THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

CHAPTER ONE

LOCAL AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE STUDY OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES

Tamar Hodos

Introduction

What do we mean when we talk about identity in the past? Are we referring to the way individuals thought about themselves and the way they communicated that to others through actions or material belongings (whether through active choice or more passive reflection)? Or do we mean the way individuals and groups are seen as collectivities by others? In fact, it is both, and more. Identity may be defined as the collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which something or someone is recognizable or known. These may be behavioural or personal characteristics, or the quality or condition of being the same as something else. This sense of collective similarity among entities, be they objects or individuals, implies that the very notion of identity also depends upon opposition through a contrast with something else. Such identification markers therefore are both active and passive, and they can be performative and receptive.

The relationship between the notion of identity and our mechanisms of social distinction enables us to examine different kinds of identities, whether they be cultural, personal, or social. Culture encompasses the social production and reproduction of meaning.[1] It represents a coherent system of values, norms, and habits that, through repetition, engender a sense of unified belonging, individually and collectively, over time. Paradoxically, within its own system, culture serves as its own agent for change while maintaining its continuity and perpetuity. In other words,

culture, while constantly evolving, perpetuates as a result of its urge to modify its representative patterns over time.[2] Efforts to define culture have highlighted that it has a dual nature, that it is defined both by inclusion and exclusion. We rely upon our ability to identify both repetition and differentiation of practices in order to distinguish who belongs and who does not; a distinction already noted with regard to attempts to establish and to recognize identity. Cultural identity may be seen in the use and shared practice of those characteristics that go into generating the repetitive system of values, norms, and habits of a culture. Within this, other forms of identity exist: a sense of personal identity may be seen as giving meaning to 'I,' while social identity guarantees that meaning and allows one to speak of the 'we.'[3] Ethnicity is one specific form of social identity that relates to self-conscious identification with a particular sociocultural group.[4]

This volume reconsiders the ways we recognize the perceived and projected identities of past cultures through their material and visual remains. In particular, the contributions to this volume are articulated around two major perspectives in the recent study of ancient cultural and social identities. One is the notion of hybrid cultures and their roles within our perceptions of culture, while the other adopts a more global perspective of culture that is derived from these internal cultures. The former focuses on the reinterpretation of material culture as it appears in contexts different from that in which it originated. Material selected by an individual or group is deliberate, and the reasons behind such explicit choice within these new contexts are explored here. One might argue that this avenue emphasizes the cultures within a culture (terminology that is preferable to subculture, which implies a distinct and more exclusive cultural layer hiding under a broader umbrella, and is often characterized as deviant from that broader norm). The latter examines how the heterogeneous natures of these regional cultures work together to create a sense of broader cultural unity while still emphasizing their distinctiveness. In the case of the ancient world, these would be the regional or more geographically local cultures that contributed to the greater notions of Greek and Roman culture. The papers in the present volume grapple with both these perspectives. At the same time they establish the important role that material and visual cultures play in shaping as well as simply reflecting identities, both within their own media and through

their relationships with literary texts. Antonaccio (in Chapter Two), for example, explicitly challenges the prevalent thought that material culture is secondary to a sense of ethnic identity, which is often derived by scholars from ancient literature. The case studies in these papers represent the first effort to consolidate these theoretical frameworks with regard to the ancient world to derive working methodologies across a range of approaches in order to demonstrate how theory might be applied to this unique intersection of material, visual, and literary cultures. The case studies are not exhaustive, however, and thus the concluding chapter highlights additional avenues that might be explored.

The Development of Identity Studies

The following overview is not intended to present a history of identity studies in the disciplines of ancient history, classical art, and archaeology, but to provide an indication of key moments when the relation between cultures and identity has been stressed in these disciplines.[5] This relationship has often centred upon ethnicity, and many of the papers in the present volume focus upon constructs of ethnic identities. This is, however, only one strand in the debate about the relationship between culture and identity, and other narratives could be presented that emphasize different aspects of identity, such as gender or class. Indeed, several papers here too confront ideas about culture, gender, and class to produce new frameworks for considering the depth and diversity of meaning that the term identity encapsulates.

From the necessarily selective perspective of key moments, therefore, the study of identities of past civilizations may be seen to find its origins in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romantic interest in the environmental and racial determinants of specifically ethnic identity. Romantic thought's emphasis on race as a natural and immutable characteristic, as expressed in novels as early as Mme De Stäel's *Corinne, or Italy*, in 1807, led in part to theories of racialism that would eventually culminate with the Darwinian evolutionary thinking of the 1860s, which popularized the belief that biological inequality existed between human groups. On the one hand, such ideas should be understood against a backdrop of the increasing sense of nationalism and the search for nationhood across Europe, particularly the unification of Italy (1850s–70s)

and then Germany (1871). On the other hand, such perspectives were quickly extended to account for cultural differences between Western and non-Western societies, for many believed that, as a result of natural selection, human groups had evolved not only culturally but also in their biological abilities to utilize culture. Popularized by the writings of Lubbock,[6] the idea quickly took hold that technologically less advanced peoples were not only culturally but also intellectually and emotionally more primitive than civilized communities. This perspective justified European political and economic control of other regions and territories beyond Europe and supported Europe's colonial empires, which were viewed as promoting the general progress of the human species by advancing Western ideals. Scholarship, in particular, viewed prehistory as linked to Europe's cultural pre-eminence: by the nineteenth century, this was manifested in the search for confirmation in the classical world of the evolutionary lineage of cultural development to which nineteenth-century Europeans believed they were heir.[7] It is in this atmosphere that European prehistory and classical archaeology thus emerged as disciplines (although arguably discontinuously and somewhat diversely in each national tradition).

Romanticism and modernism defined ideas of identity, not only by giving birth to nationalism and racialism but also, via psychoanalysis, by defining for the Western white audience a sense of self and other, of identity and identification.[8] These two strands, of the collective community and personal self, have subsequently dominated understandings of identity. At the same time, modernism's sense of progress and of faith in the success of Western Europe and its interconnectedness to the imperial programmes of nineteenth-century Europe further encouraged thinking in terms of polarities from the vantage point of 'dead white European males.' Such influence is most immediately obvious in the development of concepts such as Romanization, a term that has been widely dissected in recent years.[9] While, as will be discussed, studies of material culture have moved on to postmodern ideas, psychoanalytic thought, particularly as developed by Lacan's work on the gaze, has remained a great influence on the more theoretical scholars of ancient visual culture.[10]

The influence of evolutionary thought on the classical archaeologists of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries can be observed in

attempts to assess artefacts as stages of cultural development illustrated through seriation and typological development (see, e.g., Furtwängler on gems and other objects; Mau on Pompeian wall painting styles; Beazley on Greek vase painting).[11] In many respects, classical archaeology of this period was very much the study of art of the ancient world. Ancient art examined alongside ancient architecture, dress, philosophy, customs, political forms, and literary genres characterized the study of antiquity as the foundations for European cultural and political world sovereignty,[12] although efforts were also made to define a relationship between specific social groups and material culture through the systematic compilation of typical object types, their chronological development and their geographical distribution in Europe.[13] It was not until the early twentieth century, however, and especially through the work of Childe, who produced the first large-scale synthesis of European prehistory with his 1925 *The Dawn of European Civilization*, that the emphasis moved from artefact types to the significance of the assemblages of material as a means of defining a cultural group.[14] Childe emphasized that assemblages of objects typify, or identify, a particular culture. The underlying premise was that bounded, homogeneous cultural entities corresponded with particular peoples, based upon the assumption that any such people shared ideas, beliefs, space, and material culture.[15] This led to the study of the origins of, and the movements and interactions between, archaeological cultures, such as the search for the Minoans.[16]

This new emphasis on how groups of people lived and interacted with one another in the past enabled that past to be visualized as a mosaic of delineated cultural groups. Each group had materials distinguishable from those of another, and, by inference, must therefore have had specific ethnic identities as well. For Childe, a material's significance was determined by its functional role, rather than serving an emblematic purpose. The utilitarian value of objects such as tools and weapons understandably would result in a rapid diffusion from one group to another, while modes of burial, decorative ornaments, or household pottery would reflect more local tastes and were therefore less likely to change over time.[17] In other words, in this functionalist view, ethnic traits did not diffuse readily, whereas technological ones did.[18]

Since Childe's interest was in understanding cultural changes, which he argued were due to culturally external factors, such as migration or

diffusion, including of technology, and not internal ones, in his view the absence of external factors resulted in cultural continuity. He began to doubt whether much could be learned about ethnicity from archaeological data alone or whether ethnicity was even a concept that could be central to the study of prehistory.[19] During subsequent years, archaeological thinking continued to address issues of change but began to examine these from the perspective of the systems that make up a culture. Such approaches characterized the so-called New Archaeology, which dominated the study of archaeology largely until the 1980s,[20] and equally did not focus on ethnic identity, or even on other social identities. Rather, their preoccupation rested in holistic systemic views of culture, cross-cultural generalizations, and culture's relationship with environmental, technological, and economic factors, rather than a specific culture's social aspects (ideologies, religion, etc.) or historical contexts. This is despite the development of diverse schools of interpretation in archaeology during these years, such as Marxist perspectives (especially in the Soviet Union and to a lesser extent in postwar Italy).[21] Thus, studies of identity and identities were overlooked by these approaches, which emphasized the processes of culture development rather than the social lives of those of the cultures under examination.[22]

During this period, classical archaeology, although no longer an Antiquarian pursuit, nevertheless continued to emphasize its artefacts as typologically ordered art, especially within the sphere of Greek archaeology,[23] remaining largely unconcerned with interpretations that regarded the objects and their styles as reflections of culture in material and visual forms.[24] Thus, little headway was made in the study of ethnicity, or indeed of other forms of social identities, despite a burgeoning interest in the overseas settlements of the Greeks and Romans.[25] Rather, such sites were intellectually trawled for information about the development of homogenized concepts of Greek and Roman culture and artistic output; indeed, such unified models of culture dominated in classics itself during this time.[26] The influence of modernist beliefs during this period is reflected elsewhere in the humanities, and across the social sciences as well.[27]

By the 1980s, critical momentum overflowed across the social sciences in Western scholarship with a backlash against such systemic methodologies. In classical archaeology (which by now in North America and the

United Kingdom was beginning to become lodged between the separate disciplines of archaeology, classics, and art history, each of which followed its own theoretical trajectories)[28] and ancient history, this can be seen in a shift of interest to the more social interpretations that could be inferred from a text or drawn from material and visual culture, by which artefacts, art, and texts began to be seen widely as the meaningfully constructed material representations and literary/historical products of a culture.[29] These could then be viewed as reflections of various social meanings, including ethnic identity, though not exclusively so. The emphasis since this paradigm shift has been on the interpretation of the social meanings inferred from a critical analysis of texts or gleaned behind the design, manufacture, uses, and deposition of styles and material from the past, which must be regarded holistically as aspects of material and visual culture, be they as small as a single object or as large as an empire. This has given rise to a number of perspectives by which the same text, artefact, or work of art may be read, such as for gendered interpretations,[30] power through agency,[31] or for extrapolating the experiences of the non-elite,[32] frameworks often garnered from other disciplines, such as sociology.

Postmodernism and the Study of Identity

The variety of approaches to the material and visual pasts, which articulate different aspects of the social past (focusing on gender, age, class, on individuals as agents, or the voices of the colonized, to suggest but a few), is one facet of the wider postmodern movement prevalent in Western intellectual thinking since the 1980s. The very name 'postmodernism' implies a development beyond the ideals of modernist thinking,[33] which focused on metanarratives and world systems. In contrast, postmodernism witnesses, embraces, and thrives upon the fragmentation of the very master narratives that guided modernity. Within the movement, there is thus an emphasis on decentring, on diversity, on otherness, and hence on the local. Postmodernists have sought to break down the power balances and interdependencies that bind together groups of people, emphasizing instead variety at a more vernacular level, where pluralities can be placed alongside each other without hierarchical distinction.[34] In conjunction with postcolonialism, this encouragement of

pluralities was in many cases explicitly supported in order to give others (once labelled in modernist discourse as 'the other') a voice. Inevitably, such an approach, which deliberately contests the hegemony of 'dead white European males,' threatens the very foundations on which our visions of the classical world have been built. At the same time, some regard postmodernism as a particularly Western ideology, and explicitly as a purely cultural phenomenon expressive of an evolution of Western capitalist society.[35] For some classicists, postmodernism's connection to capitalism renders it redundant for exploring the classical world.[36] This volume, however, seeks to explore ways in which, while acknowledging the artificiality of borrowed models, postmodern concepts of identities can reinvigorate our understanding of personal and collective identities in antiquity, and stimulate a reconsideration of the material we study. The present collection of case studies interrogates the assumptions we make when we discuss identity and explores how various postmodern models of identity may be used to forge more potent interpretations of how material and visual culture was created and manipulated in the past.

One of the most influential texts in reassessing ideas of 'the other' was Edward Said's *Orientalism*,[37] which highlighted how the West produced and circulated knowledge of eastern Mediterranean cultures over time to accompany, enable, support, and maintain colonial power in the Middle East and by extension elsewhere. The colonial discourse Said highlighted promoted a timeless opposition between Western and non-Western peoples and circulated ideas that encouraged the Western subjugation of the supposedly less-civilized Oriental populations. By highlighting this discourse, Said was able to demonstrate that other narratives could be told that shed a different perspective on cultural practices, traditions, beliefs, meanings, and intentions. In breaking down the Western metanarrative, Said opened a door that enabled non-Western perspectives to articulate themselves in broader spheres. (It should be pointed out that Said was explicitly opposed to and critical of Western metanarratives rather than politically neutral to them, and critics of his work have emphasized his double standard in priorities; see especially Bernard Lewis.) It is from this vista that we see the rise of subaltern and postcolonial studies, which seek to draw out the voices of the others, the oppressed, those not the drivers of the metanarratives of Western capitalism and colonialism.

This explains the particular emphasis among ideologically postmodern scholars and writers on identities and on the impact colonial domination has had upon local cultures.[38]

For much of this period, archaeological and historical scholarship's interest in identity has remained largely focused on the identification and development of specifically ethnic, or national, identity as reflected in material culture or elucidated through textual evidence of genealogy, linguistic diversity, and myth-history.[39] Art history, particularly where concerned with the ancient world, has similarly emphasized ethnicity, especially with regard to power.[40] Cultures have often been viewed as indicators of ethnicity, defined as a self-conscious identification with a particular social group.[41] One might argue, however, that ethnicity is an active designate of an explicitly political nature, whereas a cultural identity arises from a broader social patterning. Sociologists have noted that it is easier to identify a common ethnic core where there has been a long-term process of national formation,[42] which by its nature is borne out of political direction. This can be applied to the past as much as the present, for ethnicity must be constituted in the context of specific cultural practices and historical experiences that provide the basis of the perception of similarity and difference.[43] These experiences must inevitably be tied to events in history that can be deemed political, having affected cultural landscapes and resulted in the need for cultural groups to distinguish themselves from one another. This is not to say that ethnicity and culture are strictly correlated. On the contrary, an ethnic group is, in fact, a fluid, dynamic, and contested form of identity, and one that is embedded in economic and political relations.[44] In extinguishing the Romantic passion for ethnicity as biological essentialism, such ideas place new emphasis on the active relationship between 'ethnicity' and material culture.

Thus, some archaeologists, ancient historians, and art historians have tried to outline methodologies for extrapolating markers of ethnic identity from the material record of the past. For some, these are reflected in a set of specific defining criteria, particularly a common myth of descent, territory, and shared history, with secondary indicia including shared language, religious practices, and even biological features.[45] It could be argued, in fact, that a sense of home is sustained by collective memory, which itself depends upon ritual performances,