

Education, memory and heritage: educational actions in museums and the teaching of History

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RESUMO

Neste artigo, apresentamos como as categorias próprias da produção historiográfica e do campo da educação deram suporte teórico e metodológico ao desenvolvimento do projeto de pesquisa e extensão que norteou a ação desenvolvida no Memorial da UFRPE, museu mantido pela Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco. Com base nessas referências, produzimos um discurso museográfico e um conjunto de ações educativas sobre o passado que – sendo passível de diferentes leituras por parte do público – pretende dar espaço para a construção de novos significados ao passado da community retratada.

Palavras-chave: patrimônio histórico; ações educativas; memory.

ABSTRACT

In this article we show how categories from historiographic production and the field of education provided theoretical and methodological support for a research and extension project that guided actions carried out at the UFRPE Memorial, a museum belonging to the Rural Federal University of Pernambuco. Based on these references we produce a museographic discourse and a set of educational actions about the past – which are subject to different interpretations by the public – with which it is intended to allow space for the construction of new meanings of the past to the community being portrayed.

Keywords: historical heritage; educational actions; memory.

During the first semester of 2009 we coordinated the team working on the UFRPE Memorial (an institutional museum maintained by the Rural Federal University of Pernambuco) in the design and mounting of the permanent exhibition entitled ‘UFRPE: teaching, research and extension activities.’ As a result of this action, in the second semester educational actions were designed and prepared (aimed at publics of different age groups) which strengthen the discourses and the meanings of the past in this third level teaching institution.

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In this article we present some theoretical reflections arising out of the research and extension project which guided the use of the museum as a space for the application of theoretical references for the production of historiographic discourse and the diffusion of a determined narrative of the past, with the aim of producing a positive collective memory for the community. Presented below is the registration of theoretical reflections produced during the implementation of this operation and what it taught us about the work of the historian in the field of museum education.

HISTORY AND MEMORY

The formalization of the practices of the preservation and diffusion of institutional memory is increasingly common in contemporary societies. These actions are part of a movement which historians such as Jacques Le Goff have described as technification, a professionalization of the processes of the guarding and diffusion of the symbolic elements that unify social groups. The collective memory transmitted by the oral tradition typical of primitive communities cedes place to official memory, registered and documented, produced by specialists who possess the techniques and the authority to talk about the past.

Collective memory is part of the important questions of developed societies and developing societies, of dominant and dominated classes, fighting for power or for life, for survival and for promotion.²

Individual memory, understood as the cognitive capacity to evoke absent material or symbolic elements, is enriched, according to Maurice Halbwachs, by collective memory. This is produced and diffused by the statements that the authorized subjects make through their different social places.

There are, thus, motives to distinguish two memories, one of which we can call, for example, interior or internal, the other exterior – or also a personal memory and the other a social memory. The first is responsible for helping the other, since after all, the history of our lives is part of history in general. The second, naturally, is much more extensive than the first. On the other hand, it only represents to us the past in a summarized and schematic form, to the extent that the memory of our lives presents us with a much more continuous and dense panorama.³

Upon being recognized as a legitimate narrative of the past of a social group, a collective memory acts as a constituent element of a social identity. At this moment memory, more than being the remembrance of a past that is gone, points to the potentials of a future that is intended to be constructed. It was precisely due to this identity element that national states, ethnic groups and different institutions began to develop policies to register and disseminate their collective memory. For authors such as Pedro Paulo Funari,⁴ cultural policies of memory begin with the definition of the significant cultural objects for that community of meaning. Once selected these objects become metaphors which tell members of the community who ‘we’ are in relation to the ‘other.’

The set of cultural, material and immaterial objects inherited by contemporaries only comes to constitute the historic patrimony of communities when it is recognized as such by the subject who incorporates it into their experience. For Maria Cecília Londres Fonseca, this process implies attributing a symbolic value to objects which did not originally belong to them: “In the case of historic and artistic heritage, the value that permeates the set of goods, irrespective of their historic, artistic, and ethnographic value, etc., is the national value, in this case the nation.”⁵ In other words, by choosing an object for the memorial collection, we are removing it from its original context to attribute to it another functionality, that of evoking the past and articulating the discourse for this purpose.

In addition, the growing struggle of different social groups for the recognition of their identity has relativized official and officious discourse about the past, demanding, as Stuart Hall highlights, the inclusion of new identity discourses.

Some theorists argue that the general effect of these global processes has been to weaken or undermine national forms of cultural identity. They argue that there exists evidence of a loosening of strong identifications with national culture, and a reinforcement of other ties and cultural loyalties, ‘above’ and ‘below’ the nation state.⁶

As highlighted by Dominique Poulot, public policies that valorize the cultural goods of contemporary were linked by the recognition of these objects, first, by the local communities directly related with them.

In this aspect heritage does not stop being – as it always has been – the result of a conscious selection process; however, in this perspective, it is based on

particular appreciations. For inclusion in heritage, monuments or cultural sites have to be marked first of all with a positive signal by individuals or groups.⁷

It is in this movement that different social groups come to materialize their memories through the construction of places of memory such as monuments, museums and memorials. The objects that they keep are allegories of the past that it is intended to remember. This means that they are not the past itself, but cultural objects selected and ordered to produce a discourse about the past that meets the demands of the community to evoke its past. As Lucia Lippi Oliveira point out, “these days museums are enjoying a real rebirth, but their valorization is less tied to their contribution to science, since they are seen as privileged spaces for the construction of memory and identity.”⁸ In other words, unfortunately, museums to a great extent are thought of as places for exhibiting and not for the production of knowledge on the part of the research community. They come to be visited as places for a passive visit and not for active interaction on the part of the public.

The actions of historians in the field of heritage and in the space of the museum are thus not limited to articulating a coherent theoretical and technical discourse of the past. It is also necessary for this version to be articulated with the versions and demands that communities desire to legitimate about their past, about the memory they desire for themselves. Therefore, for the historian who works with institutional memory (or the memory of social groups) there emerges a dual responsibility: to speak of the past, explaining the conflicts and disputes found in it, at the same time that a positive identity is formed for the community portrayed.

MUSEUM AND EDUCATION

UFRPE Memorial is an administrative unit of the university whose function is to keep, research and publicize the history of this university, thereby contributing to the formation of the identity of its internal community – teaching staff, students and administrative staff – but also the neighboring communities. This body was created in the Federal Rural University of Pernambuco by resolution number 19/90 of Cepe and regulated by resolution 83/90. We can say that this structure emerged and was established based on a perception of the institution – of its professors, technicians and students – that the trajectory of the university its achievements and its role with the community could not be relegated to forgetfulness. Above all, these needed to be

remembered not only as motives of pride, but also as the stimulus to face the new challenges which third level institutions in the country are encountering. The building of 'places of memory,' as argued by Pierre Nora, is born out of the objective need of social groups:

The places of memory are born and live in the feeling that there is no spontaneous memory, so that it is necessary to create archives, that it is necessary to have anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce funeral elegies, register minutes of meetings with the notary, because these operations are not natural. It is for this reason that the defense by minorities of memories of refuge with privileged foci and which are jealously guarded does nothing other than raise to the incandescence the truth of all the places of memory.⁹

In 2006 the house where Ivan Tavares, Professor Emeritus of UFRPE, had lived was restored and adapted to house the UFRPE Memorial. Currently *Casa Ivan Tavares* has an exhibition room, an air conditioned room to keep significant documents of institutional memory, a technical reservation space, areas for research and the administration of the memorial. In March 2009 this space and its collection were found to be in disuse. This was when we prepared the teaching, research and extension project which outlined the directives for its reopening. At that time we wanted to update the actions of the memorial and to have the collection and material resources already available used, as well as to seek partnerships for new initiatives to make these space of memory an educational space. Once the teaching, research and extension project was mounted a work team was set up. This basically consisted of the coordinating professor and four grantees from extension courses,¹⁰ responsible for the organization of the collection, and two BIA/Facepe/UFRPE grantees¹¹ responsible for educational actions. Other voluntary students made important contributions for carrying out activities.¹²

With the references expressed above, this work group developed a methodology which overlaid three movements that, although implanted in order, were simultaneously thought of, ensuring that the demands of one stage were respected by the others:

1º) initial research: researchers from the team used theoretical and methodological references from different areas of knowledge (History, Sociology, Anthropology and Education) to construct subprojects using the

objects of the UFRPE Memorial archive to approach relations between education, memory and heritage.

2º) museum communication: the conclusions of the initial research were transformed into summaries capable of being incorporated into museological exhibitions. Therefore, what was of interest was not long reports, but selections of objects, posters, and labels, which can communicate the conclusions which in this way inform the memory of the academic community about the historic importance of the exhibited object.

3º) Educational program: both at the moment of research and of the mounting of the exhibition, it had to be kept in mind that the material exhibited was to be the object of educational action. The planning and the implementation of this action aims to increase the potential of the meanings of the exhibition and the historical value of the heritage and collective memory. Thus, the planning of educational actions in the UFRPE Memorial was initiated alongside the mounting of the permanent exhibition.

By problematizing the characteristics of educational processes, Carlos Rodrigues Brandão reminds us that they have many forms and formalizations. Each subject receives on a daily basis information coming from different sources of information and formation, which allow the cultural values and knowledge of the community to be appropriated.¹³ We thus understand that memory institutions – whether museums or historical heritage – also act as formative spaces of the subject.

In this exhibition objects and documents from the collection were used as elements to activate the memory of practices associated with three dimensions of university action: teaching, research and extension activities. Once the objects and information that are going to be part of the exhibition were selected, educational actions were designed that could allow visitors to get a better appropriation of the meanings of the pieces and data exhibited. Understanding the exhibitions as pedagogical strategies is what we propose, based on the thought of Paulo Freire that museological exhibition discourse is not something ready, but rather is something in construction.

Knowing how to teach is not transmitting knowledge, but creating the possibilities for its own production of construction. When I enter the classroom I have to be a being open to questions, to curiosity, to the questions of students, to their inhibitions; a critical and inquiring being, restless in the face of the task I have – that of teaching and transferring knowledge.¹⁴

The proposal of a museological exhibition that breaks with the idea of the transmission of finished knowledge and the passive reception of the message by the visitor presents us with the challenge of adventuring through the uncertainties of the construction of knowledge by part of the public. A challenge that demands methodological rigor, and an action designed to be more than directivism and dialogicity. As Bittencourt remind us:

The potential of a work with objects transformed into documents resides in the inversion of a 'look of curiosity' in relation to 'museum pieces' – which are often exhibited because of their aesthetic value and awaken the imagination of children, young people and adults, about a 'out of date' or 'backward past' – in 'a questioning look,' of information that can increase knowledge of men and their history.¹⁵

Educational exhibition actions were planned using the methodological steps proposed by Maria Cristina Horta (observation, registration, exploration and appropriation), which gain greater vigor at the moment when the educators involved in the construction of the museological exhibition recognize in Paulo Freire's categories of criticality, autonomy and reading of the world a tool for pedagogical work. Heritage education is a teaching methodology for the museum space which orientates the use of the cultural object to reconstruct the meanings of patrimonial goods with their communities. It was initially proposed by Maria Cristina Horta in the 1980s, from the beginning based on Freire's thought. Nevertheless, we understand that when the actual categories of this educational thought are explained in the planning and implementation of actions, they are qualified.

Heritage Education is an instrument of 'cultural literacy' which allows the individual read the world that surrounds them, taking into account the socio-cultural universe and the historic-temporal trajectory in which they are inserted. This process leads to the reinforcement of the self-esteem of individuals and communities and the valorization of their Brazilian culture, understood as multiple and plural.¹⁶

Based on these theoretical references, the team came up with various ideas for educational actions. They were debated collectively and in this way qualified for the use of the concepts of appropriation and signification of heritage. Following this, the planning and the structuring of these activities was carried out, based on Freire's premises of the 'reading of the world,' in other words, it

permits situations in which the object was problematized so that through this reflection the person being educated would produce a new synthesis of the experience undergone.

As a result of this methodology the grantees involved in the construction of the exhibition were guided in the preparation of the educational actions aimed at the memorial's public. A visitation script was created, as well as a set of three didactic games which use pieces and information from the exhibition. For this we followed Freirian methodology – a 'discipline' – aimed at the possibility of each grantee involved in the project making their position known in relation to the work carried out and understanding that they become not only agents of the structuring formative act, but also of the educational act that qualifies them to work with heritage:

In the construction of this necessary discipline, there is no space for the identification of the act of educating, learning, knowing, teaching, with pure entertainment, a type of toy with loose rules or with none, but neither is it an action that is tasteless, unpleasant or boring. The act of studying, of teaching, of learning, of knowing is difficult, and above all demanding, but pleasurable... It is therefore necessary for the students to discover and feel the joy built in to it, which are part of it and always available to anyone willing to give themselves over to it.¹⁷

For the construction of the visitation script a collective workshop was held in which each grantee participating in the mounting of the exhibition presented their version and their reading of the objects exhibited. Since each grantee had been made responsible for the selection of a set of objects and for the mounting of a thematic exhibit, it was natural that they would have greater reflection in relation to their part of the work. In this way, we made an initial script in which each grantee informed the others what was contained in each part of the exhibition. In this way a visitation script was prepared which, formed by the multiple writings and readings of different members of the group, could be orientated by the grantees in an individual form. In this visitation script for the university objects, it was emphasized that visitors feel stimulated to observe the pieces exhibited and relate them to their daily lives as students, since all the objects are directly related to teaching, to research and the extension activities of the university.

Also produced were three pedagogical games which explored pieces and information from the exhibition. The first strategy used to prepare educational

actions for the exhibition was to look at the rules of already existing games and adapt them to the didactic demands of the exhibition. With this purpose the grantees were asked to produce ideas from which various possibilities could emerge. From this set three games were selected which could be given to visitors groups at the end of their visits: Preservation Crosswords (inspired by crosswords), the Seven Damages Game (based on the seven differences puzzle) and the Memorial Sticker Album (which reproduces an album of collectible stickers). Each of these games was designed for a specific age group and sought to produce reflection on the objects exhibited, but they all worked with important abilities and knowledge for the field of heritage preservation.

Preservation Crosswords is a game aimed at the 7-10 year old public. It consists of a set of apparently random letters. The objective of the game is to find and circle the words *UFRPE*, *teaching*, *research*, *extension*, *heritage* and *preservation*. After finding the words the group discusses what was learned about each of these words during the visit. The aim of this action is to encourage visitors to relate the words of the exhibition universe to the practice of the preservation of the objects of memory.

The Damages Game is an adapted version of the differences puzzle. Starting with the visual discrimination ability, visitors are offered photos of two identical objects – in this case an optical microscope – one of which is in perfect conditions and the other damaged. After the identification of the damage– there is no established number of ‘errors’ to be found – the group debates why some of the objects are damaged and what this implies for the memory of society. The aim of this educational action is to show the importance of the preservation of the social, historic and cultural patrimony of the community.

The Museum Sticker Album is a game consisting of an Foolscap size page on one half of which are four rectangles and on the other lines for text. The participant is offered a box with photos of twenty pieces that are part of the exhibition, in other words the stickers to be stuck in the rectangles. After this each participant has to select which stickers, out of the twenty offered, they wish to stick in their album. After this choice, they are asked to write the meaning that they attribute to the chosen stickers. The aim of this activity is to make the visitor understand that a museological exhibition is a selection of objects that intend to narrate a story.

At the core of these games is the Freirian concept that it is possible to read not only the written word that appears on the exhibition labels, but also the social world of the museum and the pieces exhibited in it. The understanding and the

reading of a museological exhibition is not restricted to what is said by the monitor or to what is written on the informative descriptions. This information exposes the reading of the object constructed by the curators, but it must be given meaning by the visitor. The educational actions collectively constructed by the Memorial team propose that each visitor can read the objects exhibited there, based on their personal experiences and on the sensorial and affective relations that they maintain with the exhibition. Thus, a telephone which, for the curator, represents the administrative work of the university, can remind a visitor of the telephone used in the house of their grandmother. The sequence of cards shows that the transformations of this object serve to reflect on the (dis)comfort of learning in the university's classrooms.

NARRATE HISTORY OR RECOGNIZE THE PAST

We believe that the action of history graduates is not restricted to research, nor that those with licentiates in history should limit their educational action to the space of the classroom. To the contrary, the professional who studies the past must be present in two fields of action of the professional historian: produce discourse about the past and create situations for the diffusion of this discourse. With this aim, strategies have to be sought not to provoke the public into the passive acceptance of one particular utterance about the past, but to promote reflection about the human experience in time, thereby using the different languages that the contemporary world places at our disposal. Here we are concerned with reflecting on the action of constructing and diffusing a historical narrative in a specific institutional museum. Our intention was to stimulate the academic community to recognize the legitimacy of historiographic production in different locations – such as museums and schools – and with different supports – such as material culture, audiovisual, hypertext. We understand that the quality of the discourse of the historian is not measured by the linguistic trope used, but by the theoretical and methodological rigor used both to conduct the empirical investigation and to produce the formative discourse of the subject.

What we highlight in our action with the UFRPE Memorial is not the certainty of the version produced of the past or the quality of the theoretical references used – although we defend them –, but the fact that the terms assumed the challenge of producing a historic discourse that could be reinterpreted by the public, at the same time that the conditions for its diffusion were thought about, as well as the results of its appropriation by part of the

community that was the target of the research. In this way there was a commitment to measure the production of critical reflection on the past and the demand for an affirmative identity discourse.

To carry out our action with the UFRPE Memorial, it was necessary to articulate theoretical references that could orientate the production of historic discourse to theoretical references about the construction of knowledge in educational processes. This was the great challenge of this action. It was necessary to articulate a theoretical and practical work methodology that could orientate and order research activities, as well as to formalize rigorous educational planning aimed at the space of informal education which is the Memorial. At the same time as this the technical demands and the social responsibilities of tasks were articulated – study man in time and educate the subject in the present.

We conclude with the conviction that it is indeed possible to reactivate in spaces of memory their function as spaces for the production of scientific knowledge at the same time that it reinforces their mission as teaching institutions. In the case of history museums, it is possible to construct discourses about the past of the communities portrayed there, which can be reworked and re-signified by visitors. Spaces of memory can and should plan and develop educational actions that explore the meaning of the objects exhibited as a form of qualifying their social function for the maintenance, research and divulgation of social memory.

We also highlight that the activities giving meaning to the objects exposed gain greater impact when they are theoretically and methodologically based. Heritage education methodology and the theoretical references of Freirian thought, in particular the concept of reading the world, were shown to be a solid basis for the educational planning carried out by the UFRPE Memorial team. We believe that it was thanks to the theoretical references adopted – collective memory, social identities, reading of the world – that the educational action constructed did not become just a closed narrative of the past for a passive public. To the contrary, it is supposed that there is a possibility of the exhibition public being able to interpret the objects and to recognize them and the situations presented in the exhibition. As a result the work constitutes an effort based on the intellectual competence of this public to give meaning to the objects exhibited based on their personal experience.

NOTES

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³ HALBWACHS, Maurice. *A memória coletiva*. São Paulo: Centauro, 2004, p.73.

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⁶ HALL, Stuart. *A identidade cultural na pós-modernidade*. 11.ed. Rio de Janeiro: PD&A, 2006, p.73.

⁷ POULOT, Dominique. *Uma história do patrimônio no Ocidente*. São Paulo: Estação Liberdade, 2009, p.230.

⁸ OLIVEIRA, Lúcia Lippi. *Cultura é patrimônio: um guia*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. FGV, 2008, p.34.

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¹⁰ The extension course grantees were: Edson Bezerra Leite, Diego Gomes dos Santos, Felipe Anilton Gomes Barbosa and Luan José dos Santos.

¹¹ The Academic Initiation Grantees were: Carla Christina Soares Guedes da Silva and Anna Letícia da Silva.

¹² The voluntary students were: Bruna Pereira das Neves, Hecton Torres da Silva and Larissa Carla Oliveira da Silva.

¹³ BRANDÃO, Carlos Rodrigues. *O que é educação*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1981.

¹⁴ FREIRE, Paulo. *Pedagogia da autonomia*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1996, p.47.

¹⁵ BITTENCOURT, Circe Maria Fernandes. *Ensino de história: fundamentos e métodos*. 2.ed. São Paulo: Cortez, 2008, p.355.

¹⁶ HORTA, Maria de Lourdes Parreira; GRUNBERG, Evelina; MONTEIRO, Adriane Queiroz. *Guia básico de Educação Patrimonial*. Brasília: Iphan; Museu Imperial, 1999, p.6.

¹⁷ FREIRE, Paulo. *Pedagogia da esperança: um reencontro com a pedagogia do oprimido*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1992, p.83.

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