

Women in Engineering and Science

Sandra L. López Varela *Editor*

# Women in Archaeology

Intersectionalities in Practice Worldwide

 Springer

# **Women in Engineering and Science**

**Series Editor**

Jill S. Tietjen, Greenwood Village, CO, USA

The Springer Women in Engineering and Science series highlights women's accomplishments in these critical fields. The foundational volume in the series provides a broad overview of women's multi-faceted contributions to engineering over the last century. Each subsequent volume is dedicated to illuminating women's research and achievements in key, targeted areas of contemporary engineering and science endeavors. The goal for the series is to raise awareness of the pivotal work women are undertaking in areas of keen importance to our global community.

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Editor

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*To the daughters, mothers, and wives in our  
families*

## Preface

*Women in Archaeology* joins The Springer Women in Engineering and Science series at the invitation of Jill S. Tietjen, editor of the series. The series aims to raise awareness of the fundamental contributions of women in science and engineering, going deep into their experiences in practicing in an unusual combination of the personal and professional. *Women in Archaeology* extends the series to the social sciences and the humanities with the support of 43 remarkable female archaeologists working in different socio-economic and political environments in six world regions at all levels of their professional careers. The 29 chapters in this volume introduce their research and experiences in practicing archaeology in the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Australia. In uniting this group of dedicated archaeologists, I made sure to represent the concerns and experiences of those women from less privileged areas in the world. Together, they tell the stories of many women worldwide who dedicate themselves to advancing knowledge and human understanding in academia and the private and public sectors. The authors in this volume celebrate women who are no longer with us, reminding us of their contributions to archaeology at a time when women had almost no voice, nor were they credited for their work by their brothers, fathers, husbands, and male colleagues. Thus, this volume demonstrates that women have always been present in the development of archaeology as a profession.

Despite the vast literature covering women in archaeology, this volume is different. It not only brings together an international group of scholars but also extends beyond gender and feminist approaches to investigate the difficulties of practicing archaeology. Yet, the contributions in this volume debunk the androcentric construction of archaeological knowledge. Indeed, the practice of archaeology has systematically privileged men to a point in which the default history contributes to “mankind,” not humankind. However, the volume is not “anti-men.” It reminds us that, on many occasions, their actions have managed to obscure the indisputable fact that women have always been in the field while being mothers, sisters, or wives. Practicing archaeology in a world where men have been and continue to be inherently more powerful is not the only challenge to practicing archaeology by female archaeologists.

Closing the gap to empower women and achieve equality in our profession requires far more than a gender perspective. Gender studies are interested mainly in the intersecting categories of age, sex, race, sexuality, and class. However, encountered barriers, as demonstrated by the contributions to this volume, extend beyond gender, identity, and discrimination. Contributors in this volume have referenced a long list of social, economic, and political phenomena affecting the practice of archaeology, including colonialism, poverty, global economics, politics, and even war. These challenges become self-evident when the practice of archaeology is placed at an international level. Therefore, this volume contributes to women's studies in general, not only to gender in archaeology, as it explores many more barriers hindering women in the world of work. Thus, I relied on the concept of intersectionality to introduce the contributions of this group of scholars, for it is a better framework to explain their facing differential micro- and macro-complexities in the practice of archaeology.

In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced intersectionality as a legal term to address the constraints and conditions that characterize the subordination of Black women within antidiscrimination and feminist theories and politics. Crenshaw claimed the legal system privileged black men and white women in matters of discrimination, sexism, or racism. Thus, to protect black women from discrimination, it was not enough to consider they were just black, for they faced many other challenges than black men. Like Crenshaw, I, too, believe that addressing the difficulties in the practice of archaeology from a gender perspective is not enough, for women archaeologists are not a homogenous group. The use of intersectionality is meant to appreciate women in archaeology positions differently worldwide regarding existing inequalities in practicing archaeology. Inequality in the practice of archaeology and its varying and interrelated forms of oppression acquire different meanings depending on the social context in which they occur. Ignoring the challenges women archaeologists face in less privileged areas of the world leads to further inequality in the practice of archaeology, if not discriminatory practices, for these are subtle and extend to knowledge production.

Adopting intersectionality as the weaving thread to bring these contributions together in the introduction to this volume intends to describe the many ways female archaeologists from different backgrounds worldwide encounter our profession. The centrism of the West has made us believe that we all share the same living reality or have the same needs. When we step out of our conventional reality, it is easier to diagnose inequality in the practice of archaeology. If we are interested in eliminating power imbalances in the practice of archaeology, we have to acknowledge that others do not share the reality we live in. Many of the challenges described in this volume are shared with western practitioners of archaeology. However, these challenges shape differently when placed in others' social realities. Even if several contributors in this volume originate from impoverished countries or emerging economies, they know their writing originates from a context of privilege not shared by other archaeologists in their own country. Many archaeologists, regardless of gender, are excluded or affected by western academic dynamics, and with this understanding, I insist this volume is not anti-men. However, acknowledging their



situation does not erase the fact that those men still practice archaeology in a setting where they have been and continue to be inherently more powerful.

The use of intersectionality in this volume requests the archaeological community to take others into account when analyzing the status of women in our profession. The authors in this volume have not purposefully embraced intersectionality while addressing the disparities and inequalities in practicing archaeology. Thus, I am solely responsible for introducing their contributions to the theory of intersectionality to acknowledge the different economic, political, and social realities in which women practice archaeology.

Mexico City, Mexico

Sandra L. López Varela

## About the Editor

Since 2013, I, Prof. Dr. Sandra L. López Varela (Ph.D. in Archaeology, University of London, 1996; RPA 15480), have been a full-time Professor at the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Behind where I am now is my parents' history. I am the proud daughter of a civil engineer who attended school barefoot in the early 1920s and a remarkable woman who learned how to read and write later in life. After lifting himself from poverty, my father offered me the best education he could afford. I was privileged to be brought up learning four languages, taking piano lessons, and practicing challenging sports. Disclosing my interest in becoming an archaeologist was not welcomed by my father, for I had to be an architect, an unusual profession for a family forged by nineteenth-century ideas of what a Mexican woman should be. Nonetheless, my daughter Nathalie is now fulfilling my father's dream of having a woman in the family following a "man-oriented" profession.

My eldest sister Araceli (†), an accountant who lived for her family, shared her household income with me to support my B.A. studies in Archaeology. There were hardly any graduate programs and grants in Mexico fulfilling my interests in archaeology. My sister Graciela, a high school teacher, drove me around Mexico City's streets to visit embassies and find grants without much success, but it brought us closer. Since my parents' passing, she has been my most avid supporter.

When the Institute of Archaeology of the University College London accepted my application in 1987 to study an M.A. in Archaeology, my father modestly supported me. Once in London, I soon worked limited hours cleaning toilets and selling hamburgers at MacDonald's on Tottenham Court Road, and later classifying microfiches at a company on Oxford Street to support my graduate studies.

In 1996, I earned my Ph.D. in Archaeology from the University of London with a thesis on Formative Maya ceramics from Belize. Since my graduation did not come with a job, soon after, I applied for a Humboldt postdoctoral fellowship—one of the most prestigious grants a scholar could receive from the German government. I became the first woman archaeologist in Latin America to receive this distinction. At the University of Bonn, I became interested in archaeological sciences and

technology. The Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung remains the center of who I am as a professional.

In 1998, I became a full-time professor at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos. Supported by the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACyT), I conducted ethnoarchaeological investigations of pottery production technologies at Cuentepec, Morelos. The research experience took me to adopt a critical and analytical stance toward economic and development growth policies to combat poverty in Mexico. Results from these investigations received the Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel-Forschungspreis award of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in 2012, granted for the first time to a Latin American woman archaeologist for her outstanding research accomplishments.

I am a survivor of the violence that took over Morelos, Mexico, which forced me to resign from my position at the university. The scar I carry has given me the strength to continue my research at UNAM with a new mission, preserving Mexico's heritage. In 2015, I developed a mobile application for iOS and Android Devices, México Alternativo, promoting peoples' heritage values ([www.mexicoalternativounam.com](http://www.mexicoalternativounam.com)). My most recent publications critically approach the national and institutional discourses of heritage and ethnicity in Mexico.

My commitment to the discipline has taken me to serve as President and Vice President of the Society for Archaeological Sciences (SAS 2009–2011). After being elected to the Executive Board of the AAA, holding the Archaeology Seat (2011–2014), I became Treasurer of the Sociedad Mexicana de Antropología (SMA 2015–2017) and Secretary of the Archaeology Division of the American Anthropological Association (2018–2020). Additionally, I have served as co-chair of the task force revising the Society for American Archaeology ethics principles (2021–2023).

Now that Springer is honoring me as editor of *Women in Archaeology: Intersectionalities in Practice Worldwide*, I am hoping this volume's contributions highlight women's invaluable participation in shaping our profession.

## Acknowledgments

*Women in Archaeology* is the result of a collaborative effort of an international group of female archaeologists who wrote their contributions during the Covid-19 crisis. Therefore, we all share the complications of contracting the virus, losing our loved ones, the emotions of their passing, and those raised by forced confinement. Resilience is what made this volume possible.

I want to extend my gratitude to all the contributors in this volume for their time and dedication, including those who found themselves in unforeseen circumstances and could no longer participate.

Many contributors share their experiences in English as a foreign language. Thus, their writing in English for scientific communication should be highly praised and appreciated.

I am grateful to Jill S. Tietjen for choosing me, a Mexican archaeologist, to lead these remarkable women through the production and editing of this volume, shedding light on the imperceptible challenges female archaeologists face beyond the Western confines. It is an undeserved honor to share their knowledge and experiences for The Springer Women in Engineering and Science series.

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