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Special Issue

The Work of Memory in the Project of Cosmopolitan Education

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Abstract

The article examines the role that personal and collective memories play in the development of one's sense of identity in the context of a multicultural society. Our way of remembering should be made object of an aware choice and should be exercised on morally relevant issues, like our personal or historical identities, with the aim of reaching an intentional, reflective, and acquired capacity to forget and remember in a cosmopolitan spirit. How should we educate ourselves about our own past, tradition and memory while living with others whose traditions and inheritances differ from ours? In the cosmopolitan orientation, a person or community juxtaposes reflective openness to new influences with reflective loyalty toward the tried and the known. Today the survival of personal and community integrity seems to necessitate the work of memory. Work is needed to retain beloved traditions in a dynamic manner, if those very traditions are not to be swallowed up in the tide of globalization. In the work of memory there is an interplay between "unlearning" the past—becoming mindful of its singularity and its interpretability—and reconstructing it.

Key words : memory, cosmopolitan education, identity, history

Introduction

Even though the idea of cosmopolitanism has a millenary history, in the past fifteen years it has been retrieved in political theory and analyzed in many variants. For practitioners and scholars in education, a recovered interest in cosmopolitanism springs from the factual consideration that our growingly heterogeneous societies demand a variety of models for understanding how and in which direction to exist together.

Cosmopolitanism is not a political concept that is borrowed by the world of education for application to school-related challenges: rather, it is an idea that lives and informs the experiences of people in education, of students in multicultural classrooms, of teachers, teacher educators and scholars. As an idea, cosmopolitanism illustrates that it is possible and desirable for different people to live together by cultivating and valuing both what they share in common as well as what separates them and makes them unique. Philosopher Siby George (2010) explains that "behind every idea of cosmopolitanism—whether it is political, economic or cultural— there lies a primarily moral idea of rising beyond one's home and hearth, kin and kith to embrace the other or the world, in big ways and small" (p. 65). A cosmopolitan education would allow for individual and communal practices of openness to what is new and other, together with practices of reflective allegiance to one's background and history.

Broadly understood within the current conversation on multi-culturalism, cosmopolitanism can be seen as a specific angle from which to consider questions of coexistence among diverse cultures. Whereas multiculturalism posits a side by side existence of cultures whose specificity needs to be preserved,[1] cosmopolitanism considers the dangers implied in maintaining distinctive cultural traditions without allowing for a recognition of some mutual shared traits amongst differences. In this essay I draw upon an idea of cosmopolitan education outlined by philosopher of education David Hansen in the book, *The Teacher and the World: A Study of Cosmopolitanism as Education* (2011). In it, he forecasts educational cosmopolitanism as a personal outlook which is developed by juxtaposing "reflective openness to new influences with reflective loyalty toward the tried and the known" (p. 1). The idea of cosmopolitanism illuminates how people everywhere can retain individual and cultural integrity while also keeping themselves open to the larger world (Hansen et al., 2009, p. 587). This article examines the role that personal and collective memories play in the development of one's sense of identity in the context of a multicultural society. How should education transmit

"culture" in plural, diverse contexts? Specifically, how should we educate ourselves about our own past, tradition, and memory while living with others whose traditions and inheritances differ from ours?

Cosmopolitanism and the Project of Cosmopolitan Education

Cosmopolitanism indicates the capacity to perceive shared human conditions while maintaining a sense of one's unique position and background. To use cherished buzzwords, the "local" and the "global" in a cosmopolitan outlook are not mutually exclusive, rather they coexist in the personal synthesis embodied in each human life. It is indeed a fact that in our cities and schools we have students, families, and teachers of diverse backgrounds preparing for a world in which homogeneity (if it was ever present) disappears and persons negotiate multiple allegiances. Cosmopolitanism is a name for an outlook toward the challenges and opportunities of being a person, in a world of ongoing social transformation (Hansen, 2011, p. 6).

Cultural hybridity, substantiating the possibility for a person to compose shifting forms of identity from multiple influences, should be celebrated for the possibility of endless borrowing (Ibid., p. 11), but it should be maintained that persons experience hybridity from a rooted position. Even in the ever fluctuant movement of globalization, it is difficult to see and appreciate how others see the world. Exposure and contact with alterity, and also the "living side by side" of cultures posited by multiculturalism, are not enough: a person must learn how to view, listen, and appreciate that others may have different stories, value different things, and feel connected to different traditions while sharing a common condition. George (2010) highlights that cosmopolitanism requires an acknowledgement and a respect for difference: "an acknowledgement that beyond a priority of affections that are authentic and valid on account of human embeddedness, there is no priority of value among persons and what makes them unique" (p. 63). Educational cosmopolitanism pos-

its that regard for difference is brought about by a work of the self on ways of conceiving one's very unique identity.

Cosmopolitan education highlights the capacity for individuals to honestly hear others by guarding the register, the trajectory, and the narrative of their past, while aspiring to retain a distinctive individual or cultural voice (Hansen, 2009, p. 595). Today, the survival of personal and community integrity seems to necessitate the work of memory. How is memory implied in the cosmopolitan project? One must work to achieve a sense of who she is and who she wants to be. Memory is the act of deciding what to preserve and what to leave behind in the outlining of this achievement. An example comes from the memoir *Little Failure* by Gary Shteyngart (2014) which describes the incessant work requested on the protagonist, a Russian Jew who emigrated as a child to the U.S.A. after the opening of the borders in the Soviet Union, to understand and to establish who he is in relation to his heritage, to his languages and history. An interesting scenario, especially for educators, is the moment in which Gary's well intentioned first grade teacher repeatedly exhorts him to "Be more, you know, normal." While it could be possible to understand the good faith from which such a piece of advice is uttered, the violence exerted by this utterance is also undeniable. The scenario serves to show how consideration of the personal striving for recognition cannot neglect the asymmetry of power positions in which much of the striving takes place.[2] The possibility of losing one's history by heeding to the demands of assimilation, or by not guarding it from the undifferentiated hybridity, threatens personal integrity. What price is young Gary going to be paying in order to be "more normal"? This very question is asked of every person negotiating a sense of personal identity amidst the contrasting pushes of contemporaneous pressures.

Cosmopolitan education of memory tries to address this tension and negotiation between one's background and past and the demands of one's present hybrid context. Work is needed in order to retain roots and traditions in a dynamic manner if those are not to be swallowed up in the tide of globalization or hypostasized in a rigid and one dimensional ac-

count of them. What is at stake is personal integrity and sense of openness.

Resorting to an inflexible, one dimensional account of one's history runs the risk to stiffen personal integrity with the loss of openness to the larger contexts in which one lives. This is true for most people and not only for those with migrant or displaced life trajectories. Globalization and social transformation can result in personal identities that are locked up and unnegotiable. I accept Michael Rothberg's (2009) suggestion that "there is no straight line running from identity to memory" (p. 4) because, if our relationship to our past is related to who we are in the present, this relation is never without "unexpected or even unwanted consequences that bind us to those whom we consider others" (p. 5). The link of memory to national identity is necessarily problematic because there is no such thing as a linear and unbroken relationship between ones' past and one's sense of identity. The young Gary in the memoir referenced above had undergone displacement from St. Petersburg to Brooklyn as a child. For him, the task of building a sense of who he is after being displaced in his childhood is trying and impervious. Considering the role played by memory in how displaced persons think of themselves sheds light upon the fact that memory is not bound to place but is implied in shaping one's relation to one's places, places of origin or descent, of inhabitance, and of future destination.

The Dynamic of Memory in View of the Cosmopolitan Educational Idea

Memory descends from multiple, concurrent, at times overlapping and at times incongruous sources; it also operates in a non-linear and non-cumulative, even if developing, fashion. In what follows I consider two ways, probably the principal ones, by which the act of memory happens. Other ways, like corresponding, evoking, overlooking, or magnifying still seem to well describe what goes one when one remembers,

but I will not specifically consider them because conserving and destroying seem to be the main components in the dynamic. I also wish to consider only the intentional or at least consciously perceived components of memory. Psychoanalytic theory offers important insight in regard to pre- or sub-conscious sites of storage for personal memories, as well as mechanism of defense such as denial or avoidance, that shall be relevant for consideration but fall outside the scope of my inquiry for this paper. I will be unable to consider these insights in my description even though I recognize their value.

Memory is the personal act of saving the past through a dance of destructive and constructive forces. It implies an interplay between forgetting and remembering, in which the creation and corrosion are simultaneously interacting. For instance, I have clear memories of episodes of my early childhood that I cannot remember directly, but that I have re-created through my parents' narration. Here memory is displayed in its creative aspect. Historiography could also be seen under this light, as a way to sustain individual creation of sense from the past drawing upon accounts written by historians. Yet, this creativity cannot be separated from a parallel need to destroy other memories of facts that we do not consider worth being saved for the most various reasons. That in memory there is a persistent relation between forgetting and remembering was also suggested in Plato's *Republic*. The work ends with a telling of the myth of Er, in which it is shown how one can avoid forgetting, and thus one's story can be remembered, only if one drinks a right amount of the water of the river of Forgetfulness (p. 291).

Memory as a fusion of forgetting and remembering is revealed clearly in the narrative works by W.G. Sebald. The author is a German of the second generation after WWII dealing with the problem of how to represent what happened in European recent history. The protagonist of one of his novels, *Austerlitz* (2001), is the child of a Jewish Czeck family sent to England to escape the Nazi persecution. As his story has been hidden from him by his new foster parents, Austerlitz discovers his past and identity through flashes of unexpected and overwhelming epiphanies,

sudden recognitions. Memory proceeds with illuminations, with unexpected moves to a different standpoint. In *The Emigrants*, Sebald (1996) writes, "Memory often strikes me as a kind of dumbness. It makes one's head heavy and giddy, as if one were not looking back down the receding perspectives of time but rather down on the earth from a great height, from one of those towers whose tops are lost to view in the clouds" (p. 145). Memory is described as a look on the past from a position that does not allow clarity of vision, but rather offers barely a nebulous perception, because what is perceived cannot possibly be brought into focus. Memory is both forgetting and retaining: letting go is important in order to move beyond (when necessary) local, naturalized standpoints; preserving is crucial for unsettling and reopening frames of reference on the world. The epigraph to *The Emigrants* (Sebald, 1996) recites "And the last remnants memory destroys" (p. 1): exactly denouncing that saving the past is only possible and meaningful by destruction.

Jason Hill (2000) calls this destruction "unlearning" the past—by which he means becoming mindful of its singularity and its interpretability. It is a laborious process that implies an effort of mastery on one's thoughts and emotions, mostly when it regards ponderous issues of religious, ethnic, or national identity, because the past stays inscribed in our thinking in ways that are normally not examined and are taken for granted. What is at stake here, and a meaningful way in which memory reveals itself as part of the project of a cosmopolitan education, is a consideration of the possibilities that open up for the person when she attends to the past without wanting to confirm a pre-established identity.

The necessity of unlearning or forgetting should follow from the awareness of the many betrayals and dangers presented by an inherited account of one's past. Educational theorists Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert (2000) warn of the ways in which established modalities of memorialization and remembrance risk erasing the past in its own alterity. One of Simon's former students, philosopher of education Mario Di Paolantonio, explains: "Spectacle condenses the past into quick encapsulations and units of information that are readily recognizable and verifi-

able (…). At issue here is how spectacles can strip the past of its alterity, of its particular tense (temporality) and irreducible ability to face us in its strangeness, consequently rendering remnants simply present-at-hand." (2015, p. 267). In Simon's view, memory should not aim at asserting or confirming communal narratives and thus identities. He considers how practices of remembrance easily mobilize emotionally charged identifications with specific communities or nations so that memory can be used as a tool of a "pedagogical project of continuity and confirmation" (Simon, Rosenberg, & Eppert, 2000, p. 12).

The act of memory should instead be a recognition that implies the individual's obligation to restructure her or his vision of the world. It should be a learning from the past as a discovery that unsettles the terms on which personal understanding of oneself and of one's world is based. Simon's proposal is focused on the idea of the past as discontinuous from the time of the present, initiating a form of "remembering otherwise" that will have as a consequence an unsettling and re-opening our frames and references. Jason Hill (2000) names the creative process made possible by the re-opening of our frames, "reconstructing the past" (p. 95). By this he means coming to perceive its values as singular and interpretable, while at the same time realizing that other people heed different values as well as practice different modes of valuing.

What I described as a cooperation between creative and corrosive potentialities in memory is also the prescription of an educational task. Even though it is undeniable that we do not master all the ways in which some things are remembered and some are forgotten, I think that we can, for the most part, choose how and what to remember. When this becomes difficult to observe on a personal level, it can be easily seen in the processes of writing of history, of curriculum choices, and of the political use of practices of remembrance and commemoration. The education of teachers would be a natural place where to encourage reflection and awareness on the educational task of memory. At least part, when not most, of curriculum is drawn from traditional sources that are naturalized and never questioned. Teachers in preparation should be alerted to

the processes by which some things are inherited and some considered worth passing over; the dynamic of destruction and creation should be made visible. While I find that the Foundations of Education course should take on the onus of helping future teachers see the workings of memory at play in the curriculum, I recognize that some discipline specific pedagogies also would allow for such an awareness. For example, Social Studies Education courses lend themselves to a thorough examination of the epistemology of historiography which will have to destabilize a perception of history as linear narrative. Oral history projects with the local community also serve well the purpose of unveiling the processes of history and historiography, and can be enacted at different grade levels with similar intentions. The study of literature as well will make it possible to consider how much of the European literature of the past century revolves around the dilemmas and challenges of broken histories and identities. Additionally, the reading of exile and immigration narratives[3)] in both k-12 and university level courses is a fitting exercise to reflect about practices of personal and collective remembrance and the obligations placed on us. At the university level there certainly are many avenues through which to emphasize to future teachers that memory is not automated but it can be made object of choice. Without choice, there would be no free exercise of memory, but anyway there would be memory, as a natural undergoing of the subject to its own functioning. Without acknowledging that we have the capacity to choose how to make memory, we leave it to others to determine it for us.

Conclusion

Our way of remembering should be made object of an aware choice and should be exercised on morally relevant issues, like our personal or historical identities, with the aim of reaching an intentional, reflective, and acquired capacity to forget and remember in a cosmopolitan spirit. This admittedly challenging process will often necessitate education, be-

cause established custom and habit may not be strong enough to sustain it. If we want individuals able to "radically reconfigure the relationship between past and present" (Simon, 1992, p. 142), we must encourage them not to be afraid of losing their grounds. As I watch the war waged at the borders of Europe against refugees and migrants, I know that we Europeans still need to deal with the heritage of the two World Wars, of the Cold War and of the most recent conflicts, like the ones in the former Yugoslavia, not to mention the conflicts we have supported with our allies the U.S.A. At the beginning of the 21st century, it is obvious to perceive of our world and tradition as fragmented ones. As history is for us radically fragmented, it is quite difficult to maintain hope in humanity.

Writing in 1940, in times of totalitarian terror and moral confusion for some traits akin to ours, philosopher Walter Benjamin created an immortal image that I am now summoning to assist me in closing my reflection.[4)] It is the image of the angel of history, inspired by Paul Klee's print, Angelus Novus, which the philosopher had owned for some years. Benjamin (1968) writes that the angel of history has:

> …his face turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress (pp. 258-259).

As for Benjamin's angel, looking back to one's past can offer a terrible sight. It is vital to be able to stand the moment of destruction that is implicit in practices of memory and bear the vision of the broken past, without giving in to paralysis. What makes this possible is the will to lose oneself, or to "unlearn" who one is, in order to open a new

possibility.

If it is true that we cannot turn our gaze from the ruins of history, Benjamin's angel also suggests that something pushes us forward. In order to be able to look into the debris that our past accumulates before our feet, we must shift to an appropriate standpoint, from which we should not only be receptive of what we are forced to perceive, but also work on our reception with our memory in its play of destruction and recreation. Only so, what we get from our past will allow us to think of ourselves, of our history and identity in a way that keeps the future open.[5]

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1) I offer this simplified description of multiculturalism to situate cosmopolitanism as a possible alternative to this model. The concept of multiculturalism has been analyzed in depth and it has been articulated in ways that make the relation to cosmopolitanism less one of opposition and more one of mutual aid. A 1994 study by Charles Taylor, Multiculturalism, presents an illuminating exam of the idea and of its ramifications. Fred Dallmayr (2015) debates the alternative between cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism by suggesting the adoption of a dialogical perspective "which stresses mutual ethical engagement" (p. 196).

2) I am grateful to Dr. Josh Sung-chang Ryoo for pointing out this important tension in his response to my paper during SIMS International Conference 2015 at Sookmyung Women's University in October 2015.

3) Books like the ones I offered as examples in this article, by Sebald and Shteyngart, are just some of the wide offerings in contemporary literature. I have enjoyed reading and teaching works by Jamaica Kincaid as well. Young adults connect well to the story of Lucy (Kincaid, 1990), an adolescent immigrant to the north east of the United States. The exemplary book allows for intense sharing and reflections on how personal narratives are woven with collective interpretations and power dynamics.

4) The gesture towards Benjamin's philosophy of history has become somewhat ritualized in the Philosophy of Education community when thinking about the ethical task of remembrance. Hansen (2012) refers to the figure of the angel of history to indicate what he thinks Sebald is not asking his readers to do: namely to seek and inhabit the past through narrative and see in it possibility of its own redemption (p. 127). In an article developed from a response to Hansen's paper, Joldersma (2014) elaborates on the meanings that arise when "bringing the perspective of the angel of history to the classroom" (p. 141). This perspective, he argues, can bring about the work of mourning, which is necessarily linked to the messianic aspect of history. Remembrance, Joldersma

posits, is awareness transformed into mourning (p. 143). He writes, "for Benjamin, catastrophe simultaneously constitutes the infusion of hope. The work of mourning not only disrupts history, but can redeem it." (p. 143). Pedagogical success consists in interrupting one's collective narratives and allowing for an undergoing of mourning. Chinnery (2011) suggests that the destabilization of the subject is required for heeding to the call from the other for unconditional responsibility (p. 398) which for Joldersma is translated through the work of mourning. In my article, I recur to Benjamin's angel with a different angle: outlining a possible posture from which to weather the violent winds of history, be it personal or communal. The angel has something to teach us because her gaze acknowledges the destruction of the past but does not crystallize it, instead she is set in motion towards a future to come.

5) My gratitude to dr. David Hansen, who first introduced me to this topic with a course on Cosmopolitan Education taught at Teachers College in 2008, and to Dr. Martin Viehhauser (Tuebingen University), Dr. Grace Clement (Salisbury University) and Dr. Josh Sung-chang Ryoo (Kookmin University) for helpful feedback on previous drafts. I also thank the three anonymous reviewers who helped clarify and suggested improvements to the manuscript.

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