SILENT VIOLENCE: STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE IN THE SOCIAL MANAGEMENT OF REPRODUCTION

Violencia silenciosa: violencia estructural en la gestión social de la reproducción

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ABSTRACT We vindicate the centrality of the management of reproduction in Hunter-fisher-gatherer societies and how this crucial management could generate a social organization in which women were subject to a *structural violence*. Our attempts to identify these forms of violence will involve us in the discussion of the objectives and possibilities of archaeological science. We propose a redefined ethnoarchaeological approach as a way for searching archaeological indicators.
Being able to demonstrate or disprove the existence of structural violence against women in the "first" prehistoric human societies would provide us with a solid basis for a debate on the naturalisation of current behaviours and expectations according to a person's sex. We could then move beyond the essentialist ideas, which have done so much to establish "immutable" roles for the sexes inside society.

Key words: Prehistory, Violence, Reproduction, Social rules, Ethnoarchaeology.

RESUMEN Reivindicamos la centralidad de la gestión de la reproducción en sociedades cazadoras-recolectoras-pescadoras y cómo esta gestión necesaria pudo generar en la Prehistoria una organización social en la que las mujeres están sujetas a una violencia estructural. Nuestros intentos para identificar esta forma de violencia nos llevan a reconsiderar los objetivos y las posibilidades de la ciencia arqueológica. Proponemos que esa búsqueda de indicadores arqueológicos puede abordarse desde una etnoarqueología redefinida como experimental.
Ser capaces de demostrar o refutar la existencia de la violencia estructural contra las mujeres en las "primeras" sociedades humanas prehistóricas nos proporcionaría una base sólida para el debate sobre la naturalización de los comportamientos y destinos según el sexo de una persona. Así acabaríamos con esencialismos femeninos y masculinos que justifican actuales roles sociales supuestamente inmutables.

Palabras clave: Prehistoria, Violencia, Reproducción, Normas sociales, Etnoarqueología.

INTRODUCTION

In our article "Desapariciones inevitables (Inevitable disappearances)" published in 2002 (Vila & Estévez, 2002), we spoke of the violence that characterises the contacts between hunter-gatherer subsistence systems and industrial systems, and observed that these contacts always culminate in the disappearance of the hunter-gatherer societies. In describing the violence exercised in the demise of the Yamana and the Selknam, indigenous societies of the Tierra del Fuego, we noted that the *type of* violence involved was different, even though the two societies disappeared within seventy years after the European contact.

As we pointed out in that study, the different types of violence elicited different reactions, and continue to do so. As we said:

> "The Selk'nam or onas were the victims of an explicit violence which is now deplored, but is regarded as an intrinsic, recurrent evil that was an inevitable part of any colonising system. On the other hand, as Martin Gusinde stated in his monumental work on the Indians of the Tierra del Fuego, the Yamana were "not bothering anybody" (Gusinde, 1986:241). The fate of this canoe-faring group seems to illustrate the idea that these disappearances were inevitable, whether or not the process were accompanied by violence — as if this were the natural and historical destiny of all 'primitive' people. And if the process is inevitable, then no one is to blame for the disappearance of these groups or, more exactly, for the "extinction of these ways of attending to the social production and reproduction which had endured over thousands of years" (Vila & Estévez, 2002:109).

and we went on to say:

> "The example of the Tierra del Fuego, specifically of the selk'nam and yamana is important, as it allows us to contest the reductionist fallacy that equates the concept of violence with explicit, direct acts of brutality which we describe as *circumstantial violence*. This term is not used gratuitously; in fact it allows us to identify and characterise the other type of violence, *structural violence*. And in fact we can see that the responses to the two kinds of violence are very different. The exercise of *circumstantial violence* provokes immediate condemnation and may even elicit violent responses which one might consider "comprehensible". The exercise of *structural violence*, on the other hand, is inconspicuous but relentless; it does not attract attention to itself and in general is more effective" (Vila & Estévez, 2002:110).
> "The apparent absence of violence (there were no massacres, no prices put on the heads of the natives) meant that their disappearance was justified as something fatally inevitable" (Vila & Estévez, 2002:114).

The example of Tierra del Fuego and the 'two types of violence' exercised there let us to establish a general statement. We contend that women are also subject to these two types of violence: *circumstantial violence,* that is, acts of brutality committed by specific individuals resulting in physical injury, and *structural violence,* the less obtrusive form exercised socially by the "group". In fact, it is this concept of *structural violence* that has characterised social systems based on dissymmetrical relations between the sexes, which, in every single case, have favoured men.

VIOLENCE AND PREHISTORIC SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Can circumstantial or structural violence exist without the other? Is structural violence more important, more consequential, than the other, which is the product of a specific situation? Is circumstantial violence an indicator of structural violence? Does circumstantial violence *only* indicate the occurrence of isolated events or exceptions? In my view, it is worth seeing if we can detect the presence of one, the other, or both, in the context of prehistoric societies.

A society is characterised by the type of relations existing between women and men in order to survive and reproduce. This is what we call social organisation. Prehistoric archaeology aims to provide a characterisation of these relations. We need to know how relations in human societies were formed and to identify what was specific and distinctive about the ways in which these societies organised production and reproduction: that is, whether they organised themselves in an egalitarian way, or by class, or according to sex, age, and so on.

To do this, we need to establish whether the form of organisation based on violence against women was already an alternative in prehistory since the times of the first social groups or whether it developed from a common denominator (structural violence) and then diversified in accordance with the groups' reproductive success, or whether, on the contrary, they all adopted a common model of violence on the basis of their various experiences. We need to know whether there were changes: and if so, what changed, and why.

So, to sum up, our interest lies in the processes of production and maintenance of the social organisation over this long period that we call Prehistory. Being able to demonstrate or disprove the existence of structural violence against women in the "first" prehistoric human societies would provide us with a solid basis for a debate on the naturalisation of current behaviours and expectations according to a person's sex. We could then move beyond the essentialist ideas, which have done so much to establish "immutable" roles for the sexes inside society.

Our attempts to identify these forms of violence will involve us in the discussion of the objectives and possibilities of archaeological science. First, we must decide whether there is a need for archaeological research into these areas; if our answer is yes, we must then search for *archaeological indicators* of this violence, and of its social importance, of its repercussions with regard to the management of reproduction, and so on.

Finding indicators of *circumstantial violence* is a relatively straightforward task. Some indicators have already been discovered and described, although their identification was not the main objective of the research. Prehistoric human remains present bone fractures in the skull, in the arms, hands and so on, which leave little doubt as to their significance. Indicators of this kind are already part of standard anthropological analyses; the differences between them have been studied and characterised, and in each particular case their importance and social significance depend on the frequency and intensity of these features within the population.

If there is no evidence of this *circumstantial violence*, it might appear that situations of dissymmetry or inequality, the differences in the social and political roles of women and men, the sexual division of labour (which we can record through other evidence),

are *inevitable facts, the natural destiny of men and women*. To be able to establish whether the absence of circumstantial violence leads necessarily to these conclusions, and whether we are therefore justified in discussing the supposed relationship between these social situations and biology, it is important to include *structural violence* in the archaeological analysis of prehistoric societies.

The presence of one or other kind of violence or of the combination of the two would allow us to assess the validity of what at present are no more than hypotheses (in the best of cases) or mere value judgments regarding the origin and causes of the social dissymmetry between men and women.

Certain indicators of *structural violence* can also be seen in bones: for example, the presence of different stress marks or diseases in male and female populations and the repeated differences in nutritional status and life expectancy (cf. Grauer y Stuart-Macadam, 1998). These indicators would reveal differences in quality of life and in access to resources, which would contradict the common characterisation of hunter-gatherer societies as communities that practised redistribution and reciprocity and did not engage in surplus production.

THE SOCIAL REGULATION OF REPRODUCTION

In spite of their undoubted importance, however, these indicators are not sufficient on their own. As structural violence is a 'silent', socially accepted form, the indicators must be conceived in terms of the indications of the social theories that propose their existence. Let us look at this more closely.

In our first article on the existence and function of the hunter-gatherer mode of production (Estévez *et al*., 1998) we proposed what we termed the *thesis of principal contradiction* or *internal mobilising factor* for these societies. From this thesis, we derived our hypothesis for the causes of the asymmetrical relations between women and men. We contended that the causes lie in the contradiction between the social conditions that determine the processes of the production of material goods and those that determine the processes of biological and social reproduction (Estévez *et al*., 1998:11).

In our proposal, which we have since developed further (Barcelo *et al*., 2006; Estévez & Vila, 2007; 2012; Vila *et al*., 2010), we discussed the relationship between the sexual division of labour, social discrimination against women, and the social regulation of reproduction on the basis of a broad critical revision of the ethnographic literature.

The sexual division of labour has been presented in many discussions as an inevitable process, as a law deriving from biology. Of course, if it were inevitable, it would obviously be an appropriate phenomenon to use to account for processes that have occurred ever since the development of the first societies. But even though this theory has regularly been exploited for political and economic reasons, its validity is, in fact, far from being demonstrated.

In our view, the sexual division of labour, which became a practically universal phenomenon, was the successful instrument that allowed society to assimilate and accept a situation of social dissymmetry (a situation of *structural violence*) between women and men, and disguise their roles as 'complementary'. The division of productive acti-

vities according to sex takes many different forms, but it can be summarised in very simple terms as a situation in which the sexes do not do or produce the same things.

In modern ethnographic societies, this difference in productive activity according to sex makes it possible to relativise the value of the product obtained, and, by extension, the value assigned to the person producing it. This process prepares the way for a power divide: those who produce the things that are 'worth more' exert power over those who produce things that are 'worth less' (Kergoat, 2010).

This power should be understood as a situation of inequality that allows specific behavioural relations between the sexes (who proposes, prioritises, orders, prohibits, punishes) to become the norm. Social norms or rules concerning the relations of reproduction focus on the control over women (over their sexuality and sexual relationships) because of their obvious capacity for procreation (fig. 1).

Our theory of the functioning of the hunter-gatherer production mode considered the regulation of reproduction as an essential element in the sustainability of the social group, built around a social organisation with a dissymmetry in favour of men. We postulated that, in these societies, the justification of this dissymmetrical organisation was a rational economic choice, and for this reason it achieved collective acceptance.
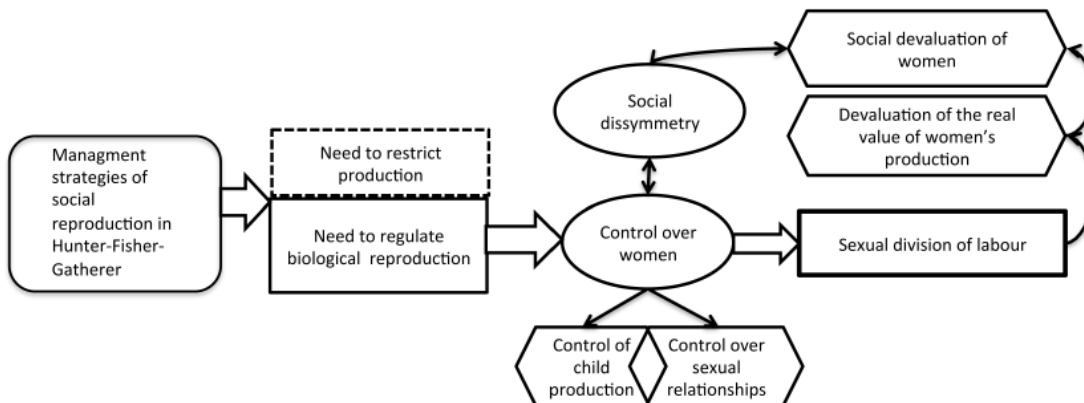

Fig. 1.—Scheme proposed of the relationship between sexual division of labour and the regulation of reproduction in Hunter-fisher-gatherer societies.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Let us now return to our initial theme of structural violence. This socially exercised violence brings with it an artificial and generalised undervaluing of women and of their role in subsistence production.

This neglect of women's contribution to subsistence and of the amount of work invested is part of a system that exercises control over women who reproduce. This control became necessary in societies, which could not reduce their own reproduction in an effective manner (except by sexual abstinence, or by regular infanticide or abortion) and could not sufficiently increase the availability (the reproduction) of the natural resources upon which their subsistence depended.

It is conceivable that there may have been alternative approaches to the problem, but in any case, maintaining control over the women who reproduce was the "solution" that eventually won out over the rest. Control of reproduction permitted the continuity of a social system whose subsistence is based on hunting, gathering and fishing.

Reproduction is the cornerstone of this system, and so the importance of its management is evident. The needs of the people (the workforce) guide and determine how resources are managed and which goods are produced for consumption. Therefore, the success or failure of the social management of the relations of reproduction determines the relations of production; in turn, the relations of production only condition those of reproduction.

These forms of management should not be seen as separate processes; we cannot analyse them in isolation as we are speaking of relations between women and men who produce in order to be able to reproduce, and in turn reproduce by producing. Therefore, if reproduction is managed most successfully by controlling women's sexual relations, production may be the means through which this control is exercised. If the contributions of one sex and the other to the subsistence of the group are different, then the social value assigned to these contributions can also be arbitrarily different: certain contributions, and those who make them, will be valued more highly than others. The social value assigned to male activities (for instance, hunting) is disproportionate to their contribution to the food supply, whereas the food that women provide or produce (and, it should be stressed, on a more regular basis) is less appreciated. In this situation, the part of the group that contributes products and activities of high social value is likely to be able to exercise control or regulation over the rest of the group and over its behaviour.

As in the sexual division of labour, the morphology of the relations of reproduction varies widely. It is not necessarily a useful guide for our research, unless we focus on recurrent features rather than circumstantial, specific ones (which could be the result of particular histories). The main feature that we see repeated in ethnographic hunter-gatherer societies is this 'silent', 'unobtrusive' violence against women. Dissymmetrical and hierarchical social relations and inequality in favour of men are justified by the presumption that the productivity of women is limited, due, paradoxically enough, to their unique status as possessors of the biological capacity to procreate. This justification of the differences between men and women conflates the (biological) *capacity* to procreate with the (social) *fact* of procreating, and male domination and the appropriation of women are attributed to natural causes, thus masking the historical and social nature of the relations of reproduction (Tabet, 1985).

Biological reproduction involves two people, and social reproduction involves the community. If we forget this, we neglect the fact that the organisation of the relations of reproduction begins with the social organisation of sexuality and ends with the inte-

gration of the (re)produced individuals as full members of the society. Reproduction is a social process.

The reproductive process is socially organised and regulated in all its 'phases', from the frequency and regularity of coitus (synonymous with the possibility of pregnancy), to birth and the subsequent childrearing which make the reproduced individual into a member of society. The management of the entire process is fundamental for any society.

The forms that the systematic social intervention in sexuality takes may vary in different societies, but they are always there. By their very presence, these norms make procreation something non-natural. At the same time, the existence of social norms presupposes the possibility of alternatives, which it is their job to prevent; we see this if we consider that there are no social regulations regarding processes that are strictly biological, like breathing.

Women are the most critical part in this reproductive process, and so the control of their sexuality is essential. But there is no known society in which women exercise this control. It is a reproduction that is imposed (that is to say, the choice of mate, the impossibility of refusing, the decision of when to marry, and so on): as Paola Tabet writes, the specialisation of female sexuality towards reproduction is imposed structurally (see all the discussion of literature in Tabet, 1985).

Our study of reproduction process (as we defined it before) in the Yamana society using ethnographic information (Vila & Ruiz, 2001) analyses the functioning of the organisation of the reproduction in that society. We also concluded that:

> "(...) the social discrimination against women, the little or no control they exercise over their lives and the impossibility of their taking individual or group decisions has been demonstrated. The social organisation of the Yamana discriminates explicitly in favour of men, even though the contribution to the production of goods for use and consumption is, at the very least, equal" (Vila & Ruiz, 2001).

The forms of the social control of sexuality vary depending on the conditions and needs of the different modes of production. In some situations sexual relations are encouraged, in others they are censured. But in all cases we find these features we have mentioned —dissymmetrical, hierarchical social relations, and inequality in favour of men.

Establishing the historical conditions in which societies might have organised themselves by exercising this structural violence against women, and ascertaining whether there were attempts to create alternatives, should be subjects for archaeological research. Special attention should be given to determining why this dissymmetry persisted, despite the drastic structural economic changes introduced by the adoption of agriculture and animal husbandry.

In our view, the historical construction we called a 'successful specific alternative' is characteristic of pre-scientific hunter-gatherer societies and is therefore not immutable.

Learning from the past does not mean repeating it or reproducing it (Vila, 2011). For this reason it is important for present-day societies, and for women especially, to understand the historical processes, which have generated or fostered the ways we live today. We must have this awareness in order to be able to make proposals for the future.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF RELATIONS

The key question, then, is how the social division between women and men was generated. How can we answer this question? As archaeologists we have to decide on our approach. What record do we use? What analogies should we apply? What experiments should we carry out?

The enquiry is based on the application of the scientific method: with observations and the formulation of hypotheses and general laws. Reconsidering the archaeological method from the inside and from the bottom up, and wondering whether perhaps the problem lay not so much in the intrinsic limitations of the discipline as in its practitioners, we devised an approach that we call experimental ethnoarchaeology (Estévez & Vila, 1995).

As we have suggested above, sexes are not biologically determined destinies. 'She'/ 'he' are social categories. Sex is social and therefore must be produced. This production brings with it the construction of social inequalities.

We can understand this social differentiation in the first human societies if we consider the importance of reproduction for the continuity of the group and the differences in the roles played in it by women and men. Reproduction was the basic factor in need of regulation, and so the first step was to identify the part of the group with the most important role: that is, women, because they are the principal multiplying factor. The process of reproduction, now entirely a social phenomenon, had to be regulated in order to achieve continuity in accordance with the technology available and the access to resources.

We should stress this social importance so as not to forget the relationship between reproduction, sexuality, work and power —the scaffolding that made the continuity of the first groups possible.

Reproduction means the production of people in a specific socio-economic context. It can be analysed like any other productive process (Vila y Ruiz, 2001). Analysing the role played by this production and its management in the general survival strategies at different points in history will help us to understand the (prehistoric) societies that we study.

Based on the description and quantification of the working time that the sexes dedicate to survival in all known ethnographic hunter-gatherer societies, we have no hesitation in speaking in terms of the exploitation of women. If, to the differences in the time and effort invested in subsistence activities, in access to resources and in the distribution of these resources, we add the work involved in reproduction, there can be absolutely no doubt about this situation of exploitation. The ways, in which these situations have been reached, have varied according to the society but, despite some opinions (i.e. Endicott & Endicott, 2008 or Lee & Daly, 1985) the critical analysis of all known hunter-gatherer societies always reflects the supremacy and political power of men (see discussions in Brightman, 1996, and Mathieu, 1985).

This recurrence in the relations of reproduction in all known ethnographic societies should provide a 'record' producing all its essential variables. How can we bring it to light? This is the methodological task now facing prehistoric archaeology.

The argument proposing the non-material nature of these relations no longer holds, since it is clear that their consequences *are* material. Even less defensible is to use

archaeological or ethnographical examples (taken out of context) to illustrate a theory on, and then consider it as proven. All that this achieves is to eternalise the debates on subjects that are just a matter of opinion.

Ethnoarchaeology opens up new avenues for research. It provides the opportunity to study societies with structurally asymmetrical relations in search of indicators that can be identified using archaeological methodology, in order to propose a record. The first step is obviously observation, though not necessarily understood literally: I mean the analysis of societies by explicitly focusing on the relations of reproduction and the possible application of the results in archaeological studies. We will have to do this without terms like data, archaeological object, record, and so on, and rethink the concepts. Once we have proposals for the indicators not only of relations but of types of relations, our task will be to determine which of these are already accessible with standard archaeological methodology (or what changes are necessary), and which ones require individual investigation before they can be incorporated.

The idea is not to re-build archaeology from zero, but to join forces and bring in as many perspectives as possible (Vila, 2006). We can start by rereading and reinterpreting what we thought was already archaeologically 'known', and by reassessing controversial cases that currently remain unclear. We may unearth things that have been never seen before, because no one has tried to look for them or because it was thought that they could never be found (Beausang, 2005; Strassburg, 1995).

And at the same time, through these observations of unequal relations we can propose new or improved ways of conceptualising projects and excavations — producing a feminist methodology for archaeology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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