

Testing the Limits of
Oral Narration:
A Case Study on Armenian Genocide Survivors

by

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Abstract

This research discusses communication and meaning in the context of orality, using a variety of theoretical perspectives, including memory theory, media and communication theory, and semiotics. Drawing on the work of Walter Ong, it provides new insight about the characteristics and limits of oral narration by assessing the memes, tropes, and phraseological units in the oral narrations of Armenian Genocide survivors. This research identifies a list of replicable forms of stories and oral devices that are used by the group in question; it then proposes that oral narration of non-fictional topics designed to convey historical or episodic information to others is intuitive, reactive, directed, fuzzy, and sticky. Concerns about the legitimacy and historical value of the narrations under review do not play a role in this research; instead, the focal point is the meaning embedded in the form and structure of the narrations under study.

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Chapter I. Introduction

Communication mediates human interaction. That seems obvious enough, but what does it really mean to say that social interaction is entangled and bound by the way in which we express ourselves and respond to the expressions of others? What does it mean for the formation of human identity? Group identity? Individual identity?

This study presupposes that the medium of orality is the only purely direct form of communication that can convey the requisite density necessary for ideation and narration *while still* individually personal *and maintaining* the quality of reflexivity. Said differently, speaking with and to other people is inherently a non-passive activity that can express complex themes and meaning for those doing it. ‘Meaning,’ and with it, meaning-making, is a unique tool in the repertoire of human devices - it is inherently reflective of the wider human experience, in that no meaning can stand apart from the group or society out of which one emerged. Meaning is fundamentally tied, either as a derivative, or in contrast, to the paradigms of the group, wider society, and human history. But meaning is not always purposeful, and is sometimes instinctual and intuitive. So what does it mean when members of specific group, individually and severally, construct narratives and recount personal histories that are markedly similar in all of form, tone, and content?

Patterns emerge. These can range anywhere from similar experienced events, similar ways of expressing feelings, and similar ways of formatting and delivering meaning-pregnant symbols. Using a multidisciplinary approach, my research assesses three types of orally-expressed communications: memes, phraseological units, and tropes. They are presented in this order, as they become increasingly complex: memes are

personally produced items of information that are perceptible and transferable; phraseological units are external language-focused constructions that reflect both an inner feeling and, to a certain extent, that of the group; and tropes are almost always symbolic devices used to convey intricate ideas reflected in both the individual and group. In my research I use the oral testimonies and narrations of survivors of the Armenian Genocide as a case study. Of course, there was sufficient bias in the selection of this topic, in that I have been personally surrounded by survivors my entire life, and have heard countless similar stories by relatives, friends of relatives, and peers. Despite this fact, my research is *not* concerned with the Armenian Genocide, or the fate of its survivors, or any type of historical reconstruction or assessment. Instead, the topic has been carefully chosen to serve as an example of the most difficult and sensitive type of oral narration that highlights the severity of human experiences. This will serve as a foundation for a theory on the limits and efficacy of oral narration.

Drawing from a variety of distinct, but complementary disciplines, including memory studies, media and communication theory, and semiotics, my research will ultimately show that a theory on the characteristics of oral narration specifically is necessary if we are to identify it as one of the distinct facets of oral communication (the other principle form being dialogue). My theory is that there exists a minimum set of characteristics to oral narration, which have been overlooked because they are, at once, both ‘meta’ and too implicit. I will provide dozens of examples that support this proposed framework, identifying the specific characteristics only in the penultimate chapter of analysis. This has been done to ensure that the reader is free to formulate their own assessment of the content; most will undoubtedly arrive at the same conclusions.

Chapter II. Methodology and Demographic Data

i. Methodology

The source of data for this study is the archive of Armenian Genocide oral interviews carried out by the Zoryan Institute in the 1980s (median date of interviews used in my sample: 1986; range: 1981-1990). The Institute holds the largest collection of Armenian Genocide oral testimony videos in North America (followed by UCLA, the hotbed of Armenian Contemporary History and Genocide Studies), at nearly 800 unique digitized videos.¹ This archive was used for the sake of convenience and expediency, in addition to the other resources Zoryan offered (use of the library and A/V equipment).

A total of 21 interviews were viewed, of which 20 are used for analysis in this study.^{2 3} The interviews were narrowed down using a single criterion: predominance of English language. From the reduced list of interviews, selections were made by alphabetical order (ending at the letter 'H'; some interviews between 'A' and 'H' were excluded when significant portions of the video were missing or corrupted). Because of the limited scope of this study (narration and communication patterns), features of language do not play a significant part. Several of the interviews were nearly evenly split between narration in English and Armenian, and nearly all interviews are dotted with Armenian words and phrases. The total length of viewed interviews is roughly 36 hours.

Nearly all of the interviews conducted by Zoryan followed an interview guide, which generally begins with questions of pre-Genocide Armenian life, and eventually

¹ In comparison, the Shoah Institute at the University of Southern California holds nearly 52 000 digitized interviews in its archive of interviews of Holocaust survivors.

² In the most prominent and genre-defining historical monograph based on Armenian Genocide oral interviews, *Survivors* (Miller and Miller 1999) 103 interviews were conducted, assessed, and reported on, over the course of several years.

³ The interview that is not included is the daughter of a prominent American diplomat who had been stationed with family in an area affected by the genocide, and who reports only what was seen from her family home.

moves into discussion of deportations, genocide events, and post-genocide life. Only 2 of the interviews used are unstructured; 4 are semi-structured, and the remainder are structured. The interviewers (4-7 are identifiable; the variance is due to the fact that in many interviews, the interviewer is not visible, and is represented only by his or her voice) were generous in the flexibility of the answers they expected for each question, and often allowed the survivor to go on tangents. Only when the survivors completed their thought did the interviewers move on to another question. Many questions, were, of course, not applicable to individual survivors, and the interviewers often asked questions that, although related and relevant, do not appear in the interview guide.

Most of the interviews were either partially or fully transcribed based on the principles of inductive exploratory research, and then sifted through for metadata and identifiers according to a list of established criteria, both manually and with the assistance of various types of computer software. The general identifiers used in my database were:

- Gender
- Date of Interview
- Year of Birth
- Age at Time of Interview
- Age in 1915
- Birthplace
- Birthplace Region
- Country of Current Residency
- Length of Interview
- Language(s) Used
- Interview Format (structured, semi-structured, unstructured)

Several non-standard and topic-specific identifiers were also used:

- Demeanor/Mood
- Frequency of Laughter
- Family Wealth
- Self-identified Social Status
- Method of Deportation

- Loss of Family
- Personal Injuries
- Property Loss
- Frequency of Racial Rhetoric

In addition to this database, an index was created and tallied, then cross-referenced with the interview metadata, and tested for word frequency and correlation with a list of emerging themes.

The term *survivor* is used extensively throughout this study to identify survivors of the Armenians Genocide. Because this topic deals with a vulnerable population, for the sake of anonymity no names are used. Unless otherwise noted, the term ‘Turks’ refers explicitly and unconditionally to Turkish perpetrators of the genocide.

Given the complexity and general obscurity of many of the themes and topics discussed, literature reviews and theoretical discussions are placed at the beginning of each chapter. Not only does this allow the reader to quickly flip back a few pages when necessary, it ensures that the foreign concepts discussed and used in each chapter were most recently read.

Words and sentences enclosed in double quotation marks are direct quotes from survivors, unless otherwise noted.

Pursuant to the guidelines of the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board, no new interviews with survivors were conducted, but the data and conclusions in this study are informed by a lifetime of exposure to Armenian Genocide survivors and media, including discussions with survivor family members prior to and throughout the ‘data collection’ period.

ii. Demographic Data

The average age of my sample at the time of each interview is roughly 82.9, and the average age at the time of the genocide is just under 12. Of the survivors, 35% are women, 90% are now American citizens. Seventy-eight percent of the survivors in the sample are from south or southeast Turkey. Fifty-six percent self-identify as wealthy compared to 22% who identify as non-wealthy. I attempted to assess tone using a few non-overlapping categories: 33% are calm or pleasant, 33% are serious, 22% are very serious, and 11% are antagonistic with the interviewer. For those who self-identify as wealthy, 73% have a 'serious' (as opposed to 'pleasant' or 'happy') tone during the interview. Nearly all who self-identified as wealthy laughed during the interviews, and were generally less 'serious' than those who did not self-identify as wealthy. Only 5% of those who were over the age of 80 laughed during the interview more than a few times; although the sample is small, it appears that there is a correlation between a higher age and seriousness or feelings about the topic. This can possibly be explained by the much higher level of awareness these older survivors would have had in 1915.

Chapter III. Historical Review

i. Genocide

The idea of what ‘genocide’ is, as both an identifiable historical event, and as a premeditated series of militant actions, begins with the jurist Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term in his landmark 1944 text, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. Beginning in 1933, Lemkin embarked on a mission to redefine and refine international laws on how they considered offenses against nation-states and individuals. In *Les actes constituent un danger general (interétatique) consideres comes delites des droit des gens*, Lemkin establishes the framework for his subsequent treatises by identifying offenses of ‘barbarity’:

Citons ici, on premier lieu, les actions exterminatrices dirigées contre les collectivités ethniques, confessionnelles ou sociales quels qu'en soient les motifs (politiques, religieux, etc.); tels p. ex. massacres, pogromes, actions entreprises on vue de ruiner l'existence économique des membres d'une collectivité etc. De même, appartiennent ici toutes sortes de manifestations de brutalité par lesquelles l'individu est atteint dans sa dignité, en cas où ces actes d'humiliation ont leur source dans la lute exterminatrice dirigée contra la collectivité dont la victime est membre.

Pris ensemble, tous les actes de ce caractère constituent un délit de droit de gens que nous désignerons du nom de barbarie.⁴

In *Axis Rule*, Lemkin carefully delineates his etymological construction of the word (attributing it to the Greek γένος, for race or people, and the Latin *cide*, for killing; in the manner of ‘infanticide’), and then describes, comprehensively, what it entails. Genocide is:

a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against the national group as an

⁴ Raphael Lemkin, *Les actes constituent un danger general (interétatique) consideres comes delites des droit des gens* (Paris: A. Pedone, 1933).

entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group...⁵

The key to Lemkin's 'genocide' is that it groups together a complete pattern of events and offers a *raison d'être* that was missing in the previously used term, 'denationalization.' That term was inadequate as a descriptor for the types of events he was writing about, as it did not account for "the destruction of the biological structure," and did not "connote the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor"⁶ – significant and recurring actions in genocide events. Lemkin later suggested that the "crime of... deliberately wiping out whole people is not utterly new in the world. It is only new in the civilized world as we have come to think of it. It is so new in the traditions of civilized man that [Hitler had] no name for it."⁷ Neither did Winston Churchill, declaring it "a crime without a name."⁸ Lemkin identified instances when one could conceivably label a series of events as 'genocide,' including Rome's total destruction of Carthage in 146 BCE, the killings during the Crusades and the wars of Islam, and the massacres of the Albigenses and Waldenses in the twelfth-century (among others he did not identify). In addition to the Holocaust, the only other recent example he could think of was the killing of the Armenians.⁹

Lemkin's work was not simply theoretical, and it had wide-reaching effects on international law. The newly formed United Nations General Assembly criminalized genocide December 11, 1946, and ratified the *Convention on the Prevention and*

⁵ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Clark, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd, 2008), 79.

⁶ Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, 80.

⁷ Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, 39.

⁸ Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p 12. Cf. Dominik J. Schaller and Jurgen Zimmerer "From the Guest Editors: Raphael Lemkin: the "founder of the United Nation's Genocide Convention" as a historian of mass violence," *Journal of Genocide Research* (2005), 7(4), Dec., 447-452.

⁹ Lemkin's work has not gone without criticism. Cf. Schaller and Zimmerer (2005).

Punishment of the Crime of Genocide on December 9, 1948. Despite this, Smith has pointed out that the resolution, while in the spirit of Lemkin's definition, was the lowest common denominator on which the negotiating states could agree, and is thus, limited.¹⁰

Article II of the '*Genocide Convention*' contains the bulk of its defining elements:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.¹¹

In a recently found 1949 CBS interview, Lemkin explains why he felt compelled to coin the term, and how it was partly in response to the events of the Armenian Genocide:

"I became interested in genocide because it happened to the Armenians; and after[wards] the Armenians got a very rough deal at the Versailles Conference because their criminals were guilty of genocide and were not punished. You know that they [the Ottoman Turks] were organized in a terroristic organization, which took justice into its own hands. The trial of Talaat Pasha in 1921 in Berlin is very instructive. A man [Soghomon Tehlirian] whose mother was killed in the genocide killed Talaat Pasha. And he told the court that he did it because his mother came [to him in a dream] in his sleep... the murder of your mother – you would do something about it! So he committed a crime. So, you see, as a lawyer, I thought that a crime should not be punished by the victims, but should be punished by a court, by a national law."¹²

ii. Armenian Genocide

Although it is impossible to convey a complete picture and significance of the Armenian Genocide in a short space, understanding the framework in which the events took place is integral to appreciating the gravity of what was felt and experienced at the individual level and what later resonated in the survivor group. As this study is one concerned with patterns of narration and narrative, judgments on the veracity of the

¹⁰ Karen Smith. *Genocide and the Europeans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13.

¹¹ UN General Assembly, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 9 December 1948, United Nations.

¹² Harut Sassounian, "Lemkin Discusses Armenian Genocide in Newly-Found 1949 CBS Interview" *The California Courier*, Dec. 8, 2005.

events, as well as speculation on the socio-political decision-making prior to and during the genocide is, where possible, avoided. What follows is a minimalist account of events leading up to and including the genocide, according to the general consensus of Armenian Genocide scholars. The reader is asked, for the sake of this study, to accept the following sequence of events when considering the presentation of data and analysis in the following chapters, even if there are reservations with the otherwise insurmountable evidence documented elsewhere.

April 24, 1915 is the standard date used as the *terminus post quem* for the beginning of the genocide events, but historians are well aware that mass killings began more than two decades earlier with the Hamidian Massacres of 1894-96, with a brief period of relative peace in between. As second-class citizens living under the Islamic rule of the Ottoman Empire since the fifteenth-century, Armenians (a historically, self-identifiably Christian nation) were routinely harassed, extorted, and restricted from participating fully in civic life,¹³ which the 1856 Treaty of Paris sought to mitigate.¹⁴ In 1890, under the direction of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, a fiercely loyal group of Kurdish soldiers called the *Hamidiye* (akin to the Roman *Praetoriani* or the later German *Schutzstaffel*) was formed to handle the Armenian communities, as well as the nomadic Kurds.¹⁵ Frustrated with the system of double-taxation,¹⁶ in 1894 citizens of Sasun (in southeast modern Turkey) engaged the “abusive” tax officials and their guards.¹⁷ In response, the Ottoman military police and Hamidiye began to attack and burn Armenian

¹³ Taner Akçam. *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 24. Armenians were given ‘dhimmi’ status, that of a non-Muslim living in a Muslim community. Cf. Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 40.

¹⁴ Russia, Britain, and France had agreed to aid the Christian minorities living in the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁵ Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), 43-44.

¹⁶ Vahakn Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 2004), 114.

¹⁷ The Armenians had agreed to pay taxes on the condition that they be protected from paying a second tax to local extorters. Cf. Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 55

villages under the guise of quelling a rebellion.¹⁸ Dadrian has pointed to this as the first time an Armenian massacre was carried out during peacetime.¹⁹

A European investigation was launched, which found the Sultan's own investigation into the events to be "false," and that the Armenians had not been "guilty of any act of rebellion against the government."²⁰ These events led to the formation of the Armenian Hunchak Party, which demonstrated a peaceful protest against the massacres and abuse against the Armenians in Constantinople in 1895. A massacre of the protestors ensued, which rippled throughout other towns and cities in the Ottoman Empire. Those who fought and those who surrendered were killed equally²¹ (an estimated a loss of up to 200 000 lives),²² with a contemporary article in the New York Times claiming another 50 000 orphaned.²³ The former prime minister of Britain, William Gladstone, called Sultan Hamid the 'Great Assassin,'²⁴ while American and European media gave him the colourful nickname 'Bloody Sultan.'²⁵

In terms of orchestrated killings of Armenians throughout the Ottoman Empire, *relatively* little else happened after 1896 and prior to the rise of the Young Turk Party in 1908. In the spring of 1909, however, between 15 and 25 000 Armenians at Adana were killed in a misguided response by the Young Turks to quash a coup against their recently formed government.²⁶ With a dramatic increase in Turkish nationalism and antagonism against internal foreigners led by the populist party, mass killings that would make the

¹⁸ In a report from one village, Semal, an Armenian priest had his eyes gouged and was stabbed to death, with the women raped and men put to death. Cf. Ibid.

¹⁹ Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*, 117.

²⁰ Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 57.

²¹ Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 61.

²² Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 42.

²³ No author, "Fifty Thousand Orphans made So by the Turkish Massacres of Armenians." *The New York Times*, December 18, 1896.

²⁴ Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 62.

²⁵ Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 115.

²⁶ Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 148-154.

massacres of the prior decade seem diminutive began with a Turkish proto-*Kristallnacht* on April 24, 1915. Armenians have since called it կարմիր կիրակի: *Red Sunday*.

At the direction of the minister of the interior, Mehmed Talaat, 250 notable Armenians in Constantinople were rounded up and taken to a concentration camp outside of Ankara. What ensued from this date on has filled volumes of history based on foreign eyewitness sources, primary documents, and the testimonies of those who survived. Massive forced deportations to Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Iran, and Russia took place throughout the Empire; concentration camps and killing “stations” were created (notably outside Yozgat, Adana, and Zeitun; and in the northern port towns (notably at Trebizond), ships were organized to carry Armenians out to the Black Sea for drowning.²⁷ Within the span of a single year, scholars and journalists of the time estimated that between 800 000 and 1 000 000 Armenians were killed or died on their journeys out of the Empire.²⁸ The following year, an additional 200 000 Armenians still traveling through the north Syrian deserts (notably at Der Zor) were slaughtered. None of these figures include the unaccounted women and children taken by Turks for servile duties, or those who suffered forced conversion and loss of socioethnic identity.²⁹ In addition to the forced death marches, burnings, slaughterhouses, and drownings, Typhoid inoculation,³⁰ morphine overdose,³¹ and toxic gas chambers³² were used to kill Armenian children.

²⁷ Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 175-176.

²⁸ James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon by Viscount Bryce* (London: Taderon Press, 2005), 640. Also see Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 179.

²⁹ Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 180.

³⁰ See Vahakn Dadrian, “The Role of Turkish Physicians in the World War I Genocide of Ottoman Armenians,” *The Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 1, no. 2 (1986): 169-192.

³¹ Vahakn Dadrian, “The Turkish Military Tribunal’s Prosecution of the Authors of the Armenian Genocide: Four Major Court-Martial Series,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 11(1), 1997, 28-59.

³² Dadrian, “*The Role of Turkish Physicians*,” 1986.

Major contributors to the field and significant collections of primary sources have been cited in the above. The only comprehensive study of Armenian Genocide oral narratives is *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide*, conducted by Miller and Miller in 1993. The authors conducted 100 interviews, and presented their findings thematically; their methodology will be referenced sporadically throughout this study.

iii. Social-Psychological Considerations

By any standard of legal justification or moral compass, unprovoked mass killings of the defenseless is contrary to social human culture. So what exactly needs to happen in one socio-cultural group, however heterogeneous, for it to go from antagonizing another group to embarking on a systematic massacre of as many of its members as possible?

Psychologist Irvin Staub offers the following:

A progression of changes in a culture and individuals is usually required for mass killing or genocide. In certain instances – the Armenian Genocide, for example – the progression takes place over decades or even centuries and creates a readiness in the culture.³³

Propagated ideals of ‘Otherness’ or alterity begin to circulate and are internalized, forming a part of the social consciousness, as it has in many other cultural groups throughout history. One scholar, in a text on the plight of the Kurds in Turkey, comments:

In order to build a coherent image of ‘nation,’ nationalist states have endeavoured to shape their citizens’ perceptions of ‘outsider’ ethnic groups and nations... This logic is certainly relevant for the case of ‘Armenian’ and ‘Greek’ representations within Turkish society because the state has historically played the pioneering role in the production and reproduction of labels and stereotypes associated with these ethnic groups.³⁴

But, as Staub highlights, genocide is far more complex, and requires something *else* to be actually carried out. Dadrian puts it this way:

³³ Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 17, 66, 85, as quoted in Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 114-115.

³⁴ Cenk Saracoglu. *Kurds of Modern Turkey: Migration, Neoliberalism and Exclusion in Turkish Society* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), 36-37.

By any definition culture [] is predictable behavior. However, in one sense such predictability is a by-product of the behavior of others responding to an act that involves culpability of one kind or other. When the response, for all practical purposes, is inaction, *the predictability of such violent behavior becomes a function of the predictability of ensuring inaction*. The interdependence at work here constitutes the core mechanism in the genesis of a culture favoring the resort to massacre as an instrument of state policy.³⁵

So whether that ‘something’ is simply complacency, or the theatricality of justice in service to one’s own people,³⁶ or a sense of self-preservation at the expense of others, or a self-perpetuated imperative to carry through a snowballing series of actions (or all of the above), the reality is that the Armenian Genocide and events like it have happened and continue to happen. In subsequent chapters, this study will describe the ways in which those affected by the Armenian Genocide related their stories and histories and narratives.

³⁵ Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*, 123 (emphasis mine).

³⁶ William Vollmann. *Rising Up and Rising Down*, vol. 4 (New York: McSweeney’s, 2003), 37.

Chapter IV. Memes

i. Theoretical Framework

Overview

Any type of communication from one person to another is mediated, controlled, and affected by memory.³⁷ Stories, affections, and even grocery lists are the products of experiential events or contemplations, and are related via the ability to logically reconstruct and convey (Small simplifies it: “Anyone can store something. Finding it at a later date is a totally different problem.”³⁸). An ‘oral memory’ is simply that which is communicated with speech in the absence of an external store, such as a written or other visual document. In societies that display what Ong refers to as ‘secondary orality’ – those that convey information orally in addition to literate means³⁹ – the medium of the transmission of memories is dependent on the concerns and aims of the ‘transmitting individual’ and the context in which the information is being requested. Because of inconsistency and disparity between ‘actuality’ and one’s ability to narrate accurately, in some cultures, formulas and mechanisms for recalling information have been devised and together form *mnemotechnics*, the ‘craft of memory.’⁴⁰

It is in the absence of external media that one can most appreciate the eventual necessity of formulas and mnemonic devices observed in the 1920s-1960s by Milman Parry and Albert Lord in the songs of the *guslari*, Yugoslavian bards.⁴¹ Societies in which orality is the primary mode of communication are not just better at memorizing and

³⁷ Cf. JP Small. *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1997), intro.

³⁸ Ibid, xiv.

³⁹ Walter J. Ong. *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 11.

⁴⁰ This is a modern word that means the art or craft of memory. Its practice can be traced back to at least Classical Greece, where a system of *topoi* (places) was employed to recall information. This was refined as the system of *loci* (traveling from room to room in a mental building) in Republican Rome.

⁴¹ See Adam Parry and Milman Parry. *The Making of Homeric Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

storing non-material information, they are also more efficient and natural; oral societies are not necessarily “better” at remembering.⁴² For example, the successful transmission of minute details relies on converting acquired information from specific to typical, such as the formatted, homogenized listing of ships in Book II of the *Iliad*.⁴³ As Parry and Lord found, the task of memory is made easier when what is being remembered is in one’s native language, is grammatical, is concise, rhymes, and when it follows metrical rules. Of course, such rules are generally only applicable to verse, and cannot be easily extended to free-prose. Even so, qualities such as being ‘concise’ or ‘memorable’ will be shown to be associated with episodic memory recovery and narration.

Episodic memory

Cognitive psychologist Anderson divided long-term memory into procedural memory, which controls functions and ability, and declarative memory, which is the domain of internal information storage, organization, and retrieval.⁴⁴ Tulving subdivided this into semantic memory, which is concerned with the knowledge of factual information, and episodic memory, which controls the scenes and events experienced by the individual.⁴⁵ This study is concerned with only the latter, in the context of oral narrations of episodic ‘scenes’ and events. Tulving has proposed that there are three components that make this possible: our sense of subjective time, autonoetic awareness (the ability to differentiate between what is current and what is past), and self (which is to

⁴² Rosalind Thomas. *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athen*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4.

⁴³ Eric Havelock. *The Muse Learns to Write* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 122-123.

⁴⁴ JR Anderson. *Language, Memory, and Thought* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1976), 78.

⁴⁵ Eric Tulving. “Episodic and semantic memory,” in *Organization of Memory*, ed. E. Tulving and W. Donaldson. (New York: Academic Press, 1972), 381-402. Cf. Eric Tulving. “Episodic memory: From mind to brain,” *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, (2002): 1-25.

say, an individual with experiences.)⁴⁶ These together allow us to organize facts based on questions like “who,” “what,” “where,” and “how,” but only insofar as they pertain to a specific ‘episode’ or scene from one’s past.⁴⁷ Simply:

Episodic memory is a recently evolved, late-developing, and early-deteriorating past-oriented memory system, more vulnerable than other memory systems to neuronal dysfunction, and probably unique to humans. It makes possible mental time travel through subjective time, from the present to the past, thus allowing one to re-experience, through autonoetic awareness, one’s own previous experiences.⁴⁸

It is worth noting that all of the participants included in this study were over the age of 70 at the time of their interviews, and might have been susceptible to normal memory loss (particularly in the area of episodic memory, which begins in most individuals at age 20) due to reduced faculties of information-recall typical of aging.⁴⁹

Collective memory

Collective memory exists insofar as individuals and external stores act as, and share, nodes, receptors, and other banks. Crownshaw states, “Cultural memory is inherently collective”⁵⁰ – but is collective memory culture? Halbwachs would argue yes: collective memory, which is the totality of a cultural group’s individual experiences, configures the past according to the present narration of it within one’s society.⁵¹

The thoughts of all persons come together within [collective] frameworks, which assume that each has momentarily ceased to be himself. Each person soon returns into himself, introducing into his memory the ready-made reference points and demarcations brought from without. We connect our remembrances to these reference points, without any sharing of substance or closer relationship occurring between them... Collective remembrances might be laid on individual remembrances, providing a handier and surer grip on them. First, however, individual remembrances must be present, lest memory function without content.

⁴⁶ Tulving, “*Episodic and semantic memory*,” 3-4.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁹ LG Nilsson. “Memory function in normal aging,” *Acta Neurologica. Scand., Suppl. 179*, (2003): 7-13.

⁵⁰ Richard Crownshaw. *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1.

⁵¹ Maurice Halbwachs. *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 40.

For Halbwachs, group identity is maintained through the collective activity of “remembering.”⁵² But culture is more than that; once something is added to it, culture can be affected and transformed, and itself can affect and transform the collectivity of memories or individual memories in an endlessly circular symbiotic process.

The discussion of cultural trauma is inherent to any study on collective memory. Crownshaw has even suggested that trauma is a “pure, unmediated form of memory”⁵³ that “compels narrative.”⁵⁴ The field emerged in the 1990s with major contributions by Caruth, and Felman and Laub. Caruth has proposed that one’s reaction to an event is not characterized by the event itself, as responses are individualistic and varied: “the pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it.”⁵⁵ The victim is “reduced to passivity [in terms of their ability to control how they recall and re-experience the event]” and lacks interpretive agency.⁵⁶ Thus, the onus of facilitating the testimony falls on those who are made privy to it: “the history of a trauma, in its belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another.”⁵⁷ In this sense, “history is turned into a memory in which we can all participate.”⁵⁸

Felman and Laub take the idea of testimony as history one step further:

As a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or

⁵² David Middleton and Steven Brown. “Territorializing Experience: Maurice Halbwachs on Memory,” *The Social Psychology of Experience: Studies in Remembering and Forgetting* (London: Sage, 2005), 35.

⁵³ Crownshaw. *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory*, 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Cathy Caruth. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4 as quoted in Crownshaw. *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory*, 5.

⁵⁶ Crownshaw. *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory*, 7.

⁵⁷ Caruth, *Trauma*, 11.

⁵⁸ Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 67 as quoted in Crownshaw. *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory*, 8.

remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference.⁵⁹

French philosopher Nora identifies an event that lends itself to trauma and testimony (he uses the example of the Holocaust) as a “*lieu de mémoire*,” in which

memory crystallizes and secretes itself at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of history in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists.⁶⁰

ii. Discussion

The theoretical framework established above acts as a set of boundaries for the discussion of examples and patterns associated with ‘memory’ in the larger set of data; these are episodic memory, associative memory, collective memory, and cultural trauma. Within these parameters, my methodology has revealed a clear, replicable pattern of event ‘types’ or ‘memes’ that exist in the narratives of genocide survivors, regardless of age, gender, birth location, or country of emigration. What has emerged is effectively a snapshot of some of the specific event ‘types’ revealed through oral narrations based on memory, shared by a collective, cultural group, narrated and transmitted individually, experienced through indirect communication, and interpreted by a research participant in the act of ‘doing’ history. References such as ‘every’ or ‘all’ survivors are restricted to the sample assessed for this study.

Memes

When many individuals recount the same type of memory severally and without any evidence of collaboration or synthesis of information outside of the norms of

⁵⁹ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 5 as quoted in Crownshaw. *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory*, 10.

⁶⁰ Pierre Nora. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” *History and Memory in African-American Culture*. eds. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O’Meally. trans. Marc Roudebush. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 284 as quoted in Chiji Akoma, “The “Trick” of Narratives: History, Memory, and Performance in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*,” *Oral Tradition*, 15:1 (2000): 5.

historiographical influence, tradition is created, contributing to the lived, experiential memories of a cultural group. These memories can be conveyed through a variety of media, but when transmitted from one individual to another, become ‘memes’ that might not necessarily maintain the precondition of ‘historicity’ a memory has to an individual. Instead, they may (or may not) morph, transform, and in some cases, become melded with other memories and thus, become distorted. The quality of being affected by human participation in the telling and retelling of the ‘memory’ can only be understood along a ‘fuzzy logic’ spectrum of relativism, instead of by the traditional binaries of absolute falsity and absolute truth.⁶¹ So if a memory doesn’t require historicity (i.e. absolute truth), does it automatically graduate to the realm of being a meme? Not necessarily. What is needed is replication of that memory, and in the context of this study, ‘memeticity’ (i.e. the quality of being a meme). This can be seen by considering a data set that might reveal patterns that can be identified as memes – which is to say, the oral narratives this study analyzes, severally and collectively, can reveal memetic patterns that underlie the way post-genocide Armenians self-identify, contributing to a pan-diasporic identity.

As Drout shows,⁶² Dawkins’ work on memes can help explain how tradition is created, shared, and accessed. A meme is “the simplest unit of cultural replication,” and is transmitted through imitation.⁶³ When several memes are combined, they create a replicable tradition (in the sense of ‘custom,’ here), and can be accessed through referential cues. Drout explains:

In memetic terms, a tradition is a combination of several smaller memes. The traditional behavior can be seen as one meme; let us call it *actio*. The response to the given antecedent

⁶¹ On the topic of truth systems, Margolis suggests that “the norms of truth should conform to what we suppose the actual structure of reality could (or must) support, and then insist that *that* entails the necessity of bivalent values.” Joseph Margolis. *Historied Thought, Constructed World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 64.

⁶² Michael Drout. *How Tradition Works* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006).

⁶³ Richard Dawkins. *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 208.

condition that triggers the traditional behavior is another meme that enables the first meme; let us call this *recognitio*... What converts a simple response to a condition into a tradition is the addition of a third meme to the complex that provides an explanation for the behavior. Let us call this *justification*... This *recognitio+actio+justificatio* complex is the fundamental structure from which a tradition evolves.⁶⁴

Dawkins clarifies the significance of memes: “When we die there are two things we can leave behind us: genes and memes.”⁶⁵ Several questions emerge. How many times does something have to be individually verified and communicated for it to graduate to the realm of memes? Does the quality of memeticity devalue something? Setting aside historical value, why are these stories repeated over and over again? Below are some of the clearest examples.

Loss of wealth

Nearly every survivor who discusses material possessions, property, or wealth, does so in the context of episodic loss, and specifically, loss due to theft and reappropriation. Most survivors describe a pre-deportation financial status of security, and many, of comfort and even excess. Some describe stately homes with attendants; one survivor says, “we had so many damn Oriental rugs it was a shame.” Others describe large estate properties with a number of transport animals; some families had these confiscated just prior to the deportation, severely limiting their storage capacity during the ‘move,’ while others were permitted to have one animal, and possibly a small wagon. Although discussed at length in later chapters, it is worth noting that nearly all of these statements are given in the context of a direct comparison with Turks, and often with Kurds (e.g. “Others resented Armenians because of their money, but [prior to the genocide] not out in the open”). The survivors report that Turks entered their homes and businesses after they were deported, taking what they liked, selling the rest, and

⁶⁴ Drout, *How Tradition Works*, 271-272.

⁶⁵ Dawkins. *The Selfish Gene*, 199.

sometimes moving in themselves. Others were not so fortunate, and had their property burned – that is, if it would not risk the loss of Turkish property in the locale, as one survivor reports. Along the path of deportation, some recall checkpoints where soldiers (not commanders, as one survivor is careful to point out) searched for valuables. Swallowing gold was no guarantee that it would remain hidden – survivors report that bellies of those still alive and dead were equally cut open.

The idea that Armenians were wealthy, while Turks were generally not, is prevalent, and evident in nearly every single individual narration. Below are two examples from different survivors:

“The Armenians in Marash were more civilized [financially and culturally] than the natives... the Armenians were better off, I really can’t say why... each time we were one step ahead, we were hit right on the head... there were times when the Armenian shops were burned, [and they] set fire to their homes. These were the conditions that the Armenians lived in...”

“They’re no good, no good. They’re rotten inside and out, because all those Armenians that they killed, they lived by their money, by their bread, by their butter.

Wealth is a determinant that can only be understood relatively. While most of the survivors report that they were from wealthy families, their understanding of wealth has to be contextualized to their contemporary circumstances: at the time, the survivors were 6-19 years old [excluding two outliers: -1 (for being born in 1916), and 29], who very likely had limited interaction with non-Armenians, and so their wealth was personally assessed relative to those in their own community. That wealth may very well have been great by anyone’s standards, but their perception of it was possibly influenced by a cultural idea of superiority, (among other factors) based on wealth. As demonstrated, that same idea can be found recounted in similar ways in most oral narratives of survivors.

Loss of socioethnic identity

Like ‘loss of wealth,’ the loss of socioethnic identity appears in specific parts, or ‘episodes’ in the narrations of most survivors. Socioethnic identity is a mostly-social construct based on a variety of distinguishing features such as language, cultural tradition, religion, and can encompass race.⁶⁶ It is more than simply ‘social’ or ‘ethnic’ identity, in that it merges sets of characteristics to describe something more than the sum of its parts. For example, Armenians would traditionally identify their socioethnic identity as being comprised of their unique language; their work ethic; their Christian identity, and with that, their plight of having to defend their faith; and their ancient claims to territory in the Caucasus. Some or all of these are the features the survivors identify as the makeup of their socioethnic identity, and if not their own, at least that of Armenians historically. When any of these features are forcibly altered or removed by an external cause, it resonates at a level of self-identification with the individual, resulting in an existential shift (and sometimes loss) in ‘self.’ Armenians who survived the genocide report one or all of three major areas that affected socioethnic identity: loss of native primary language, forced religious conversion, and forced adoption of a lifestyle not consistent with Armenian norms or ideals.

As an example of ‘loss of language,’ one survivor explains that when he eventually found himself in an orphanage run by non-Armenians, he began to lose his interest in his identity. He goes on to explain that minorities were looked down upon, and so lied about his nationality, claiming to be French, and only ever spoke Armenian with his brother and two friends. Others report that when they were later adopted by non-Armenians, they

⁶⁶ Michael Weale, et al. “Armenian Y chromosome haplotypes reveal strong regional structure within a single ethno-national group,” *Human Genetics* 109 (2001): 659–674.

were forced to speak in Turkish, for fear of being accused of being Armenian at school or at the market. One recalls that by the time he made it into an orphanage and began school, he had forgotten how to speak his native Armenian. Many others were given new Turkish or Arabic names after being taken for servile duties.

One of the more common forms of a forced change was religious conversion. Many of the male survivors underwent forced circumcision. One of them reports – jovially, while laughing – that a group of Turkish men came to his house prior to the deportation and circumcised his brother. Not knowing what was happening, as a 5-year old younger sibling, he wanted to join in – only later did he find out that the game was circumcision and that he, too, would be ‘playing,’ and would, as a result, not be able to “pee for days.” Another remembers seeing her deeply religious father decapitated when asked if he would convert to Islam, and then later, when seeing Turkish Muslims praying head down, saying “My mother and father don’t do this. What are you doing? Why are you doing this?” So sheltered was the only life and community she had known prior to the deportation. One survivor recalls a conversation his father had with officials who came to warn him about the impending deportations, informing him that the only way he and his family could stay in Kharpert was if they converted to Islam. The father refused, saying “I rather go die a Christian rather than change my religion.” After that, of course, the officials could not help him.

Another form of ‘loss’ was a change to one’s experience of life – a change to one’s norms and ideals. This took many forms. One survivor recalls seeing his adolescent sister forced into a Muslim marriage, when the police officer that arrested the man who raped her the night before offered it as an acceptable alternative to prison. The same

survivor reports that he was later selected by an Islamic clergyman from Mecca, who took him to raise as his own child, bribing him with candy and food when he had little to eat at his orphanage. The self-admittedly bright young boy eventually reasoned with the clergyman, telling him he was “going to run away, and it’s going to be on your conscience.” Another boy, taken by a Turkish man, explains that he was “treated worse than a servant,” and was expected to fulfill duties he had never done before. He was eventually outed as an Armenian, when someone at the market he shopped at for the home realized that even Turkish children did not buy groceries. He recalls that the mother of the household wanted him to become a “Turk and Muslim,” but the father told her “you can never make him to be a Turk, so don’t kid yourself.” Thinking about the type of work he had to do while working on a farm, one survivor explains his dissatisfaction as follows: “Armenians aren’t farm people... their way of living is like the Jewish, I presume... more business people... more city people.” One survivor sums up what she identifies as the general consensus of how Armenians viewed themselves and their ambitions for life:

“Remember now, Armenians were not Turks. Even though we were born in Turkey, we always considered ourselves Armenians. We never wanted to change our religion, to change our customs, and we were a people that loved to be educated, to progress, and the Turks knew this. I don’t know, somehow, they didn’t have the ambition to be educated, and they were always backward.”

What is recalled in this set is a slightly more developed pattern of memory recall, in which relationships and links are formed at the individual level as justification for specific actions, and repeated in a way that highlights the personal stories of events in a broader history.

Der Zor

The identification of Der Zor, the north Syrian desert, as the “cemetery of Armenians,” in the words of one survivor, is one of the most common depictions of the Armenian Genocide. It is spoken of as the final destination of Armenians traveling from Turkey, passing through places like Musa Dagh⁶⁷ along the way. It was used as a beacon of hope for the Armenians being marched out, who were sometimes told that all of their possessions would be returned once they arrived. One survivor recounts the words of a Turkish policeman: “...we’re going to take all of your money and jewelry for safekeeping and to guard them, and when we get to Der Zor, we’ll give it back to you.” Another vividly explains that the seams of dresses were checked “to see if you had sewn gold within them.”

Most survivors who narrate events related to Der Zor describe a nearly identical pattern of preceding events: a governmental notice was issued to Armenians living in a particular town/city or sometimes to those living in a specific quarter of a city (one survivor recalled that his father, who was an influential Armenian businessman, was told by the mayor of his town, who “was a very good friend”: “Something is going to happen. If you can, leave the city.”), and organized caravan deportations began one week later. Families were allowed to take anything they could carry, and in some places this included the use of a donkey or wagon. On the designated day, local police would knock on doors, and the deportation began. One survivor says that by the time they got to the fourth phase of deporting people, only the ladies were left in his town, as it “took some time [for the Turks] to reorganize their way of taking people.” They were transferred between towns, cities, and organized killing stations, and families were most often divided according to

⁶⁷ Made famous by the Jewish-Austrian author Franz Werfel in his novel *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*.

age and gender somewhere along the way. Some survivors report that they were told they were being relocated to “safer quarters.” One female survivor quips, “I don’t know, how safe could it be away from your home?”

If Armenians were lucky enough to be spared during their marches, did not die of dehydration, and for whatever reason were fortunate enough to survive the killing stations, many of them found themselves in Der Zor. Several indicate that they knew they were in Der Zor, not by any identifiable geographic features, but because “people were talking.” Local nomads quickly realized that they had access to a nearly endless supply of slaves (or for Armenians who were luckier, servants), and, for better or worse, began abducting children during the march. One of the survivors recalls seeing sunburned, naked people suffering from kwashiorkor, the condition of malnourishment that bloats the belly. Another recalls seeing massive graves, and watching half-dead bayoneted men attempt to crawl out. He identifies it as being so large, that it was like “a bottomless well.” (One other survivor reports seeing a “massive well.”) Another survivor describes seeing “human bodies everywhere,” and continuously seeing “people get shot, stabbed.” He saw bodies cut in half, others cut open at the belly, and children around him starving to death. At a later time, he recalled seeing people hatcheted to death, because “they didn’t want to use bullets, because bullets were expensive. They hit them with swords, stab them, and let them roll down the mountain.” He continues:

“That Der Zor... it’s a desert... it’s terrible, because there’s a river there... all of these people, they kill them, they throw them in the river, the river takes them. But the bodies, they float, they don’t sink. They float. They swell up and they float and they stink and smell and [it’s] terrible... the villages move away because they can’t stand the smell. Because they never bury them. They just kill them and leave them alone. Just like that.”

One survivor reports that after being taken to Der Zor, she was then lucky to be transferred to Mardin, Turkey, roughly 230 kilometers northeast.

If the presentation of events in this example seems out of sequence, it is intentional, to reflect the way in which nearly every survivor recounts the events. This might partly be due to the fact that the interviewer often asks the survivor to clarify or expand on an earlier statement, but can more likely be attributed to a ‘melding’ or distillation of the deportation event, the marches, and arrival at Der Zor (for those who made it there) into a contiguous experience of ‘Der Zor,’ unhampered and personally-unaffected by temporal accuracy. Vansina clarifies this: “Memory reorganizes the data it contains. It will put these in a sequential order which resembles an expression of measured duration but in fact is a creation of memory.”⁶⁸ The historical value of the narrated events is not in any way diminished by this; what can be seen is a typification or memeticisation of ‘Der Zor,’ setting the events leading up to it, the events that took place there, and the location itself into the cultural memory of post-genocide Armenians.

Fetus killing

One of the most graphic, seemingly improbable acts was cutting open the bellies of pregnant women, which has been reported in nearly every single genocide of the twentieth century. The memetic quality of the act is clearer for the perpetrators, than for those who experienced or witnessed it, and now tell about it. The act is more than simply murder, and its decidedly inhuman quality is one that is meant to resonate and be repeated as a function and extension of power politics. Although repeated by numerous survivors, here is just one example:

“I see these [soldiers] bringing a woman, she can’t walk. She’s pregnant, she can’t walk... He’s on horseback. The other poor women and children are walking while they’re on horses. He goes and hits that woman with the back of the gun, and the woman passes out and he sticks the thing in the woman’s stomach. They have those bayonets, you know, and he rips it open like that... and the baby comes out, and he goes and steps on the baby just like he’s a

⁶⁸ Jan Vansina. *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 176.

little rat... You know what I mean? I see the woman and the little baby come out of the woman. When I saw that, I said [to myself] I better keep going.”

Another survivor reports a nearly identical incident, though with the nuance of soldiers looking for gold. Such events seem to transcend even the norms of genocidal activity, acting as a place, or unit of memory that is designed to perpetually traumatize through retelling. If we consider such events as a ‘*lieu de mémoire*,’ we can see them function as mnemonic devices that represent larger events and a larger cultural meaning.⁶⁹ The act of facilitating narration prevents the relationship between the transmitter (speaker) and receiver (listener) in being understood in any other way except one where the transmitter passively narrates, while the receiver interprets and attempts to understand.

iii. Potential Criticisms

Some might respond to this method of analysis by pointing out two fundamental aspects of working with memory-based material as potential flaws, and I make no claims that these can be ignored. First, that the participants included in this study were over the age of 80 at the time of their interviews, and might have been susceptible to normal memory loss (particularly in the area of episodic memory, which begins in most individuals at age 20) due to reduced faculties of information recall typical of aging.⁷⁰ Without a cognitive analysis of each of the assessed survivors, the only way to compensate for this in a study such as this is to highlight the effect and importance of ingrained traumatic events in narration. As this study does, this task is made easier by looking at larger patterns of memetic value.

⁶⁹ Regula Fuchs. *Remembering Viet Nam: Gustav Hasford, Ron Kovic, Tim O'Brien and the Fabrication of American Cultural Memory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 20.

⁷⁰ LG Nilsson. “*Memory function in normal aging*,” 2003.

Second, there is no way to compensate for what, if anything, is screened or selected for narration by the transmitter, what is forgotten that cannot be accounted for, and to what extent the memory has been influenced by one or any combination of historiographical influence, bias, or unintended reformulation. As discussed in my methodology, such a criticism would be moot in the case of this study, as I am not concerned with the events or even the veracity of the events for their historical value. Rather, I am interested in the way in which the events are conveyed and communicated.

iv. Assessment and Remarks

This chapter has shown that there exist clear, replicable patterns of events and ideas that we can identify as memes, or at the very least, of possessing memetic value. These include ‘loss of wealth,’ ‘loss of socioethnic identity,’ ‘Der Zor,’ and ‘fetus killing.’ Our understanding of episodic memory clarifies the way in which these ‘scenes’ or ‘events’ are remembered, the way factual information is collected from them, and how we can relate these to cultural notions. Collective memory and cultural trauma, on the other hand, show the ways in which events that occurred to the individual affect and transform the story of a cultural group, and how that same cultural group can then affect and transform the stories of the individuals in ways that cannot be measured or accounted.

What this chapter has not discussed is a tremendous amount of data on what can be considered as ‘associative memories’ – objects, ideas, and themes that identify related information that is deemed historical by the survivors. For example, one of the more common types of associative memory evident in these narrations is memory that is influenced and aided by weather. Events are shuffled into a chronology based on what the

survivors remember wearing (as in the case of one lady who recalls wearing a patterned jacket in her family's vineyard, and is thus able to identify her own deportation events as taking place in the May or June of 1915), or by what they could see (one man identifies his events as taking place in the spring, as he recalls the snow had already melted). How this 'chronology-making' affects other parts of the narrative cannot be assessed, nor can we determine value or a lack of value from its absence. Such considerations, and others like it, fall outside of the scope of this study, but will be discussed at the end of each subsequent chapter to demonstrate the complexities of working with this data.

Chapter V. Phraseological Units

i. Theoretical Framework

Overview

Although writing and written records have historically been a significant force in the transmission of Armenian culture, oral narration has become one of the primary modes of communication in the decades after the genocide for victims displaced in diasporic settings. These individuals narrate their stories to their children and grandchildren, creating a body of oral literature that expresses the shared past of most Armenians around the world. At its simplest, ‘orality’ is the non-textual interface for information transmission dependent on speech, understood most often in contrast to literacy, which is textual or image-based. The term can be used to denote two related, but separate, things: a form of *communication*, or a *tradition* within a non-literate or literate culture that produces what is ironically called ‘oral literature.’ The term ‘oral literature’ is internally paradoxical, in that literature is both etymologically (Lat.: *literatura*, from *litera*, word for alphabet letter) and by definition (cf. Ong: there exists no “comparably satisfactory term for orality.”⁷¹) concerned with letters and their products. The term ‘oralature’ has been offered as a replacement, though not with success.⁷²

The relatively small difficulties in defining terms and establishing a nomenclature reflect the larger issue of how to discuss oral and literate processes, which have long been placed as binaries at either end of a “great divide.” Such theories were made popular by the nearly consecutive publication of major texts by Lévi-Strauss, Goody and Watt, McLuhan, Mayr, and Havelock in the early 1960s, which addressed orality and its place

⁷¹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 10-11.

⁷² Bruce Rosenberg, “The Complexity of Oral Tradition,” *Oral Tradition* (1987) 2: 75.

in the history of culture. Such theories were especially criticized by the major poststructuralists (Derrida, Barthes, Foucault), and more recently (despite a highly influential structuralist publication by Ong in 1982, *Orality and Literacy*), there has been a shift away from polarizing orality and literacy given that new studies in anthropology, sociology, and psychology have shown that many societies make use of each to varying degrees along a spectrum.⁷³ In line with this, Nagy contends that “the only universal distinction between oral and literary traditions is the historical anteriority of the first to the second.”⁷⁴

The most influential figure in the study of orality today, Walter J. Ong, was first to suggest the terms ‘primary orality’ and ‘secondary orality,’ the former to identify cultures that rely on the spoken word entirely for communication, and the latter to identify cultures that make use of oral elements in their literate cultures. Orality is a format of communication (which is one type of technology), and can, as an internal force, have great influence on the type of organization, sense-making and knowledge creation of a society. Only around one hundred languages, from the possibly tens of thousands throughout human history, “have been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature,” and orality has been part of human culture far longer than any other medium of communication.⁷⁵ Whereas an individual in a non-literate society has a vocabulary of around five thousand words, his Western, university-educated counterpart has between thirty-five and forty thousand.⁷⁶ The difference is not only limited to size, but also in the way in which words are used and understood. Verbal language is the basic

⁷³ Stephen Reder and Erica Davila. “Context and literacy practices,” *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 25, (2005): 175 and cf. Rosenberg, “*The Complexity of Oral Tradition*,” 74.

⁷⁴ Gregory Nagy. *Poetry in Speech: Orality and Homeric Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 73.

⁷⁵ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 7.

⁷⁶ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 47.

form of human communication, as it is common to all societies.⁷⁷ Like any medium, certain types of information or “messages” are transmitted via oral communications, unique and specific to the mode.⁷⁸

Ong’s description of orality can be reduced to its four major characteristics: orality is additive, as opposed to subordinative, aggregative instead of analytic, redundant instead of sparse, and conservative or traditionalist.⁷⁹ These features lend themselves to the assertion of a culture’s values better than the “components of a writing tradition,” which is better for the recording of data.⁸⁰ Vansina suggests that orality can be divided into two aspects: the communication of news, and the communication of interpretation. Whereas news is biased and only partially reliable (given that it is constructed by individuals), interpretations are simply an individual expression of an experience, and they, too, can be biased and unreliable.⁸¹

Phraseology

One of the fundamental characteristics of orality, of being drawn from an internal store, allows for it to be altered and manipulated instantaneously by the performer or speaker; traditional textual authorship can never achieve this type of audience awareness, nor can it control the context within which it is consumed.⁸² Said differently, oral communication is “unscripted expression, marked by improvisation and characterized by variation.”⁸³ When oral expressions and terms are used as placeholders, or what Milman Parry and Albert Lord identified as epithets or phrases, oral narratives can be seen to

⁷⁷ Ruth Finnegan. *Literacy and Orality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 15-16.

⁷⁸ Cf. Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

⁷⁹ Albert Lord. “Characteristics of Orality,” *Oral Tradition*, 2/1 (1987): 54-72.

⁸⁰ Rosenberg, “*The Complexity of Oral Tradition*,” 75-76.

⁸¹ Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, 1-8.

⁸² Rosenberg, “*The Complexity of Oral Tradition*,” 85.

⁸³ Timothy Tangherlini. “Oral tradition” in a technologically advanced world,” *Oral Tradition*, 18/1 (2003): 136.

function as unstructured texts meant to convey a larger message or story, not always dependent on the content of their smaller narrative parts.⁸⁴ Parry and Lord suggested an ‘oral-formulaic hypothesis,’ which showed that Homeric epics are organized largely according to a set of internally stored formulas that can be used at the discretion of the speaker (or in the case of Homeric epics, the bards or singers). Such a pattern was also discovered in the tales of the Yugoslavian *guslari* that they studied. For the purposes of my research, most significant in these findings is the idea of a ‘forced economy’ of oral composition, where ideas, traits, and meanings are synthesized and reduced to placeholder phrases.

While there are different views on how these phrases, or ‘phraseological units,’ (sometimes called ‘speech formulas’) operate,⁸⁵ the following can be used as the standard, minimalist definition (with no distinctions between examples based on complexity):

[Phraseological units] are stable word-groups that are not based on the generative patterns of free word-groups and are characterized by a complexity of meaning... they show:

- a) stability of use,
- b) structural separateness,
- c) complexity of meaning, and
- d) the fact that they are not built on the generative pattern of free word-groups.⁸⁶

More simply, a phraseological unit is a stable combination of words with a fully or partially figurative meaning.⁸⁷ It is in the oral, instant transmission of narrative between a storyteller and listener, that one can most quickly identify patterns of communication across a cultural group. In the previous chapter, I assessed observable

⁸⁴ This refers to the content of the story, and not its phonetic or metrical structure, which were otherwise very rigid in Homer’s epics.

⁸⁵ For major contributors, see Rosemarie Gläser. “The Stylistic Potential of Phraseological Units in the Light of Genre Analysis,” *Phraseology*, ed. A.P. Cowie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and A.V. Kunin, *Kurs fraseologii sovremennogo angliyskogo yazika* (Moskva: Visshaya shkola, 1996).

⁸⁶ Maria Tarasevitch. “Soviet Phraseology: Problems in the Analysis and Teaching of Idioms,” *Linguistics and Language Pedagogy: The State of the Art*, ed. James E. Alatis. (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 484.

⁸⁷ Anita Naciscione. *Stylistic Use of Phraseological Units in Discourse* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2010), 31.

units of replication, or ‘memes,’ that disperse organically in a given tradition, and whose antecedents, relations, and subsequent transformations cannot necessarily be accounted for. In this chapter, I will assess phraseological units that are used not very differently than what Milman and Parry found in Homer’s epics and the songs of the Yugoslavian *guslari*, and what likely exists in all forms of oral narration.

ii. Discussion

The use of phraseological units (PU) is strikingly common in Armenian Genocide oral narratives. Nearly every survivor uses them in their storytelling, and each follows the standard form of referencing other parts of their narrative, their ideas, or cultural features – whether by using metaphor, or directly. I have identified twelve ‘stock’ phrase types, which I have divided into three categories: knowledge, actions, and perspective.

Knowledge:

When discussing episodes or events related to *knowing* something, many of the survivors do so by breaking up sequences and scenes with PUs that serve a variety of functions, including a distillation of an event into a single statement (PU), a musing or generalization meant to reflect a sentiment, and an internal placemaker externalized through speech. There are six categories of PU that I have identified:

1) “We didn’t know...”

This can be further divided into two: “...what they were doing” and “...where we were going.” In narrating events prior to the beginning of the massacres, and particularly, in reference to the time between normal life and immediately before deportations began, many survivors use PUs such as this, describing their lack of

knowledge about what was about to happen. They discuss many types of events, but most commonly, events that result in the arrest and separation of men and prominent Armenian individuals, and the government notice to collect one's belongings for a purportedly temporary journey. Once deportations began, many describe their epistemological state as one of confusion and dumbfoundedness. They did not know *why* they were leaving, and equally important, they did not know *where* they were going. The type of psychological warfare used by the perpetrators created a pattern of unknowing in the survivors, a period to which they consistently refer by using these stock phrases.

2) *“They were planning something”*

Although most survivors describe a state of unknowing, when the topic of Turkish knowledge comes up, the survivors are uniform in describing a widespread and consistent program of how the Turks were to handle the Armenians, and their overall plan and end goal: “They knew what they were doing.” The survivors recreate the events by sewing together independent episodes to form a plot or narrative enacted by the highest form of government, carried out locally by soldiers and police. Phrases like this serve as a microcosm for sentiments surrounding the entirety of the genocide.

3) *“Word got around”*

Several survivors describe specific periods where they lacked a piece of information, but they were later informed through circulating rumours or gossip. The types of data passed around include: that deportations were going to begin,

where men were taken after separation, and most common, that the group had arrived at Der Zor (in the absence of signs, it is unlikely that many would be able to identify the region by topographic features). It seems as though a significant portion of *key* information was distributed this way, and many survivors assign a high value to the crowd as ‘source.’ Their remembrance and retelling of the genocide as a whole is influenced by the significance they assign to second-hand information and hearsay.

4) *“I’ve seen worse than that”*

For many of the survivors, seeing mass graves, rape, and fetus killings are bad enough, but some also report incidents that are personally significant, or incidents that affect them in a different way than anything else they have seen. One survivor recalls seeing a group of women shot after they refused to dance. For him, this sort of gender dominance resonates more with his perception of human dignity than the general racially motivated killings. Events like this serve as reminders and hallmarks of events that take on major significance for individuals, which may or may not affect their perception of the Turks, the Armenians, their retelling, and their opinion of the events as a whole.

5) *“I remember one thing”*

Many describe very detailed, specific mini-stories or features of a larger story, and preface their retelling of it by claiming that this ‘one thing’ controls a large part of their memory and their perception of how they should recount it. One survivor describes an episode in which she is separated from her sister, and begins

crying and screaming for her. She remembers that the sun was “halfway down,” and that they were on horses on a hill in a village. Out of desperation, she began offering her coat – which she considered to be “so valuable” – to people around her. I have not discussed body language or facial expression to any extent, as these issues fall outside of the scope of this study; but in this particular narration, the survivor’s physical expression of her memory of the event is arresting, and arguably very closely tied to the level of discomfort she experienced at the time, and then again each time she tells her story. She describes the first time she saw a man suffering from kwashiorkor in similar terms: “I see lots of things but that stays in my memory.” This is explored further in the following chapter.

6) *“I never hide anything”*

Although this specific statement appeared just once in narrations analyzed in this set, it is representative of a wider rhetoric that espouses transparency and truth over political correctness and ‘appropriate’ stories. The survivor who used this phrase describes her activities in teaching her grandkids about the genocide events as a substitute for their incomplete and inaccurate textbooks. What the books hide, she suggests, is revealed through her own oral literature.

Actions:

When discussing episodes or events related to *actions*, whether actions by the survivors or by the Turks, survivors use very specific phrases that seem to highlight their own personal experiences of the events. This is reflected in a presentation that is affected

by one's general perspective (e.g. pessimism), or significance in the entirety of the genocide event:

1) *"That's how it started"*

A key part in each survivor's storytelling is when they mark the point at which they personally felt the genocide began. For some, it began on April 24, 1915, or when male family members were taken, while for others, when deportations began. The 'start' can also encompass feelings and abstractions about individual life and society. It can identify the end of their previous life and norms, as well as the beginning of a new life affected by ethnic antagonism and segregation. But for most, the 'start' is something much more tangible, much more 'felt' and experienced – it marks the beginning of a period of oppression and physical and psychological harm. Some describe this by referring to their forced deportations out of their homes, where they "left everything, [taking] just the clothes we need needed on our back." The physical manifestation of the genocide can also be identified as the period of walking: "Just walk, that's all. You can't judge anything anymore yourself... you get so disgusted, so depressed, you know – walk, walk, walk... where? ... They make us walk on the corpses. They won't let us walk anyplace else. We have to walk on the dead people, all killed Armenians. They do that so we could walk on the corpses. There's a lot of road *over there*, [but] they won't let us go that way... We used to give them money so they make us sit." (emphasis mine)

2) “[*That was*]/[*this is*] *the end*”

The choice of PU to identify similar points in the genocide events is dependent on the emphases and personal experience of the survivor. While some choose to talk about beginnings, others are more pessimistic, and refer to ‘the end.’ One survivor recalls his father saying: “Alec, my boy, this is the end. Now, we don’t know what’s going to happen to us...” The survivor, who has been calm up until this point, begins to cry, and his voice breaks. His retelling of his father’s words and identification of ‘the end’ is associated with the *end* of his father’s life, and with it, the only norms of living he had known up until that point. I should point out here that, while the survivors were well into their 70s and 80s at the time of their interviews, their average age at the time of the genocide was 12, and so our understanding and interpretation of their experiences should be understood from the perspective of a child. This boy’s father died, and with that death, everything he knew about life ended.

3) “*What can I/we do?*” and “*I better keep going*”

The sentiment of helplessness is apparent in most of the survivor accounts, and particularly when discussing the ability to help those in need. For example, a boy might see women being raped (“They had quite a few young girls, they’re raping them. Right there out in the field in front of all those people. You know, when I say people [or] women – maybe 12, 13-year old girls.”), but might not have the capacity, or even the impetus to help them. The issue is not necessarily one of self-preservation in the face of impending harm, but rather, one of

inconceivable desensitization of actions that anyone, no less a child, can be expected to process and then respond to with assistance.

Perspectives

With any traumatic event, one's retelling of it is largely based on their sum total of experiences. As will be later evident in how tropes function – as realities that are constructed within frameworks that rely on associative understanding and interpretation – PUs reflect one's outlooks and perspectives. They are anachronistically applied to one's experiences of the genocide events as adolescents, and then presented within a larger, developed system of beliefs as adults. Most striking about this is the apparent personal comfort that is found in rhetoric and the generalization of specific events:

1) “Today I am ready”

After witnessing his father refuse to change his religion from Christianity to Islam – and what that meant for the entire family – one survivor entered into a somber process of acceptance that his life was now over: “today I am going to die.” But this was not an event to be understood as simply a response to Turkish aggression. The survivor recounts that day as one of spiritual contemplation, in which he works out the relationship between himself and God. He remembers praying, thinking about the salvificatory benefits of his father's actions, but at the same time, asking for protection from harm. This survivor and his family happened to live through that day and many more, on the condition that they be exiled from their predominantly Muslim town; but his statement of resolute readiness (even if internally he was conflicted), reveals a decision that cannot be

separated from his identity, and how he resolves the tension between selfhood and self-preservation.

2) *“That’s life”*

The extent of one’s humanity and one’s ability to affect life circumstances is very apparent in oral genocide narrations. There seems to be an existential tension that survivors try to work through and negotiate, and they often rely on blanket statements that distill their feelings and experiences into a single unit of expression. Exclaiming “that’s life” is one of the best examples of a phraseological unit. It includes the totality of one’s life and genocide experiences, while also expressing their own personal views about themselves in relation to the events. For most who rely on the security of this type of rhetoric, ideas of hopelessness and human frailty are exhibited throughout their narrations.

3) *“I don’t care anymore”*

When discussing current feelings toward the genocide, genocide recognition, or education, some of the survivors expressed a disdain for the entirety of the topic, distilled into this short phrase. While this PU might seem to be just an expression of feeling, I would argue that its phraseological value is embedded in the discussion that follows its announcement, and is used as a heading for the topic. One particularly negative survivor says that he no longer wants to worry about this event that shaped his life, and that he should “let the young ones worry about it.” In the next sentence, he incriminates that same demographic for failing

to effectively respond to the massive 1988 earthquake in Armenia,⁸⁸ and then mocks the ambition of the stereotypical Armenian by joking that a handful of Armenians can't accomplish anything because they would all want to be president. This sort of resentment might be attributable to his perspective on the collective failure of Armenians to prevent the Armenian Genocide, but more likely, might represent his own personal frustration with the topic and what he perceives it to mean for post-genocide Armenian social culture.

iii. Potential Criticisms

Although sifting through narrative transcripts might appear casual or arbitrary, the sort of subjectivity that is used in such analysis allows for inductive and 'ground-up' exploratory research.

Issues of language do not figure in my evaluation of PUs, as this topic falls outside of the scope of this study. Having said this, it can be argued that the type of referential information derived from PUs exists outside of language constraints. That is not to say that a PU in one language is exchangeable with its translation or transliteration in another language – but enough can be accessed from a group of PUs that make the set valuable in and of itself without having to complete a comparative study or artificially include PUs of several languages in the sample for supposed gains.

iv. Assessment and Remarks

The list of PUs in this chapter is intentionally brief, created with the intention of highlighting the most representative of examples. Individually and collectively, the PUs

⁸⁸ The quake was rated 6.9 on the Richter scale, killing 25 000 people. Cf. Robert Service, *A History of Modern Russia: From Nicholas II to Vladimir Putin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 468-469.

reveal a wealth of information about how narratives about the Armenian Genocide are structured, and how individuals relate their experiences, by choice or by instinct. The list suggests that much of what is narrated by survivors is ‘marked’ by specific stock phrases that they use to either introduce a topic, or use to distill general or specific perspectives.

There are many more examples that were not included in this list for a variety of reasons, but most likely because they were not common enough (a characteristic that does not diminish a statement’s value as a PU, but might be used as a critique for the reliability or distribution of the findings), or because the expression of the content was not ‘phraseological’ enough. There were three major ideas that were expressed in numerous survivors using a variety of phrases not included in the above list. Many survivors discussed Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and other locals that chose to help them at some point during the genocide. They used phrases like “*I’m not going to say they aren’t good,*” “*At least they had the courtesy to...*” and “*If it wasn’t for...*” Such examples might have fit one category, but their expression was too varied to be considered to conform to the definition of a PU. These statements reflect a resistance to what the survivors think are common threads of alterity in their Armenian culture. Another common type of phrase was thanking God for the country that took them in (in my sample, this meant the United States for most survivors, and Canada for one⁸⁹), which depicts deep cultural notions that might be evident in the pan-diasporic Armenian social consciousness. Finally, there was one PU excluded because it was recounted not as a statement of the individual. It encompasses nearly every feature of a PU: one survivor recalls seeing “*this too shall pass*” painted in large letters across an Armenian store owner’s shop window just as

⁸⁹ Notably, a Georgetown Boy, part of a group of orphans taken in by Canada, and today referred to as Canada’s ‘Noble Experiment.’

deportations began. This PU not only identifies the shop owner's familiarity with Judeo-Christian precepts,⁹⁰ it also identifies his personal hopes for the future, and the hopes of his community.

⁹⁰ While the term never appears in the Bible, it is the synthesis of many principles and proverbs collected in Ecclesiastes, traditionally attributed to the tenth-century BCE King Solomon.

Chapter VI. Tropes

i. Theoretical Framework

Overview

Meaning is embedded in everything. Interpreting communication is as primary of a function as encountering it. Any type of communicated information is relational, and its internal structures fluid. Although that sort of depth is overlooked in most types of communication, the complexity of oral narration requires substantive analysis. The study of the signs, symbols, and referents that underlie communication is the domain of semiotics, which considers how and why we assign and produce meaning (semiosis). It assesses both the format and details of communicated information in light of patterns and structures. The information is then used to identify the types of signs, why they are used, and their modality. Pioneered by the late nineteenth-century Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Cours de linguistique générale*, semiotics helps illuminate the individual and social functions of our productions: what we say and do. Although expressing anything requires individual decisions on content and structure, meaning is also communally generated. Valentin Voloshinov, an early critic of de Saussure, points out that meaning is too contextual for it to be processed at only the individual level, and suggests that group meaning is a function of social experience.⁹¹

Social semiotics is the study of meaning-making in a group. (A group embodies a set of individuals with a common experience or viewpoint that can be distinguished from others in society.) Social semiotics considers how different groups construct different

⁹¹ Valentin Voloshinov. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 11.

meanings.⁹² Given that communication is a social practice of social agents in a specific context,⁹³ meanings are the product of a wide communal process that encapsulates the entirety of individual expression. M.A.K. Halliday extends this by assigning communication and action to the “system of relations”⁹⁴ of which the individual is a part.⁹⁵ Thus, the social group both imparts and constrains the type and range of an individual’s ‘meanings.’

Those individual meanings can be understood by assessing context (or ‘associative structure’⁹⁶), which is the state out of which meaning emerges. Halliday and Hasan (1985) have divided context into three parts: field, tenor, and mode. *Field* is that part of a context concerning the setting, or the event that is taking place, and the institutional systems around it. *Tenor* asks about the people, about who is taking part in the context, highlighting the importance of social interaction in the process of meaning-making. Finally, *Mode* is the structure, or method of the information being communicated (Marshall McLuhan’s area of expertise).⁹⁷

Semiotics and narration

Narration is the telling of an event or story, or the process of narrating. The primary (manifest) characteristics of a narration (as object) can include its medium (oral, textual, visual), level of detail, and historical value. These can also be understood as ‘context,’ as seen above. Secondary (latent) characteristics include the models and archetypes that are

⁹² Tony Schirato and Susan Yell. *Communication and Cultural Literacy* (St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1996), 43.

⁹³ Ibid., 44.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁵ M.A.K. Halliday “Language as Code and Language as Behaviour,” *The Semiotics of Culture and Language*, vol 1. ed R.P. Fawcett, et al. (London: Frances Pinter, 1984), 5.

⁹⁶ Marcel Danesi. *The Quest for Meaning: A Guide to Semiotic Theory and Practice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 57.

⁹⁷ M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan. *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective* (Victoria: Deakin University Press, 1985), 5-9.

generally understood without substantive analysis. Within *both* manifest (structure) and latent (content) characteristics there exists a layer of information that is the domain of signs and symbolism: the realm of meaning. As narration is often an individual action, structure and content are dependent on experience and social environment. This, of course, introduces an inherent subjectivity to the narration that can be teased out and explored using semiotics. For Baudrillard, the objectivity or veracity of a narration is incidental to its value as an object.⁹⁸ Narrations are not necessarily subject to the spectrum of truthfulness, and instead are valid constructs in and of themselves, functioning (at both the communal and individual level) as created hyperrealities that convey specific items and features of cultural interest:

The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control – and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, as it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal...⁹⁹

When an event passes from actuality to narrative, it creates ‘nostalgia triggers’ – or signs – that prompt a response. Said differently, narration results in a form of simulation that attempts to displace the listener. In oral narration, these processes (nostalgia triggering and displacement) work in concert to relate events in an emotional, informational way. Narratives of personal trauma, especially, can be visually evocative of pain that is not necessarily spoken of, but can be identified in pauses, sentence construction, and the absence of words. Such behaviours fall outside of the scope of this study. This chapter is concerned with the meaning and partial hyperreality construction evident in the tropes of Armenian Genocide oral narratives.

Anything that evokes or connotes something that is not immediately evident can be

⁹⁸ Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 4.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

identified as a trope. In using a trope, one enters into an implicit contract with the socio-cultural ideals out of which it emerged, as well as established functions and boundaries of language and signs. Our realities are thus constructed within frameworks that rely on interpretation of structure, content, and meaning within. Whether applied to visual media, text, or oral speech, we understand and identify with things in terms of everything else we know. While tropes can be metaphorical, they can also be metonymic, and thus identify closely related concepts or things that are contextually used interchangeably.¹⁰⁰ They can be irony, allegory, as well as numerous other types of literary devices that aid the narrative and narration.

ii. Discussion

In previous chapters, the oral narrations of Armenian Genocide survivors have revealed patterns of memes and phraseological units. Although each of those categories, too, can be explored using semiotics as a methodological tool, tropes present themselves as particularly suitable to semiotic analysis. This section will introduce the four most common tropes in Armenian Genocide oral narratives, and assess their social and cultural value for the individual and group.

Constantinople or Istanbul?

Word selection is, in many circumstances, a subconscious process.¹⁰¹

Psychologists and media theorists refer to the process of encountering or interacting with a word as *priming* – seeing or hearing a word *primes* the individual to recall it in other conditions. This type of interaction is different than simply being ‘educated,’ or learning

¹⁰⁰ Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956).

¹⁰¹ Endel Tulving, et al. “Priming Effects in Word Fragment Completion are independent of Recognition Memory,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition* 8:4 (1982): 336-342.

about a word (although that, too, can encompass priming); it is one of the preconditions for communicating about certain topics, ideas, and things in a personalized way.

For nearly everyone born prior to 1923, and for many living even a number of decades after, the largest city in the Ottoman Empire was called Constantinople. When the Turkish Republic was proclaimed on October 29, 1923, effectively ending and reorganizing the empire, a transformation process began that eventually saw the city officially renamed as Istanbul, as it had been known and referred to informally by local Turks for several centuries prior.¹⁰² The name ‘Istanbul’ has all but wiped away any vestige of ‘Constantinople’ for the better of a century. Of course, there are still some individuals living today who were raised in the period in which the city was referred to as ‘Constantinople,’ and certainly many more when the interviews assessed in my research were conducted. But what of the effects of acculturation in a new society, that refers to the city, categorically, as Istanbul?

A staggering 89% of Armenian Genocide survivors who mention the city at some point in their narrative refer to it as ‘Constantinople.’ Exactly half of the survivors who use ‘Constantinople’ do so very casually, without any particular stress on the history of the city or its name, using it simply as a point of reference (“born in Adapazar... near Constantinople.”), or as a historical place that figures in some way in the narrative (e.g. most commonly, survivors being taken to, or displaced from, Constantinople). These individuals respond to their situation (being interviewed in a small room by a researcher) by recalling what they know about the place using the word most accessible to them; there is no hesitation prior to its utterance, and little thought seems to be involved in its use. Their original social ‘priming’ has, despite their transatlantic

¹⁰² Deniz Gokturk, et.al. *Orienting Istanbul: Cultural Capital of Europe?* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

relocation and temporal separation from a time much friendlier to the old name, unconsciously persisted. To them, ‘Constantinople’ is simply intuitive.

The other half of the survivors uses the name much differently throughout their interviews, and it is their usage that demands deeper analysis. This second group of survivors, who use ‘Constantinople’ instead of ‘Istanbul,’ does so in a way that stresses some point they are trying to convey. Three examples especially highlight the personal significance in using that name:

1) Contrasting Constantinople with Yozgat

After a lengthy discussion on freedoms in his hometown of Yozgat (east of Ankara, central Turkey), one survivor makes, what appears to be for him, an astute observation: he contrasts his hometown’s quality of life with that of the cosmopolitan Constantinople (with which he has no substantive ties, except that his father imported “goods” for his general store from there). He talks about the freedom of press and freedom of assembly in the bigger city, noting that Western newspapers and literature were censored in Yozgat, along with the right to speak Armenian. This survivor both extols and romanticizes Constantinople, and believes it to stand against the rampant oppression in non-Westernized central Turkey. That he – nearly sixty years after its formal name change – chooses to call it ‘Constantinople’ instead of ‘Istanbul,’ reinforces his idealization of the pre-Istanbul city and what it represented.

2) “For lack of communication, we didn’t know what had happened in Upper Armenia or Constantinople, where the cream of the crop, as they say, all of the intellectuals, all of the intellectual religious men, were collected together and each one sent to a different part of the country...”

This survivor directs an incredible amount of respect toward the city of Constantinople, highlighting it as the place of Armenian intellectuals, the place where Armenian intellectuals, prominent businessmen, and religious figures chose to reside, but were then forcibly removed so as to disperse their collective power and potential. Again, there is a specific effort to emphasize the importance of the city to Armenians (signified by an unrepresentatively large population of Armenian intellectuals there), and then to disregard ‘Istanbul,’ in favour of ‘Constantinople,’ instead.

3) *“I shouldn’t say Istanbul.”*

This is, of course, the most direct: the strength of its rhetoric cannot be overemphasized. The survivor, an American by birth fatefully transplanted to Tigranakert (eastern Turkey) two years prior to the first deportations, *decides* that the name of the city is ‘Constantinople,’ and any name other than that would be an affront to her ideals, and the ideals she projects onto the survivor group (and Armenians?) as a whole. Almost procataleptically (when an argument is raised and then refuted by the speaker) and frustrated for making the mistake of saying ‘Istanbul,’ the survivor looks directly into the camera, smiles, seemingly apologizes, and instructively thinks: “I shouldn’t call it Istanbul; how can I use that name?” (dramatization). The scene in which this statement appears is powerful; it is in the first few minutes of the interview, and sets the tone for the remainder.

Each of these examples underlines one thing: to use the name ‘Istanbul’ is, for whatever reason, functionally *wrong*. The survivors use a narrative device called metalepsis (referring to something by something related to it) on the idea of the city, and then choose to use what they feel is the more appropriate word (name). They show individual desires to emphasize the particularly non-Turkishness of the city at the time, in contrast to some type of degradation thereafter. This use of an anachronistic term is a small, but personally significant act of defiance that resonates in more than one individual, and defines an oppositional form of self-identification against another group, sometimes called ‘otherification,’ or *alterity*.¹⁰³

Armenianness contra Turkishness

For nearly all survivors who refer to or discuss the topic, identity is negotiated in three ways: recognition of the family out of which he or she emerged, identification with the subculture of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, and asserting a negative self-definition by identifying the Turkish ‘other.’ What emerges is a collection of individual apophatic (asserting something by saying what it is not) notions of ‘Armenianness’ and ‘Turkishness’ that reflect one’s understanding of *how the group* views itself and the ‘other.’ That point is worth reiterating – the survivors in my sample who address identity do so from the individual perspective of being a representative of the group (of survivors, if not all Armenians).

Many of the survivors describe many of their characteristics, including wealth, education, religion, and status prior to the genocide in contrast to non-Armenians,

¹⁰³ Alterity is a concept developed by Emmanuel Levinas in his philosophical text, *Alterity and Transcendence* (1970), though the idea of ‘the other’ is rooted in antiquity, and especially Greek theatre.

demonstrating a not-so-subtle form of alterity, of a socially stratified ‘us against them.’

Some examples:

“Remember now, Armenians were not Turks. Even though we were born in Turkey, we always considered ourselves Armenians. We never wanted to change our religion, to change our customs, and we were a people that loved to be educated, to progress, and the Turks knew this. I don’t know, somehow, they didn’t have the ambition to be educated, and they were always backward. The Armenians in Marash were more civilized than the natives...
“The Armenians were better off, I really can’t say why.”

“Տգևաւ էին” / “They [the Turks] were ignorant.”

“When after the war, I went back [to my property], the Turk was using it, see, and one day I wanna go and see it. After the war we went to the old country, and I stayed there, and we thought that, well our homes and things, the people start building again, all the farms start, you know, green... even the Turks they used to say the Armenians come back everything got green. And I told them, I say, “Why can’t you make it green?” / [They responded:] “Oh, we’re lazy people, we don’t know how to do it.” ”

“The farmers were mostly Kurds and Turks. Armenians were businessmen, they [owned] the stores.”

“[Unlike the Turks,] Armenians aren’t farm people. Their way of living is like the Jewish, I presume – more business people, more city people.”

“Over there, Armenians *are* very powerful people... Turks don’t have any trade. Armenians have everything.” (This statement was made while talking about pre-genocide Armenian life in West Turkey; note the tense, emphasized.)

“They are the poison, the enemy of Christians.”

If these statements (each from a different survivor) are representative of the larger set of all interviews conducted by researchers in the 1980s (if not all survivors with similar contemporary life conditions) in general, they would reveal much about how the survivors see themselves in contrast to Turks, and vice versa. But the statements are not necessarily ad hominem attacks, and to understand them as simply antagonistic or disparaging would miss a crucial point: this type of ‘otherification’ reflects how the survivors see *themselves*, more than what it reveals about the survivors’ opinions about the Turks. Notable is the fact that the statements are typifications of both Turks as a group and Armenians as a group, and that survivors convey them as representative of Armenian perspectives. Assessing the individual value of such sentiments is difficult, as

the level of cultural influence cannot be measured in the formation or perpetuation of such ideas.

[It should be pointed out that a small minority of survivors in my sample does not express these types of statements. In fact, survivors in this group are quite candid in giving respect for Turks who helped them hide, and who saved them just before they were to enter killing stations. These individuals use terms and phrases like “gentlemen,” “save,” “they were nice,” or “I’m not going to say they weren’t good.” One of them prefaces a statement by almost regretfully saying that he has “to tell it like it is.” Another half-jokingly declares: “If it wasn’t for those kind people there wouldn’t be *so many* Armenians left.” (emphasis his) The joke being that there are so very few.]

The Government v. the People

A common theme in many of the survivors’ narratives is the separation of the state (as those responsible for organizing and executing the genocide), and the people of Turkey (almost always Turks, and in a very small minority of cases, Kurds or Arabs). Survivors, in nearly every instance, refer to those who carried out the genocide as ‘the government,’ distinguishing the state from the people. Of course, one’s individual experiences determine his or her own feelings on the matter, but those who shared similar experiences recount them in the same way, suggesting that there might be a more intricate process in the way in which the survivor’s form their ideas and express them in varying degrees of culpability. There are three categories:

- 1) Survivors who express that the Turkish citizenry was not at all responsible for the genocide, and that it was orchestrated and carried out by the state alone:

“Our neighbours weren’t that bad people... of course the government was, not the people.”

“They were very nice people, but they couldn’t help us.”

“Individuals didn’t do nothing... they couldn’t do anything. The government did it.”

- 2) Survivors who express that all or most Turks (of the time) have some level of responsibility, by either direct involvement, complicity, or because of material benefit. Many recount various life circumstances that demonstrated to them that the Turkish people were little different than the state in how they treated Armenians in their communities:

“They’re no good, no good. They’re rotten inside and out, because all those Armenians that they killed, they lived by their money, by their bread, by their butter. My father - they were going to kill my father who fed the sons of bitches. Well, I don’t know. You know what? They were jealous, more than anything else, because every business, every good work was by Armenians. Not only in Erzinga, [but] all over Turkey.”

After being taken home by a Turkish doctor for servility, one survivor says, “[I was] treated worse than a servant.”

- 3) Survivors who explicitly point out that individual Turkish people are *better* than the government, and are initially surprised to find out so. These are almost entirely in narratives that involve a government official warning a friend, business partner, or acquaintance of the impending deportations.

Each of these narrative types and ‘ideas’ exemplify synecdoche (a literary device that is often carefully constructed by the hand of an author) that substitutes and uses interchangeably the part (or whole) of a thing for a whole (or a part) of it. But rather than through specific words, survivors use the device to convey notions and characteristics. Turks are sometimes representative of the offending government, which is itself sometimes representative of all of its members, which are sometimes representative of purportedly counter-cultural (i.e. counterintuitive good behaviour). Complex devices like

this, while expressed at the individual level – like the use of ‘Constantinople,’ and ‘otherification’ – play into a wider cultural pattern of ideation and belief.

Historicity and memory

In few other areas do survivors convey reservations about the historicity of what they narrate as much as they do when discussing memory. The narrations are dotted with repeated references to the validity of their individual memories, and more importantly, to the validity of their perspectives and understanding of the events as they were taking place. Survivors very often counteract this with the use of a litote, a device that anticipates, accounts for, and negates a possible objection by the reader, or in this case, the listener or viewer. There are many similar examples of this, of which the two most common types are:

- 1) “I remember one thing.” / “That stays in my memory.” (also a phraseological unit, as seen in the previous chapter)

Many survivors have a habit of isolating specific fragments of the storyline, which are often prefaced or concluded with an ‘assurance statement,’ or an affirmation in the resilience of the memory. Modifiers like “exactly” or “specifically” usually follow statements like this. They often include a reference to the number of “things” seen, but noting the particular ‘stickiness’ of the specific memorable event. Other times, the survivor will mention that even *they* are surprised about how vividly they remember the event “up to this day.”

2) Detail-driven plot points

Many survivors also use detail-driven plot points, which are simply specific memories used to assert the validity and truthfulness of the scene that they describe to be intact. These range across many things, but are most often temporal or spatial markers, like the changing of the season (and the memory that one was or was not wearing a spring coat, to remembering a particular sunset or how far along the leaves in a vineyard were.

When a survivor does not remember a particular detail, that, too, is pointed out, with the possible intention of establishing trust and rapport with the interviewer. While this device is commonplace in oratory and academic writing, its prevalence in oral narration and storytelling is curious. The reliance on details and assurance statements throughout the narratives suggests that survivors want the interviewer to believe their stories exactly as they are being told. They do not simply want to convey the gist of their experiences, or vague situations. They want the listener to come away with a set of key memory points of events that the survivors felt personally affected by; the listener, too, can be affected by these, and potentially remember them as highlights to share with others. Unconsciously, the survivors are themselves fashioning memes, reinforced sometimes with phraseological units (e.g. “I remember one thing.”), which they convey through, and support with, tropes.

iii. Potential Criticisms

The most obvious potential criticism is, of course, that this type of analysis is subjective. The incorrect way to respond to that would be to devise an elaborate argument

as to why the rigorous methodology used produced a repeatable, falsifiable set of data; this misses the point. A stringent methodology was, in fact, used for the background work in collecting and cross-referencing words, phrases, and themes; there is only so much room for deviation or variation of findings (given the conditions of my sample) if another researcher were to embark on the same task. But stopping there would discredit the, arguably, most valuable part of the work, which is in the subjective analysis of the data. Semiotic analysis of words and themes in context demands from the researcher a high level of organization and method, which prepares the content for interpretation within the confines of established principles. Beyond this, emphasis and categorization is at the discretion of the researcher, and conclusions (note: not the raw data) will almost always be unique and tied to his or her own background and worldview.

A second, related, possible criticism could be made regarding the decision to focus the research and analysis on patterns, at the expense of substantive discussion on the content (as opposed to the form) of the narrative. Again, doing so would assume too large of a task for a project so constrained by space, and was a research design decision made early in the planning process.

iv. Assessment and Remarks

As has been evident in this chapter, the way in which narration happens is a factor of the level of control the narrator wishes to impart on narrative, which in the case of Armenian Genocide survivors, is high. The survivors, for the most part, have a stock of feature stories and highlights they want remembered, in the way they themselves remember them. As mentioned briefly above, this type of communication behaviour bears much similarity to the pattern of meme creation and transfer seen in Chapter IV. It

should be no surprise that meme theory is an extension of Darwinian evolution and natural selection theory; memes are designed with a set of optimized characteristics in mind that allow them to flourish. The survivors recount some of their stories in a way that maximizes their memorability or ‘stickiness,’ using literary devices like tropes, as well as particular phrasing. Regardless of whether these stories attain memeticity or not is a secondary concern. What is of greater interest is that the survivors want their stories remembered in the way they themselves remember them.

Navigating through the complexity of literary devices is no simple task: whether the survivors are conscientious of their usage of such devices or not, the key result of this chapter has been to demonstrate the frequency and similarity of their usage. The historicity of the content, the logical reasoning of the survivors in narrating/constructing such elaborate accounts, and the level of embellishment in them is ultimately irrelevant. Of importance is that there exists a regular pattern in this type of oral narration: devices are commonly used, and used similarly by many to perpetuate stories. Assigning value to the individual accounts for the purpose of historical reconstruction would be a logical next step, for an historian or historiographer.

Chapter VII. Analysis

This research has largely been concerned with negotiating the tension between communication and meaning. The case study of Armenian Genocide oral narratives has produced a clear and replicable set of data, which will now allow me to propose a minimum set of characteristics inherent specifically to oral narration. While Ong (1982) focuses on the total system of orality and oral communication (dedicating just a brief chapter on oral narrative that discusses the significance of literacy on the development of it), he does not offer much in the way of identifying exactly what the internal processes of oral narration specifically are, and how they are expressed. To my knowledge, scholars have largely ignored this topic. In this chapter, I will outline oral narration as survivors of the Armenian Genocide use it, and because of its reductive, general nature, I hypothesize that the theory can be applied to oral narrations by any other group or individual.

The oral narration of non-fictional topics designed to convey historical or episodic information from a speaker to a listener has a complexity of five characteristics that aid transfer and reception; oral narration is:

- a) intuitive,
- b) reactive,
- c) directed,
- d) fuzzy, and
- e) sticky.

Intuitive

Oral narration is intuitive. Memories and information accessed by the speaker prior to and during the narration are reflective of what is most memorable and easiest to convey. As such, the data that is accessed by the individual is highly personalized in terms of preference of events and details to narrate, and is

inherently biased. The information in the narration is not necessarily what is most important or relevant to the listener; what matters more is the accessibility and *significance* of the information to the narrator. For example, traumatic experiences (outside of their psychological imprint) might be more painful to recall, but are more intuitive to narrate given the personal importance narrators impart to them during their lives. There are many examples of this in my research, but two of the more notable ones are the use of ‘Constantinople’ instinctively, because that is simply what many survivors believe the name should be, and the self-identification of wealth or a comparatively higher social status than Turks.

Reactive

Oral narration is reactive. Narrators can respond to external stimuli (including anything done by the listener, who is an active participant in the ‘narration event’ by virtue of his or her presence; this type of awareness is not possible in text-based literature¹⁰⁴) or changes in their thought processes depending on any conceivable factor; in this sense, it is also emergent. Oral narration is not strictly adherent to time and sequence, as it is fluid and impermanent. Many survivors exemplify ‘reactive’ narration; some do so in relation to time and the way in which they sequence events during the narration – even if they are presented out of order, as well as those who reorganize information based on cues from the interviewer, and then correct themselves. In addition, survivors often emphasize certain points for the benefit of the interviewer, for whatever reason. They will use phrases that highlight the

¹⁰⁴ Rosenberg, “*The Complexity of Oral Tradition*,” 85.

resilience of their memory, in a form of interaction that is inherently aware of the potential skepticism or confusion of the listener.

Directed

Oral narration is directed, and shares some features of performance and production in terms of the way in which things are phrased, what literary devices are used, and the level of detail and specificity in what is being conveyed.

Intuitiveness does not preclude directedness. For example, general items of information are essentially pre-selected by virtue of their significance, within which details and phrasing can be emphasized as needed for the scope of the narration to retain the intent of the narrator. The quality of being directed can be understood as the other side of ‘reactiveness.’ Both are concerned with the perception of the listener, but directedness is the quality that governs the way in which the survivor has decided to relate his or her narrative. Some examples of this include the use of detail-driven plot points like the passing of a season or sunset that can legitimize and verify the story; survivors who go out of their way to explicitly create distinctions between good Turks and bad Turks for the purpose of truthfulness, and ‘telling it like it is’; and the way in which survivors describe the ‘other,’ by contrasting it to their own qualities that are either predetermined to be superior, or are superior because of material or social value.

Fuzzy

Oral narration is fuzzy. Because of its inherent biases, the historicity of what is narrated cannot ever – by virtue of it being observed and/or experienced

by an individual – match the actuality of what occurred. To borrow a principle from physics and information technology, simply observing something irreparably changes both it and the observer. Absolute falsity and absolute truth cannot be ever determined. Value judgments, however, can be made, by weighing and balancing probability with the testimony of others, the calculable effects of events, empirical evidence, etc. This quality is evident throughout most narratives and the smaller events within them. Some survivors use very rough estimates for numbers of people, dates of events, their own personal wealth, the ethnicity of the perpetrators, and the lack of temporal accuracy in events related to Der Zor.

Sticky

Oral narration is sticky. In other words, the listener is meant to walk away from the experience with as much of the information determined (*directed*) by the narrator to be memorable and repeatable. Stickiness¹⁰⁵ simply means that the information can be absorbed quickly, and transferred again to others easily. This can be achieved by any number of means, and includes, but is not limited to memes that travel, replicate, and morph, such as the idea and act of killing a fetus and the mother who carries it; phraseological units that provide convenient and memorable sound bites, such as the use of phrases that imply ignorance on the part of the survivors, and knowledge on the part of the perpetrators; and tropes that ease the reception of information by packaging them into significant little parcels using literary devices, such as the clever use of apophasis to describe others, and litotes that anticipate reaction.

¹⁰⁵ Malcolm Gladwell calls this the “stickiness factor,” but refers to the content, or the “property of the message,” as opposed to the form. See *The Tipping Point* (New York: Little, Brown, & Co, 2000).

The consequence of proposing such a theory is clear: oral dialogue and oral narration require different things from the narrator, and are expressed by different features. Future work in these areas can begin by exploring the limits of each, and at what point their forms break, meld with the other, or become something else entirely.

Chapter VIII. Conclusion

This research has been about negotiating the tension between oral communication and meaning, and navigating through the complexity of orality and its products. I have presented the three major forms of oral tools used by survivors of the Armenian Genocide, and suggest that they are the most pervasive forms of conveying information through oral narration. From this data, I have been able to identify that the Ongian model of orality does not cover the specific qualities of oral *narration*, and I have suggested a companion model to that theory. Oral narration is intuitive, reactive, directed, fuzzy, and sticky.

This work barely scratches the surface of what is possible in both Armenian Genocide oral narrative studies, as well as in the potential for applying the model proposed here to other types of oral narration, including less significant or non-traumatic events, as well as simple historical storytelling. But far larger questions have emerged, too. The issues of veracity and truthfulness have been lurking in the shadows of nearly every chapter, sometimes more explicitly than in others. I mentioned that such considerations are not important for my purposes, but one cannot help but begin to wonder about the effect of oral narration on the construction of history. On the other hand, one cannot so easily dismiss the importance of subjectivity as personal experience and feelings when discussing oral narrations, as it is ultimately a human endeavour that reflects human emotions based on human experiences. Thus, the tension between meaning and communicating that meaning is not the only important issue; assessing truth-value, falsity, and the individual and group perceptions of these things can highlight ways in which certain themes and events are perpetuated at the expense of others. The only problems being that we can never know just what was left out, and what happened

to those who did not live to tell their stories. Such are the consequences of genocide.

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