"*Cherchons la femme!*": The Dynamics of Gender Relations and Emergent Complexity in Neolithic Çatalhöyük

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Abstract

Ever since the first artefacts and structures of Çatalhöyük were excavated by James Mellaart in the 1960s, researchers have debated why sedentary farmers, whose diet included domesticated plants, sheep and goat, displayed a myriad of aurochs bull and other hunting trophies inside some of their houses. Equally puzzling have been two parallel developments in the later habitation levels. On the one hand the excavators noted how the wild animal trophies gradually decreased in number and eventually faded away towards the final Neolithic occupation. On the other hand they established that the material and symbolic presence of women in this prehistoric town was growing stronger. It is proposed that these two processes were connected and that they can be elucidated in terms of the female–male dialectic which may have generated them.

Keywords: Çatalhöyük; Neolithic; hunting idiom; women's constructs; gender tension

Introduction

"Cherchons la femme!"
Alexandre Dumas, *Les Mohicans de Paris*

The Neolithic East Mound of Çatalhöyük in Anatolia (central Turkey) contains the remains of one of the largest permanent settlements of early agro-pastoral farmers (9000 B.P.). The town, which covered an area three times the size of Jericho, was discovered and initially excavated by James Mellaart in the 1960s. Excavations were resumed in the 1990s. Not unlike other scholars we are intrigued by the imposing

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displays of aurochs bull trophies and other wild animal representations inside the houses of a settled agrarian community (Figure 1). We are equally surprised to find that in the contemporary interpretive narrative (Hodder 2006; 2010) the social meaning of the wild has been de-gendered, notwithstanding the almost obvious association between hunting trophies and masculinity. No clear gender differences existed, it has been proclaimed rather categorically, "in all or any areas of life at Çatalhöyük" (Hodder 2006, 209). In this prehistoric town, we are told, interaction between the sexes was balanced and symmetrical in nature.

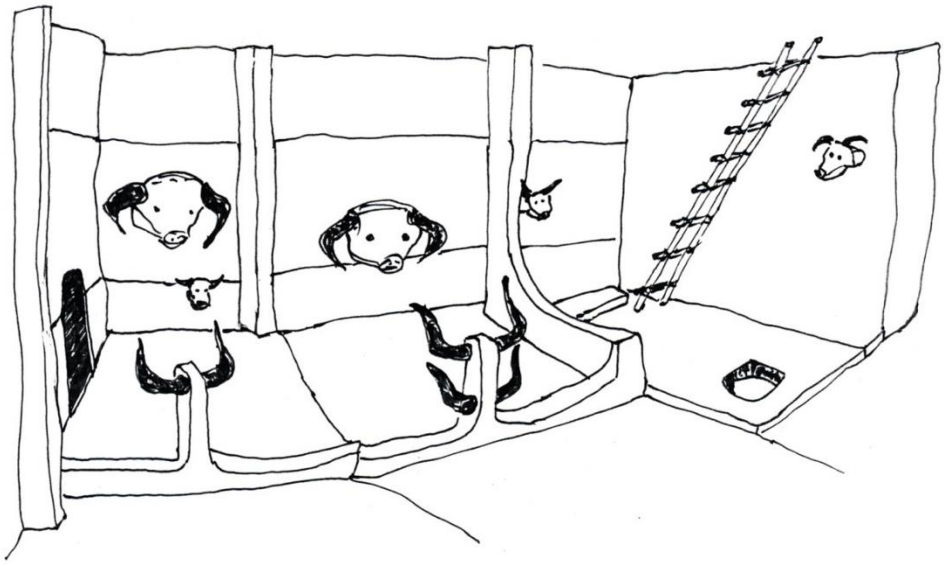

Figure 1: Inside a Çatalhöyük house (reconstruction based on Mellaart 1967, 121)

We have debated the dismissal of the analytical relevance of gender elsewhere in detail (Dederen and Mokakabye 2017). Based on an attentive examination of the archaeological data and the location of the site, we have argued that the overwhelming presence of aurochs bull and other trophies possibly indicated that some form of continuity existed, in terms of cosmological beliefs, between the farmers of Çatalhöyük and their ancestors, the great hunters from pre-agricultural times (Dederen and Mokakabye 2017, 27–30). Building on our previous ideas, we will confront in the following pages a second enigmatic aspect, namely the increasing material and symbolic visibility of women in the remains of the upper levels of the archaeological sequence.

Hodder's Çatalhöyük: The Current Interpretive Narrative

The excavation summary, *The Leopard's Tale* (Hodder 2006), and a follow up study on the role of religion in the emergence of complex society (Hodder 2010) comprise two admirable attempts to solve the copious mysteries of Çatalhöyük. In both volumes the analysis revolves around several core concepts, of which the "house-based society" is probably the most fundamental. Influenced by Lévi-Strauss's notion of a "house society" (1982, 172–174) and by the classic ethnographic account of the Pacific islanders of Tikopia (Firth 1936, 81), Hodder (2006, 95, 99, 109, 110) has contended that the house was central to the material, social and ritual life in this Neolithic town. Its inhabitants are said to have become part of the fabric of their houses. Phrased differently, the houses embodied the social rules and beliefs that shaped daily activities (Hodder 2006, 136–139; Hodder and Pels 2010, 181). Moreover, some of the buildings distinguished themselves in terms of the number and quality of their trophies, pictorial art and burials. They have been interpreted as the "dominant houses" of community leaders or elders who are believed to have controlled and organised collective hunting parties, burials, the worship of ancestors, rites of passage, trading and craft production (Hodder 2006, 92, 151–153, 178, 204, 234–236).

Drawing heavily on Colin Renfrew's "material engagement" theory (Renfrew 2001) and inspired by a fascinating study of the rise of 18th-century individualism (Deetz 1996), it was advanced further that the monuments and artefacts of Çatalhöyük exemplified a social system in which people were engaged, webbed or entangled with each other, with objects and with symbols (Hodder 2006, 241; Pels 2010, 222). This process of "entanglement" is attested to have created ever greater social, material and spiritual investments, dependencies, networks and ties. Complex society, Hodder (2006, 206, 234, 243, 253) proposed in conclusion, could have emerged from the different forms of entanglement as some kind of unintended side-product.

Taking On the Bull and the Goddess

"Çatalhöyük is undoubtedly a site of deep mysteries" (Hodder 2006, 46). A host of curious features have bewildered academics from a variety of disciplines for more than half a century, and continue to do so. In addition to debating the reasons for its origins and unusual agglomeration (Hodder 2006, 73, 107) researchers have wondered e.g. why macabre displays of wild boar tusks and horns of aurochs bulls and wild goat have been crammed inside the small living rooms; why paintings (Figure 2) and relief sculptures have been repeatedly covered up only to be revealed again later; or why figurines have been hidden in the walls (Mithen 2003, 91–96).

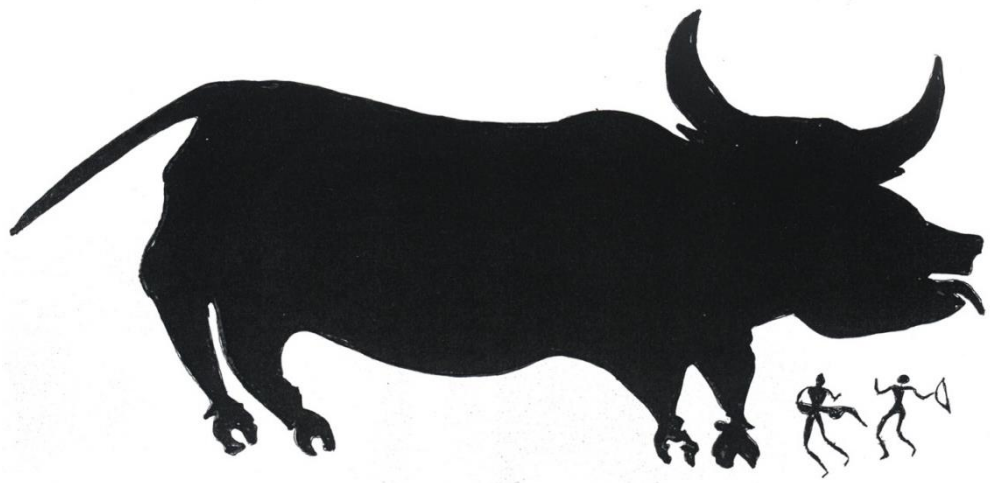

Figure 2: Hunting the aurochs bull (detail from wall painting adapted from Hodder 2006, plate 15)

It was mentioned in the introduction that Hodder (2004, 178; 2006, 209, 211) has added one more mystery to the list by proclaiming rather boldly that gender played no significant part in the daily life of these Neolithic farmers. The allocation of social roles and the interaction between women and men were neither restricted, nor guided by clear rules. This community was truly gender balanced, or at least so we are told.

In light of the widely accepted assumption that gender is "a constitutive element of social relationships," not to mention "a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Scott 1999, 42), Hodder's position on gender is remarkable, even more so as it contradicts his own, earlier work on the Neolithic of the Near East and of southeast Europe. In a well-argued essay entitled "The Domestication of Europe," Hodder (1992, 243, 246)—evidently influenced by James Mellaart and by cognitive archaeologist Jacques Cauvin—proposed that women played a central role in the symbolic expression of the reproductive fertility of the so-called *domus* (his theoretical construct for the house, home and hearth of early agrarian communities). Hodder (1992, 251) found support for the affinity between Neolithic women and the *domus* in the presence of female figurines which had been customarily arranged around the hearths and fixed to the ovens. The figurines, he decided at that time, signified and possibly celebrated the metaphor of woman as producer, reproducer and giver of life.

Fourteen years later, in *The Leopard's Tale*, Hodder's views have changed dramatically. The female fertility metaphor no longer plays any substantial role in the analysis and his former teacher, Mellaart, is taken on for having interpreted the wild cattle trophies and the female figurines on the site as depictions of the Bull and the Goddess. Mellaart had enthusiastically declared that the Bull and the Goddess were the main protagonists

in “an advanced [prehistoric] religion, complete with symbolism and mythology” (Mellaart 1967, 11, 23–24; Pels 2010, 233; Balter 2009).

The Changing Meaning of “the Wild”

In his earlier reconstruction of Çatalhöyük Hodder (1992, 241) maintained that the meaning of the aurochs bull trophies and other wild animal installations was clearly gendered. Men were metaphorically associated with the wild or *agrios* and the evidence of this connection was on display in their houses. Hodder (1992, 248) had created the *domus* and *agrios* constructs in order to explain how the farmers of Çatalhöyük—within the context of the new longer-term structures of sedentary life—tried to make sense of their transition into agricultural life. Hodder (1992, 242–244, 247) added more speculatively, but not unconvincingly, that the trophies would perhaps have constituted a symbolic means to contain and to domesticate the wild in order to ensure the productive and reproductive potential of the house. In *The Leopard’s Tale* the gendered *domus* notion is modified into the de-gendered concept of a house-based society and the *agrios* concept makes way for an ill-defined “prowess–animal spirits–hunting–feasting nexus.”

The so-called “nexus” is the most complex, if not opaque of all the constructs that provide the theoretical foundation for *The Leopard’s Tale*. The fact that it is also referred to by its creator as the “hunting–feasting–prowess–ancestry network,” the “prowess–animal–hunting–and–feasting complex” and the “prowess–animal spirit–hunting–feasting social network” only seems to confound matters (Hodder 2006, 199, 234–236). The nexus, it is announced time and again, but never really substantiated, explains the presence of the imposing aurochs bull trophies and the other representations of the wild. Hodder (2006, 249–251) believes it to be one of the main manifestations of the “entanglement” process on the site.

We prefer to define the symbolism of the wild (Figure 3) in terms of the bond between hunting and male identity that has typified hunting societies worldwide (Douglas 1954, 3, 7, 26; Turner 1967, 280; Morris 1998, 70–73; Hamiliakis 2003, 240, 243). In our understanding, the trophies of Çatalhöyük embodied those human qualities and personality features that have been traditionally perceived to constitute the essence of the hunter and masculine identity.

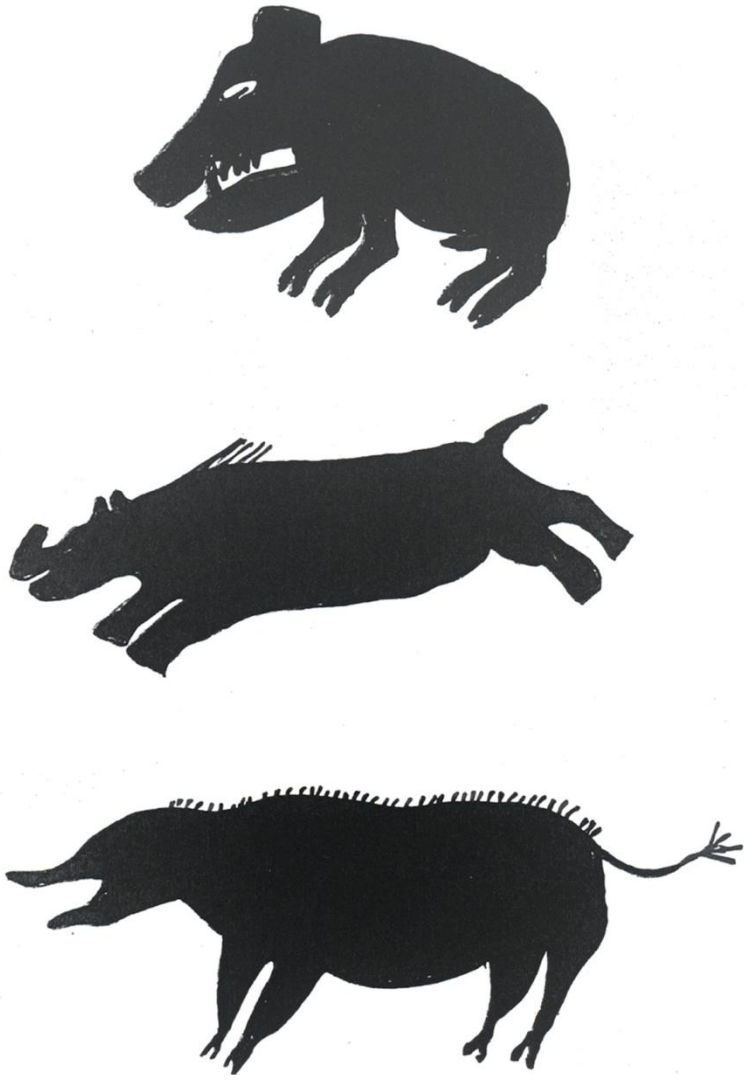

Figure 3: Symbolism of the wild. Top: Göbekli Tepe stone sculpture (adapted from Hodder 2006, 202). Middle: San rock painting (adapted from Lewis-Williams 1990, 53). Bottom: Çatalhöyük wall painting (adapted from Hodder 2006, 196)

The concepts of huntsmanship and hunter-prey alliance are aptly illustrated by the hunting songs of the Ambo (Zambia), in which birds of prey metaphorically represented the hunter. Avian raptors personified his physical and psychological strength. They also emphasised the dangers and hardships that were encountered during communal hunting expeditions (Stefaniszyn 1951).

In addition to expressing and shaping masculine identity, trophies have been acknowledged by researchers as vehicles for a variety of meanings. In some hunting

cultures they portrayed mental maps and stored spatial information. Elsewhere they functioned as tools for the ordering of symbolic and ideological structures or as models expressive of the relations between humans, ancestors and the land (Hyndman 1984).

We have proposed that the presence of hunting trophies in the houses of the prehistoric farmers at Çatalhöyük marked the survival—in a modified form—of a hunting ideology from the pre-agricultural past (Dederen and Mokakabye 2017, 27–30). We contend that a hunting cosmology had survived because it continued to provide those who lived by it with the cognitive and emotional means to make sense of their existence. Modelling life in this Neolithic town on contemporary, preliterate hunting societies, we argue that it would have underscored existential concerns such as individual and communal identity, life and death, health and illness, co-operation and dissent, success and failure, to mention only some of the most critical ones (Zuesse 1979, 17–73; Oetelaar 2014, 102–104; Douglas 1954, 26). Moreover, a wide variety of cultural elements, like housing, clothing, food, body decoration, name giving, visual art, music, song, dance, folklore, rites of passage, healing and others would have been conceived, expressed or patterned in terms of the hunting idiom.

Significantly, the hunting cosmology of traditional small-scale societies constituted "the realm of male fertility par excellence" (Herbert 1993, 166). Hunting was analogous to human procreation and its rituals, prohibitions, medicines, charms and beliefs were meant to foster and protect society. Especially some of the larger game known as the "potency or spirit animals" (Figure 4), provided healers, diviners and cult groups with substances for the preparation of the sacred medicines that would ensure the well-being and collective survival of society (Douglas 1954, 10; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989, 32, 52, 118–127).

If our assumption is correct, then the aurochs and other animals of the wild, like the act of hunting itself, would have constituted nothing less than "the epitome of life and vitality" (Morris 1998, 104). Indeed, for the farmers of Çatalhöyük, hunting and hunting symbolism would have been "fundamental to their perception of the relation between human life and the natural and spiritual powers on which they depend" (Douglas 1954, 6). This salient dimension of hunting seems to have escaped the authors of the mainstream analysis altogether.

Figure 4: Potency animal in San rock art (adapted from Garlake 1995, 24)

Finding Women's Symbolic Constructs

One of the more exciting archaeological assets of Çatalhöyük's East Mound is its lengthy stratigraphic sequence. The 18 habitation levels, which span 1200 years of uninterrupted occupation, cater rather well for a diachronic study of the Neolithic evolution (Hodder 2004, 78; 2006, 18–19, 20, 44). The findings of the researchers who resumed its excavation in 1993 confirm what was established by Mellaart, namely that the symbolism of the wild manifestly intensified throughout the lower and middle sections of the sequence only to slowly fade away subsequently in the upper levels.

Hodder (2004, 83; 2006, 247, 254–255) keenly observed that, parallel with the gradual demise of the imagery of the wild, the remains on the site also demonstrated a shift to representations that were expressive of agricultural life and of domestic production. Society was in the process of being re-crafted, he contemplated, and perhaps women were becoming more "visible." However, even if women may have become dominant in the realm of agriculture or would have gained in status because of domestic production, Hodder assured his readers, other areas of life would not necessarily have been affected. As a result the significance of women's new roles in the upper levels has been defined rather ambiguously as "central but balanced"!

We do not dispute that gender relations in this town of early farmers were generally even and symmetrical. On the other hand, we cannot ignore that hunting and masculinity might have represented "an arena of social power, authority and leadership" (Hamiliakis 2003, 243). The main issue we will raise in the following pages is that nothing has been gained from excluding social phenomena like gender tension and the construction of gender identity from the analytical agenda of *The Leopard's Tale*. We hope to paint a fuller picture and provide a better understanding of Neolithic life by showing how some of the artefacts of the later Çatalhöyük signified being-a-woman-in-the-world. We initiate the discussion with what we believe to be the most obvious form of the embodiment of feminine identity in the archaeological remains on the site, namely the exquisite miniature sculptures of stately seated, fleshy women (Figure 5).

Mellaart (1967, 201–202) assumed that these particular figurines depicted the centrality of women and their association with fertility or life potency. Hodder (2006, 215, 254–255, 261) cannily undermined any such affinity by redefining these figurines as "powerful images" rather than images of powerful women and by shifting the discussion to a single female clay image which possibly represented death. In his view the fleshy portrayal of women primarily expressed the new economic focus on domestic production and the slow-paced progress towards social complexity (Hodder 2006, 254).

Enthused by his opposition to the goddess theories, Hodder was equally hesitant to consider that the female miniature sculptures could have metaphorically depicted the fecundity of the land. Yet anthropological studies of traditional agrarian societies have demonstrated plainly that agricultural production and human fecundity can be perceived as analogous systems (Zuesse 1979, 75–132; Kaspin 2000; Turner 1967, 12–15). The Chewa of rural Malawi routinely equated their metaphorical understanding of gardening and economic production with sex and human reproduction. Suggestively, major rituals and ceremonies were neatly fitted within their seasonal calendar of gardening activities. In Chewa cosmology body and world mirrored each other. A woman's form was believed "to imitate the patterns of the world" in the same way that the world of agricultural production was modelled on the reproductive powers and functions of the female body. Theirs was truly a "cosmology of the body" which was expressed in "symbolic associations from body to house to garden to cosmos" (Kaspin 2000, 561, 565, 567, 570).

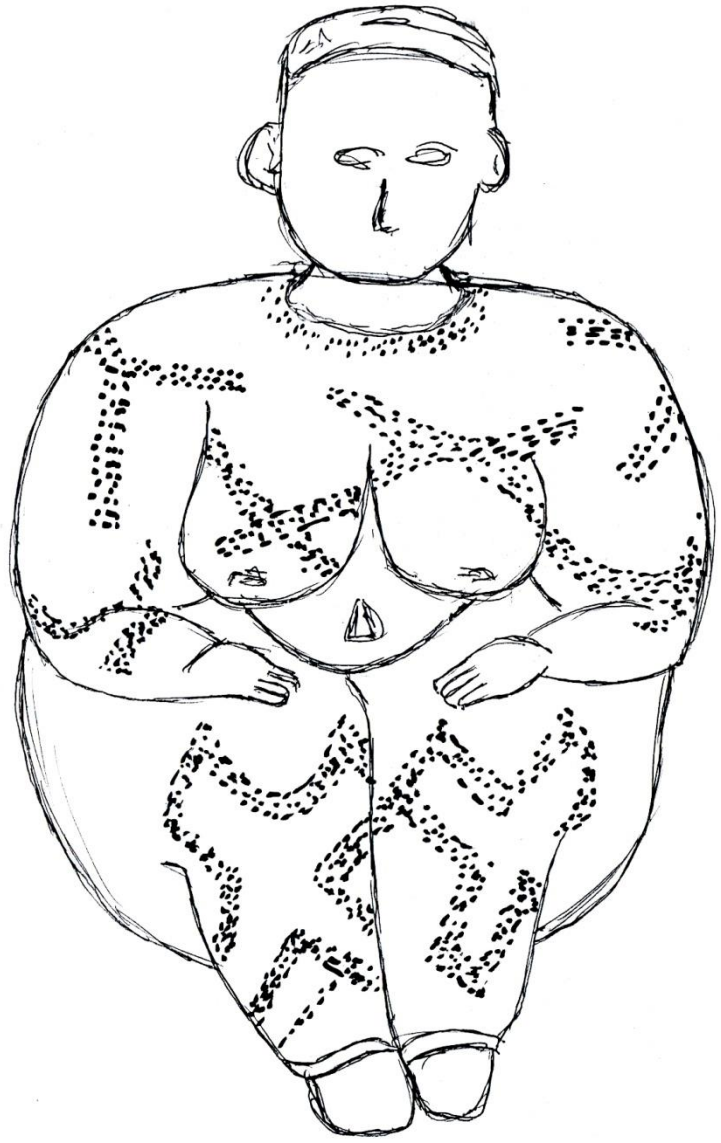

Figure 5: "Fecundity" clay figurine from the upper sequence (adapted from Mellaart 1967, 182).

Other distinct signs of an intensified female symbolic presence on the site are the increase in female burials (Hodder 2006, 256) and the elaboration of hearths and ovens. The latter are said to have gradually moved to a central location in the house, and are explained, once more, as evidence for the growing concern with domestic production (Hodder 2006, 254–255). If the oven area was a female space, as we assume, then surely

its movement to the centre of the house could have indicated a change in women's status. Hodder (2006, 247) vaguely hints at the possibility of such a scenario but leaves the issue unresolved, as is so often the case in *The Leopard's Tale*. Hodder (2006, 50) has also mulled over the female ownership of the hearth/oven area in the lower, earlier habitation levels when discussing the "tension" between the northern side of the house where the graves and installations of the wild were found, and the cooking area on the southern side. However, throughout his discussion he remains unwilling to explore the possible gendered meaning of the N/S spatial distinction, unlike Mellaart (1967, 56, 60), or perhaps in opposition to Mellaart.

As a seasoned anthropological fieldworker and cognitive archaeologist Hodder must be aware that the oven has been routinely allied with the concept of womanhood in small-scale traditional societies. Even Firth, whose passionate interest in culture focused primarily on economics, did not fail to observe that the Tikopia oven was used as a metaphor of life and transformation (1936, 418, 419, 423, 451). Eliade (1962) was one of the first researchers to note that social activities which involved the use of fire, like cooking, have been connected cross-culturally to human reproduction. We assume that the location of neonate and infant burials nearby some of the ovens and hearths of Çatalhöyük may very well indicate that the oven–womb association was part of the world-view of Neolithic women too (Pels 2010, 250).

In his analysis of the later occupation levels Hodder (2006, 231, 234) further established pointedly that *art mobilier* gradually replaced the fixed male installations of the wild on walls, pillars and benches. Stamp seals provide a notable example for this new trend (Figure 6).

We consider it feasible to suggest that they were created and used by women for the decoration of textiles and pottery, and possibly also of leather skins and the body. Some of the seals represent the leopard and the bear, two animals which, we will explain shortly, can be metaphorically aligned with women, in addition to being rather obvious masculine symbols of the wild. Other stamp seal types resemble the flower and insect motifs (Figure 7) that have been identified by Mellaart (1967, 163) in wall paintings as emblems of the female realm of agriculture. Flowers and insects could have been metaphors of spring, the season of the annual re-birth of nature.

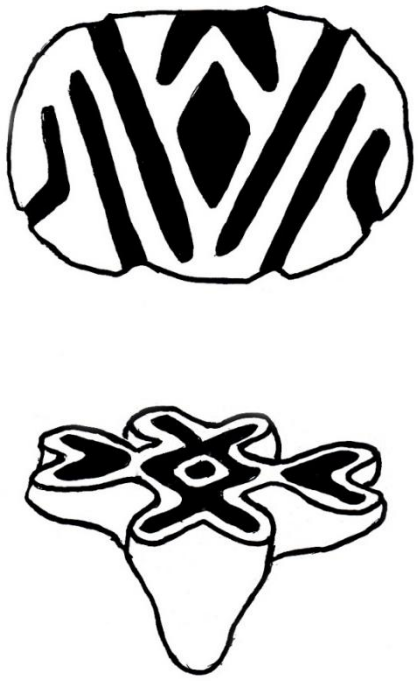

Figure 6: Clay seals (adapted from Mellaart 1967, 220)

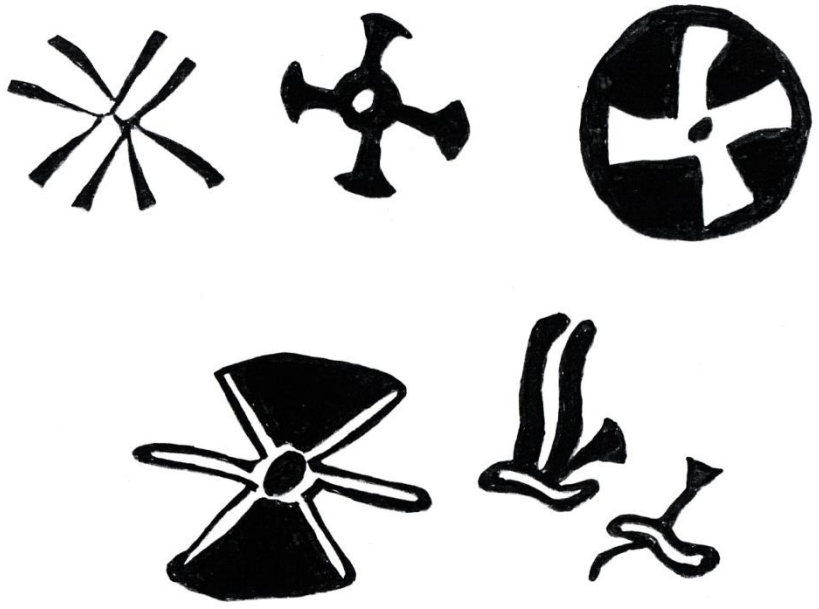

Figure 7: Agricultural symbolism. Flower (top) and insect (bottom) emblems (mural art adapted from Mellaart 1967, 33, 35, 40 and 46)

Most conspicuously, from Level V on, and especially in that particular level, another fire-related technology, pottery, is marked by a burst of innovations in design and production (Hodder 2006, 247, 251, 253). Clay has commonly been linked in pre-industrial societies to the life-giving powers of the earth and the womb, and women worldwide, therefore, have metaphorically allied themselves with the craft of pottery (Gauthier 1969, 70–71).

In Çatalhöyük earthenware emerged in the lower, earlier occupation levels, probably as a female craft. The first, crudely produced pots were no real match for the quality leather, carved stone and wooden containers, the creation of which would have been monopolised by men, since they produced and owned the leather, stone and wood working tools. We assume that once the clay vessels had improved technically and aesthetically, the manufacturing of pots could have been perceived, by both genders for that matter, as an attempt on behalf of women to challenge or intrude on a male dominated realm of craft production.

We contend that the development of female-gendered technologies may have promoted women's self-esteem and boosted the articulation of a female-centred ideology, most probably an agricultural belief complex (Zuesse 1979, 75–132). By the same token these socio-cultural changes could have amplified gender tension and contributed to the gradual devaluation and erosion of the masculine hunting cosmology.

The formation of a new cosmological order would have implied that existing beliefs and rites, which were grounded in and expressed by the idiom of the hunt, were being replaced by rituals expressive of farming, such as first-fruit ceremonies or harvest festivals. Their purpose, like that of the hunting rituals before (e.g. Douglas 1954, 23–24, 26; Oetelaar 2014, 103–107), would have been to facilitate interaction with the mystic life forces in order to safeguard and to promote the survival of gardens and of the men and women that enjoyed their products (Kaspin 2000).

The mainstream analysis, in contrast, has trivialised the social significance of metaphorical references to agriculture on the site as "idealized" constructs which are said to bear no relevance to daily life (Hodder 2002, 178; Hodder 2006, 213). Both a remarkable female figurine with a seed lodged in its back (Hodder 2006, 204) and the majestic "Mistress of the Wild"—a statuette depicting a woman seated on felines which was excavated by Mellaart's team, notably inside a grain bin—are trivialised as "weak" associations between women and agriculture. Mention is also made by Hodder (2006, 204, 213, 254) of wall paintings depicting plant symbolism. Hodder makes no attempt at contextualising them any further, unlike Mellaart (1967, 155–163) who explored the botanical and climatic conditions of the local environment to perceptively interpret the flower and insect motifs in these paintings as possible references to agricultural rites.

A similar lack of concern characterises Hodder's discussion of the neonate burials in the southern area of the house, in which the ovens were conventionally located. Both the ovens and the baskets and flowers that accompanied the burials can be accounted for with reasonable certainty as markers of womanhood or motherhood, since phytolith analysis places the manufacturing of the baskets and the harvesting of the flowers in spring (Hodder 2006, 117, 125).

Figure 8: Bear shaped clay seal (adapted from Hodder 2006, plate 23)

Moreover, Hodder has ignored the possible association between the bear icon and the women of Çatalhöyük. Based on a detailed analysis of one particular stamp seal (Figure 8), he did point out astutely that the relief sculptures which had been erroneously interpreted by Mellaart (1967, 84, 101) as representations of goddesses were in fact images of bears. However, the fact that the navel—which is clearly represented on this stamp and on some of the reliefs—is a common emblem of the womb and of female fecundity in the visual art of traditional societies is conveniently overlooked (Hodder 2006, 201; Hodder and Meskell 2010, 61). We suggest that the bear symbol, in Çatalhöyük as elsewhere (Saladin d'Anglure 1990), could have been associated with women on account of the remarkable intensity of the animal's maternal ties to its offspring. The bear reliefs were added fairly late to the iconography of the animals of the wild (from level VII onwards). Perhaps they represent an attempt on behalf of men to get women to buy into the hunting ideology.

The analysis of the leopard icon (Figure 9) by Hodder (2006, 207) follows the same pattern of disregard for gendered meaning, in spite of his acknowledgement of the dedicated nurturing behaviour of female leopards. Several of the clay figurines could depict women's affinity with this species. One elaborate clay image depicts a woman wearing a top in leopard skin (Hodder 2006, 207). Others represent women standing by or being seated on a leopard (Hodder 2006, 185). Unsurprisingly it is proposed once more by Hodder (2004, 207) that they primarily represent the focus on domestic production.

Furthermore, both the famous "Mistress of the Wild," which was mentioned earlier, and a leopard's claw that was discovered nearby a female skeleton are discussed with reference to a skull cult in which gender, of course, played no role. This cult, we are told, exemplified memory building and entanglement (Hodder 2006, 261). Finally, Hodder (2006, 91) avoids gendering the intriguing relief carvings of *paired* leopards, presumably because Mellaart has interpreted them as symbols of fertility. Even if these pairs would have represented both sexes, which Hodder presumes to be unlikely, the combinations of a male and female leopard, he explains, would merely have manifested the gender balance that characterised the interaction between the sexes in this Neolithic society!

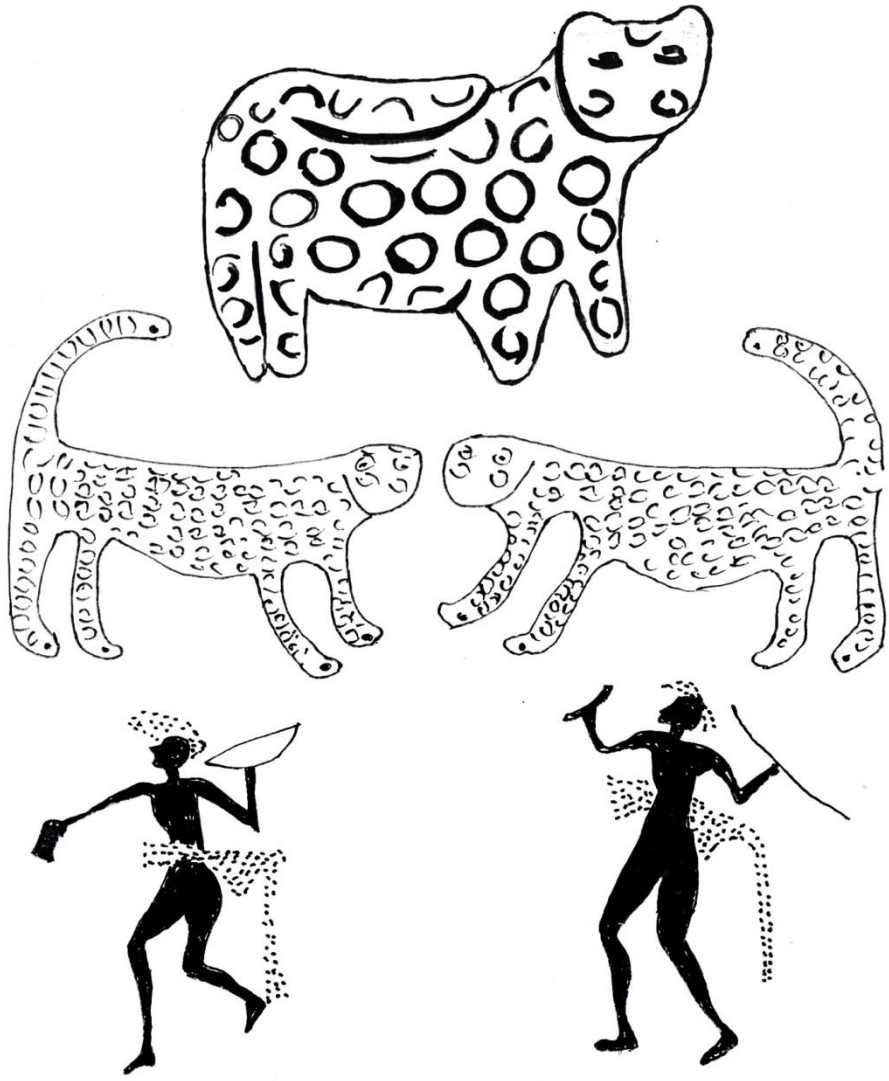

Figure 9: Gendered leopard icons. Top: reconstructed clay seal (adapted from Hodder 2006, 133). Middle: painted relief sculpture (adapted from Hodder 2006, half plate). Bottom: hunters wearing leopard skins (detail from wall painting adapted from Hodder 2006, 94)

The Dynamics of Gender Relations

Hodder (2006, 249) has interpreted the symbolic elaboration of the representations of the wild, throughout the lower and middle levels, as an obvious manifestation of the process of entanglement. Entanglement, in turn, has been explained as being the "driving force" behind the steady development towards complexity in this part of the Ancient Near East. From our side, we suggest that the farmers of Çatalhöyük may

actually have *delayed* the growth of complex society. By holding on to a hunting ideology from the past they slowed down the transition into advanced sedentism (Dederen and Mokakabye 2017, 31).

In our understanding, the overwhelming presence of aurochs and other icons of the wild betrayed a hunting ideology in crisis. The increasing visibility of women, of the domestic sphere and of agriculture in the upper levels revealed the possible source of that crisis; the emergence of a competing cosmology which was closely associated with the realm of women. The nature of this female-centred ideology has been explored in the previous section. Our next concern relates to the female–male dialectic which, in our opinion, accounts at least partly for the demise of the hunting ideology and for the rise of an alternative world-view.

In Hodder's interpretive narrative, gender tension could not have been a contributing factor to cultural change on the site, simply because neither men nor women, the reader has grown accustomed to hear, held privileged positions in this gender-neutral society. For his portrayal of the even, symmetrical interaction between the sexes Hodder relied substantially on the assumed analogy between everyday life in Çatalhöyük and Tikopia (Firth 1936). Hodder (2004, 27–8, 109–110, 209) emphasised that gender played no definite role in the use of the house or in the division of labour. Both men and women worked together in the gardens and they assisted each other in the preparation of food. On closer scrutiny, Hodder's account appears to be somewhat partisan.

Firth's analysis of the Tikopia house presents a different picture. Women were banned from the ceremonial or sacred side of the house, which faced the ocean and the canoe shed, a site for male worship. The profane side of the house, used by women and children, faced the orchards and the oven house where they prepared meals and performed their domestic activities. Women and children also used separate entrances from men. Men were allowed to rest their backs against the posts that supported the roof, women were not. Men used the sitting mats on the graves but women refrained from doing so (Firth 1936, 75, 81). In short, strict rules regarding sex did exist in this egalitarian society (1936, 470–472). The separation of men from women, we contend, confirms that some form of gender hierarchy was present.

Both sexes worked in the gardens—as suggested by Hodder—but each had its own tasks, as is often the case in simple agricultural societies. Crafts were separated too (Firth 1936, 54, 136–137). Furthermore, while Tikopia women helped their husbands with fishing and men assisted in the kitchen, this did not alter the fact that the ocean belonged to the ideological realm of men and the oven house was routinely associated with women. In religious matters women's participation was limited to food preparation (Firth 1936, 493). It was considered *tapu* (taboo) for women to perform any of the major rites, as ritual affairs strictly belonged to the domain of men (Firth 1936, 145). Women, however, executed a number of ritualised tasks under the auspices of their patroness, a

goddess, which, needless to say, has not been included in Hodder's selection of Tikopia data (Firth 1936, 471, 503–507). Lastly, men's initiation rites were more elaborate than those of women (Firth 1936, 422, 432).

Hodder is not alone in his conviction that gender interaction at Çatalhöyük could have been balanced in nature. In fact, his judgement expresses and supports an interpretive trend that was introduced by postmodern archaeology. Supporters of this paradigm challenged the outdated evolutionist notion that with the invention of agriculture gender roles became clearly separated and hierarchical, with men occupying positions of public authority and power (Bolger 2010, 506; Peterson 2010, 249). Peterson (2010, 260), after an extensive study of skeletal remains, architecture and figurative art, has found "little evidence to suggest that Neolithic societies in the southern Levant were organised hierarchically in terms of gender." Bolger (2010, 521) declared in similar fashion that there was little support for the existence of clear gendered patterns, let alone for polarised male and female roles, in the early agricultural societies of the Near East. The representation of Neolithic men and women, she cautioned co-researchers, needs to be discussed "within a noninstitutionalized, flexible and relatively egalitarian framework."

Whilst we readily acknowledge the view that gender interaction in elementary traditional communities has been, on the whole, level in nature, our analysis of Çatalhöyük also takes cognisance of the following: (i) humans universally make sense of their lives through gendered interaction, or phrased differently, cultural meanings are often created on the basis of sexual difference; and (ii) tension is as essential a feature of the human condition as is balance, even in the most egalitarian societies (Begler 1978; Solomon 1992; Douglas 1954, 2; Dederen 2011). Hodder (2006, 247–248) occasionally admits, *en passant*, to the presence of social tension in this prehistoric town; however, his attention is as a rule soon redirected to the pursuit of his main interest, namely the analysis of "material-social entanglements." The following data, which has been sourced from San ethnography, exemplifies the analytical significance of the two observations mentioned above.

In spite of the generally balanced nature of gender relations in this proto-typical egalitarian society of foragers, Guenther (1999, 248) noted that men held more than their fair share of social, political and religious powers. He further established that women appeared in storytelling as the prominent gender, wielding awesome powers over society and culture. From this he concluded that myths provided women with a symbolic means to counter "the male bias inherent in the economic and political domain of social reality" (Guenther 1999, 156). Engagingly, the symbolic terms that were used to express gender antagonism were phrased in the idiom of the hunt. Women were conventionally linked to meat and to game animals, in opposition to men, the hunters who pursued them (Guenther 1999, 153,154).

In an extended study of the Kalahari Ju/'hoan, Biesele has identified sexual balance and opposition as the two cardinal principles in which the foraging ideology of the San was grounded. Balance between the sexes and the interweaving of their powers emerged strongly as basic themes from the analysis of storytelling and the ritual curing dance, but so did female/male conflict and the sexual division of power (Biesele 1993, 83–84). In the world of storytelling and ritual, as in real life, the balance of power needed to be negotiated and re-negotiated continuously in order to contain the polarity between women and men (Biesele 1993, 192–196).

Perhaps the contradictory but related forces of reciprocity and opposition shaped the social interaction between the women and men of Çatalhöyük too. The female–male dialectic certainly existed in Tikopia, the same small-scale society on which Hodder repeatedly modelled his reconstruction of prehistoric life (2006, 27, 28, 73, 109–110, 170, 196, 209, 214). In plain contradiction of Hodder's one-sided emphasis on gender balance, Firth emphasised the significance of both gender separation or opposition and association or co-operation between the sexes. Even a minor cultural aspect such as coiffure exemplified the female–male dialectic that existed in Tikopia (Firth 1936, 503–509). Men proudly expressed their gender identity by the length of their hair and by the public display of elaborate styling. A woman with long hair was conventionally mocked and accused of having challenged the opposite sex. However, some men shared circlets of their hair with women, who would use them during female celebrations. The interplay of the principles of sexual balance and opposition is equally well illustrated by the courting dances of female and male youths (Firth 1990, 206–208), which were known for their "slanderous bawdy songs." The songs and dance movements displayed the intimacy as well as the antagonism between the participants of both sexes.

Conclusion: Negotiating Gender 9000 B.P.

Perhaps, then, the wild bull trophies, stately seated female figurines and related symbols at Çatalhöyük did not constitute mere ideological constructs which were divorced from real life, as is suggested in the contemporary analysis of the site. They may have been the material manifestations of two world-views which shaped social action. More importantly, the negotiation of these gendered symbols provides the key to their interpretation. Our position concurs with Solomon (1992, 292), who proposed that a theoretical orientation which focuses only on balanced interaction between the sexes is bound to obscure meaning.

If the intensification of the symbolism of the wild—in the lower and middle levels of the archaeological sequence—betrayed a hunting cosmology in crisis, as we contend tentatively, the animal trophies, paintings, burials, relief sculptures etc. would have been instrumental to the negotiation of the survival of an ancient way of life as well as of the values and beliefs in which it was grounded. Following Lévi-Strauss and Eribon (1991), we suggest that the conservatism amongst the supporters of the hunting ideology can be

accounted for in terms of the conviction that their life-world had been created in aboriginal times through the intervention of spiritual forces. Myth, ritual and symbolism provided men in this Neolithic community with the means to preserve and maintain their heritage. According to Turner's theory of symbolism (1967, 30–32), the wild bull trophies would have been "dominant symbols," i.e. primary cosmological constructs, less prone to change. We believe that even if, along the long and slow path of social and cultural transformation, the hunting ideology would have been repeatedly modified, its followers continued to support it, and in doing so maintain time-honoured values and beliefs (Horton 1967).

In sum, the hunters of Çatalhöyük remained loyal to the mind-set of their ancestors. They expressed their resistance to a new world in the making by intensifying their expressive culture. The Mesolithic hunters of Lepinski Vir acted likewise. They elaborated their figurative and abstract stone sculpture (Figure 10) in order to mark the continued alliance with a foraging life-style and ideology (Whittle 1996, 102–103). Motivated by a similar type of ideological conservatism, the Neolithic hunters of western Norway carried on with the production of their engravings of the deer-icon long after farming had been introduced (Walderhaug 1998).

Figure 10: Mesolitihic stone sculpture from Lepinski Vir (adapted from Srejović 1972, plate V).

On the other hand, the gradual demise of the symbolism of the wild in the upper levels manifested the growing importance of female constructs of the world and the emergence of a competing, alternative cosmology. The further development and final fate of this woman-centred cosmology remains uncertain since the archaeological remains of the Chalcolithic West Mound at Çatalhöyük await further excavation. However, we do know that in the Bronze Age hunting was finally replaced by intensive pastoralism and by warfare as prime masculine occupations. By the same token, an elitist political ideology, characterised by competitive power had emerged throughout the different regions of the Ancient Near East (Hamiliakis 2003, 242–243).

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