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Sharing European Memories  
at school

## Memory and Identity. An overview.



Lifelong Learning Programme



Education, Audiovisual & Culture  
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## 1. Introduction

Identity is an omnipresent category in the humanities, which Gosden (1994) has described as part of a perilous, but necessary, search for the things that bind and divide a human group locally and globally (after Insoll T. 2007:1).

According to Timothy Insoll, it is noticeable that the term identity occurred for the first time in The Spelling and Explanatory Dictionary of the English Language in 1786 and it was explained as sameness. In the dictionary from 1986, identity was defined as absolute sameness, individuality, personality. But definition of identity is often explained together with such terms as: gender, ethnicity, race and disability.

Identity becomes particularly visible and significant at the moments of economic and political turning points. These circumstances lead to re-evaluation of previous values and arrangements and emergence of new identities. Political and social transformations of the last decades in Europe corroborate these general observations. While creating new identities, it is very important to emphasise and legitimise rights to them. Accordingly, new ethnohistories are constructed.

There is a considerable difference between East European and West European theoretical traditions of identity and memory studies. Particular regional and national traditions need to be considered in terms of various socio - historical contexts. In eastern Europe, there is a tendency to concentrate on an internal trajectory and historical continuity of ethnic entities or “ethnos”. Although self – identification is an important element, ethnos is constructed by real cultural and linguistic elements, which set up internal connections within identity groups. As a result, ethnicity is not considered as an essentially relational construct in terms of opposition between single groups. Moreover, ethnic identity is considered as being separate from social and economic circumstances.

There are striking correlations between democratic, liberal and incorporative traditions of nationalism, which were dominant in Western Europe, and theories of ethnicity which occurred in the humanities, which are used for the construction of a new Europe in reference to a common heritage of liberalism and democracy. In Eastern Europe, exclusive forms of cultural nationalism are more prevalent and ethnos is more often considered as an objective and essential unit. This kind of differentiation between West and East required a critical analysis; otherwise there is a danger of delving into new sets of oppositions such as civilization vs barbarian or liberalism vs fundamentalism.

Historical sciences since the 19th century, has tended to accept modern political boundaries as a frame of analysis of the past. The idea of Europe, as a conceptual category, is a product of the 18th and 19th centuries discourses discovering a unique character of Europe in the opposition to the Orient. Communal identity of the groups from the past are explained as united, monolithic wholes, with continuous and linear histories, which in turn are used to legitimise claims of political autonomy

and territory placed within the prevailing ideological climate of ethnic nationalism. Archaeology and history undoubtedly played a central place in creating such identities.

In these interpretations, there is often visible a big tension between the past and the present. More particularly, it is a tension between past meanings and processes, which we would like to reconstruct from historical remains and meaning which we would like to obtain from the material culture of today. Critical role of the past in the assertion and legitimation of group identities often leads to a problematic slippage between contemporary concepts of group identity and the mapping of past groups in the past (Jones, S. 1996: 63).

While studying and analysing identity from an historical perspective, we tend to focus on single issue questions. We focus on such aspects as sex, age, ethnicity and then we move straight from the past directly into Western and contemporary categorizations: male/female, child/adult, heterosexual/homosexual; elite – not elite. In general, there is no trend to focus on a particular set of issues that connect such categories as gender, age, or status, without involving other aspects of identity like class, ethnicity, sexuality. This appears as too complex and broad a topic.

However, some scholars, like Lynn Meskell (2007), emphasise that without reflection and awareness of interconnecting various aspects of identity, we risk falling into an interpretive violence in presenting people from the past. As she said, *theoretical pluralism makes possible the expansion of social ontology, a redefinition and redescription of experience from the perspectives of those who are more often simply objects of theory*. Material culture is deeply embedded in political discourse and objectives. *The materiality of the past has long-term consequences in the life of many generations, extending beyond a heuristic enterprise. Inequalities get reproduced, be they based on sexuality, religion, ethnicity or other axes of difference. And it is the very tangibility and longevity of our data that are often at the source of the process* (Meskell, L. 2007: 24).

Memory is a crucial component in creating and maintaining individual and communal identity. One can distinguish different kinds of memory such as close memory connected with everyday life and some incidents connected with the present; deeper memory linked with important events, which are remembered for a long time; social memory connected with the common history of a specific group of people (kin, tribe, nation); or individual memory relating to the history of an individual person or family. Remembering the past can be also unwanted, and events may be forgotten. “Memories are not ready-made reflections of the past, but eclectic, selective reconstructions. People remember or forget the past according to the needs of the present, and social memory is an active and ongoing process” (Van Dyke, R.M., & S. E. Alcock 2003:3).

Memory and history are not synonymous. What is more, today, one can say these concepts are opposed to each other. Memory is constantly in the process of being made, it is vivid and based on a dialogue of forgetting and remembering. Memory is unconscious of its continuous deformation and is susceptible to manipulation. On the other hand, history is always problematic and an unfinished reconstruction of past times (which are gone). Memory is a phenomenon which is very much contemporary while history belongs to the past. As Maurice Halbwachs said,

memory is heterogeneous and specific, collective and individual in one moment. On the other hand, history belongs to everyone and no one, because it lays claim to be a universal authority. In the middle of history there is a critique discourse, which is against spontaneous memory (Nora, P. 2009: 5)

Specialists in material culture have special abilities and insights into the potential of memory. Memory has been “claimed by the heretofore silenced and oppressed as the gateway to a past that history had closed” (Van Dyke, R.M., & S. E. Alcock 2003: 1). They ask how memory is to be reflected in material remains. They try to understand how memory is visible in space, architecture and objects. Michael Rowlands (1993) created a useful distinction between inscribed memory practices, described by repetition and public access, and incorporated memory practices, characterised by opaque symbolism and mystery. Inscribed memory is visible in materially accessible commemorative activities, whereas incorporated memory lends itself to short – lived and ephemeral acts that are hard to visualise in material culture. Similar division was presented by Connerton (1989), who distinguishes inscribed memory, involving monuments, texts and representations, and embodied memory, encompassing bodily rituals and behaviour. It seems clear that it is easiest to get access to the inscribed and the material. Although embodied, performative, incorporated practices are more difficult to study, we do see “footprints” left by these activities (Van Dyke, R.M., & S. E. Alcock 2003:14).

Groups and individuals have the need to prove continuously who they are in correspondence to the others. Their identities must be joined to ancestral links that figure significantly in their statues, ranks or titles.

## **2. Social (collective) identity and memory**

The process of constructing new identities emerged together with ethno-nationalistic discourse and a revival of racism and xenophobia. This ethno-nationalistic position is often a base for self-determination, separatism and expansion of groups (Jones, S., P. Graves- Brown 1996:2). Cultures and national identities are treated as clear and homogenous entities, projected back into the past, and are defined as a natural and permanent essence.

The past plays a fundamental role in the construction of identity and its legitimisation. Well – defined history comprises a foundation in establishing authenticity of particular identities, to serve its membership and international community, and support political independence, territory sovereignty and self – determination.

In the first half of the 20th century, an ethnic group was defined as an internal, homogenous and continuous unit. It was believed to be objectively determined by its language as well as a range of cultural and racial peculiarities. This perspective was

embedded in a peculiar perception of the world, which was seen as a mosaic of people and cultures. This dependence was described in a metaphoric way by Eric Wolf: *By turning names into things we create a false model of reality. By endowing nations, societies or cultures, with the qualities of internally homogenous and externally distinctive bounded objects, we create a model of a world as a global pool hall in which the entities spin off each other like so many hard and round billiard balls* (after Jones, S., P. Graves- Brown 1996: 4)

A belief that particular archaeological cultures reflect well defined ethnic groups, set up a foundation for a construction of the past within the context of individual and monolithic units. They can be regarded as prehistoric equivalents of nations in historical periods. Archaeologists and politicians alike use this approach to assert the rights to claim the beginnings of distinct groups of people. In many cases, cultural history has simplified the way in which long genealogies of contemporary ethnic and national groups were created. These are responsible for consolidating their awareness of identity and political power in the present.

The emergence of social sciences in conjunction with nationalistic ideologies of the 19th century shaped concepts of identity. This type of connection and dependence of academic and lay definitions of identity is a continuous process on both theoretical and micro levels such as academic interrogation of historical narratives related to a particular site. In addition, the researchers need to be aware of the historically dependable nature of concepts which they are using.

In the second half of the 20th century, ethnic and national issues became one of the main interests of social sciences. Several new trends and theoretical approaches came out. Cultural entities were no longer depicted as objective, monolithic and restricted. Anthropological studies questioned the unity of political, linguistic and cultural borders. Therefore, they contested the very subsistence of discrete socio-cultural units. Scholars wondered to what extent can we talk about “objective” cultural definitions of identity.

Ethnic groups began to be considered as self-defined systems. They were described and identified by themselves. In this perspective, cultural and linguistic fluctuations are not endowed with a determining role in defining ethnicity, which is regarded as subjective we/they opposition (Jones, S., P. Graves- Brown 1996:6). These studies focused on economic constructions of boundaries, and ethnic groups were often characterized as interest groups, competing for political and economic resources. During this time, it was strongly suggested, that aspects of individual and group identity were fluid and situational.

In the last few decades we deal with multiple approaches, but it is clearly emphasised that *ethnicity involves the dynamic construction of identity through perceived cultural differentiation and/or common descent. In these terms theories of ethnicity have a great deal in common with theories of nationalism* (Jones, S., P. Graves- Brown. 1996:6). In academic discussions it is suggested that both national and ethnic entities are subjective constructs. They are not natural, and there is no objective conformity between particular groups and culture or languages claimed as its restricted possession.

Recent studies on identity exposed its dynamic, situational and heterogeneous nature. Furthermore, it seems clear that different types of identities intersect in various ways. In new alternative approaches to group identities, it is declared that there is no one-to-one connection between language, culture and ethnicity, and that group identity is historically contingent. Many authors underline that the process of the construction of group identity is multidimensional, and has an important implication in archaeological analyses. These can be exemplified by two quotes: *The importance of ethnic issues and conflicts of interest in the modern world at least partly explains and justifies our interest in them in the past. Unfortunately, in investigating these questions as with so many others, we have tended to create the past in our own image. The challenge for the future ... is to try to transcend this parochial subjectivism* (Shennan, S.J. 1989: 30). *Ethnicity is not constituted by the historical legacy of a primordial, essentialist identity; rather the formation and transformation of ethnicity is contingent upon particular historical structures which impinge themselves on human experience and condition social action* (Jones, S. 1996: 75).

The latest theoretical approaches focus on a large role for the subjectivity and constructional nature of national and ethnic identities. They imply the connections between history and cultural identity. It has been presented that nations and ethnic groups do not usually have a continuous and linear history. These kinds of accounts are constructs of historical groups, whose past is selectively appropriated, remembered, forgotten and created, but at the same time reproduced and accepted in popular consciousness (Jones, S., P. Graves- Brown. 1996:6).

Historians must avoid analysing ethnicity in the past as a modern fantasy. It is essential they critically reflect on the very idea of culture, ethnic and national groups, which occurred in human and social sciences. The concept of ethnicity was used to define the differences between the individual and the group.

Ethnic identity is only one of the social determinatives, which can go beyond status, gender, occupation, etc. But this also caused social negotiations over differences and sameness, and it often engaged bigger tensions between individuals and groups, or states.

Historians proved that ethnicity is not always a synonym for a single language, race, place or material culture. Some markers of ethnicity such as food customs, or the arrangement of the household can say more than language or type of pottery.

There is a distinct tension between pluralism, antipluralism, multiculturalism and monoculturalism, heterogeneity, monogenity, in discourse focused around identity, which cross-cuts ethnic, national and European forms of identification (Jones, S., P. Graves- Brown. 1996: 4).

Interests of historical sciences were also focused on status. According to Max Weber, class relates to a group of people who have a common special casual component of their life chances, which is represented by economic interests. Weber distinguished class from status, whereby status is based on specific, positive or negative, social judgments of character and way of life (after Meskell, L. 2007: 25). However, a lack of understanding of differences between class and status is still present in numerous analyses and interpretations. Since the 1960s, an explicit

critique of closed systems, in which the social world is perceived as a coherent whole, resistant to changes and created on a strongly arranged hierarchy of power, became apparent.

Elizabeth Brumfiel postulated turning away from approaches founded on systems in favour of an agent – centred one, which recognises the intersection and dynamism of ethnic, gendered and class issues. She argues that not only elites motivate changes within social groups, but also subordinate groups could have had an influence on the structure of hierarchy.

The first person who moved debate of memory beyond the frame of a personal and individual aspect was Maurice Halbwachs. He suggested that memory must be taken as a social or group phenomenon (after Van Dyke, R.M. 2003. p.2). It is argued that collective memory cannot be perceived as monolithic and stable, but as a changing and variable being influenced by class, ethnicity, religion, gender and other marks, which permit a multiplicity. Social memory appears, expands and vanishes as a result of acts of both remembering and forgetting. A related and common use of social memory is to create and support a sense of individual and community identity (Basso 1996; Blake 1998). It seems clear that the creation and re-creation of social memory is an active and ongoing process (Van Dyke, R.M. 2003: 3).

Paul Connerton in his book *How societies remember?*, considers social memory in depth. He noticed that images from the past often legitimated and explained present and contemporary social order. Connerton analysed small groups, whose members have face to face contact, and bigger groups, members of which do not know each other. In both types of group, it is evident that members have a common shared memory. And all beginnings and actions of a group are based on recollection (Connerton P. 1989: 2-4).

Social memory is also intimately linked with oral tradition, images, and location, and varies with scale. By the process of codification, various images and objects embody symbolism and meanings, often going beyond the generation of their creators, and are easily recognisable by members of the particular community. On the other hand, memory is active and dynamic and varies with the condition of people over time. As physical activities, commemoration and ritual are connected with the construction of shared memories and experiences in communities at different levels. *Commemoration and social memory centre on direct remembrance and recollection, as well as on indirection, abstraction, and depersonalization* (Kuijt, I. 2008. p. 173). Although memory is active, some active behaviours are not visible in material evidence.

In the era of globalization and large scale migrations of people, new approaches and categories of identity and memory are proposed. A new phenomenon of our culture has appeared – multiculturalism. New identities are formed in this new situation. The emergence of the multiculturalism phenomenon has not been satisfactorily discussed in historical literature. However, it could be potentially very interesting and widely applicable to past societies. Comparative studies of civilizations showed that not a single human population is ever regarded as a single system, but rather as a multiplicity of combined collectives, systems and organisations.

In this new approach, old questions about identity and memory such as: *Who are we? What tie us together? Where is our place? What are our traditions?* gave a new insight into this problem. In the last decades, globalization, social movements, migrations, appearance of multicultural and multinational corporations are very clearly visible around the world. This collapsing sense of space and time lead people to ask questions about identity and share/social memory as well as individual memory and identity. Can we still talk about identity? Christopher Tilley tries to answer and resolve these problematic issues: *Identities are only 'safe' and unproblematic when we do not begin to question them. Once we begin to ask who we are, and to whom we belong, we inevitably problematise that which was given and that which went unquestioned. (...) Identity becomes something spoken about in the plural, not one but many, something always changing in space-time. Identities are always responding to change, mobile rather than fixed and static, constantly open to formulation and reformulation. From such a perspective notions of identity as being forever grounded, stable and immutable can only have a mythic status. This is the way that many might like the world to be but it inverts, rather than reflects, the realities of the way that the world actually is* (Tilley, Ch. 2006. s.8)

### **3. Individual identity and memory**

The most dominant approach assumes that people have various social identities, which require permanent negotiation and organise our relationships with the other - both individuals and groups. Paradoxically, the human himself along with his/her individual and subjective character is often forgotten. Although some aspects of our (human) identity were given to us from the beginning – like sex, ethnicity, or class – it did not rigidly determine us as people and who we can become in the future! We should be aware of our individual and life experiences which form and reconstruct new dimensions of identity. There are two levels of analyses in this approach to identity:

1. connected with wider, social context of an individual, who is defined by formal associations and customs.
2. an individual level connected with experiences of a particular person.

Different aspects of identity which occurred during an individual life can be studied. The individual level is more sudden, immediate and contingent, and acts with bigger frequency, while on a social level changes follow more slowly. These two levels act in a recursive way, where individuals play an important role in the mechanism of change.

Julian Thomas defined identity as selfhood, which he explained as a pathway, which *establishes links between sequence of experiences, in such a way to draw together a comprehensible account of a person* (Thomas, J. 1996: 78). In creating an individual narrative of identity, people and objects are closely interconnected. Things are instrumental in setting up the world where we are living; they moved past into the mind, they are alongside in use, and are implicated in creating future ideas. It is



through our engaging with objects and other people that we can become ourselves. It means that identity is not already given individuality, but is a particular way of engaging with the world. Identity must be taken up, and does not have to be crafted. This way of perceiving human identity is based upon the temporal character of human life. Things which reflect people is their *having – been, their being alongside the others and their continuous projecting - forward of themselves through their projects* (Thomas, J. 1996: 78). Thus the process through which people and things come to mutually constitute each other's identities could be thought of as a series of interconnecting pathways winding through space and time.

We must be conscious that there is a possibility of recognising past identities within contemporary perspective which may be inappropriate. It can be a risk as Lynn Meskell has noticed: *an elision of difference, conflating ancient and modern experience in the process* (Meskell, L. 2002: 281). We cannot argue that together with a diverse society in the present, a similar world must have existed in the past as well. Arbitrary divisions and categorisations of identity, are very unlikely to have any validity.

Social networks in our times are getting looser. There are fewer and fewer places which individuals belong to. There is a discontinuity and fluidity of social material. Groups and communities are temporary, active and continuously changing. There is nothing sure, stable and constant. (...) *we are faced with constant change and uncertainty. We are forced to attempt to find our identity in the maelstrom of the permanent revolution of modern life* (Tilley, Ch. 2006: 10). This temporary aspect of individual identity is followed by a culture where intergenerational ties have disappeared (Szociński, A. 2008: 16).

Personal identity has come to be more a matter of self-conscious reflection. In post modernist approaches identity becomes, in part, something that may be chosen, created and operated. *Reflections on identity thus carry within themselves a sense of possibility, of being different and making a difference, a potentiality for changing the self and changing society. In modernity identities are no longer ascribed but are instead achieved. Questions of identity become then, questions about states of mind and bodily enactment in the world* (Tilley, Ch. 2006: 10)

Insoll suggests that *identities are not necessarily chosen by free will but can be ascribed; as the existence of the caste system in India indicates* (Insoll, T. 2007: 4). The author proposes considering every single case of identity research separately, taking the particular context and circumstances into consideration.

While establishing new categories of identity, one should constantly be aware of past – present correlations. Although categories of identity (whether racial, ethnic, religious or whatever) exist and are often necessary for descriptive purposes, they need to be critically examined on a more subtle level (Insoll, T. 2007: 9).

## a. Gender identity

Recent decades brought the gender category to the fore. Generally, these interests can be classified in subsequent phases:

- critique of androcentrism
- search for woman and fundamental reconceptualisation
- perception of women as active agents, who create their own social reality and resisted domination in the process (Meskell, L. 2007: 28).

But at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century these kinds of approach are widely criticized. As Conkey and Gero implied: *We worry that the recent archaeological studies of gender have participated in narrowing the field rather than opening up our studies* (1997) (after Meskell, L. 2007: 29). This time marks also the emergence of the third wave of feminism. During this time, we can observe a significant development from earlier approaches, which were focused mainly around searching for women and treating them as homogenous groups. Nowadays gender identity is perceived as a *complex assortment of networks of signifying practices, varying for individuals over time, as it intersects with other networks of signifying practices located in such concepts as class and race* (Meskell, L. 2007: 29). People are not always acting as “women” or “men”. Individuals are gendered by discursive everyday practices: *gender is thus a process of becoming rather than a state of being* (ibidem, p.30). One can argue that though gender is not natural, biological, universal, or essential, we can still claim that it is relevant because of its political ramifications.

## b. Bodily identity

According to body studies, it is noticeable to connect body with biological aspects, personal experience, embodiment, cultural markers, social difference and diachronic diversity (Meskell, L. 2007: 27). These studies showed that archaeology and history have a lot to offer to social sciences in the capacity of discussion on cultural characteristics of bodiliness.

The initial and first studies were mainly based upon Foucault’s conception of bodily assumptions that is the direct marking of society upon the body of the individual. These constructive settings are strongly influenced by post-structuralist theories, which perceive bodies and identities as constructed through various disciplines and discourses (Meskell L. 2007: 27). The 1990s brought about vibrant discussions on embodiment on both an individual and a cultural level. Identity and experience are perceived as deeply grounded and implied in materiality of the body. Other spheres of interests, in terms of body, are focused upon selfhood, agency, emotionality, subjectivity, and the individual.

Graves-Brown suggests that the multilevel nature of identity is also connected with biological aspects. He claims that biology is not separate from other components of identity: *false dichotomy between biology and culture, nature and nurture, tends to mask the organic causes and consequences of ascriptions of and claims to identity* (Jones, S., P. Graves- Brown 1996:8). Biological dimensions of our body are increasingly considered when analysing identity. This is particularly strongly emphasised by Caldwell: *our bodies need to be biological bodies if they are also to be social ones* (za Insoll, T. 2007: 4).

### c. Age

Studies focusing upon another aspect of identity – age, mainly refer to child and childhood issues. Although lately some studies on life cycles are also being undertaken. Age studies are often taken for granted as a key variable potentially influencing the manifestation of identities. Age can act in restricting what other identity variables can manifest, as for example with regard to religion or the exercise of sexuality. But it must be emphasised that age categories are to some extent cultural constructs.

### d. Sexual identity

Another important aspect of identity comprises sexuality. Historical sciences approach sexuality from many viewpoints. We can ask how sexuality can be created through economic, political and social structures. How and why did these aspects of identity become so important in Western culture? What is the relationship between sex and power, especially in the context of racial system and class?. The most recent issues comprised an interpretation of sexual aspects of identity. Sexuality is to a large degree an historical construct which brings together numerous biological and physical possibilities, like gender identity, bodily differences, reproductive abilities, desires, fantasies and needs. As Vance implied *sexuality may be thought about, experienced and acted on differently according to age, class, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation and preference, religion and region* (after Meskeil, L. 2007: 27).

## 4. Construction of memory

Memory has a great potential to be transmitted, changed and articulated. Memory needs often to be conventionalised, because it has to be meaningful and understood for the entire group; it also must be capable of transmission, and the complexity of the image of memory must be reduced as much as possible. The construction of memory can involve direct links to ancestors in a remembered past, or it can involve more general connection to a mythological past, often based on the re-interpretation of monuments or landscapes (Van Dyke, R.M. & S. E. Alcock 2003: 3)

Many scholars explain the relation between social memory, material culture, and the transmission of order at the household and community levels. *Memory is time sensitive and dynamic, and the creation of memory has multiscale aspects Memory is created through the actions of people who intersect at different social scales, such as those of the individual, the household, and the community. These are, of course, ultimately interconnected and inseparable. Yet, from the standpoint of development*

*and use, the genesis of memory is linked to the experiences and meanings that are created through the intersection of people at multiple levels. (Kuijt, I. 2008: 174).*

There are different levels of memory. One can distinguish individual memory, which is deeply connected with a live history of any given person. But this individual memory can be involved in public and intergenerational transmission of memory. After some time (longer than two generations) individual memory becomes abstract, mythical and depersonalized (Kuijt, I. 2008: 74). In addition, the deceased appear in an ancestral memory that is homogenised, common and anonymous. This transmission of memory from individual to collective and sometimes mythical is complicated, and depends on the cultural context. It is noticeable that processes of remembering and forgetting are involved in this transmission. At some stage, the dead individual is forgotten, which is linked to his/her decontextualization, which leads to the construction of collective memory, which itself is experienced and shared by others members of the group. Over time the deceased become remote and anonymous, but his/her role in memorialization is still present.

Another aspect of transmission of the memory is the act of forgetting. *The process can be conceived of as re-creating the physical structure that embodies both the living and the dead, transcends different realms and times, and obscures individual identity and history. The processes of memorialization and depersonalization are interrelated and occur with the deliberate deconstruction of memory (Kuijt, I. 2008: 185).* In some cases memory is actually defined by the process of forgetting the past. This can involve production of monuments or objects which are destroyed, left or made inaccessible. *Connection between representation and remembering can be discovered in the way places or things become memorialized. In contexts where objects are destroyed or taken out of circulation through burial or some other form of intentional symbolism, such objects become a memory in their absence, and therefore the essence of what has to be remembered. The opportunities for manipulating the possibilities of repetition are therefore abolished in an act of sacrifice or destruction that severs connection with its original status. In fact object deposition or object sacrifice exemplifies a very different kind of relation between memory and representation (Rowlands, M. 1993: 146).*

A very important distinction between practices of memory is made by Connerton. He distinguished between inscribing and incorporating practices.

- inscribing practices applied to how frequent repetition and the extensive logical integration of verbalized ritual discourse facilitates the dissemination of religious knowledge as a transportable ideology (Rowlands, M. 1993: 142)
- incorporating practices by contrast relate to iconic symbolism, the avoidance of exegetical commentary and the rigorous observance of secrecy and exclusion (Rowlands, M. 1993: 142)

## **5. Materiality of identity and memory**

Establishing the relationships between objects and identity is essential for students of the past. Archaeological and historical theories alike stress the link between artefacts and identity as an intrinsic property of social existence. While in many sciences material objects were interpreted in their own social contexts, in archaeology context must be recreated from the objects themselves. It had serious consequences for the way artefacts and identity were connected and perceived. The nature of this relationship is itself a product of socio- historic transformations, and hence should be subjected to critical scrutiny in those terms.

It has been taken for granted that material objects were used and produced by a particular social or cultural group of people or tribe and so they can in some way reflect it. But attempts to define these groups and their relation to material culture have proved difficult. Those difficulties arose from the artefacts themselves, their complexity and incompleteness and a need to choose a proper method of interpretation.

Gordon Childe's understanding of material culture was based on distinguishing particular types of remains, which were put in a series of interacting transformations and diffusions. His hypothesis was based on a Kultur – Gruppe conception, a co-extensive distribution of the objects and ethnic unit. It was devised by Gustaw Kossina in his "Settlement archaeology". Childe was one of the first who explicitly defined cultural conceptions in the archaeological field. He wrote: *we find certain types of remains – pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites, house forms – constantly recurring together. Such a complex of regularly associated traits we shall term a cultural group or just a culture* (Childe 1929: v-vi). Both Childe and Kossina used culture theory, in terms of the essence, which is something intrinsically natural, that precedes the very existence of the group, and caused its creation and defined its character. This *essence* according to Childe, corresponded to the groups of people. According to this, Childe underlines: *we assume that such a complex [of regularly associated traits] is the material expression of what would today be called a "people"* (Childe, V.G. 1929: vi).

The conception of culture was defined and applied even before Kossina and Childe. British anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in his book *Primitive Cultures* explained how he understood culture: *culture, or civilizations, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society.* (za Diaz – Andreu, M. 1996: 49). Although Childe questioned if material objects can reflect ethnicity, he sees advantages in connecting pre(historic) and ethnographical cultures, advocating a social classification which was perceptible for archaeologists as well as for ethnographers and historians.

A more contemporary attempt to connect material culture with identity was presented by Ian Hodder (1982) in reference to the results of his ethnographical studies of material culture in Baringo (Kenya). He observed that objects are not merely used as tools, possessions or simple badges of rank or belonging, but rather

they actively participate in negotiating an identity based on age, gender, and ethnicity. Hodder argued that all objects were meaningful in this way. Their meaning can be discerned. When the context of the artefact is identified, then it is possible to *read* it within a framework of this context. Contemporary contexts (excavations, oral traditions, conservation, interpretation) make it impossible for the past context (culture) to be reconstructed and read based on the very artefacts and their distribution. It is a kind of mutual connection – the meaning of the artefact is read from its context, while the context is defined by the artefact's surroundings and giving the meaning (Hides, S. 1996: 27). Cultural or ethnic identity is recoverable from the object and also undermines the necessary separation of past and present contexts.

If ideology and social organisation determined the meaning of the artefact in the past, one cannot be certain to what extent the same determination influenced any given artefact in the present. It implies that artefacts do not reveal past social contexts, but are just “meaningfully constituted”, by specific ideological contexts and codes of modern archaeology and history.

Shaun Hades critiques both Childe's and Hodder's approaches to identity issues. He argues that both authors try to put a conceptual definition upon an historical determination. He goes on to say that the correlation between objects and identity *must be an intrinsic property of the artefacts themselves* (Hides, S. 1996: 27). Childe conceptualized artefacts by functionalist and normative conceptions of cultures, while Hodder asserts that past items are meaningfully constituted. There is an apparent acknowledgement of the contemporary context of historical sciences, which is in fact an exercise in circumscribing and negating its relevance. They do not take into account the wider pre-conceptual frameworks, through which the connection between objects and identities is understood. Margarita Diaz – Andreu argues that the concept culture is strongly associated with nationalist ideologies, which occurred during the last two centuries, and also ultimately to the concept of otherness, which dominated the Western mind since the classical period.

All these definitions reflect elements which until today were connected with a category culture. In particular, the very extension of cultural attributes, including virtually all social practices, are directly connected to particular groups of people. What is more, this essentialist conceptualization of culture is uncritically accepted in archaeology. Assumptions that groups can be rigidly and clearly defined from one another have remained largely unquestioned.

Graves – Brown and Jones propose new ways of perceiving cultural identity in the past. The authors suggest that constructing cultural identity in different contexts on various scales of interpretation is likely to be manifested in archaeological records as multiple overlapping patterns in the distribution and use of particular forms and styles of material culture. That's the reason why we should adopt contextual assumptions rather than exploring new normative patterns out of a set of material culture. For example, Fitzpatrick suggests that the widespread distribution of style and forms of Celtic material, does not mean that all people who were living within this area had the same ethnic identity. There could have existed various levels of identification, whose meanings may not have lain in big narratives, but in small, local routines of everyday life (Jones, S., P. Graves- Brown. 1996: 18). *Cultural groups*

*are not neatly packaged in the present, nor are they likely to have been in the past* (ibid. p. 17).

It is clear that historical sciences are still far from coherently understanding the ways in which past societies have conceptualized and institutionalized social and cultural differences.

Every definition of culture used in the interpretation of past groups is historically contingent. The very category of culture, which has been embraced in historical and archaeological epistemology in terms of its correlation with ethnicity, is a result of cultural differentiation which emerged in the context of post – Enlightenment European nationalism.

Cultures are regarded as bounded, continuous, unified entities, that bear witness to the existence of the nations which are their bearers. Sian Jones argues that identity is a dynamic, contested phenomenon, which is manifested in different ways, in various contexts, and in relation to different forms and scales of interactions. Furthermore, the representations of cultural difference involved in the articulation of ethnicity are transient, although subject to reproduction and transformation in the ongoing processes of social life (Jones, S. 2008: 327).

Memory and its materiality is generated through actions of individuals and groups. It is, after all, through the act of remembering that memory is both crafted and maintained. People through their experience define meaning and, by extension, memories. According to Black: *“Memory and tradition alone do not preserve an object’s identity; it is the ongoing incorporation of that object into routinized practice that generates meaning”*( Kuijt, I. 2008: 173) Memory is often rooted in the material world, reflected in the actions of people, and connected to the social practices of community members.

In the last decades, materialization of memory has been extended, multiplied and decentralised. Our imperative is to save everything from being forgotten and creating places where it can be located – archives. We think that only by saving as much as we can, is there a chance that something will be left (Nora 2009: 7).

Considering materiality of practice, we should refer to Connerton’s (1989) and Rowlands’ (1993) concepts of inscribed memory, which entangle repetition and public access and are materialised through monumentality, with incorporated memory practices. *Ritual behaviour* is materially perceptible through evidence of activities such as processions, abandonments, mortuary treatments, votive deposition or feasting, although connection of such behaviour to commemorative patterns can be challenging. One of the examples of ritual behaviour is that of mortuary practices. These commemorative ritual activities revolve around veneration of ancestors. Mortuary practice is a form of public action, a performance designed and conducted by the living, often to obtain community participation, and is not always, therefore, a direct reflection of the status, authority, and importance of the deceased (Kuijt, I. 2008: 83). *Commemorative places are spaces that have been inscribed with meaning, usually as a result of some past event or attachment. Here, this broad category encompasses monuments, landscapes, natural features, buildings, tombs, trees, obelisks, shrines, mountain peaks, and caves* (Van Dyke, R.M.& S. E. Alcocks 2003: 5).

A place of memory has been explained as an instituted form of collective past memories, for example archives or monuments. Such a place of memory is a defined place – a place of recollecting and remembering (Szociński, A. 2008: 12). In acquiring by some items the status of a memory place within a particular culture, it arguably provides a medium through which the past can be reached indirectly by signs and symbols. Accordingly, places of memory have symbolical significance (Szociński, A. 2008: 14). A major role of commemorative places is their belonging to a particular group, which feels connected with a given place of memory. People are interested in creating places of memory, which intensify in specific moments of history - in turning points, when consciences break with the past. New places of memory are created because any substantial backgrounds of memory are not in existence anymore (Nora, 2009: p.4).

Places of memory, as materialized acts of remembering, have three intertwined aspects: material, functional, and symbolic. They emerged as the result of interaction of memory and history. But one required element is the will to remember. Nora underlines that places of memories exist because they are capable of generating changes in their meanings and abilities of metamorphoses (Nora 2009: 10). He further argues that various places of memory exist. They can be understood metaphorically as signs and symbols which focused our attention. Importantly, they do not have to possess material form to become and remain a place of memory.

Another kind of materialized memory is *representations* and *objects* which include such items as paintings, rock art, figurines, masks, and other items which can have commemorative functions. Objects provide graphic access to the past. According to Kopytoff (1986), objects are acknowledged to have life-histories that may be traced to illuminate the variable constructions of memory. Objects could have both purposes of remembering, as well as forgetting purposes.

Specific kinds of objects are heirlooms, souvenirs and photographs, which as a material symbol rather than verbalised meaning, provide a special form of access to both individual and group unconscious processes. *Objects are culturally constructed to connote and consolidate the possession of past events associated with their use or ownership. They are there to be talked about and invested with the memories and striking events associated with their use. The link between past, present and future is made through their materiality. Objects of a durable kind assert their own memories, their own forms of commentary and therefore come to possess their own personal trajectories. Remembering is therefore a form of work and is inseparable from the motive to memorialize* (Rowlands, M. 1993: 144).

Heirlooms are material symbols of active identity and memory construction. Another crucial aspect of heirlooms is that that they can be used to reinforce the existing social order through the construction of collective memory. *Heirlooms serve as a means by which memory and history are developed, maintained, and redefined by families, households, and communities They are, moreover, portable objects that*



*can be inherited by individuals or groups with the intent of keeping them in circulation for a number of generations. Manufactured from durable or semidurable materials, they are, above all else, emblems of ancestry and are often worn, displayed, or used in public events and rituals. Heirlooms can also be used to manipulate and transform genealogy and the construction of social history. Items become heirlooms after acquired individual property is inherited by others or the value of a commodity is redefined. Just as acquired property can become communal and focused on multiple generations, heirlooms can become commodities that are traded and exchanged (Kuijt, I. 2008: 173).*



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