Facing society : A study of identity through head shaping practices among the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean in the ceramic age and colonial period
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3   THE SOCIAL SKULL

The body is man's first and most natural instrument

Mauss (1973 [1936]:75)

Exploring the process of cranial modification and its physical ramifications invariably leads to the important question of motivation. Why did people in the past initiate and continue head shaping practices over generations? The process requires an investment of time and energy as well as a commitment to the permanent outcome by the practitioner and close kin on behalf of the infant. Intentional cranial modification must have been considered worthwhile given the enduring and socially integrated nature of the practice.

Understanding the reasons for practicing cranial modification provides archaeologists with an important window into the social world of past individuals and societies. In order to grasp the intangible issue of motivation, examples from historic and ethnographic sources will be used to paint a picture of the varied social rationales behind head shaping. Merely copying these motivations recorded in historic and ethnographic sources and pasting them onto archaeological societies is not sufficient. To comprehend the practice, we must understand how altered head shapes function within social settings. Theoretical perspectives on identity from across the humanities will be used to discuss identity formation, maintenance, and expression. The body, and in particular the head, is placed at the nexus of biology and culture and its ability to literally embody and express elements of identity is a key part of this approach.

Returning to cranial modification with this wider theoretical approach in mind, the possibilities and limitations inherent in using an altered head shape to act as a marker of identity will be investigated. The theoretical insights from this chapter combined with the motives for modification extracted from historical and ethnographic sources will provide several potential social rationales for cranial modification that can be investigated in the archaeological record of the Caribbean and beyond.

Although cranial modification is a practice found in a wide range of social and cultural contexts, several shared motivations for the practice can be extracted from anthropological, (ethno)historical, medical, and archaeological sources. This is a heuristically helpful exercise, as it will create plausible options for the sorts of social ties and motivations in cases where additional contextual information is lacking. The following section will show such general trends through carefully selected examples from a range of societies from various regions and periods.[1]

An issue that must be addressed before delving into the variety of motivations for head shaping, is the reliability of ethnographic and historical sources in representing the indigenous social world. When reading discussions on the reasons behind head shaping in such sources, it becomes readily apparent that the personal convictions of the writers may have tainted their descriptions. Disgusting, frightful and queer, monstrous, hideous, and horrid deformity are only a few of the derogatory terms reproduced by Dingwall (1931) from various sources. Furthermore, several partially successful attempts at outlawing head shaping in early colonial South America indicate European discomfort with the practice and its results (Dingwall 1931:215). All of this reveals the prejudiced position from which some writers engaged with the concept of cranial modification, a bias which may have impacted both their manner of conducting interviews with indigenous informants and the subsequent reporting of their findings. This implies that care should be taken not to use explanations from written sources in a direct and uncritical manner, as of course is generally true for all types of written source material (Tosh 2010).

Besides this potentially biased view and the resulting, unconscious or conscious, misunderstanding of the social role of altered head shapes, the original sources from which authors obtain their information can also create problems. The following example by Sala (1897) demonstrates this eloquently: 'The only reason for this barbarity is that in this manner their hair does not hinder their sight and they have a larger forehead'.[2] Sala's reference to cranial modification as barbaric already indicates a negative predisposition towards the custom. His explanation for the presence of altered head shapes, to allow the indigenous population to see without their view being obstructed by their own hair, was righteously dismissed by Dingwall as 'a misunderstanding on his part, or have been given by those who had little knowledge of the custom' (Dingwall 1931:201). Similarly,

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1   This is by no means meant as a comprehensive overview of cranial modification practices around the world. Readers are referred to the classic and invaluable compilation of Eric Dingwall (1931).

2   'La única razón que dan de esta barbaridad es que de este modo no les tapa la vista los cabellos y tienen la frente más grande' (Sala 1897:80).

Dembo and Imbelloni (1938:61) contend that such 'explanations' may be created to soothe the curiosity of inquisitive visitors. In this context, they mention Rochefort's assertion (1667) that the Caribbean Carib population flattened their foreheads to facilitate shooting arrows to the top of trees while hunting.

Despite these drawbacks and issues, written historical or anthropological sources on intentional cranial modification often represent one of the few direct ways of assessing why humans practiced head shaping. The following overview of motivations behind cranial modification necessarily relies heavily on these sources, but they have been assessed critically in an attempt to diminish the impact of any prejudices present, while simultaneously understanding that such biases can never fully be eliminated from this type of investigation. Though this overview consists of different categories, these should not be considered singular or mutually exclusive explanations of head shaping practices. As will become readily apparent in the remainder of the heuristic framework presented in this chapter, the social ties of intentional cranial modification are simultaneously multiscalar and plural.

Cultural and Aesthetic Ideals

Based on the sheer quantity of citations in written sources, altered head shapes are considered aesthetically pleasing by most societies that practice intentional cranial modification. The Scandinavian Lapps provide an interesting example in this respect. Manual massaging of an infant's head and nose was combined with tightly wound textiles, in the form of a tight scarf or traditional narrow cap, to produce a rounder skull shape (Hatt 1915). The rounder shape was considered beautiful, but the improved health of the infant was also mentioned as a factor. Massaging and bandaging the cranium was considered to increase the rate of closure of the anterior fontanel, which the Lapps believed to be crucial for the proper and healthy development of the infant. Delayed closure of the fontanel was believed to result in headaches and a delay in learning how to walk (Hatt 1915).

A desire to ensure an infant remains healthy and will grow up to be intelligent has also been enmeshed with the practice of intentional cranial modification. An ethnographic study of traditional child care practices among modern immigrants in the United States showed a persistence of mild forms of cranial modification produced by massaging the head in early infancy (FitzSimmons et al. 1998). Informants mentioned beauty, health, and intelligence as prime motivators for cranial modification. Hatt considers the relationship between head shaping and health to be the original motivation behind the practice and debates whether social notions of beauty and aesthetics became associated afterwards (Hatt 1915).

Gender

Cranial modification may also have been used to express gender differences. Several examples are provided here, but it should be noted that authors have generally equated biological sex with social gender and have not attempted to distinguish the two phenomena – perhaps unsurprisingly since most of these sources date from before the theoretical paradigm shift that underlies our current understanding of these concepts. To clarify, sex refers to biological differences between males and females in reproductive organs and chromosomes, whereas gender is a social construct (Gowland and Thompson 2013; Meskell 2007; Moore 1994).

Blackwood and Danby (1955) mention slight differences in the execution of cranial modification between the sexes among the Arawe population of Melanesia. The main reason given for cranial modification was aesthetic, with women reported to have more marked modifications created by a longer and tighter application of the modification device since a greater degree of modification made them more attractive to prospective partners. This pattern of gender differentiation, with more marked modification in females, was also seen among other populations in Melanesia and Indonesia (Dingwall 1931:124-128) and on the island of Marken in The Netherlands. Here, islanders used traditional headdresses consisting of several tight layers to create a mild cranial modification (Barge 1912). Although both men and women were subjected to this practice, female caps were generally tighter and kept in place for a longer period of time (Barge 1912).

A more clear-cut division between males and females can be found in central Celebes, where the sexes were subjected to different methods of modification. For males, the modification apparatus consisted of three boards placed in lateral and superior positions which created an altered cranial shape reportedly meant to terrify enemies. Females, for reasons of beauty, were subjected to circumferential modification using bark (Dingwall 1931:128). This situation is comparable to the modification practices encountered among the indigenous inhabitants of Tahiti. Here, both sexes underwent cranial and nasal modification, but the heads of men were subjected to additional shaping in order to 'strike terror in the hearts of his enemies' (Dingwall 1931:149).

Religion

Cranial modification is occasionally linked to religious beliefs. Houston and colleagues (2006:45) propose that head shaping among the Classic Maya was a direct imitation of the corn-cob shaped head of the Maize God. As the Maize God was associated with

notions of beauty, this may have been a reiteration of the relationship between altered head shapes and aesthetics. Although Tiesler (2012) agrees with the hypothesis by Houston and colleagues (2006), she cautions that such an argument can only apply to the minority of the population who were modified in the depicted manner and therefore is at best only a partial explanation for cranial modification in this population. Her argument corresponds to the notion of plural social motivations for head shaping suggested by the heuristic framework constructed in this chapter.

In relation to the altered head shapes encountered in the Inca Empire, Agrand proposes that frontal flattening is an attempt to imitate the shape of a snake's head as a reference to the mythological serpent ancestor of the ruling family (Agrand in Wiener 1874:82). However, it is unclear on what factual information this notion was based and it is in fact dismissed outright by Dingwall (1931:219). Emulating the shape of a totemic ancestor, in this case the turtle, was also proposed for the indigenous inhabitants of the Caribbean by Herrera Fritot (Herrera Fritot and Youmans 1946). Again, similarity between the cranial shapes observed by the authors seems to be the only basis for this assertion and it is not based on or supported by indigenous information on head shaping practices. The latter should inform our understanding of intentional cranial modification and the relation between turtles and head shaping in the Caribbean is therefore considered invalid.

Group Identity

Collective social identities exist on numerous scales and can express differentiation within and between different communities. Cranial modification can be used within a society to display the group affiliation of an individual. Such collective identities can exist on many different levels, from local expressions of family, lineage, or community to regional concepts such as province, ethnicity, or even nation.

Cranial shapes may be used as embodied expressions of status differentiation within societies. A classic and well documented example can be found among the Chinookan speaking peoples of the Pacific Northwest of the United States. At the beginning of the 19th century, Lewis and Clark described cranial flattening among the men and women of these societies (Lewis et al. 1843). Several authors reported that enslaved individuals within these communities had normal head shapes, although there were different opinions on the notion that freed slaves were allowed to modify the heads of their children (Dingwall 1931:166-169). The altered head shape was seen as a marker of freedom and can thus be considered an indicator of a particular type of social status – free or enslaved – within these communities.

Studying the long history of cranial modification in France, which arguably dates back to the Neolithic (for this discussion see Dingwall 1931:19-20), demonstrates that the social reasons behind head shaping may change significantly through time. During the Medieval Period, cranial modification in France began as an elite practice emphasizing high social standing, but was subsequently rejected by the aristocracy when it was emulated by the lower classes (Gerszten and Gerszten 1995; Littlefield et al. 2005; Tubbs et al. 2006). The practice, mainly in the form of tight bandages known as a bandeau, continued among the lower ranks of society until the beginning of the 20th century (Delisle 1902; Dingwall 1931). By this time, however, different regions had developed unique types of caps and bandages resulting in distinct cranial shapes, the most well-known of these being the so-called déformation toulouisaine (Delisle 1902; Dingwall 1931; Soto-Heim 2004; Wells 1964). Such distinct regional differences could be used to identify the region of origin and as such could be considered markers of regional or group identity.

In the Andes, group identity was displayed directly on the human body using distinct styles of clothing, headdress, hair, and cranial modification (Blom 2005a). These visual markers allowed for rapid identification by those who understood and shared the symbolic language. These communal indicators of group identity also served to create internal cohesion within larger and complexly organised communities, a fact exploited by the Inca who actively encouraged the process of regional diversification in the Andes after the expansion of their empire (Blom 2005a,b; Gerszten 1993; Hoshower et al. 1995; Torres-Rouf 2009).

Investigations into the expansion of the Tiwanaku influence sphere between AD 500 and 1100 in the Andes have shown distinct regional patterns of modification styles. While the cemeteries from the surrounding valleys show only a single style, either fronto-occipital or circumferential, cemeteries from the city actually show a mixture of both. These types of modification represent the regional identities of the surrounding valleys, which are both encountered at the point of interaction between the two in the capital city of Tiwanaku (Blom et al. 1998, 2005a,b).

A study by Hoshower and colleagues (1995) looked at the modification styles found in the Omo M10 site in one of the valleys near Tiwanaku. There were minor variations in the construction of modification devices within this site, which could be linked to spatially distinct cemeteries. The authors conclude that this pattern was produced by *ayllus* (kin groups) who constructed modification devices in different manners. These constructions appeared to be relatively conservative in nature, as they remain stable throughout different periods in the site's habitation (Hoshower et al. 1995).

Among the Osage, a group of Native Americans living on the Great Plains, the occipital flattening created by their traditional cradleboards was considered an important marker of ethnic/group identity. Historical sources confirm that the cradles were deliberately constructed and used to create the altered head shape. The 19th century brought rapid social changes to the group, including a significant increase of marriages between Osage and White Americans, which led to a gradual loss of the traditional cradleboards and the associated ethnic identity communicated through altered head shapes. The absence of such a clear identifying marker may even have been considered advantageous against racial discrimination in the later parts of the 19th century (Logan et al. 2003).

Many societies relate group identity to notions of shared ancestry, be it biological or mythical. Among the Peruvian Collaguas of Arequipa, the altered cranial shape was said to have been derived from the shape of the volcano that was their mythological place of origin (Blom 2005a; Dingwall 1931:217). A similar story has been recorded for the Koľawas in Peru, whose cranial modification mimicked the shape of the Koľawata volcano (Schijman 2005). However, in both cases the cranial shape of the neighbouring communities with distinct mythological origins were very different. These examples could be considered as (indirect) signals of group identity, rooted in a communal ancestral origin and (re-)established in mythology.

Towards an Interpretive Framework

This analysis of source material from numerous social and cultural contexts has provided an interpretive framework showing the range of variation in motivations for head shaping practices. Cultural and aesthetic ideals, gender, religion, and group affiliations on various levels ranging from small scale differentiation within a community to markers of ethnic identity have all been proposed as rationales behind intentional cranial modification. The cases cited above have also shown that altered head shapes are often associated simultaneously with several of these concepts. Such plurality and multidimensionality must be kept in mind whilst exploring the social ties of head shaping practices.

Though the interpretive framework has seemingly produced many disparate concepts underlying head shaping practices, there is a shared common thread: each represents an element of identity. The altered head shape serves as a visual social signal expressing who a person is and how they relate to others. Cranial modification can therefore be considered a way of articulating an aspect of social identity in terms of a cultural bodily practice and a manner of facilitating social identification and interaction. The following sections will discuss identity, the body, and embodiment from a social constructionist

perspective to understand the ways in which altered head shapes are created, embedded, and used to signal meaning within social contexts.

3.2   DEFINING IDENTITY?

The concept of identity became a key focus of research in the social sciences and humanities during the latter half of the twentieth century. Interest in the matter started with anthropological queries regarding the self and society, but the popularisation of the term identity has generally been attributed to psychologist Erik Erikson (Byron 2002:292; Hoover and Ericksen 2004; Verkuyten 2005). The topic fits well with the paradigm shift taking place in archaeological theory at the time away from the culture-historical perspective towards the new golden rule that 'pots are not people' (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005; Insoll 2007; Jones 1997, 2007; Terrell 2010). Identity theory provided valuable novel ways to further our developing understanding of past communities. Within bioarchaeology, identity has only emerged as a topic of interest in the last two decades but studies have been prolific, likely due to the exceptional direct access to past human bodies (Baadsgaard et al. 2012; Buikstra and Scott 2009; Knudson and Stowjanowski 2009; Sofaer 2006).

Despite this surge of interest in the topic within all social disciplines – and indeed outside of academia in Western culture as a whole – defining identity is extremely challenging (Byron 2002; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Cornell and Hartman 1998; Hoover and Ericksen 2004; Jenkins 2014). The Oxford Dictionary (2015) defines identity as: 'the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is'. However, there is an inherent ambiguity in the use of the term within the social sciences, as it seems to be composed of two tangled issues: personal and collective identity (Byron 2002; Jenkins 2014; Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005).

Personal or self-identity refers to those aspects that make an individual unique and different from others (Byron 2002; Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005; Jenkins 2014). This is the way the term is most often used intuitively in day-to-day Western life: that what composes who I am. Collective or group identity, on the other hand, refers to the way an individual relates to groups or categories based on shared similarities or differences. In this way, collective identities provide humans with an understanding of their place in society. Ethnicity is one of the most commonly cited and studied examples of this type of identity (Barth 1969; Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Eriksen 1993; Jenkins 2008; Jones 1997; Lucy 2005; Verkuyten 2005).

These two aspects compose the identity of a person and have often been treated as separate phenomena despite the fact that they are intertwined within the embodied

individual and are difficult to entangle (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Hoover and Ericksen 2004; Jenkins 2008, 2014). The construction of individual and collective identity both take place during interaction through the process of identification of similarities and differences. In this respect, they share important features and can be considered one phenomenon. The most productive way of understanding the relation between these two aspects is by studying identity as a process that takes place at three different scales: the individual and social are connected through a level of interaction. This idea is found in the original work of Erikson that views identity as relation and in essence the middle ground between the individual and society (Erikson 1950; Hoover and Ericksen 2004) and recurs in several disciplines, albeit phrased differently, including social psychology (Côté and Levine 2002; Verkuyten 2005) and sociology (Goffman 1958; Jenkins 2008, 2014). In the words of Jenkins (1997:56):

> 'This scheme is only a way of thinking about society. It simply says that society can be thought of as made up of individuals, as made up of the interaction between individuals, and as made up of institutions. It also says that it cannot be thought of as any of these in isolation from the other two.'

For this study, the strength of this simplified view of society and identification processes is that it is grounded in embodied individuals (Jenkins 2000, 2008), the same level of analysis used when accessing cranial modification in individual crania. This model demonstrates the way in which individual and collective identities are entangled and embodied in the human body and how altered head shapes may inform us about individual and collective identities.

Identification

Our current theoretical understanding of identity has come from multiple academic disciplines where scholars have developed separate but often parallel lines of thought on the matter since the start of investigations in the fifties and sixties (Jenkins 2014; Hall 1996). The importance of identity in the social sciences and humanities has produced a treasure trove of scholarly works that cannot all be discussed here. In the following section, a pragmatic choice will be made from sociological and social anthropological literature on the prevailing current theoretical understanding of identity, which could be summarised as social constructionism. These social constructionist views on how humans articulate their identities are particularly helpful in connection to head shaping practices as they reflect the dynamic multidimensional identification processes identified in the source material for the interpretive framework, while at the same time providing room for the more stable and permanent aspects of intentional cranial modification.

Plurality is important in the social constructionist approach and there is no such thing as a single dominant identity. Although individuals may feel they have a single unified identity in the sense of a unique self, this is composed of many different elements of identity or partial identities. Certain aspects become ingrained from a very early age as a part of the socialisation process of an infant, whereas other aspects are acquired over the course of life time of social ties and experiences (Cohen 1994; Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Hoover and Ericksen 2004; Jenkins 2000, 2014 Verkuyten 2005). Identities are inherently dynamic in nature and produced through a continual process of identification during interaction with other social agents (Jenkins 2000, 2014; Hall 1996; Verkuyten 2005). In fact, Jenkins (2014) argues that the term identity should be replaced with identification as this is a much more accurate reflection of the continual process that shapes and reshapes who we are from before birth to beyond the grave.

Identification is essentially a process of comparison between the self and others based on similarities and differences. This can take place internally in a process of self-identification or externally in a process of categorisation by other actors. The differences or similarities used in the process are those that are socially determined to be important. This process is the same for both individual and collective identities, although the emphasis is slightly different: individual identities tend to accentuate difference from other humans whereas collective identities stress similarities within the group and differences with outsiders. Both arise from the interplay between similarity and difference, since one cannot exist without the other. These processes of identification are important building blocks of society, as they provide humans with an insight into themselves and others as well as an understanding of where they stand in society and how to relate to others (Barth 1969; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Jenkins 2000, 2014; Jones 1997).

An important aspect of these processes of identification is the nature of social boundaries. Barth's work (1969) has had a major impact on archaeological and wider sociological thinking on identities. Barth points out that ethnic collectives cannot exist in isolation, as the comparison of similarities and differences at the basis of the identification process requires interaction between two entities (Barth 1969). This argument is in fact applicable to all types of identities. Although the term boundary might conjure up connotations of an impassable divide, these social boundaries are in fact the location of continuous interaction, for it is there that identity is constructed, expressed, and revised. This may take place at various levels: an ethnic identity requires the creation of an in- and out-group or us versus them, whereas personal identity uses a similar process in establishing self versus other (Cohen 1994; Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Eriksen 1993; Jenkins 2014; Voss 2008).

Identities are contextual and situational in nature. The social context will determine which of the many elements of identity is actively expressed by the actor or performed in the words of Goffman (1958). This situational aspect explains how many different and sometimes even opposing elements of identity are integrated in an embodied individual. The same principle applies on a more general level regarding the synthesis of personal and collective identity (Cohen 1994; Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005; Eriksen 1993).

Despite the constructed and fluid nature of identity, there are certain constraints present due to the dual process of self-association and classification by others. For example, although anyone can claim British nationality, such a claim will be assessed by others and must in some way be validated to be socially effective. So, identities are open to manipulation by actors but simultaneously constrained by social structure. In other words: identity is malleable but not infinitely so (Eriksen 1993; Jenkins 2014; Verkuyten 2005).

This strategic and positional view of identity stresses fluidity and agency, yet some identities can also be stable and continuous. Certain identities, primary identities in Jenkins' terms (2014) or identities grounded in (constructed) primordialities (Cornell and Hartmann 1998), become ingrained in both society and the individual through transmission to children during the early socialisation process. These provide them with a basic understanding of their social world through the lens of these identity elements. Gender or ethnic affiliations are prime examples of identities that are often instilled at a young age and tend to be relatively stable. Established identities that have become ingrained in society and can in the correct situational circumstances take on an almost self-perpetuating quality (Bentley 1987; Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Jenkins 2008, 2014; Verkuyten 2005).

These characteristics compose the theoretical understanding of socially constructed identity used in this investigation, selected as it reflects both the multidimensional and stable aspects of intentional cranial modification. However, the archaeological nature of the current investigation provides certain limitations and challenges for individual and collective identities. A helpful concept from anthropological and archaeological theory already briefly referenced is that of ethnicity, which will be discussed in more detail in relation to collective identities.

The Self

Personal identity, also referred to as the self, selfhood, or personhood with definitions varying slightly depending on the preferred theoretical paradigm and academic discipline, refers to our notion of ourselves as unique individuals with our own tastes

and preferences – essentially who we think we are (Cohen 1994; Fowler 2004; Jenkins 2014). The term identity spread rapidly after its mid-20th century introduction not only in global academia, but also in popular culture. This led to widespread use of the term in the media and has resulted in lay use of the term in everyday life by social actors who have developed an understanding of the meaning through their own experience, which is different from the academic use of the term (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Hoover and Ericksen 2004). This intuitive understanding is very much wrapped up with the cultural background of individuals and the Western point of view may not be applicable to the Amerindian ontologies from indigenous Caribbean populations (Conklin 1996; Conklin and Morgan 1996; Fowler 2004).

In fact, Conklin and Morgan (1996) and Fowler (2004) have demonstrated that notions of personhood vary widely between different societies. We cannot simply assume that our own view of what it means to be a person can simply be transposed back onto past people. This is not to say that the concept of self-identity is a modern notion as some have claimed (see Jenkins 2014 for this discussion), but is simply a reminder that archaeologists must take care in their analyses and take social context and cultural meanings into account.

What can be said about personal identity in relation to cranial modification is that the altered head shapes of past people would have played a vital role in how people shaped their own identity. As the infant would be surrounded by the altered head shapes of close family members during early socialisation, this would likely be incorporated, in some degree, into the concept of personhood (Conklin and Morgan 1996). Furthermore, the altered head shape represented a permanent aspect of personal appearance and the image of self, as the individual would have no memories of a time without it. This embedded nature of head shaping practices would have had an important impact on the socially informed aesthetics of individuals and the community as a whole.

This reinvokes the multidimensionality of constructed identities and the difficulty in separating the layers of analysis: how much of what we consider beautiful is personal preference and how much is dictated by social convention? Cranial modification would have undisputedly have had an important impact on the personal identities of past individuals, but the specifics of this will be extremely difficult to trace through archaeology alone and must be assessed in conjunction with other lines of evidence.

The Collective

The social function of collective or group identities is to provide individuals with an accurate understanding of where they stand in relation to others within the social organisation. These categorisations can take place using similarities and/or differences

in a variety of different characteristics including: gender, age, social status, occupation, kinship, and religion. Any characteristic can be used to create a social identity as long as the difference or similarity is deemed to be socially important (Díaz-Andreu et al. 2005; Eriksen 1993; Jenkins 2008, 2014; Voss 2008).

Using kinship as an example, different types, or perhaps more accurately, different scales of group identity based on kinship ties can be found: family, clan, community, chiefdom, ethnicity, and perhaps even nation. Here, kinship is not restricted to actual biological relations or blood ties between individuals, but used in a much broader sense as an agreement of shared ancestry based on the views of influential early sociologist Weber: 'The fact of common descent is less important than belief in common descent' (in Cornell and Hartmann 1998:16). Extending kinship in this fashion allows for larger collectives such as ethnic groups to be formed (Eriksen 1993; Emberling 1997; Jones 2007; Lucy 2005). Ethnicity and ethnic identities have been at the forefront of identity studies in all disciplines and will be discussed in a little more detail here as they are particularly pertinent to archaeological studies of social collectives and boundaries.

Beyond the 'Tribe'

Collective identities have always been a mainstay of anthropological and archaeological theory and practice. The basic units of analysis were homogeneous bounded entities with a shared set of (material) cultural characteristics: peoples, cultures, tribes, or races (Eriksen 1993; Jenkins 2008; Jones 1997, 2007; Lucy 2005). Within archaeology, these earliest attempts at connecting the remnants of the past to particular peoples led to the culture-history framework that dominated archaeological thinking in the early 20th century (Jones 1997, 2007; Lucy 2005). In anthropology, 'tribe' became the dominant concept for describing and understanding the 'primitive' subjects of study. The tribe provided a Eurocentric theoretical model that simultaneously marked the difference in the way in which academia studied our own social organisation and that of others (Eriksen 1993; Jenkins 2008).

Fundamental changes took place in anthropological and archaeological theory and practice in the 1950's and 1960's. Anthropologists working in a post-colonial context moved away from cultures as homogeneous bounded wholes and started working with ethnic groups and minorities to gain a better understanding of culture as a complex, composite, and changing entity (Eriksen 1993; Jenkins 2008; Jones 1997, 2007). Archaeology, perhaps partially in response to the negative connections of the culture-history paradigm with racist ideas and Nazi ideology in German archaeology, turned towards attempting to understand the processes that create culture and cultural change in a movement known as processual archaeology (Insoll 2007; Jones 1997, 2007; Lucy 2005). These transitions coincided with the introduction of the terms identity

and ethnicity and an increased interest in both within wider academia (Eriksen 1993; Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Jenkins 2008; Jones 1997, 2007).

The term ethnicity, much like that of identity, is relatively new but has ancient roots (Sokolovskii and Tishkov 2002). Introduced by sociologist Riesman in 1953, it derives from the Greek ethnikos (Eriksen 1993; Jenkins 2008). Although definitions of ethnicity and ideas regarding what constitutes an ethnic identity vary widely, most agree that at the core lies the distinction between us and them (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Jenkins 2008; Voss 2008). Theoretical approaches have ranged from primordialist views of ethnicity as a fundamental and fixed concept ingrained at birth and closely related to descent to instrumentalist arguments for flexible constructions that can be strategically manipulated via social agency. The standpoint advocated here is a social constructionist approach combining elements of both (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Jenkins 2008; Jones 1997), as this reflects the dynamic and permanent aspects of head shaping practices. Though the characteristics of socially constructed identities have already been outlined, there are some points worth reiterating in relation to ethnicity.

Like all types of identity, ethnicity is a process of social organisation based on the identification of similarities and differences between two collectives. However, ethnic identities stress cultural differentiation over similarities – essentially what makes us different from others (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Epstein 1978; Eriksen 1993; Jenkins 2008). What differentiates an ethnic group from other types of group identity is the reference to a common origin based on factual or fictional kinship ties (Eriksen 1993; Jenkins 2008; van den Berghe 1981; Verkuyten 2005). To quote Emberling (1997:304): 'ethnicity is fundamentally an extension of kinship'.

Although ethnicity is being discussed here and is often analysed as a group identity, it is in fact simultaneously a collective and individual identity. Its foundation in kinship ties explains why ethnic identity is often among the core concepts established through socialisation in early infancy and may create a powerful sense of belonging.[3] Ethnic identity is among the primary identities that shape the individual outlook on life. Its forms a substantial part of individual identity as well as providing an understanding of where one stands in society (Bentley 1987; Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Emberling 1997; Jenkins 2008).

To reiterate Barth's (1969) key point: the ascription and categorisation required for the establishing of ethnic identity cannot take place in isolation, but rely upon interaction

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3   The importance of ethnic ties may vary widely between collectives due to their relational and contextual nature. This explains why ethnicity may matter little to some but so much to others (Jenkins 1997).

and social contact. Ethnicity is created as much by internal self-ascription by individual agents as through external categorisation by others. The situational nature of identity is equally relevant for ethnicity. As individuals move through different contexts, ethnic identities may be more or less relevant and consequently may be accentuated or minimised in social interaction. The social construction and contextual nature of ethnic identity does not imply it is infinitely flexible. Ethnicities in particular must be validated by outsiders to acquire significance, require differences to be culturally significant, and emerge from past and present circumstances beyond the control of the group or individual. In a sense, although concepts like kinship or the past of a group may be manipulated to a certain extent, the result must remain plausible and agents are restricted to a degree by the existing structure (Barth 1969; Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Emberling 1997; Eriksen 1993; Isaacs 1975; Jenkins 2000; Lucy 2005; Wolf 1994).

This social constructionist approach to ethnicity has repercussions for the archaeological study of ethnic groups. Ethnicities may take on many different forms depending on the interactions between agents and circumstances. Therefore, there will be no direct correlation between the entire cultural spectrum of practices and a singular ethnic identity (Clarke 1968; Hodder 1982; Insoll 2007; Jones 1997, 2007; Lucy 2005). What cultural elements are deemed important and relevant in an ethnic context will differ. Consequently, they must be analysed and not taken for granted, while looking at the whole of variation in material culture in its context. Instead of looking for homogeneous bounded units, the mismatched boundaries produced by different categories become of interest as articulations between different socially constructed collectives and identities (Jones 1997; Díaz-Andreu et al. 2005).

Archaeologists should also consider that not all past group identities are necessarily ethnic in nature. In fact, some have argued that we are much more likely to encounter group identities on a smaller scale (Lucy 2005; MacEachern 1998), while others go further and believe ethnicity can only develop in relation to nations or states (Brass 1991; Emberling 1997). The first suggestion seems valid, especially given the view of ethnicity as a social extension of kinship: ethnicity requires a larger scale of social interaction, otherwise existing kinship organisation would be sufficient (Emberling 1997; Lucy 2005; MacEachern 1998). There is no reason to believe that the basic processes that construct ethnicity as outlined above would necessarily be related to the appearance or existence of states although the increasing nationalism since the 19th century and recent globalisation processes may have transformed our current notion of ethnicity and ethnic identities and certain aspects of this may be unique to modern society (Bawden 2005; Eriksen 1993; Hutchinson and Smith 1996; Jenkins 2008; Jones 1997).

Communicating Identities

In the social constructionist view of identity, social interactions between individuals play an important role in how identities are created, maintained, and transformed. Communication of identities is a fundamental part of these processes. After all, categorisation is difficult if not impossible without any knowledge regarding the other. Such information may be directly communicated by actors during social interactions or transmitted through visual cues.

These markers of identity will be discussed in more detail. It is important to note that effective communication through symbolism requires both a mutual understanding of and a general agreement on the underlying meaning. Unlike language, the abstract nature of symbols means they are interpreted differently by each actor based on previous experiences and may be subtly manipulated (Cohen 1986, 1994; Wells 2012). This slight ambiguity allows individuals to accommodate elements of individual and group identities without friction and explains how uniform communities with a shared sense of belonging can be constructed out of countless individuals (Cohen 1986, 1994; Jenkins 2014).

Social Signs

Anything can be a marker of identity, as long as it symbolises those cultural similarities or differences that are considered significant (Barth 1969). These signals can be expressed through behaviour, the human body, or material culture. Each of these will be discussed in turn in conjunction with two other important factors of identity markers: authenticity and visibility. Identities are important building blocks of human society as they represent social relationships and govern interaction between individuals. Authenticity is therefore important to ensure identities are legitimate and not appropriated by others. The visibility of markers increases the effectiveness of social signals and can reveal information on the intended audience (Isaacs 1975; McGuire 1982; Roosens 1989; van den Berghe 1981; Wells 2001).

Behavioural signals of identity, such as language, non-verbal communication, and mannerisms, are often used as they are difficult to imitate. Although a foreign language can be learned and thus linguistic differentiation can be a little more fluid, speaking a language like a native is something altogether different. More specific elements of language, such as stories or phrases, may also be used in this sense instead of language as a whole (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Lockwood 1981). However, the disadvantage of using behavioural markers of identity is their lack of visibility from a distance (Nash 1996; van den Berghe 1981).

Signalling identity through the human body or material culture has the benefit of enabling a rapid visual identification and helps to streamline social interaction. Flags or military uniforms are excellent examples of such markers (Horowitz 1975; Sørensen 1997; van den Berghe 1981). The drawback is the fact that temporary additions to the body or material culture can easily be copied or appropriated, leaving the identity open to unwanted manipulation unless it is combined with other types of markers (Isaacs 1975; Nash 1996; van den Berghe 1981). Basing group identity on physical characteristics, the most infamous example being skin colour[4], erases this risk. As this is not always an option, societies may practice bodily modification to create permanent and visible distinguishing features that signal identities (Blom 2005b; Isaacs 1975). In this manner, the individual embodies and becomes the identity (Roosens 1989).

3.3   *MARKING THE BODY*

There is an almost bewildering array of options to decorate and change the appearance of the body that can be used as identity markers. Cranial modification is one possibility in a range of permanent modifications such as tattooing, scarification, piercing, and cosmetic surgery. However, more temporary changes such as make-up, hair styling and colouring, and clothing can also be considered in the same vein. All of these are cultural means of adding the social directly onto to the biological.

The tension between the biological and social within the human body has long held the interest of sociology and anthropology. The social constructionist approaches to the self, the body, and society by the likes of Mauss (1973 [1936]), Douglas (2007 [1973]), and Bourdieu (1977) have impacted anthropological and archaeological thinking on the body and identity.

In her seminal work on the body and symbolism, Douglas describes two bodies: the physical and the social. She summarises her position as follows:

> 'The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other' (Douglas 2007 [1973]:72).

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4   Note that skin colour can only be successfully used as a marker of difference if it is considered relevant by society. Accordingly, racism is therefore not natural, but socially determined (Cornell and Hartman 1998).

The emphasis on interaction between the natural and the cultural is interesting, as this echoes ideas that the body is not simply used to display identity markers, or in Turner's terms acting as 'the Social Skin' (Turner 1980), but plays an important part in the construction and embodiment of these identities at the same time (Conklin 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Fisher and Loren 2003; Joyce 2005; Shilling 2003). The concept of habitus as posited by Bourdieu (1977) is often used to bridge the gap between signal and construction. Bourdieu's habitus has been interpreted in a multitude of ways, but Ortner provides this clear interpretation:

> 'For Bourdieu the subject internalises the structures of the external world, both culturally defined and objectively real. These internalised structures form a habitus, a system of dispositions that incline actors to act, think, and feel in ways consistent with the limits of the structure' (Ortner 2006:109).

Bourdieu stresses the internalised and unconscious nature of the habitus, but such a view overlooks social agency and the dialectic relation between the individual and society. Culture shapes individuals, yet simultaneously social actors reproduce and transform that culture through practice and their decisions to act in certain ways. Combining Bourdieu's notion of habitus with ideas on agency by Giddens (1979) links individual and society in an active relationship balancing social structure with personal acting based on embodied experience. (Re)created practice thus allows for changes through agency (Bourdieu 1977; De Certeau and Rendall 1984; Entwistle 2000; Moore 1994; Ortner 2006; Shilling 2003).

The pivotal role of the socially constructed body in the formation and expression of social identities results from the fact that 'the human body is the most readily available image of a system' (Douglas 2007:xxxviii). As such, it is echoing Mauss' ideas of a 'natural symbol' of society (Mauss 1973 [1936]). An often repeated example of this is the existence of bodily metaphors such as head of state (Babi´c 2005; Jenkins 2014; Hamilakis et al. 2002).

The body has great interactive and performative potential. It is always present in interactions with others, consider the term face-to-face in this regard, and appearance can play an important role in non-verbal communication (Giddens 1979; Joyce 2005; Sørensen 1997). The work of Goffman on the presentation of the self through the body, an extension of Mauss' earlier *techniques du corps*, also touches on this (Entwistle 2000; Goffman 1958). Goffman views the body as the mediator between the individual and society through interaction, a concept very similar to Bourdieu's habitus (Goffman 1958; Jenkins 1992; Shilling 2003).

In stressing the embodied individual and socially constructed body, some have forgotten its biological basis. Although the social body is of great interpretative interest for archaeologists wishing to understand past individuals and societies, it is important not to forget the fact that the body not only provides potential for social marking but simultaneously limits it (Sofaer 2006). Much like identity itself, human bodies may be malleable, but not infinitely so. In the case of intentional cranial modification, for example, the development of the human skull provides a limited window of opportunity during the first few months of life to redirect cranial growth and achieve an alternative shape of the human head. Head shaping practices started later in life will not be effective, a clear illustration of biological limitations to social alterations of the human body.

Any study of the human body must acknowledge it as the location where biology and culture meet. Attempting to understand complex processes of identity formation and expression through the human body from only one of its components will at best yield a partial picture (Sofaer 2006). This understanding is behind the recent boom in bioarchaeological research using osteological analyses of the actual physical body as a basis for social interpretations. In fact, the position of bioarchaeology at the boundary between the sciences and the humanities, or perhaps more accurately bridging the gap (Buikstra and Scott 2009; Martin et al. 2013; Nillson Stutz and Tarlow 2013; Sofaer 2006), echoes the aforementioned ideas on the body as a nexus of biology and culture.

The discussion on the social body and the concept of habitus has shown the theoretical potential for marking the physical body with social expressions and literally embodying identities. Before we return to the specific opportunities and restrictions for signalling identity through the altered head shapes, the focus of this study, one question that remains is whether there is anything about the skull in particular: is it, as it would seem to be, a privileged part of the social body and how so?

Why the Skull?

The human body as a whole clearly has great potential for expressing and embodying social identities, yet there seems to be a particular emphasis on the human head in many societies. In addition to the widespread occurrence of cranial modification practices, numerous other cultural customs surround the human head and skull before and after death. Special treatment of the head and hair are seen in many past and present societies, ranging from the importance of these elements of physical appearance for dress and ornamentation of the body throughout most of the European Bronze Age (Sørensen 1997) to the veiling of the female head in Islamic societies (Hansen 2004).

After death, human crania can be treated or deposited in various ways that differ from the rest of the body. Evidence of plastering, modelling, and painting of human crania has been found in the Neolithic Middle East (Bonogofsky 2005, 2015) and carving of the cranial vault was seen in Sepik crania from New Guinea (Stodder 2005). The heads of fallen enemies captured during Melanesian head hunting practices, i.e. ritual warfare connected to social and cosmological renewal, were transported back to the village and ceremonially defleshed and decorated (Corbey 2007; Knauft 1990; van Baal 1966). Taking and displaying human body parts, including heads and skulls, is by no means restricted to Melanesia but are an almost universal feature of human societies throughout history (Chacon and Dye 2007; Walker 2000). The ashtray made from the skull of black lynching victim James Irwin in 1930's America (Chacon and Dye 2007:20) or the shrunken head of a nameless Polish man from Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald (Douglas 1998) are pertinent reminders that trophies made of human body parts are not merely a thing of the past or restricted to 'the Other'.

These brief examples are a mere selection of the varied cultural treatments of the human head and skull before and after death found in societies around the world (see Bonogofsky 2015 and Chacon and Dye 2007 for recent overviews). Exact cultural meanings and values attributed to the head vary cross-culturally and through time, yet the shared emphasis on this particular part of the human body leads to considerations on why this element is so important.

The head or skull are 'regarded in many societies as the seat of personhood, ancestorhood, or the soul' (Bonogofsky 2015:3). The head – and in particular the face – is also one of the most powerful social tools available. The unique appearance of each face is used as the primary point of recognition of individuals. Even the faces of unfamiliar individuals immediately provide clues to the gender, age, and ancestry of the person that aid in our assessment of the correct social approach to the individual. Besides social pointers, facial expressions convey emotions and non-verbal feedback. Combined with the visibility of the human face, this explains its predominant position in social interaction and communication known as facial primacy (Knapp and Hall 2002; Grossmann et al. 2008; Wilkinson 2004; Zebrowitz and Montepare 2008).

The importance of the face in social interaction provides an extra dimension to the practice of cranial modification. The altered human skull shape would have been visible in daily face-to-face interactions between social actors and would have functioned as an additional non-verbal message. Wells (2012:8) argued that 'objects played a much greater role in communication and expression in societies that do not have writing than in societies that do'. This reasoning can be extended to the embodied social and cultural values of altered head shapes and the increased significance of such signals in past societies.

Identity theory has allowed us to grasp the importance of the altered head shape as an embodied social construct that expresses individual and communal relations. There is, however, an aspect of cranial modification less often highlighted that may provide valuable insights: the physical process of altering the cranial shape. Head shaping requires the investment of time and effort of another individual on behalf of the infant. Furthermore, the practice should not be seen in isolation but is embedded in the early socialisation of the newborn.

The birth of a baby is a momentous occasion both from a personal and social perspective. As a newborn enters the (social) world, the first important step is becoming human. This transformation into a social being is achieved through processes of socialisation, which may be defined broadly as 'the way in which individuals are assisted in becoming members of one or more social groups' (Grusec and Hastings 2007). The moment an infant is considered a social person is significant and varies cross-culturally. These early processes of socialisation and identity formation are dominated by external ascription and agency as a result of the dependence of the infant, but gradually become interactive as the child and its social persona develop (Conklin 1996; Jenkins 2014; Laible and Thompson 2007). The process of cranial modification, starting right after birth, can be considered to be part of this creation of the social person.

An interesting example of using this relation between early socialisation and cranial modification can be found in a discussion on the Maya by Duncan and Hofling (2011). They have used historic sources and ethnographic accounts to investigate the importance of the head in this process of socialisation and embodiment. Historical evidence suggests that shaping of the head among the Maya starts immediately after birth and the child is not named until this process is completed. Among modern communities, head shaping practices have been all but lost[5] and the naming has been combined with the Christian notion of baptism. The process of naming represents an important passage rite for the infant from a liminal being to a social actor. All of the Maya child care practices at this early stage are aimed at protecting the unsettled soul of the infant. Cutting the hair of the infant is not done until at least one year of age, as a way to cover the anterior fontanel as a potential way for the soul to escape. A torch must also be present near the newborn and nothing else may be lit from this source lest the animated essence of the infant is diminished (Duncan and Hofling 2011).

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5   Although Sargent and Bascope (1996:221) describe an infant whose head was molded by the midwife immediately after birth.

Emphasising cranial modification as a practice, in the literal sense of a way of doing things, that is inherently part of overall child care may also help solve issues regarding ambiguity and absence. Crania assessed as ambiguous, or in other words those skulls whose shapes fall between the normal cranial variation and modification without enough concrete evidence to place them in either category, are often removed from the sample without further discussion. Archaeologists also occasionally make the mistake of focusing solely on the modified skulls in a population – often their topic of study after all – without adequately explaining the absence of cranial modification in the remainder of the sample. From a social and theoretical point of view, however, both ambiguity and absence may be of interest.

Intentional cranial modification is one of a suite of processes aimed at shaping the social person of the infant in the liminal months after birth and can be considered a *rite de passage* on the road to becoming a person (Conklin 1996; Turner 1969; van Gennep 1909). The presence of ambiguous crania in an assemblage may also imply that undergoing head shaping is equally or perhaps more important than the resulting cranial shape. In this light, ambiguous crania should not be ignored or considered failed attempts at modification, but merely seen as evidence of social construction and practice.

The dialectic relation between the agent and society in practice theory provides space for both absence and ambiguity. Social reproduction is never complete, but may be influenced by individual agency. Social agents are not simply replicating structure through practice, but may choose to influence or change it in the process (De Certeau and Rendall 1984; Giddens 1979; Ortner 2006). This notion is germane to an adequate understanding of data on cranial modification practices retrieved from the archaeological record. Choices made by the practitioner during head shaping, such as the construction and placement of the device, the amount of pressure, and the duration of application, may result in ambiguous shapes. Circumstances may also dictate changes to the practice or the complete abandonment of head shaping, as described in Caribbean colonial sources. The absence of cranial modification in certain individuals in archaeological contexts may also be explained by migration from another community with different child care routines.

3.5   *THE SOCIAL SKULL*

Social constructionist views of identity have been drawn upon in order to better understand the myriad of social and cultural treatments of human skulls. Certain aspects of intentional cranial modification, including its permanent and highly visible

nature, make it ideally suited as a marker of identity and explain its presence in a variety of spatial and temporal settings. Yet other characteristics of altered head shapes limit the flexibility inherent in social identities to a certain degree, as will now be shown.

The practice of cranial modification must be commenced in early infancy in order to create the desired effect. This has several repercussions, as the infant has no effective agency or self-awareness at this stage of development. The identity is ascribed and created by another social agent. Ethnographic studies show that head shaping is almost always performed by a woman: the mother, the midwife, or another female relative (FitzSimmons et al. 1998; Tiesler 2011, 2012, 2013). From the embodied perspective of the individual, the altered head shape has always been an inherent part of who they are and shapes their view of themselves and others. The altered head shape is normal in the world view of the individual and society at large. This also explains the almost ubiquitous relation between cranial modification and beauty reported in historical and ethnographic cases. A shift in aesthetic notions might be considered an inevitable result of the incorporation of cranial modification in the habitus.

This deep embedding of altered head shapes and their associated identities also impacts the flexibility of identity described in the social constructionist approach. The meaning of the altered head shape is established during the early socialisation process and as such forms an important basic or primary identity (Jenkins 2000, 2014), which tends to be much less fluid than other identities. This explains why cranial modification as a cultural practice seems to be stable and conservative in nature, reproducing the altered head shapes and their meanings in each generation with relatively little adjustments. This is evidenced by the longevity of the practice in archaeological samples sometimes stretching over thousands of years, for example in Mexico (Tiesler 2010, 2012) and the Andes (Allison et al. 1981; Torres-Rouf 2003,) and the persistence of the practice up until very recently or even up to the current day in certain communities (FitzSimmons et al. 1998; Tommaseo and Drusini 1984). On the other hand, important social and cultural changes may result in differences in the custom of cranial modification, for example a decline of the practice after intercultural contact (Tiesler 2012; Tiesler and Oliva Arias 2010; van Duijvenbode 2010), the appropriation of the custom by other societies (Chanvalon 1761; Torres-Rouf and Yablonsky 2005), or shifts in the patterns of modification found within societies (Blom 2005a,b; Hoshower et al. 1995; Tiesler 2010; 2012). Primary identities are not necessarily truly permanent, but simply more resilient than other identities and change is more likely to come about in a gradual fashion with small changes accumulating over time (Jenkins 2014; Lucy 2005).

Cranial shape created by head shaping as a marker is visible in direct social interaction and at a small distance, depending on hair style and any additional head gear. This

performative aspect helps it function effectively in most social settings. Arguably, the power of cranial alterations does not rest solely on visibility, but is also related to the evocative nature of the head itself. Douglas's (2007 [1973]) argument that the human body is a natural source of symbolism combined with the importance of the face in social interaction and recognition together make the head an obvious choice for displaying social identity markers.

Identity and identification processes function simultaneously on different levels. An altered head shape is likely tied to individual and collective identities at the same time and as such can be approached by a multi-scalar archaeological investigation moving from the individual to the regional (and in some cases perhaps even national) level to investigate these patterns.

The heuristic framework constructed to contextualise and explain head shaping practices in past societies can be used to revisit and elucidate the motivations behind head shaping reported from the historical and ethnographic records at the beginning of this chapter. The notion that altered head shapes are aesthetically pleasing has already been discussed in relation to the incorporation into the habitus of the individual during early socialisation. In this sense, viewing beauty as a motivation may be inaccurate and aesthetic notions are likely to be accompanied by another motivating factor. The social shift in aesthetics will have a minor perpetuating effect in itself. The correlation between the altered head shape and improved health or intelligence is persistent, as witnessed in recent documentation regarding these motivations in a medical study (Fitzsimmons et al. 1998). Head shapes associated with these motivations tend to be mild (Fitzsimmons et al. 1998; Hatt 1915) and may be difficult to distinguish from normal variation in human cranial shape. It seems that recognising these motivations without additional documentary or anecdotal evidence will be difficult.

Gender differentiation through cranial modification may be visible in the archaeological record. This does require a proper investigation into gender identity, as biological sex may be a poor proxy for gender relations depending on the social context (Díaz-Andreu et al. 2005; Joyce 2004; Mays and Cox 2000; Meskell 2007). However, in order to be expressed through the permanent alteration of head shape, gender identity must be established almost immediately after birth and remain relatively fixed implying that it is most likely based on biological sex. Patterns may consist of altered head shapes restricted to a single gender or differences in shapes or degrees of modification per gender.

Group identity is a deliberately wide category encompassing all types of social collectives at a variety of levels. Many of these are based on fictional or factual kinship ties and can

include family, clan, lineage, or ethnic group. Religion, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter as a separate motivation, can also be included in this category. Variations in social status within the group can also be expressed through cranial modification practices. The same restrictions as mentioned for gender identities apply: social status must be ascribed at or soon after birth and be relatively stable throughout life. These patterns may also present as differences in presence or shape of altered head shapes.

The pattern of cranial modification representing group identity will manifest as a high percentage of similar cranial shapes in an assemblage, several distinct shapes, or clear spatial differentiation in shapes. However, even in the case of a single overarching group identity, not all crania will be modified. Mild forms of cranial modification may be difficult to recognise and despite best efforts modification attempts may not always be successful. Furthermore, incoming migrants from different communities will not display cranial modification (or may have a different type) even though they might be incorporated into the local group, further obscuring the pattern.

Determining the exact type of group identity will require the multi-scalar approach advocated earlier in this chapter as well as an in-depth investigation of the social context. Here, archaeological data can be augmented with historical or ethnographic information to provide a more accurate understanding. The following chapter will explore the social and cultural history of the Caribbean and provide a comprehensive overview of head shaping practices in the indigenous communities of the region based on such a combination of sources.