

HUNGER AND DEATH OF HUMANS: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF ICONIC GENOCIDES IMAGES OF THE WORLD

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Abstract

The intentional destruction of a particular race, ethnicity, religious groups or nationality is referred by Genocide. Genocides have occurred (and continue to occur) in every corner of the globe, in societies ancient and modern, as in Iraq and some other Arab and Islamic countries, for reasons as diverse as the acquisition of land and resources, to the demented hatred of a single man. Images work hand in hand with written records and books to document the cruelty of those historical incidents. The present study analyses ten images of the most heinous genocides in human history on semiotic bases in order to reach the meanings that an image conveys. The study concludes that images connote meanings beyond the mere presentation of a person. Children appear as signs of innocence and freedom, but sometimes they represent lost childhood and aging. Positive connotations characterize the appearance of women, such as passions, wisdom and protection while in other images, they signify hunger, distraction and their inability to provide shelter for their children and food to satisfy their hunger. In some images, men signify power and control while in others they signify hopelessness and humility. It is also noticeable that black people as well as white ones are equally the victims of those genocides. This may deliver the message that violence does not exclude anyone.

Key words: Pains, feelings, Genocides, Semiotics Analysis

Introduction

According to the definition of the United Nations that is put in 1948, genocides are those acts that are "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" (Melson, 1992). Jones (2011) quotes the sociologist Kuper who describes the term 'genocide' as a new word whose concept is ancient. During the prehistoric era, genocidal acts targeted killing every male in a particular group including male infants. Girls and virgin women were exploited to be sources of breed. *Modern genocides were agitated for reasons like seeking power and wealth or due to cultural and religious beliefs.*

Images represent one medium through which many events including genocides are documented. According to Machin & Mayr (2012), images do not only document events, people or places. They also communicate some abstract ideas through what they display. In order to reach the meanings that an image connotes, this research tries to analysis images of some genocides on semiotic bases.

Semiotics

Saussure and Peirce are regarded the founding fathers of what is recently called semiotics since semiology has been used as an alternative term (Chandler, 2007). According to Nöth (1990), some scholars used to differentiate between those two terms as dealing with two traditions. Nöth states that the term semiology is used to refer to Saussure's linguistic tradition while semiotics is used to refer to Peirce's

philosophical tradition. Gradually, the term semiotics has been widely used as a synonym of semiology.

Chandler (2007) provides a simple definition of semiotics when he describes it as "the study of signs." Yet, what kind of signs does this definition refer to? They include images, words, gestures, sounds and even objects. It is also defined by Bignell (2002) as "a way of analyzing meanings by looking at the signs (like words, for instance, but also pictures symbols etc.)." At the beginning, semiotics has been concerned with understanding how language, whether written or spoken, communicates its meanings. Later, it has started to be used in analyzing other non-linguistic communication means like visual signs. Rose (2001) regards semiotics as an analytical means by which one can understand how images communicate their meanings.

There are certain key concepts in semiotics that must be understood in order to be able to understand the meaning or meanings of an image. The first concept is 'sign'. As has been shown earlier, the sign can be a word, an image, a sound and so on. According to (Martin & Ringham, 2006), Saussure states that any sign has two components; the signifier and signified. Fowles (1992) cited in Nöth (1997) clarifies the difference between the signifier and signified. He states that the term signifier refers to the elements of the image. The term signified is used to denote the idea or concept of that image. A clearer definition of the signifier is provided by Tyson (2010) who says that it is "anything that can be perceived by senses." Kim (1996) provides the example of a rose to simplify this distinction. He says that the rose is the sign of love. The rose itself is the signifier and love is the signified. Rose (2001) states that based on the relation between the signifier and signified, Pierce divides the signs into three types; iconic, indexical and symbolic. Kim (1996) provides a plain definition of those three types along with some examples. The sign is said to be iconic when the signifier resembles the signified such as the photographs. The photograph of a lady, for instance, is an iconic sign of that lady. In indexical signs, there is an existential connection between the signifier and signified. For example, the index of fire is smoke. As for the symbolic signs, the relation between the signifier and signified is not based on similarity or existential relatedness. Rather, they are linked in a conventional way. Sebeok (2001) gives the example of the V sign that people make with their middle fingers and indexes to signify victory. Thus, this sign is a symbol of victory.

Other important concepts in semiotics are the denotative and connotative meanings. Dyer (1982) states that in semiotic analysis, there are connotative and denotative meanings of the sign. The denotative meaning is the literal meaning of that sign while the connotative meaning represents the other additional meanings beyond the literal meaning. The context of the sign is important in determining those meanings.

Statement of the Problem

Humans claim to live freely on the earth but the powerful people are intended to illuminate their rights of living through the names of race, region, and underdevelopment. The raise of human voices is presented in the names of picture to depict the pains and life-living of humans through images. It denotes the life-living aspects so that the humans would have intentions to retrieve the feeling of sympathy and pains for affected people.

Objectives of the study

- To describe the life-living scenario and the pains of the effected people,
- To highlight the intended message through images.

Research Question

- 1) Which are feelings presented by genocides images?
- 2) What are the reasons of iconic presentation of images of children and women?

Literature Review

In his paper "*Speaking of Genocide: Double Binds and Political Discourse*", Meiches (2017) claimed that the emergence of the practice of footnoting has a number of consequences for genocide studies. To begin with, limited notions of genocide have an impact on knowledge development. Consider the dispute about cultural genocide, for example. Studies that equate genocide with mass killing produce outcomes that are solely related to circumstances of mass death, regardless of the social or cultural consequences of government policy. Many potential dimensions of genocide destruction, such as linguistic death, physical displacement, and coercive educational settings, are excluded from this definition of genocide and, as a result, from the set of events under investigation. This has an impact not only on the study's findings by confining them to certain historical instances, but also on the definition of genocide as a knowledge object. Restrictive conceptions of genocide omit the larger set of agents and institutions from examination by excluding numerous complex social variables linked to mass violence. These limitations reveal legacies like colonialism or long-term dynamics like bureaucratic violence, which transcend the chronological, geographical, and ontological bounds normally associated with political decision-making.

In his work "*The Uncanny Medium: Semiotic Opacity in the Wake of Genocide*", Tambar (2017) observed that new ways of representing and mourning the Armenian genocide have proliferated in Turkey in recent years. This essay looks at how the practice of condemning historical atrocity, which is important to human rights discourses, is institutionalized. The essay gives a theoretical framework for understanding how oppositional groups question the constraints that designate the valid targets of critique by examining the institutional drive for critique. I focus on what I call an eerie medium of critique, which is a representational media that makes the shape of its dissemination appear both familiar and unpleasant at the same time. The Saturday Mothers—a group that meets on a regular basis to expose forcible disappearances that occurred primarily in Kurdish-majority provinces in the 1980s and 1990s—created the medium in question. The organization has lately begun to memorialize the deportation and massacre of Armenians in 1915. The book examines how the vigils evoke even as they destabilize ideological boundaries that are central to contemporary nation-state social life—between public and private, political and domestic, and past and present. The Saturday Mothers mobilize the family and maternal discourse that has underpinned military nationalism, but they do so in order to claim familial responsibility for Armenians, who have historically been characterized as an ethicized adversary. The practices of the group allow us to situate moments of semiotic opacity at the heart of anthropological research, in which the medium that permits and underpins social transactions becomes densely, even disruptively, visible as a figure within that social field. With the concept of an

uncanny medium, I propose that opacity in mediation can be both socially and politically productive.

"*Genocide Discourses: American and Russian Strategic Narratives of Conflict in Iraq and Ukraine*", was a study made by Erickson (2017). This study introduces the concept of "genocide discourses," which are characterized as a form of strategic narrative that determines how individuals and groups position themselves and others, as well as how they act, and play a key role in the production of violence and efforts to decrease it. Genocide discourses frequently portray genocide as essentially apolitical, claiming that genocidal institutions can only be dislodged by external violence. Second, genocidal discourses are based on the notion that genocide victims are morally innocent victims, not combatants. Because of these two factors, genocide discourses are extremely efficient in instilling moral capital in some conflict actors. In the context of contentious conflicts and political violence, the two concepts merge to form strategic narratives that steer political and military activities in certain ways, driving humanitarian responses in defense of certain people, or maintaining popular support for foreign wars. The research demonstrates its point by examining two case studies from 2014 to 2017: US debates over Islamic State genocides and the conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

Research Methodology

The images that are analyzed as iconic ones since they are photographs of humans as has been shown earlier. Rose (2001), whose model is going to be followed in this research, states that the semiotic analysis of an image passes through several steps. The first is to determine its signs. The second is to determine what those signs signify. The third is to know the relations between those signs and how they are connected to other signs in the same image and in other ones.

Since the images that are analyzed in this research display human beings, Rose (2001) uses Dyer's (1982) checklist to analyze such images and understand the meanings that they convey. Although this checklist is made to analyze the images that appear in advertisements, it is possible to apply it to images in another context. This checklist incorporates questions on three dimensions. The first one focuses on the representations of bodies such as the age, gender, race, hair, body, size and looks. The second is concerned with representations of manner like facial expressions, eye contact and pose. The last dimension concentrates on representations of activity like touch, body movement, positional communication, props and settings.

Data Collection and Analysis

In his article *10 Atrocious Genocides in Human History*, Devlin (2013) offers a brief explanation of ten genocides in the human history. The article exhibits ten images that represent the genocides concerned. This study tries to apply the Rose's (2001) model to the images that appear in Devlin's article.

1. The Holocaust



Devlin (2013) described the Holocaust as "Hitler's final question to the Jewish question." The Jews were put in concentration camps, tortured and killed. Hitler's solution resulted in six million Jewish deaths.

Analysis

This image displays children standing in a row and next to them there are male adults looking at those children. Once seeing the image, the viewers' eyes fall on the child on the left who looks towards the camera. A sorrowful, distressed, grievous and fearful look appears on that child's face. The shabby children have got the same short haircut so the viewer may not be able to differentiate between the boys and girls. The one who looks at the camera seems to be a girl because what is worn looks like a dress. Having the same haircut, ragged clothes and looking ahead as most of the children do can be interpreted as having the same detested destiny that is waiting for them. They will face the same end by turn as they are standing in a row serially. The three children who are looking back are as if looking at their previous life before being enforced to live this terror. The adults are standing in a way that indicates power or control over that row of children. They may be German officers, soldiers or those people who work in the concentration camps in which the Jewish children are imprisoned. Displaying male adults who are definitely taller than the children sustains that sense of control. Hence, the children signify fear and lost life while the adults signify power and death machines.

2. Bosnian Genocide



Bosnia was the crime scene of another massacre where twenty thousand Bosnian Muslims and Serbs fall the victims to public executions, fires and other evil acts.

Analysis

The image is of a Muslim lady sitting in front of a tomb and surrounded by many other ones. Her hijab gives the idea that the sufferers are Muslims. If adulthood is looked at as wisdom and femininity as a source of love and tolerance, this adult lady's sitting in the middle of a cemetery means that there is no place for wisdom or love in wars. Their absence results in hundreds or maybe thousands of deaths. The lady covers her face with her hands as an indication of anonymity. That is, any Bosnian person can be in her shoes since all of them have the same share of grief. It is foggy and cold, yet there is some green grass growing among the graves. Even the tombs are green. This may mean that despite the tragedy that the Bosnians live and despite their foggy situation and their inability to see what is ahead, hope is there.

3. Armenian Genocide



While World War One was seizing thousands of lives, the Ottomans were responsible for 1,800,000 Armenian victims. Various brutal policies were followed by the Ottomans to kill those people. While men were slayed, children and women were taken in long marches in the desert until death. People were burned alive inside their homes because their villages were completely burned. Others were killed by typhoid fever because they were injected by infective blood.

Analysis

The focus of this image is a naked bony child. He is a representative of starvation that the Armenians suffered from. Although he is a child, there are wrinkles on his face because of hunger. This can be interpreted as a sign of the murdered childhood and what is happening to those people ages even children. There are other two children in the image, but they are not at its focus point. Their faces are not clear,

but they appear to be smiling. They may represent innocent children who are smiling despite their miserable condition. Those two children signify how children must be, but the starving one signifies how they really are. Excluding the smiling boys from the focal point of the image means that happiness has no existence in their lives and it must be put aside just like those boys. Even if they try to go back to their childhood, grief and pain control them and dwell deep down inside of them.

4. “Stolen Generations” of Aboriginals



The Aboriginals had their story with the Australian government which worked on detaching their children away from them in 1909. The government claimed that protecting those children from the permissivity of their parents was the motif behind this policy. This action led to the loss of the Aboriginals and their heritage. Historians controverted over whether to regard the Aboriginals case a genocide or not, but the Australian government apologized for that act in 2008.

Analysis

In a desert where there are barbed wires separating it to two sides, there is a well-dressed white man standing beside an automobile. He is carrying a black child in his right hand while pushing two ladies in the left. The lady whom the man is pushing seems to be the child's mother. She tries to do her best to keep him with her, but her attempt results in failure. The other lady tries to prevent her from resisting the man as a sign of surrender. The child's body and face are directed towards the other side. This shows that he is being rooted out from his life and being exposed to another life that may be worse than his life and darker than his skin. He is a representative of the others who have met or will meet the same destiny. The young military man represents power that two defenseless ladies cannot resist. The man and his car represent a progressed life from which those poor black people are kept away.

5. Native American Genocide



Christopher Columbus' discovery of the Americas seemed not to be welcomed by the natives of those lands. The Europeans sought controlling the new world due to its richness of natural resources. The natives, on the other hand, were not willing to abandon their homeland and this decision put their tribes to death. Moreover, they were inflicted by smallpox for which they lack immunity, so they could not resist it. Millions of the Native Americans were living praise for wolves. Hence, whether killed by the invaders, died because of smallpox or eaten by the wolves, many American tribes were destroyed for good.

Analysis

This image displays twelve Native Americans armed with their primitive weapons and surrounded by green lands and mountains. Placing them in such a place is an attempt to depict the wealth of their environment. Displaying them in a group expresses their team spirit and tribal link. The scene of men on their horses who are equipped with their weapons gives the idea that they are going to a war or prepared to defend their lands against any attack. Their facial expressions are determined and their body gestures assign them roles to do. The one who is raising his hands looks like a leader who directs his followers who are surrounding him and attending to him. Others look around them in various directions. This may express their strong desire to protect their homelands. Their enemies are now everywhere after discovering the secret world of the Native Americans. Nature is the source of their life, clothes, earrings, necklaces and even weapons. Hence, they seem to be ready to fight any power that attempts to detach them from their primitive life.

6. Pygmy Genocide



Pygmy tribes lived in central Africa. What characterized their adult males was that they did not exceed fifty-nine inches tall. The Congolese were hunting the pygmies as if they were animals which resulted in destroying those tribes.

Analysis

Once seeing the image, the viewer expects those black people to be children. In fact, they are Pygmy adult males. They are barefoot and naked with big bellies due to malnutrition. Usually, men are associated with strength and ability, but Pygmy men are as powerless as children. This makes them an easy target for hunters. Even the looks on their faces are similar to those submissive looks of children. Some of them are touching those who are in front of them as if they are protecting each other or seeking the protection of the others. Having bare and muddy feet may be a sign of those men's subjection. Hence, those people signify weakness, fear and seeking protection.

7. Irish Potato Famine



The Irish Potato Famine was the reason behind more than one million Irish deaths and one million emigrants. Blights spread in the Irish lands and destroyed their crops of potatoes. The English government closed its ports and did not establish regulations to overcome that crisis. The Irish were starved and could not pay the rents and the catastrophe ended with death and immigration.

Analysis

The image exhibits the statues of three men and two women who represent the Irish people at the time of the famine. They are feeble, very thin and exhausted. Some of them are carrying things within their hands which may be the necessary stuff they need. This signifies their immigration looking for life and their strong desire to run from death. The lady on the back carries nothing which shows her hopelessness and surrender despite her infirm attempt to escape. Walking individually may indicate their indifference to each other in their struggle for life. Placing those statues on the pavement of a lively city can be interpreted as a reference to Britain's inactivity towards the Irish tribulation.

8. Rwandan Genocide



In Rwanda, Tutsis were wealthier than the Hutus who were treated violently by the Tutsis. In 1990s, the Hutus started their revolution against the Tutsis to revenge. The numbers of victims were a matter of disagreement with some saying that they were 500,000 and others saying that they were more than a million victims.

Analysis

The image is of a black teen with a distorted face touching his neck. He has got short hair with some scars on his head. A fearful look appears on his face while looking somewhere as if he is avoiding something or recalling what has happened to him. Although it is not known whether this teen belongs to the Hutus or the Tutsis, he is a representative of the victims of that conflict. His scars give an idea about the weapons that are used which are mainly machete as Devlin (2013) says. One can say that this person indicates that violence burns everyone even children. It ends peoples' lives, but its consequences last forever just like those wounds on that boy's face which will live with him for good.

9. Morori Genocide



A similar story to that of Tutsis and Hutus took place in New Zealand where the Maori lived. A group of them moved to Chatham Island and named themselves the Morori. By time, the Maori started trade with the west and they could obtain guns. Then, they attacked the Morori and murdered them.

Analysis

Again, the person who appears in this photo is a black one. His face is full of prints that appear like a mask. His eyes release a confrontational look sustained by a slight smile. This may give the impression that this person belongs to the Maori who started that war. Savagery, readiness for attack and maybe a sense of victory is connoted by this image.

10. Al-Anfal Genocide



The last genocide that Devlin (2013) talked about happened in the north of Iraq in the 1980s. Ali Hassan al-Majid used chemical weapons against the Kurds and killed about 180,000 ones.

Analysis

This photo foregrounds a mother carrying her offspring and surrounded by other children. They dwell in the mountains which are their shelter that may delay their meeting with death or even cancel it. The fully covered offspring represents the anonymous future of those people. The mother interlocks her fingers as a sign of protecting her baby. This connotes that the Kurds do want to survive and to secure their future. The children are barefoot and this may have to do with their innocence and their willingness to live freely away from the hardships of life that do not suit their age. There is child holding a piece of bread. This reveals another side of their crisis which hunger is. Homelessness is signified by the tent which is now their home. The man who is walking in front of the tent is bending his head. This can be seen as a sign of his inability to change their situation unlike the mother who appears as the protector of future.

Conclusions

Chosen images describe the pains and restless living aspects of humans as the humans have to live under the distress situation. Children and women have to feel the disgusting situation and live under the betrayal life. The study concludes that:

- Images connote meanings beyond the mere presentation of a person.
- Children appear as signs of innocence and freedom, but sometimes they represent lost childhood and aging. Positive connotations characterize the appearance of women, such as passions, wisdom and protection. While in other images, they signify hunger, distraction and her inability to provide shelter for their children and food to satisfy their hunger. In some images, men signify power and control while in others they signify hopelessness and humility.
- Barefoot children signify innocence while barefoot men signify humility and submission.
- It is also noticeable that black people as well as white ones are equally the victims of those genocides. This may deliver the message that violence does not exclude anyone.

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