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doi:10.1017/eea.2021.60

Almudena Hernando. *Arqueología de la Identidad* (Madrid: Akal, 2002, 224 pp., 14 b/w illustr., hbk, ISBN 84-460-1654-0)

Arqueología de la Identidad is the book that I have recommended to my students most frequently. It provides the conceptual tools to understand: 1) the ontological Other, past and present; 2) our own historical genealogy as individualized selves in the Western world; 3) archaeology as a modern discipline within this genealogy; and, 4) the origins and evolution of gender asymmetry between men and women.

The knowledge of the Other is an old but still vivid question. In a foundational work, Tzvetan Todorov (2010: 296) invited readers to acknowledge the Other without projecting onto them our own Western rationality, but he also admitted that it was easier said than done. This is precisely what *Arqueología de la Identidad* accomplishes, starting from Hernando's 'confession' that her own ethoarchaeological project, conducted among Q'eqchi slash-and-burn farmers from Guatemala in the mid-1990s, made no sense. Through the experience of living with them, she realized that they had wholly different ways of understanding the world,

based on distinct perceptions of space, territory, time, and reality (p. 7). Then, she had to re-conceptualize her project's premises and, in fact, her entire thought. This book is the result. Almudena is convinced that we can—and as archaeologists, I would say we must—escape our own mind-sets to understand otherness, including the past, analyzing the structures that underline self-formation or personal identity. To demonstrate this, she mobilizes knowledge in human cognition rarely considered in archaeology despite its more than indisputable potential.

The core idea behind her robust and compelling proposal is that, as humans, we need to organize reality in order to survive and cope with the world, and that identity is the main device to achieve this goal. Identity is the most basic mode of constructing an idea of who we are, what types of relationships connect us to everything else, and what the world we live in is like (p. 16). The book explores the different ways in which we can construct identity, which are always related to our capacity to control reality. However,

independently of the actual control we have over this reality, as a cognitive mechanism identity always grants us the sensation that we can indeed control it (p. 51).

The introduction and the preceding foreword present her central tenets (further developed in Chs 2–6) and main sources: Norbert Elias (1993), to understand how humans order reality through space and time; and David R. Olson (1994), to understand how they represent it through metonymy and metaphor (p. 9). As a survival mechanism, identity is common to all humans; but it can have a flexible and varied content. Despite variability, however, Almudena claims that there are structural relations between the construction of the self, the degree of material control over reality, socio-economic complexity, and the parameters used to represent and order reality (p. 10). This is why we, archaeologists and people of the present, may be able to understand the people of the past without projecting our own cultural logics onto them. Also, this is why ethnography and ethnoarchaeology are key to providing interpretive frames for the past since those situations that are structurally similar will share common patterns of identity construction (p. 49).

In the beginning, when societies were oral and there was no socio-economic complexity, there must have been no difference in social positions and everyday activities must have been governed by repetition and lack of functional fragmentation, generating the same recurring perception of other aspects of reality. Only that part of nature that was personally experienced could have been apprehended and thus become part of the world. Metonymy and space would have been the main parameters organizing this experienced world. In metonymy, signs and symbols used to represent reality belong to that same reality, which is explained

through human behavior. Nowadays, such societies develop myths to legitimize their present (p. 89) and tend to reject change because the best guarantee of survival lies in maintaining the balance achieved through traditional lifeways, in the same way their ancestors did. In such situations, the self is constructed in a relational way, inalienable from relationships with others in the same group and nature. We can thus assume that relational identity also characterized this type of societies in the past.

As socio-economic complexity emerged and increased, individuality or awareness of one's own difference from everybody else in the group began to influence personhood formation (p. 96). Metaphor, or abstract representations of reality not contained within it, appeared to represent those phenomena whose inner mechanics were being decoded. A fracture between reality and its representation emerged, something typical of literate societies, being writing a clear example. This divide also encompassed nature, which begun to be perceived as something external and amenable to control, culminating in Scientific explanations of nature's physics detached from human behavior (p. 54). Science gained priority over myth, and time—as a dynamic parameter to order reality—over space. Time would allow the introduction of change and the unknown to manage reality in an effective way, according to the dynamic and changing character that social activities were taking. The increase in socio-economic complexity did not affect everybody equally, as those in more specialized social and/or economic positions developed a deeper sense of difference. This means that societies, and selves within them, would be now characterized by different types of identity formation, with different degrees in the combination of relational and individualized features. This process is

explained in the second part of the book, where we can follow how and why we have become individuals in Modern societies (Ch. 10) through the analysis of hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists (Ch. 8) as well as peasant societies (Ch. 9).

I share Hernando's conviction that an archaeology of identity is fundamental to reach the past (p. 214). As she notes, the decisions people make are based on how they perceive themselves and their relations to others, on how they construct their identity. Understanding 'prehistory' from this standpoint opens a new world of meaning and provides new perspectives over key topics. I also find compelling her genealogy of individuality as a particular type of personhood, and not as a universal human trait (see also Fowler, 2016). Individuality implies a rational distance with reality's phenomena, including nature and other humans, which does not occur always or everywhere. This is why there were no individuals in prehistory (Hernando, 2003). *Arqueología de la Identidad* therefore invites the reader to particularize their own way of being and to deconstruct universals attached to a claimed 'human nature'. At the same time, it explains why we endow those universals, why we think what we think. One clear example is the positive appraisal of change (see also Hernando, 2013). In the wake of classical ethnographies (e.g. Clastres, 2014), Almudena deconstructs this idea explaining that societies appreciate continuity over change in inverse proportion to technological control over nature, asymmetrical relationships of power, and specialized fragmentation of functional tasks.

Unfortunately, this profound challenge to the Western male self is not always well received by academic peers. The features that go with it are so ingrained as ubiquitous, and even as moral, that claiming its absence in societies of the past is sometimes misjudged as offensive, and, paradoxically,

as Eurocentric (Montón-Subías & Hernando, 2018). The absence of science in societies with low socio-economic complexity is another telling example; as if myths were a demerit. As Almudena emphasizes, both provide discourses to explain the world, and are thus equally valid to cope with it. The only difference is that myth explains reality through human logics and thus human emotions, without opening a rupture between subjects and objects (p. 98). Moreover, myth, metonymy, and space are also prevalent in the West in the organization of those phenomena that escape scientific knowledge. And we also relate to them in an emotional way. Hernando provides the example of death. I think the 'humanization' of Covid-19 as a merciless enemy that should be defeated could be another example. Curiously enough, this same adjective was used to describe the lava river during September's eruption of La Palma's volcano. Despite scientific knowledge, we cannot yet control such phenomena.

Archaeology is not only useful for understanding our genealogy as particular selves; archaeology has been also part of this process, something the author explains well in Chapter 1. Here she situates the nineteenth century emergence of prehistory as a logical replacement of myth by science to legitimize the present in the increasing process of individualization experienced by Western men (p. 11). The new discipline provided new references based on time to justify evolution to the current state of affairs in terms of initiative and change (p. 21). And I say Western men because the book also clarifies that men and women have followed different paths in terms of identity construction. Although the topic is further developed in her subsequent *Fantasy of Individuality* (Hernando, 2017), *Arqueología de la Identidad* is also a feminist book that explains the origins of gender inequality.

Relational identity defined all men and women in the beginnings of humankind. However, men would have slowly and gradually developed individuality, while women would have maintained the relational identity until modern times. The reasons for this difference are to be found in cultural factors related to differential mobility associated with maternity and provision of care to highly dependent human offspring. Men would have assumed those practices with more mobility and risk within those practices developed by their own group (pp. 132–33). These initial subtle differences in mobility did not establish power relations between the sexes. However, they could have constituted the basis for an increasing predominance of masculine individuality, and with this, the subsequent appearance of gender inequality and men's obstruction of women's individualization to maintain female relational identity for their own benefit (pp. 20, 182). Otherwise, women could have also developed their own desires for power, which would have prevented the assignment of roles to them based on gender normativity (p. 198). Eventually, in the nineteenth century, women began to develop characteristics of individuality, but by virtue of their different historical trajectories, there is a difference between the current dependent individuality of men and the current independent individuality of women. Almudena claims that total individuality is a delusion because relational mechanisms are always involved in personhood formation, but while men stopped acknowledging and valuing them, women did not.

No doubt, *Arqueología de la Identidad* is a landmark study. It shows the fundamental, but often neglected, role of archaeology in understanding social challenges of the present, such as increasing individuality, unsustainability (due to the correlation between individuality and the emotional

detachment from nature, and the perception of the latter as something external to the self and exploitable), and gender inequality. If we want to change them, we need to understand their most profound and hidden workings, which only a genealogical historical lens can reveal. Surely, there are also some weak points or issues that need to be developed further. I would have liked, for instance, attention to the then emerging feminist and Indigenous archaeologies in the otherwise original overview of archaeology's historiography (Ch. 1). When the book was written, such archaeologies had already begun to deconstruct the discipline's status quo. I would have also liked more discussion of the relational features defining the individualized men and women of the present. For instance, if relational identity always anchors destiny and survival to an external instance and establishes with it a dependent and subordinated relationship (p. 97), what is this instance in the case of independent individualized women of the present? These 'weaknesses' however pale in front of the countless achievements, such as to situate gender inequality as the first social inequality in World History.

Class, race, and gender are today imbricated in the construction of social inequality, oppression, and discrimination (Combahee River Collective, 1977). I contend, however, that they have different historical genealogies which we should not dismiss if we are to understand what is specific to female subordination. Almudena's synthesis has much to offer to growing debates on these issues by demonstrating how gender inequality and subsequent patriarchy emerged in our deepest past. And she does so by uncovering deep structures and their workings underlying human behavior, something I believe we should embrace as archaeologists. We can then understand what makes us humans equal in difference and different in

equality, without projecting Eurocentrism, intentionally or unintentionally, into the past.

A last achievement I cannot forget to mention is Almudena's narrative. It makes the complex easy to understand and not vice versa. Although this should be a must, it is still a merit. The book was a turning point for me. It widened my horizons and my vision of the world, the Other, and my own self. This is why I have recommended it so many times, as I am emphatically doing now to all those reading this review.

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doi:10.1017/ea.2021.61

André Leroi-Gourhan. 1964–1965. *Le geste et la parole* (Sciences aujourd'hui. Paris: Albin Michel, Tome 1: *Technique et Langage*, 325pp., Tome 2: *La mémoire et les rythmes*, 287pp., numerous illustrations and maps, pbk, ISBN 978-2226023247, English translation by A.B. Berger: Leroi-Gourhan, A, 1993. *Gesture and Speech*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press)

It is something of a surprise that the works on gesture and speech by André Leroi-Gourhan (*Le geste et la parole* and its English translation, see Leroi-Gourhan, 1993) have been cited as among the most impactful books and treatises, which is what has warranted the inclusion

of a review in this special section. In many ways, Leroi-Gourhan has been one of the more under-appreciated scholars and researchers in the Anglo-American world, although, in this review, I will attempt to substantiate that his influence has been more widespread than many realize,