SOMETHING ABOUT CHILDREN

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The children brand

In the years 2005-2006 several important events happened, throwing light on the lives and conditions of children. The UN report on "The state of the world's children 2005" (Bellamy 2004) headed "Childhood under threat" points to the millions of children losing their childhood, and to childhood as the foundation of hopes for a better future. In 2006, "Museums and Young People" was chosen as the theme for the International Museum Day (ICOM 2005). Earlier a white paper on cultural heritage "Living with the past" had also been published by the Norwegian Parliament (NOU 2002,1). In this paper, museum mediation to children and youngsters was given high priority. Childhood is a political issue reflecting the challenges represented in the education and research policy of the EU.

The gap in politics between reality and the ideal of childhood forces us to focus on what childhood means to children compared to the significance given to them by their surroundings. The ways that we perceive children either from the inside or outside of their worlds are platforms for asking questions about the formation of identities and the development of personalities that are well-adjusted or feel estranged from living with the past, however short in terms. In English the concept 'childhood' is normally defined as *the state and period of being a child* (Fowler and Fowler 1992, 141). The UN's Convention of the Rights of the Child defines childhood as *a separate space from adulthood*. Meaning much more than the space between birth and the attainment of adulthood, childhood refers to the state and conditions of a child's life: to the *quality* of those years (Bellamy 2004, 3; the italics are mine). This definition of childhood is a cultural construction of post-modernity, and in contrast to the historical fact that in the past the needs and obligations of children were not well differentiated from adults. Like adults, able-bodied children engaged in arduous labour and were combatants in battle (Bellamy 2004, 3).

We may agree or disagree with the UN's definition of childhood. In our own scholarly endeavour we may search for qualifications that are applicable to the investigation of children's lives and conditions in the past. We might even find that children's quality of life in the past prevail among modern children, which leads us to acknowledge the rights of children as an important political issue in the present. Neither can we deny that childhood is to an extent linked with adult recollections of their own quality of life as children. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Lillehammer 1989, 2000), childhood is also about cultural memories, the capacity and possibility of looking backwards and forwards towards childhood in a short-term and a long-term perspective. In addition to the short-term character of personal recollections, the memory of childhood is linked with the cultural transmission of detailed knowledge from one generation to the other. The absolute dependence in preliterate societies on the wisdom of older generations for survival is the equivalent of modern libraries, museums and schools (cf. Diamond 2001). With reference to the cultural transference of knowledge between the flintknapping expert and the novice in learning the technique of toolmaking in the Stone Age (Grimm 2000) (fig.1), the cultural memory of childhood is intertwined with the past through the cultural traditions of seniors in the society. The lack of knowledge could explain why children's roles in many societies confer them to a social position of integration or separation from adults (Lillehammer 2006b).

Nevertheless, as stated by Toren (1993), adults cannot be said to 'know better' than children, even if they may be said to 'know different' and 'know more'. What the child once knew remains an integral (if implicit or even denied) part of the adult concept (Toren 1993, 473). What about archaeology's understanding of these relationships in the analysis of children's lives and conditions in the past? Do we all share the same images, perceptions and epistemologies about children, identities and the past? How does the concept of identity form part of the process of examining the life and conditions of children? The concept of identity is difficult for scholars to deal with, as the social-cultural categories related to children paradoxically fix them to a state from which they are in the process of leaving. In order to deal with these questions a simple language test may be of help.

The language test

A quick look at the English and Norwegian concepts of identity, children and childhood will clarify my point of departure. By comparison the two languages, where the Norwegian has been translated into English, would seem more or less related to one another. By looking closer into the matter we see slight differences between English and Norwegian in the meaning of the concepts "identity", "child" and "childhood".

The English concept "identity" ranges from quantitative values in mathematics to individual, social and psychological attributes related to persons. It refers to "conditions of being a specified person or thing", "individuality, personality", "identification, or the result of it", "*absolute sameness*", and "equality of two expressions for all values of the quantities, equation of expressing this" (Fowler and Fowler 1992, 435-436, the italics are mine). In the Norwegian vocabulary the meaning is restricted to attributes related to persons: "a person's name and position", "ego (feeling), self-image", and "*to be identical*" (Landrø and Wangensteen 1986, 250; my translation, the italics are mine). The Norwegian concept "child" refers to "a minor person, underage", "*foetus*, abortion", "a person in subordinated obedient and loyal relationship to someone/body", "human offspring of the first generation", and, in some dialects, "young halibut or salmon" (i.e. in Norwegian "hellebarn", "laksebarn") (Landrø and Wangesteen 1986, 41; my translation, the italics are mine). In English "child" implies "a young human being below the age of puberty", "*unborn* or newborn human being", "one's son or daughter", "descendant, follower, or product of", and "childish person" (Fowler and Fowler 1992, 141; the italics are mine). Similar differences are found in the concept of 'childhood'. As the meaning of this term in English is synonymous of "*a state or period of being a child*" (Fowler and Fowler 1992, 141; the italics are mine), in Norwegian it refers to "the period of being child", "the first stage of development", and "the weakness of old age in behaving like a child" (Landrø and Wangesteen 1986, 41, my translation; the italics are mine).

In every respect to the common meaning between the languages, with specific reference to the italics in the lists, it becomes clear that on the basis of language we share neither all the words, nor the metaphors. The concept of "child" is applied to animals in Norwegian and old people in English, while old people is related with "childhood" behaviour in Norwegian. We have mainly a common understanding in matters central to what makes a comparison possible in the classification of both the periods of coming into being and being a child. However, could there be much more to this
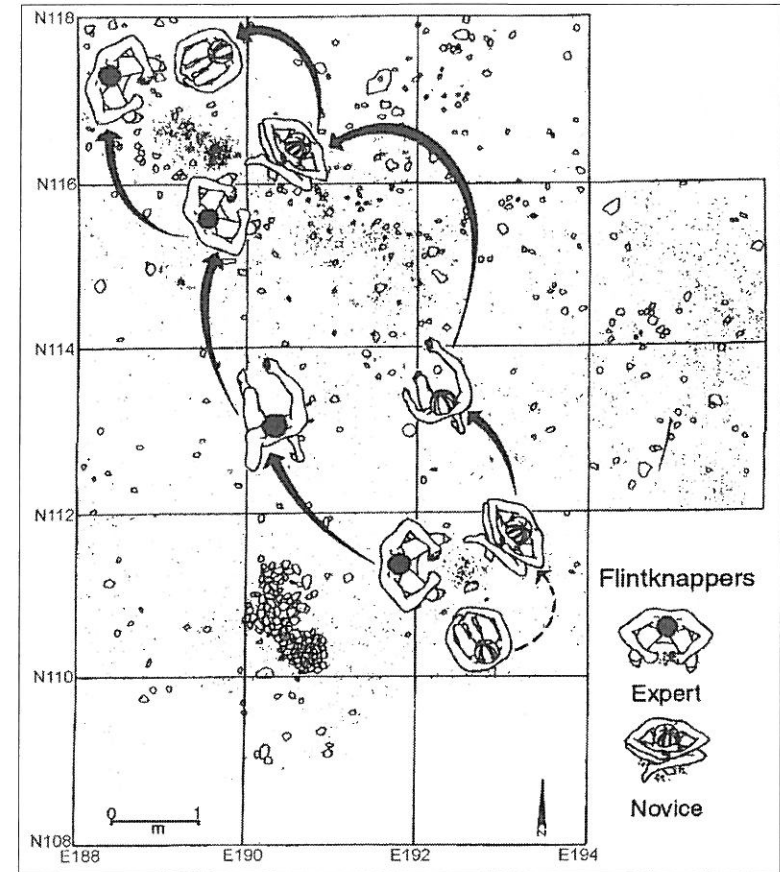
Fig. 1. Cultural transmission between expert and novice: Learning the technique of flint-knapping (cf. Grimm 2000, Fig. 5.6)

than what is discovered in selections and formulations made by authors of a dictionary?

On the common ground we may after all agree about the meaning of the identity concept. The concept reflects the construction of a cultural classification system, which consists of comparative entities that define the inclusive and exclusive qualifications of individuals, persons as well as substance. As the definitions of "child" and "childhood" point to

qualifications that are innate and affiliate to humans and animals from the outside, we may also agree that the concepts are not only restricted to age distinctions. What about the individual and collective qualifications that children give themselves based on their own experience? Would these qualifications lead to the creation of sameness or otherness in the personification of a child, and represent identities that are distinctly different in kind from adults? As identity in the Norwegian version has to do with a *feeling*, how is an inner feeling of social and cultural identity established? Is it possible to detect the quality of its form, construction and structure in the material culture of the past? Theoretical archaeology may argue for a connection in the material evidence between the establishment of self-images and the construction of burials in prehistoric societies. A definition of a child's *feeling* of social and cultural identity on the basis of the complexity of emotions would seem even more difficult to detect in archaeology because of the ambiguity of evidence (Parker Pearson 2003, 104).

In an archaeological overview of death and burial in vanished societies the material evidence of ancient children has been studied in relation to basic indicators derived from physical and skeletal remains and their contextual evidence, such as health, nutrition, learning, gender, status and kinship, economy, mortality and burials, sacrifice and infanticide, etc. (Parker Pearson 2003). As demonstrated through the ritualistic evidence represented in the Mesolithic cemetery of Vedbaek in Denmark (Albrechtsen *et al.* 1976, fig. 9), the disposal of children in adult graves could reflect the idealisation of social relationships in society (Lillehammer 2000). As the dead do not bury their dead, children are easily relegated to an inferior position dependent on the adult world, or regarded as objects to be manipulated by adults who authorised their conditions in life.

In Scandinavian studies of burial rituals emphasis is often put on social aspects that integrate or separate children from the adult world (Björkhagar 1995, Knutsson 1998, Bergh 2003). Emphasis is placed on the social process from child to adult, the social position of children among adults, or children and adults as part of a collective representation through ancestors, religious institutions or cults (Lillehammer 2006b, Lillehammer *in prep* a). An important conclusion from Swedish studies is the acknowledgement of cultural diversity in prehistoric societies (Welinder 1998). The social patterns of integration and separation represented in the Swedish evidence have been interpreted as the representation of a child-adult relationship. Their caretakers left children to tend for themselves from an early age, to learn skills and carry out tasks and in the end to become caretakers of the next generation (Welinder 1998, 194, Lillehammer 2000, 2006b).

Evidently, the type of conclusion drawn by Welinder (1998) on the cultural transmission between children and adults would seem obvious to us moderns. It is important to bear in mind that seeing children as active agents (Baxter 2005, Lillehammer 2005b) rather than as passive imitators may be very different from an adult's construction and interpretation of children (James 1993). A contradictory relationship between children and adults, and between children themselves in the creation of their own worlds of children's culture separated from adults (Lillehammer 1989, 2000, 2002, 2005b, in prep b), represent the opposite notion of blurring roles between children and adults (Lillehammer 2000). The state of being a child or an adult have been pointed out as fluid and contextually embodied (Toren 1993), which could make an archaeological distinction between the categories difficult. In order to study children and adults as process, and not as fixed analytical categories, one would need data on how interactions, concepts, behavioural forms and meanings are created, recreated and acquired, and how individuals become *committed* to their acquisitions (Rapport and Overing 2005, 32; the italics are mine). In my opinion these questions set childhood and children on the agenda of archaeological research. A consideration has to be given to historiography and to the archaeological involvement in the issue of childhood and children in the past (cf. Lillehammer 2002, 2005b).

Sidesteps to an archaeology of mind

The beginning of the 1970s was the start of what a professor in anthropology at the University of Missouri has named "The children-in-archaeology-movement" (R. Rowlett, pers. communication). His statement reflects the political flare of the period, the western trends of flower power, women's liberation and inter-sex. When looking closer into these initial years, we can see that among the first academic drops falling down on dry earth was the dawning hope of innovating archaeology with knowledge about the life and conditions of children in the past. Actually, this was a feminist reaction in Scandinavia to the normative trends in mainstream archaeology, and to what I recall as the fruits of wrath.

The feminist response was the coming out of shadowland what had been laying dormant, hidden, or unseen by archaeology for a long time, the ancient question of recognising what is obviously there in the material evidence (Gräslund 1973, Lillehammer 1989, Sofaer Derevenski 1994). Every archaeologist has obviously once been a child (Lillehammer 2000), but was the growing consciousness of children only sidesteps (Simonsen 1988) to an archaeology of mind? At the time, did the identity of an archaeologist

actually represent the self-image of a masculine seniority, too self-contained to be spotted as childish from a distance through the looking glass of an objective science? Why is it that something about children catches the eyes of archaeologists, and something evades them (Lillehammer 2002)?

In archaeology the scientific ideals of the researcher vary between those who want to discover possibly everything about the past, and those who consider this aim to be impossible. There are differences in the position between accepting that the scientific process involves an element of the subjective, and thinking it unscientific to pay attention from a non-objective point of view. The analysis of a debate in the Swedish archaeological journal *Fornvännen* in a short period between 1979 and 1982 demonstrated that the cultural perceptions of five Scandinavian archaeologists (all males) involved two different approaches towards the past: a scientific and a popular approach (Lillehammer 2004, 2005a). At the time of the discourse both types of archaeologists had considered the children issue within the archaeological context (Johansen 1979b, Welinder 1979).

The two types of archaeological approaches give the impression of an academic gap between an insider and an outsider (Lillehammer 2004, 2005a). The insider is the one who is included in the prestigious guild of archaeological science. The taste of the outsider differs from the insider in cultural habitus and competence (Bourdieu 1995). The outsider is the one on the margin who knocks at the door of the inner circles in the archaeological academy. As their methods vary between a scientific and a popular approach, the preference of the insider approach is to stick to the objective ideals of science (Welinder 1982), whereas the outsider searches the *childhood* for the personal experience that could lead to the past (Johansen 1982, 53; the italics are mine). In order to bridge the gap between past and present the outsider wants to reflect on the relationship between personal identity and past experience (Johansen 1979a, 1982). The focus is on those ideas and associations that could lead to a scientific innovation in archaeology, and to the unexpected discovery of archaeological finds in places that would seem unknown or incongruous in the landscape. May we therefore assume that the popular approach broadens the scope of archaeological interpretation and innovates the archaeological production of knowledge about children in the past?

As the archaeologist of the popular approach in the Swedish discussion never continued the methodological work on his childhood approach, we cannot conclude that it lead to a dead end. The reason for this outcome is obvious. His approach represents a different attitude towards the past, which in the discourse was easily criticised and accepted with difficulty by

his fellows in academia. The archaeological knowledge about the past was not to be found in one's own unconscious state of mind. It could only be unconsciously spotted in the landscape on the basis of an *archaeological experience* (Simonsen 1988; the italics are mine). The fact is that the childhood approach towards the past, and how it can represent a double dividend of meaning, has not been much discussed in archaeology. The post-modern interpretation of Catalhöyük has been criticised as being more about the childhoods of the excavation team members than about the results from the excavation of the site (Shipman 2005, Balter 2005). In her work on gender Sørensen has pointed out that she cannot, nor does she want "to generalize my children's lives into a theoretical argument", however exciting and enlightening "the tension between academic struggle with understanding how gender is constructed and the awareness of it happening just around me" has been (Sørensen 2000, xi). In constructing the past through a process of categorisation (Sofaer Derevenski 2002), evidently we as adults and archaeologists work to obtain a high level of objectification in order to keep the scientific and ethical standard that distances itself from the subjective spheres of privacy and intimation. In every way the academic spheres between childhood and adulthood experience seem poles apart.

In his book "A history of Archaeological Thought" Trigger presents a survey of the progress of archaeology in understanding prehistoric societies (Trigger 1994, 392). The survey is based on papers which deal with the interpretation of archaeological evidence in an American volume on the theoretical and methodological advancements in archaeology between 1978 and 1986. The hierarchy of archaeological knowledge is classified according to five research issues. Ecology, demography and economy, finds and chronology are at the top of interest, whereas social behaviour, ideology, and religion are of less or little interest to archaeology (fig. 2a) (Lillehammer 2006b). Research issues dominate the archaeological production of knowledge where the results are due to the limitations in defining broader goals for the interpretation of archaeological data material in terms of human activities (Trigger 1994).

In order to test Trigger's explanation of the knowledge hierarchy in archaeology a similar test has been carried out on published literature, which deals exclusively with child archaeology between 1994 and 2000 (fig. 2b) (Lillehammer 2006b). The survey demonstrates a shift in the knowledge hierarchy of research issues between the 1970s and 80s and from the 1990s onwards. The research interest in the subject of children and childhood has completely altered the distribution of issues to an opposite position in the hierarchy of archaeological knowledge. Child archaeology gives top priority

A) ARCHAEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE ISSUES (cf. Trigger 1994)	
	%
N=No information	47
Ecology, demography, economy	39
Finds, chronology	8
Social conditions	6
Ideology, religion, science (theory and method)	

B) ARCHAEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE ISSUES (cf. Sofaer Derevenski 1994, 2000, Johnsen & Welinder 1995, Alt & Kemkes-Grottenthaler 2002)	
	%
N=38	32
Ideology, religion, science	26
Social conditions	11
Ecology, demography, economy	4
Finds, chronology	

Fig. 2a and b. The distribution of research issues in the general knowledge production of archaeology 1978-1986 (A) and child archaeology 1994-2002 (B).

to research interests such as ideology, religion and social behaviour, less to ecology, demography and economy, and very little to the recovery of finds and to chronology. The result demonstrates clearly that the subject of child archaeology has a specific character.

The research of child archaeology has confronted the archaeological sources with questions considered relevant to the study of childhood and children in the past. In particular the studies have searched for archaeological evidence among find categories that are regarded as important to the research aims of post-processual archaeology, and to the analyses most evident in the archaeological record, such as child burials. Among those evident in the archaeological record has also been the insider, i.e. the archaeologist involved in this endeavour who prefers science to maintain an objective approach in archaeological who prefers science to maintain an objective approach in archaeological research (Welinder 2004). May we therefore conclude that the scientific approach, rather than the popular approach, is a driving force in including the child category as a main subject in archaeological research?

A popular book about prehistory in Norway published recently (Østmo 2004) has a post-modern approach of cultural diversity towards the interpretation of the archaeological evidence (Lillehammer 2006a). An analysis of the content of the book shows that 80 % of the archaeologists who contributed to the book were male. In their narratives ancient children

are present only in the Mesolithic, whereas in the rest of prehistory the adults make up the whole history. To sum up my viewpoints on the situation of child archaeology at present: archaeology is interested in the subject, but science is about adults and concerns more important matters than children.

A subject on the fringe

Since child-centred research was first introduced in Sweden (Gräslund 1973), the subject has lingered in the background as "*something about children*". The children issue appears on the scene when archaeology finds it relevant to act upon the material evidence. The demand from academia has been mixed, and the subject has mingled in between and among the headlines in sessions at archaeological conferences and seminars inside and outside Europe, including the US and Canada. Why children are not listed in the index of a new book on the key concepts in archaeology, whereas chiefdoms, the famous Australian professor Childe, and China are listed (Renfrew and Bahn 2005), is obscure to me. The lack of acknowledgement given to the subject has placed children's lives and conditions ambiguously in the background of a past distanced from the more prestigious issues in archaeology. Fortunately, in England the year 2005 saw the establishment of an international interdisciplinary forum SSCIP - "The society for the study of childhood in the past" (http://www.sscip.bham. ac.uk/). Some preliminary conclusions may be drawn from the subject's position on the academic fringe.

- A main division has emerged in the subject. The research issues approach either the children in the past, or it deals with the mediation of children of the past in the present.

- An attention to the variation in the archaeological data material has resulted in a statement of cultural diversity in the life and conditions of children essential to the study of childhood and children in the past.

- A necessity for defining the subject and the concepts applied in the study of childhood and children in the past has been acknowledged.

The reason for making these preliminary points here is a question put forward recently by a Swedish student. Why did I use the concept "the world of children" in the singular and not in the plural, "the worlds of children"? In my answer I referred the concept to a reconsideration of the concept

"child's world" (Lillehammer 1989, 2000) with regard to superior levels of application in the process of an archaeological inference. The concept "world" involves the structural relationship between children and adults as compared to the creation of a sphere designated specifically by children between themselves, the child's culture, or better still, children's culture. However, this concerns the aims for studying the life and conditions of children in the past, whether it means the exploration of those factors that are universal or particular to children or both perspectives. The Swedish student has made a point in converting the concept "world" into a plural of "worlds", which could integrate the multiple variations and the cultural diversity of children's life conditions. This turn would also change child's culture or children's culture to children's cultures. But would it take archaeology to a past of special cases and make the field of child archaeology a science of case studies?

Children, kinship and society

In Africa several family systems are matrifocal instead of patrifocal. Among the Yoruba of West-Africa the family members are grouped in relation to different mother-child units, and the children are "womb siblings", meaning sisters and brothers originating from the same womb. The mother represents the centre of the family (Oyerunke 2005). By sharing blood relationship to a mother the members, including cousins on the mother's sister's side, represent insiders compared to the outsiders who are intermarried in the family. The blood relation to women and seniority determine one's position rather than gender (Oyerunke 2005).

The family relationship of the Yoruba is not a gender based family system, but the identity of a child in the family is based on principles of ranking members according to chronological age. The principle of seniority is dynamic and fluid, and not rigid and static. In the beginning a child's identity is not differentiated between girls and boys, but the child is conceptualised as offspring. An offspring of a mother by intermarriage is ranked as an outsider in the family hierarchy. As these relationships are fluid and circumstantial the social roles of juniors and seniors place the persons in hierarchic and non-hierarchic roles based on the context (cf. Oyerunke 2005).

The archaeological study of children's lives and conditions is based on the material evidence in an archaeological record, which cover the inside and outside of houses and compounds of habituation areas and

settlements including burials (cf. Parker Pearson 2003). The contextual evidence represents places in the landscape where children once lived or accidentally died, or where they were deposed of dead or alive. This distribution of evidence has not prevented archaeologists from discovering their remains in odd places, such as in mound-fills, ditches, post-holes, latrines, wells, springs, bogs. They have been found even in distant places in the outland (Lillehammer *in press*) and on mountaintops (Ceruti 2004). It is not that these remote children do not belong, but they represent realms of "otherness" in having a different mode of communal expression (Helms 1998, Lillehammer *in prep.* a). In archaeology we have to reconsider the study of scientific evidence centred on the adult world and the home base.

In connection with an analysis on unnoticed cultural heritage the search for *non-places* in the landscape perception of modern peasants (Lillehammer 2004, 2005b, Lillehammer 2007, Lillehammer *in prep.* b) included their childhood memory in the approach (Lillehammer 2000). A non-place is something we perceive, but only in a partial and incoherent manner (Augé 1995). As a non-place is both physically and mentally constructed, it is not always what it seems from the outside. When focused coherently upon, a non-place perspective will result in a profound alteration of awareness
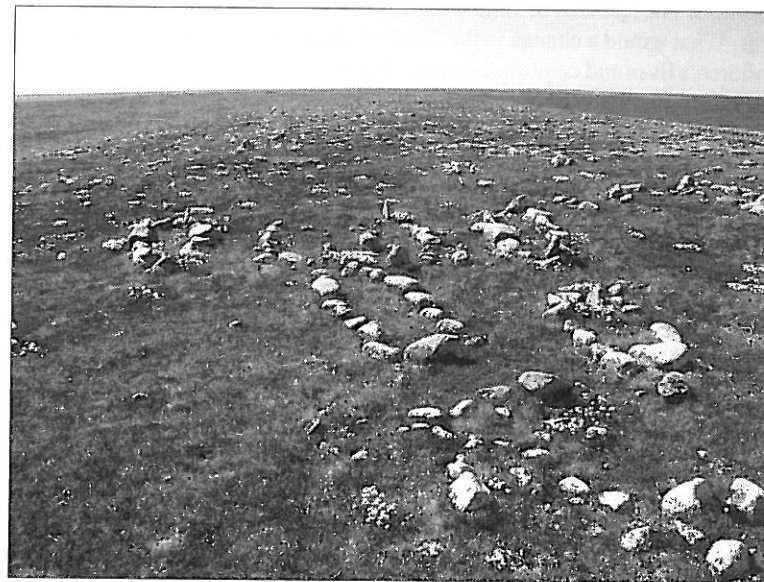

Fig. 3. "Mock kayaks"? Stone settings on the outskirt of Inuit settlement on Sentry Island in Hudson Bay, Nunavut, Canada. (Photo: Matthew D. Walls).

about children's lives and conditions in the past. Consequently the study of childhood and children is not only about the determination of biological, social and cultural age.

A reconsideration of the archaeological evidence is needed in order to detect what we have missed completely in the first place. In the environment of the playground of modern-day Inuit children the archaeologist has spotted stone settings of boats erected on dry land (fig. 3). In these boats children perform the art of harpooning fish (M. D. Walls, pers. communication). The places in the environment relate to playgrounds on the outskirts of the farm recollected in the childhood memory among Norwegian peasants in the present (Lillehammer 2004, 2005b, 2007). The playgrounds represent places distanced separately from the adult world, and these spaces in the landscape have not been acknowledged in archaeology.

Conclusion

A main consequence of the post-modern critique of multi-cultural diversity is how it influences the formation of archaeological theories and methods. The research of child archaeology is Eurocentric and has a Western bias. What would a change in the focus of place mean to the identification of children's lives and conditions in post-modern or preliterate societies outside the West? The post-modern feminist critique on the Eurocentric foundation of gender and cultural identity has been challenged by non-Eurocentric epistemologies. It points at the potentials for thinking relationships outside the male/female dichotomy (cf. Oyerunke 2005). The critique towards Western feminism on gender and family relationships has to be taken seriously in order to make progress and move forward with the subject.

In archaeology we have to ask why images of children in the past are developed primarily in Europe and North America, at least as this limits the understanding of identity formation and personification in non-western cultures. We need to stretch the notion of past from the universal past to include a multitude of pasts. In order to acknowledge the life conditions of ancient children an approach to children in the present is required. We have to explore the space for thinking out-of-place about relationships inside and outside a child/adult versus male/female dichotomy, a task I find promising for the development of the subject of child archaeology. On this point my conclusion is clear. A multi-cultural approach, which acknowledges the necessity for a multi-disciplinary engagement, is recommended. At present we need the establishment of new steppingstones to explore the

interdisciplinary boundaries in the epistemologies on children, identities and pasts. In this endeavour we have to decide on a common epistemology that would make future academic discourse promising.

Acknowledgement

Abstract

The paper deals with the epistemological background of archaeology's conceptualisation of children's identities in the past. In the advancement of child archaeology there is something about children that catches the eye of the archaeologist, and something that evades it, which concerns the formation and interpretation of the archaeological data material. This paper focuses on the understanding of central concepts, which form a theoretical bridge to the study and mediation of childhood and children in the past. Multi-cultural and interdisciplinary research based on a common epistemology is required in order to advance the subject further on the academic scene.

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