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The 'Myth' of the Self: The Georgian National Narrative and Quest for 'Georgianness'

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This chapter examines the emotionally charged debates in Georgia which have been unleashed by recent attempts to change how history is being written and taught. In December 2008, Simon Janashia, director of the National Curriculum and Assessment Centre at the Georgian Ministry of Education, gave a talk on the new history books at the Centre for the Study of the Caucasus and Black Sea Region (CBSR).¹ This presentation generated intense discussion and passionate responses. One historian teaching at the University of Georgia exclaimed; 'This is some kind of experiment that they are trying to conduct on Georgia... you are trying to raise global citizens and uproot patriotism in this country... that's what it is!' This type of impassioned response is typical for the debate on the new history textbooks. Critics are dissatisfied that someone else has a monopoly on the nature of collective memories which will be instilled.

The debate at the Centre shifted back and forth from this kind of general and abstract concern to more technical issues which were connected to the actual textbook itself. In general, listeners found it difficult to really understand who the historian was addressing with his complaints, and they had difficulties narrowing down what he was trying to say. As state projects tend to receive a negative response – this is more the rule than the exception – I was not really surprised at this criticism. However, I was curious about the line of reasoning behind this disapproval, about the specific grounds for this criticism and about the role of collective memory in all of this, as I wanted to know how history textbooks could cause such unsettlement.

One of the most interesting moments of the discussion came at the end of the meeting. In his closing remarks which outlined a general

concept of history instruction, Simon Janashia introduced the audience to a list of ‘values’ (*girebulebebi*) which he believed were integral for the school curriculum. There were eight points in total, but the top three items on his list included respect for human values and rights, empathy and care, and love for the homeland. For the disgruntled historian from Georgia, such ordering epitomized what ‘the state project’ was all about, as he felt that the hierarchy disadvantaged core Georgian values: ‘This is exactly what I am saying’, he exclaimed. ‘How can you have “love of homeland” in third place? ... So what? ... We are getting rid of patriotism now?’

The speaker’s level of astonishment made it clear to me that the issues causing concern here were not just about history teaching. There are a number of other problems bubbling under the surface, including: concepts of future citizenship, democracy, Georgian statehood and how the knowledge and collective memory of Georgian identity impact upon how people imagine the country’s changing future. Discussions on the history books tend to centre on political ideological issues rather than on how history should be taught to children.

When the new Western-oriented government came to power in Georgia after the peaceful revolution in 2003, they embarked on an educational reform which not only intended to modernize and enhance the educational system, but also to eliminate deep-rooted corruption.² This broader context of change and transformation has provoked widespread public criticism of state-directed educational projects. Critics have treated these changes as a threat to the ‘value of knowledge’, highlighting that standardizing examinations may actually distort ways of knowing. Focusing on Georgian literature and history, these critics raise concerns about protecting the ‘language we speak’ (language and literature) and the ‘memories of who we are’ (history), two elements which are considered essential components of Georgianness (*qarTveloba*). From this perspective, culturally valued knowledge is not about guaranteeing universal intelligence or analytic skills; instead, it provides culturally specific knowledge about the group. Read in the frame of this wider discourse on cultural knowledge, the university historian’s objections to Janashia’s speech gain a new dimension, as he questioned what Georgians need to know, what form this knowledge should take in order to be passed on to future generations and, finally, who should have the right to decide what is imparted and transmitted.

In my opinion, these two discourses are interrelated; the historian’s response picks up on deeper issues, but Janashia’s project seems to actually be designed to respond to these issues. Thus, this entire discursive

encounter reflects what Mikhail Bakhtin calls hidden dialogicalism. This implies a chain of texts that is, in this specific case, not only addressed to Janashia, but which is part of a 'generalized collective dialogue'.³ This chain is constructed as a response to another chain of texts circulating within the community. The logic and the arguments on both sides are mediated by cultural frames that make things conceivable in a certain way. The hidden dialogue bears a relationship not only to the specific subject matter under discussion, but it indexes larger frames of cultural cognition. These frames are linguistically and semantically embedded formulas for conceiving Georgian history and politics. They are what Maurice Halbwachs calls 'collective frameworks of memory [that] do not amount to so many names, dates, and formulas, but truly represent currents of thought and experience within which we recover our past...'.⁴ As outlined here, these frames are fundamentally characterized by the sort of dialogic organization proposed by Bakhtin. While shaping the imagination of the past, collective frameworks also operate as social matrixes which cultural, social and political meanings are woven into. As such, they do much more than recover the past; they mediate collective imaginaries of the future and quite frequently shape how we respond to ongoing events.

By introducing this brief but tense encounter between Janashia and the university historian, I want to highlight the deep-rooted beliefs and forms of thinking which underlie almost every debate in Georgia and which stem from the memories of Georgia's past. Furthermore, I want to illustrate how collective memory is both represented in and articulated by the national narrative which mediates how the group conceives of itself in the present. This means that the purview of these frames is not limited to representing the past. It extends to symbolizing collective selves, addressing theoretical questions about emotional dimensions that are usually characteristic of narrative tools. For example, how can something that is supposedly a *practical tool* for organizing information arouse such passions? Ernest Cassirer's reflections on the nature of symbolic forms provide an interesting starting point for this analysis. Cassirer's philosophy examines how humans produce 'self-contained communities of meaning',⁵ while creating the objective world. I am particularly interested in his view that symbolic systems become much more than practical mechanisms while serving as interpretive tools; these systems come to represent human efforts at self-expression or self-conception. In his essay 'Language and Myth', Cassirer introduces myth as a special mode of human thought which not only transforms reality by representing it through a certain prism, but which is also

impregnated with self-expressive emotions. One of his ideas which leads into the mode of mythical thinking is that the human mind is not necessarily concerned with facts. Its 'prime talent' is not 'discursive reason'; instead, 'language is born of the need for emotional expression'.⁶

Following Humboldt's notion of 'inward form of language', Cassirer explains that linguistic conception – naming objects, endowing significance – comes from the same process as mythic ideation. Language and myth share the ability to give names and, by that process, to endow significance to objects in the world. However, as Cassirer highlights, 'the name is never a symbol but is part of the personal property of its bearer, property which must be carefully protected'.⁷ A similar line of reasoning is applied to his characterization of mythical conception:

The mythical form of conception is not something superadded to certain *elements* of empirical existence; instead, the primary 'experience' itself is steeped in the imagery of myth and saturated with its atmosphere. Man lives with *objects* only in so far as he lives with these *forms*; he reveals reality to himself, and himself to reality, in that he lets himself and the environment enter in this plastic medium, in which the two do not merely make contact, but fuse with each other.⁸ (Original emphasis)

Here, we can see some of the principal tenets of Cassirer's philosophy. He emphasizes that myth as a symbolic form is an essential part of human existence; it is an instrument that mediates our relationship with the external world. The only way that symbolic systems, or what Cassirer calls 'plastic mediums', can achieve this mediation is through embodying or fusing human experience – a human's self – into its form and structure.

Following Cassirer's line of reasoning, I argue that, as forms of *mythical thinking*, narrative modes of collective remembering take the linguistic and symbolic form that he believed represented a symbolically 'objectified' or 'externalized' self. This allows me to examine the relationship between Georgia's national narrative, something that also corresponds to Cassirer's notion of myth, and the concept of 'Georgianness' – a collective effort at self-imagining that is frequently deployed or implied in public or private discourses. Secondly, it allows me to explore how and why these two important aspects of Georgian culture – the national narrative and ideas on characteristics inherent to Georgians – shape modes of thinking and define the emotional character of debates and discussions such as history textbook debate.

The Georgian national narrative: a constant but thwarted attempt to return to the 'Golden Age'

Having studied numerous political discussions and conversations, as well as textbooks and media sources in Georgia, I have identified three main frames which are generally employed to contextualize trends in Georgian history. Depending on the topic of discussion, people may refer to one or more of the following:

- (a) Georgia's ceaseless effort to reintegrate its historic territories into a powerful state. The precedent for this existed during the Golden Age between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. History is read here as a series of repeated attempts that are thwarted by the appearance of a 'new enemy'.
- (b) Georgians' ability to preserve national culture, namely, language, religion (Orthodox Christianity) and national identity, despite the fact that external enemies persistently try to defeat and culturally assimilate Georgians. From this perspective, encounters with the external world endanger Georgian statehood and national traits constituting 'Georgianness'.
- (c) Georgians have been able to resist their enemies and preserve their culture because of their innate characteristics which make them irreconcilable to external domination.

These frames are meaning structures that constitute narrative templates, serving as mechanisms that underlie representations of the past. The notion of a narrative template has a lengthy history beginning from the writings of Frederic Bartlett on 'schemata' to the studies of Russian formalist Vladimir Propp (1975). More recently, Wertsch has argued that collective memory should be conceived as a form of mediated action. Building on Bartlett, Wertsch emphasizes the active processes that remembering involves. Proposing that collective memory or the narrative organization of history should be subjected to a two-level analysis (see chapter 9 in this volume), he reintroduces the notion of a schematic narrative template as a cultural tool that mediates processes of collective remembering.

Three of the themes already outlined make up central aspects of Georgia's national narrative template. As an interpretive cultural tool, the national narrative is not a linear text which can be read in one way only. Instead, it provides different platforms from which we can view the past. If we take the example of the attempt to integrate Georgian

territories, we can see that the narrative is generally marked by the following features:

1. 'Trouble' in the form of a 'new enemy' appears to thwart this movement. The external threat is supported from within by internal collaborators (traitors).
2. Georgians manage to maintain their cultural values (especially language and religion) through steadfast resistance to external domination and acts of individual martyrdom; they free themselves of enemy domination.
3. Once this domination is removed, efforts to reintegrate territories are once again initiated.

Typically, Georgians employ this kind of schematic formulation of the past in political discussions or when they are trying to analyse ongoing events such as the Russian-Georgian War of 2008. Indeed, the same template of external intrusion may also be used when considering the West's intervention in Georgia's political matters. Writing on the psychology of 'implicit theories' in 1989, Ross suggested that schematic templates are not 'readily available to consciousness'.⁹ Bartlett made a similar claim in relation to 'schemata'. To put it succinctly, these templates allow Georgians to formulate Georgian events similarly. In cases like the history textbook debate just outlined above, where the claims made were based on this narrative template, participants may not have been consciously aware that the narrative provides them with a framework within which they formulate and justify their arguments.

The narrative is not only schematic, it is also plastic. It can 'stretch out' like rubber and mould itself to the many contexts in which it is harnessed. In so doing, it reveals some elements that are not evident in the simple formulation, but which continue to maintain features necessary for narrative structure. In particular settings, people may emphasize some aspects of the narrative template while downplaying others; certain discourses highlight Georgia's unavoidable destiny to struggle with a powerful enemy, while others emphasize the element of internal collaborators – traitors. There are also instances where this narrative template evolves into an almost triumphalist story, accentuating the Georgian ability to endure centuries of assaults and invasions and to somehow survive, while preserving their cultural essence.

The variations on the basic themes of collective memory often depend on the general setting in which it is articulated as well as on the purpose and motivation of the presenter. Narratives are typically devised to

make a point or to put up an argument. In such instances, they are constructed as a response to somebody else's words and reveal what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the addressivity of a text.¹⁰ When Georgians present themselves to the world or engage in self-reflection in response to foreign impulses, they emphasize the antiquity of Georgian culture and history, the importance of its geographic location and its beautiful landscapes and nature. This is clearly shown in the following passage from the preface of a history textbook (7th–10th grade) which was published in Soviet Georgia in 1974:

The historical development of the Georgian people took place on the territories that it currently occupies...it is part of Caucasia that connects Europe to Asia... Rich and diverse is the nature of Georgia... Georgia – one of the leading Soviet republics – is a country of a heroic past and a very old culture.... The Georgian people have gone through an extremely difficult and long path... This book will tell us about the heroic past and present filled with many rich interesting events.¹¹

It would be natural to assume that much has changed since 1974 and that things written under the strict censorship of the Soviet state would no longer apply to twenty-first century Georgia. Nevertheless, the image presented here is still commonly employed today, as virtually any Georgian website which features the country's profile documents. This can be seen in the following excerpt from a website produced and written by Georgians entitled 'About Georgia':

The sea, mountains, desert, plain – this is the landscape of Georgia. Diverse is the nature of Georgians, defined by these contrasts. The history counting five thousand years and Christianity of fifteen hundred years reveals why Georgian nation is so unique. Georgian alphabet is one of the few existing in the modern world. The oldest writings in Georgian language is easily read and understood by modern Georgians without any translation (almost unprecedented).¹²

Although the general themes conveyed in these two passages are quite similar, contemporary accounts tend to prioritize the importance of Christianity and the Georgian language in cultural heritage over anything else. Georgia's geographically 'strategic' location is presented as part of the reason for the continuous assaults from external enemies; this is also a central constituent of the uniqueness of Georgian culture,

as is illustrated clearly on a site designed to provide investment advice for businessmen interested in the country:

Archeological data points to the existence of the Neolithic culture in the territory of Georgia since 5000 BC till the Christian era. In the closing centuries of pre-Christian era Georgia's culture came under a strong influence of Greece from the west and Persia from the east. The adoption of Christianity as an official religion by King Mirian in 354 contributed to strengthening multilateral ties with Byzantium. Although Arabs invaded Tbilisi in 645, Georgia managed to preserve high degree of its independence, its language and religion. In 813 King Ashot established the Bagrationi royal dynasty which ruled until 1801.¹³

Most frequently, these history snippets are included to correct the general assumption made about ex-Soviet countries that they have only emerged because of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and that they did not exist as an independent state before this. The fact that all of the texts provided here (internet sites) were originally written in English, speaks to the assumption that they are intended for a foreign audience that operates according to particular presumptions and perhaps even prejudices, rather than for the native Georgians.

On his website about his 'homeland', Levan Zvambaia, a young man from the city of Kutaisi, notes:

Georgia is one of the most ancient countries of the world. This millennium is the fourth in the history of Georgia Many great and tragic events occurred in this land during these centuries. Situated between the Black and Caspian Seas, right at the boundary of Asia and Europe, the crossroads of the world's commercial routes, at the junction of world's cultures and religions, Georgia attracted like a magnet many a conqueror. The century in and the century out waves of invasions and inroads rolled across Georgia.¹⁴

These stories are remarkable because they condense events that stretch over centuries into a few lines. What is included and what is omitted very much depends on the context, but the general storyline is retained throughout. Narrative can be applied to various settings by emphasizing one element or another. For instance, discussions of Georgia's struggle for territorial integrity are most frequently couched in terms of its long-standing effort to restore the might and glory of the eleventh–thirteenth

century Golden Age state. In my general formulation of the template, the struggle for territorial integrity is the primary force that drives Georgians. The Golden Age provides an image of an ideal state that is generally assumed to have been part of the Georgian agenda since the beginning of time. While acting as a reminder of greatness, it represents a state of normalcy, a realization of Georgian potential, or a triumph of the true Georgian nature and essence. It is not simply a story of success, but a story of ‘who we *truly* are’. As Aleida Assmann highlights ‘the myth of a golden age . . . acquires the status of a normative past that reminds and admonishes a nation of its former greatness’.¹⁵

The movement towards the ‘state of normalcy’, or, in the Georgian case, a realization of this true self, is understood to be constantly thwarted by external enemies and internal collaborators. Wertsch and Batiashvili have identified this narrative as ‘foiled attempts to return to the Golden Age’, suggesting an essentialist formulation of Georgian history.¹⁶ Most of the history textbooks, even the ones from the Soviet era – it even may be more appropriate to say: *especially* the ones from Soviet era – ‘presuppose an essential character of Georgian tribes leading toward a natural tendency of state formation’. The movement was set in motion when King Pharnavaz I founded the first Georgian state in the third century BCE. As one of the textbooks notes:

...the period of Pharnavaz is the *beginning* of the long process of integrating the territories inhabited by Georgian tribes in a single state...Henceforth, an integrated Georgian ethnocultural system was formed based on the political and economic organism founded in the Kingdom of Kartli (Iberia) founded by Parnavaz. (emphasis added)¹⁷

The textbook also notes that ‘the long process of unification of the Georgian land was completed by David the Builder’.¹⁸ This iconic figure rules the Middle Ages in Georgian collective memory (1089–1125). His significance has not diminished in twenty-first century Georgia. This Golden Age narrative has served as a national moral compass for defining political goals and weighing strategies in attaining them. Representing the ‘state of normalcy’ in Georgian imagination, this is a period where the Georgian culture thrived; it is marked by the development of literature and poetry, and the construction of monasteries and temples, alongside the emergence of democratic institutions.

Most Georgians assume that this is the most accurate account of their history. There is no doubt that Georgia has indeed had to endure a

number of assaults and invasions throughout the centuries. What is striking about the collective memory of these episodes is that they are all plotted using the same basic narrative template. By contrast, as I have noted elsewhere, ‘from the perspective of formal history, each episode was unique in some way and involved a host of complex motives’.¹⁹ Collective memory rarely acknowledges these differences; in this particular case, the narrative template reduces various invaders from different epochs into a single category of ‘enemy’. Romans, Turks, Mongols, Arabs, Persians or Russians are merged into one category.

‘Georgianness’ and the world beyond it

There are two fundamental beliefs which arise from the ‘reality’ portrayed by the Georgian national narrative. Firstly, Georgian statehood is a natural phenomenon; secondly, the external world always seems to present some sort of threat. This is not necessarily a threat to Georgian statehood; instead it may be a threat to Georgian cultural values. Georgianness may be prioritized over the subscription to a particular political system, because as long as Georgia preserves its national identity through language and religion, the passage of time is inconsequential: Georgia will always be able to regain its state and territories. According to this logic, the Georgian state exists regardless of its current political status or the formal governance over its territories. This narrative emphasizes the dangers that ensue from contact with the external world, a criticism which was reflected in the arguments of the disgruntled historian at the outset. His statements imply that alien intruders in the Georgian cultural system may be more harmful than any threat to Georgian statehood. This world view is so powerful that it renders what some see as a benevolent ‘West’ – something that the Georgian nation is aspiring to become part of – into an alien force that can infiltrate and pollute cultural values. As a result, the notion of the West appears as a double-edged sword; it is something that will assist the Georgian effort of territorial reintegration; it could, however, simultaneously potentially damage cultural or even *spiritual* integrity. Ambivalence towards the West tends to be more implicit than explicit. It is doubtful that the historian was conscious of any convoluted logic when he said, ‘this is some kind of experiment that *they* are trying to conduct on Georgia . . . *you* are trying to raise global citizens and uproot patriotism in this country’ (my emphasis). He was probably not even aware that he shifted between ‘they’ and ‘you’ because he knew that he was referring to the ‘West’ and to its agent, a ‘Western-oriented’ government in Georgia, respectively.

The logic on which his utterance rests is so deep-rooted and powerful that it does not necessarily require conscious awareness.

Mythologized views of the past obscure concrete details of what is happening on the ground; we are unable to see how the past differs from the present or to identify the role of community or even an individual (apart from a powerful monarch) in building a strong state. The conception of the new history curriculum, presented by Simon Janashia at the December seminar, was based on similar claims. He began by listing the kind of images and beliefs that (old) history textbooks produce. His slides employed all of the central aspects of Georgia's national narrative that I have outlined above. His speech indirectly implied that certain things needed to be revised if Georgian education is to be successful. However, his suggestions focused mainly on rethinking Georgia's place in the world; he suggested how to deal with images of an enemy, how to emphasize collaboration and not only self-defence and how to accentuate values of civil society, institutions and civil rights. Janashia did not suggest abandoning the idea of Georgia as a glorious state or Georgian culture, but, in the eyes of the critics, his project was somehow assumed to be part of the state's agenda of Westernization, epitomizing an 'experiment' to exterminate Georgian culture and its essence. These claims are not grounded in any kind of substantive evidence. Far from it, they reflect beliefs in an ever present external threat that is at the core of the national narrative.

What is even more fascinating is the fact that this case reveals a deep-seated fear that the Georgian culture will be destroyed and the Georgian essence polluted if the narrative structure of collective memory is changed. This suggests that narrative structures as symbolic means have an intrinsic value which is beyond their capacity to convey or represent something. As Cassirer notes, symbolic forms do not merely *represent* things, they *present* them. Symbols become the organs, inseparable parts of the objects they convey. To repeat Cassirer's own words, through symbolic forms man 'reveals reality to himself, and himself to reality, in that he lets himself and the environment enter in this plastic medium, in which the two do not merely make contact, but fuse with each other'.²⁰

As I have outlined it, this debate illustrates that the dissatisfaction with the new history textbooks does not really stem from the textbooks themselves; instead, it stems from a more general sense of frustration about who holds the 'rights to history'. The underlying assumption is that deciding which past should be remembered will also determine

the future and the kind of Georgians that will become the products of this memory. In the debate which I have sketched, Janashia and the Georgian historian were both concerned with the type of Georgians which this process would produce rather than the knowledge which history teaching would impart; will they be either 'global citizens' or 'patriots'? Their concerns are based on an understanding of an essentialized Georgian nature which seems to be at stake if Georgian history is rewritten. The very term that people sometimes employ – 'Georgianness' (*qarTveloba*) – denotes some characteristic traits that are common to all Georgians; this is what makes us *us*. This notion of Geogianness is located at the intersection of past and future, it is embedded and embodied in collective memories and internalized by members of a collective. Any effort to reimagine Georgia's history, to rearrange its narrative could fundamentally transform its essence.

Although the term Georgianness can be heard in a number of contexts, it is related primarily to collective memories of a common past rather than to anything else. As a cultural concept, the history of the Georgian people is a product of this 'character' and, simultaneously, its structuring force or producer. The relationship between history and Georgianness (history as cultural construct, operative at an interpretive level) is convoluted and complicated.

As Jan Assmann notes, 'history turns into myth as soon as it is remembered, narrated, and used, that is, woven into the fabric of the present'.²¹ Narratives as symbolic, linguistic forms exemplify the human tendency of mythico-poetic ideation. They are analogous to myth in selecting certain aspects of a group's social experience (what we call history) and endowing significance to certain events by giving them linguistic form. In essence, narratives are linguistic 'names' of certain aspects of a group's existence. They are names in a sense outlined by Cassirer, who wrote that a:

... person's ego, his very self and personality, is indissolubly linked, in mythic thinking with his name. Here the name is never a mere symbol, but is personal property of its bearer; property which must be carefully protected, and the use of which is exclusively and jealously reserved to him.²²

Myths are also linguistic/symbolic signs that name objects in the environment and define the relationship between these objects. In so doing, myth gives reality meaning. On an expressive or emotional level,

linguistic signs and their meanings make up an indissoluble expressive whole and the meaning-bearing matter of the sign is fused with the object.

Myths are not just a mere symbolic portrayer of man's surrounding reality, which includes a past experience in the case of national narratives; they also symbolize the human apprehension of values. As such, myth is more the story of human sentiment about the object it describes than an account of objects in the environment. Nevertheless, myths are not usually understood as images, but they are accepted as a reality that allows no criticism or doubt. As one of Cassirer's most insightful interpreters, Susanne Langer, argues:

... human beings actually apprehend *values* and expressions of values *before* they formulate and entertain *facts* All mythic constructions are symbols of value . . . they are charged with feeling, and have a way of absorbing into themselves more and more intensive meanings, sometimes even logically conflicting imports.²³ (Original emphasis)

In the Georgian context, the emotional dimension of national narratives as *mnemonic myths* is defined by how they shape a sense of Georgianness.

As a cultural concept, Georgianness presupposes a belief in the essential, inherent nature of Georgians and as such falls under the heading of a mythical construct for Cassirer. The concept of Georgianness and its non-rational (Cassirer's 'non-discursive'), but persistent mythical nature leads to attempts by Georgians to imagine some kind of collective self. In other words, it represents an attempt to find and articulate those commonalities of traits that characterize Georgian individuals, and, through that process, to make sense out of 'self'. It is an attempt to find meaning and to invest a single concept with all these meanings.

The significance and cultural value of this concept is manifested through collective memories and national narratives. The national narrative, or what in general discussion is referred to as 'our history', is the 'organ' of the concept of Georgianness, it is one of its symbolic expressions. As language, narrative also 'is essentially hypostatic, seeking to distinguish, emphasize, and hold the object of feeling rather than to communicate the feeling itself'.²⁴ This amounts to saying that narrative is a symbolic form that represents or conceives of the nature of collective selves – Georgian selves.

In my view, efforts to conceive collective self are driven by a desire to understand one's own past, but more frequently by the human attempt to define the situations they find themselves in. Reflections on *who we*

are relate past and present experience of the people in a way that lets them explain, rationalize and deal with whatever is happening now, globally, locally or existentially, which challenges the reality that people have to face. In so doing, a consistent pattern becomes culturally established in the public imagination that links the nature of the group to its past and present experience. In the Georgian context, this is usually manifest in public rhetoric surrounding the country's political matters. Attitudes tend to express the sentiment that 'we always end up like this, because of who we are, because of our character!'; the underlying assumption here is that there is a culturally accepted pattern which national narratives reveal.

Each culture has its own constellation of symbolic systems, especially myths that express the group's individuality and constitute ways of interacting with others. As such, national narratives are one of the dominant symbolic forms that shape our political perceptions and actions. A national narrative is a nation's autobiography, its attempt to understand its personality and life. It is an effort to make sense of what happened and project this understanding into the future.

Notes

1. The Centre for the Study of Caucasus and the Black Sea Region was launched in the summer of 2008, and its goal is to develop a network of scholars working in the area as well as to create a venue for interdisciplinary collaboration. For further information, see <http://www.cbsr.ge>, accessed 22 June 2011.
2. The reform intended first and foremost to fundamentally transform entrance examinations to higher education. This involved standardizing tests and applying changes to exam subjects.
3. James Wertsch (2005), 'Generalized Collective Dialogue and Advanced Foreign Language Capacities', *Plenary Paper for Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University).
4. Maurice Halbwachs (1980), *The Collective Memory* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Harper Colophon Books), p. 64.
5. Deniz Coskun (2007), 'The Politics of Myth: Ernst Cassirer's Pathology of the Totalitarian State', *Law as Symbolic Form. Ernst Cassirer and the Anthropocentric View of Law* (The Netherlands: Springer), pp. 135–72, here p. 153.
6. Susanne K. Langer (1958), 'On Cassirer's Theory of Language and Myth', in Paul Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Ernest Cassirer* (New York, NY: Tudor), pp. 381–400, here p. 384.
7. Ernest Cassirer (1953), *Language and Myth* (New York, NY: Dover), p. 50.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
9. See James Wertsch (2002), *Voices of Collective Remembering* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press), p. 62.
10. See Tzvetan Todorov (1984), *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle. Theory & History of Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press).

11. Mikhail Meskhi and Valter Guchua (1974), *saqartvelos istoria History of Georgia 7–10 grades* (Tbilisi: ganatleba), pp. 3–4.
12. The website organizers are, as they state themselves, a ‘small group, but with wide experience in sphere of Information Technology, [who] have decided to create a site About Georgia’. About Georgia Website, <http://www.aboutgeorgia.net/about/>, accessed 18 April 2009.
13. Investment Guide Website, <http://www.investmentguide.ge>, accessed 18 April 2009.
14. See <http://georgia.iatp.ge/news.htm>, accessed 18 April 2009.
15. Aleida Assmann (2005), *Checklist for a Georgian National Narrative*, White Paper Report Prepared for the Georgian Ministry of Education: ‘Negotiating a New National Narrative in Georgia’, p. 18.
16. See James Wertsch and Nutsa Batiashvili (in press), *Mnemonic Communities and Conflict*.
17. Mariam Lortkipanidze and Nodar Asatiani (2001), *saqartvelos istoria* (History of Georgia for 10th grade history instruction) (Tbilisi: cisartkela), p. 44.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
19. Wertsch and Batiashvili (in press).
20. Cassirer (1953), p. 10.
21. Jan Assmann (2005), *Cultural Memories and National Narratives with Some Relation to the Case of Georgia*. White Paper Report prepared for the Georgian Ministry of Education ‘Negotiating a New National Narrative in Georgia’, p. 14.
22. Cassirer (1953), pp. 49–50.
23. Langer (1958), p. 388.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 386.

11

Memory Specificity Across Cultures

Angela H. Gutchess and Maya Siegel

Recent evidence suggests that culture can operate as a lens, bringing distinct aspects of one's environment into focus based on cultural priorities, values and experiences. Individuals from Western cultures tend to focus on that which is object-based, categorically related or self-relevant whereas people from Eastern cultures tend to focus more on contextual details, similarities and group-relevant information. For example, when asked to describe animated vignettes of underwater scenes, American descriptions focus on the prominent fish in the scene, Japanese participants, on the other hand, incorporate many more contextual details, such as the colour of the seaweed and water and the relationship of the fish to the other elements in the scene.¹ These different ways of perceiving the world suggest that culture shapes the ways in which individuals attend to and remember aspects of complex environments.

This chapter reviews the ways that culture can contribute to memory formation, in terms of its effects on both behaviour and neural function. The specificity of memory – that is, the details, organization and features of memories – offers a useful framework for considering how culture can shape memory systems. Given the limits on information processing capacity, the specific details encoded and retrieved in memory come at the expense of other details. Comparing the types of details and processes that individuals from one culture prioritize over others offers insight into the type of information given priority in cognition, perhaps reflecting broader cultural values. Furthermore, this chapter also examines some of the ways that bilingualism and linguistic ability affects memory.

To date, the field of Psychology has often treated human experiences and ways of interacting with the world as largely universal processes. Results from research studies conducted primarily in Western

locations, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Europe, were thought to extend to people from far-flung corners of the world, with few attempts to test this assumption. With the rise of the field of Cultural Psychology and the increasing globalization of research endeavours, the potential for cross-cultural differences in human behaviour and thought is receiving increasing consideration. In terms of human cognition and information processing, extensive experience in a culture may affect the type of knowledge acquired. It may direct attention to certain aspects of the environment, determine the types of details to be encoded into memory and convey strategies for processing and organizing information in memory and thought.

Memory seems to be a promising mode through which to measure the effects of culture on cognition. Specific details are encoded and retrieved in memory at the expense of other details. This trade-off helps to reveal what a culture most values and prioritizes through memory. Such an imprint of culture is possible because memory is a constructive process, meaning that memories do not exist as static, fixed representations of events that occurred in one's past. Rather, memory is dynamic and it can potentially be shaped and reshaped by the current motivations and goals of the individual. Culture may serve as a particularly potent aspect of the environment, contributing to one's life experiences and impacting upon one's perspective on the world. This lens through which one interacts with the surrounding world can be shaped by culture in terms of what information people attend to in the world around them, and how they reconcile this information with existing knowledge and schemas. Because information processing is limited, certain information from complex environments is necessarily prioritized at the expense of other information. In terms of memory, culture guides information processing by encoding, retrieving and even distorting specific details. One's culture may affect the types of memories one recalls and, furthermore, it may reveal the values and priorities of a culture for information processing.

Certain cultural differences in values and ways of perceiving the world have been identified, particularly in terms of the concept of self and the extent to which other people are considered to be interconnected with the self. Previous studies have shown that East Asians have a more collectivist culture; they devote more attention to the larger family structure or social group.² Their relationships and connections with other people who share close social bonds impact greatly upon their concept of the self. Those growing up in Western cultures, in contrast, are more individualistic; the self is considered to be a more

independent entity that exists apart from other individuals in the social network.³

Differences in social processes across cultures may impact on cognition and information processing. Evidence suggests that Easterners, including Chinese, Japanese and Koreans, tend to be more holistic in thought whereas Westerners, including Americans, Canadians and Western Europeans, tend to be more analytical. These aspects of culture can be traced back to the ancient Greeks for Westerners and to the more collective Chinese traditions for East Asians. Nisbett and colleagues propose that it was the societal organization of ancient Greek and Chinese civilizations that systematically shaped cognition in distinct ways that contribute to cognitive differences across Westerners and East Asians today.⁴ Because of the complex nature of relations and roles across individuals, the Chinese were highly socially interdependent. This social organization meant that the Chinese 'would always have been looking outward, trying to coordinate their actions with those of others while minimizing social friction'.⁵ The Greek social system was more independent, with fewer and less involved social relationships. As Nisbett and Masuda note: 'The independence of their lives might have given them the luxury of attending to objects in light of their personal goals in relation to them.'⁶ On the basis of the divergent nature of these social relationships, Greeks adopted an analytic approach, emphasizing rules, objects and their features and categories. By contrast, Chinese adopted a more holistic approach, emphasizing relations between objects and the importance of the context in which objects are embedded. These differences in ancient cultures may have affected the organization of Eastern and Western cultures today.

Data indicate that East Asian participants generally do, in fact, pay more attention to the field and context. East Asians invoke the social context more than Americans when explaining the behaviour of an individual, mentioning the role of other fish when making attributions about the behaviour of a single fish.⁷ For example, when shown an animation with one fish followed by a group of fish, East Asians were more likely to say that the group of fish was chasing the one fish, having the group cause the movement, whereas Americans were more likely to state that the single fish was leading the group, a more individual-oriented understanding of the scene. Even for contexts that are not so strongly social (for example, animations of fish swimming underwater), Japanese participants noticed and described the background more than American participants.⁸ Furthermore, Americans are better able to ignore conflicting context when focusing on objects.⁹ These studies serve as evidence

that members of East Asian cultures pay more attention to context than American participants, consistent with the idea that East Asians prioritize holistic processing.

This holistic information processing bias also carries over into the way that relationships are perceived between objects. When given several names of objects, Chinese participants tend to group by functional relationship instead of by category.¹⁰ For example, when presented with the items 'squirrel', 'seagull' and 'nut', Americans tend to pair the squirrel and the seagull together because they are both animals (that is, they share a categorical relationship). East Asians, however, tend to pair the squirrel and the nut together, giving explanations that emphasize the functional relationship of the items – the squirrel eats the nut.

Evidence for cultural differences in memory

As described above, memory is a constructive process, meaning that it is malleable and can be shaped and distorted in fundamental ways. Culture may determine what information is attended to, encoded into memory and, ultimately, what is accessible for retrieval. Culture may also guide which details are stored accurately, as well as how the details are distorted. A memory specificity approach encompasses these potential influences of culture, determining 'the extent to which, and sense in which, an individual's memory is based on retention of specific features of a past experience, or reflects the operation of specialized, highly specific memory processes'.¹¹ Memory specificity states that one's specific past experiences affect an individual's current memory by determining which details are prioritized and included in memory. Such past experiences include the culture in which one was raised. In this section, we will review some of the evidence for cultural differences in memory, and we will conclude by discussing promising future directions.

One way in which cultural groups differ is in their memory for objects and contexts. After viewing animated vignettes of fish swimming underwater, Japanese tend to recall information about background detail, such as the seaweed and the colour of the water, more than Americans. Americans, on the other hand, describe the primary objects from memory (for example, one large fish and two small fish) without retrieving the contextual detail.¹² In a follow-up study, Masuda and Nisbett explicitly manipulated the presence of contextual information to test whether this differentially affected memory across the two cultures. After encoding a series of pictures of objects presented against meaningful backgrounds (for example, a wolf emerging from a forest),

Japanese and Americans were tested on their memory of the object (the wolf) when the original background had been removed and replaced by a blank white background. This removal of contextual information impaired the memory performance of the Japanese participants, but not Americans, suggesting that the memories of Japanese individuals are more context-dependent; in memory, objects are more strongly associated with their backgrounds.

Neural differences across cultures also indicate differences in memory for objects and contexts. Much of this work has used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which is a non-invasive approach that allows one to make inferences about which parts of the brain are most active based on differences in the magnetic properties of oxygenated and deoxygenated blood. During an fMRI experiment, a series of images of the brain are acquired while a participant lies still in a magnetic resonance imaging scanner. The person performs tasks while looking at text or images projected on a screen and can press buttons to give their response to the information. For example, participants could view pictures of objects alone on a blank background, or pictures of objects placed in a meaningful context. Experimenters can later estimate which regions of the brain are more engaged during the encoding of objects with backgrounds compared to those without backgrounds, and then they can compare the magnitude of this difference across participants drawn from two cultural groups. In this example, those brain regions which show the largest response are more active due to the presence of a background. In this way, fMRI experiments can help to localize different brain functions to different areas of the brain.

Functional MRI experiments comparing Easterners and Westerners during the processing of object and context information reveal neural findings that are consistent with the behavioural results put forward by Masuda and Nisbett in 2001. Americans engage more object processing regions than Easterners when people encode complex scenes that contain both a focal object and meaningful contextual information.¹³ The most robust cultural differences emerged in a part of the brain that responds to semantic information about objects. In background-processing regions, however, cultural differences were negligible. This is somewhat surprising, given that behavioural studies have suggested that East Asians may be attuned to context and Americans more attuned to objects. However, the finding of a cultural difference in the neural activity underlying object, but not background, processing converges with the results of another fMRI study. An additional paradigm employed to study cultural differences in object and background processing

capitalized on the property of neural regions to adapt with repeated use during a task. This means that a neural region that initially responds very robustly to a particular picture would adapt, or respond less, during subsequent presentations of the same picture. To separate adaptation responses to backgrounds from those to objects, the researchers created quartets of pictures where either the same background was repeated across all four presentations but the object was new, or vice versa (for example, the same object was repeated across all four presentations but the background was new). Quartets consisting of the same complete picture or entirely novel pictures were also included in the experiment for control purposes. First, without considering the role of culture, the researchers found that the lateral occipital complex (LOC), a region in the visual cortex that is particularly sensitive to object information, responds to repeated objects by showing greater adaptation when the object is repeated across quartets compared to when the object is not repeated.¹⁴ A different region, the parahippocampal gyrus, which is in the medial temporal lobes and is particularly sensitive to scene information, adapts when backgrounds are repeated across quartets. When the role of culture is considered, cultural differences emerge in object-processing regions, in line with the previous finding from the scene encoding task.¹⁵ Older Singaporeans show less adaptation, or change, in neural responses in object regions than those exhibited by older Americans. However, cultural differences are only pronounced for older adults; young adults exhibit similar neural responses across the American and Singaporean groups. The presence of cultural differences for older, but not younger, adults may indicate that the effects of culture on cognition are more pronounced when people are immersed in a culture for a longer period of time or are undergoing neurobiological changes due to ageing. However, it is difficult to rule out cohort-specific effects (cultural forces that affect only a constrained generation of individuals, with effects limited to a particular time and place). Due to the limited amount of research addressing cultural differences across age groups, particularly for older adults, additional studies are needed to better understand the ways that culture affects cognition across the lifespan.

As these studies illustrate, fMRI holds great promise for the study of cultural differences because identifying the *location* of brain regions that exhibit cultural differences can indicate the types of processes that differ, constraining theories about the nature of cultural differences. These studies show that cultures seem to differ in object processing. This may not have been apparent through the use of solely behavioural measures,

which seemed to emphasize cultural differences in the processing of background context. Despite the differences in paradigms, participant groups and even in the specific neural regions that emerge in these two fMRI studies, the results suggest that the effects of culture operate in relatively lower-level perceptual and semantic processes. One might have expected cultural differences to emerge in the prefrontal cortex, a region subserving more higher-order processes. This pattern of cultural differences would have indicated that the lens of culture operates through much higher-level executive functions, which play a role in guiding attention, switching between competing demands and other effortful, resource-intensive processes. Such a pattern emerged in a study of cultural differences in attentional processes¹⁶ but, to date, it has not emerged in studies of long-term memory. Thus, culture does not appear to shape the encoding of pictures containing objects and backgrounds by functioning as an attention-demanding lens; rather, culture shapes the engagement of more automatic perceptual and semantic processes.

Easterners and Westerners also differ in the extent to which they organize information by categories. Categorization can affect memory through its potential use as a strategy to organize incoming information and through its connection to rich stores of existing knowledge, which can provide multiple cues to aid in retrieving information from memory. One of the classic findings in Psychology is that people tend to spontaneously organize information by categories during recall.¹⁷ For example, when presented with a list of randomly intermixed words, some drawn from the category of 'fruits', others drawn from the category of 'clothing' and others drawn from the category of 'animals', people tend to spontaneously cluster the words by category when recalling them from memory. They systematically retrieve the words one category at a time. To test the influence of culture on the tendency to use a category-based strategy in memory, Chinese and American participants learned lists of 20 words in which the items were drawn from four different categories. The words had been normed across both cultures to ensure that the items shared a similarly strong relationship to the underlying category across both Chinese and American cultures.¹⁸ Participants then listed all of the words that they could remember; we assessed the amount of information recalled, as well as the order that information was outputted, according to categories. Results indicate that while younger adults did not differ across cultures in their use of categories, older Americans order the words they retrieved by category to a greater extent than older Chinese.¹⁹ According to our interpretation, these results indicate that a greater absorption of culture over time may magnify cultural differences,

particularly when strategies are well practised and require little effort to implement, as could be the case for categorization.²⁰ Although age groups could cause differences in the strategies and information processing biases that culture conveys *within* a cultural group (the meaning of 'culture' could differ across younger and older adults), we maintain that our results likely reflect effects of ageing per se, as cross-cultural differences in the use of categories have been identified in a number of previous studies testing largely younger adults drawn from diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, it seems unlikely that our older adult cohort would be unique in the way that they use categories, compared to younger adults.

Consistent with the differences in social systems across cultures, memory for self and others is another area in which cultural groups differ. As noted, Westerners tend to have a more individualistic orientation whereas East Asians adopt a more collectivist one.²¹ These collectivist and individualistic orientations can affect the content of memory; this was demonstrated through the study of autobiographical memory, memory for one's personal experiences and history. In their autobiographical memories, Asians emphasize social interactions and contain more information about people compared to Caucasians, while Caucasian Americans tend to recall more individual, as opposed to more social, information than Asians.²² Asians' memories, in turn, contain more information emphasizing social interactions and people than do Caucasians' memories. Culture affects both initial encoding processes in addition to the way in which memory is reconstructed upon retrieval. Cultural differences emerge early in child development, with autobiographical memory and self concept dynamically contributing to the construction of each other.²³ For example, cultural differences in childrearing practices influence the onset of autobiographical memory, with children raised collectively in reformed kibbutzim reporting later first memories than children raised in more individualistic settings.²⁴ This finding suggests that autobiographical memory is formed hand-in-hand with the development of the view of oneself as an independent entity.

The study of self and other also allows for another application of the concept of memory specificity, in terms of unique domains of memory. One example from the social domain is the distinction between self and other: thinking about oneself is vastly different than thinking about other people. The self is associated with memory enhancements, as well as patterns of errors, that do not characterize memories for other people.²⁵ Neuroimaging methods provide strong support for this

distinction by revealing that self-referencing engages a unique region of the brain, the medial prefrontal cortex, which is not engaged when referencing other people.²⁶ Moreover, engaging the medial prefrontal region during encoding is associated with subsequent recognition of self-referential information, suggesting that the region is implicated not only in thinking about the self, but plays a critical role in memory.²⁷

Some evidence for cultural differences in the specificity of memory exists for the encoding of information in relation to the self or other. Americans treat the self as a unique and distinct domain; East Asians extend that domain to include close others. For the domain of the self, the construct is highly specific for Americans, but broader for East Asians. Recent work with fMRI provides converging neuroscience evidence that the relationship between self and others differs across cultures.²⁸ While both Westerners and Chinese differentiate self from distant, unfamiliar others, only Westerners differentiate self from close others (for example, mother). These differences also emerge in memory measures, with self-referenced adjectives better remembered than mother-referenced adjectives for Americans, whereas memory for both conditions is equivalent for Chinese.

Future directions

The brief review of cultural differences in memory establishes that culture can shape the type of information encoded into memory (for example, object versus context; self versus other), as well as the use of memory strategies such as categorization. Thus far, though, the research is limited, adopting an approach that emphasizes 'how much' information is accurately recalled rather than assessing the details and qualities of those memories. For example, types of details, whether perceptual or emotional, could be differentially emphasized across cultural groups. Memories can also be distorted by being overly general, consisting of gist-based, or general thematic information, without specific perceptual details. Remembering that one saw a bicycle, but not remembering the specific perceptual details such as its colour or the shape of the handlebars, is an example of an overly general memory. Preliminary data from our laboratory provide some support for the idea that specific details of memories can be encoded differentially across cultures. After encoding a series of perceptually detailed pictures, participants had to discriminate the previously studied picture from a very similar exemplar (for example, a picture of a strawberry ice cream cone versus a vanilla ice cream cone) on a memory test. This approach allows one to assess

how much perceptual detail is encoded into memory. Correct responses require more detailed visual information to be available (for example, the appearance of the ice cream) in order to distinguish the item from a conceptually similar one. On this task, American participants exhibited better memory for the perceptual details than East Asian participants.²⁹ This pattern is consistent with prior work by Nisbett et al. in 2001, suggesting that Americans are more feature-based and analytic in their information processing. This type of an approach, which emphasizes details, could also allow a better exploration of memory distortions and errors, in order to test whether information is systematically translated in memory so that it is more consistent with the values and goals of the individual. Such an approach may allow for more sensitivity in detecting cultural differences than one based on the amount of accurate information retrieved.

Another promising approach to the study of culture is a further exploration of cultural differences in autobiographical memories. Autobiographical memories include rich sensory, spatial, contextual, personal and emotional information, and engage a number of corresponding neural regions.³⁰ Given the complex and diverse types of information which is contained in autobiographical memories and the quantity of information that may be retrieved for these personal memories, there is abundant opportunity for some details and types of information to be prioritized over others. Moreover, contextual information, including social contexts, can comprise a substantial portion of autobiographical memories, and these are known areas of cultural differences.

The interplay between language and memory also is an important topic for further consideration. To some extent, language shapes thought, with some research suggesting that testing language can mitigate the extent to which cultural differences emerge in cognition.³¹ In terms of preferences for category or relational strategies to organize information, East Asians who are tested in their native language sometimes exhibit larger cultural differences than East Asians tested in English, compared to Americans.³² However, the overall pattern of cultural differences in preferred strategies extends across testing language for this task. These findings would likely extend to the domain of memory, with the language of presentation (for verbal information) or even the language in which the test is administered influencing the types of details remembered and the strategies used to encode information into memory. Furthermore, language is often an integral part of a culture, and studying how language affects memory will further our understanding of how culture affects memory.

It is also possible that the effects of language exert broader influences on memory for bilingual populations. Linguistic ability has been shown to affect many different cognitive functions. For example, it affects several functions which may have an influence on how one is acculturated, and may affect how one creates memories. Bilingualism affects cognition by increasing the amount of associated information that is available to an individual such that switching languages allows bilinguals to perform better on brainstorming tasks,³³ to exhibit heightened awareness of phonological structures and sounds,³⁴ and to be better at learning novel words.³⁵ However, bilingualism can also hamper cognition by increasing the amount of competing information that must be inhibited. For example, in the study of lexical retrieval, the ability to recall the meaning of a single word (to generate a synonym or antonym), and lexical access, the speed and ability to access one's vocabulary, appear to be poorer for bilinguals than monolinguals.³⁶ The second language is thought to interfere and cause slower reaction times in tasks requiring only one language.³⁷ When a word in one language is activated, the second (or third) language is activated as well, and the individual has to inhibit the other languages to focus on a single language. Interestingly, bilinguals' greater experience with interfering and competing information may lead to advantages in some domains when tasks require executive control, including task switching, working memory and inhibition control. Due to their experience in focusing on only one language and inhibiting other languages when speaking, bilinguals can be better able to resolve various types of response conflicts.³⁸

In terms of the advantages of bilingualism in memory, research thus far is largely confined to the topic of working memory, as opposed to long-term memory which has been the focus of our review. Working memory is comprised of the information that one is holding in mind and currently thinking about at any given moment. This includes the active manipulation and monitoring of information.³⁹ Inhibition control is used in working memory to focus only on certain items and to keep other items out of working memory. Executive control in working memory directs one's attention to certain items while directing one's attention away from other items. Bilinguals are believed to have higher levels of working memory due to their experience inhibiting one language any time another language is used.⁴⁰ However, this finding is not conclusive, as other studies have found similar working memory abilities between bilinguals and monolinguals.⁴¹ Inhibition should also contribute to long-term memory, with a role in memory retrieval through focused selective attention. When one is retrieving a memory,

one first activates a category of memories then inhibits the items other than the specific desired memory. Therefore, the retrieval of one piece of information causes inhibition of similar pieces of information that do not need to be recalled at that time.⁴² Stronger inhibition control therefore can enable a greater retrieval of the correct memories at the cost of inhibiting similar memories in the future, which would suggest that bilinguals should have an advantage for long-term memory tasks requiring greater inhibition of related information. We are currently conducting research to address the potential advantages of bilingualism for long-term memory when there is competing information. The study of linguistic ability and memory builds upon previous research on culture and memory to further our understanding of how the different aspects of culture, be it language or cultural values, affects how one codes and processes memories.

Summary

Although the study of cross-cultural differences in memory is in its infancy, initial results suggest ways in which culture affects not only the content of what is stored in memory, but also differences in memory strategies that impact the organization of and access to information. Future work can extend into richer domains of memory, using more nuanced measures to assess the qualities – both accurate and inaccurate – that have been incorporated into representations in memory. Culture has the potential to be studied in a variety of ways focusing not only on Eastern and Western differences, which has been the emphasis of research so far. Rather, cultural differences can also emerge within a nation based on subregions, linguistic differences and subpopulations. Importantly, culture is a mutable construct; even priming different aspects of one's culture or identity, such as collectivism or individualism, can lead individuals to behave in a culturally proscribed manner to a greater or lesser degree.⁴³ Thus, the study of cultural differences in memory holds great promise as a window into the ways that people view the world and organize the information they encounter around them, based on their cultural experiences.

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