

# Interplay of Memory, Identity and Culture in Portrait Photography as a Visual Repository of Vernacular Memory: Insights from Jordan

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## Abstract

In recent years, there has been a notable surge in archaeological research spanning the spectrum from historical archaeology to contemporary archaeology, with a particular focus on the multifaceted theme of human identity. This theme shares a profound resonance with the role of portrait photography as a medium for memory preservation, intricately weaving together the threads of identity, memory, and culture in our comprehension of both historical and contemporary contexts.

This research employs a visual culture approach to photography, transcending conventional analytical frameworks to delve into how photographs dynamically shape the broader cultural, social, and political landscapes. It scrutinizes the processes through which photographs construct meaning, wield influence over public perception, and actively participate in the complex terrain of identity formation and narrative construction.

The findings from this investigation underscore the evolving role of photography, transcending its traditional function of memory preservation to emerge as a potent tool for the construction and communication of identity. Furthermore, it emphasizes the inherently interdisciplinary nature of memory studies, forging robust connections across the domains of archaeology, historical anthropology, and photography research, thereby enriching our nuanced understanding of the interwoven facets of memory, identity, and culture.

**Keywords:** Human identity, Portrait photography, Memory preservation, Visual culture, Interdisciplinary studies.

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a notable surge in archaeological research that focuses on modernity, spanning the domains of historical archaeology to the archaeology of the contemporary past. While archaeology is deeply entwined with modernity, it offers a unique perspective that can be employed in conjunction with various intellectual frameworks. One of the central themes prevalent in modern historical anthropology and philosophical-anthropological studies is the exploration

of human identity. This theme shares a profound connection with the concept of portrait photography as a means of remembering. Both areas of inquiry are intricately woven into the complex fabric of human existence, seeking to unravel the multifaceted layers of identity, memory, and culture that shape our understanding of both the past and the present.

Archaeology, as a discipline, possesses the capacity to play a pivotal role in challenging established regimes of visibility. It has the potential to illuminate the voices of marginalized and subaltern groups, constructing intricate narratives even from minimal fragments and traces. Archaeology is a field open to reinvention and reappropriation, characterized by its readiness to reject outdated elements and embrace innovative approaches (González-Ruibal, 2013).

The visual culture approach within photography research offers a comprehensive framework for the examination of photographs as culturally significant artifacts. This approach transcends traditional aesthetic or technical analyses and delves deep into the intricate interplay between images and society. It explores how photographs dynamically shape and reflect broader cultural, social, and political contexts. Researchers adopting this approach pose probing questions about how these images construct and convey meaning, influence public perception, and actively participate in the construction of identities, ideologies, and narratives. By contextualizing the analysis of photographs within the encompassing framework of visual culture, scholars gain valuable insights into the ways in which these images contribute to the formation of cultural norms, values, and visual literacy. Consequently, this inquiry sheds light on the profound impact of photography on contemporary society, while recognizing its evolving role within the visual landscape.

This multifaceted approach to visual culture also acknowledges that what is at stake is not solely the visual aspect but also the deeper layers of meaning that visuals convey to both society and the global community (Turkcan and Yasar, 2011). Visual research methods, an integral part of this approach, involve the utilization of diverse visual materials to generate evidence for exploring research questions. These methods are characterized by their diversity, encompassing a wide array of visual materials and subjecting them to a variety of analytical procedures (Rose, 2014).

Vernacular portrait photography operates within the continuum of connections between physical photographs and mediated environments. The advent of digital platforms and web-based photo sharing has provided spaces for communicative expressions of vernacular memory, fostering communal discourse and contributing to the formation and transmission of popular memory. The relationship between remembering through physical photographs and mediated forms of communication mirrors the complexities of technological mediation discussed in the concept of vernacular memory.

In contrast to official memory, vernacular memory does not necessarily oppose or define itself against it. Vernacular portrait photography can encompass both personally created artifacts like family photographs and the value assigned to mass-produced photographic commodities within vernacular memory. This parallel underscores the distinction between personally created artifacts and mass-produced cultural products as elucidated in the discussion of vernacular memory.

In this context, the study investigates the multifaceted dimensions of photography, encompassing its cultural impact and its role in shaping contemporary society, all within the framework of visual culture studies. It seeks to bridge the gap between individual and collective recollections by illuminating the interplay between personal experiences and shared cultural narratives within the realm of vernacular portrait photography.

The research aims to ascertain the profound influence of documentary images, on the construction of public perceptions, narratives, and cultural discourse. Furthermore, the research endeavors to uncover the intricate layers of meaning intrinsic to vernacular photographs, recognizing their pivotal role in shaping contemporary cultural narratives and their potential to either reinforce or challenge prevailing ideologies. Its objectives are as follows.

1. To establish a contemporary conceptualization of personal images within a historical context, interweaving cultural memory with narrative practices, thereby contributing to the foundation of identity for both individuals and communities.
2. To analyze these photographs through the lens of visual culture, elucidating their role as reflective mirrors of societal values, power dynamics, underlying ideologies, and their contribution to the shaping of collective memory and identity formation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Memory and its relationship with identity, culture, and the visual medium of portrait photography have been subjects of profound scholarly interest across various disciplines. This theoretical discussion aims to synthesize and critically examine key insights from academic sources, offering a comprehensive foundation for further research in this interdisciplinary field.

The theoretical framework offers a multifaceted exploration of various interconnected themes, including memory, identity, culture, portrait photography, and personal identity. Drawing from a wide range of academic sources, it establishes a comprehensive understanding of these intricate concepts and their relationships.

The study commences by recognizing multifaceted nature of memory within the context of photography research. Esteemed scholars such as Lucas, Olivier, Olsen, and Tamm have contributed significantly to broadening the conventional understanding of memory. They emphasize memory as an intrinsic quality within materiality, transcending mere external cognition. This perspective not only acknowledges the persistence of past into the future but also aligns with archaeological inquiries, particularly the framework of Lucas (2010). It introduces the intriguing notion of the past as a palimpsest, where traces assume a profoundly creative and revelatory role (Lucas, 2010; Lucas, 2004; Olivier, 2003;; Oslen, 2003; Oslen, 2010, Oslen, 1994; Tamm, 2013).

In archaeological discourse, the acceptance of incomplete, fragmented artifacts, and ruins as integral components of the archaeological record is firmly established. This perspective underlines the absence of memory within the archaeological narrative, echoing Hutton's conceptualization of recollection as a reconstructive act (Hutton, 1993). Hutton's viewpoint emphasizes the active role of memory in shaping historical narratives and representations, signifying the intrinsic interconnection between memory and history. This alignment anticipates the postmodern turn within the social sciences, emphasizing the interdependence of memory and historical understanding (Hutton, 1993; Beauducel, Brocke & Strobel, 1999; Yale, 2015; Pink, 2013).

These considerations seamlessly integrate into the domain of archiving portrait photography, where the inherent memory within materiality and its interplay with historical narratives assume paramount importance. Portrait photography serves as a visual repository of collective memory, mirroring cultural symbols and historical narratives that define individual and collective identities (Wilson, 2009; Russell, 2006; Daugbjerg & Fibiger, 2011; Stepanov, 2021).

The exploration of memory adopts a multilevel approach that resonates with the diverse facets of portrait photography. At the micro-level, individual memories find preservation in portrait photographs, offering glimpses into personal histories. At the meso-level, material objects akin to the photographic medium symbolize historical events and preserve memory. At the macro-level, cultural myths and narratives within historical memory mirror the narratives emerging from portrait photography. Photographs, as cultural artifacts, contribute to the broader

historical memory of societies and civilizations, blurring the boundaries between personal and collective recollection (Aitov, 2022; Stepanov, 2021).

Portrait photography, traditionally associated with memory preservation, has evolved into a powerful tool for individuals to shape and convey their identities (Sontag, 1973; Barthes, 1981). It captures not only external appearances but also serves as a means of self-presentation, showcasing the interplay between personal identity and memory.

Intriguingly, vernacular portrait photography emerges as an embodiment of vernacular memory. It captures the interplay between specific practices of remembering, social categories, and contexts. Vernacular portrait photography provides valuable insights into how individuals socially orient themselves and develop evaluative perspectives on everyday life. These photographs occupy the liminal spaces between personal and popular memory, symbolizing personal histories and cultural narratives (Harper, 2000; Harper, 1986; Cutshaw & Barrett, 2008; Kaplan, 2003; Markus & Wurf, 2003).

In summary, this discussion synthesizes diverse scholarly perspectives to establish foundational concepts and relationships that inform the exploration of memory, identity, culture, and portrait photography. It lays the groundwork for understanding how memory operates within the realm of visual representation, how individuals construct and communicate their identities through photography, and how cultural and societal narratives intersect with personal recollections. This interdisciplinary theoretical framework offers a solid foundation for further research endeavors in this dynamic and evolving field.

## Literature Review

The realm of visual culture studies has witnessed a significant expansion, permeating diverse academic disciplines. Various fields, spanning art history, art education, film and media studies, literary theory, anthropology, history, sociology, jurisprudence, and theology, have established profound connections with visual culture, reflecting its interdisciplinary nature (Von Falkenhausen, 2020). In this intricate tapestry of visual culture discourse, the reevaluation of marginalized individuals and communities from their own vantage points emerges as a paramount concern. Each reinterpretation of their experiences serves to redraw boundaries, reshaping established notions of location, space, and significance, while potentially challenging deeply ingrained stereotypes and rewriting prevailing narratives (Desyllas & Hughes, 2010; Rolling, 2007). Visual culture studies offer a rich interdisciplinary platform for exploring how cultures manifest their values and beliefs through various visual mediums, transcending the visual itself to reveal the profound meanings it conveys within societies and across the world (Barnard, 1998; Mitchell, 2002; Turkcan & Yasar, 2011).

Within the context of this expansive framework, this comprehensive critical literature review delves into a series of papers that collectively examine the concept of vernacular photography within the context of Palestinian photographers. Nassar's seminal work from (2006) lay the foundation for this exploration by scrutinizing the influence of photography as a local practice in Palestine. This work dissect how photography has shaped self-presentation and identity construction among Palestinians and delve into its historical roots within Palestinian society. Hatoum's (2017) research elevates the discourse by focusing on the photographic representation of the Wall in Palestine. This study elucidates the visual and political struggles entailed in documenting this contentious symbol while underscoring the vital role played by Israeli and Palestinian photographers in counteracting prevailing visual narratives. Kubicki's (2013) paper widens the lens, providing a contemporary perspective on vernacular photography and linking its historical relevance with ongoing debates regarding its inclusion within the realm of museums and archives. Collectively, these works emphasize the historical development of photography as a local vocation and its profound significance within Palestinian society. Hatoum's (2017) work reiterates the discussion of the Wall's photographic representation, shedding light on the ongoing socio-political struggle in the region. Nassar's recent critique in (2021) draws attention to the marginalized status of photographic albums in the history of photography. Meanwhile, Badr's (2019) contribution underscores the integral connection between the choice of photographic subjects and the engagement of Arab

photographers with their socio-political surroundings. Qasim's (2021) paper serves as a critical reminder of the enduring structural violence of settler colonialism and the imperative to ensure that indigenous narratives, presence, and material realities remain central within the discourse. Collectively, these studies offer invaluable insights into the multifaceted dimensions of vernacular photography in Palestine, highlighting its intersection with visual representation, socio-political struggle, and historical memory in the region.

This study, rooted in the visual culture paradigm, serves as an interdisciplinary foundation for a nuanced examination of the intricate elements underpinning personal and communal identity construction within a historical context. It seeks to establish a contemporary framework by integrating cultural memory with narrative practices, thereby contributing significantly to the understanding of identity, both at the individual and community levels. In this pursuit, the research employs a visual culture lens to analyze photographs, highlighting their capacity to reflect societal values, power dynamics, underlying ideologies, and their influential role in shaping collective memory and identity formation.

### **Research Methodology**

The data collection methodology employed in this research was structured into multiple sequential phases.

The initial stage entailed the study sample, comprising a corpus of vernacular photographs and negatives approximately two hundred photographs and negatives. This archive constituted preliminary versions of vintage personal images retained by a Palestinian family, presently residing in Jordan. This archive includes family photographs and negatives, captured using medium-format cameras, 35mm cameras, and instant cameras. The quality of negatives appears superior to printed photographic images, owing to the plastic material that can preserve these images for many years, making them a reference that can be reproduced unlike printed photographic images on paper, which tend to deteriorate more rapidly.

Remarkably, this archive is cherished as familial heritage, with their origins tracing back to the 1970s (Fig.1; Fig.2; Fig3; Fig.4; Fig.5).

Subsequent stages of data acquisition encompassed the execution of an in-depth interviews with the family's head, who assumed the role of curator and custodian of these archival materials.

These interviews were initiated with an informal preliminary meeting in May 2023, centering on an extensive discourse within the family's paterfamilias. During this initial exchange, family members candidly shared their individual narratives and remembrances, spanning an array of life experiences, family gatherings, customs, traditions, and their deep-rooted connection to their ancestral homeland of Palestine prior to their displacement to Jordan on 1975. Following this, in July 2023, two more structured interviews were conducted, centering on focused inquiries regarding the historical and cultural significance of the collected photographs within the family's context. These interviews delved into the nuanced interplay between the photographs and the family's historical memory, with a keen focus on their role in solidifying familial identity. It is noteworthy to emphasize that all interviews took place within the family's residence, offering a familiar and comfortable environment for the participants, with the family members at the heart of the discussions. Employing a semi-structured approach with predefined thematic guidance, these interviews facilitated a seamless and organic conversational flow, ultimately amplifying the depth and dynamism of the interactions, in alignment with the findings of Knott, Roa, and Summers in their (2022) study.

Our methodological framework encompasses a diverse array of analytical tools, each contributing to a comprehensive examination of visual materials and data. These methods include:

- a) Semiotic analysis,
- b) Iconographic interpretation, and
- c) Meticulous consideration of historical and sociocultural contexts.

It is important to emphasize that analysis does not aspire to read or dissect photographs and negatives per se; rather, its focus resides in discerning the proclaimed 'truth' embedded within both images and text, thus shedding light on the formation of particular perceptions and narratives.

### Findings

The findings of this study encompass two significant aspects. Firstly, the research highlights the evolving role of photography, extending beyond its conventional function of memory preservation. Photography has transformed into a powerful tool for individuals to shape and communicate their identities, underscoring the intricate interplay between memory, identity, and culture. Secondly, the study emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of memory studies, forging connections between diverse fields such as archaeology, historical anthropology, and photography research. These interdisciplinary perspectives collectively enrich our understanding of the complex relationships intertwining memory, identity, and culture. In conclusion, this research underscores the profound significance of vernacular portrait photography as a visual repository of memory, illuminating how personal and cultural recollections intersect to collectively mold our identities and cultural heritage.



**Fig. 1:** A sample of family photographs and negatives taken in Palestine in the early 1970s.  
Source: Author/the family,2023



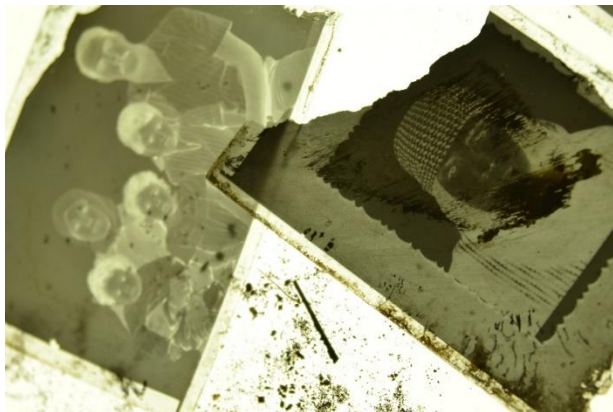
**Fig. 2:** A sample of archiving negatives from 1970s.  
Source: Author / the family,2023



**Fig. 3:** A sample of medium format negatives of portrait photos from 1970s.  
Source: Author / the family, 2023



**Fig. 4:** Vernacular family photos from 1970s.  
Source: Author / the family, 2023



**Fig. 5:** Vernacular portrait and family photos from 1970s.  
Source: Author / the family, 2023

## Underlying Ideologies, Collective Memory and Identity

This study posited that the photographic images preserved by Palestinian families who migrated to Jordan in the late 1970s harbour latent meanings and connotations at their core. These connotations are intertwined with intellectual, historical, societal, and cultural dimensions, serving to bolster national identity on one hand and transforming this identity into a continuum in the present and future through recurring narratives across generations. Consequently, the photograph becomes a tool of remembrance that transcends the realm of mere material and sensory perception, empowering the present and laying the foundation for the future.

The research findings conclude that the nature of the memory associated with these images extends beyond mere external or extended cognition, encompassing the intrinsic quality of memory as an inherent property within materiality (Lucas, 2010; Olivier 2011; Olsen 2013; Tamm 2013). This perspective not only allows the past to persist into the future but also serves as a foundational principle underpinning archaeological inquiries. Such inquiries involve the meticulous examination of traces and testimonies embedded within material culture, a concept closely aligned with the framework proposed by Lucas (2010). In this context, discussions surrounding alternative historical ontologies become relevant, wherein the past is viewed as a palimpsest, with the "trace" assuming a role that is both profoundly creative and revelatory.

This implies that the presence of photographic images, or even negatives, is a continuously renewing presence. Each review of these photographs constitutes an exploration of a past and present existential state. They convey what existed in the past and are linked to narratives and stories that were already in existence, yet simultaneously exist in the present, where they are interacted with in real-time. Therefore, they are a past with its own history and the history of the individuals within them, and they exist as a potent tool for remembrance in the present. Simultaneously, they represent the future in the memory of future generations, who will continue to pass down these stories, recognizing them as a family heritage. In their essence, these photographs encapsulate identity, culture, and the collective memory of a homeland.

During our interview, the family's head underscored that these photographs serve as both a repository of the family's past and its historical narrative, while also holding significance for future generations. He articulated that

“These visual records play a pivotal role in shaping the collective and individual memory of our family. It is not merely the preservation of these photographs as material representations of memory; instead, they are perceived as a comprehensive presence. This historical record not only informs our present but also carries forward into the future, forming an integral part of the legacy for generations to come. In essence, I view it as a continuum from the past to the future, and this day-to-day memory constitutes our subsequent heritage”

Interview with the participant 1: July. 2023.

On the other hand, the aforementioned narrative relies on concepts, terminologies, and their temporal sequences. Here, the head of the family emphasizes the interconnectedness between memory and history or, more importantly for him, the understanding of history. Memory is linked to something tangible, which is the photographic images. However, at the same time, it is interwoven within the interactive environment of family members and visitors. All of them are capable of imagining, interacting, and questioning the essence of life during that period. They all share a curiosity for knowledge and culture. This was evident during the initial family gathering in May (2023) at the family's residence, where sons, daughters and grandchildren engaged with the details and expressed a desire to learn more. They even inquired about the Palestinian dialect, traditional attire, religious rituals, the political situation during the occupation, architectural structures, roads, technology, and many other questions. This affirms that these images are not merely visual representations but serve as a key to signify the intangible and concealed aspects of their heritage.

Another significant aspect highlighted by this research is that the family head's memory has transitioned from an individual memory into a collective memory. Despite the emphasis on referencing the photographs and discussing them, he considers this process as part of reviving and preserving heritage. In his perspective, this undertaking represents a national responsibility and duty for every Palestinian who has been displaced or exiled due to occupation. He views the archiving of photographic images and negatives as an integral component of this mission.

In the field of archaeology, the acceptance of incompleteness, fragmented artifacts, and ruins is well-established, recognizing the archaeological record's inherent state of rarely being complete or undisturbed. This approach, which intertwines memory and archaeological inquiry, does not challenge the consideration of alternative memories; rather, it spotlights the absence of memory within the archaeological narrative (Hutton, 1993).

Hutton's (1993) conceptualization of recollection as an act of reconstruction strongly resonates with this perspective, underscoring the active role of memory in shaping historical narratives and representations. Furthermore, this perspective aligns with the concept that history represents a selective portrayal of the past, a narrative interpretation of events. That emphasizes the inherent interconnection between memory and history, anticipating the postmodern turn within the social sciences and emphasizing the interdependence of memory and historical understanding. Consequently, exploring the history of memory necessitates a comprehensive examination of the historiographical link between memory and history, given that memory plays a pivotal role in historical comprehension (Hutton, 1993; Beauducel, Brocke & Strobel, 1999; Yale, 2015). In parallel, these considerations find resonance within the domain of archiving portrait photography, where the inherent memory within materiality and its interplay with historical narratives become integral aspects of analysis and interpretation.

### **Societal Values and Power Dynamics**

The preceding results compelled us to investigate the significance of this archive in the context of anthropology. This led to a conclusion indicating that vernacular photography in Palestine has transcended its traditional role of recording events and documenting places and individuals. Instead, it has evolved into an open anthropological repository and a treasure trove of visual data. It is subject to diverse anthropological, historical, cultural, and existential contexts at complex and interwoven levels, with the extent of individual awareness being linked to these contexts. In this study sample

the family responsible for the preservation of these photographs demonstrates an acute awareness of the archive's significance and its intricate relationship with historical narratives, extending beyond its familial boundaries to encompass a broader socio-cultural context. Within this context, the family's head articulates,

"When I transmit this archival collection to my offspring and subsequent generations, it evokes a profound recollection of the multifaceted social, economic, and political milieu that characterized the specific moments captured in these photographic records. Moreover, it rekindles memories of the prevailing fashion, customary practices, cultural traditions, interpersonal dialogues, and narrative discourses that permeated the familial and societal domains. It is this profound resonance that impels me to meticulously preserve these visual artifacts, for they serve as custodians of our historical journey and collective identity"

Interview with Participant 1: July.2023

The discourse analysis commences with the idea of transitioning from the realization of individual family identity to an attempt to emphasize the communal and national identity linked to prevalent values, customs, and traditions in Palestine. Here, memory becomes as if interconnected and intertwined levels that are associated with the individual, family, community, and the nation. It opens up opportunities for historical and humanistic comparisons. This reiterates once more that the photographic image serves as an icon of symbols, meaning, significance, and history.

In the context of historical anthropology, the investigation of human identity extends to the formation of national identity, reflecting the collective memory and cultural symbols that define a particular country's history. This inquiry mirrors the essence of portrait photography, where individuals are captured in moments that encapsulate their personal and cultural identities. Portrait photography becomes a visual repository of collective memory, mirroring the cultural symbols and historical narratives that shape our sense of self (Wilson, 2009; Russell, 2006; Daugbjerg and Fibiger 2011; Stepanov, 2021).

Moreover, the multi-level approach to the "history of memory" resonates with the diverse facets of portrait photography. At the micro-level, individual memories are frozen in time through portraits, offering glimpses into personal histories. At the meso-level, material objects, much like the photographic medium itself, serve as tangible artifacts that symbolize historical events and preserve the memory of these moments. Finally, at the mega-level, the cultural myths and narratives embedded in historical memory find an analogue in the narratives and stories that emerge from portrait photography. These photographs, as cultural artifacts, contribute to the broader historical memory of societies and civilizations (Aitov, 2022; Stepanov, 2021). The act of photography here has evolved beyond its traditional role of preserving a family's visual legacy through memory preservation. It has transitioned into a prominent tool for individuals to shape and convey their identities. While photography has long served functions related to identity construction and communication, these roles were previously considered secondary to its primary function of memory preservation (Sontag 1973; Barthes, 1981).

In essence, the philosophical link between these ideas lies in their shared pursuit of understanding the intricate relationship between memory, identity, and culture. Portrait photography, as a visual form of memory, becomes a powerful lens through which we can contemplate these complex interconnections and gain deeper insights into the human experience. Both fields invite us to ponder the ways in which our past informs our present and, in doing so, shape our collective understanding of who we are as individuals and as societies.

This leads us to consider portrait photography as part of individuals' vernacular memory. The concept of vernacular memory provides a valuable framework for understanding the intricate interplay between individual and collective recollections, bridging the gap between personal experiences and shared cultural narratives (Pickering & Keightley, 2019). Just as vernacular memory operates at the intersection of personal and shared practices and objects of remembering, it finds resonance in the realm of vernacular portrait photography.

Vernacular portrait photography encapsulates the essence of vernacular memory, where personal and collective recollections converge. Much like photography and recorded music shape and configure personal and collective memories, vernacular portrait photography becomes a vessel for preserving and perpetuating individual and cultural identities. Each photograph, capturing a moment in time, embodies a sense of permanence that forms the foundation for assigning narrative meaning and value to our memories, mirroring the function of photography and recorded music in the construction of memory (Pickering & Keightley, 2019).

Moreover, vernacular portrait photography extends beyond individual experiences to gain cultural significance through shared usage within various relationships and social groups. These photographs occupy the liminal spaces between personal and popular memory, contributing to what is termed as vernacular memory. They serve as tangible artifacts that symbolize personal histories and cultural narratives, akin to the material objects discussed in the concept of vernacular memory (Harper, 2000; Cutshaw & Barrett, 2008; Kaplan, 2003; Markus & Wurf, 2003 ).Through vernacular portrait photography, individuals assimilate personal and interpersonal significance into their photographs, forging cross-temporal transactions as they navigate life's changes and the temporal distance between past events and their present perspectives (Pickering & Keightley, 2019).

In conclusion, vernacular portrait photography serves as a visual embodiment of vernacular memory, encapsulating the interrelationships between specific practices of remembering, social categories, and contexts. By recognizing the intertwining nature of

personal and cultural memory in vernacular portrait photography, we gain a deeper understanding of how everyday remembering, individual recollections, and collective narratives converge to shape our identities and cultural heritage.

## Discussion

The notion of personal identity has been a central theme in philosophical investigation, particularly since the Enlightenment period. Personal identity, in this context, refers to the inherent sense of self associated with being an individual. The core philosophical challenge revolves around the clarification of the term "identity" within this framework. Philosophers frequently draw a distinction between two facets of identity: qualitative and numerical. Qualitative identity pertains to the resemblance between objects, while numerical identity concerns the continuity of an entity over time (Correia, 2022). The primary emphasis in philosophical discourse on personal identity centers on the concept of numerical identity.

Self-identity finds its foundation in the formal and temporal structure inherent in intentional experiences, which underlie psychological continuity. In contrast, personal identity is firmly rooted in the specific content of an individual's ongoing experiences. More precisely, it is based on the convictions adopted by a self-identical subject, whether passively or actively, through reflection, taking into account their social and cultural inheritances (Starmans & Bloom, 2018; Bernius & Dranseika, 2016; Parfit, 1982).

This perspective translates the concept of personal, cultural, and national identity that the Palestinian family seeks to establish in the face of ongoing displacement and diaspora. The subject here goes beyond the qualitative identity that addresses the relationship between things or describes potential similarities between individuals and communities. Instead, what this family is striving for is to empower numerical identity and ensure its continuity as a rooted and enduring entity in human history. The identity here encompasses personal, cultural, and historical dimensions, while also encompassing the broader national framework, becoming an empowerment of Palestinian identity across generations and eras.

Locke's (1755) formulation of personal identity in his work "An Essay concerning Human Understanding" places a strong emphasis on consciousness. According to Locke, personal identity is predicated on self-awareness, and as far as consciousness extends backward to encompass past actions and thoughts, it determines an individual's identity. In this context, memory serves as a means of recognizing the continuity of consciousness over time.

Nevertheless, it is imperative to distinguish between memory as a tool for acquiring knowledge and memory as the essence of personal identity. Memory elucidates the past and facilitates the recognition of the same consciousness, but it does not solely dictate personal identity. Locke's emphasis on consciousness as the foundation of personal identity is occasionally misconstrued as a prioritization of memory, but these two concepts should be discerned.

In conclusion, in philosophical terms, personal identity centers on the numerical identity of an individual over time, rooted in self-awareness or consciousness, with memory functioning as a tool for recognizing the continuity of that consciousness. In the context of this study, photographic images and drafts serve as crucial tools for stimulating memory and, consequently, raising awareness of concepts associated with all previous contexts. The numerical identity of this family is realized through this tool, transcending to more robust and intricate levels of consciousness. This discussion opens the door to numerous in-depth research endeavors aimed at understanding similar tools to photographic images employed by Palestinian families to anchor numerical identity. These tools may encompass multiple archival elements, such as documents, letters, currency used, or even keys to the homes they were displaced from. This implies that symbolism and signification will accompany the process of identity realization, affirming its continuity and presence among future Palestinian generations.

According to Nagel (1971), comprehending personal identity requires an examination of an individual's first-person concept of self in conjunction with the broader concept of a "someone" to which it belongs. Nagel contends that personal identity cannot be defined solely through a priori reasoning. While a "subject of consciousness" should have the ability to self-

identify without external observation, these self-identifications must align with those that can be made through external observation. Thus, both first-personal and third-personal aspects are integral to understanding the self and its identity over time.

Nagel posits that there must exist an element of objectivity applicable to the self because the idea of making an error in one's own personal identity is logically coherent. This objectivity is rooted in something subjective. The key question revolves around how the notion of the same subject can meet the conditions of objectivity appropriate for a psychological concept. The concept of personal identity, while inherently subjective due to its connection to an individual's unique experiences and perspective, also accommodates the differentiation between accurate and erroneous self-identification (Nagel, 1971; Nagel, 1979; Nagel, 1986; Nagel, 1987).

The recognition of photography's roles in shaping identity and facilitating communication has been acknowledged, although these functions have consistently been considered subordinate to its primary role as a tool for preserving memories (Sontag, 1973; Barthes, 1981). Photography not simply reflected but constituted family life and structured an individual's notion of belonging. Quite a number of sociological and anthropological studies have scrutinized the relationship between picture taking, organizing, and presenting photographs on the one side, and the construction of family, heritage, and kinship on the other (Hirsch, 1997; Holland, 1991).

One of the notable assertions by Jacques Derrida (1996) in his work "Archive Fever" is that an archive doesn't revolve around the past alone, concerning "managing the past that might already be within our reach or not, an archivable concept of the archive." Instead, it encompasses the future, specifically "the inquiry into the future itself, the exploration of a response, a commitment, and a responsibility for what lies ahead."

Another notable assertion by Roland Barthes (1981) in his examination of the camera lucida, Barthes acknowledges this intricate cycle where images and pictures influence desire and memory. He articulates the discomfort he experiences when he becomes the subject of the camera, highlighting that having one's photograph taken is a complex convergence of four image-repertoires, as outlined in his work (1981: 13): 'the one that I perceive myself to be' (the mental self-image), 'the one I aspire for others to perceive me as' (the idealized self-image), 'the one the photographer perceives me as' (the photographed self-image), and 'the one the photographer utilizes when showcasing their art' (the public self-image or imago).

This means that the first two stages of perceiving portrait images are the individual's internal and mental stages, while the subsequent two stages are the external stages of the image, involving its representation and placement within a specific framework. Barthes' semiotics here emphasizes that the perception of photographic images is not limited to an individual's internal mental states but extends to social and cultural aspects as well.

This underscores that an individual's presence and understanding of personal identity are inevitably intertwined with their comprehension of their social and cultural context. This aligns with the contemporary phenomenological philosophy, where human existence is seen as an active presence in time and space, extending across past, present, and future (Heidegger & Krell, 2011). The essence of human existence lies in conscious awareness of the internal and external factors shaping their identity and envisioning future possibilities (Merleau-Ponty, 1998).

Ultimately, this multifaceted inquiry underscores the inextricable link between personal identity, memory, and the broader sociocultural context. It aligns with contemporary phenomenological philosophy, viewing human existence as an active and dynamic presence across time and space. This perspective underscores the importance of conscious awareness in shaping one's identity, not only within the confines of individual cognition but also within the broader social and cultural milieu. In this intricate web of self-identity, memory, and cultural context, the exploration of personal identity continues to evolve and enrich our understanding of what it means to be an individual.

This theoretical framework underscores an important aspect, which is an individual's awareness of themselves as an independent entity and their understanding of the subject as a

social being subject to environmental and communicative circumstances that instill the concepts of affinity and belonging. In our case, this family has been living a good life in Jordan since the 1970s, and despite their favorable economic, health, educational, and societal living conditions, an individual's conscious attachment to their cause, identity, and culture serves as an enduring reference point in long-term memory. It is a tangible, emotional, and sensory connection. Therefore, looking at photographic images is akin to looking at the subject's self and its representation within this subject, as if it were a state of harmony and alignment between the individual and their identity and culture. Reading the image for the family is an interpretation of the symbols, icons, and facial expressions that conceal all the stories and narrate history.

## Conclusion

In this comprehensive evaluation of the research, both its strengths and weaknesses are critically examined, shedding light on the significance of the findings and proposing areas for potential enhancements and future exploration.

The strengths of the research contribute significantly to its value. Firstly, it introduces an innovative approach to the study of memory, identity, and culture by focusing on vernacular portrait photography within the context of Palestinian families. This approach is distinctive and broadens our comprehension of how photographs act as repositories of memory, identity, and culture. By exploring this angle, the research not only enhances our understanding of memory studies but also brings forth novel insights into the interplay of memory, identity, and culture.

Secondly, the research adeptly integrates a variety of disciplines, including philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and psychology. This interdisciplinary approach constructs a comprehensive framework for comprehending the intricate relationships between memory, identity, and culture. This inclusive perspective enriches the research's depth and breadth, facilitating a more holistic exploration of the complex dynamics at play.

Another strength lies in the research's emphasis on the cultural and historical significance of vernacular portrait photography, particularly within the Palestinian family context. This highlights the role of photographs as bridges connecting personal and collective memory, identity, and culture. By recognizing photographs as cultural artifacts, the research deepens our appreciation of their historical and social importance.

Furthermore, the research delves into the phenomenological aspects of memory, identity, and culture, providing a nuanced understanding of how individuals perceive themselves in relation to their social and cultural environment. This perspective enriches the comprehension of the human experience, especially within the Palestinian family context.

Lastly, the research effectively captures and emphasizes the significance of family narratives and storytelling in preserving and transmitting cultural and historical memory. This qualitative dimension adds depth and authenticity to the study, revealing the family's active role in memory preservation.

However, the research is not without its limitations. It primarily focuses on the specific context of Palestinian families living in Jordan since the 1970s. While this focus is essential for an in-depth analysis, it may hinder the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts and communities.

Furthermore, while the research emphasizes the positive aspects of memory, identity, and culture within the context of Palestinian families, it could further investigate and discuss potential discrepancies, conflicts, or tensions within these dynamics. A more well-rounded analysis would contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved.

In conclusion, this research makes a substantial and insightful contribution to the study of memory, identity, and culture, particularly within the Palestinian family context. It creatively explores the evolving role of photography and the interdisciplinary nature of memory studies. The research underscores the profound significance of vernacular portrait photography as a visual repository of memory, emphasizing the intricate relationships intertwining memory, identity, and culture.

While the research boasts numerous strengths, including its innovative approach, interdisciplinary integration, and cultural significance, it is not without its limitations. These limitations suggest opportunities for future research in this domain. The research's true value lies in its potential to inspire further exploration into how individuals and communities employ visual artifacts to construct, preserve, and communicate their identities and cultural heritage. It highlights the intricate tapestry of human existence where memory, identity, and culture are interwoven to shape our understanding of the past, present, and future. The research stands as an inspiring platform for future investigations into the complex dynamics of memory, identity, and culture within diverse cultural and historical contexts.

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