MEMORY AND REMEMBRANCE IN AFRICA AND THE DIASPORA

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Literature can be considered as a particular “site of memory”. Storytellers and writers are users and producers of memories, and oral and written literature, as well as cinema, are powerful media to create a collective memory by “remembering the past in a narrative form” (Astrid Erll and Agnes Rigney 2006: 112). This special issue of *Afrika Focus* features articles that illustrate the role of oral and written literature and films in the transmission and creation of cultural memory in Africa. These articles are a peer-reviewed selection of the papers presented at the 11th ISOLA (International Society for Oral Literatures in Africa) conference held at the University of Florida, Gainesville, United States, from 25 to 28 May 2016.

As indicated by Tunde Akinyemi (2016) in the conference call for that event, cultural and individual memory intertwine and feed each other: “Although practically the individual is the only possible medium of any memory, the memory it ‘carries’ is always socially defined”. Several studies of cultural memory actually show that remembering the past is not simply an individual act, but a process shaped by social networks and cultural patterns, which influences the way in which elements of the past are represented for present and future goals.

The forms that cultural memory can take are numerous. The historian Pierre Nora (1989) used the definition of “sites of memory” («lieux de mémoire») mentioned above to refer to material and immaterial processes, implemented by state institutions to create national identities through the selective memory, oblivion, and even the invention of significant events. National memory takes shape through “the materiality of the trace” (Nora, 1989), such as memorials, shrines, museums, archives and emblematic places, and through less material forms such as speeches, anniversaries, ceremonies and rituals. Collective memories are structured by all these sites of memory and become the official history and the dominant discourse of the nation. Cultural memory may also conflate with the notion of “heritage”, which indicates another central feature of memory: its emotional investment.

According to the historian Luisa Passerini (2008), we should indeed study the value of emotions in the creation and transmission of memories between generations and between cultural groups, which she calls “the intersubjectivity of memory”. Finally, if remembering the past is at the heart of the construction of collective memory – and affectivity plays a structuring role in it – forgetting is also important. Connerton (2008: 60 and 63) notes that forgetting plays a role not only in the repressive forms of *damnatio memoriae*, the erasure of facts and people from public memory, but also in the formation of new identities by newly created memories and tacitly shared silences.

We construct, transmit and even manipulate what to remember and how to retain it in light of present and future configurations of our identity. The differences and oppositions in what we remember, how we remember, and what we do with these memories as a group lead to situations in which collective and cultural memory is a battlefield. Memories are controversial because the memory of the past speaks of power struggles and imbalance in the present as well as of hopes and fears for the future.

The narrative form – whether oral, written or (audio) visual – is a powerful tool for developing the dialogue between individual memories and collective memories. And while “sites of memory” often give form to a conventional, hegemonic discourse, narratives can also give voice to memories silenced in the dominant histories. We think, for example, of “lived memories”, remembrances of personal experiences and events whose memory is transmitted from the bearer of the memory to the following generations. More complex is the case of oral genres that tell the past and adapt it to the present – as myths and epic tales often do. They can be “sites of memory” when they construct and confirm existing social structures and a dominant history (for example that of local conquerors or male vs. female perspectives), but they can also assume an alternative function. For example, oral narratives can make room for episodes silenced by national history and hegemonic representations of the past, thus expressing forgotten histories and perspectives, as in the case of local representations of colonial and postcolonial encounters in the increasing process of globalization.

The articles collected in this volume present various forms of memorization in literature and audio-visual media. The emotional character of the collective memory of orality, its role in the aesthetic practice of language and in the identity formation of the community is treated in the articles by Abidemi Bolarinwa (Recreation of Oral Poetic Genres in Selected Yoruba Home-Video Films), by Adekemi Agnes Taiwo (New Media, Old Artistry: The Adaptation of Yorùbá Folktale, Narrative Strategies in Video Films), as well as by Chigozie Bright Nnabuihe and Adaora Lois Anyachebelu (Reorientation for National Transformation: the Role of Literature).

The article by Paulette Roulon-Doko (Une mémoire méconnue: témoignages sur des attaques de 2006 en zones rurales en République Centrafricaine / An unrecognized memory: testimonies on attacks of 2006 in rural areas in the Central African Republic) focuses on the formation of cultural memory through testimonies that present “lived memories” which allow the transmission, from one generation to the other, of the experience of looting to better protect themselves in the future.

The use of oral genres in various media and the complexity of the memorialization by

different agents are analyzed by Tal Tamari in the case of an epic narrative (Salimu: From Memory to Literary Narrative in Twentieth-Century Manding Culture) and by Abubakar Aliyu Liman in the case of a legendary character (Memorializing a legendary figure: Bayajidda the Prince of Baghdad in Hausa Land).

The formation of new cultural memories through the intertextual relationship between orality and contemporary written literature is explored in the articles by Edoama Odueme (Orality, Memory and the New African Poetry Diaspora: Examination Tanure Ojaide's Poetics), by Rasheedah Liman (History and Dramatic Imagination in Ahmed Yerima's Attahiru), and by Bosede Funke Afolayan (The Court Poet / Praise Singer in Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman and Ola Rotimi's Ovonramwen Nogbaisi: A Critical Appraisal), the latter also questions dominant cultural memories through the use of oral sources.

The final article by Rémi Armand Tchokothe (Archiving collective memories and (dis)owning) focuses on the reflection around the property of collective memory in the digital age. Referring to the idea of "researchers as griots", Tchokothe invites scientists to rethink their hegemonic position in relation to those who give them their knowledge, their testimonies, and their interpretations during fieldwork, pleading for the development of protective and proactive measures to counter the risk of forms of *damnatio memoriae* of local voices through and by the process of digital archiving.

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