

CULTURAL HERITAGE, HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL VALUES AND THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

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1.- General considerations.

The relationship between Cultural Heritage and the concept of citizenship may not be so obvious, but it is interwoven by links that history teaching today cannot ignore, much less obviate. It is certainly possible to approach it from different perspectives, as well as to assume it from different criteria. What is neither possible nor acceptable is that the teaching of history avoids the responsibility of taking the interpretation of the past outside the radius of the valuation of Cultural Heritage and thus undermining the behavior of citizens who, in the light of the historical-cultural values of each society, cannot avoid re-visiting their past, re-interpreting it and re-semanticizing its symbols.

In this small global world in which we live today, the teaching of history and its impact on the construction of citizenship do not seem to be keeping pace with the new generations. It is even possible that, if we continue at this pace, we will end up witnessing the formation of a new generation that will educate itself without any respect for the past or the cultural values that, in the end, made its own gestation possible.

Taking for granted women's access to vote, freedom of expression or the right to identity, for example, is a very dangerous attitude in the midst of ignorance of the struggles, tragedies, successes and amendments that made them possible as achievements of a more just society. The teaching of history should not only insist on the denuendos and sacrifices that over time have opened doors and, of course, closed others, but should also ensure that the present remains linked to the historical and cultural values that have shaped it.

This, of course, does not mean that the present will be closed to change. Rather, it means that the present must be open to synthesize with the past, without disrespecting or ignoring it. This linkage with the past does not refer to a stiffening of the present. On the contrary, it is a linkage that rejects indifference and the distancing that aims to forget. It is a linkage that seeks to ally itself with memory through Cultural Heritage so that the steps taken towards the present are remembered with full meaning and without perverse distortions.

It must be insisted that between Cultural Heritage and citizenship there is a bond that, admittedly, has become increasingly fragile. But their common goals show that there are positive implications in thinking about society in that space in which only the citizen is an actor and protagonist. The teaching of history can approach the formation of citizens through the stimulation of critical thinking, the shaping of respect for socio-cultural diversity with a sense of continuity and integration, preserving in a cordial environment *the memory* and the memories that give that sense of individual and collective belonging so necessary for social relations.

Forgetting and remembering is the natural dynamic of memory, but history, as arbiter of the different memories that necessarily coexist in any society, is called upon to provide the tools for "recognition in the other" and this is possible through the knowledge and appreciation of Cultural Heritage. Overcoming the traditional confrontation of *us versus them*, the teaching of History can introduce a comprehensive and tolerant, heterogeneous view, which allows the articulation of elements of daily life, spiritual experiences, environmental development, affective codes, etc. In this way, less authoritarian, more respectful and more inclusive individuals are formed through the understanding of their own past and its recognition through Cultural Heritage.

However, as we mentioned above, the new generations demand teaching methods and ways of relating to their past that are very different from those experienced by those of us who are already halfway through our lives. The acceleration of time and the omnipresence of the concepts of constant expiration and renewal mean that history can be seen as the most useless of disciplines. Archaic teaching models, which do not provide adequate answers to the expectations of these new experiences present in a world accelerated to the limit, are rejected.

It is not possible to think that the pressures of the present will leave the teaching of history untouched. Nevertheless, in the midst of the most uncertain and conflictive scenarios, Cultural Heritage can rise as an adequate mediator and minimizer of uncertainties. Therefore, the incorporation of Cultural Heritage as an active element in the teaching of History could strengthen the relationship of individuals with their environment (past and present), while preparing them for a solid exercise of citizenship.

2.- Monuments: heritage, memory and history.

It is recognized that Cultural Heritage is a concept that moves between the waters of history and memory, and that seeks to unite both in an effort to prevent the inevitable dynamic between remembering and forgetting from erasing important portions of our past. To define it is not the purpose of this article, since it would be necessary to review in detail not only diverse theories but also the global and particular legislation that determines the edges of a plurivalent and complex concept. However, we could agree that the definition provided by UNESCO is basic and a good methodological starting point. ¹

From this definition of the highest global organization for the preservation of Cultural Heritage, we can derive a somewhat more elaborate definition of *monuments* that will be useful

1 The *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (Unesco, 1972) states:

"**Article 1** For the purposes of this Convention, "cultural heritage" shall be considered "cultural heritage":

- monuments: monumental works of architecture, sculpture or painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, caves and groups of elements, which are of exceptional universal value from the point of view of history, art or science,
- ensembles: groups of buildings, isolated or assembled, whose architecture, unity and integration in the landscape give them an exceptional universal value from the point of view of history, art or science,
- sites: works of man or joint works of man and nature as well as areas, including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from a historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view."

in these pages. Françoise Choay provides the right words when she explains that a monument is “any artifact built by a community of individuals to remember or to remind other generations of certain events, sacrifices, rites or beliefs.”² This being so, the particularity of a monument lies in its direct action on memory, vibrating the tuning fork of the present.

Although, certainly, the Cultural Heritage of a society is not reduced or limited to its monuments, our attitude towards them constitutes a good example of how memory and historical awareness affect the valuation of heritage assets in general and how the teaching of History has a wide space for action in the construction of such valuation. We have decided to take monuments as an illustrative example in this dissertation, knowing that we do not intend to cover all the aspects of such an urgent problem as the attention to heritage in a society in which the fragility of memory makes decades seem like centuries and centuries like geological eras.

In many cases monuments become places of pilgrimage, centers of civic reverence, but this practice - without realizing it - could be twisting history, adapting it to the convenience of one sector, segregating another in the most open way. However, the practices that become everyday often prevent us from looking at this clearly, because the force of habit can become a thick veil.

A monument acts as a security device. That is to say, it ensures a bond, in some cases it even provides social trust, because it is based on certainties that, despite being tied to the past, the monument makes them continuously present and, therefore, future. A monument is survival, transcendence, eternal life. It is not for nothing that ancient civilizations put so much effort into manifesting themselves in monuments, and Renaissance man learned the lesson quickly and efficiently. The monument offered him the sure transcendence that religious faith seemed no longer to consolidate so monolithically.

However, although a monument is erected to survive, its meaning is not immune to changes, revisions, re-semanticizations, etc. This is part of the revaluation of heritage assets that societies carry out most of the time without even noticing it. It is an inevitable process that should, however, be sponsored by well-constructed information about, for example, the historical events and characters represented in the monuments, which is the case we take here to illustrate.

Doing so is complex and demands from the social actors a very deep civic commitment, because it is not a matter of tilting in favor of one or another partiality the approval of the symbolic meaning of a monument. Instead, it is a matter of analyzing the original reality of the monument in terms of its original cultural values, and how it is possible to remodel its symbolic meaning in the midst of the present reality based on the cultural values of the present without losing its historical value, that is, its link to the past and to memory.

2 Françoise CHOAY, *Allegory of Heritage*, Barcelona, Gustavo Gili, 2007, p.12. It is also worth remembering the classic definition of monument formulated by Alois RIEGL:
By monument, in the most ancient and primitive sense, we mean a work made by the human hand and created with the specific purpose of maintaining individual feats or destinies (or a set of these) always present in the consciences of future generations" (p. 23) [El moderno culto de los monumentos, Visor, Madrid, 1999]. (p. 23) [El moderno culto a los monumentos, Visor, Madrid, 1999].

It is clear that this is primarily an academic task, although not an exclusive one. Fundamentally, it is an everyday task in the hands of citizens that must be reinforced by the academic sectors in the work that only corresponds to them. In this sense, classrooms are a space for action of great importance and the teaching of history in them is essential.

2.1.- Destroying, recontextualizing or reinterpreting monuments?

In recent times it has been heard with notorious frequency that destroying a monument erases History. Although historians might quickly retort that destroying a monument does not erase History, the issues of memory might demonstrate that the fragility of memory depends more on the material traces than on History itself, and that its relationship with monuments, as well as with any other heritage asset, could be vital. This is especially true if we accept that a monument is a tool that facilitates the survival and transcendence of figures, events, ideas, etc.

Memory, as Pierre Nora has rightly said, is an affective, psychological and emotional matter, while History is not, or at least should not be.³ Because of its characteristics, memory is therefore very fragile and unstable and, although it is related to memory, it is the eternal recreation of the past in the present. History as a discipline is thus the perfect counterweight to memory, but not its enemy, as some people have tried to make it seem. Thus, a historian, for example, has a civic responsibility, not merely because he or she is a historian, but because he or she is part of a society of citizens and must assume the role of a citizen. In Nora's words, the historian is "an arbiter between the different memories".⁴

This characterization of the historian as a referee involves tangible risks. The very word "referee" brings to mind a soccer game in which the head referee can "sell out" to either side and twist the forces of the game. While this is within the realm of possibility, honest arbitration could greatly benefit the resolution of conflicts over the interpretation of the past and mitigate the different memories from competing against each other. Moreover, the times we live in show us more and more forcefully that such arbitration is absolutely necessary, that its presence is urgent and that classrooms are waiting for its intervention.

But are destroying, recontextualizing and/or reinterpreting the symbolic meaning of a monument options when it interferes negatively with the cultural values of the present? What is the role of the historian when faced with these possibilities? There is no conclusive answer. We have seen this clearly with regard to the monuments dedicated to the American Confederacy and its heroes in the United States. This is an example that could serve to advance us a little in the future towards a Venezuela after the Bolivarian Revolution.

3 See Pierre NORA, *The Realms of Memory*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.

4 Pierre NORA interviewed by Evelyn Ertlij, *Letras Libres*, February 01, 2018. Available online at: <http://www.letraslibres.com/espana-mexico/revista/entrevista-pierre-nora-el-historiador-es-un-arbitro-las-diferentes-memorias>

The discussion around the Confederate monuments, that is, those referring to the section of the states of the American Union that in 1861 decided to secede from it, assuming its own political identity linked -among other things- to the preservation of slavery, has opened a Pandora's box in American society in the midst of a political discourse that is already fragmented, prejudiced and biased enough.

The Civil Rights movement, now represented by the group around *Black Lives Matters*, has demanded the removal of more than a few monuments that honor and celebrate the sacrifice of Confederate soldiers in a war that sought to keep the black population under a slave regime. Any explanation of the reasons for these protests is superfluous, as the disconnection of these monuments with the social values that U.S. society has claimed to uphold as universal in its democratic dome is evident.

Actions have not been long in coming and in some cases the monuments have been removed from public spaces and moved to museums, cemeteries or private spaces. But the protests also claim the other side of the coin: the right to preserve heritage assets of the memory of a social group that may not be the majority, but that in a democratic scenario has the right to express itself. In short, two memories that confront each other, each with its own banners.

It is worth some precision about these monuments that can paint a broader picture. About 80% of the Confederate monuments existing in the U.S. today were erected at two points in time distant from the end of the Civil War in 1865.⁵ The first moment, between 1910 and 1930, in which the daughters, mothers, and wives of the families of Confederate heroes led an unprecedented effort to honor the memory of the fallen and veterans of that conflict. This in a period when the so-called Second Ku Klux Klan flourished nationally beginning in 1915, flying its white supremacist flag in urban areas, just where the monuments have the greatest impact.⁶

According to Sarah Beetham, the female motorization in the erection of the monuments of this first moment hid the fact that women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not have access to vote nor could they own property, so erecting a monument was a way to express themselves politically even if it was only to bring an offering of flowers afterwards.⁷ This should draw attention in times in which women have found other -perhaps more efficient- ways

5 Cf. Leanna GARFIELD and Anaele PELISSON, "There are hundreds of Confederate monuments across the US - here's when they were built," *Business Insider*, August 18, 2017. Available online at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/confederate-statues-meaning-timeline-history-2017-8>

6 As early as 1918, American writer and art critic Adeline Adams lamented the endless string of soldiers' monuments commemorating the Civil War as "a travesty and a blight". Although her complaint was more about the deplorable aesthetic and artistic quality of these monuments, she also resented the lack of substance in their conception and location. [See Adeline Adams, "War Monuments," in *The American Magazine of Art*, Vol. 9, No. 9, July 1918, p.347-352]

7 Sarah BEETHAM quoted by Marc FISHER in "Why those Confederate soldier statues look a lot like their Union counterparts," *The Washington Post*, August 18, 2017. Available online at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/why-those-confederate-soldier-statues-look-a-lot-like-their-union-counterparts/2017/08/18/cefcc1bc-8394-11e7-ab27-1a21a8e006ab_story.html?utm_term=.a211db8837aa

to raise their voices and claim their rights. It should, in any case, be part of the necessary study for any current consideration of Confederate monuments.

It should be added that, beyond these reasons for the institution of a monument in the aforementioned period, the industrial situation in the United States also encouraged the massive erection of monuments due to the lowering of costs thanks to their mass production. Marc Fisher refers as an example to the *Monumental Bronze Co.* located in Bridgeport (Connecticut), a company that mass-produced zinc statues for both Confederates and Unionists. It charged \$450 for a life-size statue and \$750 for a heroic size, even offering to assemble it on site -after catalog purchase- in a minimum of days.⁸

So the Industrial Revolution that followed the Federal War directly or indirectly stimulated that which was previously only within the reach of the authorities or very small social groups. For decades Kirk Savage has warned that this mass production of monuments had no ideological or moral intention, much less aesthetic.⁹ It would then be a market opportunity that the foundry companies saw opening up: if weapons were produced before, the production of statues could help to round off profits in times of peace.

However, this overpopulation of pedestrian monuments would change the face of the traditional monument to the great man on horseback. Over 2500 statues of foot soldiers were erected in the states that had supported the Union, while some 500 would have been erected in the so-called Confederate states.¹⁰ By the second moment of the Confederate monument craze, statues of similar appearance in different cities were more than common.

Thus, in this second period from about 1945 to 1979, which coincides with the climax of the African American Civil Rights movement and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan as a counterpart, the motivation changes radically. According to Jane Dailey, most of the memorials seem to have been erected with the intention not to honor the fallen soldiers of the Federal War, but specifically to exalt the ideals of white supremacy.¹¹ It is possible then to affirm that already by the second half of the twentieth century the symbolic references of these monuments were not to historical facts or characters but to very particular ideas that are part of the historical identity of a particular social group.

We are talking here about the memory of a collective about itself struggling to survive in the present, which it recognizes as changing. The case of the monument to Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, erected in 1948 in Baltimore could help us

8 Marc FISHER, *Op. Cit.*

9 See Kirk SAVAGE, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*, Princeton University Press, 1999.

10 Sarah BEETHAM to Marc FISHER, *Op. Cit.* In 1910, James Barnes laconically lamented the "stereotyped sentinels reproduced over and over again." He expressed that "our battlefields are disfigured more by statues and memorials than they ever were by bullets." [James BARNES, "Soldier Monuments," in *Art and Progress*, Vol. 1, No. 7, May 1910, pp. 185-189]

11 Jane DAILEY quoted by Miles PARK in "Confederate Statues were built to further a 'White Supremacist Future', *NPR*, August 20, 2017. Available online at: <https://www.npr.org/2017/08/20/544266880/confederate-statues-were-built-to-further-a-white-supremacist-future>.

exemplify this.¹² Why place a statue of Generals Lee and Jackson in Baltimore when World War II had just ended? The message was most likely aimed at African-American veterans who, upon returning from the front, wanted to join civilian life with full rights. After all, they had fought for their country just like white soldiers. The Supreme Court had issued a landmark decision in 1944 against practices it called “racist,” and U.S. President Harry Truman himself had just signed an executive order against segregation in the Armed Forces. The motifs of the Baltimore monument thus echo that memory that does not wish to fade in the face of social change that seems to be unrelenting.

But today it is not possible to accept that monuments erected to infringe on the rights of the entire population regardless of race, gender, creed or political inclination. To maintain a monument to the Confederacy in public spaces, near buildings that house public institutions such as city halls, parliaments, courts, etc., is an action of power that, read through current cultural values and in the panorama of contemporary U.S. history, seeks to intimidate those who might claim justice to their own historical memory.

It is key to ask whether these Confederate monuments can be considered Cultural Heritage, at least of a social group. Undoubtedly, they are associated with the Confederate legacy close to the ideas of white supremacy and thus to the memory of a social group that still considers them to be in force. However, it is imperative that this symbolic association be reconsidered by those concerned, not to erase their collective memory, but to understand that the fears of the nineteenth century cannot be the fears of the twentieth century and that yesterday's enemy is today their fellow citizen. Memory cannot prevent us from living in the present, it should not be used as a strange gadget that keeps the past so alive that the present ceases to exist. This, without more, is a perversion of memory and it is here that the teaching of History must act in conjunction with the presence of Cultural Heritage.

Until now it was thought that a monument could help heal wounds and contribute to unity in broken societies, but this is not the case with Confederate monuments. Slavery had a political solution despite its regrettable military corollary, but racism as a social perversion has not been eradicated. A monument cannot be considered Cultural Heritage when the values it contains are prevented from being re-contextualized or re-interpreted. In the face of these impediments, the most common solutions have been the relocation and dismantling of the Confederate monuments in the center of the conflict.

12 The monument was created by American sculptor Laura Gardin Fraser and unveiled in 1948 in a ceremony attended by Maryland Governor William Preston Lane Jr. and Baltimore Mayor Thomas D'Alesandro. We should note that this monument was removed on August 16, 2017, after nearly two years of deliberations by a commission appointed by the city's Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. Events such as the mass killings at a church in Charleston in 2015 prompted the decision. Separately, in December 2017, in Memphis, the City Council approved the sale to private hands of two important public parks that housed statues of Confederate Generals Nathan Bedford Forrest and Jefferson Davis. The sale prevented the decision on the permanence of the monuments from being in public hands and ensured that the parks would remain open to all. The monuments to both generals were removed by the new owners of the parks the day after the sale was finalized.

In this regard, the *National Trust for Historic Preservation* has indicated in a statement that it believes that historic preservation requires taking history seriously and that it is an inescapable obligation to confront the complex and difficult chapters of the past, to recognize the many avenues of understanding and characterization in which shared history continues to shape the present and the future.¹³ It would be imperative, then, that history be demythologized from every point of view, confederate or otherwise.

On the other hand, some have pointed out that to remove the monuments is to change History¹⁴, while others have expressed that it is not possible to keep constant reminders of the horror and painful wounds in the face of the victims.¹⁵ To those who ask that the monuments remain as an aid-memory of the times of a divided country, it has been responded that it is as absurd as pretending to keep the signs that indicated which seats were for whites and which were for blacks.

A case like this clearly shows us how it is possible that for a society the leaders of the past are not necessarily the leaders of the present, at least not in all cases. However, establishing where the fracture between the values of the past and the present is not a simple task. In this case, from the time of the end of the Civil War in 1865 to the present, the progress on the issue of Civil Rights is very great, although part of the American society still defends some cultural values linked to the Confederate discourse.

A monument is a place for memory. But the nature of that memory and to whom it belongs will depend on the context in which that monument was established and in which it lives today. Earlier we said that a monument is a landmark of certainty, a sort of antidote to the inexorable action of time that dissolves everything. Confederate monuments help us to understand how a monument can personify that certainty, because in theory it eludes death, the total annihilation of a way of seeing the world.

However, as Paul Cooper puts it, the essential thing is to assume that we are dealing with a part of the historical heritage that is indeed painful for a large part of society in the present.¹⁶ With that in mind, it is necessary to look for ways to remember the past without recreating its effects in the present. The teaching of history must then approach these controversial chapters of the past with an arbitral intention that allows the expression of diverse opinions, but that

13 National Trust for Historic Preservation, *Statement on Confederate Memorials: Confronting Difficult History*, June 19, 2017. Available online at: <https://savingplaces.org/press-center/media-resources/national-trust-statement-on-confederate-memorials#.WqaAbJPwa34>

14 See Kristen TREEN, "Dismantling America's monuments to white supremacy," *Apollo Magazine*, May 10, 2017. Available online at: <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/dismantling-americas-monuments-to-white-supremacy/>

15 See Fitzhugh BRUNDAGE, "I've Studied the history of Confederate memorial. Here's what to do about them", *Vox*, August 18, 2017. Available online at: <https://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2017/8/18/16165160/confederate-monuments-history-charlottesville-white-supremacy>

16 Paul COOPER, "Why to do with a heinous statue," *Foreign Policy*, August 17, 2017. Available online at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/08/17/what-to-do-with-a-heinous-statue-trump-confederate-robert-e-lee-nazi-soviet/>

leads the discussion towards a healthy, fair synthesis that allows the cultural values of the present to be manifested in heritage assets regardless of their age or origin.

Hence the importance of the original intention of any monument for the purposes of its heritage and historical valuation. But even if a monument may have a questionable original intention, purpose and function, its historical significance could still be of relevance, even essential in the understanding of the moment in which it was erected. In any case, it is history that helps us to detach ourselves from memory, that is, from the living of the past in the present, from the effects of the past on the present that prevent it from *being*. Eugenia Allier Montaño has emphasized that history is a problematic and incomplete reconstruction of what is no longer, the representation of the past; history is an intellectual operation, with a critical discourse that seeks to make the past intelligible beyond the deformations that memory pretends to impose.¹⁷

3.- Our relationship with the Cultural Heritage: monuments.

How we relate to our monuments says a lot about our cultural values. In fact, we express them through that relationship in a sense. When a monument is used for rituals that undermine the civic dignity of a group in society, then it can be said that memory disturbances have made it impossible to adapt to the present. Just as amnesia prevents the patient from remembering his past, this deformation that we see in the relationship with monuments in some societies could prevent us from remembering the present in which we find ourselves.

When the relationship with the present is problematic, it alters the dynamics of relationship and mutual recognition. To pretend that the past can and should be kept alive in the present is nothing more than an alteration of historical memory. The past cannot be recreated as a play is recreated at each performance. Memory carries out a constant struggle not to forget (or to do so, as the case may be), but remembering, even if it is assumed in our minds, does not imply transforming the present into the past. It is true that religious or civic rituality, for example, is a way of recreating the past theatrically. But we must not be confused, to recreate is not to magically resurrect.

The activation of memory through monuments, for example, seeks to avoid oblivion and thus maintain a breath of life that makes the past an *eternal present*. This *eternal present*, however, must not overwhelm the real present. It must, instead, coexist with it in a healthy and cordial way. Therein lies the tremendous difficulty that the relationship with Cultural Heritage brings with it. History returns here in its inescapable role of arbiter of the different memories as a determining factor. Catalyst of confrontations or mediator of conflicts: it is not a minor dilemma.

History studies the past, reconstructs it in order to understand it and help us to interpret it, but it does not resurrect it. Therefore, to claim that history has the duty to keep the past alive is a disfigurement of the discipline. History - and this is what should stimulate its teaching - should ensure that the voice of the past is not the only one, but rather that the polyphony from

17 Cf. Eugenia ALLIER MONTAÑO, "Los lieux de mémoire: una propuesta para el análisis de la memoria", *Historia y Grafía*, No. 31, 2008, p. 186.

and about it is the constant. In the midst of this chorus, by stimulating critical thinking and the respectful recognition of diversity, the voices of the past reduce their impact on the creation of conflicts in the present.

Thus, a monument can have many meanings today and a symbolic value that distances it from a single intrinsic value. The understanding of these values must be activated and encouraged by the teaching of History, thus avoiding that the relationship with the Cultural Heritage becomes problematic. The case of the Confederate monuments is a sufficiently strident warning not to look away.

3.1.- A look at the Venezuelan case.

It is necessary to evaluate whether in Venezuela, for example, we could eradicate personalism in national politics if we customarily worship an immaculate man several times every year. In reality, we perpetuate the value of personalism in the rituality that we assume (falsely) as citizenship. The traditional teaching of History in Venezuela inculcates in us that this behavior is not only *normal* but necessary and appropriate for patriotic honor. Not to do so could be considered treason, a sacred sacrifice.

As we have already seen, monuments act as activators of memory. But history has the power (and the duty) to separate memory from history. In Venezuela - as in many other societies - it is common that *memory* and *history* are synonymous and the teaching of history ends up being a perpetuation of memory, even preventing it from transforming and adapting as it would be its natural evolution. Thus, collective memory seems to have established a sort of dictatorship over History, acting in favor of the servitude of men and not in favor of their liberation, to paraphrase Jacques Le Goff.¹⁸

In Venezuela, it should be kept in mind what happened with the *Columbus Monument in the Golfo Triste*, crowned by a statue of the famous navigator elaborated by Rafael de la Cova (1858-1896) in 1894. The monumental group, which was placed in the later named Paseo Colón in 1934, was practically destroyed in 2004 by groups of political activists related to Chavismo (such as "Coordinadora Simón Bolívar" and "Juventudes Indígenas"). After Christopher Columbus was tried for the genocide of Amerindian populations 500 years ago and found guilty, the statue was condemned to "no longer be idolized" and pulled down from its 10 meter high pedestal.

Beyond the regrettable loss in artistic and aesthetic terms from this act, it is necessary to reflect on the role of the teaching of history around the meaning of October 12 as an official holiday in Venezuela and on the Discovery and Conquest of America. It is not the purpose of these pages to do so, but we wish to call attention to the beneficial role of conciliation that the teaching of History has been able to exercise around events of the past that have traditionally been controversial and susceptible to be used as political propaganda.

18 Jacques LE GOFF has said: "We must act in such a way that collective memory serves the liberation and not the servitude of men", p. 183 (*El orden de la memoria*, Ediciones Paidós, Barcelona, 1982).

The monument to Columbus could have been the victim of a misrepresentation of the history of the Discovery and Conquest of America that the teaching of history would not have been able to reverse. It is possible that the quality of history teaching in our country has opened the door to the generation of an artificial and extemporaneous historical resentment. And although we do not intend to accuse the teaching of history as solely responsible for these somewhat perverse distortions, it is not feasible to avoid the role it may have played in turning memory into a resource of liberation and not of servitude as Le Goff rightly referred to.

It is servitude to assume a single vision of the past, it is servitude not to accept the nuances, it is servitude not to recognize other memories. It frees us to know that we are diverse, it frees us to recognize that we are human, capable of learning, of making mistakes and making amends. Therefore, by keeping in mind that the meaning of a monument does not reside in the bronze or the stone, not even in its artistic value, but in each of us in the present, then Cultural Heritage can become a meeting point. Even if those who commissioned the monument wished to give it a particular meaning, it is in us that the fullest meaning of a monument is revealed.

Future generations will incubate different meanings for their cultural heritage and that is inevitable. Today's hero could be tomorrow's villain (and vice versa). A symbol of humanity from decades past sometimes ends up becoming a symbol of inhumanity today. The meaning of cultural heritage is not frozen in time. It is tied to a dynamic that changes hand in hand with the society to which it belongs. However, this dynamic should not be a storm that suddenly shakes the foundations of all social values under the baton of a group married to an ideology that imposes itself under any circumstances. The teaching of history has enormous possibilities to contribute to avoid this and to generate spaces for a respectful and cordial dynamic.

4.- Cultural Heritage, its values and its place in the society.

The concept of monument, which seems to be present in all cultures, does not determine how each society relates to them, which ends up being a contingent, diverse and variable process. Dynamic in its nature, as dynamic as our memory is. This dynamism of memory can be eclipsed and even paralyzed when the teaching of history shows only a valid dynamic of relationship with our heritage and, consequently, with the monuments and what they represent. To avoid this, the teaching of History should avoid being assumed as synonymous with *memory* and in tune with changes in society, guaranteeing the critical vision of what would otherwise be an automatic ritual that executes our memory similar to physiological processes.

This is where the recontextualization or reinterpretation of monuments within the framework of what is recognized as Cultural Heritage is an interesting option. But recontextualizing a monument demands a social agreement that implies revisiting history, removing the past and clarifying memory. This, of course, requires a democratic understanding of collective memory as an active force in society.

Many good examples can be found in the countries of the old European communist bloc. After the Fall of the Berlin Wall - in some cases even before - monuments dedicated to Lenin or

Stalin were torn down with the festive euphoria of freedom. What happened to the monuments in communist countries - it was thought - would not erase the decades of fear, authoritarianism and control over the population. Instead, it was believed that it would open windows for the entry of fresh air with the certainty that those dark years would remain engraved in the memory of many generations. But to the surprise of many, today nostalgia for those years of the strong state survives. Perhaps if the monuments to Stalin had not disappeared from public spaces, everyone would remember the terrible years of communism? No one can say. And, as you will see, we seem to be entering a blind street.

If the removal of a monument cannot be avoided, it must be, in any case, a deliberate, consensual decision, not the result of a fit of euphoria. We know that this is not always possible, but when it is, this decision must be taken community by community, monument by monument, because there are no rules that can be applied to all monuments everywhere. Each society must look into the corners of its memory and the context of the present. It must seek to understand how offensive a monument might be to its fellow citizens and whether those offenses are worth preserving the monument at all costs. The importance of this difficult process of recognition must be addressed by the teaching of history, which is, after all, the arbiter of a society's memories.

On the other hand, a monument is a place of memory and we must prevent it from becoming a place of irrational worship and fanaticism. But preserving a monument as a place of encounter and not of contempt is very complicated in a diverse and pluralistic society. The task is inescapable, however. So when we are confronted with a monument, we must be able to ask ourselves: What is it that the monument commemorates? How should we understand it today?

It is necessary to distinguish whether the monument awakens sectarian memories or historical truths. As we have seen in the case of Confederate monuments, some do terrible damage by their mere presence in public places, in front of public buildings. This, above all, because the meaning of a monument lies not in its materials or its beauty but in each of us today.

What is ultimately required is to study each monument individually. This is mandatory. And to do so, as much information as possible must be gathered about its history and not just its genesis, about its cultural-historical context and associated cultural values, the intent and purpose invested in it when it was erected, and the function it was meant to serve in society. Even so, this is not all. When we refer to monuments, it is fundamental and necessary to analyze how they act in the cultural dynamics of the present, how it relates to current cultural values and whether it acts as a catalyst with positive or negative effects.

Sometimes monuments are admired only for their beauty, for having been erected long ago it is almost impossible for the general public to appreciate them for their original intent, purpose and function. Even remembering what they are supposed to commemorate is sometimes not commonly accessible. The truth is that no one has to believe that sacrificing the lives of others for mere pleasure is a legitimate practice to accept and acknowledge that the Roman Colosseum is a magnificent work of ancient engineering and architecture. Likewise, today it

would be absurd to destroy this building because of the thousands of lives that were sacrificed by the imperial authorities of Rome for the sake of what was then understood as entertainment.

The dilemma with monuments arises when the original intent, purpose and function are supported by values that still survive in the dictatorial memory of a given group of society in the present. When that group does not mind opening painful wounds in other groups of that same society, wishing to impose its memory and refusing to revise it and recognize errors in it, conflict erupts. The main obstacle arises when a group of individuals considers that its cultural values are superior to those of any other group and acts to suppress those values other than its own by any means. In such cases, the artistic and aesthetic values attached to a monument become secondary.

When we refer to monuments, it is fundamental and necessary to analyze how they act in the cultural dynamics of the present, how they relate to current cultural values and whether they act as a catalyst with positive or negative effects. It is key here to forget the existence of an intrinsic value in Cultural Heritage is imperative to give way to the necessary revaluation and recontextualization of it. Otherwise, the way in which we relate to heritage assets could degenerate into a cultural flaw that, without realizing it, would be preventing the adaptation of society towards an increasingly fairer model of coexistence.

If Clifford Geertz showed us decades ago the impossibility of understanding cultures on the basis of universal notions and standards when speaking of cultures,¹⁹ the teaching of history cannot base its discourse on cultural heritage on past values that are immovable in the present. The truism that yesterday is not today and today is not yesterday does not always seem to be taken into account. Thus, when we attribute an intrinsic value to a heritage asset, to a monument, for example, we accept that it has value because of certain inherent, material and symbolic characteristics that are specific to it. This would translate into an objective intrinsic value that becomes, in the end, an absurdity, because as we said, yesterday is not today.

A monument does not benefit if we destroy or restore it. In any case, the beneficiaries are us today. It is clear that "those who suffer the effect of its conservation or destruction are the social agents who live it and confer a value on it."²⁰ On the other hand, the monument itself does not carry a symbolic quality either, it is we who attribute it to it. This is also the case when we consider inherent properties of the monument that is considered a heritage asset. That is to say, the monument will never be inherently cultural heritage, it is so because we have decided so by assigning it a set of values.

In the same way, the meaning of a heritage asset depends on how it is perceived, on the conceptions and valuations that revolve around it and use it as a handle, as a materialization of themselves. That is why they sometimes turn out to be true battlefields or terrains to be conquered. Nestor García Canclini has indicated that due to the different conceptions and

19 See Clifford GEERTZ, *La interpretación de las culturas*, Barcelona, Gedisa, 2009.

20 Isabel VILLASEÑOR ALONSO, "El valor intrínseco del Patrimonio Cultural: ¿un noción aún vigente?", in *Intervención*, Year 2, No. 3, January-July 2011, p.7.

valuations to which Cultural Heritage is subject, they end up generating what we would call a heritage in conflict, in which a “material and symbolic struggle” is staged.²¹

The use of monuments to express ideas implies the existence of a social group that is convinced that its cultural values find a place of materialization, of survival and transcendence in them. It is then in the use of monuments, in the role they play in social values that the teaching of history must pay attention. There, the necessary adaptation to the times, the correction of deformations and the possibility of preserving adequate places for a healthy historical memory can be seen and evaluated.

How one social group uses a monument (by revering or destroying it) to attack another group determines how inadequate the values of that social group are for preserving understanding and respect. But also how adequate or inadequate is the current interpretation of that monument as an instrument for the preservation of concord. This should be a guiding principle for any democratic society when dealing with historical memory in the spectrum of cultural diversity. Thus, in the midst of the controversies that certain monuments may generate in some societies for various reasons, there is one thing we must all keep in mind: *the past must always be remembered, never venerated*. This is a cardinal issue for the teaching of history.

21 Néstor García Canclini, "Los usos sociales del patrimonio", in Encarnación Aguilar (Ed.), *Patrimonio etnológico: nuevas perspectivas de estudio*, Andalucía, Conserjería de Cultura, Junta de Andalucía, 1999, p. 18.

