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Survivor Song: The Voice of Trauma and Its Echoes

Abstract

For societies and cultures that experience mass torture and trauma, giving voice to the story of what happened is significant for both the specific individuals who have survived or witnessed the trauma, and the culture that is forced to process it and incorporate the experience into its collective identity. Testimonial literature that resulted from the detention and torture of *desaparecidos* under the military dictatorship in Argentina in the 1970s and 80s, and the genocide of the Armenian people in 1915, reveals many different approaches in the ways that people write about torture and trauma. In attempting to find a voice to describe trauma, which is inherently indescribable, accounts range from factual histories to artistic endeavors intended to capture the truth of the experience being related. For many survivors, telling their stories is an act of resistance against the perpetrators' attempts to silence them. Examining the voices of survivors and witnesses in the context of literary trauma theory and historiography allows the story itself to be considered in terms of the implications that it has for both those who tell it, and those who hear it. In the aftermath of trauma, the generations descending from the survivors are deeply affected by how the story of trauma has been transmitted through their families and cultures. It has powerful implications for both individual and collective identity, and this is vividly displayed in the gestures of memorialization, literature, and personal perspectives of those who live in post-traumatic cultures.

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SURVIVOR SONG: THE VOICE OF TRAUMA AND ITS ECHOES

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Jennifer Rinaldi

June 2011

Advisor: W. Scott Howard

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For societies and cultures that experience mass torture and trauma, giving voice to the story of what happened is significant for both the specific individuals who have survived or witnessed the trauma, and the culture that is forced to process it and incorporate the experience into its collective identity. Testimonial literature that resulted from the detention and torture of *desaparecidos* under the military dictatorship in Argentina in the 1970s and 80s, and the genocide of the Armenian people in 1915, reveals many different approaches in the ways that people write about torture and trauma. In attempting to find a voice to describe trauma, which is inherently indescribable, accounts range from factual histories to artistic endeavors intended to capture the truth of the experience being related. For many survivors, telling their stories is an act of resistance against the perpetrators' attempts to silence them. Examining the voices of survivors and witnesses in the context of literary trauma theory and historiography allows the story itself to be considered in terms of the implications that it has for both those who tell it, and those who hear it. In the aftermath of trauma, the generations descending from the survivors are deeply affected by how the story of trauma has been transmitted through their families and cultures. It has powerful implications for both individual and collective identity, and this is vividly displayed in the gestures of memorialization, literature, and personal perspectives of those who live in post-traumatic cultures.

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Foreword

My experience with trauma, particularly that of war, initially came to me through art. Only the most sheltered of people can claim such a thing, but that is my truth. My fancy, Connecticut private-school experience included acting in the school plays, and earning the role of Mrs. Van Daan in *The Diary of Anne Frank* my sophomore year was a highlight of my young life. The director, a formidable Jewish woman who intimidated the hell out of me, began our experience with the play by inviting us, these Catholic-school teenagers, to her home, where she would give us background information on the Holocaust, and, hopefully, an understanding of the story we were about to tell. I remember nothing of that night other than the pictures. I had dutifully read Anne Frank's diary in 8th grade, and was moved by it then. I could cite facts about World War II and Hitler well enough to get A's on any history test that asked.

I thought I knew all about this.

I knew nothing.

The sanitized history textbooks we had been issued had chosen not to print the pictures. You know those pictures. They are famous and infamous and a part of how the world remembers the Holocaust. The pictures taken by the soldiers as they liberated the camps, of the people they found there, were seared into my fifteen-year-old brain that night. I remember opening the large, heavy book, eager to do my part and prove my

dedication to the artistic process of preparing for this production, and feeling like I'd had the air knocked out of me. I couldn't swallow, my eyes pooled with tears, and I fought the urge to throw up in my director's beautiful living room. It was the first time in my life that I understood that history was not just facts and dates—that these things we read and learned about were things that had happened to actual people. How naïve and childish it sounds to write this, even now. But it is true. If you had asked me before that moment if I knew that history had happened to real people, I would have said yes, but I didn't really know that until I saw those pictures. Being a member of that cast was one of the most powerful experiences I've ever had. We were manifestations of this girl's voice—and we recognized, as well as any teenagers forty years removed from the events and growing up in the luxury of unquestioned safety could, that her voice mattered.

My first knowledge and awareness of Argentina came to me in an equally trite package. At the age of fourteen I was cast as a dancer in a community theater production of *Evita*. My father played Juan Perón, and I was enthralled by the music, the dancing, and the story that depicted Evita's life. Bookish overachiever that I was, I checked dozens of books out of the library about Argentina during Perón's regime, and devoured them, enamored with the romantic stories of revolution and corruption in a world so far beyond my own that I never quite perceived it as real. I maintained a superficial fascination with Argentina from afar, and never even heard of the *desaparecidos* until I was a spoken word artist in my thirties, and heard a fellow poet read a poem that mentioned the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*. When I looked up the reference, I was astonished that these things

had happened in my lifetime, and despite being a reasonably well-informed, undeniably well-educated person, I had absolutely no knowledge of The Disappeared.

My interest in the Armenian genocide came through a far more personal interaction, though my lack of any previous knowledge was no less disconcerting. The very day I arrived at NYU as an undergraduate, and moved into the dormitory, I stepped into my new world and the first thing I saw in my dorm room was a flag I didn't recognize, hanging over one of the beds—of course, the best bed in the room, the one by the window. I was napping in my own bed when through the door burst several people, arguing loudly and passionately in the strangest language I had ever heard. It wasn't European, didn't sound Asian, and it wasn't Slavic, even to my untrained ears. All I knew was that it was loud, sharp, and rather obnoxious to wake up to. What entered my life at that moment was a fireball of intense Armenian teenager. Nanor Misserlian became my roommate, my best friend, and just through her existence, my teacher about the history of a people I had not known existed until that moment. Somehow my expensive, privileged education had failed to bring this country to my attention. My melting-pot East Coast industrial town had been filled with all kinds of immigrants, from all parts of Europe, but I'd never met anyone who said they were Armenian. It was all new to me.

I had never even heard of this place, but here was this girl whose identity was so tied to her heritage that she actually introduced herself by proudly claiming to be Armenian. This flag-flying girl was completely unsurprised at my lack of knowledge—she said that was part of being Armenian. It was later that same week when she first brought up the genocide. I was more than a little skeptical—it was one thing to now be

aware of the existence of some obscure little country over near Russia somewhere, but I was pretty sure I would have heard of a whole genocide. As I learned more and more, I was appalled at myself for not knowing—and realized how subjective history education really is.

Now, as a full-fledged adult, I know that there is so much I don't know, and I understand that I can never truly understand. My knowledge of these particular atrocities only exists because aspects of my life brought them into my sphere of awareness. The endless stream of refugee children that pour into the urban high school where I teach make me aware that there are, even now, atrocities committed all over the globe every single day. These things are not just facts in historical context, or political machinations to be analyzed; they are horrors inflicted on real people. I will never know every story. I cannot hear every voice. But I do know that every voice has a story, and by listening, we recognize the real people that history happens to.

Survivor Song: The Voice of Trauma and Its Echoes

Introduction

We must see all scars as beauty. Okay? This will be our secret. Because take it from me, a scar does not form on the dying. A scar means, I survived....Sad words are just another beauty. A sad story means, this storyteller is alive.

Narrator in Chris Cleaves' *Little Bee*

Trauma is an inevitable part of the human experience. Some of the most fortunate among us may only experience it in the series of events that are simply part of living: the death of a parent or grandparent, a car accident, empathy for people on the news who are living through circumstances that we find unimaginable. For others among us, trauma intrudes more directly into our lives: living through war, violence committed against our families or ourselves, the death of a child. All trauma, all pain, is intensely personal. Whether it manifests itself physically, psychologically, or both, we feel what we feel individually. However, when trauma affects a group of people, in addition to their individual, personal pain and processing, there is the experience of collectively enduring the trauma itself, and its aftermath. The chorus of voices that emerge from collectively experienced trauma is simultaneously harmonious and dissonant, and weaves together an expression of trauma that both foregrounds and transcends the individual, and can have tremendous impact on identity and understanding for entire cultures. But regardless of how many voices join the chorus, each one still has his or her own story. For many trauma survivors, telling or not telling their stories becomes a pivotal decision that has tremendous impact on the rest of their lives. Choosing to voice pain, or to relegate it to

silence, is the most private, personal of decisions, and it may not even be made consciously or be allowed. The circumstances in which the survivor finds himself or herself living following the trauma may be an unsafe venue for his or her voice. The protective defenses of the mind may powerfully compel or insistently repress voice. Every individual human who has endured trauma has a voice. Whether that voice is heard or silenced depends on so many factors of self and circumstance, and whether it rings out into the world, or only against the walls of one's own mind, it exists—trauma speaks in roars and silences, and every permutation in between. I believe strongly that we are compelled to listen.

When considering trauma not only in how it is expressed and processed by individual survivors, but also by societies and cultures collectively, it is important to understand that the passage of time is a significant factor, because the response to trauma evolves over time as it moves from an event of the present into an event of the past. The Armenian genocide of 1915, occurring thirty years prior to the Holocaust, and the military dictatorship in Argentina that began disappearing its own citizens thirty years after the Shoah, offer an opportunity to examine some salient points of similarity and difference in the collective cultural experience of trauma over the span of a century.

The Armenian Genocide, the Shoah, and the Argentine dictatorship share certain relevant characteristics: all were events of mass torture, trauma, and murder, committed against people who believed they were inextricably part of the societies they lived in who, at a specific point in time, were perceived as *other*, and therefore threatening, by their own nations. Also, all three periods of horrific abuse were initiated by the rise of

new, militaristic, self-styled "savior" regimes who sought to purify their respective countries, and couched their intentions in fervent nationalistic rhetoric. In addition, all three cultures, Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, Jews in Germany and Poland, and leftist political activists in Argentina, were cultures with rich literary traditions that valued both education and writing. As a result, the writerly impulses of survivors in these cultures had both an impetus and an outlet.

Each of the cultures is discussed here through examination of historical context, survivor and witness testimony, and implications of the aftermaths. Each one is examined individually, but when taken collectively, there are resonant echoes that sound along the parallels, and allow understanding of how trauma moves from survivors through successive generations to influence community identity, rippling out across a culture over the passage of time.

Argentina's dictatorship is presented first in an attempt to capture a culture's processing of trauma in the present. It offers a look at still-living survivors, in a society still logistically processing the dictatorship with ongoing legal proceedings and the initial stages of creating a shared vision for memorialization. Legal testimony, artistically constructed memoirs, and attempts going on right now to acknowledge, honor and represent the *desaparecidos* all offer individual and collective experience of fresh trauma that is still very much present for Argentinos.

The Holocaust, as the initial catalyst for virtually all literary trauma theory, is represented in the theoretical implications of all torture and trauma literature, but contemporary Israeli literature offers a particularly interesting evocation of the Shoah as

deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of modern Israeli identity, and as inescapable as an indelible scar scrawled across a culture that has knit itself back together, but is nonetheless forever marked. Contemporary Israeli literature is not merely a rendering off that scar, but its presence permeates all of its stories.

The Armenian genocide happened almost a century ago, and is definitely an event of the past, but still has a very powerful impact on the present lives of modern Armenians of the diaspora who spread throughout the world in the years following the genocide, and established strong communities primarily in North America, with some scattered through South America and Europe as well. The fact that the genocide remains unrecognized by most of the world's governments still evokes bitter anger in many modern Armenians, and as people now descended almost exclusively from survivors, the genocide, even ninety-six years later, is very much a part of their present collective identity.

Argentina, the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide present an opportunity to look at trauma through the eyes of its survivors, witnesses, and descendants across a century, and collectively these three cultures truly offer the voice of trauma, and its echoes.

My own experience with trauma has been that of the most privileged, protected, and fortunate of people. My voice, when speaking of trauma, is that of a listener, an observer. It is part of my experience as a human being to recognize both the ferocious iniquity people are capable of inflicting upon one another, and the astonishing capacity that people have to endure things I quite literally cannot imagine. But all of the voices, those of the perpetrators and the victims, the witnesses and the survivors, ring in my ears.

In the course of researching this material, the hideous truth of the evil men do has been inescapable, but the extraordinary ability of survivors to emerge from the most horrific of circumstances never fails to humble me, and I am left breathless, in awe of what is the very strongest in us. I do not know if I am made of such stuff. I fear I am not, and I recognize the privilege that has prevented me from ever knowing. All I have done here, is listen and observe, and I am using my voice to tell what I have heard, what I have seen. My voice is small, but I want to use it to tell. This is the very least I can do: share as many of their voices as possible, and acknowledge their power and impact.

CHAPTER 1

The state-sponsored terror that plagued Argentina under the military dictatorship that reigned there from 1976 to 1983 is a chapter in history that has yet to fully be told. Argentina is a country still struggling to contend with its shameful past, and to close wounds that many would rather ignore than heal. In December 2010, I had the opportunity to travel to Buenos Aires and study the history of the dictatorship and the *desaparecidos* first-hand. I knew that walking the streets of Buenos Aires, seeing the detention sites, and being able to talk to survivors would be invaluable for my research, but I did not anticipate the true impact of the experience: my visit ensured that I could never again limit my understanding of Argentina to an academic, intellectualized exercise. After meeting and talking to Nora Strejilevich, a survivor, and walking the ruins of *Club Atlético* with her—the ruins of the detention center where she was held and tortured in 1977—I could never again read the word *desaparecido* without knowing that each and every *disappeared* was a real human being. Standing in the *capucha* (attic) of the ESMA building where over 5,000 *desaparecidos* were held and tortured, I could never again write “it is estimated that over 30,000 lives were lost during the dictatorship” without understanding that 30,000 people, individual human beings, were subjected to unimaginable torture, and savagely killed. The experience irrevocably changed my work, I think for the better, in refusing to allow me to ever again reduce lives to bare statistics. The *desaparecidos* have not disappeared. Their voices remain.

Speaking the Unspeakable: Finding Voice to Articulate Torture

“The problem is that torture is, quite literally, *unimaginable* to those of us who have never undergone it” (Shulz 2). With this statement, William Shulz, in his introduction to *The Phenomenon of Torture*, succinctly explains the reason he chose to edit a collection of readings and essays on torture. Shulz served as Executive Director of Amnesty International USA from 1996 to 2004, and throughout his life’s work has encountered innumerable accounts of torture from all over the world. He is all too familiar with the vast range and scope of torture practiced throughout history. As he wryly states, “If you ever doubt the human capacity for ingenuity, you have but to consider the many other ways the human mind has fancied to torment the body and crush the spirit” (1). Shulz believes that by exposing as many people as possible to the stories of torture, the understanding that it is “*unacceptable*” (3) will move people to fight vigorously against ever condoning, either overtly or tacitly, the practices of torture. It is this hope, that the tragedies of the past can be used to prevent tragedies of the future, that is most often cited when accounts of torture are produced and collected—despite the overwhelming, inescapable truth that we humans never seem to learn from our own atrocities. Nonetheless, the desire to bear witness to atrocity, to name it and describe it, is powerful for both societies and individuals who have survived torture.

Testimony can be an important part of healing for survivors, and offer an important aspect of understanding for those who hear the stories. The need to tell the story can be a powerful one, despite the inherently “untellable” nature of atrocity. Torture simply cannot be put into words that convey its experience. It is only in the gaps, the

silences, the understandings that occur in the spaces between words, that torture can be comprehended by a reader. Writers, in relating their stories of torture, must find a voice for the utterly unspeakable. As Maurice Blanchot describes in his *The Writing of the Disaster*, “It is upon losing what we have to say that we speak—upon an imminent and immemorial disaster....We speak suggesting that something not being said is speaking: the loss of what we were to say” (21). Readers, in absorbing stories of torture, understand that they cannot possibly understand. It is this relationship between writers and readers, this contract of understanding that what is being described is, in its very essence, indescribable, that the stories are able to be told and heard. Virtually all testimony of torture avoids emotional description. When a person describes being tortured, there is an inevitable quality of detachment in their words. This detachment can be partially explained by the way in which reliving the experience through the telling triggers a defense mechanism of dissociation, but it is also a consequence of the impossible enormity of the task. Because pain is always an internal, personal experience, conveying it beyond the body to another is extraordinarily difficult. In an interview conducted by a group of scholars from the University of Denver, including the author of this paper, in Buenos Aires in December of 2010, activist, writer, and torture survivor Nora Strejilevich explains the problem of describing torture in writing:

It is very hard, not only because of shyness. You don't want to banalize it. There is no way to describe it because there is no memory of pain. When it happens, you are not trying to find the words, and when you are trying to find the words, it is not happening. You don't want to be too blatant because it seems exhibitionist. (Interview)

Strejilevich's book, *A Single, Numberless Death*, is a testimony of her experience in a clandestine detention center in Buenos Aires during the military dictatorship that reigned in Argentina from 1976 to 1983. In it, she uses a collection of poems, memories, legal testimonies, news accounts, personal descriptions, and various other sources to weave together a powerful and poignant account of what she and her family endured when she, her brother and two cousins were *disappeared* by the government. She survived, but her cousins and brother remain disappeared. Strejilevich's book describes torture, but only through poetry and indirect reference. However, despite avoiding direct description, the experience is vividly conveyed through the layers and textures of the various texts she employs. *A Single, Numberless Death* is an excellent example of the contract between reader and writer to agree that understanding of torture can only happen in the spaces between words, and further, the fact that the detached quality of the writing does not prevent the reader from feeling the deep emotional content of the text.

Unfortunately, the horrific practices of the military dictatorship in Argentina offer an all too complete opportunity to study the representation of torture. Although the junta officially took power in 1976, the abuse of the human rights of the Argentine people by the military began before the regime was installed, and the systematic torture and disappearance of those suspected as leftist subversives began in the early seventies. It is estimated that over 30,000 people were *disappeared*, and the methods of torture employed against those imprisoned cover a wide variety of physical and psychological torment. The subsequent testimonies of survivors and investigations into the military's practices during this time have yielded a large and varied collection of accounts of

torture, from formal, legal depositions, to literary works, to personal memoirs. There are numerous testimonies included in *Nunca Más*, the official report published by the Argentine National Commission of the Disappeared (CONADEP) in 1984, and virtually all of the testimonies recorded involved torture:

They were tortured, almost without exception, methodically, sadistically, sexually, with electric shocks and near-drownings and constant beatings, in the most humiliating possible way, not to discover information—very few had any information to give—but just to break them spiritually as well as physically, and to give pleasure to their torturers. (2)

In 1981 Jacobo Timerman, publisher and editor of the influential newspaper *La Opinión* at the time of his abduction, published *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, which details his experiences of imprisonment and torture for over thirty months at the hands of the Argentine government. Timerman's book, as well as Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival*, originally published in 1986, are the most well-known personal testimonies from this period of Argentine history, although both are controversial texts in Argentina, and they present two very different methods of storytelling. Nora Strejilevich's innovative presentation in *A Single, Numberless Death*, by putting together a collage of varying voices, with alternating tones of fact, observation and poetic rendering, offers yet another way to approach the telling of torture. Finally, *That Inferno: Conversations of Five Women Survivors of an Argentine Torture Camp*, is a transcript of several conversations between women who all survived being in the ESMA, the Navy Mechanics School in Buenos Aires where over 5,000 prisoners were held and tortured over a ten year period (*Nunca Más* 132). The conversations are transcribed in dialogue form, allowing the voices of the speakers to reach the reader in a

way that feels quite natural and untouched. *That Inferno* is particularly chilling in its revelation of the insidious psychological torture that the navy officers at ESMA relished inflicting upon the prisoners.

Through examining this varied selection of accounts of torture in Argentina, it becomes clear that despite the fact that torture is impossible to describe, writers have found ways to do it, counting on the listener/reader's willingness to understand the detachment and find meaning in the spaces over and around and between the words. In all of the testimonies, voices rise from the silence, not only to insist, "Never Again" (*Nunca Más*), but also to heal as individuals, and start on the long road toward healing a nation that to this day cannot resolve its ambivalence regarding the events of the past. By sharing their stories, all of those who have offered testimony are continuing the work that they started before they were abducted, and fighting for testimony and truth to triumph over lies and silence.

Torture

Any look at the representation of torture must first consider the nature of the torture itself. The facts regarding what exactly various forms of torture entail are a necessary, if disturbing, point of entry into a discussion of how that torture is then depicted in writing. In her challenging but brilliant book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry posits that torture destroys or "unmakes" the world of the victim, and that it is only by reasserting the self through acts of creation that the world is "made" again. As Scarry defines it, "Torture aspires to the totality of pain" (55). Throughout her book, Scarry acknowledges the limits pain pushes and exceeds, and

the ways in which those limits “unmake” language—and yet demand a voice. The tension grows between pain’s inability to be expressed in language, and its absolute insistence on being expressed. Indeed, on the very first page of her introduction, Scarry states, “Physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story” (3). However, as she goes on to explain, the very nature of physical pain renders it unspeakable, and robs it of coherent words: “Physical pain does not merely resist language, it actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4). The irony of this truth that torture destroys language is the fact that torture is so often specifically and pointedly defended by its practitioners as a way to gain words. Torturers attempt to justify what they do by insisting it is the only way to obtain otherwise unattainable information—despite the fact that the information gained by torture is notoriously unreliable. As Juan E. Méndez states in the foreword to *The Phenomenon of Torture*, “Every serious law enforcement specialist agrees that torture elicits highly doubtful information, if any at all” (xiv). What torture accomplishes is not information, it is terror. Torture terrorizes its immediate victims, the other prisoners who are aware it is happening, and then spreads to those who fear being captured. In this capacity, it is incontrovertibly effective, and the events in Argentina reveal the military government’s systematic use of all aspects of torture to terrorize the “subversives” it set out to destroy.

Following a long period of political instability that culminated in crushing economic decline and social chaos, a military Junta comprised of the leaders of the three branches of the Argentine Armed Forces took control of the country on March 24, 1976.

When Admiral Emilio A. Massera of the Navy, President General Rafael Videla of the Army, and Brigadier General Orlando R. Agosti of the Air Force first assumed power, their ascension was hailed by the vast majority of the Argentine population as a great boon for the country. Writer Jorge Luis Borges coined the term “The Gentlemen’s Coup” when he said, “Now we are governed by gentlemen,” in reference to their taking over (Feitlowitz 6). As Marguerite Feitlowitz explains in her highly informative book on the regime, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture*,

The generals arrived with a plan, called the Process for National Reorganization, whose language lent grandeur to an otherwise desperate moment. This was a fight not just for Argentina but, the generals stressed, for “Western, Christian civilization.” By meeting its “sacred responsibility” to forever rid the earth of “subversion,” Argentina “would join the concert of nations.” Argentina was the theater for “World War III,” which had to be fought against those whose activities—and thoughts—were deemed “subversive.” Intellectual, writer, journalist, trade unionist, psychologist, social worker became “categories of guilt.” (7)

In other words, when the extreme right-wing military junta took over the country in 1976, their power base was founded in the anti-leftist paranoia that festered throughout the Americas, which the United States not only ideologically supported, but also materially funded. The U.S. Army School of the Americas in Panama specialized in counterinsurgency techniques and the instructors were eager to spread their teachings to the nascent military governments emerging throughout Central and South America during the 60s, 70s and 80s. In fact,

In September 1996, the Pentagon itself finally admitted that its students were taught torture, murder, sabotage, bribery, blackmail, and extortion for the achievement of political aims; that hypnosis and truth serum were recommended for use in interrogations; and that the parents of captives be arrested as an inducement for the prisoners to talk. (Feitlowitz 9)

Argentina's leaders learned their lessons well. Their commitment to freeing the country of its subversive elements was carried out in a ruthlessly savage system of terror and torture that left a wound in the country, and its people, that festers to this day.

The forms of torture employed in Argentina covered all of the bases. When people started disappearing as early as 1973 and 1974, leftist organizations, most notably the Young Peronists and the Montoneros, understood that they were in danger, and began to take precautions to remain safe. These precautions themselves led to a constant, persistent state of anxiety that was, in and of itself, a torturous existence. To “go underground” meant walking away from family, friends, jobs, and the political work that they had been so committed to—work which often involved social services for the poor. Feeling that everyone you touch is endangered by your presence, trusting no one, knowing that asking someone for a safe place to sleep could make them targets—all of these things lead to a life fraught with danger and excruciating anxiety. *Compañeros* among the Montoneros, terrified of being “sucked up” like so many of their disappearing friends, began to carry cyanide pills on their persons at all times, with the intention of committing suicide if they ever “fell” into the hands of captors, so as not to reveal any information about the organization. All five of the women speaking in *That Inferno* had pills with them when they “fell”, and remain conflicted to this day that they were unable to use them for various reasons (39-43). Miriam Lewin, who was held for nearly a year in solitary confinement in a room by the Air Force before being held at the ESMA for another year, described what life was like before she “fell”:

I remember that my *compañero*, who had been underground since June 1976, gradually lost his rear guard, places where he could stay. People would tell him, “Look, if I were single, I’d lend you the apartment, but now I’m married, and I have a baby, and I’m scared to.” Or you’d ask relatives whether they could wash your clothes, and they would get furious, or you’d lose contact with even your parents, because they still had teenagers at home and they were afraid they’d be *sucked up*. You had the feeling that they’d take anyone, not only militants: they’d take people who were committed, those who weren’t so committed, friends, relatives. And the stories of repression that were going around were so savage that the people who loved you, who otherwise would have opened the door to you, closed it instead. You ended up completely alone. (34)

Miriam was not wrong—not being militant was no guarantee of safety, but being militant was a clear and present danger. The terror that young activists, and their friends and families, felt all over Argentina was merely the first form of torture inflicted by the government. Once they were actually “sucked up”, the psychological torture of fear never lessened, and was now accompanied by physical torture beyond what they could possibly have imagined when they feared being taken.

Actual physical torture in the detention centers took many forms, but there were some that were favored and ubiquitous in all of the secret prisons. The torturers of Argentina were particularly fond of using electric shock to torment the *desaparecidos* in their care. Electric prods were used all over the body, with particular attention to the nipples, genitals, teeth and feet of the victims. In a grotesque allusion to the popular children’s drink in Argentina in which a bar of chocolate is submerged in warm milk, the *submarino* form of torture involved dunking a captive’s head repeatedly in liquid, bringing them to the brink of drowning over and over again until they lost consciousness. The liquid could be anything ranging from a sink full of water, to buckets or toilets filled with feces, vomit and urine. Specific methods of beating the soles of the feet and

removing skin and flesh from them, were also employed. Relentless beatings, usually with batons, or other blunt instruments, were conducted in all of the clandestine centers (*Nunca Más*).

In addition to the unfathomable overt physical torture, the very conditions of confinement also brought harm to the prisoners' bodies. A vast majority of the prisoners were kept blindfolded at all times, often acquiring, in addition to an excruciating sensitivity to light, conjunctivitis and disfiguring eye infections. According to Metin Başoğlu and Susan Mineka in the section "Uncontrollable and Unpredictable Stress in Torture" from Başoğlu's *Torture and Its Consequences*:

Blindfolding is highly aversive even when not combined with other forms of torture. Loss of visual monitoring of the environment distinctly intensifies feelings of helplessness and introduces a significant element of unpredictability regarding imminent aversive events. When blindfolding is combined with other forms of torture, it appears to potentiate their effects. (203)

Being forced to lie, sit, stand, or crouch for hours on end led to agonizing muscular pain and degeneration. Inadequate rations of contaminated food, as well as extensive overcrowding and limited or no access to toilets, showers, or clean water led to rampant malnutrition and disease (*Nunca Más*).

However, in achieving torture's goal of "totality of pain", as Scarry describes it, the clandestine detention centers of Argentina did not stop at the physical. The psychological torture used by the government on the secretly imprisoned citizens of its own country ranged from the simplest methods of producing fear and disorientation, to astoundingly elaborate and bizarre ways of breaking spirit.

Mock executions and “Russian roulette” games were commonplace. Audio equipment was utilized to play not only personally insulting material, such as Hitler’s speeches for Jewish prisoners, but also recordings of loved ones being tortured. Often, without recordings, prisoners could hear their siblings, friends, spouses, fellow prisoners, being tortured nearby. One of the most pervasive and insistent methods used against the prisoners was at the very center of the concept of *disappearing* itself. By disappearing their victims, and releasing no information, the captors negated their existence. In *Lexicon of Terror*, Feitlowitz quotes Javier Alvarez, recalling, “The first thing they told me was to forget who I was, that as of that moment I would be known only as a number, and that for me the outside world stopped there” (51). Ana María Careaga, who was 16, recently married, and pregnant at the time of her disappearance, told Feitlowitz, “They were always saying, ‘We have all the time in the world,’ ‘You don’t exist. You’re no one. If someone came looking for you (and nobody has) do you think they’d ever find you *here?*’ ‘No one remembers you anymore’” (51). Adding to this sense of being disappeared was the fact that so many of the detention centers were located in populated areas—prisoners could hear traffic, and people, all day and night, and yet no one seemed aware that on the other side of the wall they were being held and tortured.

In the ESMA in particular, psychological torture reached an unprecedented level with the introduction of the *recuperación*, which was a “program” designed to strip prisoners of their militant leanings and make “proper” citizens of them. This process created a staff and mini-staff of prisoner-workers at ESMA with elevated privileges, such as hours without blindfolds, better food, and clean bathrooms, as long as they did work

for the Navy such as preparing false press releases and creating pamphlets and flyers with which to falsely accuse militants. Even more bizarre, some ESMA prisoners were allowed phone calls to convince their parents they weren't being held. Captors took prisoners out to dinner in Buenos Aires, and encouraged the female prisoners to dress up and wear make-up. Some were even taken on "family visits" for a night or weekend, knowing the whole time that they couldn't reveal anything to their loved ones, and that they would be returned to the ESMA in a matter of hours. These methods seem unusually cruel, even for torturers, as they so completely distorted any sense of self or reality that the prisoners might have retained, while asserting their utter and complete control over them. Prisoner Mario Villani, who has the dubious distinction, according to *Nunca Más*, of having been held in the most prisons of any surviving *desaparecido*, explained to Feitlowitz that while he was on a "visit" from ESMA,

There was no point in even thinking about trying to escape. They let me know they'd done impeccable research on all the members of my family—the buses my nieces and nephews took to school, the bus my brother-in-law rode to work. No, there was no way. They'd have killed everyone.
(84)

The hold ESMA had on its prisoners was absolute.

A final, perhaps most effective, aspect of torture for Argentina's *desaparecidos* was the torture of blame and guilt that their own minds inflicted on them, of course, always utilized and encouraged by their captors. The people who were politically active, and committed to militant organizations, felt guilty that they had put their families and friends in danger by being involved in the struggle for what they believed. The leftist organizations of Argentina were predominantly concerned with labor and social equality,

and fought tirelessly for workers' rights and the poor. Some organizations were more actively militant against the right-wing, but far and away, the Peronist Youth and Montoneros movements sought social change through non-violent work in education and awareness. Despite this, the ensuing disappearances made many militants feel responsible for the disappearances of their family and friends. Those that revealed information under torture felt guilty for betraying their *compañeros*. Those that did not reveal information under torture felt guilty when the torturers told them they would torture someone else unless they spoke. They felt guilty for not trusting one another, and they felt guilty when they trusted someone who turned out to be on the "other" side. Above all, the survivors felt guilty for surviving, when so many others died. To this day, they wrack their memories for clues as to why they are alive when so many are not, and they wonder if they did something "wrong" that allowed them to live (*That Inferno* 147-51).

These facts about all of the types of torture used in Argentina read like a laundry list, and indeed, echo the detachment of so many of the accounts of torture given, whether in official testimonies, or memoir accounts. While the language-defeating, unfathomable aspects of torture are present in every description, the need to tell the story has led many survivors to find ways to speak the unspeakable, and let their voices tell their stories, even when they must tell of torture. Examining the differing methods in several accounts of torture in Argentina reveals the unmistakable complicity of both the writer and the reader in understanding what is truly being conveyed, even when it is beyond words.

The Need to Tell

Adorno's famous assertion that to make art from the suffering of Auschwitz is barbaric has been addressed time and time again over the last fifty years, not only by virtually every critic writing in the field of literary trauma theory, but by the many writings, paintings, films and various other art forms that seem to resoundingly prove him wrong. And yet, understanding that it is intrinsically barbaric to discover art in something so horrific is a concept that resonates with us, and therefore Adorno is often a valuable starting point for discussions of representations of horror. To add yet another layer to the discussion, Edmond Jabès, a Jewish poet writing after World War II, responded to Adorno's idea that poetry cannot be written after Auschwitz by insisting, "Yes, one can. And furthermore, one has to" (Waldrop 9). These perceptions of the relationship between torture and its rendering ring true because torture, regardless of the scope and scale of it, is always intensely personal for the victim, and each individual is compelled to process it in a way that his or her unique experience demands. For some, the inchoate horror of what they have endured refuses to be transformed into art, and must remain locked in silence, or meted out in only the barest of facts. For others, the poetic response is all that is possible. But regardless of how each individual responds to trauma, what every single sufferer shares is this: whether through silence or creation, all trauma will express itself. Pain will make its presence known through overt expression, or willful repression, through shattering screams or thundering silence, through the creation of art, or the destruction of self. Pain always reveals itself in one way or another.

The occurrence of trauma inevitably creates a tension in the victim between silence and the need to tell. To silence the pain is to suppress it, to control it, to deny it. In protecting the self, the instinct for silence is a powerful means for containing the pain. However, pain silenced is not pain dissolved. In his chapter “An Event Without Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival” from his and Shoshana Felman’s groundbreaking book in Holocaust literary trauma theory entitled *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Dori Laub explains,

...the imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust is inhabited by the impossibility of telling and, therefore, silence about the truth commonly prevails....[but] None find peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent....The “not telling” of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor’s daily life. (79)

The forces that motivate people to tell their stories are myriad, and compelling. On the most personal level, the desire to release the burden of knowledge, to purge the self of the horror, can be overwhelming. Despite the agony of the events themselves, some survivors feel that they must tell, and that process of telling can be a significant and necessary part of healing. When speaking about how she came to write *A Single, Numberless Death*, Nora Strejilevich admitted, “I had something inside that I had to get rid of. Like anguish” (Interview). In the introduction to her influential book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth characterizes trauma as haunting the victim: “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event” (4-5). Laub also views the trauma as a type of “haunting”, and strongly believes that telling is the way to exorcise those ghosts, and enable the self to move past the events that created them:

The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life. (78)

Telling the story can release the hold the event has on the victim and allow the individual to process the experience outside of the self, and in doing so, gain the assistance of others in attaining perspective and, ultimately, closure. On a community level, survivors often feel that they owe it to those who did not survive to tell the story. They feel it is their duty to bear witness to what happened, and therefore validate the victims' sacrifice. They may also feel that they alone can bring the horrors to light. Shoshana Felman, in her collaboration with Dori Laub in *Testimony*, cites Paul Celan's verse, "No one bears witness for the witness," as a defining aspect of testimony, and elaborates, "To bear witness is to bear the solitude of a responsibility, and to bear the responsibility, precisely, of that solitude" (3). On an even broader, socio-political scale, survivors often feel the need to tell as a defense against future atrocities: if they tell the story and can make others understand what happened, then surely the listeners will work to make sure it doesn't happen again.

While all of these reasons have an innate logic, there is no guarantee that either the silence or the telling will accomplish the desired result. Transformation and redemption are promises that cannot always be kept. The silent anguish of so many victims belies the idea that their silence has protected them. As Ron Baker points out in his chapter entitled "Consequences for Tortured Refugees" in Metin Başoğlu's text on the treatment of torture victims *Torture and Its Consequences*, because of the enormity of the

task and the impossibility of collecting accurate data, there is really no way of knowing statistically how many survivors are able to process their trauma effectively. In other words, there is no way of knowing how many survivors can ultimately be considered 'successful survivors' (Baker 84). In all-too-disturbing examples, both Paul Celan and Primo Levi, Holocaust survivors, told their stories, creating extraordinary art, yet both ultimately took their own lives. They were somehow never able to release enough of their own pain. Survivors can relate the circumstances of the trauma, but those that succumbed are still dead. And most hopelessly discouraging of all, no record of the atrocities that humans have inflicted on one another, regardless of how poignant and powerful, has eliminated future acts of terror and destruction. Nonetheless, despite these ugly truths, there are no absolutes. Silence can keep demons at bay, sometimes long enough to find a way to exorcise them. The act of telling can indeed offer catharsis and healing, victims are mourned and their sacrifices acknowledged, and every day people fight against the evil that men do. In each individual survivor, the internal tension between silence and telling will eventually give way and determine the shape and expression of the pain. Whether it is manifested through the terrible weight of silence, or told plainly and factually, or presented through the clarifying lens of art, the pain of trauma will show itself. Transformation and redemption cannot be promised, but they can and will always be sought.

In the construction of texts, writers bear poetic witness to trauma and strive to capture it in order to convey it to others. They seek words for that which cannot be spoken, they manipulate syntax and form to evoke the sense of the tragedy, and

ultimately they attempt to distill the traumatic experience and transform it from an act of destruction into one of creation. Ironically, although the very creation of a text refutes the act of silence, in conveying the totality of trauma, particularly in the language-robbing truth of torture, writers must find ways to allow silence to exist within their words. The void that silence leaves is a presence of absence, and must be given attention. In *The Writing of the Disaster*, Blanchot writes that, "surely we feel that [silence] is linked to the cry, the voiceless cry, which breaks with all utterances, which is addressed to no one and which no one receives, the cry that lapses and decries" (51). In many ways, silence is the beginning of expression--it is an invitation, a space left open to be filled by the story. In the Preface to their book *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation*, Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer argue that:

...the disaster of the Shoah—in which the victim and the survivor find it impossible to know, or put words to, the experience in which they find themselves—is located at the junction of the compulsion to speak and failure of speech, where the witness manages to redeem the moment (to finally see what lies beyond or behind what can be told by history), to “fall victim” to it, and leave a trace of it in language. The witness, confronted with the sublime object, is rendered both speechless and is compelled nonetheless to speak. (xi)

In the various accounts of torture by Argentine survivors, the nothingness of silence and the mystery it creates are inextricably bound within the words they use to tell their stories of torture and trauma. The need to tell compels them to use several distinctive methods to give voice to silence, to speak the unspeakable, and find ways to use words to convey things which are beyond words. In doing so, they ask the reader/listener to fill the gaps created by silence with understanding of that which cannot be said.

Representations of Torture

Nunca Más

In the analysis of depictions of torture by Argentine survivors, *Nunca Más* is the essential starting point. Its significance as a documentation of the atrocities that occurred during the dictatorship cannot be overstated. When the military junta finally stepped down in 1983, it was in a state of utter defeat. As Feilowitz describes it: “The regime was eventually brought down, but not because of its record on human rights. Rather, it crumpled under the weight of its own corruption, economic mismanagement, and military incompetence” (12). It is ironic that the military leadership caused its own demise by failing so spectacularly in a military endeavor, having severely underestimated the British willingness to fight for the tiny Falkland Islands (known as Las Malvinas in Argentina). The humiliating defeat in the Falklands led the junta to step down, but in one final stunning display of arrogance, they issued a Final Report, “proclaiming victory in its Dirty War against subversion, pardoning itself for any possible ‘excesses,’ and registering ‘genuine Christian pain over any errors that might have been committed in the fulfillment of its assigned mission’” (Feitlowitz 12-3).

But the country had finally had enough.

When Dr. Raúl Agosín was elected in December of 1983, he pledged to “fully investigate and legally address the abuses of the prior regime” (13). One of the first things he did as president was to ask prominent writer and human rights activist Ernesto Sábato to lead the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP) in

collecting testimony “from victims of abduction and torture, from the families and friends of *desaparecidos*, and from other witnesses willing to come forward” (13). The members of CONADEP soon realized that the massive task before them would require much more than the six months originally allotted for the project, and it was extended to a year. In 1984 *Nunca Más* was published, and the dirty secrets of the so-called “Dirty War” were laid bare for all the world to see.

While the struggle to bring the perpetrators to justice has been fraught with setbacks and difficulties, and continues to this day, the collection of testimony from the survivors provided incontrovertible proof of the atrocities, as it corroborated facts across multiple witnesses and circumstances, and told incredibly consistent accounts. As a gathering of evidence, *Nunca Más* was successful in providing a basis of proof of the existence of many detention centers, and facts gleaned from testimony were able to definitively identify clandestine structures, even when the military and police forces went to great lengths to alter and conceal their whereabouts. The ongoing archaeological excavation of Club Atlético and the continuing legal ramifications of the evidence discovered at ESMA are directly related to the information initially uncovered by CONADEP. Human rights activists like the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, and the The Programme for the Recovery of Memory for the Clandestine Detention, Torture, and Execution Centre “Club Atlético”, and the Spaces for Memory Institute project at ESMA, are still very much engaged in bringing the evidence to light and the perpetrators to justice, despite the ambivalence of so much of the population and the legal roadblocks that have made justice difficult. Despite the overwhelming evidence and undeniable

guilt brought forth by *Nunca Más*, the nation's leaders and legal system have time and time again thwarted efforts for true justice. In an effort to move on and not to dwell in the past, two significant laws were passed that grossly hindered effective prosecutions. The Due Obedience law passed in February of 1984, in flagrant opposition to the guidelines and precedents established by the Nuremberg trials which prosecuted Nazi war criminals, ruled that officers who were following the orders of superiors could not be held accountable for simply doing their jobs. To make matters worse, the Punto Final law set February 23, 1987 as the cut-off date for all trials related to the dictatorship (Feitlowitz 14). Both laws were enacted with the intention of moving past the past, but the result was that many, many repressors evaded prosecution, and, to this day, attempts to bring torturers to justice through complex legal maneuverings continue. But regardless of the ongoing battles not yet won, the very creation of *Nunca Más* was still a victory for justice, in and of itself. *Nunca Más* heralded a new era in Argentina for the open acknowledgement of the *desaparecidos* and the atrocities they suffered. In its pages are numerous testimonies, telling plainly and clearly what went on in the clandestine centers, and describing the horrendous litany of tortures endured.

One of the most important aspects of the torture testimonies in *Nunca Más* is not found in the stories themselves, but in the significance for many survivors of the act of telling them. Several of the women in *That Inferno* spoke of the powerful effect that testifying had on their personal healing. Liliana Gardella said, "I felt relieved only after I finally was able to testify and tell everything I knew. It was only then that I freed myself, when I started to feel that I had finally committed." Elisa Tokar said, "I think

some people found that testifying in CONADEP was a relief: a before and an after.” Miriam Lewin agreed, “I felt calmer after I testified to CONADEP in New York” (267). In asking for their stories, CONADEP was “undisappearing” the survivors, bringing them back into the light, and saying that the country cared about learning the truth. This reconnection to identity as a recognized self, and the reemergence of a voice from silence, was as important as the contents of the testimonies themselves.

The nature of *Nunca Más* as a legal document meant that the testimonies were gathered in a manner that emphasized the listing of facts and details. Consequently, the tone of the testimonies, in relating torture, cannot appropriately be considered a choice on the part of the speakers. Nonetheless, in the countless testimonies in *Nunca Más* which depict acts of torture, the observation of two distinct, significant aspects of the representation of torture can be observed: first, the descriptions invariably come across as detached and dryly factual; and secondly, and most importantly, despite this inherent detachment, the emotional content of the horrific acts being described remains very vivid and present for the reader.

The writers of *Nunca Más* admit in the section about torture, “we wondered about the best way to deal with the theme so that this chapter did not turn into merely an encyclopedia of horror” (20). Acknowledging that the horror was unavoidable, they chose to offer one testimony in its entirety, as particularly representative of a vast majority of the testimony they reviewed. Throughout the report, there are many, many other depictions of all forms of torture, from the physical, to the psychological, but the testimony of Dr. Norberto Liwsky is the one chosen as most emblematic. In it, he

describes the terror of his abduction, and then goes on to describe the specific tortures he was subjected to. He wrote:

For days they applied electric shocks to my gums, nipples, genitals, abdomen and ears. Unintentionally, I managed to annoy them, because, I don't know why, although the shocks made me scream, jerk and shudder, they could not make me pass out.

They then began to beat me systematically and rhythmically with wooden sticks on my back, the backs of my thighs, my calves and the soles of my feet. At first the pain was dreadful. Then it became unbearable. Eventually I lost all feeling in the part of my body being beaten. The agonizing pain returned a short while after they finished hitting me. It was made still worse when they tore off my shirt, which had stuck to the wounds, in order to take me off for a fresh electric shock session. This continued for several days, alternating the two tortures. Sometimes they did both at the same time.

Such a combination of tortures can be fatal because, whereas electric shock produces muscular contractions, beating causes the muscle to relax (as a form of protection). Sometimes this can bring on heart failure....

One day they put me face-down on the torture table, tied me up (as always), and calmly began to strip the skin from the soles of my feet. I imagine, though I didn't see it because I was blindfolded, that they were doing it with a razor or a scalpel. I could feel them pulling as if they were trying to separate the skin at the edge of the wound with a pair of pincers. I passed out. From then on, strangely enough, I was able to faint very easily. As for example on the occasion when, showing me more bloodstained rags, they said these were my daughters' knickers, and asked me if I wanted them to be tortured with me or separately. (22-3)

These excerpts from Dr. Liwsky's account are remarkable in several ways. The first is the clinical detachment that persists, despite the occasional use of adjectives. He uses words like "dreadful," "unbearable," and "agonizing", yet the account is still very meticulous and factual, and is given as plainly as an explanation of how to fix a bicycle. It covers not only excruciating physical torture in the precise details regarding the removal of skin

from his feet, but also psychological torture, noting the threat of his daughters' safety and the implication that they have been sexually violated. It is a remarkable account because of the incredible attention to specific facts—and the fact that there is no possible way for the reader not to understand that he or she cannot possibly understand. Despite the use of adjectives and the precision of the description, the reader is fully aware that these words are still wholly inadequate to convey even the smallest amount of the pain and suffering he endured—yet in that understanding of the impossibility of understanding, the reader of *Nunca Más* is able to get a sense of the enormity of Dr. Liwsky's terror, and therefore, the emotional content of the description is powerfully transmitted through the tremendous onus of that which cannot be described, even through description. The reader's experience of understanding what is beyond the words is not limited to Dr. Liwsky's testimony, but is enacted again and again throughout the reading of *Nunca Más*. CONADEP's report is not the most literary or emotional book to describe torture in Argentina during the dictatorship, but its significance cannot be overstated, and the way it functions in conveying the horror of torture to the reader, despite its plain language, proves that the contract between speaker and listener, writer and reader, works effectively.

The Little School

Alicia Partnoy's book, *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival*, was published in 1986, and utilizes 20 "tales" to recount her experiences as a detained-disappeared captive held in La Escuelita, Bahía Blanca. Partnoy had testified for CONADEP, and in 1984, along with three other witnesses, led the committee to inspect

the site where the Little School had stood. Despite its having been demolished, the details of their testimony enabled CONADEP to verify the site (*Nunca Más* 208). While it was important to Partnoy to give specific details and as much evidence as possible to help in determining the facts related to *desaparecidos* and captors, as well as the structure and location of the building, when she wrote her book, she chose a creative narrative form to convey her experience. Appended to the end of the book are legal facts and diagrams and details regarding the detained and the oppressors, but the stories themselves are crafted in a literary presentation.

Partnoy's text is one of the most internationally well-known and oft-cited depictions of being captive under the dictatorship, and its continuous popularity since its initial publication in 1986 is testament to its effectiveness—despite the fact that it remains difficult to find in Argentina. Because it tells the story of being held in Argentina, it necessarily describes torture. It is not clinical or factual like her testimony in *Nunca Más*, but neither does it render the torture in lurid description. Like so many writers relating their experience of torture, she found ways to speak through the gaps. Diana Taylor, in her book *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"*, says that Partnoy's writings “work around violence and reenact a survival strategy that she learned in the concentration camp: to distance herself from the biological facticity of the torture and death taking place around her and to cling to an overriding need for human connectedness and wholeness” (158). This is evident throughout *The Little School*, as the direct description of physical torture isn't given, but the solidarity of the prisoners provides a cohesive theme for the stories, regardless of

what is happening in each one. However, in her book *Displaced Memories: The Poetics of Trauma in Argentine Women's Writing*, M. Edurne Portela takes umbrage with

Taylor's insistence that Partnoy avoids torture, and makes an excellent point:

...torture is not only the infliction of electroshocks on the body, beatings, and/or sexual abuse; it comprises every single second lived at the concentration camp. Torture is being blindfolded every day and night, torture is not being able to go to the bathroom whenever needed, torture is receiving blows because one drops the soup, torture is being handcuffed most of the day, torture is hearing the screams of other prisoners, torture is knowing that one can die any day. In summary, Partnoy's work is actually plagued by references to torture even though she does not provide an "accurate" account of what happened to her. (68)

Portela is absolutely correct. While Partnoy never explicitly describes personal physical torture, *The Little School* is, nonetheless, a continuous—and powerful—description of torture being endured.

Anne Cubilié is also interested in Partnoy's relationship to torture in her writing. In her chapter "State Terror and the Ethical Witness" from *Women Witnessing Terror*, Cubilié defines a specific genre of writing about trauma as "testimony of atrocity." She states that, "atrocity testimonial witnesses to the specific experience of overwhelming violence, such as torture, death camps, mass death, and so on, survived by the speaker/writer without a wider emphasis on the life experiences of the witness beyond the boundaries of the atrocity experience itself" (145-6). Cubilié is distinguishing this from *testimonio*, which she considers testimony that includes the larger implications of society, culture and experience that led to the atrocity. While she acknowledges Partnoy's position as part of a larger community, and the gestures that Partnoy makes toward solidarity with that community, she suggests that the intimate personal nature of the text

embodies the ethos of testimony of atrocity. She writes that authors of atrocity testimony, “embrace fragmentation, confusion, gaps, complicity, and powerlessness simultaneously with their performance of resistance, memory, voice, and identity as survivors” (149). In this context, *The Little School* offers an excellent example, precisely because of its difficulty in directly portraying torture. Cubilié explains:

The very fragmentation of Partnoy’s text, the multitude of gaps between styles of text and forms of testimonial, that babble of voices and absences, textually embody this crisis of not knowing how to write about torture. And this very “not knowing” is itself an acknowledgement of the atrocity, of the radical disenfranchisement from language that torture performs. Partnoy’s fragmented text embodies the radical break with language, knowing, and certainty that torture enacts. (152)

It is certainly true that *The Little School* utilizes the feeling engendered by fractured and unstable images and words to convey the instability that was, in and of itself, an aspect of the torture she endured. It is also true, as Portela asserts, that the book is about torture from beginning to end, whether or not it portrays the physical torture of the speaker in an explicitly descriptive form. A passage at the end of the tale “My Names” embodies all of these observations about the text, as well as its ultimate message of survival:

The day we took our third shower—I had already been here for almost two months—a guard was bringing me back from the bathroom; my long hair was wet under the white blindfold, my dress still torn from the leap over the backyard wall, my hands tied, my bones sticking out of my cheeks and elbows...I suddenly heard a guard singing a folk tune:

“Should treacherous Death
harness me to her hitching post
please use two horse whips to make me
a cross for my headboard.
Should treacherous Death...”

Since that moment they have called me Death. Maybe that is why every day, when I wake up, I say to myself that I, Alicia Partnoy, am still alive. (42-3)

The passage shows the use of the fragmentary, the use of spaces and silence, and it also refers to multiple tortures: the blindfold, perhaps a failed escape attempt, malnutrition, being bound, negation of identity. This makes the contrast of the last line all the more triumphant—despite all of this, she is still here, she survives. Partnoy has found a way to speak the unspeakable, and the reader hears the unspoken, loud and clear.

Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number

Jacobo Timerman's text is another extremely well-known account of being held prisoner in Argentina, and his position as the prominent, wealthy, politically-connected editor and publisher of *La Opinión*, a popular Buenos Aires newspaper, at the time of his disappearance, had a significant influence on both the way the book was written, and the way it was received. Compared to other testimonies, Timerman's is notable in several regards. His journalistic background evidence is evident in clear, strong prose, which, while it occasionally offers a metaphoric conceit or vivid description, stays firmly rooted in accuracy and explanation. Timerman's text does not "embrace the fragmentary" like Partnoy's, nor is it as factually driven as the testimonies in *Nunca Más*, but rather it reads as a thesis—a story told as evidence of a particular theoretical stance. In this case, his point is that the ambivalence and measured reasonableness of his political affiliations made his abduction inherently absurd, especially in light of the blatant anti-Semitic bias used against him during his confinement and, specifically, during torture. Timerman's book is highly critically and popularly regarded, owing in part to his notoriety as perhaps

the most famous of the *desaparecidos*, but also because the clarity of the text presents his situation in a way that more linear-minded readers can understand. In the representation of the physical and psychological torture he endured, Timerman maintains a detached and literal tone. However, he goes on to explain that his detachment was a deliberate and conscious survival technique. This explanation allows the reader insight into the detachment, and, once again, lets the reader's comprehension of the ultimate inaccessibility of the experience fill in the missing emotional context. In the rendering of the torture itself, Timerman acknowledges the impossibility of conveying torture, then goes on to fully inhabit his detachment even syntactically, by employing a passive-voiced, third-person explanation, that occasionally veers into second-person, with the odd first-person comment thrown in to remind the reader that yes, he knows he is talking about himself:

Blows are showered upon a man. He's placed on the ground and someone counts to ten, but he's not killed. A man is then led to what may be a canvas bed, or a table, stripped, doused with water, tied to the ends of the bed or table, hands and legs outstretched. And the application of electric shocks begins. The amount of electricity transmitted by the electrodes—or whatever they're called—is regulated so that it merely hurts, or burns, or destroys. It's impossible to shout—you howl....What does a man feel? The only thing that comes to mind is: They're ripping apart my flesh. But they didn't rip apart my flesh. Yes, I know that now. They didn't even leave marks. (33)

The overall effect of this writing technique is strange, but ultimately evocative. Timerman is an excellent writer, and his method somehow manages to offer a description that is simultaneously both vivid and detached. It conveys the torture, and asks the reader's complicity in understanding the unutterable quality of the event, and makes it easy for the reader to do so because of its clarity and detail. Timerman's testimony is less

personal and literary than Partnoy's, but is nonetheless able to speak in a voice that the reader can hear, and bring the experience of torture to the page.

A Single, Numberless Death

Like Strejilevich herself, *A Single, Numberless Death* is a richly textured book that is at turns funny, somber, insightful, terrifying, and it works on multiple levels. In interviews with Nora Strejilevich, the understanding of the very personal and human experience of atrocity is impossible to ignore. She is a vibrant, intelligent woman, who has clearly been scarred—but not defeated—by her experiences as a *desaparecido* held at the Club Atlético clandestine detention center in 1977. Her commitment to the work of remembrance and healing is strongly evident not only in her book, but in her continuing work in the creation of spaces of memory to commemorate the experiences of the *desaparecidos*; work which is predicated on the belief that it is the stories of how people lived and were present that matter far more than those of how they suffered and vanished. She does not shy away from the harsh reality of what she and so many others endured, but she does not allow only suffering to define her. Of her book *A Single, Numberless Death*, Strejilevich says, “I didn't write thinking that it would be a book that people would read. I wrote it because it was healing me. I was feeling released” (Interview). What emerged was a book that combines her own personal narrative with a multiplicity of voices. There are testimonies from many survivors, as well as official quotes and news stories, poems, flashbacks to her childhood, and many different materials, that she has carefully combined to tell a full, rich story of not only her experience in Club Atlético, but the story of her family and her life outside of that experience. Her brother and cousins

disappeared as well, but never returned. Her book considers the totality of all of their experiences, and the various sources and fragments come together to create a whole that is so much more than the sum of its parts. Strejilevich explained, “I tried to put in everything to give it levels and levels and levels of understanding, of feelings, of emotions, of truths” (Interview). *A Single, Numberless Death* conquers the unreachable, incomprehensible, unspeakable quality of torture by letting multiple voices tell it in multiple ways. The disruptive nature of the constantly switching voices, styles, and modes of narrative captures the chaos and mutability of the immediate physical experience, as well as the ongoing psychological journey. As Portela explains it, “The shattering of the body caused by torture is represented through linguistic plays that emphasize the destruction and fragmentation of the female body through the ritual of inscribing it with pain” (133). Strejilevich does not avoid depicting torture, but she does find her way into it through several avenues, giving it the “numerous” quality that she consciously imposes throughout the book. She wanted to “tell the story of a whole generation, a whole time” (Interview). In telling her story, and everyone’s story, it was necessary to include torture, but she tells it from so many angles—her personal experience, testimonies from *Nunca Más*, poetry, and news clips. In perhaps the most direct personal depiction, Strejilevich writes:

I’m shaking, my teeth chatter, everything hurts. I want to see where I am. I pull down the blindfold, and for the first time I open my eyes. It’s no use. There’s only darkness. This room is like a closet, with barely room to sit. I’m here to think it over. My mind is blank. I can’t even think about death. Between my thoughts and me, this compact metal door. They want me to think it over. I can’t come up with anything. I’m all out of words. Names, names, and more names. And background music for the jailer’s tune: a swarm of cries that are shouts, shouts that are screams, screams that are

wails, a volcano of anguish comparable to nothing. Nothing to say, nothing to add. A searing pain like a stitch deep in the thickness of the muscles, in my womb, in my bones. If my body does not fall to pieces, it's only because it's pierced by countless needles. Music. Shocks. And music to muffle the shocks. An impeccable counterpoint. (17-8)

The description is undoubtedly fragmented, but the pieces create a whole understanding for the reader, who is, once again, asked to comprehend what the blank spaces contain, in all of their unknowability.

Her short story, “Too Many Names”, is a much more straight-forward, autobiographical narrative, but Strejilevich still recognizes the necessary missing spaces inherent in the story no matter how it is told. As she writes, “To whom can we recur when people, objects, world, universe have been stolen? To no one. Only perhaps to the word, the memory, the recollection of that which in the moment of disaster we do not know how to name. That was why I decided to write—because I didn't know what to say” (286).

Strejilevich's work, whether in literary, academic, or activist form, innately understands that the spaces, the gaps, the inchoate unknowable, must be filled by the reader/listener. As the title of *A Single, Numberless Death* suggests (even more definitively in Spanish where it translates to “A Single, Numerous Death”), these experiences are both personal and collective, and understanding comes when the unspeakable speaks through the gaps.

That Inferno

That Inferno: Conversations of Five Women Survivors of an Argentine Torture Camp offers a wholly unique perspective on the representation of experience for two

reasons. The first is the very structure and methodology of the text. These women, who had known one another both inside and outside of their confinement at the ESMA, decided, after two decades, that it was important to tell the truth of their experiences. Their need to tell was strong, and their desire not to dodge or sidestep the ugly realities led them to an interesting decision. They decided to record their conversations, because they believed that they would speak to one another honestly. In this way, the tape recorder became complicit in the effort to render truth. Because the text is a transcription of speech, the detachment of representing torture is both lessened and heightened, in turns, as the women come to terms with their memories and the way they feel about themselves in the context of those memories. The second reason why *That Inferno* is such a powerful tool in understanding the way torture was conducted in Argentina is found in its unflinching revelations about the *recuperación* project at ESMA, and the truly horrifying psychological torture that it entailed. The irony is that the *recuperación* led to much more palatable physical conditions for the prisoners who participated, but the bizarre and cruel elements of the psychological torture are as unfathomable as any recollection of physical pain could be. The reader's task is so much more subtle with *That Inferno*, because there is little description of physically painful experiences that invoke instantaneous flinching. When reading the conversations, there are few jolts in the moment of reading, but as the horror of what they are describing sinks in, it is inescapable. Perhaps more than any other text examined, *That Inferno* requires more of the reader's attention to the unspoken.

What distinguished ESMA from other detention centers was its position as the heart of operations for the Navy and its high visibility as a fully operating school and residence. Many detention centers operated in the middle of cities and communities, but ESMA had hundreds of people coming in and out every day, was located on a busy street, and had cadets and officers living on the premises at all times. These circumstances, combined with the ambitions of the Navy leaders to jockey for supremacy over the Army and Air Force, and bolstered by what can only now be seen as sheer madness, led to a system of imprisonment that was at best bizarre, and at worst pathological.

While it is estimated that over 5,000 *desaparecidos* came through the ESMA, the vast majority were killed quickly and efficiently. Even the writers of *Nunca Más*, after all that they had read and heard, found the reports of the death flights from ESMA “scarcely credible” (221) —not because there was not a vast amount of corroborating evidence, but because they simply could not believe the savagery displayed. For years, every Wednesday, prisoners would be drugged, taken down the road to an airport, loaded onto helicopters or airplanes, and dropped to their death into the Rio de La Plata. There is no way of truly knowing how many *desaparecidos* died this way. If prisoners were not sent to the river, they were held primarily in the basement and the *Capucha*, or attic area, of the officers’ residence building. The *Capucha* is a slang term that also refers to the hoods that prisoners were made to wear at all hours of the day and night. In the *Capucha*, they were kept in narrow cubicles, partitioned off by pieces of wood that were only two feet high, and they were therefore never permitted to stand, or often even sit up. The ESMA is known to have been instrumental in stealing the babies born to prisoners in captivity and

torturing not only the pregnant women, but their fetuses and babies, most cruelly. However, not even these horrors can compete with what were the truly insane circumstances of imprisonment at the ESMA.

Through *recuperación*, some prisoners entered a psychological nightmare that is unimaginable. There were so many facets to this torture that it is difficult to explain them all. First of all, the purpose of the *recuperación* was to force the prisoners to betray their *compañerós* and fellow prisoners by renouncing their political affiliations and becoming ideal “Western, Christian” citizens. This involved not only banal things like the women acting more “feminine” and dressing in pretty clothes and wearing make-up, but also both men and women were forced to become *marks*, and ride out with the soldiers to point out “subversives” to be disappeared. Even if the prisoners refused, they would be driven to a corner in their neighborhood, made to stand on the street corner, and anyone who recognized or approached them was abducted. But this was only the beginning.

Prisoners in the *recuperación* process were put to work by the Navy in offices in the basement, editing press releases, operating a printing press with the purpose of creating pamphlets to falsely accuse militants, summarizing news reports, and anything else their captors dreamed up. For the “privilege” of being on the *staff* or *mini-staff* of elite prisoners, they were fed decent food, allowed use of decent bathrooms, and were able to move around and not wear the *capucha* for several hours a day. This makes it sound as if life in ESMA was pretty good for these prisoners compared to others, but they lived in constant, relentless fear, unsure of who to trust and further blurring lines between captives and captors. The *recuperación* prisoners were treated differently by the captors.

They laughed with them, joked with them, brought them sweets. They even gave them “family visits”, dinners out in Buenos Aires, picnics and barbeques. These facts make it sound as if ESMA became more of a dormitory or summer camp than a detention center. But that was most definitely not the case. A captor would announce to several of the *staff* that they were going out to dinner, and tell the girls to “put on something pretty”—then the girls would have to sit in public at a beautiful restaurant, eating an expensive meal, pretending all the while that they were not prisoners. They were right there, out in public with “normal” people—and they were still *disappeared*. They knew that in a matter of hours, they would be taken back to the *Capucha*. For many of the prisoners, even after they were “released”, they were given Navy or government jobs where they could be constantly monitored, and they were forced to come back to ESMA every night to sleep. The officers gave them “privileges”, along with the privilege of knowing that they were never, ever free—no matter where they were. When reading *That Inferno*, at first glance it appears to be a much more benign and tepid text than the vast majority of testimonies of atrocity from Argentina, but the women’s experiences—that they still fear no one will ever understand—reveal an insidiously evil system of torture that they are still deeply emotionally and psychologically scarred by, even as they live their relatively normal lives in Buenos Aires today (*That Inferno*). Munú Actis recalls just how far her captors’ reach extended into her life: “After they let me leave the country, for a long time I lived in fear that they’d come looking for me again, that they wouldn’t leave me alone. They were like a ghost that kept pursuing me. And in fact, they made their presence felt more than once” (251).

The women of *That Inferno* all have their ghosts, but getting together to record their “tea parties” was a step toward banishing them. Unlike the other texts examined, the torture most fully rendered in *That Inferno* is not full of sharp pain and agony, it is the stuff of soft malevolence that makes its way into every corner of the mind. If the representation of torture is so difficult because it is can never truly be understood, then *That Inferno* offers one of the greatest challenges. The fragments and gaps elude the speakers as much as the listeners, and create a horror that is, truly, unimaginable.

Honoring the Past, Creating a Future

Argentina remains a country deeply wounded by its past, and the scabs grown over the last thirty years still seem easily torn away. The willful ignorance that allowed the *desaparecidos* to vanish in the first place and the population’s willingness to look away remain a threat to the country’s future. But great strides have been made in bringing to light the atrocities of the dictatorship, and by telling their stories, over and over again, to anyone who will listen, is the way in which the victims of the past are striving to prevent victims of the future. The title of CONADEP’s report, *Nunca Más*, means “Never Again”. And despite the fact that the world always seems to provide an “again”, the efforts of those to speak the unspeakable, to reveal the hidden darkness, to tell the stories of torture and trauma, continue in the creation of art, of literature, of spaces of memory. We know that the experience of torture is completely beyond words, but we still must strive, as both writers and readers, to let the nothingness, the gaps, the spaces between what can be spoken, speak to us and for us.

CHAPTER 2

Of all the voices that emerged from the terror in Argentina, those of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* are the ones that shouted loudest and made themselves heard. When I learned about the *Madres* and their work, I was struck by the irony that the strongest challenge to the macho, militaristic regime came in the form of women who did not negate their identity as women, rather, they harnessed its power. They evoked motherhood as a talisman and relied on the universal understanding of the fierceness with which mothers protect their young. In doing so, they made themselves all of our mothers, and made their children all of our children. The power of their resistance came not from the masculine tools of weapons and brutality, but from the feminine arts of nurturing, loving, and refusing to look away when someone was hurting their children. They would not be silenced, and as their movement spread, thousands of mothers of disappeared children worldwide were also given a voice.

The first time I opened a book containing the riotously colorful *arpilleras* of Chile, I realized that these women, like the *Madres*, had formed a powerful resistance movement using the only tools they were allowed—those their patriarchal oppressors would never have thought to forbid: mere scraps of cloth, needles and thread. With these humble, feminine, domestic weapons, they created tangible texts that carried their voices, and the voices of their men and children, past the enforced silence of their existence. Smuggled out of Chile on innocuous burlap, the stories of what was happening under

Pinochet's rule found a voice, not through the raucous shouts of men, but through the quiet whispers of women who wove them into a literature of fabric.

The young women of Argentina and Chile had already forged identities outside of their expected domestic roles, and fought the injustice of their governments alongside their men, not behind them. As active members in the resistance movement, they were also captured, tortured and killed alongside the men as well. For some of the young women who survived, their fight took the form of writing, telling their own stories and those of their *compañeros* and refusing to let them disappear into silence.

Women of Argentina and Chile, marching, sewing, and writing, sang out through the silence that the dictators imposed.

Speaking for the Silenced, Women Find Their Voices

I believe that women are strong. I believe it is incorrect to call us the weaker sex, because we are much braver.

Gala Jesús Torres Aravena, *La cueca sola* songwriter

When a woman begins to think, she is her own person. She is changed forever.

Patricia Hidalgo, *Arpillerista*

In the 1970s in Latin America, amidst horrific abuses of the people by totalitarian military dictatorship governments, an extraordinary thing happened—women found their own voices through their desperate need to speak for those who could not. In cultures that prided themselves on the strength of their men and the subservience of their women, the inconceivable circumstances created by the governments' campaigns to silence all opposition left the men emasculated and the women desperate. For many, if it had been to fight for themselves, they might never have left their houses. But someone had hurt their

children, their brothers, sisters, husbands, and they simply could not stay silent. Their voices rose, strange in many of their throats, unaccustomed as they were to shouting. And they were heard.

In Argentina, following the “Gentlemen’s Coup” of March 24, 1976, it is estimated that over 30,000 people were *disappeared* by the paranoid military government that had assumed power, and articulated their intention to eliminate all voices that opposed their new vision of a united Argentina (Feitlowitz ix). In Chile, following Pinochet’s September 11, 1973 coup which ousted Allende, it is suspected that over 28,000 people suffered brutal torture and imprisonment at the hands of the military regime, and "the vast majority of the eleven hundred souls who disappeared at the hands of Pinochet's secret police have yet to be found, let alone permitted a proper funeral"(Agosín 2). In both countries, during these turbulent times in which the new military governments were asserting themselves, anyone even remotely considered as a threat was eliminated swiftly and completely. In Argentina, students, writers, scientists, doctors, anyone who the government suspected of “subversion”, were kidnapped from their homes, their jobs, the sidewalks, buses—simply snatched away, sometimes in broad daylight, to be imprisoned and tortured in one of the over 300 covert prison centers scattered across the country. When their families went to the police, to the military, to the government, looking for answers, they were told that no such person was being held. Devastated mothers, searching desperately for information about their children, found themselves recognizing one another as they made their daily rounds to the police stations,

military posts and government offices asking questions. From the instinctive behavior of these mothers that drew them to the Plaza in front of the President's home, the Casa Rosada, emerged the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*. From a group of 14 women who met and in 1977 began walking arm in arm to comfort one another and force people in Buenos Aires to acknowledge the *desaparecidos*, the Madres are now a large and influential organization that has affected not only law and political action in Argentina, but in countries all over the world where mothers seek information on their lost children (*Las Madres* film).

In Chile, the repression tactics of Pinochet's government were heinous and blatantly abusive, but they were merely one more unbearable aspect of life for people who were destitute and starving, barely surviving a completely crippled economy and wildly corrupt labor practices. Almost immediately upon Pinochet's seizing of power in September of 1973, "political dissidents" were being rounded up and taken away to be tortured and killed. A favorite method of the kidnappers was to appear at a man's house, and tell his mother they were friends from work, or that they were friends with information about a job. Many of the mothers in those early days believed them, and made tea for their sons' and daughters' abductors while they waited for their targets to come home. The guilt of allowing these monsters into their homes only added to the mothers' despair over their lost children. But in Chile in the 1970s, subsistence survival forced these housewives to do anything they possibly could to put food on the table and fend off their family's starvation. The men were out of work, out of hope, and in constant

danger of reprisals from the government for even the most innocuous political leanings. The men stayed in their homes and brooded as they cursed fate. The women went out to search for information about their disappeared loved ones, and found a way to survive. In one of the first articles published in English chronicling the development and impact of the *Arpillera* movement, appearing in the journal *Feminist Studies* in 1984, Eliana Moya-Raggio explains:

If a man or a woman is unemployed, or perhaps if a woman's husband is in prison or missing, then their children's hunger pushes that woman toward assuming the responsibility for earning a living. When she does so as an *arpillerista*, she is not participating in an alienating job; on the contrary, she is creating a form of resistance and preserving a form of popular art. Housebound and isolated in the past because she was both poor and female, she now moves from passive observer to active participant in a process of collective work that not only helps her in feeding her children, but also changes her life radically, giving her a clear goal, as one of them says: "To achieve liberation after much suffering." (278).

The Arpilleristas

Amid Chile's crippled economy, the churches offered space and sponsored workshops and collectives to allow women to share facilities for home-maker jobs like laundry, sewing and communal cooking. In the course of seeking ways to earn enough to stay alive, the *Arpillera* movement was born. By sewing quilts depicting the missing, and chronicling the poverty and oppression of their lives, the women of Chile not only used their home-spun skills to generate a modest income, but also found their "voice" to cry out against the horrors they were witnessing, and seek justice amid the chaos that was literally stealing away the lives of their children, husbands, and brothers. They pieced their simple art together from scraps of fabric that told the stories of the missing, often

incorporating small objects and photographs into the work, making each *arpillera* a sort of talisman, imbued with the spirit of the *desparecido* it portrayed. The *arpilleras* are a unique literature of visual and tactile art that poignantly and vividly capture the plight of the oppressed. These rectangles of burlap covered in fabric fairly shout their stories, giving voice to not only the disappeared, but also those who wait for them. In doing so, the *arpilleras* themselves become texts, a tangible literature of distinctive voices. Eliana Moya-Raggio eloquently describes the *arpilleristas*' harnessing of a voice that speaks for the people:

She does not use words because words have been denied her. But she can speak through a skill traditionally considered feminine, the use of thread and needle. Her needlework becomes testimony, based on the daily happenings of the inner history of a people. To look at an *arpillera* is to want to know, to learn of the story it relates, and to know of the woman who made it. Thread and needle are now at the service of images representing a collective memory and the almost epic testimony of a suffering people. (278-9)

Like the *Madres* of Buenos Aires, the *Arpilleristas* of Santiago, in desperately searching out ways to process their grief and bear witness to their loss, discovered a dynamic within themselves that their previous lives had not revealed. While the absence of the *desaparecidos* became the single clarifying definitive of their lives, that absence also came to be filled with a voice, that in speaking for the silenced, gained power as it defined them both as individuals, and as part of a larger movement seeking justice and redress.

As Marjorie Agosín points out in her beautiful book *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love*:

The *arpilleras* were born into a desolate and muffled period in Chilean culture when citizens spoke in hushed voices, writing was censored, and political parties vanished. Yet the *arpilleras* flourished in the midst of a silent nation, and from the inner patios of churches and poor neighborhoods, stories made of cloth and yarn narrated what was forbidden. The *arpilleras* represented the only dissident voices existing in a society obliged to silence. The harsh military dictatorship that stressed domesticity and passivity, was disarmed, muzzled by the *arpilleristas*, who through a very ancient feminine art exposed with cloth and thread the brutal experience of fascism. (Agosín 45)

The *Arpilleristas* evaded the male overseers of their lives by utilizing a traditionally female activity, one that is considered acceptable for women to undertake, in order to engage in a decidedly subversive act of protest. The grinding poverty and blatant oppression politicized the women of Chile in myriad ways that they had never considered before. In her 2009 study of the Chilean women's political movements in the shadow of the Pinochet regime, Donna Chovanec interviewed many women who felt empowered for the first time in their lives to fight the oppression that threatened every aspect of their daily lives. One member of Casa de Encuentro de la Mujer (CEDEMU), a community-based women's organization that Chovanec is affiliated with, described becoming politicized:

One learned to value oneself more, to love oneself more, to move away a bit from the yoke of the house. And apart from this, we did community actions, very nice social actions. We also helped many abused women, pregnant teens...in various sectors, in whatever sector where the presence of women was required....Well, apart from this we also always went downtown to throw pamphlets, we met outside the cathedral to do a minute of silence, to sing the national anthem, to do all those acts against [the regime], to accompany the detained and disappeared...

We were always, more than anything, fighting against the dictatorship. (Chovanec 33)

Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo

This wholly new feeling of empowerment was not limited to Chile's women. In Buenos Aires, the women of Argentina were also discovering a tenacity in themselves that compelled them to do more than just passively wait for news of their missing children. They, too, became politicized and ardent in their mobilization to clamor for information. In an interview with Marguerite Feitlowitz for her influential book *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture*, Matilde Mellibovsky, one of the *Madres*, explains,

I am a very ordinary, common, vulgar woman....I was always in the kitchen, I liked movies, I daydreamed. I had an idea of 'doing something' (as we used to say) once the kids were older. But they took my daughter and the next day I was a Mother of the Plaza de Mayo. There was no other choice. (Feitlowitz 93)

The *machismo* that permeates all aspects of Latin American culture is, ironically, one of the primary elements that facilitated the women's ability to gain political currency. The aggressive, antagonistic stance of the macho military force in Argentina would have perceived men demanding answers in the Plaza de Mayo as threatening, but they dismissed the kerchief-covered, middle-aged women surely as a nuisance, but nothing worthy of their attention or retaliation. The *Madres* marched for two years before the military considered them dangerous enough to arrest and detain (*Las Madres* film). They were denounced through official press releases as merely "loco"—surely just some crazy women crying for their children. This arrogant posturing of the men in power allowed the *Madres*, fully within their traditional archetypes as mothers, to have a significant impact

on the government's ability to conceal and manufacture information about its covert operations. The very assumption that caused the military to ignore them—the fact that they are simply mothers—is precisely what made their presence in front of the Casa Rosada so resonant for people all over the world: they are simply mothers--and we all have mothers, and love mothers, and know mothers, and we all understand that it must be a particularly striking horror for a mother to not know what has happened to her child. As Feitlowitz realized when she met Matilde Mellibovsky, "It is such an *intimate* thing to lose a child" (93). The instinctive human feelings that compelled the *Madres* to gather in the first place, are the universal feelings the world recognizes and empathizes with as it listens to their voices.

Empowerment

In Chile as well, the groundswell of activism seemed ignited from something innate and intrinsically human within the women, rather than from an outside source. While surely the impetus of external events provoked the feelings, it is almost uncanny how those feelings appeared to resonate so strongly and manifest themselves so similarly in women who had never before felt moved to political action. The research team for Chovanec's book summarized the feelings expressed by Chilean women in their call to action:

....we went around adding, one woman, another woman, and there quietly, another. Women who had never left their houses started to be invited or simply to invite themselves. They shared the same problems, the same disquietudes, the disinformation or the distorted information that came officially, the uncertainty, the "not having," of having to make do a lot of the times (maybe the majority of the time). We felt afraid, but we met just

the same, in the parish, in a house, we talked, we gave ideas. We had to throw out the dictatorship. We began to control the fear. (47)

Chovanec believes that Pinochet's savage campaign to eradicate all opposition terrorized the men of Chile, and therefore made the women's involvement inevitable. She also observes that women specifically used their roles as women in order to avoid retaliation:

In part, because the traditional opportunities for men to organize and mobilize during the dictatorship were eliminated, women were thrust to the forefront. Framing their oppositional activities as an extension of their traditional roles in the care and protection of their families, women made political claims from within a "maternalist" discourse. Appropriating this discourse gave them some moral authority and a small measure of safety in expressing their demands. (79)

In these "acceptable" gender-approved contexts, and driven by the most powerful innate instincts of motherhood, the women of Argentina and Chile left behind by their *disappeared*, not only found their collective voice, but discovered their individual voices as well. Many *Madres* and *Arpilleristas*, when discussing their involvement with their respective movements, inevitably move from the political to the personal when they discuss how they have been changed by their experiences. Collectively fighting the governments' oppression, and fighting for the rights of their silenced loved ones, could not help but foster self-awareness and empower individual identity. One of the first casualties of this new sense of self was the assumption of male dominance in the home. María Madariaga, an *arpillerista* represented in Agosín's book, recalls the early days of the *arpilleristas'* clandestine meetings:

Some husbands were opposed to the idea, but mine wasn't. He never said anything, much less when I began making money by selling the *arpilleras* I made....Some of the other women had husbands that would hit them, sometimes breaking their teeth. Sometimes we saw María with a small towel in her mouth and her face was all purple. Her husband didn't want her to make the *arpilleras*--or to leave the house for that matter. But we had to leave the house and go to our meetings! (141)

As the women found strength in their solidarity, they emboldened one another to stand up for themselves. When one of her sister's husbands came looking for her and challenged her in front of the other women, *arpillerista* Adriana Rojas remembers how the group responded: "We all stood behind her and gave her advice. How can he treat you like that? You are a person. We had to value ourselves and if we respected others, we demanded others to respect us" (Agosín 160).

For the *Madres* as well, gaining their own personal power cast their men into a supporting role that they did not wear comfortably. Sergio Mellibovsky, husband of *Madre* Matilde, asked Marguerite Feitlowitz if she had the same question as all the reporters: "Why the Mothers were so brave and the fathers cowardly" (94)? He himself has marched alongside his wife for more than 15 years, but admits that the fathers have not, on the whole, fared well: "But I tell you, we haven't held up. Many fathers have died, committed suicide. Fathers are pathetic, you see. The violence we feel toward the guilty ones we turn on ourselves. In Argentina, the guilty remain faceless. So when we look in the mirror, we want to draw blood" (94).

The fathers of Argentina's *desaparecidos* have resigned themselves to standing behind their wives, letting their women speak for them as well as for their missing

children. The *Madres*, having found their voices, are indeed using them. On the *Madres* page of the *Women in World History* web site, María del Rosario de Cerruti insists:

One of the things that I simply will not do now is shut up. The women of my generation in Latin America have been taught that the man is always in charge and the woman is silent even in the face of injustice...Now I know that we have to speak out about the injustices publicly. If not, we are accomplices. I am going to denounce them publicly without fear. This is what I learned. (www.womeninworldhistory.com)

The Writers

While the *Madres* and *Arpilleristas* were learning to speak for those who had been silenced, the younger generation of educated Latin American women who believed in their own voices were discovering just how powerful, and dangerous their voices were to the oppressive regimes they spoke out against. The *disappeared* of Argentina included vast numbers of women, who were as ruthlessly abducted and tortured as their male counterparts. Whether taken for their own suspected "subversion" or their associations with subversive men, literally countless young women, many of whom were pregnant, filled the cells of Argentina's clandestine prisons. Ironically, for machismo patriarchal cultures that seemed to revere motherhood, the pregnancies of subversives seemed to present a particular affront to their perception of what mothers should be. Consequently, the ruthless savagery with which the pregnant *desaparecidos* were treated was also intrinsically tied not just to their being women, but also to their being women who posed a threat to the idealized concept of motherhood. Their voices, and the voices of their clandestinely delivered children who disappeared as well, were all but eliminated, and only survive in the texts of the witnesses who continue to hear their echoes.

So many of the *desaparecidos'* stories ended in silence. Because of the Argentine government's ongoing refusal to produce lists of those disappeared, the names and fates of thousands of "political dissidents" will, in all likelihood, never be revealed. Despite the extraordinary power of the *Madres'* movement, and the tireless efforts of human rights groups for the last several decades, the whole truth of the secret prisons will never be known. However, despite the grotesque abuses, the soulless, systematic eradication of so many human beings whose only crime was to recognize a corrupt government and say so, some of the *desaparecidos* reappeared. The few who survived are burdened with the task of speaking for so many who did not. And some of the survivors, exiled from Argentina, in relative safety from the government's vengeful reprisals, traversed the distance back to their homeland, by telling their stories, by once again raising their voices, and refusing to allow silence to reign.

Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival*, and Nora Strejilevich's *A Single, Numberless Death*, are personal accounts of the unimaginable horrors that each woman survived in secret prisons in Argentina. While surely both women must have wished to move as far away from their harrowing experiences as possible, they both, ultimately, felt that they had an obligation to offer testimony, to bear witness, to speak for all of those who could never tell. In her "Introduction" Partnoy writes, "The voices of my friends at the Little School grew stronger in my memory. By publishing these stories I feel those voices will not pass unheard" (18).

It is astonishing that these books could be beautiful, but they are. They are somehow as delicately beautiful as the events that they describe are brutally ugly. Through their own voices, in creating these fearsome narratives, they have threaded the voices of so many others. The chorus that results sings of hope despite the relentless despair that forced its collaboration. By sharing their voices, by owning their words, Partnoy and Stejilevich defiantly rebuke the ludicrous claims that attempted to deny the truth of what they survived. In 1978, then President General Rafael Videla insisted, "In Argentina, political prisoners don't exist. No one is persecuted or constrained on account of his political ideas" (Feitlowitz 28). Partnoy and Stejilevich exist. Despite the torture, the fear, the savagery, the unbridled cruelty of the military oppressors, they still exist. And they have spoken, raising not only their own voices, but lifting too the voices of so many trapped in the silence of their deaths.

Alicia Partnoy

Alicia Partnoy's tales are spare images, deftly crafted in a few bold strokes. Each one captures a day, a feeling, a glimpse at a life reduced to one simple but blunt imperative: live. As the guards and torturers cruelly taunt and toy with them, each prisoner must focus his or her entire existence on survival. Partnoy revives the voices of those she remembers so vividly, and by injecting each tale with some small but precise detail, she makes each voice distinctive, and renders each desperate grasp at survival in crystalline clarity. This aspect of her writing also challenges the perception of witnesses

as unreliable, by coming across to the reader as a meticulous accounting of exactly what happened.

One particularly vivid example is the description in the chapter "The Small Box of Matches" of the painstaking steps Partnoy took to preserve and keep her tooth.

Somehow the physicality of the details regarding the tooth itself ensures that the stark reality of the circumstance is conveyed:

I took a thread out of the bandage and wound it around the metallic point, completely covering it. I realized with relief that the tooth remained secured. When I took it off some hours later, the thread smelled rotten. I discovered the smell could be prevented by removing the tooth for eating and replacing the thread several times a day. (89)

The specificity and sensory detail offered in this description ground the story in the concrete and literal, but the metaphoric and symbolic implications are simply inescapable, and elevate the story to art. She says, "...inside that little box is a piece of myself: my tooth....it's a part of me. If the guards realized how important the tooth is for me, they would seize it" (88). As a result, this small chapter on something as ordinary as a tooth becomes a voice of testimony, giving facts that serve as anchors for the "truth" of the tale, and also a voice for the disappeared, conveying with nuanced complexity the significance for the prisoner of literally and figuratively keeping the self together, and not allowing the guards/torturers to take even the smallest piece from her. The sense-evoking aspect of the imagery--feeling the space in her mouth with her tongue, the metal stud of the implant, the smell of the gauze--makes the experience both excruciatingly personal, and empathetically universal. It is her tooth, but the reader can recognize and imagine

every sensation. This connection is what gives the book its power, and reveals its voice as both unique and representative. Her voice rings as "real", and is simultaneously the voice of many.

Perhaps the most haunting passage in the book, "Ruth's Father", also plays with the concept of voice as the narrator listens in on her husband being tortured, and the litany of questions and answers is laced with a silly song they used to sing to their daughter. There are several voices represented in the piece, from the wrenchingly poignant singing of the children's song, to the demands of the interrogators, to the observations of the tortured, to the silence of the listener, whose voice is just as powerful in its absence as it would be if it asserted itself. The singing has multiple layers of meaning and contexts, each facet of which provokes a different emotional response for the listener, and, by proxy, the reader. The song is a happy memory, made horrific by highlighting the distance between the present reality and the memory. It conjures both sweet remembrances of time with the baby, and sheer terror at not knowing the child's fate or current whereabouts. In addition, the words themselves are encoded with metaphor. The little frog that is maddeningly heard all the time yet evades capture, represents hope itself, that "they" cannot get what they want from the victim. Interspersing the song with the interrogation dialogue highlights the absurdity of both texts and contexts. And finally, it is the understanding that "she" is hearing all of this, and that she loves this man, and that it is her child he is singing to, that makes the silent listener such a profound part of the narrative, even though she is never overtly

acknowledged in the text. Her absent voice shouts as loudly as any transcribed in the passage.

Despite its depiction of a truly horrifying reality, "Ruth's Father" is one of the best examples in the book of Partnoy's ability to filter the reality through the art of word-working and produce an account that is less *factual*, but nonetheless more *true*. In the acts of transforming witness and testimony into art, truth is not limited to facts; indeed, the agency art has to accurately portray trauma can often produce an effect on the outsider that factual accounts cannot encompass. If one of the motivations for poetic witness is to make others understand what the survivor has experienced, then it is important for traumatic writing to utilize the art of the story, rather than just relying on the facts.

Dominick LaCapra's influential work *Writing History, Writing Trauma* endeavors to clarify the distinction between writing in the discipline of history, and personal accounts of trauma. Essentially, his book recognizes the need for fact-based accounts developed through a historical discipline, but also regards the human emotional response to accounts as relevant and significant in how we interpret and ultimately choose to understand historical events. He values fictional accounts for, "giving at least a plausible 'feel' for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods" (13). What he refers to throughout several chapters as "traumatic realism" (186), is the ability of a fictional account to transcend the purely factual and convey the often uneven, fragmentary, dissociative aspects of trauma. The tension between factual accounting, academic analysis, and artistic interpretation sometimes

becomes problematic for readers, if they have an agenda or expectation regarding the intention of the text. In other words, if the text is expected to tell the truth, some readers are put off by anything other than a minutely crafted recitation of facts. However, as Marita Sturken points out in her book *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, the way in which memory is constructed and presented can represent a decision that has implications beyond the individual, and factual accuracy, as interpretation of a culture's experience:

A desire for memory has often made it appear fragile and threatened when in actuality it is fluid and changing. The instability of memory is not specific to postmodern times, and it does not offer evidence of the past's insignificance; however, it is what makes memory both political and subject to debate. The changeability of memory raises important concerns about how the past can be verified, understood, and given meaning. Yet it is important not to allow discussions of memory to bog down in questions of reliability. Memory is crucial to the understanding of a culture precisely because it indicates collective desires, needs, and self-definitions. We need to ask not whether a memory is true, but rather what its telling reveals about how the past affects the present. (2)

From another perspective, academics seem to regard "witnesses" as sources of information, but dismiss them as ideological contributors to the understanding of events, choosing to fill that role themselves wielding the special skills of analysis that their education affords them. Partnoy herself can be seen as existing squarely at the center of this debate: she has testified before Human Rights Commissions worldwide, giving facts regarding the detention of *desaparecidos* during the state-sponsored terrorism; she is herself an academic, and is accustomed to conducting the sort of analysis that academia would like to lay exclusive claim to; and she has produced an evocative, beautiful book

that is quite artistic in its depiction of the circumstances she survived. From this unique position, Partnoy challenged assumptions about truth and witness and art in her 2006 MLA article, "*Cuando Vienen Matando: On Prepositional Shifts and the Struggle of Testimonial subjects for Agency.*" The article is essentially Partnoy taking umbrage with a scholar's assertion that "native" witness testimony needs to be filtered through the constructs of an academic lens before it can be properly understood and appropriately analyzed. In it, she asserts that scholars in the U. S. and Latin America are challenged to, "train their imagination to go visiting without tying it to the leash of truth" (1666). She feels that the "authenticity" of witness is hardly something that academia should get to certify, instead, testimony should be taken as an expression of the witness in whatever form it has been produced. She insists, "[many texts] do not claim to deliver the truth but just want to be included in the conversation" (1668). When crafting her account, she wanted to convey the truth of what had happened, but to do so by imbuing it with the voices she remembered, and therefore produce a resonant text that has an effect on the reader as an emotional empath, as well as a receptacle for facts.

Nora Strejilevich

Nora Strejilevich also chose to allow voices to be heard in the telling of her story. Her *A Single, Numberless Death* is a swirl of many, many voices, and actually incorporates official public statements of the oppressors into the text, right alongside the internal monologues and memory-laden vignettes of the missing, and those who mourn their absence. It is the juxtaposition of these voices, the jagged seam between the public

lies and private truths, that gives her account its tremendous power. Poetry, memoir, official reports, fragments of conversation, first-person narratives, third-person narratives, and all manner of textual devices nestle next to one another in Strejilevich's pages, and the combination allows the text to speak with many voices, and conveys a totality of the experiences that a single voice could not have captured. One passage that illustrates this technique perfectly reads:

SCIFO MÓDICA'S anonymity lasted until May. On the fifteenth of that month the Federal Police inaugurated a Center for the Care of Victims of Sexual Violence, a branch of the Center for the Orientation of Victims, chaired by Scifo Módica. His picture was published in the newspapers, and his face was familiar to some disappeared ex-prisoners. It was "Scorpion," from the Athletic Club.--*Página 12*, 16 July 1996

The electric prod opens gashes, which the guards close with utmost care so that they can be opened again.

They opened the door of our crafts workshop, where we kept our tools-- polishers, different instruments, among them a dentist's drill used for burnishing rings. "Mmmm, what a terrific prod!" I heard them say.

Thanks to the prod, I end up in the infirmary.

THERE WAS MEDICAL CARE, but it was only for people close to death from excessive torture, for those whom they wanted to keep on torturing. They were taken to the infirmary, treated, given IVs, and then returned to the torture chamber. One of the prisoners was in charge of the infirmary.--
CONADEP

(Strejilevich 47)

By moving from a journalistic account, to dryly related facts, to a first-person past-tense memory, to a first-person present-tense statement, to a report from the commission that later gathered facts and reported on the state-sponsored terrorism that the government referred to as The Dirty War, Strejilevich is able to say so much more than simply, "I was

tortured with an electric cattle prod." She is able to raise a multitude of voices to provide context and bolster the telling, and she therefore makes it all the more chilling.

A Single, Numberless Death recreates the very texture of memory in its pastiche of sources, bits and fragments, and multiple voices. The text is very self-conscious in its consideration of memory, and how much it asserts itself in Strejilevich's consciousness--whether she chooses it or not. The book includes passages that take place after she was released and living in safety, and there she finds she cannot evade the insistence of memory: "Despite all my good luck charms, an oppressive weight bears down on me. I don't know what's wrong, just that my memory hurts. A chorus of voices demanding something rises like a tide. They speak in unison, screaming dissonant rhymes" (125). This is significant to the overall work because throughout the text, Strejilevich's references to memory as its own entity suggest the impetus for the book, and further contextualize its overall memory-based construction. Her need to tell is voiced quite clearly in the final pages of the book when she writes: "I cannot cling to the past; I have to let it pour out, in an avalanche of scenes and voices. I'd like to let it escape so I can air out that corner where I have so ill-fittingly lodged it. I want to have a more bearable existence" (161).

As she says, "We are not all amnesiacs" (168). She could not will away the memories, or silence the voices, and therefore was compelled to let them speak. In doing so, she regained her own silenced voice, and was able to move forward, not past her past, but through it.

To Not Forget

Ultimately, the women of Argentina and Chile have indeed taken up their mantle as the keepers of memory. The *Madres* and the *Arpilleristas* understand that not forgetting is their primary charge. On March 24, 1996, the twentieth anniversary of the coup that led to the disappearances,

The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo--Founding Line garlanded the trees with large photos of their children and set up tables with a selection of their personal items: diplomas and musical instruments; rosaries and yarmulkes; drawings, poetry, postcards, and travel souvenirs. There were soccer balls and tennis rackets, cameras, typewriters, and stethoscopes. Thirty-thousand balloons were released to the sky. "How and when they died is something too many of us still don't know," said Renée Epelbaum [a Founding *Madre*], "but no one, no one shall deny that our children *lived*." (Feitlowitz 186)

The *Arpilleristas* still make quilts, aware that theirs is a country too willing to forget.

Alicia Partnoy and Nora Strejilevich chose to imbue their survival with the memories of those who never made it home. In marches, and fabrics, and texts, these women have woven memory into voices, and let those voices be heard. In speaking for those who could not, these women found their own voices, and discovered just how mighty they could be. They not only speak, they are heard, and the echoes that roll from this choir of voices ring out across the silence that oppressors use to conceal their crimes. As they are compelled to speak, we are compelled to listen.

CHAPTER 3

Contemporary Israeli literature writes the story of a culture that finds great strength in its unified identity, but is nonetheless compelled to grapple with the many forces that forged it. The Israeli identity is victim and warrior, chosen by God and forgotten by Him, wanderer of the earth and embedded in the soil of the homeland, utopian idealist and unapologetic realist, all at once. Postmodern Israeli writers must navigate both the material and philosophical landscapes that they inhabit. The trauma of the Shoah is intrinsic to the post-Holocaust Israeli consciousness, as is the post-utopian revisioning of the Zionist ideal in the face of fifty years of turbulent violence.

Reading the work of modern Israeli novelists, I became fascinated by the powerful echoes of the Shoah that resonate through their writing, and what that means in the context of a culture which, in the aftermath of trauma, must incorporate both loss and survival into their collective identity. There are things once known that can then never be unknown, and knowing the utter depravity humanity is capable of will never leave the Israeli consciousness.

Re-Visioning the Trauma of the Shoah: The Resonating Echoes

Orly Castel-Bloom's *Dolly City*, and Nava Semel's *And the Rat Laughed* are both contemporary Post-Modern Israeli novels that explore the Post-Holocaust consciousness of modern Israel. Castel-Bloom's novel does not foreground the Shoah, instead, it weaves the post-traumatic awareness of it into the world created by the text. Semel's work

addresses the burden of the Holocaust's trauma directly, using the various sections of the novel to examine ways in which testimony and witnessing can be effective, or ineffective, in their inevitable impact on those who hear the stories without having experienced the trauma themselves. Both novels create futuristic visions of Israel that are indelibly marked by the past events of the Holocaust, and both visions ultimately celebrate the legacy of survivors, albeit in vastly different ways.

Castel-Bloom's *Dolly City*

Only Castel-Bloom's *Dolly City* is a vivid example of the ontological concerns of the Post-Modern in its very intentional creation of an alternate world. The grotesque urban dystopia of Dolly City is certainly allegorical, but extends beyond allegorical to embody a recognizable, but thus far unnamed, literary genre. Post-Modernism has virtually demanded a re-visioning of the world from its authors, yet offers no existing terms that adequately describe the *metaphor-made-manifest* quality that consequently imbues the settings and characters of so many of its works. "Magical Realism" is as elusive a term as "Post-Modern" when trying to craft a rigid definition, but, like Post-Modernism, the reader may not be able to define it without asterisks, but we recognize it when we see it--and, conversely, when we don't. *Dolly City* may exhibit characteristics that push the boundaries of realism, but it is not Magical Realism. There is an un-real, surreal quality to the setting, characters, and events of the novel, however, there is not the slightest hint of "magic" or the supernatural about any of its unreality. Although it is distinctly un-real, it is aggressively grounded in imagery that is brutally vivid in its

substantial corporeality. The images employed are distinctly fleshy, and urban, and unvarnished ugly--but they are not fantastic. *Dolly City* is not a realistic book, but it is in no way "magic". Instead Castel-Bloom uses disturbing descriptions and a horrific protagonist to create a world that *is* the trauma of the Holocaust, expressed metaphorically. As *metaphor-made-manifest*, the world of *Dolly City* *is* the trauma so painfully etched into collective Jewish consciousness. It is generally agreed upon in Israeli scholarly criticism that Castel-Bloom's work is decidedly Post-Zionist, and it is certainly viable and appropriate to look at *Dolly City* as an expression of and commentary on Jewish identity in a Post-Zionist context. However, while the more immediately relevant political underpinnings of the book speak to a current world view, it is virtually impossible to look at Israeli identity in contemporary literature through any interpretive lens without understanding it as inherently and significantly Post-Holocaust. Although the narrative of *Dolly City* only mentions the Shoah in subtle passing references, the ontological paradigm presented by the book is a continuous, unflinching expression of the post-traumatic psychological impact of the Holocaust. Further understanding of how this mindset is processed as Post-Zionist leanings can be traced through the text, but the book is, in its bones, a *metaphor-made-manifest* expression of the ever-present Post-Shoah trauma that inhabits and inhibits Israeli consciousness. *Dolly City* could only exist in a world that has known the Holocaust.

There is no question that *Dolly City* is allegorical. From the very first pages where the narrator goes from mutilating and eating a goldfish to arranging the disposal of her

dead dog, Dr. Dolly's world of Dolly City is rendered in such grotesque hyperbole that although we recognize the actions and events as being described "realistically", we also immediately understand that this is a deliberately crafted world intended to heighten our discomfort with its raw ugliness. It is allegory, but allegory is an inadequate description for the ontological gesture of the book. The figurative implications are somehow *more* than mere allegory.

The depiction of such a terrifying dystopia is hardly unique to *Dolly City*, and we recognize that the vivid and gritty depiction of the city itself is bolstered by the rampant use of disgustingly fleshy and corporeal imagery. Dolly is a nightmare of a doctor, and even more appalling as a mother. Indeed, when Dolly discovers the discarded infant she will take as her son, he is in a garbage bag, with a "festering hole two centimeters wide in the middle of his stomach" (17). The child's horrific life has only just begun, as Dolly proceeds to act out every whim of her troubled psyche in a series of violations to his body.

In her obsessive fear of disease and abnormality, Dolly injects, slices, pokes, prods and carves into the child's flesh. This series of horrors inflicted on the baby is presented in vivid, detailed descriptions that accentuate the physicality of the acts, all the while narrated in Dolly's very matter-of-fact tone to chilling effect:

I gave the child an anaesthetic, I put him to sleep, and I did it to him. I slipped my hands into white gloves and began sawing through his thorax. His internal organs were revealed to my searching gaze--his heart, his lungs. I poked around in there and then I opened up his stomach and I held an organ parade--I demanded to know if they were all present and correct. (36-7)

The factual stylistic mode of delivering the story belies its clearly unrealistic aspects. Certainly, no child could possibly survive the onslaught of Dolly's many surgeries. Events occur in the text that we must recognize as not being possible in reality, but it is nonetheless still grounded in "real" physical actions and reactions. This is an alternate realism, but there is nothing "magical" about it.

If the novel is allegorical, but more than allegory, and unreal, even surreal, but distinctly not magical realism, then there should be a way to describe what we recognize as its ontological proposal, which acknowledges the way in which the imagery serves the totality of the effect on the reader. The text *Dolly City*, in its portrayal of the city itself, along with its revolting inhabitants and their monstrous actions, is *metaphor-made-manifest*. The book, encompassing all of its characters, descriptions and events, is metaphor, presented as an ontological construct.

The realism of the world of *Dolly City* is a sustained and extended metaphor for the sheer horror of an existence dictated by an awareness of the most base and vile aspects of human behavior. The book has taken all of the ugliness inherent in humanity, and created a world that *is* that ugliness. The "reality" of the world of *Dolly City* is an embodiment, a metaphor given physical attributes, depicting the "reality" of our world.

As a construct of a dystopian Tel Aviv by an Israeli author, the implications of this manifested metaphor as commentary on Israeli identity are powerful. In this context, *Dolly City* is a post-modern rendition of a Post-Zionist Israel. However, an understanding

of this world as Post-Zionist can only be built on the more essential understanding that it is Post-Holocaust consciousness that allows such a world to be imagined.

Cathy Caruth's 1995 book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* established a starting point for all subsequent discussions of literary trauma theory by asserting essentially that the relating of trauma is less about the accurate rendering of a factual account--which she posits is impossible--than it is about how it displays the effects of the trauma on the witness. In other words, Caruth's work with trauma considers the need for post-structuralist, post-modern engagement with the trauma of the Holocaust, since these non-linear, often fragmentary or dissociated responses are the only responses that the traumatized self will allow. She recognizes that an indirect telling of the trauma is not an ineffective way to communicate, despite its inherent limits. "The impossibility of a comprehensible story...does not necessarily mean the denial of a transmissible truth" (Caruth 154).

Although certainly not all literary trauma theorists and psychological trauma theorists directly agree with Caruth, these ideas she has raised are sufficiently interesting that virtually everything written on trauma since 1995, from either the humanities or science camps, grapples with Caruth before asserting a position. In examining *Dolly City*, Caruth's ideas regarding an altered but unmistakable expression of the trauma of the Holocaust seem particularly relevant. Throughout *Dolly City* there are numerous subtle and a few overt references to the Shoah. The text is riddled with mentions of "trains" and

"transports", and we learn that all the trains in Dolly City run to Dachau. Regarding her trip to Dusseldorf to provide her child with a new kidney, Dolly tells us:

I wouldn't lose any sleep if I took some German baby from an orphanage in Dusseldorf and cut out his kidney and donated it to my son. On the contrary, I felt a sense of vocation. I knew I was doing the right thing. If the worst came to the worst, I might kill a German baby or two. (51)

And, indeed, she ultimately kills several in this endeavor. In Part III the novel offers a description of the "anti-anti-Semitic quarter where the Holocaust survivors crucify a different goy every day" (112). Perhaps the most direct commentary of all comes when Dolly threatens to shoot a Hasid in the head and he retorts, "After what the Germans did, nothing can surprise me" (122). These are merely a few of the ways in which Castel-Bloom brings consciousness of the Shoah into the text, and by doing so, directly reminds us that this is a Post-Holocaust world.

Throughout the book, the world of Dolly City perpetually reveals itself as a depiction of the trauma of the Shoah. Dolly's conscious, persistent cruelty to a vulnerable baby, poorly justified by faulty reasoning, echoes the unimaginable cruelty of the Germans. Her obsession with medical experimentation in general reflects the horrific eugenic and surgical experiments conducted in the camps. The blighted urban landscape and industrial feel to the city evokes the mechanized systems of extermination. All of these elements serve as allusions to well-known images of the Holocaust, but the Holocaust is also present in the layers of decay and debasement so casually catalogued throughout the book.

The many descriptions of scatological and sexual acts consistently dehumanize the people performing them, stripping away all pretenses of privacy or self-respect, removing any consideration of them as individuals. Physical violence is constantly and consistently presented as "normal" in the world of the novel, and even otherwise non-violent characters, like Dolly's mother, are disturbingly desensitized and appear unaffected by it. The recurring image of thousands of utterly useless yellow anti-depressant pills casts a stark light on the unyielding nature of the pervasive hopelessness that characterizes the city and its inhabitants. Most lurid of all is Dolly's perception that cancer is everywhere. She says:

I saw cancerous growths on the blonde women's faces, on the barrels of tar, on the wheels of the buses, on the electricity poles, on the trees, on the wheels of the cars, on the newspapers; wherever I looked, malignant, terminal, spreading tumors danced before my eyes. (72)

This vision of absolutely everything as diseased, is indicative of the sense that evil is present, and infectious, and multiplying throughout every aspect of existence.

This corrupted world of rot and ruin is relentlessly harrowing and makes tangible the despair that a society must inevitably feel when it has been forced to recognize humanity's capacity for malevolence. This is the world we are left with when we face the fact that the Holocaust happened, and it is the world we continue to feed with our now corrupted souls. The leap from Post-Holocaust to Post-Zionist then becomes a mere step away.

It is impossible to miss or mistake the Post-Zionist situating of this novel. Even if one had to be politically knowledgeable to identify some of the more understated

referential notes, the fact that Dolly carves a map of Israel into her infant son's back demands that even the most apolitical reader take note. The fact that as the child grows the borders of Israel grow with him, etched in scars on his back, and that they ultimately "return(ed) to the '67 borders" (171), highlights the unsettled, unsecured, distrustful feelings about the once-utopian vision as it exists in the present and future. Dolly says so overtly in the novel, making plain the metaphoric implications of her character as political commentary:

Madness is a predator. Its food is the soul. It takes over the soul as rapidly as our armies occupied Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip in 1967. After madness takes over the territory of the human mind, the mad cows come into the picture. All they know how to do is eat, so they stuff themselves sick and lay the fields waste. And if a state like the State of Israel can't control the Arabs in the territories, how can anybody expect me, a private individual, to control the occupied territory inside me? (110)

By allowing Dolly as narrator to equate Israel with madness and connect that madness to the inability of a person to "control the occupied territory" inside themselves, Castel-Bloom tells us quite explicitly that the novel exists as a metaphoric representation and commentary on Jewish consciousness. Dolly's specific references to the Germans in justifying some of her more violent tendencies in the book fall into a particular aspect of Post-Zionist theory which blames using the Holocaust as an excuse for Zionists to allow themselves to become victimizers. In his 2009 article, "The Privatization of the Holocaust: Memory, Historiography, and Politics," David Gutwein addresses the Post-Zionist belief in this mishandling of Holocaust memories as a call for individuals to deal with their own experiences personally, rather than allow the construct of a nationalized

Israeli consciousness predicated on the very concept Dolly evokes when she quite calmly vivisects German babies:

The Post-Zionist depiction of Zionism as intrinsically oppressive is meant to invalidate the moral foundation of the Israeli welfare state and turns its privatization into an emancipatory act. The privatization of collective memory of the Holocaust and other events in Zionist and Israeli history should, accordingly be perceived as the ideological legitimization of the politics of privatization, and especially of the welfare state as an expression of national and social solidarity. (58)

Gutwein's article recognizes that, "Politically and culturally the collective memory of the Holocaust plays a key role in constructing Israeli identity," (1) but also challenges the Post-Zionist perception of Zionism as ultimately immoral and counter-productive to the modern ideological Israeli state. However, like Castel-Bloom, he cannot tackle the subject without acknowledging how the Post-Holocaust rationale has been used as an impetus for violence.

By raising these philosophical questions, the world of *Dolly City* is, in and of itself, a manifestation of the trauma of the Shoah, and a commentary on how that trauma continues to affect Israel today. Castel-Bloom's re-visioning of a world in which we know that the Shoah happened, is, in essence, a way of expressing the trauma as a construct. By giving it shape and form, she expresses the inexpressible, showing, rather than telling, what has happened. This re-visioning of Israel is then inherently Post-Zionist, because it rejects the possibility of a utopian existence in a Post-Holocaust world.

Castel-Bloom's re-visioned ontological gesture, is, therefore, a world of trauma. The novel *Dolly City* is the metaphor of post-traumatic Jewish awareness of the Shoah,

made manifest in a city and story and characters that embody the trauma itself. This created world is a post-traumatic rendering of our own world, and as such, is the inescapable Jewish consciousness of the Holocaust made manifest.

Semel's *And the Rat Laughed*

Nava Semel's *And the Rat Laughed* also contends with modern Israeli consciousness in a Post-Modern treatment, but her approach is vastly different from Castel-Bloom's. *And the Rat Laughed* utilizes several different worlds to closely examine how testimony, as the story itself, functions for both the individual and the society. These worlds encompass the past, present and future, and veer from the realistic, to the mythological, to the surrealistic, as they offer multiple spaces and times in which The Story unfolds. By creating this variety of worlds, Semel is able to consider testimony in multiple contexts, for both witnesses and listeners, and is therefore able to address the totality of the story's effect on not only the specific people who lived it, but also the succeeding generations who must process the story in terms of their own lives. In this way, *And the Rat Laughed* embodies the ongoing impact of the Holocaust as the direct experience becomes further and further removed from personal memories, and moves into society's collective consciousness. Shoshana Felman, in her article, "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching", outlines the very conflict that Semel's novel grapples with:

Oftentimes, contemporary works of art use testimony both as the subject of their drama and as the medium of their literal transmission....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 remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge, nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference. (5)

And the Rat Laughed utilizes the "bits and pieces of a memory" in a testimony that requires its listeners to understand it despite its being "in excess of [their] frames of reference." In doing so, she offers a powerful look at testimony as The Story takes on a life of its own. In his article entitled "Between History and Memory: The Voice of the Eyewitness," James Young asks:

Is it possible to write a history that includes some oblique reference to such deep memory, but which leaves it essentially intact, untouched, and thereby deep? By extension, what role, if any, might the survivor's deep memory play in writing the history of the Shoah? (277)

Semel's book just may offer an answer to his question.

In the first part of the novel, entitled, "The Story", a Holocaust survivor's granddaughter asks the old woman to tell her story. Throughout this section, the story is given agency and is often described as an entity with its own will and agenda, and is accorded physical action. In the very first pages The Story is personified several times: "It rises out of its grave, egging her on, intrusive" (3). "If she were to give it a voice, the story would burst through without her being able to contain it, and its severed limbs would scatter in all directions, unfamiliar even to her" (3-4). "Even when she pent it up inside her, the story would stab its way through, jabbing its spikes into her" (4). All of these metaphoric representations of The Story as an entity characterize the story's inherent need to be told, despite the speaker's reluctance to relive the trauma. This aspect of testimony is articulated clearly by Dori Laub in his chapter entitled "An Event Without

a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival" from his and Shoshana Felman's definitive text *Testimony, Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*: "There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus come to know one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life" (78). Semel portrays the grandmother's struggle through a series of internal debates that capture the desperate ambivalence felt by survivors as they fear bringing the darkness within them into the light. As Laub describes in his chapter "Bearing Witness":

The fear that fate will strike again is crucial to the memory of the trauma, and to the inability to talk about it. On breaking the internal silence, the Holocaust from which one had been hiding, may come to life and once more be relived; only this time around, one might not be spared nor have the power to endure. (67)

Indeed, the grandmother is ultimately unable to articulate her story in a way that is intelligible to her curious granddaughter. Nonetheless, Semel's novel goes on to demonstrate that The Story must inevitably be told.

One of the difficulties the grandmother faces in revealing the truth of her experiences is the fact that she was not, in fact, in a camp during the war. The granddaughter has approached her with the assumption that her story of being in hiding will obviously be much more uplifting and inspiring than a tale of the horrors of the camps. In fact, her story is much more horrifying than her granddaughter could possibly imagine. By presenting the disconnect between the granddaughter's false assumptions and the truth of the story as it is finally revealed, Semel deftly presents the ugly dangers of

comparing survivors' stories in the macabre game of one-up-man-ship that modern society's desire for grisly detail so often invokes. The story of the girl-the-grandmother-once-was is not a Holocaust story in the traditional sense, but it is no less compelling a tale of the tragedy of the Shoah than its counterparts set in the camps. When Semel begins to layer the reader's knowledge of what the girl actually endured with the granddaughter's naïve and idealized picture of how the "Righteous Gentiles" must have behaved, we, too, feel the compulsion for *The Truth* to assert itself.

Getting at "The Truth" is a driving force in the novel, and one of the most problematic aspects of dealing with testimony. The concept of "unreliable testimony" haunts literary trauma theory, and in the past has been used by scholars of all stripes and disciplines to invalidate witnesses' stories. However, in current theory, the inability of testimony to accurately recount facts has been identified by many different theorists as a byproduct of the inexpressibility of trauma caused by the mind's need to distance itself from the events themselves, and is now generally accepted as a consistent attribute of trauma testimony that does not render it invalid, but, rather, explains how it functions. In his profoundly influential text *The Writing of the Disaster*, Maurice Blanchot articulates the inarticulate quality of language in relating trauma:

It is language that is "cryptic": not only as a totality that is exceeded and untheorizable, but inasmuch as it contains pockets, cavernous places where words become things, where the inside is out and thus inaccessible to any cryptanalysis whatever--for deciphering is required to keep the secret secret. The code no longer suffices. The translation is infinite. And yet we have to find the key word that opens and does not open. At that juncture something gets away safely, something which frees loss and refuses the gift of it. (136)

Blanchot understands that it is in the spaces and images surrounding the words of description that the "truth" is revealed. Cathy Caruth goes further, asserting that survivors are not just unable to articulate their trauma, but are, in fact, unable to fully recall all of its details:

The ability to recover the past is thus closely and paradoxically tied up, in trauma, with the inability to have access to it. And this suggests that what returns in flashback is not simply an overwhelming experience that has been obstructed by a later repression or amnesia, but an event that is in itself constituted, in part, by its lack of integration into consciousness. Indeed, the literal registration of an event--the capacity to continually, in the flashback, reproduce it in exact detail--appears to be connected, in traumatic experience, precisely with the way it escapes full consciousness as it occurs. (152-3)

Semel addresses this aspect of trauma in various ways throughout the book. The grandmother not only cannot tell her story, but her recollection of it is depicted in fragments and images that eventually produce a whole version of events, but must be pieced together and understood in the context of the frame eventually revealed by the facts surrounding the story. The section entitled "The Poems" offers repetitive combinations of images: pit, potatoes, lice, Mother, Father, The Stefan, hole, rat, Jews, child, little girl (99-116). These are all elements of The Story, and the reader understands that the grandmother's interest in the computer led to her sending out these fragments over the internet. The Story is contained in all of the fragments, but is never offered as a cohesive whole. This method by which the grandmother finally releases her story into the world underlines both the compulsion to tell the story one way or another, and the inchoate way in which it exists for the teller. As Caruth succinctly puts it:

For the survivor of trauma, then, the truth of the event may reside not only in its brutal facts, but also in the way that their occurrence defies simple comprehension. The flashback or traumatic reenactment conveys, that is, both the truth of an event, and the truth of its incomprehensibility. (153)

Semel develops the notion of *The Story's* incomprehensibility in myriad ways, ranging from the granddaughter's lack of understanding, to the fragmentary elements of the narrative, to the way in which the world receives pieces of the story through the poems on the internet, the myth of the rat, and the priest's diary. The various meanings assigned to the fragments are appropriated without any of the meaning-makers having access to the whole. Consequently, the misinterpretation and misappropriation of the grandmother's story in the future world takes on poignancy for the reader at the realization of the truth lost, while simultaneously reaffirming that despite all of the hindrances and challenges, the story still lives--no matter how fragmented and misshapen. By adding the element of the passage of time to the mix, Semel succeeds in highlighting the fragmentation, and precluding "the truth" from ever being fully understood. Blanchot's view of fragmentation shows that he would approve of Semel's approach:

Fragmentation, the mark of coherence all the firmer in that it has to come undone in order to be reached, and reached not through a dispersed system, or through dispersion as a system, for fragmentation is the pulling to pieces (the tearing) of that which never has preexisted (really or ideally) as whole, nor can it ever be reassembled in any future presence whatever. Fragmentation is the spacing, the separation effected by a temporalization which can only be understood--fallaciously--as the absence of time. (60)

In the worlds of the book, all time is relative to the initial events of *The Story*, and the distortion through time both challenges and strengthens the power of the legend.

Ultimately, it is the mythology of The Girl and the Rat that survives through the centuries.

The rat is a powerful symbol in the novel, and its significance is developed through several conceptualizations of the relationship between the rat and the girl. In the section of the book titled "The Legend," the abstract connection to the rat is introduced when the grandmother tells her granddaughter the myth of the laughing rat. According to the tale, when God made the animals He gave them certain traits in common, such as jealousy and the ability to weep, and He then gave each creature specific traits. However, the rat was dissatisfied with what he got and begged God for the ability to laugh. God told the rat that until he heard the underground creatures beside him laughing, he would not laugh. Throughout all the time that the rat found himself below ground with a little girl, he did everything in his power to make her laugh, but she would not laugh. Finally, at the end of the grandmother's version of the legend, when the little girl who was underground finally came up out of the hole and into the light, she:

pointed at the rat and emitted an enormous sound instead of all the sounds she hadn't made before. She pointed to the sky, or maybe it was to the earth--and screamed: There's the happiest creature on earth!...And then the rat laughed. His laughter made the ground shake. It was his first and last laugh, and it made the pit shake too from end to end till it shook so hard that the rat collapsed into the pit, and was buried without a trace.

Thy footsteps are not known, the Psalms tell us. (90)

Like all elements of The Story in the novel, this passage is somewhat cryptic, but offers rich metaphoric implications. In the context of the Shoah, the rat's laughter, despite all odds against it, can be seen as survival in its most raw expression: laughter will happen,

no matter how dark and hopeless the circumstances. Extending this concept into the story of the rat, it is possible to see the rat as a representative for the Chosen People--it is not enough for God to give the gift of tears along with the traits needed to survive; as your creations, we deserve and demand laughter as well. As the story of the rat transforms from legend to reality in the course of the book, the idea of the rat laughing expresses the wild raucousness of despair that must be endured, and casts suffering in a light of sheer absurdity.

The "real" rat in the novel lived in the pit with the girl-who-the-grandmother-once-was throughout her long ordeal. Through the endless months of near starvation, soaking in her own excrement, and being raped repeatedly by the farmer's son, the rat was her only companion. Therefore, in her mind, he was imbued with qualities of succor and kindness that surely no rat has ever possessed. Hence, the "real" rat becomes a mythological figure for the girl, and an unlikely talisman against the darkness. When the reader becomes aware of the significance of the rat in the girl's horrific trauma, the book's earlier descriptions of the old woman seeking rats in a pet store are given a potency they lacked when initially encountered. All through the novel, Semel plays with the contradictions between the typical impression of rats as disgusting vermin and the role of the rat in the story, forcing us to question the assumptions we make before allowing testimony its truths. The hideous and disease-ridden rat is a friend, and the young, strapping farmboy who goes to church every Sunday is a monster. In both cases, The Truth hides beneath outward assumptions, and makes the listeners culpable if they do not

truly hear the story. In twisting these preconceived notions, Semel demonstrates that the reception of *The Story* is itself a cautionary tale, and gives responsibility to the listeners.

The reception of *The Story* takes on its own significance in the most imaginative section of the book, which takes place in the distant future at the end of the year 2099. In an entirely digitized dystopia, a single, isolated entity of thought wishes to discover the "true" story behind the *Girl & Rat* myth that has become so ubiquitous throughout the last century. Manifested in comics, pop songs, video games, animated series, and all forms of popular iconography, in 2099 the *Girl & Rat* myth has taken on a life of its own, and has been incorporated into the worldwide consciousness in every conceivable form, including religion and art. Various stories have been ascribed to the images of the girl and the rat, and they have cycled through several role-reversals painting one or the other as the story's hero and/or villain. Clearly, *The Story* has been lost, and distorted to a grotesque after-image of its original intent. Semel uses this world as opportunity for commentary on present-day Israel by presenting a future Israel divided into two distinct ideological bases. One is TheIsrael, "a tiny political entity along the Mediterranean Sea that still insists on retaining its sovereignty" (142). As Y-mee tells Stash, the other entity she's reaching out to:

It's a society addicted to the present, alienated from anything that preceded its establishment as a sovereign state and determined to focus exclusively on whatever will serve to justify its future existence.... But it seems like the obliteration of the past has led to a pathological distortion in the way they perceive the future: almost every mythological representation of the future is short-term, and includes a cataclysm. (142-3)

The other depiction of future Israel is Ju-Ideah, "a separatist self-contained entity, a network of autonomous religious enclaves spread over the geographical area surrounding the areas of TheIsrael and ThePalestine, among others" (143). She goes on to say: "In complete contrast to TheIsrael, Ju-Ideah does not obliterate the past. In fact, it regards it as sacrosanct. Their motivation for separatism isn't that they want to forget, but rather that they're intent on avoiding anything that's new or different" (143). By creating these two visions of Israel in a novel wholly concerned with processing the testimony of the past, Semel simultaneously warns us of the dangers inherent in either forgetting the past or clinging to it. It is a not-so-subtle admonishment to both honor the stories of the Holocaust, and move forward from them. In the midst of the crass commercialization of the *Girl & Rat* images, the divided Israel, and the cold depersonalization of this future world, Semel still offers hope in the entity Y-mee's desire to connect to others and discover and acknowledge the truth, even if that truth is painful. Y-mee reminds Stash that despite having the technology to obliterate traumatic memories from entities' minds, some of the entities have petitioned to have their memories retrieved because, "without the missing event, no matter how unsettling or horrible, they were not what they were supposed to be" (150). It is her search for truth that leads to the discovery of the priest's diary, which not only recovers The Story, but allows the rat one more level of significance.

In the priest's diary, The Story finally acquires some vestiges of hope amidst the relentless horror that has characterized its narrative thus far. Through the eyes of the

priest—a genuinely "Righteous Gentile"—we are allowed to see the girl-who-the-grandmother-once-was regain her humanity, even after the torturous nightmare she has endured. In his desperation to offer her any possible solace, the priest becomes the rat, scratching in the dirt with the little girl until she is strong enough to accept his presence as a human. The priest-rat is both Catholic and vermin. He embodies the Holocaust victims' assumptions of what evil is, and then refutes those assumptions by being truly good and kind. He nurtures and loves the little girl, and eventually writes in his diary, "Against all forgettings, this memory will prevail" (231). And with that, Semel offers her last word on *The Story*.

Echoes of The Shoah Continue to Be Heard

Both Orly Castel-Bloom's *Dolly City* and Nava Semel's *And the Rat Laughed* are contemporary Israeli novels that address the ways in which the traumas of the Shoah haunt the Israeli consciousness. Castel-Bloom's re-visioning of a dystopic Israel is threaded with references to the Holocaust and her ghastly city becomes a metaphoric manifestation of the world which allowed it to happen, and which must now exist knowing the evil that humanity is capable of. Semel's novel explores testimony from many angles, not only examining the responsibilities of both witness and listener, but also considering the ways in which both can succeed and fail. Her futuristic Israel stands divided into those who abandon the past, and those who are embedded in it. Despite their wildly different approaches, both novels end on a similar note by pointedly heralding survivors. Dolly knows that her son can withstand anything, and we know that the little

girl grew up to have children and a long life. Neither novel shies away from the ugliness wrought by the Shoah, but both ultimately envision worlds, and people, who live on. If the rat can laugh, we all can survive.

CHAPTER 4

Venturing into the testimonial evidence of the Armenian genocide is not to be undertaken lightly. I approached it as a scholar, seeking whatever insight it could offer into literary trauma theory, and the way in which trauma travels through generational shifts in cultural identity. However, with this particular culture, I could not ignore the relentless way in which my academic observations translated themselves into the personal. Again and again, what I learned from the historiography and testimony of the genocide filled in the gaps that I had not even realized existed in my understanding of the Armenians whose lives are woven into mine. I recognized my friends in this story because it is their story—their lives created this story, and this story created their lives. I understand now that the Armenian-Americans I have grown up with are all, every single one, the descendants of survivors, and that this informs and influences everything that they are.

As I interviewed modern Armenian-Americans, and asked them to tell me their families' stories, the tension between the academic and the personal became a productive one, and underscored the message that survivor stories inherently contain: the study of history is the study of what happened to people. It cannot be reduced to a recitation of facts. History, even a century past, lives in the people who experienced it, and in the way their experiences translate into the individual and collective identities of their descendants. All of their voices tell the story of who they were, and who they are, and for

Armenians living all over the world ninety-six years after the Turks endeavored to systematically eliminate them from the earth, their voices tell stories of survival.

The Armenian Genocide: Voices That Echo Across a Century

The Armenian genocide, the first genocide of the many that would characterize the bloody global legacy of the 20th Century, offers scholars and historians a template for widespread extermination of people that has been followed again and again, to catastrophic results. But for the Armenians themselves, now nearly a century after the events of 1915 that marked their near-total elimination as a people, the genocide remains the defining touchstone of their identity, culture, and perspective of the world. Survivor testimony of the Armenian genocide occupies a unique place in the sadly extensive, always growing, collection of worldwide testimonies of atrocity, because of its forced defensive position in the face of the continuous denial of the genocide by its perpetrators. While it has not been unusual for the architects of genocides to deny them, the relentless Turkish campaign in the face of overwhelming evidence, coupled with the world's governments' embarrassing passivity and refusal to challenge Turkey's outrageous claims with official acknowledgement, has resulted in a paradigm of genocide recovery specific to, although not unique to, the Armenian experience: egregious, horrific crimes against them with no resolution from either the perpetrators or the observers, which has led to a people grievously wronged who feel compelled to tell their stories not only as a catharsis to work through the trauma of the events described, but also to defy the trauma of having those same events denied. As time has passed and the first-person experiences of the

survivors have evolved into family histories passed down through three or four generations, the cautionary tales must balance the litany of suffering that serves as evidence for the righteous indignation of the aggrieved, with an identity as a culture that deserves to be rooted in a perception of both the individual and the collective as survivors rather than victims. The competing elements of this delicate balance are woven through the last century of Armenian literature as profoundly as they are in the very experience of being Armenian post-genocide.

Over the last century, survivor accounts, historiography, documentation, and analyses of the Armenian genocide have been produced and utilized as they are in the aftermath of all atrocity, to bear witness to the extraordinary terror, torture and horror that people were subjected to, and allow survivors to tell their stories. But in addition to these common agendas, the surviving Armenians have now spent nearly a hundred years amassing an enormous body of evidence with meticulous thoroughness and painstaking scholarship in order to make the Turkish denials utterly impossible. That they have succeeded in doing so, offering vast amounts of proof from every conceivable source, yet still face the Turkish government's insistence that no such events took place, has left a festering wound that, to this day, generates a powerful anger and justifiable outrage that permeate all aspects of Armenian identity. The literary legacy of the genocide reveals the pathology created by its denial, and is manifested in the evolution of perspective from survivors, to their children, to their grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. The trauma of the genocide will never heal for a people who feel that their pain has been largely

unacknowledged, and their wrongs unredressed. However, despite all of the loss and anger and damage sustained by the Armenian people, they do survive; and a century after their near-total devastation, many Armenians even thrive, as they continue to grapple with the implications of their story.

The History: The Events That Made Genocide Possible

The story of Armenia is impossible to separate from its geography and topography. Straddling two continents, its position between Europe and Asia enabled its soaring heights as a nation and people, and also eventually led to its catastrophic destruction. Both extremes were also significantly affected by the nation's landscape, from the isolation of its rugged interior to the swath it has cut at various points in time through the Ottoman Empire to the port city of Constantinople. Several centuries poised between the two aggressive and evolving states of Russia and Turkey had whittled away at Armenia's borders, until the 19th century found the Armenian state a much-reduced area, primarily rural, confined by jagged mountains and vast desert, and pockets of Armenians scattered through Russian and Turkish communities, constantly vulnerable to religious and economic oppression, and used as pawns in games played by powers who found their expendability not merely convenient, but actually desired. The Ottomans in particular grew to be fanatical in their hatred of the Armenian people for not only their Christianity, but also for the resources of their fertile farming tracts; and furthermore, as the Armenian habit of sending their children to Europe for education became more and more common, the largely illiterate Turks greatly resented the Armenians for their book-

learning, characterizing it as effete and preposterously arrogant in contrast to the rough warrior ideal for Turkish men. Turkish men did not want to be learned like the Armenians, but they considered the Armenians' reliance on education as further proof that they were un-Turkish. In addition, the very qualities that made Armenia vulnerable, were the same qualities that the voracious Ottoman empire used to its advantage—instead of positioning itself as a pawn between continents and powers as Armenia had, Turkey used its location as a base of power, and a bargaining chip in the increasingly complex machinations between the European and Russian monarchies jockeying for position and control. All of these aspects of geography, topography, and ultimately ideology, set in motion the series of events that led to the Turks' savage and unapologetic attempt to wipe the Armenians off the face of the earth.

The Turkish nation in the 19th century was riddled with internal problems. Their unshakable belief that they deserved a seat at the table with dominant world powers was a pipe dream in light of their economic instability, lack of infrastructure, and perpetual ethnic conflicts. Nonetheless, the barbarous Ottoman Empire continuously sought alliances and participation in European politics in order to gain the power that they believed their positioning entitled them to. It was precisely because of the inherent strategic possibilities in Turkey's location that European powers deigned to involve them, however marginally, in their affairs of state. In an 1853 conversation with the British Ambassador in St. Petersburg, Russian Tsar Nicholas I said of the Ottoman Empire, "We have a sick man on our hands—a man gravely ill" (Graber 21). Referred to thereafter

throughout the 19th century as the “Sick Man of Europe”, Turkey was considered hopelessly backward, incapable of holding its own in the newly industrialized West, and therefore, most political moves involving Turkey took the form of admonishments and conditional treaties requiring Turkey to make changes that would bring it more in line with Western practices, in order to make it possible for European governments to procure advantageous alliances with them. Two successive Turkish governments, though very different in many ways, both actively sought foreign assistance in bringing Turkey onto the modern global stage. G.S. Graber, in his book *Caravans to Oblivion: The Armenian Genocide, 1915*, characterized this point in Ottoman foreign policy:

In their successive campaigns to conquer Europe during their heyday of military prowess in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, no European armies had been able to withstand the Turkish cavalry or infantry. Not until the Turks stood at the gates of Vienna in 1529 was their drive into Europe halted. From this time forward, Turkish military might declined; the Ottoman Empire disintegrated, and the successive Ottoman regimes were constantly on the verge of bankruptcy, tottering from one calamity to another until rescued by foreign aid. Now, compelled as they were to turn to the hated foreigner to learn the modern skills essential to their survival, the Turks were selective in their choice of whom to approach for advice, and which institutions they might copy. (10)

The German Emperor, Wilhelm II, took advantage of this need in order to further his Ottoman ambitions. In particular, his imperialistic desire for expansion was manifested in his commitment to constructing the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway, which he saw as a politically expedient way of investing German capital in the backward empire, in order to gain a foothold for the future (Graber 10-1). Wilhelm’s providing German advisors to the Turkish military solidified the German-Turkish connection, and would later have

significant impact on how the events of World War I impacted both nations, and the fate of the Armenians. In fact, Wilhelm's concerted efforts to stay in the favor of the easily angered, wildly unpredictable and often paranoid Ottoman Emperor Sultan Abdülhamîd II, meant that Germany refused to sign on with the rest of Europe's condemnation of Abdülhamîd's first Armenian massacres in 1894-6 (Graber 11).

Although the 1915 genocide occurred years after he had left the throne, there is no doubt whatsoever that Sultan Abdülhamîd II was the primary catalyst behind the Turkish desire to not merely subjugate, but annihilate the Armenian people. His open hostility toward Armenians, and blatantly oppressive policies, led to political organizing by Armenians, which then fed his always-festering paranoia. A series of events throughout his reign ratcheted up the conflict between the Turkish government and its Armenian citizens, and actively fostered the violence that would explode in 1915. However, the seeds of Abdülhamîd's hatred were sown years earlier in what is known as the Tanzimat era in Ottoman history. Ironically, this period of "Reordering" was intended to modernize Turkey by legislating equality for its many disparate ethnicities, but in practice the reforms served only to foment dissent on all sides. According to Stephen Astourian in his chapter "Modern Turkish Identity and the Armenian Genocide", from Richard Hovannisian's collection of articles in *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, two imperial decrees of this period, the *Hatt-i Sherif-i Gülane* (the Noble Rescript of the Rose Chamber) of 1839, and the *Hatt-i Hümayun* (the Imperial Rescript) of 1856, were based in the concept of *Ottomanism*, or parity for Muslims and

non-Muslims (25-6). The Tanzimat reforms were meant to show Europe that the Ottoman Empire was able to support its diverse population to the benefit of all, but they backfired spectacularly. The new policies undermined the established balance of power between the ruling Muslim Turks and the non-Muslim minorities residing in “their” land, and the Islamic reaction to the Tanzimat laws was one of furious indignation that their “sacred national rights which were earned with [their] ancestors’ blood” had been taken away from them (Astourian 26). The Muslim Turks were infuriated, and sought to make sure the Armenians stayed where they belonged, subjugated in the power structure. In a further attempt to appease European sensibilities, shortly after Sultan Abdülhamîd II ascended the throne in 1876, he gave the Ottoman Empire its first constitution, considered the summit of the Tanzimat reforms; however, the constitution was short-lived and never followed. The Sultan openly declared that the constitution would only foster revolution, and that he had only implemented it to silence the foreigners (Graber 28). The Sultan dissolved the newly formed parliament in January of 1878 and in light of the Russian Tsar, Alexander II’s, declaration of war against the Empire, his strongly held beliefs in Muslim superiority and sovereignty were manifested in policies that encouraged gross inequalities and rampant oppression of the minority populations. These policies included abusive taxation and restrictions against language and religion that severely limited the Greek, Armenian and Jewish populations in Turkey. This was in direct opposition to the treaty signed at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 that had a specific provision regarding the Armenians. Article 61 of the treaty insisted that the Sublime

Porte, the Ottoman governing body, immediately implement the reforms and improvements needed in local areas to guarantee the safety of the Armenian people from the oppression of the Circassian and Kurdish overlords. As Merrill D. Peterson explains in his book *“Starving Armenians”: America and the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1930 and After:*

The article was so limp as to be worthless against the Sublime Porte. Nor did it make an impression on warlike Kurds and Circassians. It was a fraud, a piece of diplomatic artifice. Its only value, as the future would show, was as a standing reminder of a pledge once made but never, even in the most perilous times, meant to be fulfilled by the six signatory powers. (17)

The Article changed nothing for the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire in terms of the day-to-day abuses they suffered, but it did acknowledge in writing that the way in which they were treated was wrong—at least according to the European understanding of humane treatment. The growing number of European-educated young Armenians, with their increasingly globalized understanding of human rights, also bolstered the growing anger among the Armenian people regarding their treatment at the hands of the Turkish government. In his *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, Richard Hovannisian explains:

Feeling abandoned and betrayed, a growing number of Armenians began to espouse extralegal means to achieve what they now regarded as the right and moral duty to resist tyrannical rule. Instead of meeting its obligation to protect its subjects, the Ottoman government had become the instrument of exploitation and suppression....Local self-defense groups that had coalesced in the 1880s gradually gave way to several broadly based secret political societies in the 1890s....they sought cultural freedom and regional autonomy, equality before the law, freedom of speech, press,

and assembly, unhindered economic opportunity, and the right to bear arms. (24)

Two groups that emerged from this period were the *Hunchak*, from the Armenian for “bell”, which was decidedly socialist and begun by Armenian ex-patriots in Geneva in 1887 (Peterson 22), and the *Dashnakstutium* party in 1890 that eventually evolved into the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and has persisted in various forms throughout the last century (Graber 28). Both groups called for an independent Armenia.

The formation of these groups stoked the paranoia of Abdülhamīd who continued to see Armenian revolution as a threat that needed to be quashed without reservation. However, it was not the liberal intellectual politicians that finally caused the eruption of organized bloodshed; it was the oppressed and outraged Armenian peasants of the Sassun region deep in the Armenian mountains. Tired of the Kurds’ extortionist tactics of double taxation, “protection” fees, siphoned dowries and quick violence, the peasants of Sassun banded together in resistance in 1893 (Graber 28-30). Graber suggests that it is idealistic to assume that their actions were politically motivated, stating, “it is arguable that the peasants’ fight had more to do with outrage at a system of double taxation than with a passionate belief in human liberty” (29). Regardless of the motivation, any armed resistance was exactly the trigger that Abdülhamīd needed to utilize his Hamideye forces for the very purpose he had created them. Abdülhamīd named his bully forces after himself, and by 1892 had authorized some thirty regiments of approximately 500 men each, in order to facilitate “control” of the Armenians. Formed from groups of itinerant Kurds, the Hamideye troops were sent into the mountains to collect the exorbitant taxes.

When they met resistance, regular troops were sent from Constantinople to aid in defeating the “insurrection”, and it is estimated that 3,000 Armenians were massacred in the mountains of Sassun (Peterson 23). The Sassun uprising touched off a series of massacres in the eastern provinces over the next several years, culminating in August of 1896 when the Dashnak party took control of the Ottoman Bank in Constantinople for 13 hours. Although they submitted demands, these young, poorly armed, frightened men quickly surrendered for the right to leave the country, having actually done nothing to the Bank. However, the attention of the international press and the “proof” that the Armenians were out of control, infuriated the Sultan, and he authorized, “Two days of Turkish butchery and looting in the streets and along the fashionable avenues follow[ing] the Dashnaks’ departure” (Peterson 24). It is estimated that over 5,000 Armenians were killed over the two day period. The death tolls of the Hamidean massacres are estimated at a quarter of a million Armenians across the Ottoman Empire between 1893 and 1896 (Hovannissian 25-6).

The days following the Dashnak bank takeover are considered the end of the Hamidean Massacres, a fact attributed to the growing international awareness of the Armenians’ plight, as reports flooded into Britain from various diplomats stationed throughout the Ottoman lands. It was in the wake of the Hamidean Massacres that voices championing the Armenian cause began to be more strident and urgent. A network of diplomats and reporters continuously wrote about what they were seeing, and it would be easier to understand if it could be said that their words fell on deaf ears, but that was not

the case. In fact, the cry was heard loud and clear, and accounts, illustrations, reports and pleas found their way out of the Ottoman Empire, and engendered great sympathy for the Armenians from the European and American people. British Foreign Documents of the period offer several examples of these powerful testimonies. Graber quotes the letter that Longworth, the British consul in Trebizond, wrote to the British embassy in Constantinople on October 28, 1895, announcing:

The Armenians were and are still in great stress: killed in cold blood, robbed of their goods, flung into gaol, not allowed to emigrate, blackmailed by the Moslems and persecuted by the authorities, the poor people are in deepest despair. (31)

Longworth was deeply affected by what he was witnessing, and horrified by the state's role in the violence. He wrote again, five days later, lambasting the authorities who engaged:

in the make believe that there was an insurrectionary movement at Trebizond, unable though they are to name a single Turk killed or wounded by Armenians on the occasion of the outbreak. Such dogged obduracy and perversity can only be possible in a shameless and despotic Government, supported by a people who had shown themselves to be murderers and robbers of the helpless and innocent. (31)

And the consuls were not the only reporters. The Rev. Mr. Chambers, a British cleric attached to an American mission, sent word to London describing a massacre at Akhisar on October 22, 1895:

The murders were committed in the most inhumane manner: cudgels, knives, axes, swords and firearms were used. Young boys helped in the slaying. Ropes were tied to the feet of the dead and the bodies were dragged through the streets....and thrown into the wells. One old man of 75 years was tumbled in without being killed, and was left to die among the corpses of his friends. (32)

The voices were passionate and poignant, and their message was heard, but nothing substantive resulted.

What is perhaps the most unsettling and disturbing aspect of any study of the Armenian massacres and genocide is the irrefutable fact that Europe and America were well-aware of what was happening to the Armenians. Many civic and social leaders, particularly in Britain and America, spoke publicly and passionately about the plight of the “Starving Armenians” throughout several decades of their systematic oppression and decimation, but the governments of Europe and the United States consistently and repeatedly made empty gestures toward censuring the Turks, and never did anything decisive or with any teeth in order to stop what was happening. In fact, the number of legislative proposals that eventually came to naught in order to preserve cordial relations with Turkey is downright embarrassing and continued well into the 20th century in both Britain and America. Indeed, Peterson’s *Starving Armenians* is a well-documented, meticulously researched text that chronicles the international cry for human rights for Armenians, and the absolute dearth of any substantive political action. It should, however, be noted that in the aftermath of the genocide, British, Swiss and American orphanages quite literally saved the few survivors that were left. Without the tireless work of the men and women who ran those orphanages, the genocide might have actually succeeded in wiping Armenians off the face of the earth, and their contribution cannot be overstated. Nonetheless, the unwillingness of heads of state to address the Turks directly

and impose sanctions, even after the formation of the United Nations, is a blot on history that cannot be explained or erased.

Despite the voices that arose telling of the Armenians' plight, the massacres periodically continued through several government upheavals in Turkey. In an eerie precursor to so many of the South American genocides of the 20th century, the 1908 coup which installed the Young Turks, members of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), as the new head of Ottoman government, was initially hailed by the oppressed Armenians as a harbinger of positive change. Sultan Abdülhamîd II's fears regarding the revolutionary corollary to education were realized when the earliest meetings of the Young Turks took place in the military medical schools that he had reluctantly set up, despite his reservations about the dangers of an educated populace. As Graber describes it, at schools all over the country and abroad, "young, forceful and ambitious Turks—who considered themselves first and foremost patriots—gathered in secret and discussed the future" (37). The result of these clandestine machinations was that in 1908 the Committee of Union and Progress, which "combined European revolutionary ideals with profound disappointment over the deterioration of the Ottoman Empire" (Peterson 28), gave the Sultan an ultimatum demanding that he reinstate the abandoned constitution of 1876. He did, although he plotted a counterrevolution that led to his complete overthrow in 1909. When the Armenians first heard of the CUP, they were thrilled and eager to be a part of the reforms to create a revitalized and powerful Turkey. However, all too soon they understood that they were not going to benefit from this revolution (Peterson 28-9).

In 1909 in the ancient Cilician city of Adana, 20,000 Armenians were massacred for reasons that have never clearly and successfully made it into the historical record. It is known that the Young Turks blamed the bloodshed on the Hamidean resistance, but in light of the incipient genocide in 1915, these claims seem implausible.

Despite the new infusion of a European-educated power structure that was quite deliberately and consciously looking to reinvigorate the nation and help it take its place at the table, the early years of the Young Turks' rule saw a rapid disintegration of the holdings of the Ottoman Empire. As Hovannisian succinctly put it, "In the immediate aftermath of the Young Turk revolution, Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria asserted full independence, Crete declared union with Greece, and Italy forcibly pursued claims to Tripoli and the Libyan Hinterland" (26). This did not bode well for one of the last Christian minorities still residing on Turkish land. A rallying ideology known as Pan-Turkism emerged, cementing what history has taught us is one of the most clamoring alarm bells that precede genocide: a belief in restoring the country to its "rightful" citizens, those most emblematic of the nation's dominant culture, beliefs, ethnicity and power. The global events of the 20th century have illustrated time and time again that this ideological stance so often heralds genocidal atrocity, and the Armenians in Turkey were the first concrete example of the century to display this horrible truth. The inevitable siding of the Ottomans with Germany against Russia in the exploding World War of 1914 made the Armenians even more vulnerable, as so many lived in the Russian territories and were therefore easily scapegoated as enemies. Under the cover of the First

World War, the push for a unified Muslim society, added to the long-festering resentments regarding Armenian control of agricultural resources, as well as their dominance in most of the economic markets in the cities, encouraged the Young Turks to achieve their plainly stated goal of total annihilation of the Armenian people. As Hovannisian explains:

The Young Turk leaders were drawn to the newly articulated ideology of Turkism, which was to supplant the principle of egalitarian Ottomanism and give justification to violent means for transforming a heterogeneous empire into a homogeneous state based on the concept of one nation, one people. (28)

The “forgotten” genocide that would offer a blueprint of atrocity for the 20th century was executed with ruthless precision, enabled by a restless warrior culture that justified their grotesque and horrific actions as winning back “Turkey for the Turks.” It is one of the most shameful chapters in human history. Ambassador Morgenthau, the U.S. ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, and one of the most important voices in telling the Armenians’ story, would one day write in his autobiography *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story*:

I am confident that the whole history of the human race contains no such horrible episode as this. The massacres and persecutions of the past seem almost insignificant when compared to the sufferings of the Armenian race in 1915. (321-2)

The Genocide: Accounts from Witnesses and Survivors

The Armenian genocide of 1915 was the first genocide of the 20th century; a century that saw a proliferation of ethnic and ideological cleansings across the globe so pervasive that, indeed, the word genocide itself had to be invented. In 1944 a Polish lawyer of Jewish descent, Raphael Lemkin, coined the term by combining the Greek

word *genos* (race or tribe) with the Latin word for killing, *cide*, and defined it as killing individuals not for reasons of individual culpability, but because they are members of a particular group (Lemkin). The ruthless, savage attempt of the Turks to eradicate the Armenian people offers a template for the motivations, intentionality, methodology, and implementation of the genocides that followed it, including the Holocaust. In virtually every book ever written on the Armenian genocide, a reference is made to a statement made by Hitler on August 22, 1939 as he assured his military commanders that they would be successful in their plans for Poland by saying, "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" (Miller 5).

While every genocide to follow can trace certain aspects of its execution to the Armenian genocide, there are facets of the Turkish plan that are horrifically unique to the Armenian experience. One is the effectiveness of their eradication. The sheer numbers involved in mass extermination, as well as the dehumanizing methods of viewing and processing the victims collectively rather than as individuals makes statistical estimations inherently problematic. In all genocides, it is virtually impossible to determine the death tolls with any reliable accuracy, but it is estimated that the Turks succeeded in eliminating fully between two-thirds and three-quarters of the entire Armenian population, over 1.5 million victims. According to the website of the Armenian National Institute:

It is estimated that one and a half million Armenians perished between 1915 and 1923. There were an estimated two million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire on the eve of WWI. Well over a million were deported in 1915. Hundreds of thousands were butchered outright. Many

others died of starvation, exhaustion, and epidemics which ravaged the concentration camps. Among the Armenians living along the periphery of the Ottoman Empire many at first escaped the fate of their countrymen in the central provinces of Turkey. Tens of thousands in the east fled to the Russian border to lead a precarious existence as refugees. The majority of the Armenians in Constantinople, the capital city, were spared deportation. In 1918, however, the Young Turk regime took the war into the Caucasus, where approximately 1,800,000 Armenians lived under Russian dominion. Ottoman forces advancing through East Armenia and Azerbaijan here too engaged in systematic massacres. The expulsions and massacres carried by the Nationalist Turks between 1920 and 1922 added tens of thousands of more victims. By 1923 the entire landmass of Asia Minor and historic West Armenia had been expunged of its Armenian population. The destruction of the Armenian communities in this part of the world was total. (www.armenian-genocide.org)

While the facts and figures and historical implications of the events of 1915 provide an outline, understanding of the genocide must come, as all true understanding of history does, through the voices of the witnesses and survivors. It is one thing to note that 1.5 million Armenians were killed in the genocide; it is another thing entirely to recognize that each one of the 1.5 million was a person, with a story. The stories describing the executions, deportation caravans, rapes, starvation, and the endless litany of horrors that the Armenians were subjected to are truly testimonies of atrocity, and are as disturbing, horrendous and nauseating as any recollection of savagery can possibly be. The desperation, despair and utter devastation told in their stories creates a bleak picture of humanity at its absolute worst. The awareness of the cruelty that human beings are capable of inflicting upon one another is relentlessly present in all of these testimonies—but so is the extraordinary strength, courage and mettle that has allowed these stories to be told. There are eyewitness accounts from many people, mostly foreign diplomats who

were compelled to report on the evil they witnessed, but most of the stories that now exist of the genocide itself come from survivors. These people survived circumstances, conditions and abuse beyond the most nightmarish imaginings. They survived, and they told their stories. Almost a century after the genocide, many of the survivors have died, virtually none exist anymore, yet their stories and their legacy have served not only as the harshest of cautionary tales for the world, but also as a gift to their children and their children's children, proof that they are descended from the very strongest people: survivors.

It is important to note a very significant difference in the accounts from witnesses, primarily foreign diplomats, and the accounts from the survivors themselves. The obvious difference is that the witnesses only had to watch what was happening, while the survivors experienced it. However, it is also of value to understand that the witnesses were writing in the present. They were sending letters and reports about events that were happening as they wrote them. As Peter Balakian characterizes these witness accounts in *The Burning Tigris*, "Written by professional, educated men, the narratives are often eloquent in their clean language and clinical images. They provide a certain detachment and perspective on events that might otherwise seem to surpass description" (225). In contrast, by the very nature of the experiences the survivors went through, it was quite impossible to write or tell these stories while living them. The survivor accounts are exactly that—accounts told by survivors after living through their ordeals, and they are written and spoken from circumstances of relative safety. As a result, they have a

perspective that was perhaps not possible while they were living through the experience, and which is bolstered by things they have learned and experienced subsequent to the genocide. This broad awareness often comes through in the survivors' stories.

The voices in both the witness and survivor accounts are as varied and as complex as the individuals who are doing the telling. Some exhibit clear signs of PTSD and dissociation as they relate one atrocity after another in plain, factual prose with barely any affect. Some cannot keep the intensity from their descriptions as they describe the memories that haunt them every day of their lives. Some have a touch of the storyteller about them, ascribing heroism and villainy to the appropriate characters. Others acknowledge the stripping away of all shame as the ugliest facets of what it took to survive are revealed. While each voice is individual, it is a collective story. The accounts are disturbingly consistent, which in and of itself reveals the organization behind the Turkish plan—there is simply no way that so many of the experiences could be so similar if the deportations and killings had not been meticulously designed. When examining testimony from the Armenian genocide, it is not humanly possible to be unaffected by what these people went through, and it is equally impossible to remain unimpressed by the extraordinary triumph that surviving this ordeal represents. It all comes through in their voices.

The systematic extermination of all Armenians from the Ottoman Empire was approached with a clear organizational plan intended to carry out the task with the utmost efficiency and efficacy. It is a plan quite chilling in its simplicity: First, round up all of

the “leaders” in each village or community. By killing the priests, doctors, lawyers, merchants, and others who hold sway in the towns, they swiftly eliminated the most likely sources of resistance. Next are all of the remaining men. Once the men are imprisoned and slaughtered, their property is forfeit and there is no further complication with eliminating the women and children. Finally, deportation of the women and children. By removing them from their communities in a forced march, the women are immediately distanced from any resources. The deportation not only emptied the towns and villages quickly and efficiently, but also provided a simple but effective way to kill hundreds of thousands of people with minimal effort and no overhead. Since the goal was the death of the deportees, no provisions or accommodations were necessary. In addition, the inevitable weakening of the marchers, as well as the absence of their men, allowed the Turkish soldiers to steal anything of value that the marchers carried, and rape the girls and women with virtually no opposition. Finally, disposal of the corpses was largely left to nature, as the dead dropped along desolate desert and mountain terrain. From an efficacy standpoint, the plan was a monument to efficiency. From a human standpoint, it was unspeakably ruthless and cruel. From a historical standpoint, it provided future genocides with a playbook.

Years after the genocide, the actual Turkish playbook was discovered, translated, and sent from the British High Commission in Constantinople to the Foreign Office in London in early 1919. The 10-point CUP document verifies what was already obvious, that the genocide was meticulously plotted and executed. It reads:

- 1) Close all Armenian societies, and arrest all who worked against Government at any time among them and send them into the provinces such as Baghdad or Mosul, and wipe them out either on the road or there.
- 2) Collect arms.
- 3) Excite Moslem opinion by suitable and special means, in places such as Van, Erzeroum, Adana, where as a point of fact the Armenians have already won the hatred of the Moslems, provoke organised massacres as the Russians did at Baku.
- 4) Leave all execution to the people in the provinces such as Erzeroum, Van, Mamuret ul Aziz, and Bitlis, and use military disciplinary forces (i.e., Gendarmerie) ostensibly to stop massacres, while on the contrary in places as Adana, Sivas, Broussa, Ismidt and Smyrna actively help the Moslem with military force.
- 5) Apply measures to exterminate all males under 50, priests and teachers, leave girls and children to be Islamized.
- 6) Carry away the families of all who succeed in escaping and apply measures to cut them off from all connection with their native place.
- 7) On the ground that Armenian officials may be spies, expel and drive them out absolutely from every Government department or post.
- 8) Kill off in an appropriate manner all Armenians in the army—this to be left to the military to do.
- 9) All action to begin everywhere simultaneously, and thus leave no time for preparation of defensive measures.
- 10) Pay attention to the strictly confidential nature of these instructions, which may not go beyond two or three persons. (Balakian 189-190)

In light of this document, the already outlandish Turkish denial of the genocide seems patently absurd, but they, of course, deny the authenticity of the document. Nonetheless, it lays out the steps of the plan clearly, and history shows that they were slavishly followed.

Rounding Up the Leaders

The initial roundups of influential community members had a two-fold purpose: to eliminate their influence, and to create an atmosphere of fear in order to flush out pockets of resistance. The Armenian community in Constantinople was an economically and artistically flourishing one, and a significant presence in the city. To this day, commemorations of the genocide take place on April 24, because the significance of these arrests cannot be overstated. The brazen display of these unlawful, blatantly unjust arrests of the Armenian elite by Turkish soldiers in the middle of one of the most important cities in the world is considered in retrospect the ringing of the opening bell of the genocide.

Grigoris Balakian, a prominent priest in Constantinople, was one of the 250 intellectuals and important cultural and religious leaders rounded up on April 24, 1915. His harrowing existence from that fateful night, through his ultimate return to Constantinople years later after surviving prison, deportation, living underground, and exile, are chronicled in the powerful book *Armenian Golgotha*, initially written from his posting in Manchester, England in the years following the war. In these memoirs, he vividly recalls the surreal quality of finding himself in prison that night:

From the deep silence of the night until morning, every few hours Armenians were brought to the prison. And so behind these high walls, the jostling and commotion increased as the crowd of prisoners became denser. It was as if all the prominent Armenian public figures—assemblymen, representatives, revolutionaries, editors, teachers, doctors, pharmacists, dentists, merchants, bankers, and others in the capital city—had made an appointment to meet in these dim prison cells. Some even

appeared in their nightclothes and slippers. The more those familiar faces kept appearing, the more the chatter abated and our anxiety grew. (57)

Following the abduction of these men in Constantinople, the same scenario was played out across the Ottoman Empire, with the leaders of every village, town and *villayet* throughout Turkey taken in the first rounds of arrests. As a survivor from the small village of Chemeshgezak recalled when interviewed by Donald Miller and his wife, Lorna Tournyan Miller, for their project *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide*, “You see, they [Turks] first took the educated, the intellectuals. They took these people to a home, which they had converted into a prison, and tortured them in order to get them to talk” (68). Torture was prevalent in many of the interrogation sessions conducted across Turkey, in the hopes of linking the leaders to subversive anti-government activities in order to make a display of them to their “followers” in their local areas, lest those followers were even considering resistance. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, initially reluctant to take his post as the U.S. envoy to the Ottoman Empire, was so deeply affected by the events he witnessed in the years of the genocide and its aftermath, that he spent not only his years of service, but indeed the rest of his life working tirelessly to tell the Armenian story. The following passage from his memoirs *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story* is an extremely graphic description of the common methods of torture used by the Turks in their interrogations. It is disturbing, but the detail involved offers little doubt of its authenticity:

A common practice was to place the prisoner in a room with two Turks stationed at each end and each side. The examination would then begin with the bastinado. This is a form of torture not uncommon in the Orient;

it consists of beating the soles of the feet with a thin rod. At first the pain is not marked; but as the process goes slowly on, it develops into the most terrible agony, the feet swell and burst, and not infrequently, after being submitted to this treatment, they have to be amputated. The gendarmes would bastinado their Armenian victim until he fainted; they would then revive him by sprinkling water on his face and begin again. If this did not succeed in bringing their victim to terms, they had numerous other methods of persuasion. They would pull out his eyebrows and beard almost hair by hair; they would then extract his finger nails and toe nails; they would apply red-hot irons to his breast, tear off his flesh with red-hot pincers, and pour boiled butter into the wounds. In some cases the gendarmes would nail hands and feet to pieces of wood—evidently in imitation of the Crucifixion, and then, while the sufferer writhed in his agony, they would cry: “Now let your Christ come and help you!” (306)

Although the Armenians were long-acquainted with the particularly barbaric nature of Turkish cruelty, these initial torture sessions of their leaders seemed to usher in a new era of utterly shameless violence. In reading all of the accounts of both witnesses and survivors, it is extremely difficult to maintain a modern scholarly neutrality based on the understanding that all people are human beings, they merely have differing motivations. While it is certainly true that examples of extraordinary violence and cruelty abound in all telling of the human story, no matter where or when it takes place, it is also certainly true that the behavior of the Turkish people, both military and civilian, toward the Armenian people at the turn of the 20th century, is as revolting a display of collective barbarism as history can offer. Of course, in almost every survivor account, there is a tale of at least one kind and empathetic Turk who was ashamed of the Armenians’ treatment at their peoples’ hands, but examples of wildly aggressive and heinous behavior are pervasive throughout the accounts, and it is impossible not to acknowledge this fact.

From a broader base than the singular experiences of individuals who were tortured and killed, the elimination of the intellectual and cultural leadership truly was one of the most powerful blows to the Armenian people, effectively crippling not only the civic infrastructure of the people, but also virtually eliminating their collective artistic culture in one fell swoop. Grigor Balakian's great-nephew, Peter, is a modern Armenian-American writer, who learned about the genocide only as an adult. However, since then, he has written extensively about the Armenian experience, both in the past and present. In his book *The Burning Tigris*, which details the American response to the human rights issues raised by the genocide at the turn of the 20th century, he comments on the terrible loss that the killing of the intellectuals represented for Armenians:

What happened to these deported Armenian cultural leaders [from Constantinople] happened to Armenian intellectuals all over Turkey. In this calculated way the CUP destroyed a vital part of Armenia's cultural infrastructure, and succeeded in practically silencing a whole generation of Armenian writers. The death toll shows that at least eighty-two writers are known to have been murdered, in addition to the thousands of teachers and cultural and religious leaders. It was an apocalypse for Armenian literature, which was in its own moment of a modernist flowering. (216)

Not only writers, but painters, sculptors, artisans, scholars, musicians and artists of all stripes were targeted in the early days of the genocide, as the Young Turks recognized that artists are the storytellers, and they wanted this peoples' story silenced. They were frighteningly effective in this endeavor, and modern Armenians still frequently articulate their mourning for the loss of artistic culture that they are still seeking to reclaim today.

Eliminating the Men

It is not uncommon for aggressors to specifically target the male population of their enemies, and the Turks were no exception. As stated in their plan, they intended to exterminate all Armenian males under the age of fifty. Following the initial elimination of the intellectuals and community leaders, their next step was to kill all Armenian males above the age of twelve as quickly and efficiently as possible. The seeds of this plan had been planted a year earlier in 1914 at the start of World War I when all adult males were conscripted into the military to fight for the Empire. It was ridiculously easy for Turkish conscripts to buy their way out, and almost impossible for Armenians to do so. As cannon fodder, the warrior Turks and Kurds preferred to use the infidel *giavors*, the derogatory term for Christian minorities in Turkish, and serving alongside Armenians also allowed them to kill them often and with virtual impunity. The inequality was furthered by the practice of forcing Armenian villages to feed and house Turkish soldiers, while Armenian conscripts were often left in open fields or barns. The tension of this situation is vividly described in a scene from Elizabeth Caraman's memoir of her childhood during the massacres and genocide, *Daughter of the Euphrates*. A soldier has just entered their home and demanded that her father organize the Armenians to provide room and board for the Turkish soldiers:

Father rose angrily as if to fight and I, turning, ran to Mother to come and stop him. She threw herself upon Father and begged him to control himself. He shoved her aside and in a rage shouted, "Do you realize that this man is asking me to place two or three Turkish soldiers in every home tonight, while the Armenian soldiers will be quartered in the church and stables? Do you know what will happen in our homes if the Turks are

permitted to sleep in the same home with our women and girls? Each family is to be held responsible for the escape of deserters! Oh, merciful God, do You hear me? How can I make the people do the impossible...?" (142)

The threat of rape was very real, and as the accounts will reveal again and again, and it was common practice. These home invasions were only the beginning of weakening the Armenian men's positions in their homes and villages.

The next phase of making the men vulnerable came about in the form of violent searches for arms and ammunition in Armenian homes. On the pretense that it was evidence of anti-government sedition, the searches were used as justification to arrest, torture, and kill Armenian men, leaving the then largely irrelevant women and children without protection. It should be noted that while there were certainly some very brave Armenians who did indeed arm themselves with the intention of resistance, the instances were so rare as to be laughable as a plausible basis for widespread Armenian arrests. In *The Burning Tigris*, Balakian quotes extensively from diplomatic correspondence during the period of the genocide. The following refers to a report prepared by Leslie A. Davis, the American Consul stationed in Harput, that explained what took place in Turkey to the State Department:

...a process of framing the Armenians as seditious was under way. Davis noted that their supposed search for bombs and weapons often led the Turkish gendarmes to bury bombs in the backyards of the accused, in order "to manufacture evidence against the Armenians." He described the process in detail. First the gendarmes would surround a town to prevent anyone from leaving, and then more gendarmes would go house by house demanding that the occupants surrender their weapons, when often there were no weapons to be found. "I have seen many houses where the gendarmes had dug up the floors and torn away the walls in their efforts to

find weapons which they thought were concealed there.” The situation became so absurd that some terrified Armenians actually went out and bought weapons from the police, spending “large sums of money for some old gun or revolver.” (227-8)

The fact that evidence was clearly being invented is corroborated by a letter to Ambassador Morgenthau dated July 28, 1915, from Oscar Heizer, the American Consul in Trezibond: “There was no inquiry as to who were guilty or who were innocent of any movement against the government. If a person was an Armenian that was sufficient reason for being treated as a criminal and deported” (Balakian 266). These home searches were employed throughout Turkey, and in the village of Habousie in the *villayet* of Mamuret ul Aziz, Caraman’s father was a victim:

Finally, on a late afternoon in April 1915, three Turkish officers stalked into our house and demanded that Father give up his hidden arms and ammunition.... When Father replied that he had no guns or ammunition two of the men clubbed him about the head with their riding stocks. As he staggered under their blows, Mother screamed and ran to stop them, but they shoved her aside and dragged Father out of the door and down the street toward their headquarters. (152)

The arrests of the men were not only expedient in accomplishing the Turkish goal of leaving the Armenians physically vulnerable, they also enabled the widespread blackmail, robbery and looting of Armenian wealth that the Turkish military and peasantry were eager to undertake. Especially in rural areas, Armenians and Turks generally co-existed well, depending on one another for local trade, and sharing certain communal markets and circumstances. Ethnic prejudice against Armenians had been steadily growing throughout the last century, and was manifested in common derogatory slurs and a practiced distance, but even throughout the massacres of 1894 and 1909, the

violence shown against the Armenians came primarily from military sources. The new concept of Pan-Turkism espoused by the Young Turks swept across Turkey and encouraged and inflamed anti-Armenian sentiment to the point that now, in 1915, the tide had dramatically changed, and the Turkish people were all too eager to actively join in persecuting the Armenians, especially if they could profit from it. The extortion of Armenians throughout the process of genocide was extensive, and brazenly shameless on the part of the Turks. Executed through both officially devised methods and unofficial opportunistic moments, the stripping away of all Armenian goods by the Turks was accomplished quite thoroughly in several ways. One of the military methods used in the early days of the conflict was the outright robbery of entire villages under the pretext of ransoming their already unjustly held prisoners. When the men were rounded up and imprisoned and tortured during the arms searches, the next step was for the Turkish soldiers to offer the prisoners' release and the village's protection for a specified sum, which they then stole, before killing the prisoners and raping, killing and deporting the villagers. In his rather informative and analytical account of his experiences during the genocide entitled *Judgment Unto Truth: Witnessing the Armenian Genocide*, Ephraim Jernazian describes this process as it took place in the much-besieged village of Urfa:

The Armenians were told that the prisoners (including those returned from Rakka and Aleppo) would be freed and Urfa would be assured its peace and security in return for the payment of six thousand Ottoman gold pieces (about thirty thousand dollars). This was a huge ransom, but worth the sacrifice if we could be sure the promise would be kept....Men, women, and children brought everything they could—rings, bracelets, gold pieces, piled high at the Prelacy. The result: Immediately upon receiving the ransom, the men from Diarbakir, together with a band of local recruits, set

to work with relish. Instead of releasing the prisoners, as promised, they tortured them mercilessly, demanding information from them with which to arrest others. (71)

The military's tactics emboldened the Turkish citizens, who were quick to seize the opportunities afforded them by the obviously government-sanctioned treatment of their Armenian neighbors. One of the more disturbing incidents that Caraman relates in her memoir offers proof that Turkish citizens considered even children fair game. Shortly following her father's arrest, she learned how much her world was changing:

On my way home I knelt at a spring for a drink and when I stood up I saw a Turkish woman standing there waiting. As I pushed by her she grabbed me and seizing my ear-lobe tried to pull off my tiny gold earrings set with chip diamond. I screamed and fought her, trying to pull away, but she threw me to the ground falling on top of me and with silent ferocity sought to get hold of my ears. I screamed that I would give them to her if she would let me disengage them. She rose and stood over me as I loosed them....As I resumed my journey...I realized for the first time that I was an alien in my homeland. (162)

All across Turkey, Armenians were beginning to understand just how precarious their position was becoming. However, there was no time to act. As the CUP plan clearly outlines, swift and simultaneous execution of the extermination process was designed to eliminate the possibility of preparation for resistance or retaliation. With the military and citizenry working in concert, and no one but foreigners raising any objections, it was time to put the murder machine in motion.

As Ambassador Morgenthau explains, the system for killing the men was efficient and standardized:

In almost all cases the procedure was the same. Here and there squads of 50-100 men would be taken, bound together in groups of four, then

marched to a secluded spot a short distance from the village. Suddenly the sound of rifle shots would fill the air, and the Turkish soldiers who had acted as the escort would sullenly return to camp. Those sent to bury the bodies would find them almost invariably stark naked, for, as usual, the Turks had stolen all their clothes. In cases that came to my attention, the murderers had added a refinement to their victims' sufferings by compelling them to dig their graves before being shot. (302-3)

Again, with ruthless pragmatism, this scenario was enacted throughout Turkey, from the largest cities to the smallest villages. Armenian men were rounded up, bound together, and killed throughout the Ottoman lands. Regardless of where survivors are reporting from, the accounts are eerily similar. In Habousie, Caraman's father actually survived the first time he was taken to be killed. Caraman recalls her last encounter with her father as he escaped back to their street to see his family before he died:

As I knelt beside him I saw that his neck was covered with a crust of blood and dirt, and that his shirt was wet with blood. He had been stabbed in the neck and back and from his feebleness I judged had lost a great deal of blood..."Last night they tied our hands behind us and led us out of Echme into a little ravine not far from the road on the way to Habousie. There were thirty or forty of us....We marched for quite a while before we were halted and lined up with our backs to a newly dug ditch. Two men walked behind us and stabbed each man several times, kicking and rolling him into the long grave as he fell. I only remember being stabbed in the neck, here." (165)

However, his escape was short-lived, and he soon fell prey to the Turks' effective methods. He was quickly recaptured, and his eleven year old daughter watched as he finally succumbed:

Soldiers were coming down every street herding before them, with whips or gun butts, our men and boys. Wailing and weeping women crowded round each hopeless captive and though beaten down with gun or clout as they approached they returned again and again to implore the soldier captor to release *their* dear one. Even as I watched, the two prison guards

appeared lugging Father by the shoulders, his heels dragging in the dirt. They let him fall to the ground and one of them from somewhere got a piece of old carpet which they wrapped round him, his head and feet protruding at the ends. They then slung him across the back of a donkey and without a word, and even before I could move to kiss him goodbye or cry out, they had gone off. (168)

It was the last time Elizabeth Caraman ever saw her father.

A survivor from Konia interviewed by the Millers also witnessed her father's death in essentially the same manner:

They asked all the men and boys to separate from the women. There were some teen boys who were dressed like girls and disguised. They remained behind. But my father had to go. He was a grown man with a mustache. As soon as they separated the men, a group of armed men came from the other side of a hill and killed all the men right in front of our eyes. They killed them with bayonets at the end of their rifles, sticking them in their stomachs. Many of the women could not take it, and they threw themselves in the River Euphrates, and they, too, died. They did this killing right in front of us. I saw my father being killed. (80)

When the order for all men above the age of seventeen to report to the center of Marash, Abraham Hartunian was spared, as a priest, for the express purpose of utilizing him to keep the women and children under control for deportation. Therefore, he had the unusual experience of being a man watching as all of his contemporaries were led to the slaughter. His account, *Neither to Laugh nor to Weep; a Memoir of the Armenian Genocide*, displays his exuberant personality and consistently offers one of the more emphatic and emotional voices in describing the genocide. Although they are different fare from the tone of many accounts, his strident pleas and exclamations perfectly suit the horrors he is relating. In his book he describes watching the men of Marash go to their certain deaths:

Thus the thousands who had given themselves over to the hands of the bloodthirsty gendarmes were driven out to the desert slaughterhouses. The remainder, crushed, pale, hopeless, were left in the city to await their turn. It was no more a secret that the annihilation of the nation had been determined. How can I describe my mental anguish, the agonies of my heart, my emotions! The scenes of that day had bereft me of mind and strength and will. (64-5)

The executions of so many of the men left the remaining women and children in perilous circumstances. Not only had they lost their male loved ones, but they now were often left with no means of financial support, or physical protection. Armenian familial structure was an interesting mix of traditional patriarchy and strong matrilineal ties. It operated on a clearly delineated division of labor, with the women running all things domestic and having a significant say in family decisions, and the men responsible for providing for the family and maintaining the property—which in a pre-industrialized, largely agricultural society, meant a great deal of physical work. Therefore, while it would be inaccurate to say that the women were subservient and without personal power, it is definitely true that the removal of the men from their families made their survival excruciatingly difficult, if not impossible. The Turks clearly understood this, and by eliminating the men, had made their next move an easy one.

Deportations

The Turks' sinister genius in exterminating the Armenians through deportation has been recognized and utilized by many subsequent oppressive regimes, not the least of which was the Nazi party. Hitler openly acknowledged that the design for the extermination of the Jews was borrowed largely from the evident success of the Turkish

campaign. Deportation is so effective because it works on several levels. First, deporting people removes them from all of their existing support systems. It takes them away from their extended families and communities, and takes them out of the familiar into a wholly unfamiliar environment over which they have absolutely no control. Secondly, it gathers the victims neatly into a centralized location or grouping, to facilitate mass executions. Finally, and perhaps most horrific of all, it reduces the expenses of the extermination itself, because the very conditions inherent to deportation ensure that many of the victims will succumb to illness, starvation, and desperation, essentially killing themselves through various means. The nightmare of the Armenian deportations can scarcely be imagined, even with many detailed accounts describing them. The pure evil that must be embraced in order to drive hundreds and thousands of people to their deaths is beyond comprehension. The numerous descriptions of the deportation, from both witnesses and survivors, reveal one of the most disgusting episodes in human history, and they are relentless in their sheer horror. The foreign diplomats who witnessed these events were irrevocably changed by what they saw. While some were inspired to heroic efforts to do everything they could to help the Armenians, others were so damaged by their new understanding of the human capacity for evil that they were broken men, haunted by memories for the rest of their days. As for those who actually lived through being deported, it is impossible to read their stories without understanding that these survivors are surely some of the strongest people who have ever lived. The things they endured, the decisions they made, the resolve and determination that they had to possess in order to

survive, are truly unfathomable, but the very fact of their survival is incontrovertible proof that the human capacity to endure can, sometimes, best even the most ferocious evil. These survivors are all, every single one, absolutely extraordinary people, and their voices deserve to be heard. As each voice tells its heartrending story, it is crucial to remember that they survived.

The mass deportations of remaining Armenians were executed almost simultaneously across the breadth of Turkey. The urgency involved in organizing them quickly ensured that many Armenians did not truly understand what was happening, and therefore would not resist, even with the feeble means left to them. As further incentive for the complicity of the Turkish people, who at this point did not need much convincing, the deportations were extremely profitable for soldiers and citizens alike. As the Armenians, mostly women and children now, were herded into their caravans, their property and land was confiscated, and they desperately tried to sell their remaining goods for anything they could possibly get. They understood that sewing machines and furniture would be of no value to them now. The Turks quickly took advantage of the situation as the Armenians were taken from their homes and collected in the streets. In his correspondence with Ambassador Morgenthau, Consul Davis noted with great distaste, “The scene reminded me of vultures swooping down on their prey. It was a veritable Turkish holiday and all the Turks went about in their gala attire to feast and to make merry over the misfortunes of others” (Balakian 234) In Habousie, the Armenians seem to have had accurate reports of what to expect. As Caraman remembers, they knew

enough to disbelieve the Turkish claims that they were being “resettled” in southern colonies:

The town was full of rumors, supposedly from escaped “colonists,” that as soon as the column was well on its way, it was set upon first by the accompanying “guards” who confiscated all jewelry and money they could find, and anything else they wanted, including the prettier girls and women. Satisfying their greed and lust they would then permit the nomad Kurds to take the leavings, after which the decimated and terror-stricken column, utterly stripped of its goods which they had taken for the new “colony,” would be butchered outright, or driven onward until all had perished of hunger or disease. (176)

Although they had heard what was coming, they still could not possibly have imagined what lay ahead. They sold their goods and hid their jewelry in their clothes, but they were still utterly unprepared.

As appalling as the blatant theft and larceny of the deportees was, it was only the beginning. As the Empire united in its efforts to rid itself of the Armenian scourge, Turkish citizens in villages throughout the land stepped up to do their part. As much as they had taken to stripping the Armenians of their worldly possessions with glee, they were ready and willing to take on a more active role in their neighbors’ destruction. Yet another unconscionable aspect of the Turkish participation in the genocide was the complicit relationship between the military and the civilians. As the soldiers drove the caravans through the mountains and into the deserts, they alerted Turkish villagers along the way so that they could profit from the passing, and rape and murder their fill of Armenians. Stories abound of Turks charging outrageous extortionist sums for food and water—and often withholding the same, once the sums were paid. And once the soldiers

had had their fill, Kurds, Circassians, Beaudoins, and other rural Turks were all encouraged to take any women or children that they desired, whether for rape, or servitude, or “marriage” into their harems, Islamization, or a combination of all of the above, Armenians were picked off the caravan lines by various Turks all along the deportation routes. And as if all of this were not enough, Turkish peasants were notified that the caravans were on their way, and asked to meet them with their farming implements, in order to kill as many Armenians as possible. In his autobiography, Morgenthau describes the scene at Angora where the caravan of its last remaining male Armenians was being driven into the wild:

A mob of Turkish peasants fell upon them with clubs, hammers, scythes, spades, and saws. Such instruments not only caused more agonizing deaths than guns and pistols, but, as the Turks themselves boasted, they were more economical, since they did not involve the waste of powder and shell. In this way they exterminated the whole male population of Angora, including all of its men of wealth and breeding, and their bodies, horribly mutilated, were left in the valley, where they were devoured by wild beasts. (312)

In June of 1915, as the caravans were moving inexorably toward their valleys of death, both victims and witnesses became more and more aware of the reality that the deportations represented. On June 13, Abraham Hartunian was ordered to report to the caravan, along with the rest of the remaining citizens of Marash. Of that day, he writes:

We were caught in a military chain, and all of us were going to be deported. Hopelessness! Abandonment! Bitter sorrow! Black hell! Who shall I think of? Myself? My loved ones? I to be sent off in one direction, my family in another, far, far away from each other! Alone! Alone! To be tortured, despised, torn piecemeal, annihilated! *Asdvadz im!* Oh my God! (84)

And as his long relentless trek unfolded, Hartunian discovered his initial fears were not unfounded--if anything, they paled in comparison to the reality he was now living. As he describes the journey itself:

We lined up, to be driven over the mountain, between huge rocks, through muddy and inextricable paths, without turning right or left, a group of fifteen hundred souls! We must walk. And we must walk quickly, quickly! Under the lashes of whips, beaten with the butts of rifles! We are walking. We are running! Panting! Gasping! We are running away from the lashing and the beating! But what should the old people do? The women? The weak? The children? The mothers holding their babes? They stumble, roll, are tramped under foot. (91)

Meanwhile, in Harput, Consul Davis was not content being merely a witness and began to hide as many Armenians as he could fit into his home and garden. He fired off letter after letter, and dispatch after dispatch, trying to tell the “civilized” world what was happening in Turkey, but many of the letters were censored and intercepted by the Turks, and never reached their destinations. However, in a letter that did get through to Morgenthau, dated June 30, 1915, he voices his fears of the total annihilation that the deportations will surely bring about:

The full meaning of this order can scarcely be imagined by those who are not familiar with the peculiar conditions of this isolated region. A massacre, however horrible the word may sound, would be humane in comparison with it. In a massacre, many escape but a wholesale deportation of this kind in this country means a longer and perhaps even more dreadful death for nearly everyone. I do not believe it possible for one in a hundred to survive, perhaps not one in a thousand. (Balakian 232)

Sadly, his predictions would prove only too accurate.

As the grotesque lines of desperate souls marched inexorably forward through the scorching summer, witnesses could not fathom what they observed. Morgenthau would

never shake the images of that time, and described them graphically in his autobiography years later:

The hot sun of the desert burned their scantily clothed bodies, and their bare feet, treading the hot sand of the desert, became so sore that thousands fell and died or were killed where they lay. Thus, in a few days, what had been a procession of normal human beings became a stumbling horde of dust-covered skeletons, ravenously looking for scraps of food, eating any offal that came their way, crazed by the hideous sights that filled every hour of their existence, sick with all the diseases that accompany such hardships and privations, but still prodded on and on by the whips and clubs and bayonets of their executioners. (316-7)

A traveler through Anatolia, Armin T. Wegner, could not possibly have imagined the horrors he would encounter when he set out to explore Asia Minor. In a letter he used vivid imagery to try to convey the enormity of what he was seeing:

The roads are lined with famished and suffering Armenian refugees, like a weeping hedge that begs and screams, and from which rise a thousand pleading hands; we go by, our hearts full of shame....This flood of outcasts, hundreds of thousands of refugees, drags itself along through the Taurus and Amanus passes. (Balakian 273)

A German businessman, Bernau, who worked part-time for Consul Jackson, was sent under the pretext of being an employee of the Vacuum Oil Company to investigate what was really happening in the villages. He was distraught over what he witnessed there:

In Meskene alone, Bernau reported, there were sixty thousand Armenians buried, and “as far as the eye can reach mounds are seen containing 200 to 300 corpses.” Bernau saw men, women and especially children eating “herbs, earth, and even their own excrement,” and every day dozens were dying of typhus and dysentery. As he watched a group of women who were searching for barley seeds in some horse dung, he gave them bread and they “threw themselves on it like dogs dying of hunger, took it voraciously into their mouths with hiccups and epileptic trembling.” Within minutes another 250 women, children, and old people who hadn’t eaten for a week “precipitated themselves toward [him] from the hill,”

Bernau wrote, "extending their emaciated arms, imploring with tears and cries a piece of bread." (Balakian 262-3)

The story was repeated yet again in Urfa, where Jernazian witnessed an assembly of desolate souls beyond anything he could have envisioned:

Urfa was a regrouping station for exiles—a concentration camp....Long, straggling lines of struggling old men; dazed and horror-stricken women; and emaciated, feebly moaning children. Most were in rags—some with no covering at all—wary, hungry and thirsty, stricken with disease, tongues parched, legs swollen, barely able to walk even under the threat of the whip. These were the survivors of original contingents, usually ten times as large. Under scorching sun and over burning rocks by day, exposed to wind and dust and insects, with no shelter from the cold, dark nights, they passed through the Valley of Death. (64)

However, it is of no small significance that immediately following this passage, Jernazian also is compelled to remark, "Remarkable as was the physical survival of these exiles, more remarkable was the spiritual strength that sustained them" (64). Though it was an excruciating existence, and though so many of their number had fallen, the wretched deportees streaming into Urfa were still, at that point, survivors.

The Burdens of the Mothers

In their collection of survivor accounts painstakingly acquired through patient interviews and meticulous documentation of over a hundred Armenians, Donald and Lorna Miller point out that while every facet of the genocide offers a litany of horrors, the women on the deportation routes suffered not only every possibly physical torment, but also carried a burden of psychological torture that is immeasurable. Their chapter entitled "The Experience of Women and Children" begins with the following paragraph:

It is perhaps inappropriate to argue that women suffered *more* than men during the deportations, but, in general, they had a significantly *different* experience from the male population. Many of the men were killed relatively early in the deportation process, often experiencing brutal and violent deaths. In contrast, women were left alone with their children to suffer for months on the deportation routes. They were raped, their children were abducted, and they were forced to make excruciating decisions. For example, Was their own life to be valued over that of their children? Would their children have a greater chance of survival if given (or even sold) to passing Turks or Kurds? Should they sacrifice the life of a weaker child in order to preserve the life of a stronger son or daughter? (94)

Hartunian's memoir closely echoes these concerns, and reveals that at least one

Armenian man understood the difference in their circumstances:

The Armenian had lost every right! Everything now belonged to the Turk. This was my first step of deportation, and I was walking under the scorching sun. But at least I was a man. What were the mothers to do? Mothers who had been deported from other places already! Mothers who had lost their husbands and sons! Mothers who had small ones with them! Should they bewail the loss of their loved ones? Their darlings were hungry and thirsty. Should they think of their need? They were unable to walk. How could they bear their children on their shoulders and arms? My good God! Thou shouldst not have allowed it! (85)

The questions these passages raise are both poignant and relevant, and stories of the harrowing experiences of mothers on the deportation trails fill so many of the existing survivor accounts. Thrust into a nightmare where they were often utterly incapable of taking care of or protecting themselves, women forced to march with their children had to watch, helpless, as their children were ravaged by soldiers, starvation, the elements, and crippling fear. Morgenthau also wrote of the impossible decisions Armenian mothers grappled with:

There were women who held up their babies to strangers, begging them to take them and save them from their tormentors, and failing this, they would throw them into wells or leave them behind bushes, that at least they might die undisturbed. (317)

Stories of such desperation run rampant through survivor accounts, and run the gamut, as all human stories do, from shameful cowardice and weakness to triumphant heroic courage. In the context of motherhood though, the arc of these stories illustrates the vast scope of the devastation these women were faced with. Several survivor accounts mention women selling their children for bread, but these references always seem to be hearsay, and even when they are, the Millers point out, the survivors hastily explain that it must not have been to appease their own hunger, but rather a desperate attempt to have someone—even a Turk—save their child. Indeed, many Armenians allowed their children to be placed with Turkish families in many contexts, hoping that they would at least survive. There is no way of knowing how many women and children were absorbed into Turkish households during the genocide. Some emerged and made their way to the cities and orphanages in the years following World War I, but is impossible to estimate how many retained their changed identities. Despite the fear of Islamization, certainly many mothers found it preferable to have their children raised as Muslims than to have them die. The vile choices many mothers were forced to make on the path of deportation surely cannot be second guessed by those who did not have to make them.

In one of the most crushing stories from the Miller interviews, a survivor recalls a neighbor, “poor Miriam Hanem,” who survived the genocide physically intact, but psychologically destroyed because of the choices she had made:

She would be sitting on the floor, crying and crying, pulling her hair. She would tell her story, over and over: “I killed two of them. I killed two of them,” she would repeat. Apparently, she was walking, holding one child’s hand and holding the other in her arms. On the way, they would eat grass or nothing at all. From all of this, they had diarrhea and, meanwhile, they could not stop because the gendarme would beat them and make them walk. So she let go of one of the kids because he kept dragging her behind. She couldn’t walk on with him pulling her back. So he was left behind. Meanwhile, she walked on and on until the child in her lap died. She buried this one, but then would cry to us, “What happened to the one who was alive? The wolves ate him; the wolves ate him. One died, I know. The other one, the wolves ate.” (100)

No less disturbing are the accounts of the particular trials pregnant women faced in the caravans. The detached voice and succinct phrasing in which a survivor from Aintab describes the death of her newborn sister on the deportation route is chilling both in what it says, and what it does not: “My mother was pregnant on the way. So a little sister, Mary, was born. But since there was no food to eat, the baby died” (Miller 102). The matter-of-fact relating of the incident does not lessen its impact on the listener, and underscores the existence of a reality in which this situation was reduced to such plain, unemotional description.

Bedros Vartan Yessaian, a survivor born in the village of Kinjilar in 1904, wrote *A Survivor’s Story*, an unpublished document that tells his story for his family. In it, he remembered, “Later we learned of a pregnant woman of our village had childbirth at the departure time and was obliged to throw her newborn child into the nearby Sakaria river. She was the young wife of Janig Belalian” (manuscript).

Another survivor, this one from Konia, described a game played by the captors with a pregnant girl:

I can still picture the whole thing right now. They would kidnap more of the older girls. They had brought some deportees on the cliff. They would tie them, shoot them and throw them in the river. There were gendarmes among them, civilians and soldiers. Sometimes it would be a pregnant woman. They would look at one another and say, “boy or girl,” and pierce her belly with the sword. (Miller 88)

Unbelievably, this “game” is described in several accounts from wildly varying sources, and appears to have been “played” by soldiers throughout the deportation routes.

However horrifying these mothers’ tales may be, there are also countless accounts of mothers who literally sacrificed themselves to give their children every last morsel of food or drop of water available. Stories also abound in which mothers fought like tigers to protect their children from the predations of the soldiers, and helped them escape into the wilderness. As vulnerable and abused as the women were themselves, it must have taken extraordinary feats of courage to stay strong for their children. Most were not able to bear the enormous burden they carried into the desert; they simply were not built for it. But some proved their mettle amidst impossible odds, and their children survived to tell their stories.

Rape

Any story of the Armenian women’s experience of the genocide is, sadly, incomplete without an understanding of the vast number of rapes and assaults that were forced upon them. Not only did the women have to endure the grueling, punishing physical environment, and the psychological burden of protecting their children, but at all times, through every excruciating step along the way, the physical and psychological specter of rape was ever-present. Female Armenian deportees, regardless of age, from the

youngest children to the oldest grandmothers were raped so often by Turkish soldiers and citizens that virtually no account of the genocide fails to include mention of it. Victorian sensibilities require that witnesses and survivors alike refer to the “outrage” and “abuse” of women, but no euphemism can disguise the ugly truth of what hundreds of thousands of Armenian women suffered at the hands of Turkish men. Even those who survived the deportation by entering Turkish households, were often raped repeatedly as a matter of course, whether they were “daughters”, servants, or wives in their new roles. It is significant that the stories of rape in both witness and survivor accounts are mostly related by men. The women who survived rape did not often use their voices to tell those stories. However, the men who witnessed what took place use their own voices to decry the savage abuse of the women around them.

One diplomatic envoy, an American pastor serving as the American consular agent in Urfa, Rev. F. H. Leslie, wrote a letter to Consul Jackson on August 16, 1915, and Jackson forwarded the letter to Morgenthau. In it, Leslie describes what he witnessed as the women were driven through Urfa:

For six weeks we have witnessed the most terrible cruelties inflicted upon the thousands of Christian exiles who have been daily passing through our city from the northern cities. All tell the same story and bear the same scars: their men were all killed on the first days march from their cities, after which the women and girls were constantly robbed of their money, bedding, clothing, and beaten, criminally abused and abducted.... Their guards forced them to pay even for drinking from the springs along the way and were their worst abusers but also allowed the baser element in every village through which they passed to abduct the girls and women and abuse them. We not only were told these things but these same things occurred right here in our own city before our very eyes and openly on the streets. (Balakian 255)

Leslie was broken by the atrocities he bore witness to, terrified that the Armenian people would be completely annihilated, and he pleaded with Jackson to send someone to relieve him of his post. He warned, “I cannot handle this work nor remain here much longer” (Balakian 255). Leslie’s own story ended tragically. Soon after the summer of 1915 he was imprisoned for his Armenian sympathies, and tortured while incarcerated. Already devastated by the destruction he had seen, he couldn’t withstand his imprisonment and committed suicide there. His innate goodness made it impossible for him to exist in a world where the extermination of an entire people was unfolding in front of him. The treatment of the Armenian women made him fear greatly for his wife, and following his death Jackson made sure Leslie’s wife got out of the country (255).

Before he was deported himself, Hartunian felt great anguish over his inability to help the damaged and desperate women who were seeking shelter in Marash. As a priest, and as a man, he felt an overwhelming responsibility toward these women, and despaired that the village was so under siege that it had nothing to offer them:

Driven from far distances and scattered in the Turkish and Kurdish villages around Marash, some of the many Armenian women, surfeited by the hardships to which they were daily subjected—and who knows what inhuman rapes!—had dared to come to Marash on foot, in the hope that at least here they would get some relief....These young, beautiful women were beseeching that they be granted the mercy to remain, and they were being roughly refused. Already many like them had been massacred. Was it that even these, after sating the bestial Turkish lust, were to be massacred? (70)

Later, on the deportation route, he was tormented by his awareness of what the women were suffering. In his memoir he describes a particularly harrowing night spent listening to the degradation that he was helpless to prevent:

Night fell, and again the defilements belonging to darkness began. The prettier women were taken aside and raped. Among them was an extremely beautiful girl, about twenty-five years of age. During the day the *zaptiye* had disputed over her: "I'm going to have her!" "No, by Allah, I'm going to have her!" At night, one after the other, they raped that holy virgin, and then, killing her, threw her mutilated corpse to one side because they could not agree who should have her. (94)

The women were prey for the Turks, and the men around them could do nothing to stop it, but several men did choose to tell these women's stories—not to dishonor them, but to honor and acknowledge the tremendous hardships that they faced not only as Armenians, but specifically as women.

Jesse B. Jackson, the American Consul in Aleppo, prepared a report entitled, "Armenian Atrocities" for the Secretary of State in 1918, and Peter Balakian quotes it extensively in his description of the women, the survivors, who made it to Aleppo:

In late July 1915, Jackson reported that as the temperature ran somewhere between 105 and 115 degrees, "a group of more than 1,000 women and children from Harput was being conducted southward near Veran Chiher [Veran Shehir], East of Diyarbekir." The women and children were then turned over to a band of Kurdish *chetes* who abducted "the best looking women, girls and children, killing those who put up the most resistance," and beat and stripped the rest of the women, Jackson went on, "thereby forcing them to continue the rest of the journey in a nude condition." About three hundred of these women arrived in Aleppo days later "entirely naked, their hair flowing in the air like wild beasts," having traveled "afoot in the burning sun." Some of these women came to the consulate, and Jackson recorded that their bodies were "burned to the color of a green olive, the skin peeling off in great blotches, and many of

them carrying gashes on the head and wounds on the body as a result of the terrible beatings.” (253)

In the garish details of his description, there is no mistaking the awe he experienced when seeing these women emerge from the desert, hideously abused, but nonetheless alive.

In Peter Balakian’s autobiographical novel, *Black Dog of Fate*, he relates a story third hand, “Dovi’s Story”, told to him by his aunt, who was told the story by Dovi herself. Dovi’s story, like all genocide accounts, is a litany of brutality, but it is interesting to note that in referring to the abuses against women, even Dovi, whose story is given to the reader in the first person, speaks vividly of what she witnessed happening to other women:

Women were tortured. If a woman would not readily submit to sex with a gendarme, she was whipped, and if she tried to run away, she was shot. Once when a young girl tried to run, the gendarme took out his sword and slashed her dress open, and she stood there with her young breasts naked, and he slashed each breast off her body, and they fell to the ground. I stared at the two small breasts lying on the ground. I stood frozen, then I just walked away. The girl bled to death next to her breasts. (219)

When it came time to tell of her own violation, Dovi was much more terse and gave no details, rather she refers to the incident only as a catalyst for renewed perseverance: “One night I was raped. I prayed every night to the Virgin Mary and to Jesus and to God. And they answered my prayers. After this I felt some mindless will to survive” (221).

During the deportations, Armenian women were forced into circumstances that literally, only one in a thousand survived. They lost their husbands and their children, they walked endless miles through mountains and deserts naked, burning, freezing, starving. They were raped repeatedly, and savagely beaten, and the fact that any lived

through it at all is truly remarkable. There were few survivors, but those that made it through proved themselves made of something so strong that even Turkish warriors and the summer desert sun could not defeat. These mothers, these daughters, these sisters, these women, survived.

Corpses

As that horrible summer progressed, and as the evil work was done, those not strong enough to walk out of the desert stayed there. Throughout the Empire, all along the deportation routes, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of corpses were left to rot. In virtually every account of the genocide, from virtually every voice, the most wrenching descriptions are of the bodies. They were inescapable, and though now voiceless, the corpses spoke more powerfully and eloquently than any diplomatic letters or memoirs ever could. The story of the genocide, in many ways, is told by the silenced corpses.

In an especially descriptive account from a survivor who had seen the aftermath of the caravans from Moush, Erzerum, and Bitlis, the understanding that the bodies are not merely objects, but *people* comes through quite poignantly:

When we were going to the village, the road on both sides was filled with dead bodies. I have seen with my own eyes thousands of dead bodies. Women who had long braided hair—their hair comes off the head and their bodies were all swollen. It was summer, you know, so the fat from the body would be melted around the body. And the hair would be intact. (Miller 84)

Hagop Kalayjian, a survivor from Amassia, wrote “A Survivor’s Memoir” for the journal *Ararat*, many, many decades after he survived the genocide as a child.

Nonetheless, his vivid description belies the passage of time and reveals the images burned into his memory:

The first thing we saw were countless swollen and blackened corpses by the bank of the river. These were the poor victims who had arrived here quite some time before us and had fallen. They were spread out all along the river bank. We had to drag these corpses a short distance away so that we too could drink from the water. Our group of hapless deportees saw that dreadful scene and realized that it wouldn't be very long before we too would be dying like them. (65)

Like Kalayjian, Hartunian also first encountered the corpses while he was still very much alive, but he saw them not as a harbinger, but rather a reminder of what others had suffered. Startlingly, they evoked in him a deep appreciation for what he had *not* endured:

Some time later the horrid scene of hell was revealed before us! Corpses! Corpses! Murdered! Mutilated! The corpses of Armenian men, women, and children! Stepping over them like ghosts of the dead, we walked and walked. There was no need of taking us to Der-el-Zor and massacring us there!....To see the scene of Der-el-Zor, it was not necessary to go into the desert!...Here were the bodies of those driven out before us and shot, stabbed, savagely slaughtered! I had heard what deportation was. I had imagined it. Now I saw it with my own eyes. Our convoy, despite all its sufferings, was the most fortunate. The previous convoys had experienced more! (91)

In fact, Hartunian's account is one marked by a profound empathy that is exhibited throughout the text, even in the most powerfully disturbing passages. When he again describes the experience of seeing the endless corpses, he is most moved by the plight of the living:

Again we saw corpses all around. This scene had become a natural part of our days. What betrayed us all again to bitter horror was the sight of an Armenian young man, lying on the ground. He had been shot but had not died. How many days had he been in this agony—hungry, thirsty, roasting under the sun by day, shivering at night with the cold? His wound tortured

him constantly. No one could help him. Some of the women went near him but he was out of his mind. He twisted and turned, rolling continuously. The whole night long he rolled back and forth without ceasing, filling us all with nauseating horror. Oh that another bullet had put an end to his suffering! (100)

For Leslie Davis, the American Consul from Harput, the autumn of 1915 required an accounting of just what was left in the aftermath of that most terrible summer. He had seen the most violent deprivations of man on vivid display, and although he greatly feared what he would find, he felt it was his duty to venture out and see for himself. It was so much worse than he could have possibly imagined. On the autumn day when he rode out to Lake Göeljük, he truly rode into the Valley of Death. As Balakian describes in *The Burning Tigris*, using Davis' words:

Everywhere he looked there were corpses: corpses piled up on the rocks at the foot of the cliffs; corpses in the water and on the sand around the lake; corpses filling up the huge ravines. As they passed a clump of trees covered with vines and bushes in the middle of a ravine, Davis' Turkish guide told him to look in, and he saw "about fifteen or twenty bodies under the trees, some of them sitting upright as they had died." In one ravine Davis estimated that there were about a thousand corpses, in another about fifteen hundred. "The stench from them was so great" that Davis rode as high up on the ravine as he could, but he couldn't escape it. (244-5)

In the aftermath of the summer of 1915, all that was left of Armenians across Turkey were their corpses. American, British and Swiss missionaries worked to set up orphanages for the surviving children, but entire villages, entire cities, entire provinces had been scoured clean of Armenians—leaving only their corpses, and a terrible legacy of introducing modern genocide to the 20th century.

The Plight, and Flight, of the Children

The pivotal experience of the genocide, the one that would lay the foundation for and shape the future of the Armenian people was what happened to the children. Spared the initial outright massacres of the men, and through abduction, Islamization, and sometimes just the ability to run away, children were able to survive the genocide through avenues closed to their mothers and fathers. As all of the accounts and historical analyses state again and again, there is simply no way to know how many women and children were actually absorbed into Turkish, Kurdish and Arab, and nomadic families. Any that became fully assimilated, obviously, never reclaimed their identities as Armenians. However, there is no question that of the few Armenians who survived, the vast majority of them were children who made their way to the orphanages, and subsequently formed the diaspora of Armenians who eventually made their homes across the world. There are several facets of the children's experiences that were crucial in determining the fate of the Armenian people. One is the fact that they were children, and therefore somewhat malleable in the throes of horror, able to survive by simply existing in and surviving in the moment, without intellectually agonizing over every decision and tragedy with the guilt-burdened psyches of adults. Paradoxically, but even more significantly, virtually every surviving child was traumatized in his or her formative years by violence, terror, extraordinary deprivation, and abandonment, all of which imprinted a map of pain on these children that would follow them across the globe and throughout their lives, leaving psychological scars on future generations who sometimes did not even

know their families' histories. Finally, aside from the emotional implications of the children's circumstances, logistically, many were able to survive because they were fostered in "enemy" households. It is important to note that while, by far, most accounts from children who lived in Kurdish or Turkish households insist that they were treated well and as members of the family, these accounts represent an inaccurate sample of the children. The existing accounts are the recollections of survivors, who reclaimed their Armenian identities. The children who were abused or maltreated and prevented from reaching the orphanages never told their stories, and therefore their voices are not represented. Nonetheless, it is also vital to recognize that the ultimate survival of the Armenian people was enabled by the care and kindness that was shown to many of these children not only from their unlikely foster families, but also from the herculean efforts made by the men and women who risked their lives running orphanages with virtually no resources in a hostile, war-torn country. However they subsisted, considering what the children endured, their survival is nothing short of miraculous, and their stories offer endless convolutions of sorrow and triumph.

Children on the deportation routes found themselves living a nightmare that they had no hope of waking from. Their fathers, brothers and uncles had been slaughtered, often on the streets of their villages right before their eyes; they were forced to leave their homes to walk into the unknown; and as they stumbled over mountains and across the deserts in the scorching heat of summer they were starving, desperately thirsty, and their small bodies wholly unprepared for the ravages of endless miles of walking. They saw

their mothers and sisters debased and abused, often forced into nakedness and shame. And more terrible than any nightmare a child's mind can even create, so often they were wrenched away from their loved ones: desperately forced into the hands of a passing Turk in the hopes of some chance of survival, or simply left behind as mothers couldn't hold onto them any longer, or made to keep walking as their mothers and grandmothers fell prey to the soldiers and the desert and could no longer go on.

The thirst and starvation that killed so many reduced the deportees to acts of unfathomable desperation that those children who survived would never be able to forget. Over 70 years after their ordeals as children, many of the survivors interviewed by the Millers remembered vividly what it was like to actually starve:

One survivor remarked that when you are hungry, grass is better than honey or steak....But survivors also ate anything else they could find, including dead birds, fish, donkeys, and other animals that had fallen along the deportation route. Several survivors said they picked the grains out of animal dung and ate them. (86-7)

Another survivor from Arabkir recalls being terribly thirsty, and not being allowed even the most disgusting water:

At one point we got to a place where there was a spring of water. Thousands of people ran to it to drink water, and others drank from any puddle they could find. My mother had me on her back and she too bent down to drink some of the dirty water that was mixed with animal urine. The gendarme nearby came and hit her in the breast. She fell back and I fell off of her. They would not let us drink, even from the dirty water. (Miller 85)

It was no less terrible for the adults, their own hunger and thirst exacerbated by the torment of being unable to do anything for their children but watch them suffer.

Hartunian recalls the impossibility of this situation:

We hear the children's screams, the mothers' sobs. They are hungry, they are thirsty, and they are cold in the night air. They have no place to rest. They cannot freely move their bowels. They are suffering. They are visualizing the unbearable journey of the next day and its horrors, and they are going mad....And some, unable to bear these things, drop dead. (87)

The inability of some of the adults to endure what they were experiencing added a tremendous emotional cost to the children. Written more than sixty years after his childhood, Hagop Kalayjian's memoir relates not only the fear and bewilderment that colors all of his memories, but also the detached helplessness that forced him to simply keep going. On the road of deportation, his grandmother was the first to succumb:

My kind, sweet grandmother was thin; my mother and I lifted her from the cart and took her a little ways off, some fifty steps away, to a hill. Scratching the ground with our fingers, my mother and I were barely able to dig deep enough to cover half of her body with soil. (65)

The children were also often traumatized by being left behind, unable to keep up with the relentless pace set by the soldiers driving them forward. A survivor from Aintab, Hagop, couldn't walk any more in a hail storm:

I said to my mother, "Please leave me here and go on." She said, "How can I do that?" "I can't [go farther]," I said. "My legs don't move anymore." So, in tears, crying, they left. I cried, and they cried. It was dark. In the morning I woke up, and in the midst of all the water, the sun came up—a sweet sun came out and I stood up and now I am crying, saying, "Mommy, Mommy," and eating whatever grass I can. All alone, with no one around in the desert, I am walking, calling for my mother, Crying and eating grass. (Miller 98)

This story actually has a remarkable ending, one of far too few to end in joy. Hagop's mother, unable to bear the guilt of leaving him behind, turned back the next day but could not find him. He walked forward seeking her, and she wandered for days among the column looking for her son. They never found one another in the desert. However, twelve years later, while scouring a newspaper that listed hundreds of orphans by name and birthplace, she found Hagop's name, and they were reunited.

But for many of the children, their separation from their mothers was all too permanent. After losing his grandmother, Kalayjian's mother was the next to fall:

I began to say to her, "Mommy, the Kurds are coming again to rob us." She didn't say anything and then, suddenly, fell to the ground and breathed her last breath. I stood there for a while and then saw that, from afar, a Kurd was coming toward us, riding a white horse. That's when I left my sweet mother there. Instead of being buried in God's holy ground, she became food for wild animals and squirrels. (66)

Unable to care for his siblings alone, a child himself, his loss of family was completed days later:

My brother said again that he was very thirsty. He had a small knife hidden on his person so I told him that when the Kurdish women brought water in a goatskin container, he should puncture it with his knife and drink the water. Right away, he disappeared. I told my little sister, Nuvart, to walk since I was very tired and couldn't carry her any longer. Thus, I left the two of them on their own. (67)

In his account, Kalayjian offers no apologies for walking away. The matter-of-fact tone in which he relates this last severing of himself from his brother and sister is disturbing because the reader is forced to acknowledge that his voice survives, because he survived. The desire to judge these actions is absurd in light of the reality he lived through. He

escaped the deportation line when they passed a village, and by begging various Turks and Kurds for sanctuary, he was taken in by various Turkish and Circassian families over several years, and eventually made his way to an orphanage in Bardizag. Hagop Kalayjian's story is the story of the children of the Armenian genocide, in all of its ugly truth.

For so many Armenian children, being orphaned by the genocide led to their living with surrogate families in a wide variety of circumstances. There are accounts of children being abducted, or sold, kept as slaves or servants. Many were harbored by sympathetic Turkish neighbors in their own villages once the caravans departed. Many more were given away along the deportation routes as mothers thrust their children into the hands of anyone who would take them, preferring the unknown to certain death. Others, like Kalayjian, offered themselves to families they encountered once they escaped the caravan. As previously noted, existing survivor accounts often admit that the children were treated well by the families they stayed with, but there is no way of knowing how many of those children never again identified themselves as Armenians, or how many were actually mistreated. One would hope that they were generally treated kindly and well taken care of, but, unfortunately, the human history of fostered children all over the world would suggest otherwise. Nonetheless, survivor accounts again and again refer to time spent living under the roofs of Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and Circassians.

In the manuscript of Bedroz Yessaian, carefully saved as an account of his family's history, of his time between deportation and reuniting with his uncles in Istanbul he says:

The Arab nomads who live in the Syrian Desert used to come to our tents asking us to live with them instead of sure death. Thousands of Armenians were thus saved. I saw no Hope and informed my brother that I was going to live with the Arabs....With Arab nomads I stayed for two years and my Arab (parents) treated me as if their own biological son. (manuscript)

Many of the accounts from male children are like this, and simply refer to living and working with their foster families until they could make their way back to Armenians either in the orphanages, or cities. For female children, especially adolescents and older girls, their time spent with other families had additional complications. Particularly in Muslim families where women tended to be subservient and men had multiple wives, Armenian girls often found themselves fending off the advances of the males in the family—and many were unable to successfully do so. When Caraman found herself resisting both the father and the eldest son of the family she stayed with, she became more and more anxious to escape. Not only was she being pressured sexually, but the father was also intent on converting her to Islam. The situation reached a crisis one night when in front of a prominent Muslim guest who was a local official Caraman refused to recite Muslim prayers:

“I will *never* say Mohammedan prayers! I know my own and I will continue to say them as long as I have my life!” I shouted defiantly. For a moment everyone was dumb, then the father seized me and roughly shook me. The official swore, and shouted that I should be taken to prison. Hanum begged the father not to be rough with me, but his wrath rose as he realized the enormity of my insult to him and his authority in front of his

honored guest, and he slapped me on the mouth, rained blows on my head and shoulders, and at last knocked me down onto the floor where I lay still, too terrified to move. (221)

As a result of her defiance, Caraman was taken to prison. There she was visited by a Syrian woman who lived near the family. Despite the danger that she felt the father posed to her both physically and spiritually, the neighbor persuaded her to return:

She reminded me of what I knew only too well, that my Turkish family was the kindest in Mezre, that they really loved me and would be only too glad to save me from exile. “And you won’t be killed so sweetly as you think, my dear girl. Oh, no, girls as pretty as you are dragged out of the line and raped. Some guard will take you for his woman for a month, then turn you into the streets with your belly ripped open. I have seen many such a one these last few weeks.” (225)

Caraman had few options, and none of them appealing, but she saw that returning to the family was the lesser of two evils, even if the father continued to press for her to convert and marry him:

The father tried to persuade me whenever he could find me alone, promising me a house of my own at a reasonable distance from the present one, if I would willingly consent to the ceremony. I knew that he could compel the marriage, or forego the ceremony, whichever he wished, if I balked too long at his propositions, but he was temperamentally a gentle and kind man, however much he had beaten me, and he would rather have my consent to the arrangement than to force me into it...Nonetheless, the prospect of marriage with the father was abhorrent to me. (226)

Finally, believing she could put him off no longer, with the help of his wife and some sympathetic neighbor, Caraman did indeed escape and made her way to a nearby American hospital that soon sent her on to the orphanage in Kharput.

The orphanages run by American and European missions and programs, without question, ensured the ultimate survival of the Armenian people. The courage and

fortitude displayed by these kind and tireless workers in fighting seemingly insurmountable odds to save the children stood out in sharp contrast to the shameful cowardice their governments showed in their unwillingness to challenge the Turks. Despite the lack of any governmental action, the people who came to run the orphanages in Armenia were doing all that they could to help the “starving Armenians” that American and European newspapers reported on. For the tens of thousands of Armenian orphans, despite the grueling conditions, the orphanages represented nothing less than reclaiming their identities and lives.

The role the orphanages played in the survival of the children went far beyond providing mere physical survival. In fact, the limited resources, difficulty in transporting goods, and sheer numbers of desperate orphans meant that the children were provided with just barely enough food to survive. They ate thin gruel, occasionally supplemented with an onion or a piece of bread, the bread notoriously filled with whatever dirt and floor scrapings the Turkish bakers could add to them. The children were lice-ridden and disease ran rampant through the wards; they slept five or six to a bed, which consisted of small cotton bedrolls spread on the floors each night. But what offers succor and sustenance is so much more than material subsistence. In the orphanages the children who had lived with other families were given back their Armenian identities. In many of the orphanages they were educated and taught skills they would retain and use throughout their lives. They were given care, and community, and in the wake of all that they had endured this was perhaps the most valuable aspect of all. Despite the tremendous efforts

of their caretakers, they were often barely clothed and fed, but much more importantly, they were again loved and valued, and found strength in one another.

As the Millers succinctly state after interviewing many survivors, the orphanages “served an extremely important function in gathering the survivors, and thereby became the basis for establishing a new generation of post-genocide Armenians. For the orphaned children, these institutions were a bridge from disorder, trauma and chaos, to relative order, stability and structure” (125). In the early 1920s when it became clear that the Turks were still slaughtering any remaining Armenians they came across, the orphanages became instrumental in evacuating the children, wherever possible reuniting them with relatives, and getting them as far away from the Ottoman Empire as they possibly could. Although the few remaining Armenians lamented leaving, by now it was clear that their homeland no longer existed. Their villages had been plundered, they had nothing to return to, and they were no longer safe in the land they had occupied for centuries. It was time to go. Caraman concludes her memoir with this recognition:

If I was deserting my homeland, what was I leaving behind? A land where through my whole life a dread of the Turk had permeated every thought; a land where for five years I had eaten scanty bread, and roadside greens, and often too little of that; a land in which I had helped to bury too many brutally killed, too many heartlessly starved into a voiceless death, too many in the grip of disease. A land of awful memories, of lifelong nightmares. I was escaping it all—escaping all except that thing called Memory. I was seeking security and peace for the rest of my life. I was seeking AMERICA! (274-5)

The Turks very nearly succeeded in their attempt to rid the earth of their Armenian people. They had massacred over 1.5 million people, and the remaining few

had endured extraordinary terror and hardship and unspeakable horror. But they had survived it, and now they spread out across Europe and the Americas, and began the painstaking work of rebuilding their lives. Strangers in strange lands, they could not ever forget what they had lived through, but it was time to move forward, toward the future, and leave the past in the mountains and deserts of the land that was theirs no more.

The Aftermath

Carrying the Scars

The Millers' project, conducted as it was in the late 1980's and early 90s, was important work for the surviving Armenian community, particularly in America, as it allowed survivors, all now quite elderly, to tell their stories, and have their voices be heard. For a surprising number of those interviewed, it was the first time they had told. Trauma survivors live with their wounds throughout their lives, and whether they speak or stay silent, the trauma itself speaks through them. Through the meticulously catalogued stories the Millers collected from survivors themselves, and a series of questionnaire interviews conducted by the author of this paper with contemporary Armenian-Americans (the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of survivors), a picture emerges of the aftermath and how the exiled Armenian culture has evolved and survived into the 21st century. Peter Balakian's autobiographical novel, *Black Dog of Fate*, published in 1997, beautifully describes the silences his family cultivated regarding the genocide, and the ways in which those silences were overcome as he wrestled with his own discovery and reclamation of his Armenian identity. All of these voices, from the

survivors through the generations to those that live today, tell the story of a people irrefutably marked by genocide, who continue to fight not to be defined by it.

Many survivors never spoke of what they experienced, trying to contain their pain within themselves. For some, the circumstances of their exile also forced them into silence. Armenians who lived for years as Turks in Turkey, or in many other Muslim countries before finally making their way out, were forbidden to ever speak of the genocide or even speak Armenian, for fear that they would be killed. When relating that her parents never spoke of the genocide, L.G., a 40-year-old woman currently living in New York wrote: “I think they wanted to put the past behind them. It brought up too much pain for them. They also grew up in Turkey, so they were used to living ‘silenced’” (Interview). H.Y., an 81-year-old son of survivors, explained, “It was such a horrible story that some survivors could not tell their actual experience and had nervous breakdown[s] when they remember all the killings, the rapes, the beheading of children and burying their loved ones or leaving them to die in the death march” (Interview). In their article about their project entitled “Oral History in Perspective” for Richard Hovannisian’s *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, the Millers also suggest, “One reason events are repressed is surely that they are too horrible to contemplate. But we also suspect that in some cases survivors’ life histories are tinged with guilt and shame: memories of rape, forced nudity, humiliation of parents, the abandonment of siblings, coerced conversion to Islam, and so on” (192).

For Balakian, when he first became aware of it, he perceived his family's silence as a betrayal. He simply couldn't comprehend how his grandmother could have lived through such things and never talked about them. When his Aunt Lu finally revealed some documents of their family history to him, he was already a young man in his twenties, but he reacted like a petulant child. He insisted they should have told him. His Aunt held her ground:

“What good would it have done you, when you were a boy, to know this?”

“It's the truth. It's important.” I was shouting, “Not just to us, but to the History of this whole horrible century.”

“Maybe so,” she said, sounding dismissive, “but children shouldn't know this.”

“It would have helped if I had known some of this.”

“How?”

“I would have understood things about how our family is.” (206)

When he further pressed her on how she could possibly have not asked her own mother about what she had lived through, Auntie Lu explained that her mother's silence had been total, and that they had respected that:

We had a different kind of relationship with our parents. What was private was private. It's not like today when everything is discussed by everyone to anyone in any place....Maybe some mystery to life isn't so bad. Why does everyone these days feel they have to know everything from the time they are born? (206)

Balakian felt somehow slighted by being kept in the dark, but many children of survivors recognized how much it cost their parents when they did speak of their pasts.

The now 74-year-old daughter of Hagop Kalayjian, explains:

The trauma of the genocide stayed with my father throughout his life. He was very angry and bitter but he didn't take it out on my mother and me.

Anytime he would talk to someone he would bring up the genocide, in a way in an attempt to educate as many people as possible about it. When he did talk about the genocide, he became very dictatorial – you had no choice but to listen even if you heard the story 100 times. My mother told me he [had] nightmares from time to time. My father had a very high tolerance to emotional pain and he rarely cried – in fact, he did not show his emotions much at all, burying it all inside. I think by so doing he suffered much more than we could see and it could have led to his many health problems (heavy smoking, stomach ailments). (Interview)

N.I., also a daughter of survivors, remembers, “My father talked and got very anxious when he talked about it. His voice would tremble, he would get angry. My Mom put her trust in God. Even if my mother did not talk about genocide she was affected tremendously – it was a depressed, sad house with lots of unspoken fear and REPRESSION” (Interview). Whether they railed on about their experiences, or held them all in, the pain of their childhoods marked all of the survivors deeply. The granddaughter of Kalayjian, now 35-years-old, remembers talking to her mother’s godfather, Baruir Nercessian, and being terribly moved by the intensity of his long-buried hurt:

Unlike my grandfather, he didn’t speak of the genocide until he was in his 60s. One day, I went to visit him at home (he was about 100 at the time), he asked me if I knew his mother’s name (he named my mother after his, who died during the genocide) and when I said yes, he burst into tears and asked why she sold him (she sold him to a man at an auction for 4 ½ pennies). I could see how raw the pain was for him. It was as if he was a child again reliving the painful memory of being abandoned by a mother desperate to ensure he would live. I think this is not uncommon for many survivors. (Interview)

This observation is corroborated by the Millers’ experience. Even more than seventy-five years after the events of the genocide, when they interviewed the survivors they noted:

The pain of remembering events from the deportations was obvious in many interviews. Men, otherwise strong and assertive, would stop and

weep as they told how their mothers had died during the ordeal of the deportations, or how their fathers had been taken to be butchered...One woman visibly shook during the interview, describing her condition as a result of “weak nerves” stemming from her deportation experience. She, for example, had never told her story to her children, but said that she still dreams at night about being chased by Turks. (192)

What is clear from the experiences of so many Armenians is that they carried the pain and trauma of the genocide throughout their lives, and it reared up often. One survivor poetically explained to the Millers, “Does the fire go out? Does it go out? When ashes come, it looks like it is out. But when you stir it, it burns again” (157). Another stated plainly, “It is impossible to forget. The wound is there and does not go away, no matter what you try to do or even try to ignore it. It is a part of your body, and it will not go away” (156). For many survivors, particularly as they got older, and were gathered in safe spaces many years and miles from the atrocities they suffered, when they had the opportunity to spend time with one another, the old wounds couldn’t help but resurface. As the Millers described:

We were told frequently that whenever survivors get together, they inevitably discuss the topic of the genocide. In fact, one survivor stated: “Whether you want to or not, you talk about those days. That is where the conversation goes.” Another respondent expressed the same sentiment: “When we are gathered, this talk always comes. It just comes.” (156)

Some survivors told their stories; some packed them down hard into their chests and held them there as tightly as they could. Eventually, as Balakian got older, he recognized that his grandmother had done what she had to do to protect herself from the pain of her memories, and he learned to accept that her silence had not been a rebuke; it was a way to go on. He reflected:

I've come to see my grandmother's numbed response to the Armenian Genocide as a necessary way of survival....In a cultural climate that did not recognize or articulate the moral significance of genocide, my grandmother was forced to turn inward, like those shell-shocked soldiers of World War I who came home, bit their tongues, or bit them off, and went on with their lives. (287)

Distillation of the Stories

For those that did tell their stories, as years passed and their children and children's children learned the legacy of their past, the survivors' accounts became crystallized as family history, and shed many of the details and vivid texture of first-person memory, as they became told and retold, eventually focusing on the most essential and salient points of what had occurred. As the children and grandchildren of survivors tell their families' stories, the collected fragments of narrative tend to give bare, stark recitals of terrible wrongs, and many, many of the stories end with an admission that much knowledge has been lost. In each case, individual families focus on different aspects of the story. For some, the circuitous journey to safety seems to stand out. R.M., a 49-year-old American woman, tells a story of a family that made their way through many countries on their road to safe haven:

Both my mother's and father's parents were Armenian Genocide survivors from villages in the province of Kharpert. On my mother's side, my grandmother was a child of about four years old when the deportations took place. Her father had been taken away by the military and never seen again, and her mother hid with her two children at the home of an in-law who was on good terms with a local Turkish official who had given orders that the family would not be harmed. My grandmother's mother was later married off to a well-off, elderly Armenian man. After he died and the borders were re-open[ed], she and her children made their way to Syria, then Lebanon, then France. My mother's father was around twelve years old when the deportations happened. His uncle was a scout in the Russian

army, and sent word back to the extended family to escape their village before they were forced on a death march, and advised them on the best route to make their way to Russian Armenia. Shortly after my grandfather arrived in Armenia, Armenia declared independence (1918-20, before falling to the Soviet Union). The story of my father's family is less clear. They were also from villages in Kharpert. My grandfather and mother escaped but many of the other members of their family did not. (Interview)

K.K., a 73-year-old now living in the U.S., also tells of a family that traveled far to get here:

From the stories of my father who was ten years old during the Genocide, his father was killed by the Turks in front of his eyes by cutting his muscles and putting salt on his wounds. My grandfather and two great uncles ha[d] been killed by Turkish soldiers and my grandmother with three small children w [as] exiled to the desert of Der Zor (present day Syria). From there they went to Mosul (Iraq) and then to Lebanon and Romania. (Interview)

For other families, the unanswered questions about those they were separated from are a prevalent theme. Y.M., a 39-year-old Psychologist living in New York City, displays this longing for answers in the stories of her family on both sides. Her story is one of the most vivid and detailed from the contemporary interviews, largely because her family has valued its telling and remained vigilant in their efforts to seek lost family members throughout the last ninety-five years:

My mother's father was a young boy, about age five or six when the Genocide happened. I remember hearing stories of his family, along with hundreds of others, hiding quietly in caves while the Turks went looking for Armenians to slaughter. Sitting in the damp cave for days in the dark, my grandfather caught something which eventually led to his being infected with TB, which ended up causing his death at a young age and leaving my mother fatherless at the age of five. She has very few memories of him but tells me he had a great sense of humor and very large giving eyes. So after hiding in the caves, my maternal grandfather watched

his father and mother murdered and for some reason, the Turkish gendarme who killed his family took a liking to my grandfather and took him under his wing as his “stable boy”. My grandfather survived because he was taken into the favor of this man and cleaned his horse, brushing hair, changing horseshoes, etc. At some point in the story, my grandfather had two siblings, a brother and a very young infant sister. Since their parents were killed and these two young boys did not have the means or ability to care for their infant young sister in the middle of a genocide, they wrapped her in blankets and left her at the doorstep of either an orphanage or church, as far as I remember. My mother always said my grandfather regretted this decision his entire life and always wondered whether his baby sister survived and if so, where she was now. On my father’s side, his mother’s genocide narrative is very clear for me because I interviewed her for a school project when I was young. She was about thirteen to fifteen [years old] when the genocide happened. She had been married at that young age to a freedom fighter who went off to fight the Turks and she never saw him again. Her father was a well-respected man in town so the Turks decided to humiliate him in front of the town and, rather than killing him outright, tied him to a watermill and had him turn round and round all night until he drowned. They brought his body back to his family and dumped it at the doorstep. My grandmother was the one who identified his body. She was the oldest child of, I think, seven kids, so she was used to taking a maternal role in the family. After things got really bad and their town was being plundered, my grandmother had to escape with her mother and all the other children. My grandmother describes an incredible scene: along with hundreds of other Armenians who were escaping from the Turks, my grandmother’s family came to a large rushing river. The Turkish gendarmes were situated very high up on a mountain behind them and were shooting randomly at the Armenian villagers who were escaping. Safety waited for them on the other side of the river, where atop the mountain directly in front of them were Armenian freedom fighters shooting at the Turks. So the air was full of screams and bullets flying everywhere, and the river was rushing so powerfully it was carrying away old men and young children. My grandmother held onto two siblings with her hands, carried her younger brother on her back and held onto her mother who had tied the baby onto her back and was holding the remaining children. They locked arms and crossed the river together. That seems to be the climax of her genocide story and the most emotional part of her history. One of the stray bullets hit and killed the baby on her mother’s back. Her mother gave up hope after the realization that her baby was dead and forced my grandmother to “keep going” in her escape. I’m not very clear on what happened after this

but I know my grandmother was separated from her siblings, many of whom ended up in orphanages. Again, there was a younger brother she never found and felt responsible for. When I was about fifteen, we found my grandmother's long-lost brother's family. Her brother had long since passed away, but it was incredible and strange to meet close relatives for the first time at this late age. (Interview)

T.S., a 20-year-old resident of New Jersey with a strong interest in her family's history, also tells a dramatic story marked by loss:

The story my grandmother tells is that her father's family was taken out of their house by a Turkish gendarme, and his brothers and he were spared while everyone else had their heads chopped off. Her father was chosen to hold one of the gendarme's horses while he chopped the heads off his mother, father, and rest of his family, save for his brother and little sister. They went and hid in an abandoned house, until they couldn't take care of their little sister anymore and took her to the church and left her at the front steps. They were going to come back for her, but by the time they found a long lost aunt someone had already taken her. My father's family: His grandmother was twenty y[ears] old when the genocide began. The village in which they lived was occupied by Turks who took her parents, murdered them and then came and took her small sister of three years old, beat her, raped her, cut her throat, so she could die in the street. My father's grandmother survived by running away to the mountains. Eventually she went to college at an American Protestant Missionary School in Yozgat, where everything is now destroyed there and [there are] no Armenians. At the Missionary school, they helped her by moving her and the rest of [the] refugees to Syria....She eventually married in 1928 after which she worked with survivors, because none of her family survived. She was also a hunchback because of the torture and beatings the Turks did. She had seven kids, but six did not survive except my father's father, or my grandfather Joseph. (Interview)

In two of the contemporary stories, the fact that their families contained craftsmen is mentioned as a point of pride that they were too valuable for even the Turks to kill. One comes from L.G.:

On my mother's side, my great-grandmother was taken in by a childless Turkish hoja and his wife, and then eventually was married off to a

Russian (we think Ossetian) man, who had left the Russian empire and was working in the Amasia region (he was quite a bit older than my great-grandmother). They had four children eventually, one of which is my grandmother. I know my great-grandfather Kevork was taken for dead by the Turkish army and thereby survived. Supposedly he worked icognito as a kebabji before returning back to Amasia. My grandfather was a toddler at the time and he survived by being taken in by some Armenian relatives (they were some kind of craftspersons, who were deemed too necessary to deport). I only have these fragments of knowledge. I know a lot of other family members did not survive. Others were scattered. Some ended up in France, some in the U.S. (Interview)

A.G., a 57-year-old man who lived in Istanbul before coming to America, also refers to survival based on the need for craftsmen:

My paternal grandfather was killed in 1915. Grandma survived with her two boys (dad and uncle), they lived with a Kurdish tribe for a while and then in an orphanage in their native city of Sepastia. My maternal grandfather was not sent to exile because he was a much needed craftsman for Germans in Sepastia. His wife and four kids were killed/lost in 1915. After the war he resettled in Istanbul and got remarried. (Interview)

Examined collectively, the stories are remarkable for many reasons, not the least of which is the extraordinary things that had to be accomplished by extraordinary people in order for the storytellers to even exist and be in a position to relate their families' journeys. While they share several similar themes and events, each is unique not only in the specificity of the details it contains, but also in the way those details have been emphasized. All of the stories quoted thus far, whether factual or dramatic, have still maintained a sense of distance from the events and the people they happened to. N.I.'s story alone from the contemporary interviews connects the events of the past to her direct understanding of who her parents were as people:

Both of my parents were genocide survivors. They were born in Arapgir, eastern part of Turkey/historic Armenia. My father was ten years old. What he remembers is he was walking with his father and all other Armenian men. My father was holding his father's hand...they walked and walked for a while and eventually his father pushed him into a ditch. That is how my father was saved. My father never recovered from this trauma of being abandoned. My Mom did not talk much about genocide. She was one or two year[s] old. She prayed a lot, still prays and goes to the church at the age of ninety-seven. (Interview)

By connecting the events of the genocide directly to the parents she grew up with, N.I.'s story brings the voice of the contemporary Armenian into the perspective of the impact the genocide has had not only on its survivors, but on the future generations of those survivors who have grown up in its shadow. While obviously the later generations escaped the immediate violence and trauma that their ancestors endured, the trauma has evolved and been translated into a collectively understood experience, that has had tremendous influence on their lives in terms of understanding who they are and how the world works.

Un-Fairy Tales: There Was, and There Was Not

A fascinating theme that emerges from the voices of contemporary Armenian-Americans is the profound impact that the stories of their childhood have had on their awareness. Not only did they grow up with the true stories of the genocide, but the fictional tales they heard as children differed greatly from the Disney-esque fairy tales told to their American friends. Like the typical English opening, "Once upon a time...", Armenian stories always begin with, "There was, and there was not." Right from the start, there is a reality-based pragmatism. Y.M. recalls:

The stories I heard as a child were based on historic Armenian fairy tales. They were a far cry from Mother Goose. There was always a major lesson to be learned, there was always a moral to the story, and most of the stories were about how one person outwitted the other...I feel like many of the stories were about how even the poor gave to those less fortunate, or how even the poor could succeed. I felt like the moral of the story was always, "So what--you have nothing? You still have your head...and your heart." (Interview)

N.M., a 39 year old Armenian-American woman from New Jersey remembers:

I grew up reading Armenian children's stories. I don't recall the names of the books or what the stories were called, but I do remember that they always seemed to involve children who were poor, struggling, and they never seemed to have shoes. Also, it seemed the moral of the stories was always "Aram" didn't have food or money, but he didn't complain and that was a good thing. In theory, this doesn't seem like a bad moral. Children learning that it's OK not to have "a lot" is a good lesson. But in practice, the stories had a depressing effect. They didn't fill you with hope or leave you feeling that you could follow your dreams, or that in the end everyone lives happily ever after in a big castle with a prince. These lessons, while not as practical, are important too. (Interview)

Traditionally, a culture's myths and fairy tales emphasize the values and traits that they hold dear. As both women recognized, the devaluing of possessions and the concept that you can be alright without them, is an important focus for post-genocide, exiled Armenians. But as N.M. also points out, the lack of grandiose dreams is telling, and speaks of a people who no longer believe in the possibilities of wild, extravagant happiness. Instead, they are more literally survival-based, and rely on getting by on one's wits. It is not difficult to understand where these stories come from, and why they are the ones passed down.

Balakian eventually came to understand his grandmother's stories as the way she had found to communicate to him her experiences, however obliquely. He writes:

This was how she told me about her past. The Armenian invocation, *Djamangeen gar oo chagar*—there was and there wasn't—was like the intrusive past, which seemed to appear out of time, like lyric memory that had been activated. I'm not sure it was calculated to have a great effect on me. I think it was the only way she knew to speak to me about something she wanted to say, but couldn't say in any other language to a young boy, her eldest grandson. (289)

Many years after her death, long after he had learned what she had endured in the genocide, her stories took on a new resonance and meaning for him. In fact, the title *Black Dog of Fate* references a story she once told him. In the story, a rich, beautiful woman spends much time, money and care creating splendid food and gifts to bring to Fate, but when she knocks on Fate's door, it is answered by a surly, slatternly woman who rudely sends her away. A week later, a terribly poor woman with nothing to her name finds a black dog dead in a field, so she drags it home and cooks it, and brings it to Fate. When this poor, smelly woman knocks on Fate's door, it is answered right away by a dazzling, gorgeous woman who says, "Come in, I've been waiting for you for a long time" (9). Young Peter was baffled by this story, and couldn't help himself from asking for a little explanation. When he asked, "What's Fate?", she replied: "'*Pakht*,' she said, 'it's *Pakht*,' making the deep, guttural gargle with her throat as you do with some Armenian words. '*Pakht*. You know, luck, fate. Fate....It's your destiny, it's what's in store for you....It's a force, something bigger than you are'" (10). When he went on ask about the dog, she said, "The dog...the dog, the dog is Fate's answer to us—to the human world....The dog tells us to have hope. The dog tells us there is mystery....The dog tells us that appearances are deceiving—the world is not what you think, *yavray*" (10).

Whether the harsh voice of terrible truth, or the cryptic voice of survival lessons, the stories born of the genocide have embedded themselves in the consciousness of contemporary Armenians of the diaspora, and staked their claim in the formation of a modern cultural identity.

The Burden of the Past

For the children of survivors, the uneasy mix of their parents' extraordinary fortitude and devastated psychology can lead to complex and contradictory messages about what the legacy of their ancestors compels them to be. Levon Boyalian and Haigaz Grigorian, in their article "Psychosocial Sequelae of the Armenian Genocide" from Hovannasian's *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, state, "For Armenian children of survivors of the genocide, a dominant theme that emerges is the feeling of being 'special'; special in the sense that there is an obligation that was placed on them directly or indirectly, to be the bearers of the hopes and aspirations, not only of a given family but of a whole people" (181). As the passage of time offers more and more children of survivors, whether from Armenia, the Holocaust, the Congo, or anywhere else in the world where genocide has threatened the continued existence of a people and a culture, the position that these children find themselves in, owing an allegiance to a future based on a much broader picture than their individual selves, is observed again and again. This is not necessarily a bad thing, and has many positive effects on individual lives, inherently giving them a purpose and foundation that others might lack. Nonetheless, the pressure can be suffocating. Boyalian and Grigorian make this point as well:

The children also grew up in many instances with a sense that life was a serious business; that because of this past and the sufferings of their parents, they were required to be serious and in some sense, almost sad; that they did not have the right to be happy and cheerful. Of course, they have all experienced directly the sadness and tears of their own parents. It should be further made clear that the sadness of the survivors themselves goes beyond the simple loss of family and friends to include and encompass the total loss and wiping out of one's home and homeland, transportation to an alien land, and no foreseeable hope for a return to one's roots. This sense of total loss of one's origins plays a significant role in the psychological experiences of the surviving generations of Armenians. (181)

Stemming from this widespread understanding of *loss*, the successive generations of Armenians following the genocide have had to come to terms with their retention of Armenian culture, despite living in countries and circumstances far removed from its origins.

Balakian's reconciliation with his Armenian identity came long after a childhood specifically designed by his parents to protect him and his siblings from its burden. They displayed what he found to be a bewildering mix of near-total American assimilation, with some deeply entrenched Armenian habits, all of which was marked occasionally by an awkward and often unexpected bristling with Armenian pride. His parents spoke fluent Armenian, but only to each other. As he explains:

My sisters, Pam and Jan, my brother, Jim, and I never learned Armenian. In Tenafly, New Jersey, in 1960, who would want to know Armenian, a language spoken by an ancient Near Eastern people who lived half a globe away and were now part of the Soviet Union? My parents spoke Armenian when they wanted to communicate privately or when they were in public places and needed to discuss the price of veal or the amount to tip; (5)

His father, a doctor, refused to speak Armenian in his office—even to older Armenian patients who would have greatly appreciated it (74). They belonged to the local country club, dressed fashionably, and rarely ever actually mentioned Armenia.

On the other hand, his mother was a phenomenal cook, preparing elaborate meals every day filled with the exotic scents and tastes of the Near East, and clearly disdainful of typical American cuisine. Once when Peter made the mistake of asking his mother if they could have a casserole for dinner once in a while she responded with, “If the Americans want to eat that way, let them!” (52). This utterly confused him, since he had always been raised to consider himself American, although he did acknowledge, “the small bit of Armenianness I understood gave me a feeling of having a slightly more substantial sense of identity than many of my peers” (285).

It was only much later in his life, as a young man in his twenties, that he began to seek knowledge of all things Armenian and find connections between himself and this cultural identity. In this way, the Balakian family quite perfectly fit the description given by Peterson in *Caravans to Oblivion*, which noted:

The Armenian American community exhibited the generational pattern of assimilation common to the experience of immigrant groups. The first generation clings to the old ways, adapting slowly and hesitantly to the new culture in order to survive. The second generation, acclimated to that culture, shrugs off the old ways and rebels against the authority of tradition. The third generation typically seeks to recover what its parents forgot and to work out an accommodation with the immigrant heritage. (165)

Rediscovering this “forgotten” past has been a powerful talisman for many contemporary Armenian-Americans, and Peterson included in his book a piece from poet David

Kheridian's 1970 collection *Homage to Adana*, which addresses the profundity of this experience:

For My Father

Our trivial fights over spading
the vegetable patch, painting
the garden fence ocher instead of blue,
and my resistance to Armenian food
in preference for everything American,
seemed, in my struggle for identity,
to be the literal issue.

Why have I waited until your death
to know the earth you were turning
was Armenia, the color of the fence
your homage to Adana, and your
other complaints over my own complaints
were addressed to your homesickness
brought on by my English. (170-1)

Kheridian's poem echoes the major theme of Balakian's autobiography, in that he understands only too late that his father had a story to tell him, and that he was actually telling it all along, his father's voice subsumed by their interactions in everyday life. Balakian loved his grandmother very much, but as a child shied away from her constant *eenching*, "...she hovers around me, forever asking how I am and what I want. She keeps repeating an Armenian word, *eench*. It means how or what, and is fraught with solicitousness, concern, anxiousness; and if you add all these things up in Armenian, it means love" (4). On the tenth anniversary of her death, he wrote a poem that seemed to flow directly from his mind onto the page, and contained images that he himself didn't recognize as belonging to him:

From *Words for My Grandmother*

Ten Years ago
I walked your dark stairway,
water hissing on the stove,
your orientals worn
and beaten into deep
reds and blues by your
half-confessed past.

When you took my head
in your arms
and kissed my hair
I stared as always
at the skin of your hands
still discolored by
the arid Turkish plain.

The image of my grandmother kissing my hair as she *eenched* me to death was no surprise, nor her discolored hands, but the last image, “the arid Turkish plain,” also seemed to come out of nowhere. I was twenty-three and no one had spoken to me about the Armenian Genocide. My grandmother’s flashback had been a strange set of surrealistic images that left an imprint on me, but she never talked about her past in rational language. This poem, then, was a tremor from the unconscious—the historical unconscious, the deep, shared place of ancestral pain, the place in the soul where we commune with those who have come before us. (141-2)

Both Kheridian and Balakian came to reconcile themselves with this connection to the past and recognize in it an insistent call to identity. For modern Armenians living far from their now virtually non-existent homeland, bearing a legacy of pain and destruction, coming to terms with this identity is both compelling and repellant, as it balances the obligation to preserve a threatened culture, with the instinct to distance one’s self from victimization. Boyalian and Grigorian saw this dichotomy at work:

Thus, a peculiar burden is placed on the children, and to a lesser extent, the grandchildren of survivors, who may feel a familial obligation to maintain their ethnic identity. This in its diluted and uninformed aspect becomes a people who were slaughtered and expelled from their homeland for no “apparent reason” and who subsequently were known as “starving Armenians.” What an identity to maintain! (182)

Construction of a Modern Identity and Culture

In *Black Dog of Fate*, Balakian’s Aunt Anna, a well-regarded literary critic, tells him, “The Futurist French poet Marinetti says we cannot carry the cemetery of our ancestors on our backs” (247). Armenians in the modern world are forced to wrestle with the weight of their ancestors’ past and decide whether to shoulder it or throw it off, although many of them find themselves tethered to it regardless of their inclinations. One of the strongest urges, expressed again and again by the contemporary Armenian-Americans interviewed, is a rejection of an identity based on victimization. And surely, considering that the progeny of survivors are born of people who had the strength and internal resources to endure despite the most cataclysmic destruction, they have good reason to reframe their cultural identity in terms of triumph rather than defeat. Nonetheless, the near-total devastation of their people, their homeland, and their culture cannot be ignored, either. It is an issue that today’s Armenians of the diaspora continuously grapple with, both individually and collectively. K.K., an Armenian-American man in his seventies, suggests that it is impossible to not be overwhelmed by loss: “In every Armenian family is a tragedy and the wounds of the Genocide reverberated in the hearts of our ancestors and ours. They and the new generation have been longing for their lost relatives, lost land and loss of spiritual values” (Interview). In

reference to the events of the genocide, L.G. fears that they remain too prevalent in the contemporary consciousness of Armenians:

Sadly, I think they have stymied our culture and identity, with so many Armenians defining themselves through the genocide. Without undervaluing its importance, I think its constant emphasis has been detrimental to our community in many ways. We haven't been able to get beyond it. I don't believe in genocide as being the defining principle of Armenian identity. (Interview)

For Y.M., a young mother in her late thirties, the issue of victimization is significant in how she approaches her children. As she articulates her personal struggle:

We grew up with a sense of victimization and guilt – the pain of trauma and the denial of the Turkish government was transferred to us. So, we grew up with a keen awareness of oppression, social justice, our resilience and that we are survivors, as well as the pressure and responsibility to keep our language and culture alive, searching for family origins or lost family members....I think there is a way to pass down stories without leaving the future generation with the message that “we were/are victims.” I’m not entirely sure how to do it, but I believe there must be a way to say, “These people did something horrifying to your ancestors, but it wasn’t because of who we ARE as a nation.”....I am conflicted about how to handle [this] with respect to telling my own children. The evil is insurmountable – how do you tell a child that 1.5 million of his own people were killed? Anyone, any victim of trauma, is left with the burning question, “Why me?” And so it was with us growing up, “Why us?”--so there must be something inherently *wrong* with *my people* to make someone want to rid the planet of us once and for all.... The genocide has really shaped us as a people in terms of our cultural identity....we grew up feeling like “victims” – it’s like having “cultural PTSD”. If an entire generation has PTSD, including nightmares, hypervigilance, fears – how does it shape their style of parenting? Does the next generation become more fearful and obsessive? Do they become fixated on “saving” everything because the previous generation lost so much? Anecdotally, I have seen many of my parents’ friends’ basements – these people can’t throw anything away. They grew up with such a deep and profound sense of LOSS that they are overwhelmed with fears of losing everything, so everything, from paperclips to silk flowers to gloves that are too small to books that are no longer read, is saved “for a rainy (bloody?) day”. And

so, I am left wondering how that experience of trauma passed down by generation shapes the way the children of genocide survivors then parent their own children, i.e., my generation. (Interview)

The concept of Armenian identity in terms of victimization is closely aligned for many modern Armenians of the diaspora to the loss of art, literature and culture that the genocide made inevitable. As L.G. describes it:

Ultimately, I think the end result of the genocide, the scattering and eventual assimilation of Armenians, has meant Western Armenian culture is practically dead, particularly in the U.S. There are only a handful of writers, fewer and fewer readers... this is the quiet and non-bloody end result of the genocide—assimilation and a disappearance of a culture. (Interview)

For today's Armenians, the decimation of Armenian arts and letters is, in many ways, what defines their status as victims. As A.G., explains, "The Genocide mostly destroyed our culture. The culture includes literature, music, art, architecture. The genocide is part of my permanent identity, there does not pass a day I do not read or think about the genocide. We constantly live its impact" (Interview). This impact is also inextricably tied to the continued lack of official acknowledgement that the genocide occurred. R.M. feels strongly that until this happens, it will be impossible to move beyond victimhood:

The Armenian Genocide severely disabled Armenian culture. The Armenian cultural leaders (writers, performers, intellectuals, etc.) were murdered, and the Armenian culture has hobbled towards a slow death ever since. The Genocide made Armenians victims, and because there has been no acknowledgement, accountability, and restitution for the Genocide, the identity of "victim" has yet to be overcome. (Interview)

Kalayjian's daughter sees the current generation as battling the issues of identity on many fronts, but agrees that victimization cannot be overcome until the genocide is acknowledged:

The genocide nearly annihilated the Armenian community, first by killing all of the intellectuals. By eliminating the great thinkers of our community, our community suffered tremendously because there was a dearth of literature and culture for decades after the genocide. The genocide created an Armenian diaspora who were strangers in a strange land and the first generation of Armenians born abroad oftentimes were not taught Armenian because their parents, genocide survivors, wanted them to assimilate and forget about the past. So our language was lost in a way. It was only when the second generation was born that there was a questioning of one's identity and an interest in Armenian culture and language. Moreover, the genocide defines our identity as a people, whether good or bad – in a sense, we have a victim mentality because the genocide has not been recognized and we have not achieved any justice. (Interview)

These two themes, loss of an artistic-intellectual culture and the need for the genocide to be recognized, both play powerful roles in determining the collective efforts of modern Armenians to preserve and cultivate a continuing identity. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), and its youth-based organization, the Armenian Youth Federation (AYF), have a strong influence on not only the American community of Armenians, but Armenians all over the world. The ARF is the surviving manifestation of the Dashnaktsutyun party that emerged in Armenia in the 1890s. It is politically socialist, but does not limit itself to a socialist agenda. The primary goals of the ARF are concerned with the fight for human rights and justice in the still-embattled Armenian state, which re-established independence after the fall of the Soviet Union, but has struggled in the wake of the 1988 earthquake, and with a severely crippled infrastructure, to find firm

footing on the world stage. Perhaps even more relevant to the vast numbers of Armenians now spread around the world are the ARF's continued efforts to force the governments of the world to officially acknowledge the genocide—the fact is that the U.S. and Israel, in 2011, have still failed to do so. On a day-to-day basis for Armenian-Americans, the ARF is influential in community life, sponsoring schools which teach Armenian history and language, poetry readings, art exhibits, newsletters and academic journals which celebrate Armenian artistic culture (www.arfd.info). The ARF's youth organization, AYF, encourages modern youth to not only learn their language and culture, but also to be involved and active in the Armenian community, with the articulated goal of future membership in ARF and political and social consciousness. They accomplish this by sponsoring national events like the Armenian Olympics, which is basically a conference for young Armenian-Americans to gather together once a year and strengthen their ties to one another and the community at large (www.ayf.org). Both of these organizations are vital in maintaining the interconnectedness of Armenians now spread geographically across the globe, and in fostering strong pride in Armenian heritage and a clearly developed political unity in the fight for genocide acknowledgement. By encouraging Armenians to be active participants in, rather than passive recipients of their cultural legacy, the ARF and AYF strive to defeat the victim mentality and reinvigorate Armenian artistic and intellectual culture.

Restitution and Resolution

One of pearls of wisdom imparted to Balakian by his grandmother is: “Souls are either good or evil. Good souls are connected with angels and saints. Evil souls with suicides or criminals or Turks” (29).

A potent unifying ideology for modern Armenians is a still-festering hatred of the Turks, and consequently, the fight against the Turkish denial of the genocide. While the contemporary academic intellectualization of history and historiography demands that all accounts are understood to be biased, and seeks a non-judgmental neutrality, the irrefutable evidence of the genocide, coupled with the blatant and relentless campaign of the Turks to suppress all references to not only the genocide, but to Armenia itself, makes it difficult to discard the Armenian’s unabashed hatred of the Turk. As Balakian learned to embrace his Armenian heritage, as an academic himself, he was astonished to discover the truly insidious nature of the Turkish campaign:

It has become clear to me that Turkey not only is a culture of profound human rights abuses but a place devoid of any mechanisms of critical self-evaluation....In Turkish schools everyone is taught that in 1915 the Armenians were traitors who attacked and killed Turks and deserved everything they got. There is no mention of Armenia, not on maps, in encyclopedias, in tourist pamphlets, or guidebooks, let alone in the telling of the history of Anatolia. A Turkish writer for the Encyclopedia Britannica had been sent to prison for letting the word *Armenia* appear on a map of ancient Anatolia. Tour guides and travel literature have expunged the word *Armenia* from their narratives. Armenian churches and buildings—many of them among the important and beautiful ancient structures in Anatolia—are not acknowledged as Armenian. Recently, I checked a Fodor’s guide to Turkey to find that the description of the great ruined Armenian city of Ani did not mention the word *Armenian*. When the permanent exhibit of the ancient Near East opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the word *Armenia* was removed from its

historic place on the map. The chairman of the museum's board at that time was a former U.S. ambassador to Turkey. All of this was a continuation of the genocidal program to wipe out Armenia. (269)

On a more personal note, as one survivor explained to the Millers:

When we think of what happened, we cannot forget the pain. Your mother and father come to mind, your own children. He [referring to a Turk] takes the child from its mother's lap and kills it. A wild beast does not do that. Of course those feelings remain with us all the time. And by remaining in us, the feelings will affect our grandchildren, too. The Armenian's heart is burnt. He cannot reconcile with the Turks. (165)

Some Armenians do seem willing to recognize and acknowledge that there have always existed among the Turks some kind individuals—indeed, many Armenians who survived the genocide did so in Turkish homes. (Miller 164-5) And considering the harrowing and soul-shattering experiences that Abraham Hartunian lived through, his “Author's Note” prefacing his memoir *Neither to Laugh nor to Weep* is amazingly poignant and displays an astonishing belief in the inherent goodness in all people, and God:

Because my autobiography is tied up with Turkey, the Turks, and Moslems, and a number of European powers, it is natural that I have borne down heavily upon them. But I desire people to know that in my heart there is neither hate nor revenge. I have not written to dishonor anyone. And especially, I have no wish to poison minds against the Turks. I trust that the present Turk is ashamed of what the old Turk did. I trust that the so-called Christian powers of Europe regret the wrongs they heaped upon the Armenians. And I believe that finally, in this world, God's power will prevail, and justice will conquer might.

However, many Armenians simply cannot relegate their hatred to the Turks of the past who perpetrated the actual genocide, since the Turks of the present continue their campaign against the Armenian people. Boyalian and Grigorian conclude their article “Psychosocial Sequelae of the Armenian Genocide” by stating:

Finally, by a continued denial by the Turks of the genocide and by the general lack of knowledge and acceptance of the truth about the massacres, the psychological genocide continues. The legacy it leaves for the identity formation of subsequent generations is that those who perished deserved to be brutally exterminated and forgotten or that our parents and grandparents and we, in turn, are all liars and again unworthy of consideration and dignity as honest human beings. Is it any wonder then that generations of Armenians are unwilling and unable to put aside the events of 1915 as past history and “let bygones be bygones”? The first genocide of this century is still reaping its virulent results. (183-4)

The Millers also observed that the denial precludes resolution:

It is indisputable that the Turkish government’s denial of the genocide has profoundly affected survivor response. In any humanly created tragedy, denial by the perpetrator retards the victims’ ability to focus on their own healing. It is difficult to overstate how offensive it is to survivors that the reality of their suffering is denied by the Turkish government. Armenians expend an enormous amount of individual and collective energy in combating this distortion of the truth. Every time an official denial is made by the Turkish government—or whenever the American government refuses to acknowledge the genocide—the effect on survivors is akin to rubbing salt on an open wound. (160)

It seems a safe assumption that unless the Turkish government admits their crimes against the Armenian people and takes responsibility for their actions, the wound of the genocide will remain a part of Armenian identity, and will continue to engender outrage and furious indignation among Armenians, regardless of how many generations they are removed from the actual events of 1915. Even if they must accept that the Turks will never admit to the genocide, having the other nations of the world acknowledge what vast amounts of evidence have proven to be indisputably true would be a significant victory for post-genocide Armenians worldwide. It would assure the children and

grandchildren of survivors that their painstakingly collected accounts and the voices of the survivors have been heard.

Why They Tell the Story

Close to a century after the virtual annihilation of the Armenian people by the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian genocide, despite providing a playbook for all of the subsequent genocides that would plague the 20th century, remains startlingly unrecognized by history. This is due in large part to the Turkish campaign to suppress knowledge of the genocide, but even understanding the ways in which the Turks have successfully limited and outright altered the historical record, it is simply unfathomable that more people do not know about the genocide. Although, when examined in the context of the vast array of atrocities committed all over the world, it should come as no surprise that so few stories get told, and even fewer heard. The truth that so many voices are silenced begs for as many voices as possible to tell what they know. In his Foreword to Graber's *Caravans to Oblivion: The Armenian Genocide, 1915*, Roger W. Smith, Professor of Government, College of William and Mary warns:

...many of us still tend to think of genocide as the providence of the bestial, mad, or primitive. Genocide, however, is a human crime, one that animals are not capable of performing; it requires sustained organization, rationalization, and the cover-up known as denial of genocide. If the ends of genocide are often mad or at least irrational, the means chosen are carefully calculated; perpetrators wait for the "right" moment to carry out the destruction....In fact, all of these labels are ways of evading a recognition that ordinary human beings have a capacity for destroying their fellows when caught up in certain political and social conditions. By speaking of the bestial, mad, and primitive, we minimize awareness of how often genocide has taken place in the twentieth century, and we also prevent understanding of why and how genocide takes place. (Foreword)

The Armenians of the diaspora, scattered around the globe, carry the tremendous burden of a horrific past of grievous wrongs committed against their people. As they continue to face the Turks' denial of the genocide, and obstruction of the paltry justice of acknowledgement, the existing Armenian community has worked tirelessly to collect and distribute the stories of the survivors, as well as official documentation that proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that the genocide occurred. It is in the voices of the survivors that the true legacy of the genocide can be found, because these voices rise in a powerful chorus of survival. They endured the unspeakable, and now speak the unendurable. They, their children, and their children's children have forged new lives, in foreign lands, but they carried the weight of the genocide with them. As the stories are distilled through successive generations, the voices gain a clarity borne of their progeny's recognition that these people, their ancestors, are some of the strongest people who have ever walked the face of the earth. As they continue to develop and cultivate a new Armenian identity and culture, they must do so as the legacy of survivors. The genocide must not be forgotten, but it must be processed, and only by realizing that each and every voice of survival comes from a real person, who possessed unreal strength and found the power within him or herself to survive, can that new identity recognize the truth of the foundation it is built upon. The stories must be given voice, and the least, the very least, we can do, is listen.

CHAPTER 5

Memorials occupy an interesting place in cultural identity. They are tangible manifestations of loss that seek to offer the intangible resurrection of hope—the hope that by remembering, we can stave off the losses of the future. I have visited many memorials throughout my life, but before I went to Argentina, I had never considered them through the lens of the deliberate decisions that go into their creation.

In a country whose wounds have not healed, where survivors and their captors must co-exist in the urban landscape, Argentina's memorials to the *desaparecidos* are still in the process of being created. As a result, there is no unified consensus as to what these spaces of memory should be. Therefore, Buenos Aires today offers an extraordinary opportunity to personally experience a wide variety of memorial gestures, each created with its own specific intentionality.

In Buenos Aires I saw commemorative *baldosa* tiles on the sidewalks beneath my feet. Writer and activist Nora Strejilevich stood next to me and pointed to her brother's photograph on the display of *desaparecidos* in front of the ruins of *Club Atlético* where she herself was held and tortured in 1977. I ended my two-hour journey through the ESMA by standing in the *capucha* mere feet from shackles that had chained people within its stalls. I walked the length of the wall on the banks of the Rio de la Plata at the *Parque de la Memoria*, touching the names engraved in the stone, surprised to find Rinaldis etched there. I have not merely studied the various approaches to creating

effective memorials, I have experienced them. They affected me in many different ways, but they all had an impact. All are powerful spaces of memory, each raising its own unique voice to tell the story, and each having its own story to tell.

Memorializing Trauma: Giving Memory Its Voice

In the aftermath of trauma, a culture has to process what happened both individually and collectively. The collective acknowledgement of the traumatic events is a necessarily complex endeavor, combining individual stories into the story of the culture's experience, and seeing those stories through multiple lenses—lenses which are often tied to wildly varying agendas and goals. As a result, when a society chooses to commemorate and memorialize its history, many competing factions invested in the history and historiography of the events, such as individual survivors, governmental agencies, families of the victims, and historians committed to documenting facts, have to make decisions regarding the form that the commemoration will take. These decisions are crucial to the culture's ultimate processing of the trauma, since the very creation of the memorial is itself not merely a passive commentary but an active participation in the creation of cultural memory. The memories, artifacts, and moments selected for memorialization become the manifestations of the event that will be collectively experienced, and therefore privileged in the story. In addition, the choices regarding the form that the memorial takes, and the way in which the events will be remembered and experienced by the public, also profoundly influence how the culture's identity is seen in the context of its past trauma in the present and future. As Marita Sturken describes in

Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of

Remembering:

The forms remembrance takes indicate the status of memory within a given culture. In acts of public commemoration, the shifting discourses of history, personal memory, and cultural memory converge. Public commemoration is a form of history-making, yet it can also be a contested form of remembrance in which cultural memories slide through and into each other, creating a narrative tangle. (44)

Sturken's work specifically examines the American collective cultural response to both Vietnam and AIDS in the context of its memorial actions and structures, but her observations are relevant when applied to the making of meaning for any culture in creating its commemorative gestures. The choices made in memorializing the *desaparecidos* of Argentina, the victims of the Holocaust, and of the Armenian genocide all reveal the tension of Sturken's narrative tangle, and the complexities of collective remembrance for cultures.

Argentina Remembers

The efforts to commemorate the experiences of the *desaparecidos* in Argentina are extraordinarily complex, as they are taking place in a country that is still attempting to sort through its deeply conflicted feelings about blame, responsibility, and its very identity as a nation. The powerful desire to hear the voices of the disappeared and remember that the state itself committed terrorism against its own people exists in direct opposition to a strong urge to silence the voices and forget the trauma of the past. These feelings are complicated on both sides by fear. The surviving detained-disappeared and the families of those who have never returned fear that if they allow the *desaparecidos* to

be forgotten, then they will truly have disappeared, and therefore, the evil men who attempted to eliminate them will have won. Nonetheless, many Argentines today also display an unwillingness to speak too loudly about what happened—they remember how quickly the balance of power changed in the past, and they still do not trust that they will not be targeted in the future. For others, it is simply easier to forget, to leave the past in the past, and not be troubled by their country's shameful history. Added to this swirl of competing perspectives is the fact that litigation continues to this day, and many of the artifacts and testimonies of memory are considered evidence in ongoing trials, and therefore must be treated carefully, and utilized in ways that will not compromise the intricate legalities involved. Moreover, even among the communities which agree on the importance of establishing memorial events and structures, the still-seething, fierce internal ideological battles over the way in which the *desaparecidos* should be represented continue to complicate the challenge of developing a unified vision of how to best honor them. Ultimately, the result of this convoluted tangle of perspectives has been a variety of memorial gestures that differ greatly in their philosophical approaches. As each visitor to, witness of, or participant in the commemorative act brings his or her own ideology to the point of contact, the impact of a memorial is always a deeply personal, highly individualized experience. While the effectiveness of each memorial can be debated on specific points, the fact that there are so many different approaches also means that there are many different responses, and the power and poignancy of the story can resonate on many frequencies.

Performative Commemorations

For many of the surviving *desaparecidos*, it is important that commemoration is part of a continuing effort of resistance and exists beyond static forms of memorial. In her recent article for the journal *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* entitled “Performative Memorial Sites and Resistance in Argentina,” detained-disappeared survivor Nora Strejilevich uses the term “performative” to describe memorial actions that involve active participation of the community. One vivid example she offers is of a march in 2001 in the Buenos Aires neighborhood of San Telmo, in which the marchers made and carried large silhouettes, representing the disappeared. As Strejilevich explains:

This flat figure reveals a *desaparecido*, the gap that his or her kidnapped life has created in the community. What is most striking is the connection established between the missing and those who “hold” them. While the disappeared is the main character wandering around the neighborhood, the citizen becomes the support without which the shadow would not be able to walk. A connection is established between the disappeared biography and that of the living, whose existence is now marked by the absent one. (237)

Strejilevich feels that this connection is vital to the aspect of remembrance that she believes should be privileged most, which is a celebration of each *desaparecido*’s living life and place in the community. Her work insists repeatedly that remembering the disappeared only in terms of their absence and deaths negates what is truly being mourned, which was their presence and lives.

A particular form of memorialization that specifically seeks to involve the community and establish the permanent presence of the disappeared in the world is the

baldosa. *Baldosas* are the creation of the “*Barrios* for Memory and Justice” movement.

As Strejilevich describes:

In front of a house or site of a “popular militant’s” disappearance, a testimony is left (a personalized tile) with his or her name along with the dates of their birth and kidnapping. The event of “laying the tile” is held in a public space: the sidewalk. What summons the audience to such an act is the necessity to point out the void left by a murder amidst the collective life....The tile is resistant, just like the memory of a member of the community who, being absent, occupies a crucial place among the living: a place that is not ghostly anymore. (242)

The *baldosas* themselves are beautiful, colorful mosaic tiles and they now become a permanent part of the physical world. When walking the streets of Buenos Aires, one may find oneself standing on a *baldosa* while waiting for the bus, or window shopping, or heading to the theater. They offer a permanent reminder that this person was here-- they lived here, right in the neighborhood. As part of the very sidewalk, *baldosas* cannot be ignored; they literally become embedded in the path of the everyday life of the community. The tile-laying ceremonies invite the families and friends of the disappeared to bring pictures, memories and anecdotes of the living person to share with the neighbors as the tile becomes a part of all of their lives. They are intensely personal ceremonies, celebrating the individuals as people, and establishing the continuity of their connections to their communities. For Strejilevich, the “performative” quality of memorials that involve the living is vital:

These movements in Argentina are, then, recovering a culture of resistance among a population that, until recently, had mostly chosen oblivion and amnesty. But, are these memories of the resistance and/or memories of the horror? Other memorials (walls with the names of the disappeared by the *Plata* river), even if necessary, are most prone to the danger of

crystallization. It is in these places where the memories of horror prevail. The “performative memorials,” on the contrary, have the capacity to change again and again, since they are shaped by and for the present. As soon as they are experienced as crystallized rituals, they, paradoxically, cease to exist. In the face of crimes against humanity, societies need to create their own paths for collective remembrance. Through these actions, citizens who participate become, again, agents of resistance able to redefine how to deal with their present, shaped by such a sinister past. This is, in my opinion, a crucial way (beyond legal justice provided or not by courts) for communities to work through a legacy of terror. (242)

Club Atlético

One of the challenges facing memorial movements in Argentina is how to deal with the places of captivity. The military government’s method of detaining the captives in plain sight means that literally hundreds of clandestine detention centers have been discovered in the aftermath of the state-sponsored terror. These detention centers exist throughout Argentina, clustered most thickly in and around Buenos Aires. One such site is *Club Atlético*, where prisoners were held in the basement of a three-story police building. The building was demolished in the late 1970s for the construction of the motorway 25 de Mayo (www.collectivememory.net). Information revealed in testimony for *Nunca Más*, the government report that gathered evidence of the crimes that occurred during the dictatorship, allowed *Club Atlético* to be identified as a location where prisoners were held and tortured. The demolition of the building to make way for the highway had destroyed valuable evidence against the state, but according to the “Collective Memory” website, “In April 13, 2002, the Government of the City of Buenos Aires began excavating the sight [sic], marking the first time that urban archeological excavation had been undertaken with the goal of insuring that the criminal acts

committed by the state during the dictatorship never be forgotten” (www.collectivememory.net). In 2003, the Mayor of Buenos Aires created the *Proyecto de Recuperación de la memoria Centro Clandestino de Detención “Club Atlético”* in order to facilitate the excavation and preserve evidence and artifacts, as well as mark the site as a memorial space to honor the memory of those once held within its walls. Today, under an overpass of the motorway 25 de Mayo, the site of *Club Atlético* sits, still undergoing excavation. The site is marked by street art, depicting souls escaping up the support column that rises from the ruins, as well as a chalk-outline silhouette representing the missing that covers the hill above the excavation. An enormous board filled with the pictures, names, and ages of those who were discovered to have been held in *Club Atlético* dominates the entrance to the scaffolding that leads down into the site. As a memorial site, *Club Atlético* is unique because of its dual role as an archaeological site of legal evidence, as well as a place of memory to honor the *desaparecidos*. Situated as it is out in the open, on the streets of the city, it offers passersby the startling realization that the torture enacted during the dictatorship was conducted not only in remote, darkened corners of the country, but also within the very fabric of the city’s everyday life.

ESMA

The Naval Mechanics School, located on Avenue Libertador in Nuñez, Buenos Aires, was another site of detention and torture in the heart of the city. As the headquarters and residence of naval officers, the ESMA complex was utilized extensively, and it is estimated that over 5,000 *desaparecidos* were held within its walls

during the dictatorship. The entire complex is now a vital part of the *Memoria Abierta* (in English, Institute for Spaces of Memory) project, in which a collection of human rights organizations endeavors to preserve the spaces of horror, and create museums from them as both memorials and centers for education about the crimes committed there.

According to the mission statement on the *Memoria Abierta* website:

The Human Rights organizations that comprise *Memoria Abierta* believe that joint action strengthens our presence in society and makes us more effective in the work toward the goals that unite us:

- To preserve the memory of what happened during the period of state terrorism and its consequences throughout society.
- To promote a social conscience that values active memory.
- To articulate a social memory that influences Argentine political culture, contributing to the construction of identity and the strengthening of democracy.
- To prevent all forms of authoritarianism in future generations.
- To construct a heritage that serves as testimony to what happened in the country during the period of state terrorism, and the subsequent struggle in search of truth and justice, that can be shared with society. (www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/eng)

In order to fulfill these goals, the *Memoria Abierta* project approaches the ESMA site in very deliberate and specific ways. Like *Club Atlético*, the ESMA is not just a site for memorial, but is also evidence in ongoing litigation, and must be kept intact to preserve that evidence. Therefore, the officers' residence building at ESMA, although it is working toward being a museum, is not filled with displays and installations. It exists largely as it was when it was in use, and offers very little in the way of placards or informational signage. Instead, the experience of visiting ESMA relies strongly on the interaction between the guides and the visitors. Guides are themselves students of the evidence of the state-sponsored terror, and they share information, stories, and the

experience of the detainees with the visitors. They keep visiting groups small and intimate, introducing the visitors to one another, and encouraging them to actively engage in asking questions and raising issues that come up in the course of the visit. They patiently answer every single question, encouraging discussion among all of the visitors, and share the personal insights that they themselves have acquired in working on the project. The visits are quite consciously designed to be physically uncomfortable—there are no chairs or benches, public restrooms or elevators, and visitors walk through the site and stand on marble floors for several hours. In order to reach the basement where many detainees were held and tortured, and the *capucha* (attic) where long-term prisoners were held, visitors must climb and descend stairs through what was clearly a residence, seeing that the men who lived here could not possibly have been unaware of what was happening as hooded prisoners were taken through their living space on a daily basis. *Capucha* means “hood”, and it is both the “hood” of the building and a reference to the hoods that the ESMA prisoners were forced to wear. In the *capucha*, visitors can see the long rows of tiny stalls, barely two feet high in some places, where prisoners were forced to crouch or lie for hours, days, weeks, months, and in some cases, years on end. The experience of visiting the ESMA is exhausting both physically and emotionally, and it is designed to be.

Memoria Abierta is working toward making the entire complex a museum which will house an extensive document collection, as well as a site which will help visitors

truly understand the extent of the crimes committed there. As they describe on their website:

The Museum that we Envision [sic] should be a place where present citizens and future generations come to know the recent history of the country through testimonies, documents and objects. We hope that the Museum will contribute to the comprehension of what took place in past decades and will stimulate, in those who visit, an active commitment to solving the country's problems. (www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/eng)

It is an unusual memorial site, but it commemorates an indescribable period of horror, and attempts to connect the visitor to the *desaparecidos* through an empathetic experience, choosing to privilege *showing* rather than trying to *tell* that which cannot be articulated. The decisions in constructing the visitors' experience at ESMA have been carefully and consciously made to allow the site to speak for itself, offering a unique voice in memorialization.

Parque de la Memoria

Argentina's most traditional memorial site, the *Parque de la Memoria*, located on the banks of the Rio de la Plata, is also its most controversial. A state-funded memorial complex, it covers a wide swath of land on the banks of the river, and contains seventeen commissioned sculptures by both native and foreign artists, as well as a huge stone wall that lists the names and ages of the *desaparecidos*, arranged chronologically by the years in which they disappeared. The controversy began with the location itself. The park is situated far away from downtown Buenos Aires, past an airport, in an area that receives virtually no foot traffic. If people are going to visit the memorial, they must choose to do so, and go out of their way to get there. Many survivors and families of the *desaparecidos*

wanted the memorial to be in the heart of the city, where regular citizens would encounter it in their daily lives. However, despite the logistical difficulties of the location, the site on the river also carries deep significance. During the dictatorship, the military leaders at ESMA killed countless prisoners by drugging them, loading them into airplanes, and dropping them into the Rio de la Plata (*Nunca Más* 221). Many, many of the bodies of those who were murdered by these “death flights” were never recovered, and the river became their grave. As a result, having the Parque de la Memoria on the banks of the Plata is seen by many as fitting.

Another controversial aspect of the park is the wall itself. Like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., it is simply a wall of names, in this case with ages listed as well, and this design choice provoked many of the same objections that initially arose in opposition to the Vietnam Memorial: it is cold, impersonal, a “gash of shame” rather than a monument (memoryandjustice.org/site/parque-de-la-memoria). In *Tangled Memories*, Sturken describes the effect of the Vietnam Memorial and her comments are relevant in the context of the *Parque de la Memoria* wall as well:

This listing of names creates an expanse of cultural memory, one that could be seen as alternately subverting, rescripting, and contributing to the history of the Vietnam War as it is being written. The histories these names evoke and the responses they generate are necessarily multiple and replete with complex personal stakes. (59)

She specifically notes the impact that such a list has for many visitors when she explains:

These names, by virtue of their multiplicity, situate the Vietnam Veterans Memorial within the multiple strands of cultural memory. The memorial does not validate the collective over the value of the individual. In response to the memorial, visitors commonly think of the widening circle

of pain emanating from each name, imagining for each the grieving parents, sisters, brothers, girlfriends, wives, husbands, friends, and children—imagining, in effect, the multitude of people who were directly affected by the war. (58)

One choice regarding the Argentine wall of names that differs significantly from the design of the Vietnam Memorial is the future plan to create an interactive data base that will allow visitors to the *Parque de la Memoria* to look up individual *desaparecidos* and see photographs, testimonies and other information about their lives. By including the data base, the memorial seeks to put faces to the names and personalize the visitors' interaction.

In Argentina, where the effects of the dictatorship are still deeply felt, and feelings regarding the events are often conflicted, there are several different gestures of commemoration and memorialization that seek to remember the *desaparecidos* and make meaning of their lives and deaths. While every person will experience these memorials in an individual way, and will find some more resonant than others, the different approaches make each experience unique, and all have been created and continue to be performed with the intention of giving voice to the silenced. Collectively, they form an interesting array of modern attempts to convey the inexpressible, and to develop memorials that both honor the dead and connect to the living.

Holocaust Memorials

In the sixty or so years since the Holocaust, a tremendous amount of effort has gone into finding appropriate and effective ways to commemorate it. In the attempts to create places and experiences that honor the victims and allow truth to speak, the desire

to prevent Holocaust museums and memorials from becoming grotesque catalogues of horrors requires that a balance be struck between factual depictions, stark realism, and artistic representation. Certainly, the Holocaust is necessarily central to the modern construction of Jewish identity, but it transcends the limitations of identifications with one culture. Commemorating the Holocaust, and processing what it cost the world's people in understanding the evil that human beings have the capacity for, is important for the collective culture of humanity.

There are many Holocaust museums and memorials all over the world and each one represents a need to give meaning to the incomprehensible, with the understanding that remembering is important—not just for the dead who suffered, but for the living who must continue in a world where this has happened. The memorials take on a wide variety of forms, from abstract sculpture, to evidence-based presentations of facts and historical context, to experiences designed to recognize what individual victims went through. In their chapter entitled “Museums and the Imperative of Memory: History, Sublimity, and the Divine,” from their book *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation*, Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer compare two of the most well-known Holocaust Museums in the world: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and *Yad Vashem*, a complex of museums and memorials in Jerusalem. Bernard-Donals and Glejzer consider both of these places in the context of the visitor experience, and what that experience brings to bear on the visitor's connection to “what could be called the divine” (132). In other words, they are examining

the impact of the museum's approaches on the individual visitor in the context of that individual's experience of a connection to a greater understanding of the vast implications of such desecration of life. Essentially, their comparison reveals that *Yad Vashem's* political agenda and deliberate choice to provide historical context leads to an approach that "shows us the dangerous ease of remembrance without witnessing: epistemology solves problems of ontology; knowledge becomes being" (141). They go on to state: "The rhetoric of the museum thus places the viewer in the position of having to give up her name in the face of the state, to identify with Israel's history instead of any particular victim" (141). However, they do note that the part of the museum that seems to evoke the most powerful response in visitors is the Children's Memorial. The Children's Memorial has the visitor walk through a dark corridor, with quiet music and the illuminated faces of children. The visitor then enters a dark chamber flickering with countless candle lights, and they hear a voice reading the names of children murdered in the Holocaust. Bernard-Donals and Glejzer recognize that "the Children's Memorial constructs a space from which the viewer might see something, witness something that itself goes beyond any story" (140). It is their contention that it is this "space" that makes the experience personal for the visitor, and therefore gives voice to the story effectively, without actually limiting the visitor's intake to a specific story.

Bernard-Donals and Glejzer, in believing that the spare images and the "space" for the visitor to connect personally to what they are witnessing is most effective, therefore find the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) to be a much

more powerful experience for its visitors. The USHMM has taken great care in creating exhibits that allow images, unencumbered by an excess of historical facts or commentary, to speak for themselves—and their voices resonate powerfully. One of the most vivid examples they provide in making their point is the presentation of a desecrated Torah ark, without accompanying historical information. As they explain, “It does not provide us access to the events that culminated in the desecration of the ark, and certainly not understanding of them. But it may do something more important: force the viewer out of knowledge by rupturing history” (143). The concept is that by eliminating the factual context of the desecration, the object invites the viewer to witness the impact of the desecration by feeling its significance, rather than intellectually understanding it.

Another example at USHMM that evokes a similar, visceral, rather than intellectualized response, is a passageway between two exhibits in one of the museum’s towers, that is covered with more than a thousand photographs taken between 1890 and 1941. As Bernard-Donals and Glejzer describe them:

These photographs are completely unremarkable portraits: some are posed, others are informal. Some are candid shots of people and families gathered for picnics, or strolling down streets of a single small town in what is now Lithuania. The photographs are what is left of the life in a shtetl community that was eliminated in two days by an SS mobile killing unit. (148)

The photographs depict no horrors—it is quite the opposite. Instead, they display what was lost. They convey the absence. And in doing so, Bernard-Donals and Glejzer argue, they allow people to see, in the mundane experiences of the people of the shtetl, themselves. The photographs of unnamed, complete strangers, half a world and half a

century away, allow modern visitors to recognize the totality of the loss that the shtetl's destruction represents in a way that the statistical facts never could.

What Bernard-Donals and Glejzer ultimately posit is that it is precisely in allowing the unspeakable, unknowable, and inexpressible to exist in a space that makes no attempt to speak, know or express what it cannot, that a memorial can offer the viewer a powerful and poignant understanding that is in itself inexpressible. They see this as reaching the sublime. As they write:

...if you think about the lives alluded to in the artifacts that remain from them in the museum...you can imagine the points of connection between the intention you believe you see in a person's gait and a similar intention when you smile for photographs at weddings or family reunions. You can also see the horrible accidents of life—crime, the death of a child, the destruction of one's property—as the reverse of this reflection, and there are innumerable instances of such reflections in the museum: the unimaginably huge piles of shoes taken from victims at Majdanek, or the photograph of a ten-year-old boy with his hands raised in surrender at the point of a gun during the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. But this understanding of one's lived life ties together the divine and the human or historical in such a way that we are able to see one in the other. The phenomenal world (the world of life and death, the world of stories, of laws, of our experiences), and the conceptual (that aspect of life that provides for our capacity to even describe our lived lives as such), and the noumenal (that which we cannot see but can only think, the events themselves) become oddly commensurable. We come to make an easy equation between them: God lives here or, in the reverse, God has died here. (151)

Bernard-Donals and Glejzer's comparison is only one perspective, but captures well the challenges in memorializing events that are beyond description. Holocaust museums and memorials face the daunting task of conveying a horror so large that it cannot be comprehended in its totality. Instead, they must select moments, images and

experiences that offer in their narrow scope a lens through which to gain a broader perspective. In terms of giving voice to the memories, they must find ways for lone singers to allow the chorus to be heard.

Armenians Still Struggle With Memory

Nearly a century after the Turks committed genocide and came close to succeeding in eradicating the Armenian people, the voice of memory for the Armenians still struggles to be heard. In modern-day Armenia, in the city of Yerevan, the Tsisernakaberd Memorial Complex offers monuments, memorials, a museum and a research center, all dedicated to the memory of those lost in the genocide. Known in English as the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, run by the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, the Tsisernakaberd Memorial Complex has been painstakingly constructed to honor those lost and Armenia is very proud of it, making sure that all visiting dignitaries and heads-of-state come to the memorial (www.genocide-museum.am/eng). However, the location of the complex in Yerevan makes it largely inaccessible to the vast majority of the Armenians of the diaspora, and furthermore, virtually ensures that the rest of the world will never see it. For a people who have spent the last ninety-six years seeking acknowledgement from the world that the genocide took place, the Tsisernakaberd Memorial offers little hope of spreading awareness.

Armenian communities all over the world have been successful in amassing testimony and creating libraries and archive centers to collect and provide information about the genocide, but they have been less successful in having their dream of a

significant, accessible museum come to fruition. The attempts to build the Armenian Genocide Museum of America in Washington, D.C. have been riddled with conflict. Property was acquired mere blocks from the White House, but legal battles and infighting have prevented construction and eaten up a great deal of the funding that was originally collected to erect the museum. Initially slated to open in 2010, the museum is now indefinitely postponed, and there are no feasible, concrete plans for completion (www.bizjournals.com/washington/stories/2010/06/21). It appears that the “Forgotten Genocide” of the 20th century will continue to remain outside the collective consciousness of the West, remembered by few who were not directly affected by it. The Armenian-American community continues to strive for acknowledgement, and the lack of a substantive memorial is symbolic of the culture’s inability to give voice to their remembrance in ways that can be heard beyond the walls of their insular community.

Cultural Memory

In the creation of memorials, cultures honor the past as they acknowledge the past’s influence on their present identity as a people, and they make meaning that carries a message about how they hope to move forward into the future. Memorials represent a collective hope that human beings are capable of learning from their mistakes. As a culture makes decisions in how to commemorate events and give voice to memory, they are also deliberately choosing what not to forget. In the aftermath of trauma, individuals must learn to live with their memories in order to survive, and the same is true for the collective experience of a culture. As a culture, they must find a way to live with the

memory of the trauma and confront it collectively, in order to reshape a cultural identity that is able to move forward. In the opening pages of *Tangled Memories*, Sturken considers memory in the cultural context:

What does it mean for a *culture* to remember? The collective remembering of a specific culture can often appear similar to the memory of an individual—it provides cultural identity and gives a sense of the importance of the past. Yet the process of cultural memory is bound up in complex political stakes and meanings. It both defines a culture and is the means by which its divisions and conflicting agendas are revealed. To define a memory as cultural is, in effect, to enter into a debate about what that memory means. This process does not efface the individual but rather involves the interaction of individuals in the creation of cultural meaning. Cultural memory is a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history. (1)

In the process of memorializing, cultures privilege certain stories, giving those memories the loudest voices, with the furthest reach, thereby not only remembering history, but actually creating it in the process. For the people living in the wake of the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, and the Argentinean dictatorship, navigating the complexities of their cultural heritage, and confronting the memories, are part and parcel of redefining a post-traumatic cultural identity. The ways in which they have chosen to give voice to the memories through memorialization are the weapons they wield against the dangerous silence of forgetting.

Survivor Song

To study torture and trauma is to peel away the protective layers of denial that allow us to believe that humanity is innately good. It is a journey into darkness that no amount of meticulous scholarship and academic perspective can keep at bay. But it is

important work. Testimony is powerful. To bear witness to atrocity is to give voice to a story that needs to be told—and needs to be heard. All pain is experienced individually, but through the phenomenon of empathy we can feel sorrow for the pain of others. When we hear the voice of trauma, we feel something, and although pain is inherently indescribable, it is through the empathy generated by our shared humanity that we are able to discern an impression of the truth of the experience, even when that truth can only be found in the spaces and silences that fragment the inexpressible.

To speak the unspeakable, to tell the stories that can never quite be told, is always an act of resistance against silence. The act of listening automatically makes the listener complicit in resisting silence. The telling of the story is important in and of itself, but the transmission of the story to another transforms the telling into a collective act, which lends power to the voice by giving it agency. In the aftermath of trauma, a culture needs both to speak and to listen, and then make meaning from what it has heard. The echoes of trauma resound through successive generations, who, upon hearing them, must then find their own voices—which will inevitably carry traces of the echo. It is part of their story now and will speak through new voices.

Ultimately, whether produced as intentional historiography or evidentiary witness, whether an attempt to artistically capture truth or simply relieve a burden of pain, whether it is stitched into an image or spoken into the air, when a story is told, it should be heard. Every voice that tells its story of atrocity and trauma is the voice of a person who has survived it. These survivor songs, by their very existence, fight the darkness that

their stories engender. They survived. And no matter how powerful the forces that inflicted the torture and inchoate horror, this person, this survivor, was stronger. No matter how ugly the story, when a survivor's voice rises in song, the sound it makes is beautiful.

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