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O Brave New World

A Look at Identity and Dissonance

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> If we wish to make a new world, we have the material. The first one, too, was made out of chaos.
>
> —Robert Quillen

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Miranda, raised alone by her father, Prospero, in exile on a remote island, finds her world turned upside down by a shipwreck that brings people to her home. For Miranda, who has known no humans other than her father for as long as she can remember, encountering these men is completely at odds with her familiar experience. Amazed by the vast diversity with which she is suddenly confronted, she cannot help but exclaim

> Oh, wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
> That has such people in't!

Miranda's sudden transposition from her accustomed isolation to a populated world placed her in a vastly divergent and sharply contrasting new environment. This type of dislocation, though widely diverse in form, is a common human experience. Although Miranda found wonder and joy in the transformation of her world, the experience of such contextual disruption is more often one of chaos and dissonance. This book seeks to gather the experiences of people and groups who share this common thread of adapting to "brave new worlds." It was inspired by the recognition of a unity in the ostensibly disparate work of colleagues: human adaptation to

environments that are in some way dissonant with the familiar world—adaptations that, at least in part, take the form of the production and reproduction of identity.

The history of the modern world is one of dissonance. Oxford Dictionaries (2016a) describes dissonance as a "lack of harmony" resulting in a "tension or clash." The processes of power that have shaped this world—colonialism, capitalism, enslavement, and the like—create contexts of dissonance, where people's lives and often their very bodies are uprooted, disrupted, usurped, and irrevocably altered. These are not new things, but their influence has broadened immensely since the first Europeans landed on the shores of the New World and proceeded to conquer much of the globe. The speed of modern communication, transnational travel, and global trade has merely served to deepen these effects.

The impacts of globalization on the modern world arise from forces set in motion hundreds of years ago. Contexts of dissonance exist today as much as they did at the height of European colonialism, and the studies in this book are relevant to contemporary issues, such as economic and corporate colonialism, military conflicts, human smuggling and modern slavery, and the disparities of wealth that exist throughout the world. As we write this, dissonance surrounds us. Europe is flooded with millions of refugees displaced from the Middle East by conflict, the result of the colonial division of space and of modern imperialism. The US presidential administration continues efforts to keep migrants out of the country based on racialized tropes of religion, ethnicity, and nationality. Threats of terrorism are exploited by politicians to create climates of fear. Corporations and financial institutions manipulate the global economy, producing instability and anxiety at the very core of people's lives. The very foundations of Western democracy seem at times to be in danger of collapse as right-wing, ultranationalist forces gain influence and power.

The following 12 chapters are case studies of the identities of individuals, neighborhoods, communities, or entire societies living with and within contexts of dissonance. The subjects range from Dutch abolitionists in Brooklyn, New York, to a Creole plantation owner in Montserrat, to sex workers in French colonial Algeria, to Romans and Britons on the Romano-British frontier. The societies and individuals discussed in the book had to navigate uncertain and changing terrain in order to survive—and hopefully thrive—in their respective environments. The authors lay out the ways their subjects creatively addressed the disruption, and often violence, that pervaded their lives.

All of the authors approach their sites or subjects through the interpretive lens of identity. We recognize that identity has been in vogue in the social sciences in the past 20 or so years, but the concept's popularity (and, perhaps, overuse) does not mean that it lacks value. The fashionableness of the term seems to us to have resulted in a muddying of what it is that "identity studies" are actually studying, where often it can be difficult to pinpoint how identity is being defined and/or applied, or even why it is relevant. This is not meant to discount the many excellent articles and books that have been written on this topic, such as Voss (2008), Insoll (2007), Casella and Fowler (2005), Díaz-Andreu et al. (2005), and Jones (1997), but to argue for identity's continuing usefulness where clearly and rigorously applied. We thus begin this introduction by tracing the concept of identity to its root meanings and discussing the basic components that are essential to a full understanding of the word. We attempt to provide a well-articulated and accessible explanation of these concepts to introduce them to students or other interested readers who do not have a background in identity theory. We hope that the diverse case studies in this volume will also be of interest to practicing archaeologists and scholars in further understanding the application of identity to archaeological contexts.

What Is Identity?

"Identity" comes from the root Latin word *idem*, meaning "same," and in early usage in the late sixteenth century, it meant "the quality of being identical" (Oxford Dictionaries 2016b). We can trace the development of the word as it broadened to incorporate the idea not just of a likeness, but of an *active affinity* for a thing because of that likeness ("identifying" with it). In modern usage, the term not only conveys an affinity for something but embodies the whole person: "who or what a person is" (Cambridge Dictionaries 2016; also Merriam-Webster 2016; Oxford Dictionaries 2016b). This includes intangibles that define us, such as "qualities," "beliefs" (Cambridge Dictionaries 2016; Merriam-Webster 2016), and "characteristics" (Collins Dictionaries 2016; Oxford Dictionaries 2016b).

Interestingly, some definitions have moved from the word's root meaning of "sameness" to its polar opposite, difference. Cambridge Dictionaries (2016) defines identity as "who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group *that make them different from us*" (emphasis added). Merriam-Webster (2016) similarly asserts that identity is what "makes a person or group *different from others*" (emphasis added). This paradoxical meaning captures

the complexity of identity. It can be many things at once: both unifying and divisive, internal (an individual's personal beliefs about her identity) and external (an individual's publicly expressed identity), imposed (identity assigned by others) and expressed (identity formed in individual practice), and personal (individual) and social (group).

This definitional tension between similarity and difference in conceptualizing identity has played out in a range of scholarship. Barth's (1969) classic study of ethnic groups was among the first to theorize ethnic identity as being constructed in relation to difference. Ethnicity is articulated at the boundaries between groups, when it becomes necessary to define group membership (in essence, by recognizing sameness)—for example, in response to resource competition. Jones (1997) also argues that ethnic identity is constructed in encounters with others, which is how actors become aware of commonalities and differences and examine and rationalize their own cultural predispositions. Perhaps, as Voss (2008:14) argues, identities are "suspended within the tensions . . . between similarity and difference."

Some scholars suggest using the term "identification" rather than, or in combination with, "identity" (Hall 1996:3; Voss 2008:14). This term stresses the active process of recognizing and affiliating with sameness. Casella and Fowler (2005:8), however, argue that "identification" is not "identity," as the former is a temporary process, whereas identity itself is "more elusive." Along those lines, we view identity as incorporating an aspect of self-conceptualization. It is thus not just a process but a thing, and while identity is never static, it is not wholly ephemeral or transient, as it is constructed from embodied cultural knowledge and personal experience.

Identity cannot be discussed without acknowledging the dynamics of power that play a role in its formation. In the daily acts through which we fashion identity, structures and dynamics of social power are created, reinforced, and challenged. Identification practices "follow and (re)produce the contours of power in social life" (Voss 2008: 14). Individuals or social groups may identify with, or be assigned, identities based on the level of control they hold in a particular context. As Bourdieu's (1977) work reveals, this level of control derives from the value of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic resources (or "capital") that people possess and use in relation to one another. People, structures, and institutions that hold power in a society can limit the control individuals and groups have over their own identities.

Even within unequal relations of power, however, people and groups have the capacity to shape what they are. Identity is not simply who someone is

but who someone *chooses* to be—an active *agent* in decision making, even when choices are made within the confines of particular cultural structures external to, or internalized by, individuals. Therefore *agency*, a key term in understanding identity, can be defined as the capacity for action by individuals or groups, which may or may not be exercised to realize particular goals, but which can also reproduce existing cultural structures (Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Giddens 1984; Varien and Potter 2008).

An agent's choices are made within the constraints of the organizational structures of a society, such as kinship, marriage, gender roles, etc., that may or may not limit decision making. *Structures*, the other piece of this equation, are "rules and resources" (Giddens 1984:377) that both shape and are shaped by practice (Sewell 1992:4). They are largely "virtual"—"regular patterns of activity" that organize human relationships (Barker and Jane 2016:279, 648). This concept is abstract and elusive, but we imagine structure as interconnected systems, both tangible and not, that organize and bind society, including norms, institutions, beliefs, behaviors, and relationships. Agency and structure are mutually constitutive forces, where structures are learned and embedded in the (un)conscious and in the body (Foucault 1979) and can be re-produced by social action but can also be shifted, altered, or entirely changed by the action of agents.

An agent's choices may be made reflexively, meaning guided by one's self-interests, while others are nonreflexive and shaped by one's *habitus*. "Habitus" (Bourdieu 1977) refers to the unconscious practices and dispositions one acquires from being raised in a particular social milieu. Habitus does not compel a particular way of doing things but serves as a largely unconscious reservoir of ways of thinking and being that inform social action (Bourdieu 1977:72–73). Giddens' (1984) concept of "practical consciousness" is similar: a taken-for-granted knowledge of "everyday social practices which actors carry in their heads as tacit knowledge" (Haugaard 1997:103). We all have this basic "cultural competence," a sense of what is "reasonable and unreasonable" for us to do in a particular situation (Hodder and Hutson 2003:90). Giddens (1984:43) explains this competence simply as knowing how to "go on" in social activities. Combining Bourdieu's and Giddens' concepts, we approach identity with the notion that there exists in the individual a reservoir of social knowledge and predispositions to particular styles of thought and action that are instilled through the context of one's upbringing—for example, home, school, church, and media. These things inform our actions but do not dictate them.

The choices people make about who they are constantly shift as the

context changes (Casella and Fowler 2005:1–2), and as the choices are played out in social settings where they encounter acceptance, inquisitiveness, challenge, and/or opposition. This raises one final point for our definition of "identity," building on the fact that it is not fixed or static but manifests in fluid and changing ways. Any study of identity must account for its myriad aspects including, but not limited to, gender, ethnicity, race, class, nationality, sexuality, and age. These aspects are overlapping and interwoven, layered and inseparable, but each can be drawn on and adapted as needed depending on the context of interaction. Identity, then, is not one single thing but a vastly complex and continually shifting part of who we are as humans—one that, as we contend in the next section, is worth pursuing.

The Usefulness of "Identity" in Archaeology

Identity as a tool for analysis has been employed by various disciplines within the social sciences since the 1960s, when it was taken from its psychoanalytic perspective introduced by Freud in the early twentieth century (Atherton 2013:10). It eventually became popular with sociologists, and by the end of the 1960s, social scientists became interested in a previously ignored "set of enclosures," such as class, gender, ethnicity, and race (Hollinger 1997:336). By the 1980s identity entered the archaeological discussion, with debates primarily focused on single-use categories like gender, race, and class (Atherton 2013:10; Jenkins 1996). This restricted focus gradually shifted as scholars, following Bourdieu and Giddens, focused on the role of the individual agent (Díaz-Andreu et al. 2005:5), and inspired by this work, a range of "practice" theories began to zero in on the processes of daily practice (see Ortner 1984) that are implicated in identity formation. By the 1990s archaeologists started looking at identity as a potential framework for analysis and began both deconstructing individual categories of identity and recognizing the multiple categories sited in an individual (e.g., Díaz-Andreu et al. 2005; Meskell and Preucel 2004). As anthropological and archaeological theory moved into the twenty-first century, scholars began to see identity as a more fluid, situational engagement of subjects with their societies, and to question how, when, and where various aspects of one's identity intersect (e.g., Insoll 2007:6; Meskell 2007; Mullins 2011:115; Voss 2008:12). These methodological and theoretical discussions and debates within the social sciences around the meaning, use, and interpretation of identity continue to evolve and expand.