

Narrating the Armenian Genocide: an Italian Perspective

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Abstract

In many diasporic Armenian communities around the globe, stories of the Armenian Genocide resurface long after the traumatic events of 1915. This is also the case of survivors (and their descendants) who took refuge in Italy. Finding it difficult to speak at length and in depth about their profoundly painful memories and experience some waited decades to share the trauma through oral history accounts and written memoirs. This article addresses the memoirs of Armenian Genocide survivors in Italy. It explores how, despite all the trauma and difficulty, they put pen to paper and give expression to the horrors and tragedies they witnessed, documenting what the world needed to know better.

Keywords: Armenian genocide, genocide memoir, oral history, memory, trauma and literature

1. Introduction

In many diasporic communities, the Armenian Genocide stories appeared long after the traumatic events of 1915, even though there were some cases when the survivors testified immediately. Most notably, the British government published in 1916 a massive volume of 700 pages of testimonies entitled *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon* by Viscount Bryce, usually cited in short as “The Blue Book”. In the words of Alan Whitehorn: “The Blue Book, [...], remains a century later, among the primary evidentiary collections on the Armenian Genocide. [...] It is a powerful refutation to those who would deny the historical record”¹. The endured horrors were also expressed in letters

¹ The book contains 150 documents and eyewitness accounts. Nine decades later, the pioneering volume was reprinted by the Gomidas Institute, with the previously deleted confidential names of sources now inserted into the text (Whitehorn 2015, 92).

and notes handed to humanitarian organizations facilitating family reunions among the scattered survivors of the Genocide. These were collected by Petros Tönapetian, among others, and published privately in London in 1922 under the title *Jayn Tarapeloc* ‘(The Outcry Of The Sufferers)’. The Armenian Genocide was witnessed through the countless photographs taken by Western missionaries like Armin Wegner whose photographs today “comprise the core of witness images of the Genocide” (Balakian 2003, 258)². There were of essential importance also U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau’s (1918) dispatches to Washington.

While bystanders were shocked and greatly troubled by what they witnessed, they were still able to provide important historical documentation with photographs and embassy reports. By contrast, given the enormous amount of suffering of the victims of genocide, they were often overwhelmed by massive psychological blocks, which endured for much of their lives. Accordingly, the genocide survivors often found it extremely difficult to speak at length and in depth about their profoundly painful experiences and memories.

The Armenian Genocide survivors’ silence was also due to the fact that they were over-protective of their children considering them a representation of survival and treating them as substitutes for the relatives who perished and communities that had been wiped out. Thus with the aim to ensure their protection, the parents often refused to share the trauma with the second generation. However, the children in their turn, wanted to learn more and to rediscover their roots³. As Peeromian asserted, “the psychological block was one of the main reasons that the first-generation survivor-writers of the 1915 Armenian Genocide did not leave a very rich literary legacy in response to what they experienced” (2012, 7). The Armenian Genocide survivor writer Kostan (Gostan) Zarian wrote: “Our loss is so enormous that it is impossible to write about it. We all have this great desire to forget. Our yesterdays are filled with blood and fire, our todays with uncertainty, and our tomorrows remain shrouded in mystery” (1981, 20). The survivors did not want to speak, affirming that their “heart would not bear the tragic experience anew”⁴ or as Dante would have said “which

² Consider also AA.VV. 1996, Guaita 2005.

³ While exploring the impact of World War II on the second-generation Armenian-American identity, Aftandilian (2009) noticed that the War brought the memory of the Armenian Genocide to the forefront within Armenian-American families, as survivors of the Genocide had to send their sons off to war. Aftandilian interviewed World War II Armenian-American veterans and found that the topic of returning home, was more emotional than the topic of their combat experience. His research on the children of survivors found that many children were named after the murdered relatives. These children felt special, because an obligation was placed on them, directly or indirectly, to bear the hopes and aspirations of the survivors not only for the family, but also for the Armenian people as a whole.

⁴ From Arshakouhi Petrossian’s testimony, a survivor from Yozghat. Cf. Svazlian 2011, 351.

to remember only, my dismay renews”⁵ (*The Divine Comedy*, “Hell”, I, 6). The task seemed so immense and indescribable and the responsibility too great.

This was also the case of my great grandparents from my mother’s side. Mkrtich Atashian and Karmilè Paronikian, were from Van. They never told the story of their survival and not a single word about the massacres. According to their daughter Dr. Sedmar Atashian’s testimony, to the questions they used to answer, “We left Van a year before those events” (Haroutyunian 2016, 16). The only thing that Mkrtich would repeat was, “We buried a pot of gold under the pear tree. If you go there, you can take it. It is certainly still there”⁶. The relatives didn’t want to cause them the additional trauma of asking questions. Yet, it was also the period of the Soviet regime, when people were afraid of speaking about anything.

Until 1970s, Armenian Genocide scholar’s attention was firmly, and almost exclusively, fixed on documents, statistics and data. Scarce, if any, attention was given to oral history, memoirs and literary responses⁷. Two main reasons account for this state of affairs. The first is ideological as the scholars were faced with denial of the basic facts and laboured to document and validate the factuality of Armenian Genocide. The second reason is eminently practical: no initiative for collecting oral histories or considering narrative works became available until then. With the passage of time, Armenian Genocide scholarship has changed in character from descriptive to analytical and broadened from historical to encompass cultural, artistic, visual and literary aspects, thus emphasizing the importance of the memoirs, the artistic literature, and the eyewitness accounts that provide a broader understanding of Armenian Genocide. Some people and organizations were involved in this process. Richard Hovannisian, the historian who was the first to engage in gathering oral testimonies of genocide survivors remembers that first generation speaking little about their memories and experiences – “either not to want to burden or driven by an assumption that no one cared”⁸. Hovannisian (1986, 1992; Hovannisian, Myers 1999) in the early 1970s undertook the largest oral history project in the Armenian community, interviewing survivors and recording their stories, reaching a landmark in 2005 with the digitalization of all 800 interviews. Verjiné Svazlian (2011), ethnographer and folklorist, over the course of more than half a century recorded

⁵ Dante in Petrocchi ed. (1994): “che nel pensier rinova la paura!”.

⁶ For further details about these survivors’ testimony, cf. Haroutyunian 2015b, 17-18.

⁷ This paper uses ‘literary response/representation/expression/scholarship’ for literature and ‘memoir, written/published testimony’ for survivor’s written memories. However, Oshagan (1968, 246) by using the term ‘chronicle’ for Yesayan’s *In the Ruins* suggests that “new categories must be invented when writing enters into the poorly explored regions of the interdiction of mourning and Catastrophe” (Nichanian 2002, 197).

⁸ “The ‘Half-Immigrant’: in between California’s Generations”, Richard Hovannisian’s public lecture held at the University of Southern California on January 28, 2015.

– and thereby saved from a total loss – directly from the Armenian Genocide survivor-repatriates and further published the eye-witness testimonies and songs revealing their experience. Michael Hagopian, an educational filmmaker, spent forty years gathering the testimonies of Armenian Genocide survivors to provide evidence of one of the most contentious events in world history. He compiled four hundred interviews with Armenian Genocide survivors and witnesses with the firm aim to catch history for the future. Michael Hagopian's archive is now preserved at the Shoah Foundation, University of South California. In 1983, the Zoryan Institute undertook a major oral history program aimed at documenting on videotape the memoirs of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide. It was felt that the legal validity and the historical value of a testimony would be enhanced tremendously when the sight of the witness was added to the sound. The mentioned and other oral history projects were of critical importance as they began their work when there were still a relative handful of survivors left in the world. Without their work, the memories would have been lost to history. The next person was Rubina Peroomian (2003, 2008, 2012, 2015) who gave birth to the Armenian Genocide literary scholarship from the 1990s. With the publication of several books, she furnished a database of relevant literary responses and analyses of a number of texts.

Over the course of recent years, I have been involved in researching the literary representation of a trauma, focusing on the Armenian Genocide⁹. In addition, the experience of translating Antonia Arslan's Genocide narratives (Arslan 2007, 2012) and teaching a course at California State University in Fresno¹⁰ on "The Armenian Genocide through Literature and Translation" led me to hypothesize the theory of "layered translation" (Haroutyunian 2015a, 44). Through evidencing the several passages between historical event and its literary representation, I concluded that the literary representation of a trauma is not always the immediate step after the historical event; but is actually the result of a multi-layered process. According to the theory of "layered translation", what follows the historical event is the translation of that event in the minds of the survivors, i.e., their memory and interpretation of the event. Memory later becomes the subject of oral history, and oral history enters the minds of

⁹The first fruits of the research on the literary representation of the Armenian Genocide have been presented through public lectures in 2013 at California State University in Fresno and at the University of South California in Los Angeles. The further results have been presented during the 44th Annual Scholars' Conference (ASC) on the Holocaust and the Churches "Remembering for the Future: Armenia, Auschwitz and Beyond", hosted by the American Jewish University, Los Angeles, on March 8-11, 2014. Cf. Haroutyunian 2015a, 2015b, 2016.

¹⁰In 2013 this author had the honour to be the 10th Henry S. Khanzadian Kazan Visiting Professor in Armenian Studies at California State University Fresno. For further details about the course cf. <<http://hyesharzhoom.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/123-HS-Vol-35-No-1-October-2013.pdf>>. See also "Family History Project Excerpts" (Vardanyan 2013).

the writers of memoir and fiction. Between these layers some other layers may intervene. For example, the passage from a survivor's memory to oral history can pass through a psychological layer, as the trauma often blocks the survivor from telling one's story.

Until now my research has mainly been focused on the final layer, i.e. on the literary representation of the Armenian Genocide. This paper will consider the memoirs of the survivors who took refuge in Italy and gave expression to the horrors and tragedies they witnessed through published testimonies or oral history.

2. *Armenian Genocide memoirs*

A handful of Armenian genocide survivors arrived to Italy almost immediately after the traumatic events. However, they waited for a long time to share the trauma. Being bearers of the traumatic event or of "non-event", in order to share the trauma they needed a time shift¹¹. Language and foreign script barrier were among additional challenges facing the survivors. On the other hand they couldn't write in their native language, which in the words of Altounian (2013, 45) was "severed from its reference, that were disqualified from the impunity of the experienced crimes in the absence of anyone else, is experienced by the survivors as a delirious language"¹². The memoirs were published after decades in Italian, when these survivors were in their late 60s to 80s.

The survivor Raffaele Gianighian (1992) was 9 during the Armenian Genocide. Being forced to leave his birthplace, he lived for four years in fear of death, losing day by day his relatives until the loss of his identity. With the name of Abdullah and a circumcision, which however didn't preserve him from the violence of his Kurdish companions, he managed to survive thanks to the intervention of tormented and fortunate circumstances that led him to Italy, to Cortina d'Ampezzo, where he settled¹³. In his memoir, Raffaele describes his pilgrimage at the age of 71 to his native village of Kisak in the district of Khodorchur (Vilayet of Erzerum) to gather the story of Armenians who lived there in 1915: the memory of the places is still extraordinarily sharp and accurate, but all traces of the Armenians who in 1915 were in Kissak are removed; the house where he was born had disappeared, that of the neighbors ruined and only three

¹¹ According to Claude Janin (1996, 38-39) "The traumatic event is a 'non-event', something that is not produced". That "first stage of the trauma [...] is the cold core of the non-assimilated trauma by oneself".

¹² Consider also Beledian (2001, 181-182); Ertel (2001, 82-83). In the last chapter "Traduire au tiers ce qui reste" of her *L'intraduisible*, Janin Altounian (2005) considers the importance of the transmission of memory through linguistic and cultural displacement. Cf. also Jugian-Perez (2006).

¹³ For name changes consider among others Garna 2005, 150.

columns of his father's forge were preserved. Also the cemetery "was demolished to make a field. [...] everything has become extinct as if an earthquake had annihilated everything"¹⁴. Some years later Raffaele's son, Vartan, visited the same places of his father and re-edited his father's book with annotations, where he described some aspects of the last hundred years of history of the Armenians and Turks, of victims and perpetrators (Gianighian 2014).

A careful reading of these texts reveals that the survivors, i.e. the 1st generation in this paper, had to make a choice through an inner struggle: either to close themselves within memories or to forget them in order to continue¹⁵. The silence became the rule. The second generation was left aside and for them the priority was the language challenge and the integration in the new host societies. On the other hand this same first generation didn't share the trauma also due to not being able to get rid of psychological blocks. Hence, they lived with the burden of the trauma and managed to share it with their children and grandchildren only after decades, as explains Coren Mirachian, a survivor born in 1904 in Ghemereg in the preface of his memoir *Da pastorello a medico*:

The first purpose of the book is to make my daughters and grandchildren aware of my past, so full of tormented events with struggles and sacrifices of all kinds, so that they learn to overcome the inevitable struggles of life; and to be useful to those discouraged, especially if young and somehow facing difficulties [in order for them] to learn to overcome the adversities of life. (Mirachian 1986, 7)

Ora primo scopo del mio scritto, è il desiderio di fare conoscere alle mie figlie ed ai nipoti il mio passato, così carico di tormentate vicende con lotte e sacrifici di ogni genere, affinché ne traggano insegnamento per superare inevitabili lotte della vita; poi per essere utile a quanti scoraggiati, specie se giovani o comunque in difficoltà, affinché imparino a superare le avversità della vita.

In the book, Mirachian narrates about his slavish life in different Turkish families, followed by different periods spent in the orphanages, always frightened and hungry. After various transfers he arrived to Smyrna where an Armenian family adopted him. Unfortunately his trauma renewed when during the further massacres he lost this second set of parents whose family name he would proudly carry till the end of his life. He managed to escape by sailing to Athens, then to the orphanage of Corfu, and later arrived to Venice to Moorat Raphael College¹⁶.

¹⁴ Gianighian 1992, 45-46; "[Il cimitero] è stato demolito per farne un campo. [...] tutto è estinto, come se un terremoto avesse cancellato ogni cosa". The English translations are by this author, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁵ Cf. Fossion, Rejas, Servais, *et al.* 2003, 521.

¹⁶ In the first half of the 19th century, the Armenian Mekhitarist Congregation underwent considerable expansion of its educational activities with the foundation of numerous schools and colleges in the Crimea, Venice, Padua and various centers in Asia Minor and the Caucasus. In accordance with the conditions of the wills of two Armenian benefactors, Samuel Moorat

Sometimes the survivors didn't live to see the publication of their memories. These were the cases of Varvar Tachdjian and Manug Khanbeghian.

Varvar Tachdjian born in 1909 in Svas, began writing her memories in French and in Armenian from her mid-seventies until the end of her life. Her notes were found in 1990 after her death and published only in 2003 in Italian by Varvar's daughter Alice (Tachdjian Polgrossi 2003). In the book *Pietre sul cuore* (Stones on the Heart), Alice interwove her mother's memories to her own recollections and thereby enriching the text with excerpts from their private correspondence and conversation.

Manug Khanbeghian's memoir *The Cross and the Half Moon*, came out in 2001 in Milano, almost twenty years after the death of the author. Khanbeghian, an otorhinolaryngologist and one of the most active members of the Armenian community of Milan, was born in Trabzon in 1895. He survived the Armenian Genocide, since in 1915 he was a student in Venice at the Armenian Moorat-Raphael College. Upon the advice of his eldest brother, a Mekhitarist monk, he didn't return home that fatal year, and thus experienced the tragedy in distance. He learnt that his two sisters in order not to fall into the hands of young Turks had preferred death by jumping from the window of the house. In the words of Manoukian:

The complex narrative in which he competed in the last years of his life can be read as the painful experience of the process of drafting the terrors of memory with respect to its own lack from the place of the tragedy.
(Manoukian 2014, 248)

La complessa narrazione in cui si è cimentato negli ultimi anni della sua vita può essere letta come la sofferta testimonianza del processo di elaborazione dell'angosciosa memoria relativa alla propria assenza dal luogo della tragedia.

Through the characters developed by the imagination of the author the book tells the story of a village and a family swept away by the massacres of 1915. It is also a story of women who knew how to tenaciously resist in their own land and, even though defrauded by all, managed to survive with dignity and to keep their traditions and culture alive.

and Eduard Raphaël Gharamianz, in 1834 and 1836 respectively, the Samuel Moorat College was founded in Padua (Prato della Valle), moving in 1846 to Paris, and the Raphaël College was set up in Venice, originally located in Ca' Pesaro and moving in 1850 to Ca' Zenobio ai Carmini. Both colleges became the principal points of reference for the Armenian communities in Europe for secondary school education and in fact taught the intellectual and managerial class of the 19th and most of the 20th century. This was especially true of the Venetian college which, in 1870 merged with the Paduan Institute which had since moved to Paris. From then on, the college in Ca' Zenobio had the double name Moorat-Raphaël and so it remained until 1997 (Peratoner 2007 [2006], 141-143).

The next memoir is by Vasken Pambakian (2010). He was only two years old when his native Smyrna underwent the catastrophe of the Great Fire, completely destroying the Greek and Armenian quarters of the city. Pambakian's book *Viaggiando nei miei ricordi* (Travelling through my Memories) is interwoven with the memories of his eldest brother Hrant and uncle Harutiun covering the early period and of his own experience in reconstructing in detail the harsh aftermath of the survival. His pharmacist father is killed by the Turks, while his mother, with three small children, escaped in the refugee camp in the periphery of Athens. Pambakian's memories start from these slums where the family resided for two decades before their interminable voyage to Italy. As Manoukian affirms:

It is here that in extreme narrowness of space and means the individual and collective prerogatives of initiative and will to resist can be outlined. These two elements will allow the small community of refugees not only to survive but to equip themselves with the basic facilities for the education of children and the formation of a essential community life. (Manoukian 2014, 251)

Ed è qui che, in condizioni di estrema ristrettezza di spazi e mezzi, si delineano le prerogative individuali e collettive di intraprendenza e volontà di resistere che permetteranno a questa piccola comunità di profughi non solo di sopravvivere, ma di dotarsi delle strutture di base per l'istruzione dei bambini e la formazione di un minimo di vita comunitaria.

In the memoirs the survivors usually described their childhood, however, the memories of Father Cirillo are that of an adult. In 1965 Capuchin friar Cirillo Giovanni Zohrabian (Hovhannes Zohrabian Guregh) published in Palermo the two volumes of his memoirs of missionary life (Zohrabian 1965). Born in 1881 in Erzerum, father Cirillo stayed in Anatolia until 1923 when the court in Trabzon sentenced him to death by hanging. He was taken to the prison in Constantinople under armed guard where he underwent the terrible torture of the Turkish *palahán*: five times sixty strokes of the cane on the soles of the feet. Then the death sentence was commuted to perpetual exile. In the beginning he moved to Greece where he stayed from 1923 to 1938, first as chaplain of the Armenians of Corfu and then ordinary of all Armenians living in Greece. In November 21, 1938, through a letter of Patriarch Agagianian from Beirut he was appointed Patriarchal Vicar in Upper Gezira in Syria. During these years of episcopate (1938 to 1953), he oversaw especially the clergy, founded schools, educated young people, testified everyday charity toward all. Called to Rome, when he was nearly eighty, he continued his service to the Church and to the brothers, with delicate missions and visits to communities and Armenian colonies scattered throughout Europe and Latin America. He died in Rome September 20, 1972 and is buried in the church of the Capuchins of Palermo. At the request of the Archbishop of Palermo, on March 22, 1983 the Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum (Congregation for the Causes of Saints) granted the permit to proceed with the process of beatification.

Written first in French in 1924 and later expanded, it was outside the scope of Father Cirillo's intention to publish the memoir,

[...] in order not to hit the susceptibility of the Turkish government, which, after ordering the extermination of defenceless Christian populations, would not tolerate the slightest hint to its horrendous crimes and would have taken his revenge out on the Catholic missionaries stationed in Anatolia. (Manoukian 2014, 245)

[...] per non urtare la suscettibilità del governo turco, il quale dopo aver ordinato lo sterminio di inermi popolazioni cristiane, non avrebbe tollerato il minimo accenno ai suoi orrendi crimini e avrebbe sfogato sui missionari cattolici dell'Anatolia la vendetta che non avrebbe più potuto prendersi su di me.

All the memories mentioned above are included in separate publications. However, there were some voices of Armenian Genocide survivors which were collected in a volume entitled *Hushèr* meaning "Memory" in Armenian, memory of a past that will not be erased and denied (Arslan and Pisanello 2001). The editors collected a series of testimonies from the Armenian Genocide survivors living in Italy and those of their children, who had preserved the legacy of their beloved parents with precious and painful memories.

One example is the diary of Isabella Kuyumgian Sirinian (ivi, 31-57), from a wealthy family with an aristocratic ancestry. In her memories the life before 1915 corresponds to an image of fullness, while the image after August of the same year radically changes: death, deportation to Syria and loss of everything they ever had. With hope, they move from Damascus to Constantinople to start a new life there; but once arrived every single thought of hope vanished. Isabella got married nonetheless, but shortly after became a widow with a child, Dicran, to raise. In 1943 a new cycle is about to begin: the Kheyayan relatives are in Milan and can receive their nephew so that he can study at university. From that moment, Dicran will become the reference figure of the Italian diaspora.

Besides Isabella's story, the book *Hushèr* includes also the memories of other survivors, as the Mekhitarist Father Ignatios Adamian, Anahit Besdikian, Garnik Nalbandian, Hripsime Condakgian, Ovsanna Keuleyan, Hrant Pambakian. These were memories of a catastrophe that befell them while they were very young, still children, unable to understand the reasons. In these testimonies emerges a great deal of courage and a profound love of life. The most striking aspect is the ability to distinguish between the criminal purpose of rulers and many common people, without whose brave help many would not have survived. In so doing, they preserved the trust for others and for life.

The survivor memoirs provide an invaluable research tool not only for researchers, but also for fiction writers who address the topic of the Armenian

Genocide¹⁷. One of these phenomena is the Italian-Armenian novelist Antonia Arslan's Genocide novel *La Masseria delle allodole* (2004; *Skylark Farm*, 2006), which with its 36 editions in Italy alone, has sold over 600,000 copies to an Italian readership for the most part previously unaware of the Armenian Genocide. However, it is through the power of translation into more than fifteen languages that *Skylark farm* has surpassed the borders of Italy taking the knowledge of the Armenian Genocide throughout the globe and thereby contributing to its "afterlife" – to use the word of Walter Benjamin (2000) – as well as its cinematic rendering to a global audience.

3. Concluding Remarks

The shock of the Armenian Genocide was so all-powerful and so overwhelming that physical, temporal and emotional distance was needed for it to be absorbed and to allow the indescribable experience to burst out as literary expression¹⁸. During the deportations many of those who passed through unimaginable tortures and stayed alive, subsequently refused to share their trauma for decades and in some cases forever. In their minds, they metaphorically "translated" the history into memory, which stayed blocked within psychological borders (Altounian 2005; Brodzki 2007; Haroutyunian 2015a). While bystanders were shocked and greatly troubled by what they witnessed, they were still able to provide important historical documentation with photographs and embassy reports. By contrast, given the enormous amount of suffering of the victims of genocide – or craftsmen of survival, to use Altounian (2013, 42) – they were often overwhelmed by massive psychological blocks which endured for much of their lives. Accordingly, the genocide survivors often found it extremely difficult to speak at length and in depth about their profoundly painful experiences and memories.

Amongst the additional challenges facing the survivors were:

- language and foreign script barrier and lack of fluency in the new local language¹⁹;

¹⁷ Among many others, consider Hilsenrath (1989), Cossi (2007), Vosgianian (2009), Bohjalian (2012), Werfel (1933), Berberian (2013).

¹⁸ While comparing Zepel Yessayan's activity before and after 1915, Nichanian (2002, 196) concludes that in 1911 she wrote "a splendid book of mourning" as "she still had a space for mourning in her mind. In 1918, on the contrary [...] she was totally unable to do so. [...] She no longer had the grasp of the immeasurable event". Nichanian refers to Yesayan's *In the Ruins*, where the author provides a first-hand account of the aftermath of the 1909 massacres of 30,000 Armenians in Adana, which were "a microcosm of the Genocide of 1915. But the literary responses to the former, the poetic tools, the language, and the intensity of images remained incomparable to the immediate responses to the 1915 Genocide" (Peroomian 2012, 20).

¹⁹ Many survivors first wrote in Armenian and later translated their memories into the language of the host country. For ex. this was the case of Varvar Tachdjian who first wrote in

- continuing angst of fractured family structure and reliving trauma of earlier horrors of genocide²⁰;
- cultural challenge of immigrant experience in a new culture;
- patriarchal traditional Armenian culture meant that few Armenian women wrote about their experiences.

However, the immigrants despite all the trauma and difficulties, decided to put pen to paper to document that which the world needs to better know. These important survivor memoirs emerged, often in isolation, in small print runs, and sometimes as unpublished manuscripts. They emerged in a variety of locales and conditions that characterized the global Diaspora.

The literature of testimony became cathartic for many of the authors and their families. Through their acts of post-genocide memory, their individual and collective testimonies served to unite them, bridging their living present to the past, lost world of their ancestors and families. In this way, their roots deepened and grew stronger and their identity took greater hold in the rugged terrain.

As the different themes in the survivor accounts have been identified, the various dimensions of the collective trauma of the Genocide have become better known. What has emerged are the common factors (factor analysis), (sociological) themes, and (literary) motifs. Each memoir is a distinct first-hand observation of a massive catastrophe that swept swiftly over the Armenian nation and left such widespread death, devastation, and deep traumatic suffering.

Finally, the study of memoirs leads us to a more nuanced understanding of whether the Genocide narrative writers were and are still looking for a model among the eyewitness accounts, or if they are augmenting their own style to better serve the narrative progression of their story – making it more dramatic and thus effective as a story to be remembered by its listener.

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Armenian and in French but later her daughter published her memories in Italian (Tachdjian Polgrossi 2003).

²⁰ Cf. Altounian 2013, 39-70.

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