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Between Geographical Sameness and Historical Selfhood: Identity of a Historical Community in Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy

Considered in a historical context, the issue of the identity of social groups, communities, or nations brings many problems. Some of these are rooted in the discoveries that new research brings. Historians study them, trying to reach through various mediations what we used to

call identity. Other problems relate to existing narratives that historians confront. These narratives sometimes create a plurality of stories, and at other times confronting historians with an ideological and manipulation-marked only “true” story. Many of these problems are the result of the barrier of time separating historians from the communities they are examining for identity. The question of community identity is also one of the most important challenges for historians. This issue is a subject of a multi-faceted debate between extreme positions seeking a hard core of identity and those that postulate a nomadic identity or deny it any significance at all.

One of the thinkers who sought a way to describe identity between extreme positions was French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. In the final period of his philosophical work, he developed a theory of the narrative identity of the person. He framed and juxtaposed classical models of identity as

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sameness and selfhood, and introduced new patterns of identity described in terms of character and keeping one's word. This juxtaposition enabled the French philosopher to describe personal identity on a narrative plane taking into account not only aspects of being oneself but also of being another. Ricoeur reasoned that the otherness revealed in many passive phenomena has a significant impact on the formation of identity.

The purpose of the article is to try to apply Ricoeur's patterns of personal identity to a description of the identity of a historical community. Also from the earlier works of the French philosopher will be derived those aspects that relate to the identity of the community and the historians' work, which plays a key role in defining this identity. In his earliest texts, Ricoeur pointed out that in addition to the causal arrangement of facts and the discovery of the temporality of the past, the purpose of history is to understand the people of the past. It is a challenge for historians not only because of the time difference but also because there is a "specific distance which stems from the fact that the other is a different man"¹. That is why the historians' work, as Ricoeur emphasized, is like analysis, and only then can some form of synthesis build upon it, but never a comprehensive sense of history.

The article will hypothesize that the community identity can be considered between the categories of geographical sameness and historical selfhood, using the example of demographic and collective memory models of the community. These two categories refer to the classical philosophical criteria of identity described as "being the same" and "being self", which are related by historians to a multiplicity of aspects included in the geographical and historical criteria. By exploring these aspects in a web of interdependence, historians resemble narrators of a novel, who do not create a predictable plot but consider contradictions, twists, and conflicts. Thus, the work of historians acquires an ethical dimension, which is not without influence on the formation of the identity of the community to which they also belong.

1 P. Ricoeur, *Objectivity and Subjectivity in History*, in: *History and Truth*, transl. C. A. Kelbley, Evanston 1965, p. 28.

Geographical Sameness and Historical Selfhood

The question of the identity of the historical community can be considered in several contexts. On the one hand, it concerns the persistence of a certain group over time. This persistence changes as a consequence of many processes and activities taking place over time. On the other hand, such changes are contained within certain limits, leaving intact certain autonomy and specificity that make it possible to distinguish a given community as separate from others. The issue of the identity of the historical community, as well as the question of personal identity, appeared in the context of Paul Ricoeur's reflections dating from the beginning of his philosophical work. The French philosopher outlined a set of elements constituting a certain coherence of a community distinguished from others in the context of civilizational diversity. In the *Christianity and the Meaning of History* Ricoeur, considering the relationship between civilizational progress and Christian eschatology, writes:

We may look upon each of the “varieties” of mankind as a historico-geographical complex which covers a certain domain and which, although it may not be rigidly defined, has its own peculiar vital cores and zones of influence. A certain cultural affinity and unity of purpose bring men together in time and define their belonging to the same “space” of civilization. Thus the core of a civilization is a global will-to-live, a way of living; and this will-to-live is animated by judgments and values. Naturally we have to beware of reducing these concrete judgments to a list of abstract values (as when we say that the eighteenth century bequeathed us the idea of tolerance or equality before the law, etc.). Here it is a matter of values which are actually experienced and acted upon, and which must be seized in concrete tasks, in the manner of living and working, of owning and distributing goods, and of being bored and having a good time².

The multiple aspects that make it possible to distinguish a community from others can be found in the analysis of this passage. These aspects

2 P. Ricoeur, *Christianity and the Meaning of History*, in: *History and Truth*, p. 86–87.

can be divided into two categories: geographical identity and historical identity. Geographical identity includes a domain, vital cores, and zones of influence. These are certain aspects of the community that can be qualified as elements of sameness (Latin *idem*, French *mêmeté*, German *Gleichheit*). This identity model enables one to recognize some being as the same, despite the passage of time³. Ricoeur noted that *idem* refers to three different aspects of identity as being the same: numerical identity, qualitative identity, and uninterrupted continuity.

Numerical identity emphasizes the aspect of the singularity of being. Positive numerical identification indicates that the object we recognize at a particular moment in time is the same thing we experienced at another moment. We can recognize things belonging to us by their characteristic features despite the passage of time. Similarly, we can recognize certain groups by their symbols, flags or emblems, and national communities by the contours of their borders known to us from atlases and globes, the names of their capitals, or even by the anthems played at various ceremonies. However, the variability of symbols as well as national borders, the collapse of some urban centers, or great migrations can make it significantly difficult to recognize a particular community. Therefore, qualitative identity also plays an important role as an aspect of sameness. It emphasizes the preservation of identity despite the lack of numerical identity through similarity. Because of this aspect of identity, we can say that someone owns the same book, the same suit, or has ordered the same dish⁴. This element of being the same is often used in some identity narratives about communities; for example, intended to emphasize the continuity of certain nations between antiquity and modern times. It invokes geographic similarities, but brings the danger of reductionism used by some ideologies that seek to justify the superiority of a nation or group by referring to ancient civilization, while completely ignoring great migrations and movements of communities.

Although numerical and qualitative identity models usually work well in common-sense practical life for objects, they are sometimes fallible

3 P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, transl. K. Blamey, Chicago–London 1992, p. 115–116.

4 P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 116–117.

when used to identify individuals and communities. The passage of time which brings changes can cause various difficulties in identifying individuals and groups. Just as without detailed dendrological analysis it will be impossible to recognize a huge oak tree as identical to the acorn it was many years ago, recognizing an elderly person we know as a child in an old photograph might also be problematic. Likewise, recognizing the continuity of a particular historical community can raise many questions. The criterion of identity recalled by Ricoeur and introduced by Locke, which takes into account changes over time, brings a clue⁵. Defined as uninterrupted continuity, the model does not assume the immutability of things, but only orders the changes. This order refers to the relationship between changes, whose sequence indicates duration over time. In addition to the classic example of the ship of Theseus, which at each port receives a new part in exchange for an old one until all the elements are replaced, we can recall Hume's considerations. Reflecting on the changeability of personal identity, he refers by analogy to the continuity of the community's permanence despite change:

In this respect, I cannot compare the soul more properly to any thing than to a republic or commonwealth, in which the several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons, who propagate the same republic in the incessant changes of its parts. And as the same individual republic may not only change its members, but also its laws and constitutions; in like manner the same person may vary his character and disposition, as well as his impressions and ideas, without losing his identity. Whatever changes he endures, his several parts are still connected by the relation of causation. And in this view our identity with regard to the passions serves to corroborate that with regard to the imagination, by the making our distant perceptions influence each other, and by giving us a present concern for our past or future pains or pleasures⁶.

5 J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford 1975, p. 329–349.

6 D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford 1960, p. 261.

The criterion of uninterrupted continuity makes it possible to apply geographic aspects to attempts to recognize the communities as the same. Hume's description of the persistence of a community despite change seems to be most in harmony with demography, which is one of the aspects belonging to the geographic criterion. Demographic changeability is an example that, on the one hand, allows describing one of the most important characteristics of a community, and, on the other hand, allows for continuous variability. It also seems that the demographic aspect of *idem* is the most universal element belonging to all communities, unlike, for example, the area. Every group, the familial, local, religious or national one has its own members, who constitute the demographic structure. The censuses known since antiquity, seeing God's blessing in numerous offspring, and counting the faithful in churches are just some of the practices that highlight the importance of demographics of communities. Demography still affects the military strength or economic potential of a particular national community. It influences the vitality of a particular religious group or the strength of family connections.

Despite the undoubted usefulness of the model of *idem* for the study of community identity, the limitations of this model should be emphasized. Ricoeur noted that limiting personal identity to *idem* would reduce it to some distinguishing feature of sameness; fingerprints, irises, or DNA⁷. Similarly, an attempt to reduce the identity of a community to a geographical criterion would bring with it the danger of reductionism. Therefore, it is important to include a second model that makes it possible to consider the community in terms of selfhood.

In addition to the geographical criterion, which corresponds to *idem* identity of the community, we can distinguish the historical criterion in Ricoeur's analyses. This criterion refers not only to the past, but also includes its vision of the future, and a unity of purpose. Elements related to

7 Ricoeur pointed out the danger of reductionism when commenting on Derek Parfit's concept of identity. Parfit's analyses first reduce personal identity to *idem* and then remove any meaning from it. Parfit's conclusion that "personal identity is not what matters" is, according to Ricoeur, based on erroneous assumptions that ignore the historicity and temporality of identity – see D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford 1984, p. 282–293; P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 129–139.

the historical criterion of the community can be related to personal identity understood as selfhood (Latin *ipse*, French *ipséité*, German *Selbstheit*)⁸. This pattern, unlike the identity understood as *idem*, does not seek some core of permanence describable from the outside, but rather refers to the subject's relationship to himself or herself.

Ricoeur, in considering the identity formula of *ipse*, relates to the analyses of Locke, who attributed the category of sameness to human identity and the category of selfhood to a person. This distinction was related to Locke's postulated definition of a person who, as a rational and thinking being, recognizes himself as the same despite numerous changes. According to Locke, the key element of ipse identity is the act of reflection belonging to each person. It is revealed "when we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, meditate, or will anything"⁹. In all these moments, the person recognizes himself as the same despite different places and times. This consideration leads the British empiricist to conclude that it is the ability to be conscious and recognize oneself as thinking that creates personal identity. Ricoeur emphasizes that consciousness retrospectively extends into past events, giving it the character of a memory extended for some time into the past¹⁰.

It should be clarified that, contrary to Locke's theory, Ricoeur classifies memory as an aspect of *idem* identity¹¹. However, this seems to be more a result of juxtaposing the future-related and belonging to the *ipse* pattern of promise with the retrospective role of memory. In this context, it is important to emphasize Ricoeur's distinction between memory understood as *mnēmē-memoria* and as *anamnēsis-reminiscentia*. The former is a type of memory that appears in the subject involuntarily, without action on his part. This kind of memory, both individual and collective, is an aspect of *idem* identity. *Anamnēsis*, on the other hand, is a memory that requires the activity of the subject, who seeks what is past. It is a reflexive memory that is critical of what is revealed, and seeks to cover the facts. It seems that

8 P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 116.

9 J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 336.

10 P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 125–126.

11 P. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, transl. D. Pellauer, Cambridge–London 2005, p. 110.

anamnēsis-reministentia can be qualified as *ipse* identity, especially in all those cases where reference to it enables the subject or community to take action and plan activities. This prospective dimension always contains elements of reminiscence, just as a promise includes the aspect of not forgetting the moment of its making, which is in the past¹².

To clarify the connections between retrospective memory and prospective plans for the future of the community, we will use keeping one's word as a model of identity considered by Ricoeur in the context of personal identity. Keeping one's word is, according to the French philosopher, a model characterized by resisting the passage of time, changes in motivation, and disremembering¹³. The community also has an obligation to remember the given word. A promise can be made by representatives of the community, or by some collective in various forms of vows. Authorities declare on oath to care for the welfare of the population, judges swear to judge fairly, soldiers vow to fight for the homeland, doctors make the Hippocratic Oath to treat patients, firefighters, and police officers pledge to protect others. This memory of giving a promise enables individuals to keep one's word and thus allow them to take actions in the present and future. The structure of keeping one's word, which introduces a relationship with other people, makes it possible to relate this model directly to the identity of communities. The other person appears as the one to whom the word is given and as the one who expects the promise made to be kept. In addition, the model of the promise also brings into the picture a third person who is a witness to the word given and can testify to it. Thus, the model of the kept word refers to three persons, and thus to some form of community.

Hannah Arendt stresses that making and keeping a promise is a signpost and helps create a community identity based on trust, the alternative

12 More on the distinction between *mnēmē-memoria* and *anamnēsis-reministentia* – see M. Bugajewski, *Zagadka pamięci mimowolnej. Uwagi o teorii pamięci Paula Ricoeura*, in: *Między nauką a sztuką. Wokół problemów współczesnej historiografii*, eds. E. Solska, P. Witka, M. Woźniak, Lublin 2017, p. 143–149.

13 P. Ricoeur, *Filozofia osoby*, transl. M. Frankiewicz, Kraków 1992, p. 34.

of which is domination and control¹⁴. The model of keeping one's word contains a retrospective aspect relating to the moment of giving a word to another, and a prospective moment relating to fulfilling the promise in the future. Thus, the model of keeping one's word includes a memory of history, and a vision of the future is based on certain judgments and values. A promise is also an example of value lived and realized. According to Arendt, a promise can be the basis for the functioning of a community, and includes such relationships as justice and distribution of goods, guilt, and forgiveness. Analyzing the promise makes it possible to describe more of the references that occur within a community. On the one hand, this approach allows for a more comprehensive description of identity models; on the other hand, it poses further challenges to historians. These are related to certain heterogeneity of some historical communities, which often results from asymmetrical relations of their members marked, for example, by servitude or slavery.

Ricoeur increasingly emphasized the role of memory in the formation of personal identity in his later works. Although the promise contains a retrospective aspect, the analysis of the identity of the historical community highlights the aspect related to the memory of the past. The community's memory of its beginnings, a history rich in ups and downs is an important aspect of identity. This aspect also includes the willingness of community members to pursue the truth about the collective's past, and illuminate the darkness of history. The cohesion of a community's identity will depend on actions directed at uncovering the truth about its past or hiding it.

Demographics and Collective Memory

Identity as sameness and identity as selfhood should not be considered in separation from each other. Separation leads to reductionism by considering only *idem* and many aporias when identity is limited to *ipse* alone. Aware of these dangers, Ricoeur created new models of personal identity incorporating aspects of both *idem* and *ipse*: character and keeping one's

14 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago–London 1998, p. 237, 244–245.

word. Both models as shown above have the potential to be transferred to communities in the form of geographical and historical criteria, especially as demographic and collective memory-related models.

The first dimension is based on a certain set of characteristics that describe a community and can be referred to as a person's character. Character makes it possible to identify and recognize a person by certain individual traits viewed from the 3rd-person perspective. At the same time, the person perceives himself or herself in the 1st-person perspective as the one who is the possessor of this particular character¹⁵. The reference to the Aristotelian concept of virtues allows the French philosopher to consider the character in a temporal context. He gives it a history, comparing the character to layers of different habits and traits accumulated over the years. New habits are laid down like successive layers on top of old habits, influencing a change in character, while maintaining some links to old traits. The history of these changes is open to the future, and character, until death, does not remain complete. This dynamic is the point at which the narrativization of personal identity begins. A person is not recognized only by stable character traits, but rather by the moments belonging to history in which some traits were acquired or lost.

This model of identity can be successfully applied to a community, considered in a historical context. On the one hand, a particular community may be perceived by members of other communities as possessing certain specific and distinguishing features compared to other groups. These characteristics may be the community's size, territory, leading centers of place and culture, lifestyle, shared values, shared plans for the future, and reference to other communities. On the other hand, the community can view itself as the subject of certain characteristics. These views can be consistent or completely different. Over time, these views can change, just as the character of the community can change. Similarly, as an acting person shapes or loses certain traits according to Aristotle's theory of virtues, the character of the community also changes. However, the question should be posed as to whether the character of the community and what

15 P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 122.

geographically belongs to it is not something more involuntary than the character traits of a person. An example would be a person who is part of a community but abandons the lifestyle of the majority, or espouses different values¹⁶. In situation like this, a person may be falsely attributed some traits that characterize the majority of community members. In this context, the advantage of the demographic model, which describes the size of a community, is once again revealed. This model takes into account the diversity of changes and allows individuals to decide whether they want to belong to a particular group or renounce that affiliation. The demographic model reveals, in addition to *idem* identity, an overlapping *ipse* identity. This overlapping occurs when persons, in an act of reflection, recognize membership in a community, which they can either maintain, distance themselves from it, or renounce it altogether.

An analysis that does not consider the demographic aspect which includes the moment of reflection of the community members on their membership and focuses only on the character traits of the group would bring many problems. The moment of people's decision whether they want to continue to be part of the community would be eliminated. Such a decision is in relation to how individual members relate to the community, to the values, memory, and plans it represents¹⁷. Historians face the challenge of studying changes in the characteristics of a community, the duration of which is usually many times longer than the life of an individual community member. Thus, changes in the characteristics of a particular community may not only take on a much larger scale, but also change many times. Over the decades or centuries of its existence, a particular community may not only change in some one particular direction, but these changes may be more complex. Recognizing the community's characteristics by its members is another challenge for historians. In the case of communities that have not lasted to the present day, historians can only

16 For more on the involuntary modalities of subject identity formation – see J. Jakubowski, *Skończoność egzystencjalna: studium nad filozofią Paula Ricoeura*, Bydgoszcz 2017, p. 221–239.

17 It is necessary to emphasize the role of collective memory of the community which has a constitutive role of formation of personal identity of its members – see A. Warmbier, *Tożsamość, narracja i hermeneutyka siebie. Paula Ricoeura filozofia człowieka*, Kraków 2018, p. 307–318.

look for traces of evidence of how the community perceived itself and how it was viewed by other communities. On the other hand historians often have to struggle with official ideological narratives when they research the historical identity of communities.

The demographic aspect that takes into account the self-reference of people as to their membership in a particular group makes it possible to describe conflicts in a community and its divisions. Thus, it becomes linked to relations between members of the community or its subgroups. The demographic aspect also includes the reference of smaller groups to larger communities. This facilitates the study of non-obvious cases where a group only partially considers itself to belong to a community or where members of some group are associated with completely different communities. Historians' consideration of demographic data gives them tools of detailed analysis that also takes into account the moment of self-determination of new communities. It should also be noted that the demographic criterion is contained in the orders of recognition. Changes in people's membership in groups, self-determination of new communities, and disappearance of others are closely related to relations of recognition¹⁸. Just as some groups disappeared naturally, others were persecuted or conquered, which involved a fundamental lack of recognition. Similarly, some new communities were recognized by different groups, but others were denied this recognition on various levels related to law, religion, etc. Recognition, or its denial, has a significant impact on the formation of identity, which can be affirmed or denied by others from the very beginning¹⁹.

A collective memory of one's history is fundamental to the constitution and maintenance of a community's identity, whether it is a family, religious, ethnic, or national group. But the context of collective memory raises the problem of intersubjectivity. Ricoeur addresses it, emphasizing the danger of hypostasizing the collective and giving it the status of a subjective *Ego*. Rather, collective memory is submitted to intersubjective relations between members of the community, who preserve the possibility of attributing their

18 P. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 139–141, 203–216.

19 M. Drwięga, *Odpowiedzialna wolność*, Kraków 2020, p. 161.

own actions and memories²⁰. According to Ricoeur, the concept of collective memory is also related to the concept of collective consciousness, and is based on the objectification of memory in intersubjective exchange. These intersubjective relationships create a space for collective action, which includes the active search for the truth about one's past and modifying collective memory²¹.

The strength that allows a community to survive various crises, persecution, displacement, loss of territories and freedom lies in memory. The founding myth, the story told about the past reveals its power by opening up to the future a community that remembers its past. Thus, goals, desires, and actions will be linked to memory. Ricoeur emphasizes the temporality of reference, which consists of the past, present, and future of the historical community. „Such a present has a future made up of the expectations, the ignorance, the forecasts and fears of men of that time, and not of the things which we know happened. That present also has a past, which is the memory of past men and not of what we know of their past”²². The French philosopher points out that historians try to reconstruct past events and causal relations that people experienced at other times. In this way, their work begins to relate directly to other people, the communities they created, and ultimately to the identity of those communities.

This importance of memory exposes it to numerous manipulations involving ideological excess or deficiency of collective memory²³. The manipulations try to deprive memory of its aspect of active exploration and critical reference to the past (*anamnēsis*), in favor of passive evocation of specific memories (*mnēmē*). Some histories may be repeated and strengthened in memory by certain members of the community for specific reasons. Sometimes they are also idealized, hyperbolized, or attributed to the entire

20 P. Ricoeur, *Hegel and Husserl on Intersubjectivity*, in: *From text to actions. Essays in hermeneutics*, vol. 2, transl. K. Blamey, Evanston 1991, p. 244–245.

21 P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, transl. K. Blamey, D. Pellauer, Chicago–London 2004, p. 119. More about the problem of collective memory – see D. J. Leichter, *Collective Identity and Collective Memory in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, “Études Ricoeuriennes” 3 (2012) no. 1, p. 115–117.

22 P. Ricoeur, *Objectivity and Subjectivity in History*, p. 28.

23 P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 79.

community. In contrast, other events in history, particularly those that are painful or marked by ethical evils, may be forgotten, repressed, belittled, or falsely attributed to another group. A more difficult task faces historians in reconstructing the history and identity of a community in cases where its memory has been subject to numerous manipulations throughout time. Ricoeur points out that “the historian undertakes to «do history» (*faire de l'histoire*) just as each of us attempts to «remember» (*faire memoire*)”²⁴. A person discovers the truth about himself or herself at the moment of remembering what is forgotten. Similarly, the work of historians is not only to establish facts, but also to relate and present them, affecting the community to which history relates.

The model of identity related to collective memory understood as reminiscence (*anamnēsis*) and keeping one's word reveals the relationship to other communities and groups and to certain phenomena that, although part of a particular community, are marked by a certain otherness to it. This perspective on personal identity was outlined by Ricoeur in *Oneself as Another*. The French philosopher points to the role of otherness in identity formation. This otherness, which reveals itself as a phenomenon of passivity, is classified by Ricoeur as the categories of body, conscience, and Other²⁵. For the French philosopher, identity is not something self-transparent like Husserl's *Ego*, but takes into account the various phenomena of otherness mediated through a long path of reflection. The metacategory of otherness considered as a co-constitutive element of being oneself can also be transferred to the community. The historical community did not experience itself directly, and its identity was not constituted only by personal relations between its members. In the case of the historical community, the aspect of otherness also has a significant role.

In the case of a group, the dimension of otherness can reveal itself, for example, as a certain system of values established by the ancestors, the not always positive history of a particular community, or even certain facts and events of the past, which, although partially repressed from its

24 P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 57.

25 P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 317–319.

collective memory, still reveal themselves in the form of various traumas²⁶. The otherness of other communities was also important to the constitution of each historical community's identity. Relationships of recognition, the discovery of the traditions of other communities, and appreciation of one's culture were formed in relations with other communities. There are not many dimensions that would not be affected by a confrontation with another community. Beliefs, religion, philosophy, value system, morality, goals for a good life, art, architecture, and leisure are just some of the areas that were shaped by encounters with otherness. But the dimension of the otherness of a community can also be brought by certain prospective obligations rooted in past relations with other communities such as war reparations or other obligations; contracts and agreements. Sometimes these have a dimension of moral debt such as asking for forgiveness due to acts once committed. The inclusion of the dimension of otherness in the analyses is crucial to the study of the historical community's identity, as it affects the character traits and collective memory of the community. The community, like a subject, can take actions concerning other communities, and be subject to the actions of those other communities. These activities co-form character traits and internal relations, reflecting the group's selfhood. For example, the oppression of an entire social class can spread to relationships between subgroups, where the stronger one will oppress the weaker one.

Historical Story and Narrative Identity

Ricoeur's analyses show the multifaceted nature of the historical community's identity and direct his research towards narrative identity. Referring to Aristotle's *Poetics*, the French philosopher seeks to frame identity in the form of a story. He uses narrative tools that make it possible to explain and describe the contradictory characteristics and actions of both the person and the community. Ricoeur adopts the idea of life history that consists of many interdependent stories and events forming a coherent unity as

26 P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 78.

a narrative of stories. Historians become narrators when searching for the identity of a historical community. Many times they are faced with the challenge of combining what is concordance and discordance into a single historical story²⁷. Concordance is the principle of order and the arrangement of events, and discordance is the principle that places this concordance in danger by introducing various random accidents. They disrupt the initial order, but develop the plot forward²⁸. Ricoeur defines configurations as mediations that occur alongside the competition between the concordance and the discordance. It is the art of composition, which aims to show this incompatibility as compatible. Inscribing randomness and multiplicity of events into the unity of the story, and making sense of the narrative is possible through configuration. This unity can be simultaneously disrupted and dispersed by various coincidences and random events, which can be integrated into the story. The transition from life to unity is described by intrigue. It does not detach itself from life, but gives it meaning through the story of it.

The uncovered events by historians disrupt the created narrative while allowing it to develop. In the configuration of narrative history, historians include everything that normally acts as a disturbance of regularity. The setting of intrigue has a paradox embedded in it, which, thanks to the configuration, reverses the effects of random events and incorporates them into the realm of the probable or necessary. In this way, historians have the opportunity to make sense of the story, which at first may appear to be a collection of random events that are devoid of interaction with each other. Reconfiguration makes it possible to give, or rather discover that sense²⁹. It is a kind of re-reading that makes it possible to reinterpret certain facts, to look at them differently. A historian, while “longing for the enlargement and thorough exploration of history, he looks for them not in a rational meaning but rather in the complexity and wealth of connections between

27 P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, transl. K. McLaughlin, D. Pellauer, vol. 1, Chicago–London 1984, p. 42–43.

28 P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 141–142.

29 P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, transl. K. McLaughlin, D. Pellauer, vol. 3, Chicago–London 1988, p. 247–248.

the geographical, economic, social, and cultural factors”³⁰. By combining various facts and describing the connections between them, historians often unveil new meanings. History is presented in such a way as to explain the key elements of the story, why someone is a hero, and why a community chose such representatives or decided to become involved in a to conflict with another group. This is accomplished without overturning previous events or actions taken by the communities. Rather, it happens through modifications and changes. They occur as a result of refiguration, which is possible in retrospect and allows historians to look at these facts differently. Refiguration as a re-lecture has a constitutive dimension for the identity not only of the individual but also of the communities. Ricoeur emphasizes this by analyzing the history of the Chosen People, who built their identity based on a constant reading of their, ultimately written, history. Referring to Marc Bloch, Ricoeur notes that historians are observers of traces who do not restore the future but recompose and reconstruct the retrospective sequence of events. Rather, it is a kind of analysis that makes possible the arrangement of historical facts and makes them understandable.

He [Marc Bloch] is ever so right in maintaining that the historian’s task is not to restore things “such as they happened”. For history’s ambition is not to bring the past back to life but to recompose and reconstruct, that is to say, to compose and construct a retrospective sequence. The objectivity of history consists precisely in repudiating the attempt to relive and coincide with the past; it consists in the ambition to elaborate factual sequences on the level of an historical understanding³¹.

This re-composition not only makes it possible to interpret a certain history of a community anew, but it also influences the identity of historians and then of all who become familiar with this history, sometimes even of

30 P. Ricoeur, *Objectivity and Subjectivity in History*, p. 34–35.

31 P. Ricoeur, *Objectivity and Subjectivity in History*, p. 23–24

the entire community, especially if it concerns its history reinterpreted or unveiled³².

Time is an important function of a historical narrative. It makes possible the reconfiguration of past events and influences the present experience of their consequences. Ricoeur attributes to the story the function of Freudian “working-through” (*Durcharbeitung*) enabling the liberation from trauma, which is accomplished through the understanding of one’s history, and the recognition and acceptance of random events by a community³³. The reconfiguration of certain historical events repressed from the collective consciousness and community narrative often makes it possible to understand the past, and forces one to confront the actions taken by ancestors. This working-through of one’s history by a group also has the power to free one from the pathologies of collective memory that shape a false historical identity of the community. These pathologies of memory are often the result of painful experiences that, on the one hand, can be forgotten, questioned, and repressed, and, on the other hand, constantly brought out, recalled, and over-emphasized³⁴. Pathologies of memory can lead to obsessions of collective memory, which are likened by Ricoeur to hallucinations of individual memory in moments when an attempt to repress the past constantly brings the thought of the past³⁵.

The historical narrative can also be considered in the ethical field from the perspective of actions taken by historians. Ricoeur emphasizes that, despite the appearance of ethical neutrality, also the historical story is not morally indifferent. This lack of neutrality is due to the subjectivity of historians, who are not devoid of intentions and aspirations. Decisions of historians choosing to undertake a particular research topic are marked by certain curiosity. It refers to people’s actions and their motivations. Thus, historians make a certain valuation, which belongs to their humanity and

32 M. Bugajewski, *Historiografia i czas. Paula Ricoeura teoria poznania historycznego*, Poznań 2002, p. 101.

33 P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, p. 247–248.

34 More on pathologies of collective memory – see: A. Leder, *Przyśniona rewolucja: ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej*, Warszawa 2014.

35 P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 53–54.

makes itself known already at the level of some sympathies or antipathies. Particularly important in the study of the identity of the historical community will be the study of their values.

The historian's subjectivity takes on a striking prominence at the moment when, over and above all critical chronology, history makes the values of past men surge forth. This calling up of values, which is ultimately the only way of evoking man that is open to us since we are unable to relive what they lived, is not possible unless the historian is vitally "interested" in those values and has a deep affinity for the task. Not that the historian should share the faith of his heroes; in that case he would seldom write history but rather apologetics or hagiography³⁶.

The ethical actions of historians are also revealed in the form of repayment of historiographical debt to those who lived before them³⁷. There are also forms of history of victims such as Auschwitz that give this debt a unique dimension of the moral obligation not to forget³⁸. According to Ricoeur, historians who study history are like people who practice memory. Historians teach members of their communities to use a memory that does not just passively accept what is imposed (*mnēmē*), but seeks out and critically analyzes the facts of the community's past (*anamnēsis*). The French philosopher calls fidelity to this search for truth by historians³⁹.

Conclusion

The goal of historians' analytical work is often to describe the identity of the historical community. In this process, historians use narrative tools and the criteria of geographical and historical identity. The geographical criterion answers the question of sameness of the historical community.

36 P. Ricoeur, *Objectivity and Subjectivity in History*, p. 29.

37 P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 260–261.

38 P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, p. 186–189.

39 P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 55.

The demographic model, which belongs to the geographic criterion, also takes into account reflection on the membership of people in the community and allows a more comprehensive description of the group's identity. The criterion of historicity is related to the identity of selfhood and the model of memory (*anamnēsis*) understood as reminiscence. It reveals the complexity of identity, taking into account many aspects concerning the relationships between members of a particular group as well as interactions between different communities.

The internal dialectic based on geographical and historical criteria represented by models of demography and collective memory is revealed in the identity of the community developed by the story. These models give singularity to the community bringing the identity to a synthesis, which consists in incorporating randomness into the group's life story and aims at unity. In this way, imaginative variations are used by historians to construct and search for narratives. They enable the search for changes in the plot and actions of the community at the level of historical fiction.

Ricoeur completed his concept of identity by bringing it to the practical and ethical level, in which all actions in any story have axiological value. Geographical and historical models help to show the ethical implications of the community's actions. The story of the historical community can reveal the pursuit of good life through certain actions that form dispositions (virtues). But it is the historical model that takes into account collective memory that especially reveals the moral obligation to fulfill the community's promise to other communities and their members.

Ricoeur emphasizes that the entire past, including historical communities, their identities, and individual people, is part of our humanity. It can be experienced and relived by us as well.

History is therefore one of the ways by which men "repeat" their belonging to the same humanity; it is a sector of the communication of minds which is divided by the methodological stage of traces and documents; therefore it is distinct from the dialogue wherein the other answers, but is not a sector

wholly cut off from full intersubjectivity which always remains open and in process⁴⁰.

Our experience of the historical story also shapes our identity, enriching it not only with the memories of past events but also with the traits, values, and lifestyles of people belonging to various communities. This is why the historians' work is so important, which is not a recreation of the past, but rather research and analysis leading to the unveiling of the past with its uncomfortable and challenging historical facts that need to be rethought and sometimes "worked-through".

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Abstract

Between Geographical Sameness and Historical Selfhood: Identity of a Historical Community in Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy

The issue of the identity of communities considered in a historical context brings many problems. The question of community identity is one of many challenges facing historians. It is subject to a multi-sided debate between extreme positions that seek a hard core of identity, and those that postulate a nomadic identity or deny it any meaning at all. Concerning the thought of Paul Ricoeur, the article will hypothesize that community identity can be considered between the poles of geographical sameness and historical selfhood, based on the model of demography and the model of collective memory. These models relate to the basic philosophical criteria of identity, and allow historians to refer to the multiplicity of aspects that fall within the geographical and historical criteria. By exploring these aspects in a web of interdependence, historians resemble narrators of a novel, who do not create a predictable plot but consider contradictions, twists, and conflicts. Thus, the work of historians acquires an ethical dimension, which

is free from influence on the formation of the identity of the community to which they also belong.

Keywords: identity, community, history, memory, Paul Ricoeur

Abstrakt

*Pomiędzy geograficznym „byciem tym samym” a historycznym „byciem sobą”:
tożsamość wspólnoty historycznej w filozofii Paula Ricoeura*

Problem tożsamości wspólnot rozpatrywany w kontekście historycznym niesie wiele problemów. Do wyzwań, przed którymi stają historycy, zaliczyć należy również zagadnienie tożsamości wspólnoty. Jest ono poddane wielowątkowej dyskusji rozpościerającej się pomiędzy skrajnymi stanowiskami poszukującymi twardego rdzenia tożsamości a tymi, które postulują tożsamość nomadyczną lub zupełnie odmawiają jej jakiegokolwiek znaczenia. W nawiązaniu do myśli Paula Ricoeura w artykule zostanie postawiona hipoteza, że tożsamość wspólnoty może być rozpatrywana pomiędzy biegunami geograficznego „bycia tym samym” oraz historycznego „bycia sobą” w oparciu o wzorzec demografii oraz wzorzec pamięci wspólnoty. Nawiązują one do podstawowych, filozoficznych kryteriów tożsamości i umożliwiają historykom odniesienia do wielości aspektów mieszczących się w kryteriach geograficznych i historycznych. Badając te aspekty w sieci powiązań, historycy przypominają narratorów powieści, którzy nie tworzą przewidywalnej fabuły, ale uwzględniają sprzeczności, zwroty akcji i konflikty. Tym samym praca historyków nabiera znaczenia etycznego, wpływając na kształtowanie tożsamości wspólnoty, do której oni sami również przynależą.

Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość, wspólnota, historia, pamięć, Paul Ricoeur

