



The New Place and Understanding of Archaeology in the Context of Post-modern Science and Post-modern World

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Abstract

The re-emerging archaeological focus of different countries and regions and the new importance of archaeology in international relations represent an outstanding example of the new trends of the postmodern world. On the other hand, the new presence of politics, identity and culture in the scientific researches, as well as their close connections to all archaeological endeavors, represents a trademark of the post-modernity of archaeology as scientific discipline and an excellent illustration of the wider post-modern trends in social sciences and humanities. This study illustrates the new role and importance of archaeology in the postmodern world, but its main aim is to locate the specific state of mind of the postmodern science that stimulates such global developments.

Keywords: post-modern science; post-modern world; archaeology; culture; politics.

1. Introduction

The archaeology, archaeological artefacts and archaeologically inspired products today play important role in both high and popular culture [1] of the rapidly globalizing and interconnected world. At the same time, they appear and appeal in diverse forms through different aspects of the culture of living in variety of national and regional contexts on all continents.

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They represent an integral part of the media and film production, the contemporary post-modern architecture, the systems of formal education [2], as well as national festivals, international presentations and touristic offers of different destinations [3]. The leading researchers in this and related fields have already explored the multiple forms through which the archaeology, archaeological material, hypotheses and narratives are infiltrated in our everyday life, like: "television programmes about archaeology, the Asterix series on many children's bookshelves, Celtic-flavoured holidays in Ireland, the megalomaniacal classical style in the business buildings erected since the late 1980s" or "the departments of archaeology, museums of archaeology, and heritage departments operating all over the world" [4].

However, under this multicoloured surface of easy detectable influences, interconnections, reinterpretations and commercial utilization lay hidden some of the most important aspects of the influence of archaeology and archaeological artefacts. The archaeological material, its interpretations and public commemoration have built over years important principals that transformed into decisive aspects of the software of our minds. Hidden in the forms of personal value systems, symbols of personal or collective identity or societal "traditions" and moralities the archaeological hypotheses and, in many cases, misinterpretations have become an element that exists and persuades all forms of contemporary human communication.

The deep connection and influence of archaeology on contemporary identities and politics has emerged as an important niche of the contemporary archaeological thought. It gained serious ground in diverse researches, both archaeological and non-archaeological. Today, many archaeologists have focused their attention on the complex relations of archaeology, culture and politics. These aspects have gained great new importance in the archaeological research of various periods and cultures, but even more in the analyses of the history and perspectives of the archaeology as a scientific discipline. On the other hand, this specific relation has provided interesting scientific dilemmas and plethora of information for many contemporary researches in other scientific disciplines, like the studies of nationalism, theory of international relations, studies of diplomacy, political science, cultural studies, etc.

Today, in the contemporary post-modern reality of the new millennium, looking back on the two centuries of birth and dominance of nationalism, we have enough material and critical distance to analyze some of the most important overlaps and interference of the history of archaeology and history of nationalism. One of the most dominant views and unison positions of the researchers of these processes is the understanding that both archaeology and nationalism have their roots in the specific historical developments on the European continent.

Yet, the relation and complex interferences of archaeology, politics and culture would have been less interesting for the new globalizing reality if they were to remain a phenomenon of local or regional importance. Instead, this complex relation and the wider dynamics that it triggers have spilled as a global disease through all continents transforming the cultures, identities and political relations in multiple ways.

This essay represents an analysis of the new position and understanding of archaeology as a scientific discipline, per se, but also as societal agency. It takes into consideration the transformed and constantly transforming paradigms of the post-modern science, the self-reflective nature of many recent scientific focuses as well as the

new emerging need for interdisciplinary approach as the only possible direction for anticipation of the multiple factors that influence both science and society.

This study gives a brief overview of the increasing presence of archaeology and archaeological heritage in the global relations of the contemporary post-modern world, but the main aim remains the theoretical focuses and paradigms of the post-modern science that emphasize the process of dramatic reappearance of archaeology in the global relations.

2. Methods and Interdisciplinary Approaches

The approach of any serious scientific analysis of the complex relationship of science, culture and politics has to be extremely mindful for any possibility of one-sidedness. At the same time, it has to provide a matrix that is wide enough to take into consideration the variables of multiple factors that influence this on-going exchange with complex implications for both science and politics.

This study introduces specific interdisciplinary approach, taking into account some of the new tendencies and scientific analyses in the fields of archaeology, history, IR, diplomacy, political science and studies of nationalism. This wide theoretical field is treated primarily through the review of the current and most recent literature of the different scientific fields, while other method of research is also used to illustrate some of the most particular developments. In this context, the study also uses the method of review of policies and secondary data.

2.1 Limitations of the study

This research takes an ambitious goal of answering some of the most controversial aspects of contemporary archaeology, wider field of science and society. It has a very wide focus, while its conclusions are illustrated mainly through the contemporary developments in four specific scientific fields: archaeology, theory of international relations, diplomacy and cultural studies. Thus, while it provides novel ideas and results and forward-looking approaches of research in the field, this study limits itself only to preliminary answers to these global trends. Additional wider or more specific research in this area would certainly open further dilemmas and hopefully point to this paper, not as an ultimate stage of the research, but as one of the important contributions in the development of this important scientific niche.

3. Results

In the last two decades, the contemporary social sciences and humanities went through a process of serious self-reflection that changed not only concrete understandings and hypotheses but also some of the basic premises of the development and growth of these scientific disciplines. This new stage of development of these scientific disciplines is many times referred to as post-modern science. While, as in the case of many other new stages of development of a certain phenomenon and process, it is many times acclaimed as its future, one of its most confusing characteristics is its dismissal of the concept of progress. Thus, the new post-modern science overthrows some of the fundamental principles of the modernity that gave the very meaning and the reason

d'être of the contemporary scientific work.

The concept of progress, as well as other values of the modern age, was built upon the cultural and political traditions of the Enlightenment. In the field of science it aimed towards emancipation of the scientific work from the restraints of all inherited traditions. This has opened a new possibility for independent development of sciences out of the wider creative contexts of the myths, religions and mystifications accumulated in the previous epochs [5]. The ideal of the modernity that gave great impetus to the development of numerous scientific disciplines was the creation of an "objective science" [5] that will not be influenced by society, but instead it will transform into a powerful tool in the quest for the absolute "truth" [6]. Thus, it will have the capacities to take over the place of the religion, and lead society in "progress" [5] and prosperity.

Yet, in the last decades the new post-modern tendencies in different scientific fields illustrated the illusionistic character of many of the "truths" of the modernity, as well as the artificially emphasized barriers of science, culture and politics [4], that are not supporting the scientific method, as much as they are supporting the traditions and the professional histories of different scientific disciplines already well established by the beginnings of the twenty-first century [6]. This development did not change just the paradigms of science, but it also changes rapidly the understanding of the existence and relations of people, societies and entities in the contemporary globalizing world. Thus, contemporary science and its post-modern nature transcends from by-product into an active agent in the creation of the post-modern world.

3.1 The global post-modern relations through the lenses of the post-modern scientific concepts

Today, after decades of search for new concepts and ideas for this important aspect of science, we are left with very few clues and prescriptions for the future development. One of the few visible impacts of this rapid deconstructive process is the widely recognized need to question the layers of axioms that represent the history of the concrete science, rather than the subject or process that it analyzes. Another, equally important consideration of post-modern science is the need for comparative and interdisciplinary approach in the research on most of the contemporary phenomena.

Thus, for example, today any analysis on the foreign policies, including the international cultural strategies, has to bear in mind the new focuses and viewpoints of the theory of the international relations (IR). The reasons behind such approach are rooted in the very nature of the scientific analyses. While the evaluation kit of the practitioners in planning and implementing policies operates mainly in the frames of the foreign policy strategies, national interest or public opinion and quality of life of the citizens, the scientific interest in foreign policy strategies is bearing in mind the wider global developments including new players, tendencies and global ideas. This approach is gaining additional validity in the contemporary relations, as the international processes and their protagonists are increasingly and actively influencing the national realities and through them the policies themselves. Thus, the evaluation of certain approaches and strategies in foreign policy from purely scientific point of view is closely related with the developments of the ideas and theories of international relations.

In this context, the foreign policies of a certain country or any country in international relations has been seen and analyzed much differently by the protagonists of the idealist and realist ideas in the theory of IR. In the case of the international cultural strategies, area often called international cultural relations, or simply cultural diplomacy, the post-modern tendencies in the theory of IR are of even greater importance. The new domination of the ideas of the constructivists in the theory of IR and the great emphases that they are placing on culture [7] as key factor in the international relations is giving new perspective to the whole area of cultural diplomacy. Thus, the constructivists do not place the dilemma of usage of culture any more just in the equilibrium between national interest and the common (shared) interest like in the previous scientific debates among the IR theorists. In contrary, for the majority of constructivists the culture or cultures of certain nation is much more dominant in the creation of its foreign policies than the economy or security. Even more, while many theorists in the past were appealing against the utilization of the culture in politics, because of the negative effects on the culture, the new viewpoints in this field argue that the national cultures are created, transformed and exist just in relation with the others in the international context [7,8].

These contemporary scientific developments are not limited in the area of the theory of IR. The transformations of both theoretical and practical approaches to diplomacy in the post-Cold War period were equally dramatic. Thus, while in the period of the Cold War the cultural diplomacy was frequently considered as just another facet of the wider concept of public diplomacy, today many theorist and practitioners see the cultural diplomacy as different, wider or more effective tool than the related public diplomacy. The factors which lead to such development are connected with the intensive transformation of the global reality, as well as the great transformations of the principles and approaches of the social sciences. The new global challenges that the diplomats and diplomatic systems are facing in the post-Cold War era, including international, regional and intra-national conflicts, as well as terrorism, migrations and other international challenges are closely related, dependent and in many cases deeply rooted in culture, cultural differences and misconceptions.

The response to such challenges of both practitioners and scientists is a great global urge for cultural dialogue, as well as profound research and understanding of the concepts and practices that create, influence and transform cultures. In this context are the considerations of many renowned practitioners and scholars, like Jan Melissen, who reminds us that: “The practice of cultural relations has traditionally been close to diplomacy, although is clearly distinct from it, but recent developments in both fields now reveal considerable overlap between the two concepts” [9].

3.2 Archaeology through the self-reflective and interdisciplinary magnifying glass of post-modern science

The developments of the social sciences and humanities have gained new weight in the post-modern world. The archaeology is by no means an exception. But before they acquire their rightful place in the post-modern global reality, they are obliged to confront with some of the biggest misconceptions that they created or that they are founded on. This self-reflective process moved the science from the modernity to a new post-modern reality, where the paradigm of “objective” science, uninfluenced and independent from the social and personal context, is replaced with an intensive research of the interactions and by-products of complex, but constant, relationship between science, culture and society.

In the field of archaeology, the most prominent researchers [10,11,12,13,20] and editions [14,15,16,17], have not just anticipated the novel approach from the last decades of the twentieth century, claiming that “most archaeological traditions are probably nationalistic in orientation” [4,5], but also extended such theses, arguing that “all archaeological traditions were originally nationalistic”, motivated and in mutual relationship with nationalism and other collective identities and the political opportunities [4].

Therefore, today, while a massive body of literature is analyzing the effects of society, politics and culture over the development and the professional history of archaeology, the other side of this relationship becomes equally appealing scientific focus. It becomes obvious that the influence of archaeology, archaeological artifacts and narratives over the wider area of identities, cultures, values and mindsets, makes it profoundly important aspect of the international strategies, branding efforts and other foreign policy goals of different countries.

The now postmodern archaeology is showing clear signs of awareness that no matter how deconstructive and self-critical it becomes, its work, analyses, hypothesis and artifacts will continue to inspire, influence and transform identities, culture and relation on a global scale.

4. Conclusions

This study anticipates the increased importance of archaeology, archaeological hypotheses and artifacts in the global relations of the postmodern world. Yet, its main focus is to open discussion and provide some preliminary conclusions on the other side of the complex relation between science and politics. Thus, instead of reaching towards societal developments, it makes a wide overview of the developments in the postmodern science, and especially in the wider field of social sciences and humanities.

The study analyzes the great magnitude of changes in the very premises of these scientific disciplines. It suggests that the influential conclusion of the renown American orientalist Edward Said has transformed not just into pathway but also a prophesy for the post-modern science. Today scientists of numerous fields acclaim the statement and build their new hypothesis with no reservation on the axiomatic premise that “no one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life . . . there is such a thing as knowledge that is less . . . partial than the individual . . . who produces it. Yet, this knowledge is not therefore automatically nonpolitical” [4].

Thus, the contemporary developments and role of archaeology in the post-modern global society is not just a product of the needs of the contemporary society or societies. It represents as well an autonomous development of science, or rather a development that represents the understandings and the state of the mind of postmodern scientists.

Scholars that argue on the future of archaeology today bother less with the insulation of this science from external influences. They rather analyze and suggest pathways which would lead to active and productive place and role of archaeology, its products and byproducts in their constant interaction with society and international politics.

This new developments and role of archaeology in the post-modern world are well illustrated in the words of the Director of Stanford Archaeology Center, Professor Lynn Meskell. She argues that even though in its modern stage of development “archaeology has traditionally separated out studies of our dead subjects from the field’s contemporary valences; yet the two domains emerged in tandem and are epistemically interlaced.” At the same time professor Meskell emphasizes that in the new postmodern phase of development “archaeologies of identity, past and present, represent one of the most significant growth areas in our discipline.(archaeology)” [18].

Finally, many contemporary researchers in the field of archaeology, history and related sciences underline that through their professional history, from the nineteenth century until today, these disciplines have been instrumental in the creation of grave misconceptions and ethnically and culturally motivated hatred. Therefore, it is their responsibility to take part in the deconstruction of certain misunderstandings and the wider global dialogue [19]. In the words of some of the protagonists of these contemporary scientific trends, “they represent our (archaeologists’) contemporary engagement with other fields and audiences and fulfill part of our ethical responsibility as public figures charged with the trusteeship of the past” [18].

5. Recommendations

The new post-modern world is intensifying its interests in the field of archaeology and the artifacts and narratives connected to or interpreted by this scientific discipline. The resources dedicated to this field of research are growing and the only dilemma in such context is if the archaeologists will be the main winner of such development, or they will lose the attention and the privileged position in the “trusteeship of the past”. In this context, the analyzes and conclusions of this study point out four general areas that might be used as recommendations from archaeologists and the creators of cultural and other policies.

1. Therefore, archaeologists and the archaeology in its postmodern stage of development are obliged to find capacities to utilize the new focuses, principals and tendencies of the intensively transforming global post-modern world.
2. Archaeology as a science as well as a societal action has to transform itself and evolve rapidly in order to grow as a science and keep the pace with the transformation of the contemporary world.
3. Archaeologists are obliged to continue on the path and develop some of the most important advances of the post-modern development of this discipline. This includes the strongly skeptical and self reflective mode of the archaeology in the last two decades, but also the awareness that the results of the research of the past are always interconnected with our present and our aspirations and visions for the future.
4. Countries around the world increasingly utilize the materials and narratives connected to archaeology. But the dialogue of the PR, political and diplomacy strategists with the competent and open-minded archaeological professionals will certainly bring added values and longer lasting results of such policies. In this context, the foreign policy strategists have to understand that the differences between the promotion of archaeology and different forms of pseudo-archaeology closely resemble the relation of public relations and cultural diplomacy. Thus, while the narratives developed by pseudo-archaeology might look more flexible, usable and efficient to the political strategists, the real value of these investments is very limited and, as any false message produce, they result with long-term mistrust by the partners and audiences in the international

relations. On the other hand, while the researches and work of archaeologists takes additional time, effort and resources, the effects of such investment from the states and the creators of policies might be long-lasting and profound. The wider and argumentative debates based on the scientific methods bring not just serious and widely supported results, but also a meaningful medium for cultural exchange that might be used in furthering the global awareness for the interests, values and capacities of a certain society.

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