

Share to remember: a
comparison of black
dog of fate and
holocaust by bullets



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People have been telling stories since the dawn of mankind. They are ways to communicate about the past to younger generations and most importantly, a way to teach. In both *Black Dog of Fate* by Peter Balakian and *Holocaust by Bullets* by Father Patrick Desbois, the importance of stories as a way to understand and cope with genocide are apparent throughout the books. Along with stories, both Balakian and Desbois use primary documents to appeal to their readers, creating a mix of emotional and practical understanding. Although both texts differ in styles and subject matter, they aptly describe how humans deal with genocide.

Both Balakian and Desbois deal with the idea of “second memory”, or the telling of stories as a way to convey past experiences to new generations. In Balakian’s case, it is his grandmother, telling him stories of the old world. He always thought that these stories were bizarre, vague and seemingly without a point. When he hears her story about fate, he remembers wanting to say “Gran, these stories of yours- they’re weird and I don’t get them” (*Black Dog of Fate* 10). While at the the time he doesn’t understand, the stories are the way to connect with the past. Balakian didn’t understand until much later the Armenian experience in Turkey. He notes that “After my grandmother died, Armenia seemed more and more remote, and I lost my direct and visceral sense of the ancient New Eastern World that she embodied. Yet, no matter how deeply I sank into suburban life and the happy society of Tenafly, my memory of my grandmother was a strange shadow appearing now and then to remind me that there was something else I need to know” (*Black Dog of Fate* 31). Balakian’s realization that he was involved in something more than just his regular suburban life is all due to his grandmother’s stories and the

way she made him a part of the Armenian genocide. Even though he didn't experience it himself, the stories he was told were ways to learn about it, and ways for his grandmother to cope with the Armenian genocide. By sharing, she passed on the memories of an event that were seemingly lost in history's eyes, but would live on in her family. Desbois also has an idea similar to "second memory" when he examines the many different holocaust sites around Eastern Europe. His goal is to gather as many stories as he can from those who have experienced the Holocaust in their villages. One of his earliest examples is an interview with a woman named Olena. She tells a story of how the Germans gathered up all the Jews on the edge of town and proceeded to shoot them. Her story has a chilling humanity to it though. She recounts how one of the women who was shot called out her name and asked her to save her from the Nazis (Holocaust by Bullets 58). It is through these stories that Desbois centers his book around. By bringing attention to the millions who were shot, he gives them a sense of closure. He attempts to bring justice to those who knew none at the time when they needed it the most. By gathering the stories of the people who observed the events and putting them into a single place, he is guaranteeing that they will never be forgotten. In this way, the idea of "second memory" becomes third and fourth and fifth memory, passed down accurately and never lost to time. In both Balakian's and Desbois book's they faced the past and learnt, and more importantly listened, as a way of understanding and recognizing the significant events that happened, even if they weren't directly affected.

In both Black Dog of Fate and Holocaust by Bullets the subjects of the book, Peter Balakian and Father Patrick Desbois respectively, both try to deal with

the genocides that affected people so greatly. In Balakian's, life it is his whole family and more specifically, his grandmother. In Desbois' it is bringing truth to those who died in the Holocaust, but were forgotten because they weren't part of the camps that so many died in. To help people understand their journey, they used both emotional and rational reasoning as a way to communicate their message. They seek to connect emotionally with stories from real people that illustrate just how terrible the things that occurred were. Another way that specifically Balakian tries to connect is with his poetry. As a writer, he is gifted with the ability to make his words connect with his reader. An excerpt from one of his poems reads "two boys came, with the skin of their legs in their pockets, and turned themselves in to the local officials; this morning sun is red and spreading" (Black Dog of Fate 194). Balakian is able to describe the Armenian experience in a few short words. Those who have already suffered were doomed to suffer more. The image of the red sun is one of blood and death, the death of the Armenians. It is not just emotionally that the writers appeal to their readers however, both use primary documents to cement the realness of the genocides they are learning about. Balakian uses his grandmother's lawsuit against the Turkish government to demonstrate the harsh realities of the Armenian genocide. On one page he notes "Out of the combined convey of 18, 000 souls just 150 women and children reached their destination" (Black Dog of Fate 205). Balakian offers real, hard statistics to those who can't understand his emotional appeal. Desbois is much the same way. Even though he isn't a writer by trade, his interviews with people like Olena are as realistic and emotional as it gets, putting the reader in that person's shoes. Like Balakian, he also uses primary documents to appeal to more practical readers. The <https://assignbuster.com/share-to-remember-a-comparison-of-black-dog-of-fate-and-holocaust-by-bullets/>

pictures of the cartridges that he uses are alarming. The massive amounts that he finds gives the reader an actual image to see. It helps them process the scale of what happened. But the most impactful thing after seeing these bags of spent cartridges is the occurrence of the idea that these are just a few shells out the vast majority. The scale is actually unimaginable. Seeing the bullets and knowing that the policy was one bullet per Jew is one of the most terrible things that a human could experience (Holocaust by Bullets 114). With pictures and words, documents and poetry, Peter Balakian and Father Patrick Desbois illustrate the horrors of Genocide to their readers.

It is hard to imagine things on large scales. Even a few thousand people is such a large number that it is hard to picture in one's head, let alone millions of people. Yet, this is what Peter Balakian and Father Patrick Desbois have to do. They carry the memories of the millions of people that died in the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust. However, the cross is not just theirs to bear. Through their writing they share with the reader of what has occurred. And so with every new reader, there is someone new to help them carry the load of recognizing and aiding them in their journey, the journey not just for justice, but for closure as well. The journey will be long and difficult, maybe it will never be ultimately fulfilled, but it is up to all of us to try.