division of labor characterizes all modern human societies run the risk of projecting their Western beliefs onto the archaeological record. Moreover, they jeopardize the neutrality of their interpretations as well as others’ ability to assess those interpretations. However, those researchers who come to the archaeological record with the concept of diversity in gender ethnographically and prehistorically, will be able to develop models that enhance our understanding of the relations between males and females in different societies and at different times. Models of gender interaction then can be tested empirically with archaeological data.

The Many Views of Gender Research

As the reader of this volume will discover, not all its authors agree with one another. Far from

being a flaw, I see this as a *strength* of the book, because archaeologists are still learning about gender and what causes its variation among societies. It is too premature in our understanding of gender for everyone to agree with a particular paradigm or theoretical perspective of how gender operates in different types of societies. At this point we can distinguish between studies of gender that are Western-centric, male-biased, biologically deterministic, or otherwise flawed, but other than these extremes, we have much more research to conduct before determining which perspectives are most productive.

The various contributors to the book have come to the study of gender in very different ways. The genesis of my own work on gender began after I conducted research in several culturally different contemporary societies. From this began my interest in gender, which ultimately led to this book, *Gender in African Prehistory*. The ethnoarchaeological studies I began in 1978, made me realize how simplistic and unsophisticated were many archaeologists' perspectives on gender. Most prominent were assumptions that in all societies males equal power, prestige, and spatial segregation—while females equal domesticity, subordination, and their own, usually technologically or aesthetically inferior, tools. I certainly observed such a dichotomy among the Euroamericans I studied (Kent 1984). However, the dichotomy was mitigated by status among the Salish-speaking Northwest Coast Indians and was not present among the Navajo Indians I observed. I was aware of similar gender dichotomies present among Arabic, Japanese, and other non-Western, highly complex societies. Later, cross-cultural studies of why anthropologists often consider hunting and meat to be more important than gathering made me aware of many anthropologists' unglamorous views of women's work (described in Kent 1989a). The only conclusion that one could draw from the literature was that women led extremely boring, repetitive lives that stood in sharp contrast (according to the writers) to the exciting, risky, and generally more interesting lives of men. Women were "burdened" with child care (a concept, I suggest, that is probably most appropriate to Westerners, who perceive raising children as a burden; child care is not necessarily thought of the same way in other societies). Sadly, according to some researchers, as the result of a biological constraint on women's time and efforts, they could not participate in the supposedly more stimulating, politically important, and socially valued activities of men (Kent 1989a).

A cross-cultural study of the correlation among gendered space and tools, function-specific space and tools, and the sociopolitical organization of societies revealed a great diversity in gender relations that was influenced by the sociopolitical system of a group (Kent 1990a,b). This ethnographical documented variability was not recognized or applied to most archaeologists' interpretations of the past use of space or objects, though the concept of variability was usually incorporated into interpretations of prehistoric sociopolitical organizations.

My understanding of gender continued to evolve and continued to diverge from that written by many archaeologists. In 1987, I began my first research season among the highly egalitarian Basarwa at Kutse. Some of my views of gender were either not appropriate or not conscious (see Kent 1993, 1995). For example, I interviewed both women and men on the same issues, only to find that what had been taught about males and females was not appropriate in all societies. I found myself making implicit assumptions about males and females that prompted individuals to ask "why do you say [think, or ask] that?" I discovered that more of my assumptions than I realized were Western assumptions about the nature of gender, a topic I explored over the next nine field seasons at Kutse.

About the same time, gender was beginning to be examined more intensively by archaeologists. I was concerned that many Western assumptions that stereotyped gender were being applied to non-Western societies. The "universalist" belief of a biologically determined or influenced division of labor was basically Western culture's conception of gender. My fieldwork showed the assumption was

far from universally present. The even more common belief that all societies past and present separate male and female activities, material culture, and space also was not supported by my fieldwork, which indicated a rich diversity in gender that was culturally determined, and therefore culturally variable. This cultural diversity was even present within groups having similar economies, such as hunter-gatherers. The increase in gender studies of the past by archaeologists led to differences in the approach and theoretical orientations that, as noted by Nelson (Chapter 16), varied by continent. Considering the diversity of cultures and gender found today in Africa, it is interesting that archaeologists have tended to regard prehistoric African gender relations as similar to their own society's concepts. When a non-Western view of prehistoric gender relations is sought, many archaeologists rely on a single ethnography of a contemporary group, such as the Bantu Central Cattle Pattern, or on androgynous interpretations of the past.

I have described my personal odyssey that led to the development of *Gender in African Prehistory*. All of the following authors have their own individual odyssey that has led them to study gender. Most view gender as being variable through time and, at least partially, as being integrated symbolically with the behavioral expression of culture (e.g., Schmidt, Chapter 8; Lane, Chapter 10; Segobye, Chapter 11; Hall, Chapter 13). The chapters attest to the methodological rigor connected with examining gender in prehistory. As noted by Nelson (Chapter 16) and Gifford-Gonzalez (Chapter 7), gender research requires better, not worse, archaeology than that often practiced today.

My quest to understand gender relations in the past has not ended with the publication of this book. Instead, my knowledge of gender has further developed in its sophistication as I incorporated the valuable insights provided by reading the following chapters. I believe archaeologists of the 21st century will pursue the study of gender, stratification, symbolism, ideology, and other facets of culture known to influence relations between people and will begin to discard the Western-centric and environmental models so popular, but yet potentially so misleading, that are common in the archaeology of the 20th century. I fervently hope readers interested in Africa and beyond will be able to incorporate the knowledge of the diversity of gender in African prehistory and what dynamics influenced the construction of gender through time. Ultimately, studies such as those represented in this book and in emerging studies of gender throughout the world will force archaeologists to rethink the prehistory of *all* the continents.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Sarah Nelson, Lyn Wadley, Fekri Hassan, and Cheryl Claassen for useful suggestions on a rough draft of this chapter. However, all errors are my responsibility alone.

**Perspectives of
Gender from the African
Archaeological Record**

Resolving the Past

Gender in the Stone Age Archaeological Record of the Western Cape

Resolution

Engendering the archaeological record or the prehistoric past requires that we ask and attempt to answer a number of difficult questions. Most specifically we may ask who collected the shellfish, who painted the rock paintings, and who made the stone artifacts we record and collectively regard as “the record.” Was it men, was it women, was it both, was it some men or some women, or was it anyone who could? More generally we may wonder what it was like to have been a man, a woman, or perhaps an old woman, in some particular prehistoric time and place. And it follows from this that we should wonder how male, female, or other roles were maintained, challenged, and changed in social situations where men and women held different agendas, enjoyed differential access to status and power, and may have led very different lives. In short, engendering the past is a search for resolution in the social dimension and an attempt to reflect the experiences of different categories of person. It is a parallel endeavor to the resolution of space and time that, when taken together, offer a resolved and therefore meaningful past.

During the heyday of ecological archaeology the relations that were considered significant were those between people and their natural environment (for a critique see Mazel 1987). Although the environment was conceived of as complex and as incorporating many interactive components such as rainfall, soils, vegetation, and resources, society was often depicted as unified and simple, apparently devoid of internal structure or divisions. Not surprisingly society, incorporating undifferentiated “people,” generated no latent energy for change, no contradictions to be accommodated; explanation consequently, focused on environmental or climatic change. Coincident with, and in fact necessary for, a shift to an interest in social explanations for changing archaeological signatures has been the recognition that past societies were far from simple. Thus, the recognition of interest groups with conflicting objectives or competitive visions allows the engine of change to be situated in the social as well as the natural environment. This shift has meant that “people” now have to be resolved into men and women, young and old, initiated and uninitiated, relatives by blood and by marriage, stone tool makers, bead makers, dancers, and painters. I view gender as a component of this interest in greater resolution.

The problem is, clearly, how to achieve the resolution of person, how to recognize the roles of men and women, the rules for women or men at particular times in the past. For me it is not simply a matter of problematization, a stage that has been effectively achieved very largely through the momentum of the feminist movement (Conkey and Spector 1984; Gero and Conkey 1991). It now appears to be an issue of method, a need to operationalize our understanding of the roles of men and women in the past.

relooking at archaeological evidence through gender-sensitive eyes. My suggestion here is that to find gender, the culturally defined roles of men and women, requires first that we find men and women. It is hard to disentangle the specific question “who collected shellfish?” from the more general “who was it like to have been a woman?” or the issue “how were gender relations constructed, perceived, and changed?”

To pursue this agenda I describe some work being done by archaeologists interested in the history of Stone Age precolonial people in the Western Cape of South Africa. The intention is not to claim that the arguments are conclusive, or even persuasive, but rather to illustrate an approach to seeing men and women in the distant past as actors in a social as well as an environmental arena. My threat is the argument that there is a consistency among very different kinds of evidence, written and material, about gender relations among Southern African hunter-gatherers (often referred to as San, Basarwa, or Bushmen) for the past few millennia, but that this becomes elusive when we look back as far as the terminal Pleistocene. I suggest three sources, from which men and women are clearly visible: ethnographic texts, rock art images, and buried human skeletons. I refer also to some less well-anchored speculations drawn from other parts of the archaeological record such as stone tools and faunal remains. Although spatial patterns in archaeological remains may relate to gendered behavior, I agree with Kent (this volume) that most patterns reflect the distribution of activities rather than gendered space.

Ethnography

Ethnographic accounts of former hunter-gatherer communities in the Kalahari (among them Ka 1982; Lee 1979; Marshall 1976; Silberbauer 1981; Tanaka 1976) obviously contain direct observations of men and women and have been a popular entry point for Western Cape archaeologists interested in various technological and social issues including gender (as examples see Parkington 1972, 1977, 1984, 1988, 1996; Solomon 1989, 1992, 1994). This is not unreasonable because it is widely believed that there are strong genetic, linguistic, and cognitive links between 20th-century people of the Kalahari and late precolonial communities of the Western Cape. More pertinent, perhaps, we have observations made by early travelers and early settlers on the lives and behaviors of hunter-gatherer and pastoralist groups that survived into the 17th or even 19th centuries in the Western Cape, albeit often as dispossessed and subordinate communities (see, for example, the reports in Barrow (1801–04); Sparrman (1785); Thunberg (1795–96)). Even more direct references to the lives of men and women come in the form of the 19th-century accounts of life in the Karoo region of the South African interior collected by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd (Bleek 1924, 1931, 1932a, 1933a,b, 1935, 1936; Lloyd 1911). These/Xam people were former hunter-gatherers who were being incorporated into colonial society as farm laborers. It is not the intention here to deny the usefulness of ethnographic or historic observations for suggesting explanations of archaeological remains. Quite the contrary, the implication is that gender roles may not have changed much in the last thousand years before colonialism. Perhaps the problem, though, is well made by returning to some of the questions posed earlier. Who painted, who collected shellfish, who made stone tools? In the Kalahari and the Karoo the answer is, simply but obviously, *no one does any longer*. Historical and ethnographic accounts incorporate changes resulting from colonial intervention, so that some behaviors had disappeared prior to reliable observations and others had changed.

What, then, does it mean to be informed by the ethnography, more specifically on the issue of gender? Women emerge as the gatherers of plants, providers of carbohydrates, collectors of the major

components of the diet; as the makers of ostrich eggshell beads; as the singers and clappers but not normally the dancers at healing dances; as potential “owners” of water holes and central figures in the maintenance of group identity; as users and maintainers, but perhaps not makers, of digging sticks and perforated weight stones; as closely identified with domestic space and duties but not so with wide scale political roles. Men, by contrast, are meat providers, being solely responsible for the hunting of large game with the bow and poisoned arrows, though this may happen rarely and contribute occasional bounties rather than regular fare. Men also manufacture most hunting and gathering gear, engage in dance and trance more frequently than women at healing occasions, are more likely perpetrators of violence against both men and women, and emerge in interactions with farmers and administrators as spokespersons for former hunter-gatherers.

So much for the economics and technology, but Megan Biesele’s work (1993) on the expressive culture of Kalahari Ju/’hoansi has revealed the deep and pervasive role of gender relations in the language and oral traditions of such groups. What emerges is a complex metaphorical framework whereby men and women articulate the tensions of gender relations, incorporating and focusing on the roles of “man the hunter” and “woman the childbearer.” Encapsulated in the belief system of *n!ao* (*n!ow* in Lorna Marshall’s [1957] usage), the economic and procreational levels are conflated so that a common language for sex and hunting is used. McCall (1970) has aptly noted that men “hunt” women as they hunt large game. Equivalents are noted between the penis and the arrow, the semen and the poison, the blood of the kill and the blood of birth. It is also apparent from Biesele (1993) and other texts that these tensions characterize the relations only of adult and sexually active men and women. Girls before first menstruation and boys before their first large game kill—in each case the first shedding of blood—do not engage in the metaphorically phrased struggle, and older men and women—after the last shedding of killing or menstruating blood—are less antagonistically related. The tensions find expression in the notion that harm enters society through women, especially women who are, or expect to be, menstruating, who thus are disqualified from becoming healers and must adopt the supportive role of clapping and singing at the healing dances.

Nor is such a framework limited to the Kalahari of the mid-20th century, though it is best reported here. Clearly the comments of Xam Bushmen of the 19th century Karoo to Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek reflect a version of *n!ao* belief, although the word is never used. Thomas’s (1950) northern Namibian (then South West African) observations from the first half of the 20th century and Qing comments to Orpen (Orpen 1874) may be taken to imply a widespread set of beliefs that frame gender relations through the perceived equivalence of hunting and sex. These beliefs also include the creation of hunters and husbands at male initiation and prey and wives at female first menstruation rituals (Parkington 1996). A man has two wives, his human wife and his eland or gemsbok male animal. There is, thus, a direct link between the technology of the bow and poisoned arrows, the economics of the division of labor between man the hunter and woman the gatherer, carnivore and herbivore, and the generalized gender roles of aggressive man and supportive woman.

It is obviously tempting to simply import these wonderfully detailed scenarios into our reconstructions of Western Cape late prehistory. But it is important for us to question whether we are learning much about the past by this form of analogical reasoning (Wylie 1982). Even a brief focus on the question of shellfish gathering may persuade us that we are not. There are many changes in the archaeological record of shellfish gathering in the Western Cape during the Holocene. The volumes of shell midden recorded per unit time vary enormously, as do the sizes, numbers, and placement of sites (Buchanan 1988; Jerardino and Yates 1996; Parkington et al. 1988). The frequencies of different shellfish targets also vary considerably and include periods of undoubted focus on either limpets or mussels as well as periods where more diverse sets of shellfish were gathered. There are some

Holocene millennia missing from the coastal archaeological record, suggesting the possibility of lengthy cessation of shellfish gathering on any scale. The density and range of artifacts and animal bones in shell-dominated deposits also varies, as does the extent to which the animal bones point to seasonally restricted collecting times. All of this points to a far from stable strategy of shellfish gathering and an almost certainly variable relationship between coastal visits and overall settlement systems. Reliance on the ethnography might lead us to assume that shellfish collecting is invariably the task of women, whereas this may have been quite variable through the millennia.

Clearly the ethnographic and early traveler accounts provide ideas and detailed scenarios that can be used to formulate hypotheses about past situations. Testing such hypotheses, in this instance one about male and female roles, requires that we build arguments to link men and women with component parts of the changing patterns of evidence we call the archaeological record. Where, though, is the check on our constructed history? Obviously ethnography alone does not produce a past, so information from these sources needs to be linked to material traces of past systems. We may not have to penetrate far back into the prehistory of the Western Cape before we have to envisage scenarios quite different from those seen and partially described by travelers and ethnographers.

Rock Art

For many viewers the most beautiful rock art images in the Western Cape, and certainly among those into which the most obvious efforts to incorporate natural detail have gone, are the magnificent paintings of large game, most often the eland. These animals are the most likely to have been killed by men with bows and poisoned arrows and they remind us of the “hunter and his gemsbok wife” (Thomas 1950) or the special relationship between the creator mantis/kaggen and his eland (Bleed 1924). The focus on these animals, to the almost complete exclusion of shellfish, plant foods, and small game such as tortoises that could have been collected by women, encourages us to begin to see the art as part of the same expressive vocabulary as Marshall and Biesele have recorded as n!ao in the Kalahari.

Human figures are far more frequently painted than animal figures in the corpus of Western Cape rock art. As a residual art, however, many of the human figures are not readily diagnosed as those of men or women, and instead have to be recorded as of indeterminate sex. My view, not shared by all researchers (Solomon 1996), is that almost all human figures were intended to be read unambiguously as either men or women, and quite probably particular categories of men or women, more specifically related to differences in age and initiation. The regular depiction of penises on men and buttocks on women draws attention to the sexual potential of these people and underlines the relationship between the paintings and sexual tensions and metaphors. Men are painted with recognizable penises not because they walked and hunted naked, but surely because the painter intended the viewer to be able to distinguish between different categories of person, between men and women, and between young and older men and women. If we are right, then, here is a finely resolved component of the Western Cape archaeological record that allows us to assess the roles, associations, and references implied by male and female human figures.

Constraining the potential of this situation, and certainly limiting the range of gender interpretations, is the social context and both the ritual and symbolic intent of the painters and the painting (Lewis-Williams 1981, 1993; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989, 1994; Vinnicombe 1976). No doubt the paintings are far from a simple visual ethnography and refer more directly to the socially constituted roles of men and women, rather than attempting to illustrate the range of activities and

contributions made by them. There are clear patterns reflecting distinctions intentionally drawn by the painters between depictions of men and women, and these are of direct relevance to gender roles and relations. The association of men with bows and, less often but no less unambiguously, women with weighted digging sticks, is entirely consistent with ethnographic accounts, as is the observation that most groupings of humans are either predominantly men or women and seldom include both. Men with the finger-spread clapping convention have never been recorded on survey. These features of the painted record can be taken as meaning that the society of the painters was similarly structured along gendered lines and shared many of the gendered roles with that of modern Kalahari groups.

In the Western Cape there are many more depictions of men than of women, in some subregions as many as five or seven times as many (Manhire 1981; Van Rijssen 1980). Most of the large groupings of human figures, certainly those with more than 10 figures, are processional and best interpreted as dances—most likely the dancing associated with initiation events for young men or first menstruation events for young women (Parkington and Manhire 1991). Many paintings, including processional ones, and especially those dominated by men, include conventions that are reliably associated with trance, either the occasion of a healing dance or the geometric forms experienced by shamans during an altered state. The initiation events and the shamanistic references clearly link the paintings with custom and belief as expressed in Kalahari and Karoo ethnographies (Yates and Manhire 1991; Yates et al. 1985).

Consistent metaphorical associations between women and the kinds of large game animals hunted by men with bows and arrows are found in recent Kalahari expressive culture, specifically among the Ju/'hoansi (Biesele 1993; McCall 1970), 19th-century Karoo stories (Bleek 1924), and Western Cape rock paintings (Parkington 1996). The paintings, as Solomon has noted (1989, 1992, 1994), relate explicitly, and perhaps primarily, to gender and sexual relations and should continue to be the focus of any research that attempts to uncover the history of gender in Southern African hunter-gatherer society. It is, thus, extremely important to try to date rock paintings so that archaeologists can actively derive changes in subject matter, which may constitute a unique record of the maintenance, challenge, and change in relations between men and women. The paintings at the moment express detailed resolution of place and person, but not of time, with the result that the detection of change through the evidence is difficult or impossible. Recent dates for buried painted wall slabs in the Western Cape (Jerardino and Yates 1996) of over 3,000 years imply that the association of male and female identities with hunting and procreation respectively may be valid for at least much of the late Holocene.

Burials

Buried human skeletons, if dated directly, are easily the most resolved component of the archaeological record. Not only can time, place, and person be derived from appropriate analysis, but also some resolution of the age of the person can be gained. What this means is that any associated grave goods, any pathologies, any inferences from anatomy, tooth wear, or injury, and any measurement of trace element or isotopic composition refer to a specific, individual man or woman. There can be little doubt that here lies the most significant potential for establishing patterns of differences between men and women at particular times in the past—differences that could provide the basis for gendered interpretations of diet, health, injury, and general behavior.

In the Western Cape the most promising work so far in this direction is that of Judy Sealy and her colleagues in the analysis of stable carbon and nitrogen isotopes (Sealy and van der Merwe 1980).

- [click *The Green Pharmacy: New Discoveries in Herbal Remedies for Common Diseases and Conditions from the World's Foremost Authority on Healing H*](#)
- [download *Laruelle: Against the Digital*](#)
- [click *Forensic Mental Health Assessment: A Casebook \(2nd Edition\)* pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)
- [download *Lovers at the Chameleon Club, Paris 1932*](#)
- [read *Dawnbringer \(Forgotten Realms\)*](#)
- [Vil m Flusser: An Introduction pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)

- <http://www.satilik-kopek.com/library/Hard-Core--Power--Pleasure--and-the--Frenzy-of-the-Visible---Expanded-Edition-.pdf>
- <http://diy-chirol.com/lib/By-the-Sword--Valdemar--Vows-and-Honor--Book-4-.pdf>
- <http://aneventshop.com/ebooks/Geeks--Mush-Heads-and-the-IT-Revolution--How-SRA-International-Achieved-Success-over-Nearly-Four-Decades.pdf>
- <http://reseauplatoparis.com/library/Secrets-to-the-Grave--Deeper-Than-the-Dead-.pdf>
- <http://creativebeard.ru/freebooks/Dawnbringer--Forgotten-Realms-.pdf>
- <http://diy-chirol.com/lib/Vil--m-Flusser--An-Introduction.pdf>