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## CROSSING THE MIRROR: AN APPROACH TO THE SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF THE PREHISTORIC PAST FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

A través del espejo: una aproximación a la percepción social del pasado prehistórico desde una perspectiva de género

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### RESUMEN

Los medios de comunicación son un sistema de comunicación inmediata y efectiva, que forman una cultura de masas constituida por símbolos, mitos y estereotipos de los individuos como una forma de «producción industrializada de la realidad». Dentro del marco conceptual de la Arqueología Pública, desde una perspectiva crítica y feminista, se presenta un ensayo de aproximación a la percepción social del pasado prehistórico en el ámbito de la *Cultura Popular* contemporánea. El propósito de este trabajo es analizar y conceptualizar los mensajes e ideas generados por la cultura de masas alrededor de la representación de la humanidad prehistórica para entender cómo se construyen y qué tipo de sociedad promueven. Para ello, se aborda la imagen de la *cavewoman* desde su configuración en el imaginario popular para analizar los estereotipos y sexismos instalados, su origen, su repercusión en la percepción social de la Prehistoria y qué papel juega esta idea en la sociedad contemporánea, y más particularmente, qué implicaciones tienen para las mujeres. Debemos, atravesar este espejo distorsionado e imagen del pasado, creada por la sociedad de consumo proyectando la suya propia, donde la imagen de la mujer no es sólo la del pasado, sino también la del futuro.

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### Palabras clave

*Cavewoman*, Estereotipos de género, Prehistoria, *Cultura Popular*, Arqueología Pública.

## ABSTRACT

The media is a system of immediate and effective communication, which forms a mass culture made up of symbols, myths and stereotypes of individuals as a form of «industrialised production of reality». Within the conceptual framework of Public Archaeology, from a critical and feminist perspective, an essay is presented to approach the social perception of the prehistoric past in contemporary *Popular Culture*. The purpose of this work is to analyse and conceptualise the messages and ideas generated by the mass culture around the representation of prehistoric humanity to understand how they are constructed and what kind of society they promote. To this end, the image of the *cavewoman* is approached from its configuration in the popular imaginary to analyse the stereotypes and sexism installed, their origin, their repercussions on the social perception of prehistory and what role this idea plays in contemporary society, and more particularly, what implications they have for women. We must go through this distorted mirror and image of the past, created by the consumer society projecting its own, where the image of women is not only that of the past but also that of the future.

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### Keywords

*Cavewoman*, Gender stereotypes, Prehistory, *Popular Culture*, Public Archaeology.

In the following pages, we introduce an approach to the social perception of the prehistoric past from contemporary *Popular Culture* within the conceptual framework of Public Archaeology and contemplating Gender Studies.<sup>1</sup> Our objective is to analyse and conceptualise the messages and the ideas generated by *Popular Culture* concerning the representation of prehistoric humankind that, according to this approach, obeys the sexism established in society.

In order to do so, we propose to invert the usual sense of discourse; instead of addressing society with a speech, we listen to society thinking out loud about the prehistoric past and discern the implications of society's thinking on daily reality. We contemplate the phenomenon of mass culture as the commonplace where most of the ideas regarding the past are conceived (Cirafici *et al.*, 1996; Comendador, 2011; Lowenthal, 1985; Ruiz, 2012; Vizcaíno, 2015) and for which reason in the last two decades *Popular Culture* has abandoned its marginal role in the scientific literature to become a veritable research topic (Menéndez & Fernández, 2015: 197). In this way, according to Joanne Hollows (2000: 24-27), following in turn Stuart Hall (1981 &

## INTRODUCTION

1. This text is based on the oral communication of the same name presented at the *26th Annual Meeting of the EAA* in 2020 at session #424, as well as on various experiences in the subjects *History: Introduction to Ethnology* and *Public Archaeology* as teachers, publications and lectures by both as researchers, and many hours of fieldwork and class preparation, with long car journeys and endless coffee breaks, as colleagues.

1992), *Popular Culture* has been defined as everything that is consumed by the masses, that is done by or comes from “the people”, equating what is popular to “everything that the people make and have made”, and configuring a fighting scenario and space where the distinctions among the cultures of the social groups are continually made up.

Herein, we focus on the ideas underlying the image of the prehistoric woman and their conception within the scope of contemporary *Popular Culture*. We study the image of the *cavewoman* from its configuration in the popular imaginary with the purpose of analysing embedded stereotypes and sexism, their origins, their impact on the social perception of Prehistory, and the role of this idea in contemporary society, with particular emphasis on the implications that it has for women. This will provide us with adequate tools to reflect on two aspects: how research facilitates the development of a critical view of the past, and how we can influence on the generation of new discourses about the prehistoric past and gender relations.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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We build up from the premise that the contemporary world and Prehistory are not as distant as it seems like it is usually thought. Without indulging in idle discussions of the relativity of time, we acknowledge that the study of the past is ineluctably conducted at the present. This applies, in particular, to archaeological knowledge and its transfer to society, whatever its sign, whose meaning is thus always made up from and for this time (Comendador, 2019). Therefore, quoting Christopher Tilley (1989), «writing the past is not a simple innocent and disinterested reading of an autonomous past produced as an image, since writing the past is drawing it in the present by rewriting it in the light of the present» (:193). There will be those who think this is unsubstantial when developing a discourse on Prehistory, but in our approach, this context is essential.

In the last years, the relation between woman and Prehistory has been the object of different research approaches that, far from being dead-ends or fashionable trends, mere by-products of post-modernity and the feminist *mainstream*, have reached a strong presence and a high quality in the scientific literature. In this context, one of the most frequent research venues addressing the spread of scientific knowledge about Prehistory is the analysis of the presence of the feminine collective in the cultural products and official communications media, such as archaeological and historic investigations, school textbooks, and other elements that contribute directly or indirectly to the diffusion of this knowledge, such as museum displays. The role that it has in historic discourses has been discussed in the literature, drawing particular attention to those revolving around Prehistory and its representation (for

example Adovasio *et al.*, 2008; Berman, 1999; Cintas *et al.*, 2018; Crespo, 2001; Fries *et al.*, 2017; González, 2008; Gifford-González, 1993; Hurcombe, 1995; Levy, 2017; Moser, 1993, 1998, 2009; Moser & Gamble, 1997; Mouriño Schick, 2022; Querol, 2006, 2007, 2013, 2014 & 2017; Querol & Hornos, 2015; Querol & Triviño, 2004; Sánchez, 2005, 2018 & 2022; Vujakovic, 2018; Wiber, 1997). In contrast, the social perception within the scope of *Popular Culture* has not been explored so much in the academic environment, being more common in digital media such as blogs and magazines or platforms addressing scientific topics for the general reader. This is even more significant concerning the study of the image of the prehistoric woman. For this reason, we have resorted to the field of *Cultural Studies*,<sup>2</sup> where gender studies addressing this subject matter take pride of place. There exists nonetheless a significant repertoire of investigations, focused mainly on film and comic books, where we must highlight Volume 8 of the journal *Complutum* (1997) as a pioneering publication in this field, that we take as starting point for our work (Banh, 2014; Comendador, 2019; Holtorf, 2005 & 2007; Querol, 2010; Sainz, 2020; Soler, 2012 & 2016; Tejerizo, 2023). Conducted in their majority by women, they have not only brought to the foreground ambiguity and discontinuous use, both regarding contents and to the conjugation of the logic relative to gender in historic discourses, but also the need to develop a different archaeology and its potential for education (Ruiz, 2010). This is the aim of projects such as *PastWomen*, *BodyTales*, *PROCON Project*, *Gender: Perceptions and Material Culture*, etc.

The paradigm concerning the past is “cooked” neither in the official academic discourse nor in museums or textbooks but instead in a mixture of social ingredients. All of them are influential in the transfer of knowledge and its affluence. A discourse flows, is shared, exchanged, reworked, rewritten, etc., creating a radical change in the games of power dealing with the ownership of information (Comendador, 2011 & 2013). This is a consequence of the fact that most of the elements that are received to make up an idea of prehistoric humankind in the collective imaginary do not come so much from archaeology as from cartoons, films, and, more generally, any of those audiovisual referents, that are more easily accessible to the general public (Ruiz, 2012: 57). After years listening, it dawned on us that recycling the past sheds light upon the origins of our image of societies and in this way of the importance of the social construct of the past as it is created from the present.

The daily presence of the past in society through *mass media* and mass culture is an incontestable phenomenon permeating our mentality and society (Cirafici *et al.*, 1996; Lowenthal, 1985; Vizcaíno, 2019). From ad-

2. Broadly speaking, we could describe *Cultural Studies* as an interdisciplinary field of research that, through any cultural manifestation, attempts to study culture and its interaction with power and the context in which it is embedded in depth. In other words, they explore how meanings are produced and disseminated in today's societies. Following the emergence and formation of the discipline in the United Kingdom, cultural studies address diverse and heterogeneous topics: its history and development, gender and sexuality, nationalism and national identity, colonialism and post-colonialism, race and ethnicity, popular culture and its consumers, and so on. Such studies can currently be found in Latin America, Asia, Europe and Australia (During, 2005).

## RECYCLED PAST: THE PAST TODAY, MILLENNIA AND MARKETING

vertising to television through films and video games to the manifold of social networks currently available, reality is saturated with symbolic referents of the past. All in all, they come from that which is consumed by the masses because the past has become a commodity in post-modern societies (Lowenthal, 1997).

On the one hand, marketing and the advertisement culture continually generate images that become almost subliminally embedded as an image of the past, usually understood as a time of hardships and struggles for subsistence, in which people «were almost like us, living in worse conditions... but, well... they were on their way to becoming like us» (Comendador, 2011: 62). The past makes legitimate a message to sell not so much an object as a lifestyle, a paradigm and, ultimately, a sense of identity-based on consumerism (Vizcaíno, 2019: 65).

On the other hand, we have *mass media*, which can shape the reality of the present and the past. Syncretism, a closed narrative character, allusion to stereotypes if not actually archetypes, makes of *mass media* a most direct and effective communications system, shaping a «culture» for the masses made of symbols, myths, and images that the individual assumes as a form of «industrialised production» of reality (San Nicolás, 2003; Aguilar, 2015). To this, it must still be added the fact that *mass media* have become an inseparable part of our lives, if not even of our sense of ourselves and our history (Grossberg *et al.*, 2006: 3).

They affect behaviour and even ideology insofar as they contribute to shaping a meaningful universe that becomes an actor in the intelligible organisation of the phenomena that appear in the spaces of daily life to individuals and groups (Comendador, 2013:116-117). That is to say, it perpetuates itself in an alienating discourse that pretends to make legitimate the present rather than explaining the past drawn solely by the idea of «selling» the advantages of the present no matter what. In order to achieve their ends, they draw support from stereotypes and gender roles, that collection of beliefs and socially shared norms which, by use, define in a simplistic form not only the persons in the group but also those outside. In this way, «the social» is the decontextualised sum of many individualities, seemingly interconnected but effectively unrelated and anchored in the plane of representation through the mediation of «screens», whether real or metaphoric, in a conception of the world as a «great hall of mirrors» (San Nicolás, 2003).

On that «created reality» made up by consumer society and *mass media* neither is the work of female historians or archaeologists influential nor is their function understood. Moreover, the latter is the object of stereotypy, too. Neither the most distant scientific discourse nor the language of so-called «high popularisation» are easily accessible; rather, on the contrary, they can even be ambiguous and complex. Interestingly enough, in our field of study, the use of language has grown stronger, all the more direct and graphic based on myths, clichés, and dreams, giving birth to a collection of images, true or false, that modern society has attached to Prehistory (Figure 1).

It is thus no wonder that there exists a broad gap, if not an abyss, between the paradigm of the «past» adopted by contemporary society and the techno-scientific discourse, just as our investigation highlights (Comendador, 2013). In this context, Prehistory is defined as a distant past, hardly impinging on the present time, from which it is actually disconnected, and with a tendency to disaggregation, remaining in an indefinite limbo. This image, which has become a fixed cliché, serves to project various ideas that do not so much attempt to configure that moment as to define the time from which they are constructed by alterity (Comendador, 2019: 30). From this point of view,



Figure 1. Some examples of the prehistoric past in consume society and mass media. In order: 1. *The Flintstones* (Charlton Comics, 1965), a comic published in 1965 in the issue nº25; 2. *Far Cry Primal* (Ubisoft, 2016), a videogame for PlayStation released in 2016; 3. *Sapiens. A Graphic Historia: The Birth of Humankind* (Yuval Noah Harari, David Vandermeulen and Daniel Casanave, 2020), a graphic novel published in 2020; 4. *Dinosaurs* (Micheal Jacobs and Bob Young, 1991), a sitcom that aired from 1991 until the beginning of the 2000s on multiple television channels and in various languages; 5. *Barbie 20.00 B.C. or Barbie Cave*, a doll designed by the Danish art toy maker Malte Y. Eskestad in 2019; 6. *Year One* (Harold Ramis, 2009), a film released in 2009.

32 although they may appear to be «innocent» images, they are endowed with an essential ideological charge, insofar as they configure a «mirror image» of the present-day world. At the same time, they project a specific ontology, understood as a mode of existence or of «being in the world» (Moragón, 2013). The image that is projected forms opinions not only about elements of the present but also about future or past trends (Díez, 2011; Soler, 2016).

Every year with our students. Between nervous laughing and expressions of bewilderment in front of such an exercise, regardless of their course and age, there always rise proposals full of clichés and stereotypes in which they build prehistoric humankind to their likeness, never disappointing in poetic license such as the appearance of a mammoth or an aesthetics tailored to *The Flintstones* so as to convey a sense of authenticity and «historic» rigour to the thing. By collecting these drawings, we have developed a gallery of images named *Prehistoric Anonymous*,<sup>3</sup> recently updated to version 2.0 as *Prehistory in Stereo(types)*. Despite the time lapse between one gallery and the other, all of the drawings take us back to the same clichés and preconceived ideas. The representations are essentially the same. Within this amalgamation we can distinguish two large groups that we proceed to describe next. Both of them are comprised of images where we can observe the projection of stereotypes and the make-up of the image of the other. By the way, a «humankind» where women hardly seem to fit.

### PREHISTORIC ANONYMOUS: THE REPRESENTATION OF PREHISTORIC HUMANITY AND ITS IMAGINARY

3. *Prehistoric Anonymous*: Comendador, B. [entry in blog *Recycled Past*]; available in open access at <https://pasadoreciado.blogspot.com/2013/09/prehistoricos-anonimos-coleccion-2013.html>

In the first place, we find ourselves facing a large group of drawings that perpetuate the condition of Prehistory as the place and time of primordial origin of the patterns of life in society, which come to be out of evolution and progress. In these drawings, the stereotype of the hunting and gathering society dominates, appealing to specific and well-known references such as the Altamira rock paintings or scenes of hunting and stalking animals of extinct species, mainly mammoths. It is almost a constant representation of the concept of human evolution and, in particular, the idea of technical progress by contrasting the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic worlds, focusing on the command of technologies and structural changes attached to the configuration of settlements and the control of production. Another common attribute is the emplacement in what could be depicted as hostile and extreme spaces, such as iced or desert landscapes and jungles, emphasising the need to remain adaptive in constant strife for survival.

Secondly, there is a series of drawings that could be classified as prehistoric portraits or characterisations where the stereotype of the *cavemen*, hairy with ape-like features, is dominant, together with all sorts of variables that remind us of the well-known Fred Flintstone character. The drawings of prehistoric females are scarce, always made by anonymous girls. We were particularly impacted by two of them, one from either gallery, because they were almost identical (Figure 2). Both portray a woman whose body is thin and curvy, almost «sexy», appealing to the aesthetic canon of Wilma Flintstone (there goes the couple), so much in terms of clothing as hairdressing. As for the context, in one of them a simple line frames the figure inside the domestic space, namely, a cave, where we can identify food remains and a bonfire. On the other, a fruit tree highlights, as a matter of fact, that gathering is for women, precisely the same as the kitchen space. Furthermore, within both spaces, her action is to address the family pet (a sort of crossbred dinosaur with what looks like a mastiff) and a child, both of them companions in her duties. In the case of the cave drawing, we must add the attitude of submission of the animal to the woman. Indeed, by raising her index finger she emphasises who is in charge at home. This is improved by zooming in on one of the drawings, most precisely the pseudo cave wall, and looking at the decorative paintings of hunting men. It is only seldom that simple drafts contain such a stereotyped call to the past.

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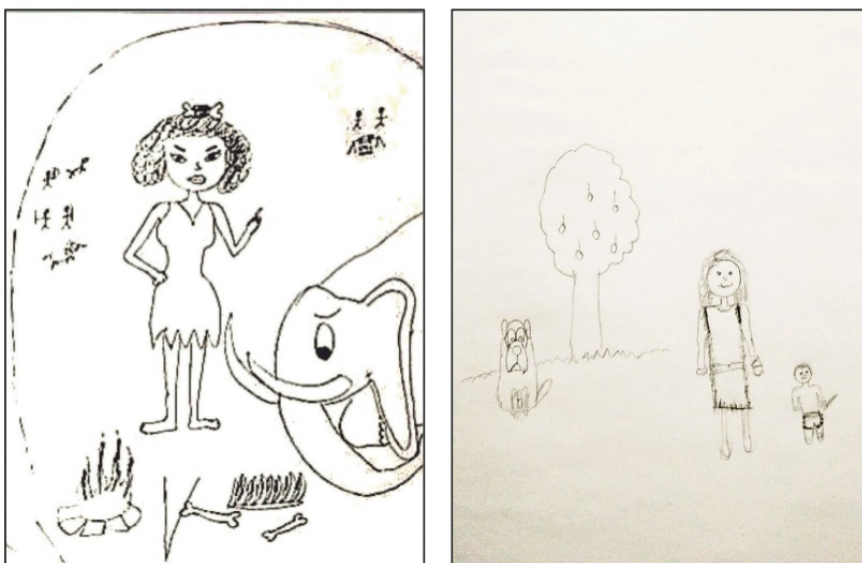


Figure 2. Drawings of prehistoric women from the galleries *Prehistoric Anonymous* (2013) and *Prehistory in Stereo(types)* (2020-2023).



Figure 3. The two visions of prehistoric women. From left to right: *Femme de la race de Néandertal* and *Femme négroïde de Laussel*, both in plaster painted by Louis Mascré around 1910.

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This imaginary attached to the feminine collective obeys the twofold vision of the prehistoric woman that can be traced back to the 19th century, namely, as a nurturing mother and as a sexual object. One of the most illustrative examples in this regard is the series of three-dimensional busts and sculptures made between 1909 and 1914 by the artist Louis Mascré under the scientific advisory of the archaeologist Aimé Rutot. These were exhibited in the early 20th century with the objective of communicating to the public what was known at the time about human evolution, substantiating the main ideas about the process with a clear scientific vocation. From the 15 works, only two of them are feminine figures (Figure 3). One of them portrays a Neanderthal mother holding her newborn baby in her arms, seemingly dominated by a biological instinct to protect her offspring. The other is a three-dimensional representation of the bas-relief from the Gravettian period of the Upper Paleolithic, known as the *Venus of Laussel*, characterised as an exuberant and sexually receptive *Sapiens* woman (González, 2008). Both images were actually shaped under masculine regard for the internal and external anatomies of the feminine body. The replication of the woman's role as wife and mother has evolved through time under the influence of the Christian iconography of the First Couple and the Sacred Family (Lasheras & Heras, 2003).

As a short annotation to all of the above, it is significant that the female students display a stronger trend to picture prehistoric human groups with a larger diversity by putting forward mixed groups in terms of age, assigning a manifold of roles, and drawing women hunting and painting. It does not work in the case of male students, in any case. Such a differential trend according to gender has been the object of an assortment of studies addressing school preconceptions about science and sexual roles, e.g., the response to the query to «draw a scientific lab» (Buck *et al.*, 2002; Mehmet, 2006), highlights the existence of a differential interpretation according to gender, precisely as it happens in our context. This trend has been identified in recent research on university students' perceptions of work and gender roles during Prehistory (Pastor & Mateo, 2019).

In general lines, we can say that it is a stable and anachronistic Prehistory, where hunting dominates the mindscape and thousands of years of life remain almost the same, making an intrinsic connection between the prehistoric-savage binomial and technological progress as the key to human evolution (Bonet, 2012; Comendador, 2019; Crespo, 2001; Hernández, 1997; Sánchez, 2018). The most salient stereotype is that of hunting and gathering society, the Palaeolithic world, where



the contact with nature is direct, influenced by the Christian iconography of Adam and Eve's Paradise, and it is significant the presence of geological elements characteristic of the formation of the Earth, such as volcanoes, as well as the customary cliché of humans living at the same time as dinosaurs (Bonet, 2012; Comendador, 2019; Jardón, 2012; Moser & Gamble, 1997). These conceptions repeat themselves to the point of becoming perpetuated in our imaginary on the grounds of a partial or total ignorance concerning the subject. The above has resulted in the settlement of the stereotype of the sexism of prehistoric societies in the form of the distribution of roles, as well as in the generation of an iconographic corpus installed in the image of *The Flintstones* that has become the basis of a formulaic representation of Prehistory.

We examine next the presence of the prehistoric past in contemporary *Popular Culture* with the aim to identify and analyse the images and congenital schemes provided of symbolic value that are a part of the unconscious collective and their origin in relation to gender; more precisely, to the image of the *cavewoman*.

In order to undertake this task, it is particularly interesting to understand the concept of the *eternal feminine* as it is formulated in the work of Simone de Beauvoir (1949). This is a construct, an archetype or model, idealising an immutable concept of woman, fundamental to the so-called gender essentialism, or the belief that women and men have different inner essences that cannot be altered by time or the environment. According to this thesis, such a feminine essence or identity remains immutable through time (Comendador, 2019: 32). The articulation of this archetype is bound to become fundamental in the construction of the image of the prehistoric woman, at the same time that a series of conventional and frequently used stereotypes, containing a patriarchal ideological load, make up the idea of the woman as something passive, erotic, and excluded from the role of an active subject that experiments, acts, and takes part in the process of social reproduction.

However, as it has been discussed in earlier publications by one of the authors, if «the feminine» has been eternal and immutable, how not to have it founded in Prehistory? How not to go back to the origin of times in order to disclose that everything has always been like that? How not to found the *status quo* in precisely the moment right before «Eve bit the apple»? (Comendador, 2019: 32).

If we are to speak about the prehistoric woman, the main stereotype is that of a pre-modern and uninhibited woman that accepts submission (Klee, 2018). It is a stable and immutable Prehistory and, at the same time,

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an anachronistic Prehistory, where the staging and its contexts are not documented (Hernández, 1997: 315) but are used as a pretext to tell science-fiction stories without any historiographic foundations.

Regarding the body representation, a first venue of inquiry into the ideological discourse concealed behind consumer society and mass culture is the study of how the image of the woman has been produced, or instead manufactured, through the masculine extra- and intradiegetic gaze (Alba & Pérez, 2015; Menéndez & Fernández, 2015; Mulvey, 1989). The contribution of the media, in particular of the film industry, has been particularly effective to this end. We must bear in mind that, as a cultural industry, cinema is influential on audiences and interacts in the construction of social identities, meanings, and mediated messages, both individual and collective (Menéndez, 2017; Revilla *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, until the middle of the 20th century it was the most popular and maybe the most important form in building our collective imaginary through symbolic images with which to represent human life, as well as a type of forum where the spectators used to gain self-awareness (Jardón, 2012: 5).

36 At the end of the 1990s, Laura Mulvey, in her paper *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975),<sup>4</sup> brought into evidence that, in the media, sexual difference works in a way such that not only images, but also gazes, dominate. Man is the bearer of the gaze (the active subject), whereas woman is only a receiver (the passive subject), whence the binary hierarchies active/passive and subject/object found in society are replicated. The woman is reduced to a body, specifically to its construction as a sexual object or an artefact of seduction. In the case under discussion, we must mention the contribution of Begoña Soler in her analysis *¿Eran así las mujeres de la Prehistoria?* (2012), where she studies how the image of the prehistoric woman has evolved to adapt to each age's aesthetic canon.

The assignment of attitudes and attributes or roles is as important as the representation of the body. As we have already noted, in the majority of cases, the woman is represented with a sexual attitude and a passive role or performing lesser works, mainly limited to the domestic environment. Motherhood is only seldom portrayed. As Begoña Soler remarks (2012: 93), it may seem exaggerated and surprising that from the first silent films by Chaplin to the most recent blockbusters, and encompassing other products of mass culture such as comic strips or television series, the attitudes representing women in Prehistory are all so much in a likeness. In this regard, we can identify three large groups, namely, *savage woman*, *submissive woman*, and *antiwoman* (Figure 4), which, together with the remaining elements evoked throughout the different groups, are part of a complex image that intends to mirror the society of those years, and also the current one.

4. An indispensable work for feminist film studies, influencing fundamental authors in this field of study such as Annette Kuhn, Ann Kaplan, Teresa de Lauretis and Pilar Aguilar Carrasco.



Figure 4. The three stereotypes of *cavewoman*. From left to right: the savage women (*Women of the Prehistoric Planet*, Arthur C. Pierce, 1996), the submissive women (*Prehistoric Women*, M. Carreras, 1967), and the anti-women (advertisement of Arrow White Shirts Company, 1494).

It is usual to attach to the image of the prehistoric woman the idea of a «savage» or «uncivilised» character and an inability to refrain from her «primitive passions», as if this was an instinctive aspect genetically fixed in the female sex, with an innate disposition to surrender to male domination by brute force through the clash of the sexes (Comendador, 2019; Soler, 2012). The popularity of the cliché of the woman under submission to the male power, whether or not this is violently, is therefore not shocking. This is indeed the clearest and most frequently represented attitude, especially in terms of a male dragging along his female to the cave grabbed by the hair. Pushing this idea further, it can be thought of as a substantiation of the erotic myth of submission to the beast, whether it is a savage animal, a dinosaur, or a giant gorilla, as in the King-Kong legend. Another instantiation takes the form of the domination of the «Amazons» or the queen-goddesses,<sup>5</sup> able to rule empires and empowered in their eroticism but helpless nevertheless in the face of «romantic love», since the first images of the «Amazons» on the screen were set on exotic or prehistoric locations. As it is properly pointed out by Begoña Soler (2012: 93), the submission of the woman is always a reflection of the respect that they must pay to the established social order and to power, which is actually exercised by men, and not to accept it or to confront it implies death, fall in disgrace, or exile. Lastly, within the scope of this amalgamation of clichés, only to a lesser extent, we have the «anti-stereotypes», such as the fat woman, shapeless and ugly, deprived of «femininity attributes», and dragging along the man by his hair, features actually reinforcing those of the principal stereotype by the force of contrast.

At the end of the day, the image of the *cavewoman* is a mirror projection generated by a dissymmetrical society that claims legitimacy for an ideological political situation of coercion and alienation, where the creation of an «eternal feminine» goes back to the origin of times. An image through which the distribution of roles in the imaginary has established the stereotype of sexism in our image of prehistoric societies.

5. Defined by Dominique Mainon and James Ursini (2008: 24-27) as a type of heroine who fights aggressively; is part of an organisation or culture governed by women and therefore is not defined by her relationship with a man; shows some empathy with her sex; uses typical weapons and tools; dresses and adorns herself with warrior elements; is independent and does not need a man to save her; lives in or comes from a lost civilisation; and maybe homosexual, bisexual or even have no sexual desire. As a small note, this is a very recent phenomenon despite the general consideration of «Amazons» as a symbol of female empowerment today.

## SEXPLOTATION: FROM MISS PREHISTORIC TO LARA CROFT

In the framework of a society where everything is potentially an object of consumerism, the woman's body is also merchandise that can be bought and sold. A canon of womanhood so settled and spread as timeless that even prehistoric women existing only on the screen are size S «hotties». There it goes another stereotype.

According to Rosalind Gill (2007), one of the most important attributes of contemporary *media culture* is that «femininity is defined as a bodily quality rather than – to name a few – a social or psychological structure» (:147). From this premise, the projection of stereotypes into Prehistory, both regarding bodily and gender attributes or the distribution of roles, has the capability to legitimate and naturalise this *status quo* (Comendador, 2019). Such an impact on the social make up of the body is not just an aesthetic matter inasmuch as it is decisive to attach identities in our society, where the social and cultural contexts model the body. The body has become the cultural icon of excellence, ubiquitous, predominant, and even socially discriminating, as pointed out by Cristóbal Pera (2006: 23). Similarly, it is absurd to think of sexuality as being limited to an "instinctive" aspect of the human being, as if it were a feature of the species, insofar as it is a direct product of culture (Serrano *et al.*, 2016).

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Such an objectification of the woman and her use as a sexual object or seduction artefact, together with her consideration as a passive or ornamental element throughout history, have become deeply installed in *Popular Culture*. The construction of a dissimilar society between men and women has been another of the patriarchy traps, planned through simultaneous devices, to wit: the presentation of women as the cause of the perdition of men, the sexualisation of the feminine image, the male domination through violence, the construction of prostitution as a necessity, and lastly, the definition of sexuality for the males as an instrument of power (Lorente, 2014: 175). As it has been pointed out by M<sup>a</sup> Isabel Menéndez (2017 & 2021), gender stereotyping and feminine hyper-sexualization are elements that facilitate the discovery of the patriarchal values underlying the symbolic constructions introduced in consumerism society as a falsely subversive practice that supports the *culture of rape*.

The multi-screen society of the 21st century demands a constant presence encoded from the perspective of sexual seduction, a public exhibition embraced by men and women, even girls, who expose themselves time and time again in social networks replicating the codes already established by the sex industry. On the other hand, the insistence in reproducing *ad infinitum* the difference of roles between men and women is introduced as being something natural, necessary, and even liberating, although behind it lurks a model that does not encourage the freedom and the autonomy of the

individuals, especially when it comes to women (Menéndez, 2017: 4-5). In this regard, the film industry has found a goldmine in the binomial women/Prehistory, the latter being a period when women are assumed to be half-naked, not to speak much, and have unbound primitive instincts, since it is a moment «when women did not have a sense of shame» (Soler, 2012: 88). The pornography industry is another case in point by incorporating Prehistory in media production creating a sub-genre displaying sexual intercourse between prehistoric women and dinosaurs (*Dinosaur Porn*) (Almansa, 2014).

It is not necessary to go any further along the line regarding the social perception of the *cavewoman* in contemporary *Popular Culture* than the image created around female archaeologists. Just as pointed out by María Ibáñez (2015), «female characters usually mimic the schemes of their male counterparts, but only seldom do they have a main role, thus being limited in most cases to secondary roles as companions of the archaeologist's findings» (: 315-316), once more bound to be a passive and secondary element.

Some of the most iconic female archaeologists in *popular culture* that we have grown with, to the point of being referents to us before becoming professionals, are the treasure hunter Sidney Fox from the *RelicHunter* (Gil Grant, 1999), the Egyptologist Evelyn Carnahan from *The Mummy* (Stephen Sommers, 1999 & 2001; Rob Cohen, 2008), the archaeologist Sharon Golbanen from *The Body* (Jonas McCord, 2001), and of course, the well-known Lara Croft, who is equally able to find a lost tomb as to bring down an enemy squad. All of the above characters are exaggerations bordering on the grotesque, but as it has been appropriately highlighted by Cornelius Holtorf (2007: 81), they are nothing more than the instantiation of male fantasies. After all, men are the principal consumers of action-adventure films, video games, etc. This is not only the case with audiovisual productions from the late 1990s and the early 2000s, but also with more recent fictions, such as Dr Elisabeth M. Shaw in the dystopian science-fiction film *Prometheus* (Ridley Scot, 2012) or animation films targeting a childish audience, as it is the case with Sara Lavrof, the loyal companion and partner in adventures of Tad Jones (Enrique Gatao, 2012, 2017 & 2022). Yet another case in point of replicating stereotypes regardless of the context.

As a final summary of the above discussion, we compile the constants that shape the image of the woman in this context regardless of age, profession, occupation, and the film genre precisely as it was the case for the *cavewoman*, all of them giving birth to the configuration of an immutable archetype concerning femininity (Figure 5). These are ideas that reinforce the phenomenon of *symbolic violence* typical of frameworks of male domination in the systematic representation of women as sexual objects, in their being self-explanatory of the world from androcentric schemes applying a masculine gaze, and in their replication of sexist dynamics that have been traditionally assimilated in society, such as the identification of men with heroes and of women with their loyal stewards. Let us note that in developing this compilation we have benefited from the papers of Pilar Aguilar on audiovisual analysis (2004, 2010, 2017 & 2023). Synthetically, these constants are as follows:

1. Absence of women as symbolic subjects. In other words, the androcentric perspective is constantly enforced.
2. Women are episodic in the sense that their action is secondary, partial, or just incidental throughout the narrative.



Figure 5. Female archetypes in cinema: archaeologist vs cavewomen. From left to right: Sara Lavrof (*Tad, the Lost Explorer*, Enrique Gato, 2012), Eep (*The Croods*, Chris Sanders and Kirk DeMicco, 2013), Lara Croft (*Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, Simon West, 2001), Rachel Welch (*One Million Years B.C.*, Don Chaffey, 1966).

3. The woman's body is a fragmented and objectified entity. Related to this, we would find what the author describes as *amputated sexuality* in the sense that eroticism and sexuality appear mainly in terms of the masculine subject: virile genitility against feminine characters who do not seem like they have a sexuality of their own.
4. The assimilation of the feminine to the masculine in the sense that the main female character is a subject that mimics the male forms and manners.
5. The absence of ideological or political criteria of their own.
6. Their appearance as whimsical, incongruous, clumsy, or useless beings.

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Although they may seem irrelevant, frivolous or hilarious images, these representations do not dignify women. Stereotypes are common arguments from the past, and the first step to the current prejudice and discrimination. For all this, we claim the need to break this specular image, through a Gender Archaeology or a humanistic vision. As Ángeles Querol (2006: 28) and other authors have pointed out on numerous occasions, «imaginative actualism» is very dangerous from different points of view, since the audience, especially the non-specialist, gives great importance to the antiquity of customs and values, and with such antiquity endorses attitudes of the present that can become undesirable, such as aggressiveness, social inequality or the subordination of some individuals compared to others, especially women compared to men. In turn, together with imaginative actualism, through the consumer society and the mass media, the patriarchal system has been naturalised as part of our social dynamics, naturalising the unequal relationship between men and women, which therefore constitutes the core of the subjective fabric with which our view of the world is constructed (Hernando, 2015: 22).

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## CONCLUSIONS: BEYOND THE FLINTSTONES EFFECT

men and women, which therefore constitutes the core of the subjective fabric with which our view of the world is constructed (Hernando, 2015: 22). We should not forget that we are not the only people who reconstruct the past, but that we all create our own image of the past as a result of various factors such as previous ideas, new assimilated images, our personality, expectations, socio-cultural context, etc. (Copeland, 2004). The narratives model us, especially the audiovisual ones; quoting Pilar Aguilar (2015),

narratives are models that explain to us how to situate ourselves in the world, what strategies to use to overcome obstacles, how to negotiate with reality and with other human beings, how to manage our desires and our fears, how to confront the desires and fears of others, how to abide by the rules of the 'tribe' and also how to expand the limits of what is meaningful, how to give innovative perspectives to the meaning of our lives (: 26).

It is an urgent necessity and a societal requirement to develop quality archaeology that embodies a gender-specific outlook while adhering to the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusivity; it should also be in sync with the «not so new» theoretical and methodological feminist perspectives and advancements in archaeological inquiry concerning gender. Furthermore, it is imperative in our professional practice to review from a critical perspective some of the misconceptions about sexual roles in Prehistory and to reflect on the role of women in the construction of history.

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