



## Study of Distortion Factors in Oral Memories

(Based on the Published Works of Oral Memories in Guilan, 2011-2021)

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### Abstract

One of the most important ways of recording past events is rewriting events that have literary, narrative, and historical support in Iran. Minstrelsy, lamentation, Maghame, storytelling, hadith, etc. are some examples of chronicles. However, in the modern era, due to the variety of social and media data, memory is mentioned as one of the sources of historiography, but oral memory and history are a way to collect and prepare historical information through the recording of historical events with the help of interviews with the participants of the events; Or in other words, it is the science of recording the information of the general public and their perceptions of an event, and this process is beyond information recording because everything that those interested in understanding the conditions of the past are looking for can be found in oral history. However, any historical phenomenon can be distorted. Memory is a phenomenon that is constantly changing. Even people with the best memory are not able to redefine an event without change. But when these changes are made deliberately, the foundation of the memory is threatened and we face a phenomenon called distortion.

In the reconstruction of history through the collection of narratives of various groups of people, there are different forms of reality in the form of hadith, fairy tales, and storytelling. In this article, relying on the books of oral memories of Guilan, two categories of distortions are discussed. One category is individual distortions in which the narrator plays a decisive role. For instance, sometimes the human mind changes reality in such a way that the original event is forgotten, and the narrative created by the mind replaces it. This is why personal imagination enters the realm of history and gives an unreal flavor to historical events. An informed researcher should always be aware of such notions. Furthermore, usually, the characters who are on the side of the political losers of a story try to give themselves a lesser role in recounting an event than what happened in reality, and in other cases, they may exaggerate the quality of the event. In



addition, each person forms a memory structure in their mind according to their beliefs, ideology, profession, and their view on life and the world around them. Individual views influence human perception and sometimes cause the memory to be selectively expressed. An informed researcher should always be aware of such perceptions, and their knowledge and the questions they ask the narrator should lead them to accurately retell the memories.

Another factor of memory distortion is related to the quality of the interview. The quality of the interview in oral history depends to a large extent on the memory of the interviewees as far as they have mentioned in terms of an unreliable nature. Usually, political figures and government officials are not willing to share their memories at the time when the event is happening. Thus, many details, especially small conversations and events, are erased from memory.

In impersonal distortions, writers, authorities, social and political changes, etc. play a greater role. In this regard, the other category of memories for people are common memories that the people of a region, country, etc. remember, which are called the collective memory. Collective memory is a collection of memories that are common among the people of a community and are passed from one generation to another, or any generation can be involved in the formation and change of these memories. In fact, these shared memories are different in detail, but in general, they are referred to as collective memories because of the content they have in common. Governments usually align societies with themselves by guiding collective memories.

Another pest that affects oral memories is the exclusionary view of subjects. For example, regarding the event of the Islamic Revolution, even though there is no extensive information about the various militant groups and militant personalities during the Pahlavi era and the Revolutionary era, there are nevertheless some topics and materials such as armed struggles and guerrilla warfare of the militant groups that have remained silent among the historical information. On the other hand, almost all organizations, groups, and people who are engaged in the production of sustainable literary works are supported by the institution of power. The existence of a relationship between literary and artistic works related to the revolution, war, and government has caused these works to take the title of "government". Since the institutions move in line with the ideology and demands of the government, some aspects of the oral memories are not raised by the interviewer during the interview or are not discussed in the compilation. This issue can seriously distort the field of oral memories.

Another factor of impersonal distortions is the change in the context of the society. Every historical phenomenon changes and transforms with the change of social and historical contexts. For instance, often, the rulers of a new dynasty have a conflicting and different narrative of the events of the previous rulers, as after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, in addition to Reza Khan's atrocities, we rarely hear about some of his activities in the field of civilization and development of the country from official authorities.

Apart from the mentioned factors, another factor of impersonal distortions is the confusion of literature and history. One of the main concerns of the authors of memory



booksis to attract the audience. This concern has caused many authors in this field to leave the scope of trustworthiness under the pretext of creating the necessary platform for a better understanding of the text of oral memories by the audience, and with intensity and weaknesses, bring the text closer to a literary text from a documentary event. If the memories are included in the literary text, they will lose their authenticity and cannot be cited as authentic data for researchers and historians.

Since the narratives of the actors and eyewitnesses of an event are formed based on expediency, interests, ideology, social variables, etc., in oral memories, narrators have various kinds of narrations for the same event. These differences and contradictions can damage the credibility of the narration. To discover the truth, in addition to matching the memories of the narrators with each other, the researcher must use archival documents for validation, verification, and correct understanding of historical events so that the oral memories of a character are narrated close to reality.

**Keywords:** Oral memories, interview, truth discovery, distortion, Guilan.

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