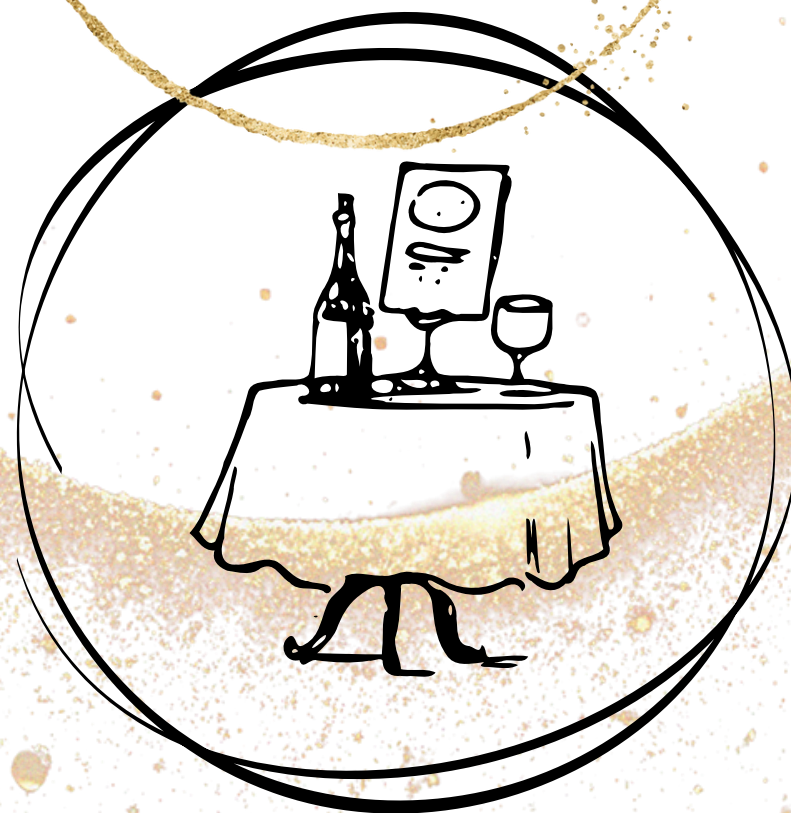


practices of
memory



& the
formation of
identity

An ethnographic study in
Orthodox faith communities

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Prolegomena I – How I came to study memory

Previous research on hope in the context of pain

- The Judeo-Christian tradition centers hope around remembrance.
- Individual's experience is that hope is communicated and nurtured through fellowship, storytelling and rituals of memory.

Prolegomena II – Why study memory...

... as a public matter?

→ The culture of Washington, DC

... in the context of religion?

→ The people of Washington, DC

... in the context of worship?

→ The history of ritual

... in Jewish and Christian tradition?

→ The concept of hope

Methodological considerations

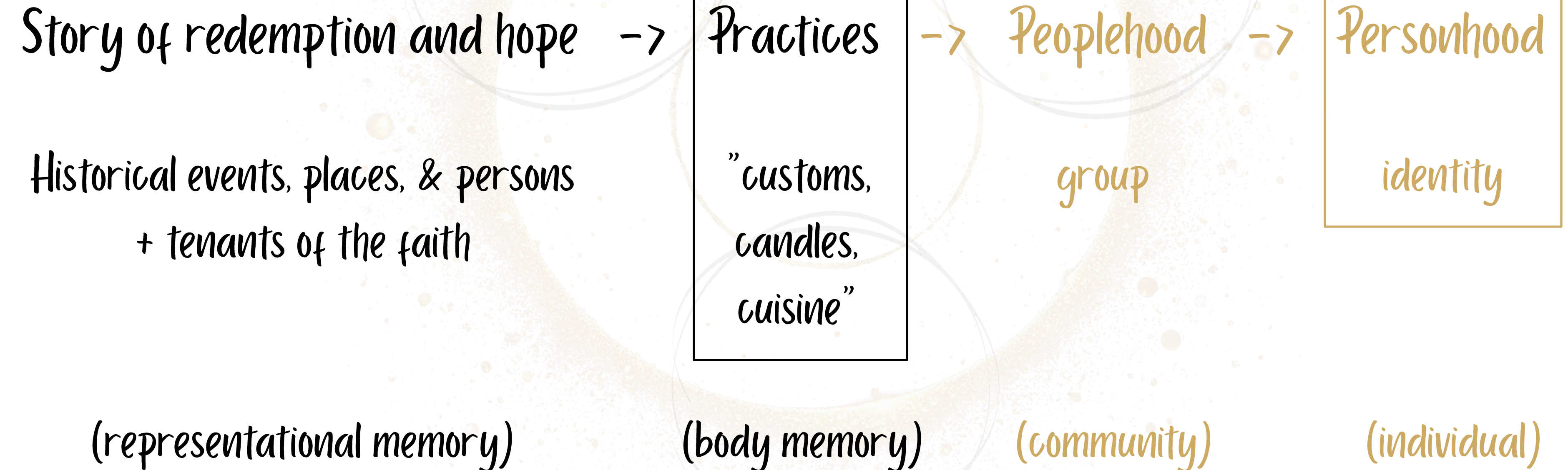
Data collection

"Practices of memory":	Embodiment	-> Observation/participation
"Stories of redemption and hope":	Narrative	-> Interviews

Data presentation

Transformation through immersive experience	-> Visual art
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Practices of memory are the embodiment of the narrative of hope
& they form identity in community:



practices of memory

"having those actions can really help create that more tangible connection to [faith]" - Chloe

"customs"

"candles"

identity

community

"cuisine"

& the
formation of
identity

"I think it kind of forms your identity in ways you don't know until later, like, you know, those were all established in my, I don't know, my soul or my mind, my being from a kid." - Chloe

practices of memory

"And so I live liturgy to liturgy most of the time." – Owen

"customs"
provide
structure

"I follow certain rituals ... ranging from a daily pattern to a weekly pattern to a monthly pattern and to an annual pattern of holidays." – Eva

"the memory is just trying to have that kind of prayer rule ... just having that sense of schedule ... I just feel like it just sets my day up to be ... a good day. ... and you're doing the the prostrations, ... getting on your face and knees before God. And just praying ... to have that remembrance that you know it's not about you. There's more to life than just you. I think that's very important." – Brian

"So if hope is this promise of life in death, then I would say that coming into contact with that, ... that's reality, that's the story of Christ, and ... anything that I do that reminds me of the reality of that pattern and that is in the books that we read, in the church fathers, in the liturgy, in the hymns, in the prayers, and not just explicitly in them, but also in the pattern by which those things manifest." – Raphael

"the practice of Shabbat, and every holiday, there are just thousands and millions of things that my life is constructed in a Jewish way" – Isabel

"So I try to punctuate different parts of my day with prayers, or with a reading, just to give me little ritual reminders of what it means to be an Orthodox Christian." – Martin

"the link to tradition..., that uncompromising sense of structure in a rapidly changing world. ... it's never changing. It's never going to compromise to whatever is going on, whatever is in vogue." – Brian

practices of memory

"in any Orthodox service, you have a good amount of burning of incense and ... the incense in any setting represents our prayers going up to heaven." – Patrick

"some of the traditions of even lighting candles, ... around the anniversary of her birthday and of her passing," – Chloe

"candles"
speak to the
senses

"on the anniversary of their death, they get their candle lit up"
– Isaac

"when we light candles on a Friday night. That's something that is like deeply historical, because that is a tradition that, like Jewish women have done in their homes for, you know, millennia." – Isabel

"You see all of the icons and the light coming in from the windows, and you see the incense, the smoke of it coming up and you're getting hit by this, the smell of it. So it's activating all of your senses and it can be like an otherworldly experience." – Brian

"one way I [connect to the past] is kind of through ... artifacts. So I have my grandparents' Menorah, that I light every year. ... my father has the etrog, the citron that we use on Sukkot, ... that was given to him by his Rabbi, which used to belong to ..."
– Isaac

practices of memory

"Why are we eating Matzah? It is because that was the bread of affliction that we had on our backs when we left as slaves from Egypt. ... We eat this food that's called Charoset. It's like apples and honey and nuts and cinnamon, and it's supposed to represent the mortar ... that they spread to connect the bricks when they were building as slaves, ... , food is tying us into history." — Isabel

"the high point and the Eucharist and it's like everything changes. So, like the pattern is there and that helps me remember death and resurrection and Christ's own story," — Raphael

"And but Easter or Pasca is like a big thing and every year ... we would do these traditions with my family, we would make bread, ... we would make 80 to 100 loaves of bread every year. So it's a huge thing." — Chloe

"cuisine"
represents
symbols

"[At the Passover Seder,] It's about doing things ... that recall this history. From dipping to the salt water to ... each thing is a reminder. Everything tonight is filled with so many symbols. And I mean really symbol after symbol after symbol. Everything has meaning, everything has a purpose. ... [On Shabbat,] the table itself is ... like the altar, and the bread is part of an offering, and ... it's all meant to have some symbolic association"" — Jacob

"especially Christ's death, the memory of that, ... which is what we do, every liturgy. ... at the Last Supper he ... breaks the bread and pours the cup and he says, that "you would remember me." And so ... we're remembering Christ's death, constantly. And but it's not just that he died, it was that he was resurrected, and ... that's what gives us hope for salvation and for eternity." — Michael

practices of memory

"Like when you pray [and look up to the iconography], Christ is right there. It grounds you in a space, in a time, in a place. It physicalizes the act of prayer, so that it's not just my head thinking the right thoughts. It's every part of me, ... the integration of my entire self," – Owen

"everything we do isn't so much a commemoration, it is being." – Eva

"before I saw myself as a machine and through Orthodoxy, I found out I was human." – Raphael

"First of all, ... observance of Shabbat and the holidays. If you do that, you're already far along in terms of remembering your identity and your role as a Jewish person. Secondly, ... the rituals that we have for death" – Levi

Practices
create
Identity

the formation of identity

"your whole being, your physical and spiritual being, are fully incorporated into the liturgy and ... that practice of doing that same thing over the course of your whole life ... creates a space within which you can learn a lot about yourself and those around you and the church and Christ and it builds a space for you to learn how to practice remembrance," – Michael

"prayers, ... reading, ... little ritual reminders of what it means to be an Orthodox Christian." – Martin

"The Passover Seder night is ... a communal night of remembrance. And I think it is the definitional Jewish act of remembrance. We come together around the table because we like to eat and collectively through symbolic reenactment, remember where we came from and define ourselves as part of this continuum." – Jacob

A note on "the formation of identity"

Asked about the impact of religious practices on their health/wellbeing/flourishing, participants responded with notions of identity and meaningfulness, e.g.

Levi: "Well, I guess knowing who I am. The Jewish rituals create a whole multi-thousand-year history and Jewish ritual, the fact that I'm ... a direct descendant of Levi, ... So I on that score, I know who I am. And then, as an American, I know the achievements of the United States. ... So I have these two big streams of support for my identity."

Chloe: "it kind of forms your identity in ways you don't know until later, like, you know, those were all established in my I don't know my soul or my mind, my being from a kid."

Jacob: "Can't live without Torah ... my whole life is built around this, ... I'd be a different person. ... My life would be completely different without the Jewish practices that I engage in. I find them enriching, empowering, meaningful. They give direction to your thinking, they give direction to how you spend your time..."

Synopsis

A possible explanation as to why practices of memory nourish hope and establish identity

This study (empirical)

Practices of memory reflect:

- > Structure
- > Senses
- > Symbols

Previous study (theology)

Hope is embedded in:

- > Time
- > Physicality
- > Relationship

Previous study (empirical)

'With hope', Mia says, 'I feel more at home in my own body. Because [pain] can make you feel like you've got this invader coming in and try and take over everything ... [but hope] makes me feel like I'm ... one and one with my body.'

Some thoughts on application in clinical and pastoral settings

If practices of memory create identity through

- "customs" that provide structure...
- "candles" that speak to the senses...
- "cuisine" that represents symbols...

... I suggest asking questions along the line of:

How do you
practice
memory?

What gives
meaningful
structure
to your life?

How do
you experience
tradition with
your senses?

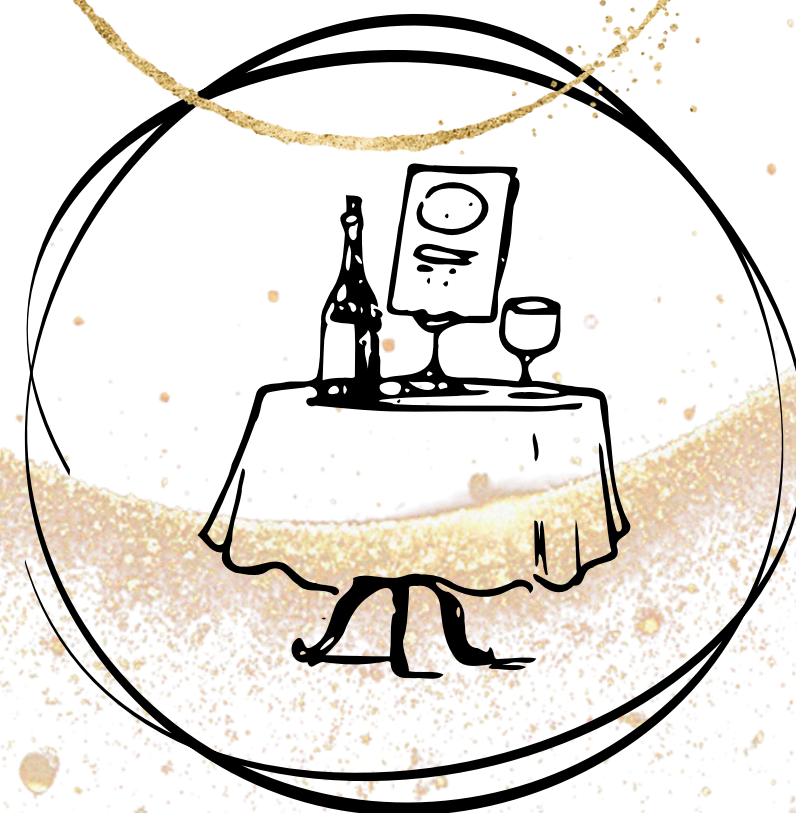
Which tradition
are you
rooted in?

Who is your
community?

Which symbols
connect you to
the people & wisdom
of the past?

What
forms
your
identity?

practices of
memory



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Thank you for engaging!
I will gladly receive your
questions and comments.

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