Cultural Memory, Context, and Multidirectionality[1]

Peter Gaál-Szabó
Debrecen Reformed Theological University, Hungary

1. Cultural memory in context

Much as the research of cultural memory has implied its contextual nature by insisting on its social background in the case of both individual and collective memory, it evinces the necessity to focus on this aspect more as "contextual" describes both situatedness in terms of being tethered to a multiplicity of external discourses and inner heterogeneity, implying a multiplicity yet connected by complementing, albeit contesting, elements and notions. The emphasis on multiplicity (including the variety of content and the modes of remembering) deny the narrow limitation of the study of memory to binaries, thus enabling the examiner "to go beyond the sharp binaries between the individual and the collective, between the national and the global, and beyond the binary between history-as-it-was and memory as something collectively construed" (Hobuß 2011). Tersely put, memory represents a context, derives from a context, and its use is contextual.

It has been suggested by psychological studies of contextual memory that elements enter memory, embedded in a "mental environment" that contains both external and internal referents (Csépe *et al.* 2007-2008). The context of elements shapes the storing of information (engram or memory trace; see Tulving 1983: 11) and it is through the engram that the context can be recalled in an ecphoric process. For this reason, the individual mental state and the multimodal components of perception provide for the focalized identification of the memory trace (or "selectivity" and "perspectivity" in Astrid Erll's assessment [2008: 5]). However, the complexity deriving from the multimodality of perception alone must yet deny unifocality – in the sense of being reduced to refer to a simplified entity – that the idealization of the item might imply, but much rather indicate a context condensed in and represented by the entity, i.e., with other entities processed by the different perceptual components there within. The mental state signifying the subject and a subject position in the time and space matrix allows also for "individual representations of past experiences [...] formed by the interplay of multimodal components" (Bietti 2016: 127). Representations of elements are always multimodal

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as the memory trace is established across modalities in the memory process as "retrieving a memory involves simulating its multimodal components together" (Barsalou 2008: 623). Simulation is nurtured by the context, i.e., the interplay, of specific modalities in the context of a mental state, and, simultaneously, evokes and reproduces a context, which it represents and in which it is embedded. In Tulving's footsteps, the ecphoric information represents a complexity (1983: 183) – the context to which the retrieval cue ("a proximal specific cue" or "non-specific distal cues" [Moscovitch 1995: 243]) connects, enabling re-experiencing the original event (Csépe *et al.* 2007-2008).

The findings of psychological research bear relevance for the study of cultural memory on both individual and collective levels. The contextual approach presupposes multimodality within cultural memory, i.e., multimodal ways in which a remembering subject connects to and reproduces cultural memory, connecting it to a context in which cultural memory is simulated, i.e., re-enlivened. Modalities do not only refer to perceptual variety but also the "modality of culture" and "modalities in culture" (Bernstein 1981: 339-40), entailing differences between culture, on the one hand, and "specific forms" with a "specific syntax" (*ibidem*: 340), on the other.

Cultural memory in context denotes being present together, thus referring to elements of different kinds precipitated in one representation accumulating and conveying multiplicity. Just as no cultural phenomenon can be decontextualized, i.e., detached from other phenomena belonging to the same paradigm that "cultural" refers to in the given cultural context, the texture of cultural memory hinges on the multimodal coding of its landscape as well as of particular elements in it. The "polyphonic memory acts" (Hobuß 2011) enable memory to be stabilized: the multimodality of phenomena with internal and external referential features embeds them in cultural memory adding to their solidification in it while granting accessibility for remembering subjects and collectivities through rendering "recollections [...] more precise and fixed in their personal form" (Halbwachs 1992: 83) in their particular social and cultural context. Hence the continuity of memory spanning over different (consecutive) contexts is also secured.

To highlight the relevance of the modalities of perception: if contextual memory entails, among others, "kinesthetic, visual, auditory, haptic, spatial, affective and linguistic memory traces" (Bietti 2016: 127), then it is justified on this ground to address the context of cultural memory analogously. By way of example, in African American memory, the kinesthetic implications of the ring-shout, the auditory resonations of spirituals, the memory of smell in the metaphor of "a stinking ship" (Cone 1973: 21), the spatial memory trace of the lynching tree, the linguistic memory of masking, etc., provide combined the texture of the African American memoryscape of slavery. Remembering enslavement means remembering a context, in which the memory of slavery is invoked through the simulation / retrieval of individual elements while the elements make sense together through their interrelation. African American memory narratives are multimodal as they incite

different modalities of perception (and others) that the images of the narratives center on and often structurally follow.

Dynamism is inherent within cultural memory and in the process of remembering. The multifocality accompanying, or, rather, resulting from multimodality indicates diverse perspectives or standpoints very much similar to what James J. Gibson describes regarding the nature of sight as ambulatory vision, which entailing snapshot-like ambient vision offering "pictorial depth perception" (Gibson 2015: xiv) and aperture vision referring to "a sequence of snap shots" (*ibidem*: 290) provides for "different points of observation" (*ibidem*: xiv) through the changing position of the viewer. The different and changing perspectives that are immanent in the construction of cultural memory also describe how the remembering subject connects to it: in an always dynamic manner, the relationship between memory material and the subject are renegotiated, re-contextualized and, concomitantly, actualized.

Much as memory carriers or practitioners appear to represent the community's drive to maintain or restore memory (see Alexander 2004: 11), the remembering subject becomes the ultimate interface between cultural memory and the context in which the community is embedded, substantiating the link between subject, community, its context, and memory. The term "contextual" connects individual memory to the collective as individual memory reasserts, modifies, and even dissents from the collective, and vice versa the collective hinges on individual memories as they provide for a nurturing collectivity that can be seen as its context. Nevertheless, in a similar way that elements in memory need to be seen as part of the whole, the remembering subject emerges as part of their actual social and cultural context and the context of their community embedded in it, too. As Jeffrey Blustein maintains, in so far as collective memory is social, "*as* part of a group [...] group members *remember together*" (Blustein 2008: 183). It is not merely activities done collectively, though; the content and mode are also negotiated, in which collective memory is remembered individually and collectively. The idea of "pooling of experience and 'memories'" (Middleton and Edwards 1990: 7) comes to the foreground for David Middleton and Derek Edwards, who describe negotiation as a "contest between varying accounts of shared experiences" in which "people reinterpret and discover features of the past that become the context and content for what they will jointly recall and commemorate on future occasions" (*ibidem*: 7). The part / whole relation and the formidability of experiences verified by the multimodality of the mental context alone presuppose that the relatedness to cultural memory and, to end that, cultural memory itself change, granting the latter its dynamic character.

The outcome of negotiations regarding memory serves as "the basis of future reminiscence" (*ibidem*: 7), showing that the remembering process merges the past, present, and future interpretations of cultural memory into one scale of an interconnected continuum. Jan Assmann's communicative memory (2011: 36) verifies the interrelation within memory overarching living generations with direct

experience of an event. Analogously, communities possibly distant in time and space without direct connection to the memory content or even to each other establish and maintain a link to the continuum of cultural memory through negotiation and contestation of variants. In the context of religious memory, for example, links to memory, in Danièle Hervieu-Léger's interpretation, amount to "new forms of social compromise which produce multiple readings of the foundational text" (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 119). New forms suggest "new representations" (*ibidem*: 119), implying the "(re)constitution of a chain of belief" (*ibidem*: 166). The re-establishment of (even imaginary) lineage (*ibidem*: 166) actualizes the chain of memory, showing "tradition in the act of becoming itself" (*ibidem*: 127). The idea is also echoed by Middleton and Edwards in a different context: for them, people "collectively reconstruct what the culture already 'knows' as part of its socio-historical evolution" (Middleton and Edwards 1990: 8). The moments of linking, by adding and altering by reinterpreting, to memory content make up chain-links and thus the context of cultural memory.

2. Multidirectionality as context in eco-memory

The emphasis on the context entails the possibility that it is shared, linked, or even contested by other collectivities, enabling or blocking cross-cultural memory work. The concept of multidirectional eco-memory appears to offer a productive way to combine cultural memories. One finds that the compound word "eco-memory" refers to either the study of human memory of the environment or, largely put, the memory of the environment including all species, i.e., non-human entities. Some studies, however, endeavor to establish an intersection in which they theorize, as Rosanne Kennedy does, a "multidirectional eco-memory" that "would link human and nonhuman animals and their histories of harm, suffering, and vulnerability in an expanded multispecies frame of remembrance" (Kennedy 2017: 268).

She bases her argument on Michael Rothberg's idea of the democratization of the notion of cultural memory "in the interests of a more egalitarian future" (Rothberg 2009: 21), seeking to decolonize memory (see Judaken 2011: 492), in that no particular cultural memory should be prioritized over the other and, in a way, cultural memories should be harmonized to render them accessible to and shared within and across cultures, i.e., it suggests "the juxtaposition of two or more disturbing memories that work dialogically to bring together different histories of suffering" (Zapata 2015: 529). Juxtaposition, however, also implies oppositionality. As Rothberg argues, "Shared histories of racism, spatial segregation, genocide, diasporic displacement, cultural destruction, and – perhaps most important – savvy and creative resistance to hegemonic demands provide the grounds for new forms of collectivity that would not ignore equally powerful histories of division and difference" (Rothberg 2009: 23), which is to say that collectivities are thought of as orientated against some hegemonic entity. In addition, deployed against the

uniqueness of memory in an attempt to avoid "the trap of competitive victimhood" (Assmann 2014: 551), which, from a certain point of view, can be seen as hegemonic, too, the liberal and ahistorical approach to memory fails to acknowledge the essential nature of cultural memory – "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts" (Erll 2008: 2); namely, it emanates from the experiences of a particular community and reflects the identity production of the community.

Several issues arise here: First, to decentralize cultural memory by emphasizing strands that are shared by comparison in other communities threatens the very identity of the particular community much as such memories can have "a strengthening effect on one another" (Van Ooijen and Raaijmakers 2012: 474). Further, if certain victimized memory narratives are meant to form a new collectivity, they can still be mutually exclusive with other memory narratives and resulting in continued "memory competition" (Rothberg 2009: 10) as the centripetal interpretation of subject positions does not allow the inclusion of other, from the point of view of the former, centrifugal interpretations – ultimately in danger of failing the democratization process of memories. Third, even if the intercultural and transcultural concerted formulation of cultural memories is possible, it means the deployment of a shared (for Rothberg, traumatized) memory in opposition to some cultural memory, too. In this way, inclusion, i.e., sharing memory content, always already precipitates as an assertion against some other cultural (social, political) realm, which is the reproduction of some kind of oppositionality. Multidirectional it may be but hardly egalitarian if it is called to mean reconciliatory. The inclusion of the realm in opposition to which the memory is deployed obstructs the maneuver. Fourth, the realization of a multidirectional collectivity is further complicated by the actual heterogeneity of the particular memory narratives regarded as homogenous due to the unifying, cohesive effect of symbolic treatment. Memories can work as a prism (see Assmann 2014: 550) for other memories; however, it is based on similarity derived from the symbolic and not shared lived experiences, meaning that the multidirectional memory community will move on an ideological basis rather than tethered through existential connections. Memories are ultimately not simply synchronic, depicting the here and now, but diachronic, embedded in a chain of memory (see Hervieu-Léger 2000), often partaking in the memory work of other collectivities which they are part of or are confluent with. Or even, much as bi/multicultural remembering subjects may be seen as multidirectionally motivated, rendering their memory narratives multidirectional in a multilayered geographical context, where a local, sub-regional, national, regional, and even continental approaches to memory involve the multiplicity of directionalities, mutually exclusive, i.e., competitive, memory narratives render the realization of a collective multidirectional memory problematic. On a pessimistic note, to override the competition of certain memories, it seems an external referent is needed against which it is deployed, unifying interests and suppressing differences, thus enabling transnational memories, i.e., "new forms of belonging and cultural identification" (Assmann 2014: 547).

For Rothberg, multidirectionality is conceptualized "to create new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice" (2009: 5) by way of comparison. However, based on the above, multidirectional memory can only be thematized in support of the own cultural memory – a reason why, instead of comparison and sharing, the method of analogy is more productive. Rothberg's discussion of screen memory (Freud's terminology of *Deckerinnerung* ["cover memory"] is perhaps more plastic) refers to this possibility. As I also suggest elsewhere in connection with reworking traumas (see Gaál-Szabó 2017), screen memory does not only work to keep away more local concerns but also as a vehicle for traumatic memories to be transposed. In the vortex of "displacement" and "re-placement" of memory as "memory re-emerges in seemingly unrelated geographical locations, historical periods, and material objects" (Freeman, Nienass, and Melamed 2013: 2), multidirectional maneuvers reflect on the own cultural memory and strengthen the own cultural memory centripetally. Analogy, however, may enable transcultural ties in that it brings the other closer, i.e., as a prop to sustain the self and the own collectivity.

Arguing against "the anthropocentric concept of collective identity" (Kennedy 2017: 269), Kennedy seeks to "expand outwards to a multispecies horizon that includes the oceans and their creatures, and to examine how events, actions, and processes affect elements in the assemblage" (*ibidem*: 269), whereby "multidirectional eco-memory places memories of the violence against and dispossession of particular human populations in complex, nuanced relation to memories of the suffering, slaughter, and endangerment of animal populations" (*ibidem*: 269). If "multi" invites for her sharing of memories of different species to establish, as she quotes Deborah Bird Rose "cross-species relationships of responsibilities and accountability" (*ibidem*: 272) with the aim to establish "sustaining collectivities [including] one's nonhuman kin [in] relationships of mutual interdependence" (Rose 2011: 86-87), then the "multispecies frame of remembrance" (Kennedy 2017: 272) suggests harmonization and negotiation of memories across species, which would necessitate the participation of non-human species in the discourse. However, based on the difficulty to establish multidirectional memory across human communities, where communication between them can be idealized and considered as possible, it is hardly imaginable for the apparent impossibility of harmonization of memory narratives that, at the current level of research, multispecies memory can be established as a result of concerted negotiation and harmonization of memory narratives across species.

Instead, Kennedy's interpretation of whaling as allegory suggests that multispecies eco-memory is but the extension of the Anthropocenic reassertion of the human gaze, anthropomorphizing the non-human environment. Her pondering condemns the human impact on the environment, but, on the other hand, it evokes ideas regarding the "regenerative possibilities" (Chua and Fair 2019: 8) of the Anthropocene while criticizing the human as "a singular universal subject" (*ibidem*: 11) – thereby blending in one line of thinkers in the field.

From the point of view of eco-memory, therefore, despite attempts to decentralize the Anthropos, it remains in the center as the remembering subject – as Kennedy also acknowledges, it is "inevitably anthropocentric" (Kennedy 2017: 9) even if interconnection between species is acknowledged. Multidirectional eco-memory reasserts that it is a memory from within and through the analogies the remembering individual or community reveals that multidirectional proves yet to be monodirectional in the sense that eco-memory expresses concerns, ideology, in short, the subject position of the observer.

Conclusions

In this paper, cultural memory is thematized as contextual for its multimodal inner heterogeneity, the various (perceptual) channels through which it is established, and the context with the remembering subject as part of it, which nurtures and actualizes it in a constant dynamic movement. The term *modality* has diverse interpretations across disciplines. Broadly speaking, here it is used to conceptualize memory as an interrelated multiplicity of memory traces that the remembering subject grounded in a specific temporal-spatial setting connects to. The multidirectionality of cultural memory serves as the centripetal activity of the mnemonic work of the particular remembering subject or community in that through the dynamic processes of analogy, the cultural core is strengthened – much as through this activity transcultural ties may also be enabled – so that memory is not detached from but incorporates the remembering subject in an embodied reality.

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