

# **The House Made of Memories**

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## Abstract

This research explores the emotional and generational threads that tie people to physical spaces, focusing on one family home and the women who once lived there. Through in-depth oral history interviews, memory mapping, and collaborative storytelling with my grandmother and her sisters, the project uncovers how early memories, particularly those rooted in childhood, shape lifelong perceptions of home. As each sister recalls the same house in subtly different ways, their memories form a shared narrative that is both personal and collective. The research looks at how these inherited experiences are preserved, adapted, and carried forward, eventually shaping my own understanding of home. The research creation aspect, the reconstruction process, carefully built from memory fragments, shared drawings, and storytelling, becomes a way to visualize their emotional geographies and to honor the place that continues to live on through us. By reconstructing the physical and emotional life of this house, the project becomes not only an exploration of memory, space, and identity but also a reflection of my role in this evolving history.

**Keywords:** Home; place attachment; place identity, place and memories, feminist oral history

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I want to thank my grandmother Anahit and her sisters, Zaruhi and Susanna, for unknowingly planting the seeds of this project in me from early childhood. I grew up listening to their stories, which nurtured my love for oral history and storytelling. Their voices and memories became the foundation of this work. Without them, I would not have had the idea, the interviews, or the understanding of how deeply a sense of home can shape a person's life.

Secondly, I want to thank my mother and my entire family for always standing by my side and taking care of the many logistical pieces of this project. Their support helped me bring my creative vision to life and to reconstruct the small house that now stands in our home, carrying the memories and stories of our family.

And my greatest thanks go to Dr. Attarian, whose kind encouragement, thoughtful advice, and genuine excitement gave me the confidence to take creative risks and follow through with this work. Her contagious passion for oral history helped me see the value in this project, not only as an academic pursuit, but as something personally meaningful for me and my family.

Finally, thank you to everyone who supported me throughout this journey, my family, friends, professors and support group. I appreciate each of you.

## **The House Made of Memories**

This project is a serenade to the house where I live now, a place that shaped me, nurtured me, and helped me grow into who I am today. Its walls have witnessed my highest highs and lowest lows, heard my laughter and tears, and stood quietly as I moved from one university to another on my journey toward becoming an academic.

As I prepare to leave for my master's degree abroad, where I'll begin building a new home, I felt the need to look back at the homes my family lived in through generations. I wanted to learn from their experiences and carry their stories with me, so that one day, my own grandchildren might write an oral history project about me and the home I built for them.

When doing an oral history project, you accidentally become the time machine everyone talks about, moving backwards and forwards in time, collecting yourself between the pages of history, meeting people you thought you knew from new perspectives, seeing their younger selves, becoming friends with them, and realizing that the person you see in the mirror today is the reflection of all the past selves of the people you love.

Through this project, I found my place in time and decided to leave a mark in this family history, by building not only a physical model of a house but also creating space for memories to breathe again. I collected voices, moments, and emotions and gave them a form they hadn't had in years. I didn't just listen, I felt, imagined, and visualized every corner they described. With every interview, I stepped deeper into the world my grandmother and her sisters once knew, and somehow, it became mine too.

This was never just about the past, it was about understanding how it lives in us quietly, shaping our gestures, our dreams, even the way we walk through our own homes. I wanted to

hold onto that. To show how a house, even after being left behind, continues to exist in stories, in habits, in the rhythm of everyday life.

Now, the little house I built sits in our home, not just as a final product of a project, but as a symbol of everything I've gathered and carried through this journey. And I know, someday, someone else might find it, touch its walls, and ask questions, just like I did. And maybe they'll tell their version of our story, in their own way, adding another layer to this living memory.

### **Literature review**

This literature review explores the emotional and psychological connections people have with their homes and the ways in which these connections transform ordinary houses into meaningful spaces. It examines how homes become central to individuals' identities, shaped by memories, emotions, and personal experiences. The review also delves into the concept of place attachment, focusing on how emotional bonds to a place develop over time and how these connections help individuals navigate their sense of self and belonging. Additionally, it considers the role of memory in these attachments, exploring how past experiences tied to a home influence the way people interact with their living spaces, shaping both individual and collective identities. Through this exploration, the review aims to shed light on the complex relationship between home, memory, and identity.

### **The Concept of Home**

Home is a place where you wake up, do the dishes, make breakfast, and go to bed. The images that depict the home make it seem regular and ordinary; however, this is what makes it special – the regularity of its being (Douglas, 1991, p. 287). Yet, what exactly transforms a simple dwelling into a home? To describe a house, one should look beyond its walls and visual

features, focusing instead on the primary virtues that foster attachment to the inhabited space (Bachelard, 1994, p. 4). This suggests that a home is not merely defined by its physicality but by the emotional and psychological connections it nurtures. One may argue that a home is appreciated for its functionality - serving as a storage space for personal belongings or providing shelter on a rainy night. However, what differentiates it from a mere storage unit is the scope of human intentions. A home is not simply a space for temporary occupancy; rather, it becomes a backdrop for life's most intimate moments. As Douglas (1991) notes, "Nobody usually expects to give birth or to die in hotels or railway stations" (p. 295). This distinction underscores how homes evolve beyond their structural purposes into deeply personal and symbolic spaces. The feeling of safety and comfort shapes the layers that turn a dwelling into a home. Those who study places and spaces may focus on the objects that define a house, yet it is the emotional significance attached to these objects and the necessity of keeping them that should be examined (Bachelard, 1994, p. 4). This aligns with the phenomenological perspective, which seeks to uncover the underlying reasons for attachment to space, how people establish strong ties to a place and, as Bachelard (1994) describes, "take roots in a corner of the world" (p. 4). In essence, the home is not just a shelter but an extension of one's identity and lived experiences, shaped by both the tangible and the intangible.

## **Place Attachment**

When defining place attachment, researchers describe it using terms such as "a positive affective bond" (Shumaker & Taylor, 1983, p. 233) and "a deeply affective crystallization of emotions and a center of felt value" (Cochrane, 1987, p. 11), highlighting the emotional connection between people and places. These definitions suggest that place attachment is not

merely about physical location but about the emotional and psychological investment individuals develop over time. Brown and Perkins (1992) define place attachment as positively experienced bonds that people form with sociophysical environments, which grow from behavioral, cognitive, and affective ties through time (p. 280). This implies that attachment is not an instantaneous phenomenon but rather a gradual process shaped by lived experiences and personal interactions with a place. It becomes clear that key characteristics of place attachment are time, humans, and emotions, which jointly give meaning to the place. In other words, a place does not hold significance on its own; rather, its meaning emerges through human experience and emotional investment. Eyles (1989) states that place is not only an arena for casual life but also a source of meaning, becoming the center of human existence (p. 109). This reinforces the idea that attachment to place is deeply intertwined with identity and purpose. Places become the donors of stability, predictability, familiarity, and safety (Brown & Perkins, 1992, p. 280). These elements contribute to a sense of security, which is crucial for well-being. Ultimately, the development of emotional bonds with places is a prerequisite for psychological balance and healthy adjustment, as it helps individuals overcome identity crises and find the stability they need in an ever-changing world (Lewicka, 2008, p. 211). Thus, place attachment serves as more than just a sentimental connection, it plays an essential role in shaping an individual's emotional resilience and sense of belonging.

### **Place Identity**

Halbwachs (1950) states that “our physical surroundings bear our and others’ imprint” (p. 1). This suggests that places are not merely backdrops to human activity but active participants in shaping personal and collective identities. Thus, a place serves as a way for individuals to differentiate themselves from others, maintain a sense of continuity, foster positive self-esteem,

and develop a sense of self-efficacy (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). In other words, place is deeply intertwined with self-perception, providing a foundation for stability and identity formation. Auguste Comte observed that mental stability primarily stems from the consistency of the physical objects we encounter daily, as their minimal or nonexistent change creates a sense of permanence and stability (as cited in Halbwachs, 1950). This idea reinforces the notion that familiar environments contribute to psychological well-being by offering a sense of predictability in an otherwise dynamic world. People create their identities in relation to the physical environment that they design for themselves (Proshansky, 1978, p. 147). The choices individuals make in shaping their surroundings reflect not only personal tastes but also deeper cultural and emotional ties to place. The way people arrange their homes, from furniture to décor, not only reflects personal tastes and individuality but also shapes preferences and a sense of belonging. This act of designing one's space becomes a form of self-expression, reinforcing identity through tangible surroundings. Objects are an essential part of society, and the permanence of a home provides a group with a sense of continuity. While groups shape their physical surroundings, they also adapt to them, becoming enclosed within the spaces they create. This reciprocal relationship between people and place highlights how identity is not static but continuously shaped by interactions with the environment. This interaction between a group and its environment influences its identity, stability, and evolution. Ultimately, the physical world does more than mirror social structures, it actively reinforces them, shaping both individual and collective experiences, and providing a sense of rootedness in an ever-changing world (Halbwachs, 1950).

## Place and Memories

As cited in Hoelscher and Alderman (2004), Edward Said explains the concept of memory as an identification with a specific place in the world, stating, “People now look to this refashioned memory, especially in its collective forms, to give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world” (p. 348). To remember something, people often anchor their emotions and feelings to an object, place, or visual cue, creating a gateway to their memories and past experiences. This process is deeply connected to how humans experience time, where past events are not only influences but are also actively revisited and negotiated in our thoughts and feelings (Sutton, 2024, p. 594). Memory is a constructive process, shaped by the selective nature of recalling, interpreting, and transforming past events, often in relation to present emotions or moods. The role of external resources, like familiar people, objects, or places, helps sculpt our cognitive and emotional experiences, making memory a dynamic and ongoing interaction with the world around us (Sutton, 2024, p.594). Building upon this understanding, Bachelard (1994) delves into the role of space, particularly the home, in shaping memory and imagination. He suggests that the home is not simply a physical space but a sanctuary where memories are revisited and transformed. Bachelard writes, “And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Im-memorial things are” (p. 5). This passage underscores how the act of remembering is not just a recall of past events but a journey that transports us back to the “motionless” moments of our earliest experiences, frozen in time like immemorial things. These memories, as Bachelard notes, have a distinct quality, “Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home” (p. 6). The memories of home hold a special place in our hearts, different from other experiences, and it is through this

connection that we weave a tapestry of dreams and emotions. As Bachelard observes, “we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost” (p. 6). This highlights the poetic nature of memory, where emotion and imagination shape our recollections, not just as historical accounts, but as creative acts that enrich our sense of self and place.

## **Conclusion**

When researching literature on the topics of the home concept, place attachment, place identity, and place and memory, you come to the conclusion that the meaning of home cannot be reduced to walls, addresses, or even the objects that fill a space. It is built slowly, through emotions, memories, and the silent understandings we form with the places that hold us. Attachment, identity, and memory do not exist separately but move together, layering experience upon experience until a place becomes inseparable from the self. By recognizing the deep ties between people and their environments, we better understand how places shape who we are and how we carry them with us, even long after we leave.

## **Research question(s)**

This research explores how people form deep connections to physical spaces by focusing on the life cycle of a house and the emotional weight it carries throughout a person’s life. It examines how early memories, especially those from childhood, shape the way individuals perceive home, influencing their sense of identity, belonging, and even their future aspirations. At the heart of this exploration is the way traditions, feelings, and meanings tied to home are passed down and reshaped through generations. Through the memories of my grandmother and

her sisters about their childhood home, I trace how the idea of home has changed within my family, gradually evolving until it reaches me.

### **Methodology**

For this project, I have employed feminist oral history practices and visual storytelling methods within a framework grounded in feminist epistemologies. This approach acknowledges the significance of lived experiences, positionality, and subjectivity in knowledge production. By integrating these methods, I aimed to capture the nuanced ways in which home and identity are transmitted across generations, emphasizing voices and narratives often overlooked in dominant discourses. Part of this capstone is the research design which involved the reconstruction of my family's generational house in Voskehask. Doing interviews with the elder female members of my family, I gathered information that helped me to create the model of the house.

### **Feminist Theories**

Doing a research project about a family member raises questions about subjectivity and objectivity, which are widely discussed in Lorraine Code's *What Can She Know: Feminist Theory and Construction of Knowledge* (1991). I draw on Code's work to situate my research within feminist epistemology, framing how knowledge is constructed and understood in this context.

Feminist epistemologies challenge the idea that knowledge can be produced in a detached, impersonal way, and they focus on how gender, social contexts, and power dynamics shape the process of knowledge creation (Code, 1991, p. 27). The objective/subjective dichotomy is a central focus of feminist analysis. In conventional epistemology, a series of

dichotomies upholds the institutionalization of “masculine” modes of thinking, while simultaneously devaluing “feminine” approaches to knowledge. Feminist theorists have convincingly argued that dichotomous thinking is a hallmark of malestream thought. These dichotomies often parallel the male/female divide, not only describing the world but also evaluating it in ways that reinforce male intellectual dominance. This structure of opposites has long supported social and ideological systems that sustain the privileged positions of men, while relegating women and marginalized groups to less valued roles (Code, 1991, p. 28). The persistence of these dichotomies highlights the need for feminist epistemologies to question and deconstruct these ingrained assumptions.

The myth of objectivity asserts that knowledge must be detached from personal biases, emotions, and the social context of both the observer and the observed. This view is historically associated with the masculine way of relating to the world, which sees scientific inquiry as cold, logical, and impartial. Feminist epistemologies, on the other hand, critique this ideal by arguing that knowledge production is never truly objective, as it is always influenced by the values, experiences, and perspectives of those creating it. These influences are often shaped by gendered, racial, and cultural contexts, which have been traditionally overlooked or marginalized in scientific inquiry (Code, 1991, p. 28).

To expand on this discussion, it is crucial to consider the dissolution of the objective/subjective dichotomy. This does not imply that the terms themselves lose significance; rather, it challenges the absolute power that the oppositional structure of this dichotomy bestows upon them. Code (1991) argues against two key beliefs embedded in the objective/subjective dichotomy: the idea that some knowledge can be purely objective and some entirely subjective, and the belief that true knowledge must be either entirely objective or entirely subjective. She

contends that knowledge is always a product of both subjective and objective elements, intertwined in complex ways. The belief that subjectivity contaminates knowledge or that pure objectivity guarantees truth is mistaken. Instead, knowledge exists along a continuum, with varying degrees of objectivity and subjectivity. A nuanced theory of knowledge must reject simplistic dichotomies, recognizing that cognitive experiences and the knowledge they produce are situated in specific contexts and are influenced by both subjective and objective factors (Code, 1991, p. 30).

This perspective aligns with feminist epistemologies, which call for a reevaluation of traditional knowledge standards that prioritize abstract, detached, and impersonal methods. By incorporating both the subjective and the objective, feminist epistemologies offer a more holistic, inclusive approach to understanding how knowledge is created and how it reflects the lived experiences of those involved in its production (Code, 1991, p. 30). In my research project on a family member, this approach is crucial. It allows me to acknowledge the personal, emotional connections I have to the subject while also considering the broader cultural, historical, and social contexts that shape the narrative. By embracing a feminist epistemological lens, I can more fully appreciate the complex interplay between my subjective perspective and the objective elements of the research, ultimately producing a richer, more nuanced understanding of my family members' lives and experiences.

### **Feminist Practices of Oral History**

To explore this research method, I first read *Women's Words: The Feminist Practices of Oral History* (Gluck & Patai, 1991), which led me to delve deeper into the origins of feminist oral history, exploring the earliest articles published on the subject. The book discusses the National Women's Studies Association Conference in 1977, which played a pivotal role in the

creation of literature on feminist oral history practices. I examined the original theory to understand how the field evolved over time and how it connects to my own research.

The first major body of literature on women's oral history emerged in 1977 with the publication of *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* (Vol. 2, No. 2), marking the first time an entire journal volume was dedicated to this subject. This issue opened with the article *Listen! Women Speaking*, in which Lynn Z. Bloom highlights the invaluable role of women as narrators of oral history. She argues that their voices are essential for reconstructing collective memory and providing meaningful ways to navigate both the present and the future (Bloom, 1977). As the introduction to the volume, Bloom's article sets the stage for the discussions that follow, emphasizing how women play a crucial role in transmitting lived experiences across generations, sharing stories with one another and with their children, who, in turn, continue the cycle. Another key article, *What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History* (Gluck, 1977), delves deeper into the feminist practice of oral history, exploring its methodology and significance within the broader framework of feminist scholarship.

Feminist oral history is a research method that challenges traditional historical narratives by centering the voices and experiences of women, particularly those who have been marginalized or overlooked in dominant historical accounts (Gluck, 1977). Rooted in feminist epistemology, this method prioritizes the subjective and experiential knowledge of women, recognizing their oral testimonies as valid and significant sources of historical data. Unlike conventional oral history approaches that often focus on elite or public figures, feminist oral history emphasizes the everyday lives, relationships, and socio-cultural contexts of women, thus redefining what is considered historically important (Gluck, 1977).

A key aspect of feminist oral history is its rejection of hierarchical researcher-subject dynamics. Instead of positioning interviewees as passive sources of information, this method fosters a collaborative process in which women actively participate in shaping their own narratives. Researchers engage in reflective listening, acknowledging their own positionality and the power relations at play in the act of recording history. This approach not only amplifies women's voices but also challenges the objectivity claims of traditional historiography, which has historically excluded or misrepresented women's experiences (Gluck, 1977).

Furthermore, feminist oral history expands the scope of inquiry by incorporating themes that have been traditionally dismissed as private or unimportant. It explores issues such as domestic labor, reproductive health, sexuality, emotional labor, and interpersonal relationships, framing these aspects as essential components of historical analysis. By centering women's lived experiences, this method disrupts the male-centric historiographical canon and contributes to the broader feminist goal of reinterpreting history through an inclusive and intersectional lens (Gluck, 1977).

Choosing this method is vital for me because, as a female researcher, I am interviewing the women in my family to learn about my great-grandmother, whom I recognize as the founder of "the generational house." For me, it was important to choose my great-grandmother as the central figure of the research, because, following Bachelard's concept, I believe that women are the foundation of the house, nurturing it from within: "In the intimate harmony of walls and furniture, it may be said that we become conscious of a house that is built by women, since men only know how to build a house from the outside, and they know little or nothing of the "wax" civilization" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 68).

## Visual Storytelling and Art-Based Research

The creative aspect of this capstone is the creation of a physical model of my grandmothers' house, giving shape to the memories they have shared with me. Even though I have never been to that house in Voskehask, I have carried its image with me since childhood, shaped by their conversations about the beautiful, big house they had in the middle of nowhere, in the heavenly countryside, where the music was provided by buzzing bees and the colors were painted by vibrant wildflowers. I have not been there, yet I have always had a strong visual image created through memories that were not even mine. My primary goal was to bring these memories to life and give them a real, physical form that would allow my family to visit it whenever they want.

The visual storytelling methodology is essential for my capstone project as it is enabling the translation of personal and collective memories into tangible representations. Visual storytelling can be considered a method within the broader framework of Arts-Based Research (ABR).

Arts-Based Research, as defined by Barone (2012), seeks to “enhance understanding through the communication of subjective realities or personal truths that can occur only through works of art” (p. 2). This theoretical and methodological framework provides the foundation for how I conceptualize the creation of the model, not only as an artistic expression, but as a site of knowledge production. The memories embodied in this house are communicated not just through language but through form, texture, space, and composition. ABR values such aesthetic forms of communication because they allow access to affective and embodied dimensions of experience that are often missed in traditional qualitative research.

Moreover, ABR invites a political and ethical stance from the researcher: it challenges hierarchical knowledge production and emphasizes collaboration, reflexivity, and care (Finley, 2005). These principles align deeply with my feminist methodology. In reconstructing my great-grandmother's house with the help of my grandmother and her sisters, I position them not as subjects of research but as co-creators of knowledge and memory. The act of building this model becomes a participatory process where artistic creation is not separate from data collection, it is the data, the method, and the message.

Incorporating visual storytelling into my research allows for a multidimensional engagement with memory and identity. Visual methods have been shown to facilitate and enrich communication, producing richer and different kinds of data than verbal methods alone. ABR extends this by transforming research findings into aesthetically powerful, emotionally resonant forms, such as models, maps, drawings, or performances, that resonate with both participants and broader audiences. This not only democratizes knowledge, but also makes it accessible and meaningful to the communities involved (Finley, 2005).

*Shushi: Mental Maps*, a book by CSN Lab, inspired my approach to visual methodology. This book is a collection of mental maps drawn by the people of Shushi after the 2020 Artsakh war, as they reconstructed their city through memories. In the methodology section (p. 196–237), it is demonstrated how the creation of visuals allowed individuals to connect with one another, evoke shared memories, and revisit their homes through imagination. When sketching the maps, participants often shared responsibilities, one person drew the streets, another marked military points, while others contributed schools and churches. In some cases, one individual would start the drawing and then pass it to a family member to continue. This deeply collaborative and

expressive form of storytelling exemplifies ABR in practice, art as memory, art as testimony, and art as resistance.

My methodology integrates feminist oral history practices, feminist epistemology, visual storytelling, and arts-based research to explore the evolving concept of home in my family's history. By conducting interviews with my grandmother and her sisters, I seek to preserve and reconstruct the memories of my great-grandmother's house, recognizing how lived experiences and generational narratives shape identity and belonging. Through this interdisciplinary approach, I aim to honor the voices of the women in my family and contribute to a broader understanding of how home is created, remembered, and reimagined across generations.

### **Research Design**

For this project, my primary research method is conducting interviews with my family members, my grandmother and her sisters, to explore how the concept of home has evolved over time, ultimately shaping my own understanding of it today. My interviewees are Anahit Muradyan (my grandmother and the youngest sister), Zaruhi Muradyan (the middle sister), and Susanna Muradyan (the eldest sister). I did two rounds of interviews, first interviewing the participants individually and then organizing a group interview-discussion. I chose to have two stages, as I first wanted to learn more about their personal memories and later get them together to have an intimate conversation that I could observe. At the heart of this family history is my great-grandmother, Noyemzar, who laid the foundation for our family and metaphorically built the first bricks of our "generational house." Through these interviews, I aimed to explore her life: how she lost her home in Mush, how she, as a genocide survivor, managed to rebuild from nothing, and how this new house became a home, filled with traditions, customs, and vivid

memories for a large Armenian family. By examining the house they grew up in and comparing it to the one I live in now, I sought to understand how my grandmother and her sisters internalized the family values set in their childhood and how they later passed them down to us. I also wanted to explore my own connection to our home and use this knowledge to create a meaningful space for future generations. The insights gathered from these interviews guided my efforts to reconstruct my grandmother's house in Voskehask, preserving both its physical structure and the emotional essence of the home they once knew.

## **Conclusion**

The methods employed in this research combine feminist oral history, visual storytelling and arts-based research in the framework of feminist epistemology to create a multidimensional approach to understanding the concept of home and identity within my family's generational narrative. The use of feminist oral history allows for the centering of women's lived experiences, placing value on subjective memories and rejecting hierarchical knowledge structures that traditionally marginalize voices like those of my grandmother and her sisters. This practice is grounded in feminist epistemology, which challenges the separation of objectivity and subjectivity, asserting that knowledge is deeply embedded in personal, cultural, and social contexts. By combining these approaches with visual storytelling and arts-based research, I have been able to bring my family's history to life through the creation of a physical model of the house. This model serves as a tangible representation of the memories and emotional connections that my family shares, bridging the gap between past and present.

## **Artist Statement**

I grew up in a house full of people and stories. When you're a child and constantly listening to fascinating stories about your family members and relatives, you take them as something very basic and usual. Sometimes, you don't even realize that these are stories that reflect history, stories that are part of the narratives you've learned at school, and stories that are worth telling to others.

Every time our relatives gathered in our big and full house, they would start telling stories, laughing and crying (but laughing most of the time). As a child, I always thought I had heard the same stories a thousand times and that there was nothing new to learn. But who could have imagined that one day, all these stories would come together to form a single narrative, one I now see from a completely new perspective, one I could never have imagined before, and that my family members would become the historians telling stories that would transform my entire outlook.

When thinking about this capstone, the first idea that came to mind was doing an oral history project, but the actual topic emerged later, when I suddenly noticed the true historians right beside me: my grandmother and her sisters. For a long time, I didn't know this project would be about home, until I realized how important home really is to me. I grew up in my house, listening to all kinds of stories. And once I realized that these were my last months at home, the last times I would hear these stories in that familiar setting, I wanted something complete to carry with me. I wanted to have it with me at all times, especially when I go on to build a new home oceans away from here, to keep homesickness at bay.

Whenever I thought about leaving home to study abroad, I always said I wished I could carry our home in my pocket, so that every time I missed it, I could take it out and "walk through

its rooms.” I’ve always hated the feeling of homesickness. Then I began talking about it with my grandmother, who has changed homes twice and is now living in her third. Our conversations about “home in the pocket” inspired me to create this “pocket-house” for her. Unlike me, who can return home or video call and see it, my grandmother can only imagine her childhood house, she doesn’t even have a single photo from it. So I decided to rebuild her childhood home and explore the topic of home, looking at its life cycle and connecting it to the development of a person’s identity and character.

I started this project by interviewing my grandmother Anahit and her sisters, Susanna and Zaruhi. Anahit is the second youngest child in her family and the youngest sister. She was born in 1959 in the village of Voskehask in the Akhuryan region, and lived there until she turned 14. She then moved to Yerevan to finish school and later study nursing in college. Zaruhi, born in 1956, is three years older than Anahit. She moved to Yerevan with Anahit in 1973 and studied at the Chemical Technicum. While studying, Anahit and Zaruhi lived in their brothers’ houses until their parents joined them in the city and bought a house, where they lived until the sisters turned 20 and 22. Susanna, the eldest, was born in 1951 and lived in Voskehask the longest, as she married a man from the same village. She later moved to Yerevan with her family in 1982.

I conducted three individual interviews with each participant, followed by one joint group interview. These interviews provided all the necessary information about the physical home they lived in, the feeling of home, and their personal understanding of the concept. Since my project follows a feminist approach, I also focused on the female experience, exploring their stories through a feminist lens. I asked questions about their grandmother Noyemzar, the founder of their childhood home, and their mother Siranush, who managed the household and worked tirelessly to care for nine children and a husband. The interviews were divided into the following

sections: background information, childhood memories and the feeling of home, Noyemzar and her house, traditions, daily life and family practices, losing the childhood home, generational transmission and identity. At the end, I gave them paper to help me visualize and reconstruct the house physically.

After completing the four interviews, I began the transcription process to turn the material into text for my research creation. I had all the necessary materials: four interviews with three participants and three maps showing the layout of the house in Voskehask and the summer house located 60 km away. With all this information, I began the building process. The interviews gave me factual details, like the color of the stones, the size of the rooms, and the surrounding landscape, which helped me select building materials for the reconstruction. It was incredibly exciting to have my whole family involved: my mother helped with shopping, my uncle with construction, and my grandmother and her sisters gave detailed instructions. It was important for me to treat this construction like the building of a real house, only a pocket-sized version of the home my grandmothers had lived in. I even asked my grandmother to place the first stone, following traditional house-building rituals. During the interviews, I learned about the emotional significance of the summer house for the sisters, so I decided to include it too. Without it, the house wouldn't be complete, and the project wouldn't feel successful. In just a few days, the house, its surroundings, and the road leading to the summer house were all standing, fully complete.

Once the physical house was ready, I moved on to the next important step: giving the house life. I decided to attach QR codes to different walls of the house. These codes tell the story of the home, introduce its characters, and allow their voices to be heard, giving physical life to the memories. I used interview recordings so that people who scan the codes can actually hear

the voices of my grandmother and her sisters. They mentally walk through the house with the listener, guiding them and sharing stories about different objects, like the TV or the beehives. I also used lightly edited transcripts to provide written details and facts from my grandmother and her sisters. Additionally, I included photos and videos from the building process and the interviews. I incorporated family archive materials as well, so that viewers can see real-life images of family members from the time they lived in that house.

As a final result, my project includes a small physical replica of the house in Voskehask, brought to life through images, audio recordings, and texts, all generated from the interviews with Anahit, Zaruhi, and Susanna.

### **Reflections on Process**

I didn't expect this capstone to feel so close to home. At first, it was just a project, but the moment I sat down with my grandmother and watched her eyes fill with tears, I realized this was something much more. Rebuilding a house I've never seen from the memories of the people I love turned into an emotional journey, not just for me, but for all of us. These weren't just interviews. They were shared moments, long-forgotten stories, and quiet laughs between sisters who hadn't spoken about their childhood in years.

I chose this project because it fully showcased my potential as an English and Communication student, a researcher, a history lover, and an artist. Reconstructing my grandmothers' stories felt like a creative process as much as a research one. I was able to blend history, memory, and emotion, creating something that went beyond just facts. The maps, the interviews, the memories, they all came together to form a story that felt bigger than any single conversation. It was in this process that I truly felt I was not just researching their past, but also

expressing something deeply personal about my own connection to their history. I completely enjoyed the research creation process – it was a space where I could express both my creativity and artistic vision. Having all the parts of the project come together, I felt an overwhelming sense of pride that I am happy to share.

### **The Beginning of It All**

At first, I was unsure how this project would go. My interviewees, my own family, were hesitant. They were skeptical about the idea of being interviewed and didn't really see the purpose of it. They agreed mostly because they wanted to support me, but something shifted the moment I gave the consent form to my grandmother. She realized it was serious, that this was something more than just a casual assignment. From that moment on, she was not only willing but genuinely interested. She even arranged my next interview with her sister on the spot and spread the enthusiasm.

### **Stories Begin to Flow**

My grandmother, who is very emotional, found herself moved during our conversation. Her eyes filled with tears as she recalled memories from a childhood that, although distant, still lives vividly inside her. My grandfather sat beside her, gently helping her remember, offering his own details, and giving her a kind of quiet support. He especially engaged in the mapping process, eagerly participating and giving directions.

The second interview, with my grandmother's sister Zaruhi, had a different rhythm. She is not as talkative in formal settings, but once she realized the interview was just for my

coursework and not something intimidating, she became much more relaxed. Her husband played a key role too, she trusts his intelligence deeply and even asked him to draw the map while she guided him. Watching them interact made me see how memory is often held together by relationships, by shared glances, reminders, and gentle corrections.

By the time I reached Susanna, the eldest sister, the process had taken on a life of its own. The others had already told her how much they enjoyed it, so she was ready. Her memories were the most detailed, the most grounded. She had lived in Voskehask longer than the others, and her version of the story carried a certain weight. Although she didn't want to draw the map herself, she reviewed the others' versions with precision, offering suggestions and corrections with care.

### **The Conversation That Brought It All Together**

The group interview was the most enjoyable and rewarding part of the process. It felt different, less structured, more alive. They already knew what I was looking for, so the conversation flowed freely. They laughed, interrupted each other, and got emotional together. They filled each other's gaps, picked up on small details, and created a space where memory wasn't just recalled, it was rebuilt in harmony. I barely had to guide them. I would simply ask a question, then sit back and observe. Their dynamic carried the entire interview. I chose this conversation as the foundation of my reconstruction because everything I wanted was there: detail, emotion, rhythm, unity.

### **My Role in History**

Throughout this process, I realized that I am not just recording history, I am a part of it. Our house is always full of guests, not because there's an occasion, but because that's how we

live for centuries. That's the culture we carry forward. This openness, the joy, the harmony of our home, it all stems from the women I interviewed or learned about from the interviews. Their memories are embedded in the way we cook, the way we host, the way we laugh loudly and care for each other. There is a sense of movement and life here that feels both present and inherited. My role was not only to collect the pieces of the past but also to understand how I am shaped by them. Their history is in me, and it continues in every conversation, every visit, every tradition we unknowingly repeat.

### **Creating from Memory**

When I began thinking about the reconstruction part of this project, I wasn't confident. I thought I might be aiming too high, asking for more than I could actually achieve. But the process surprised me, it unfolded more naturally than I expected. My interviewees helped me every step of the way. Their enthusiasm, their trust in me, and their willingness to relive memories gave me everything I needed.

The creative part of this project, the reconstruction, was where I felt most like myself. It brought together everything I care about: storytelling, visual expression, memory, and communication, and what is more important, my whole family. My first experience of building a house was something I will cherish forever.

### **Conclusion**

In the end, this project became more than I could have ever imagined. It gave me a reason to sit down with the people I love, to ask the questions I had always wanted to ask, and to listen closely, not just with my ears, but with my heart. I thought I was rebuilding a house, but I was

really building something else: a bridge between generations, a place where memory, emotion, and identity meet. And now, with this little house standing in our home, I know that a part of our story has been preserved, not just for today, but for the days and people still to come.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix #1 Interview Guidelines**

#### **Background Information**

1. Your name?
  2. How old are you?
  3. Where do you live now?
  4. Where did you live in your childhood?
  5. Tell me the names of your siblings.
- 

#### **Childhood Memories and the Feeling of Home**

1. What are some of your strongest childhood memories from the first house you lived in?
  2. What made you feel safe, loved, or happy in that home as a child?
  3. Can you describe a typical day from your childhood spent in your house?
  4. Were there specific corners, rooms, or objects in the house that were special to you as a child?
  5. Do you remember playing games or doing fun activities in or around the house? What were they like?
  6. Was there a favorite spot where you would go when you were happy, sad, or just needed to be alone?
  7. How would you describe the feeling of “home” as a child, what did it mean to you back then?
  8. Can you tell me the similarities between your first house and the house you live in right now?
- 

#### **Noyemzar and Her House**

1. What do you remember about Noyemzar, as a person, a mother, and a grandmother?
2. In what ways did Noyemzar influence the family values or the way the household was run?
3. How did she talk about Mush or the past she had to leave behind?
4. What did Noyemzar tell you about her house in Mush?

5. Tell me your memories about her that were made in your house in Voskehask?
  6. How do you think she went about consciously creating a new sense of home after the genocide? In what ways might she have rebuilt her world, through rituals, relationships, or personal practices, and why do you think those choices mattered?
- 

### **Traditions, Daily Life, and Family Practices**

1. What were the daily routines in that house, meals, chores, rituals?
  2. Tell me about the specific traditions or customs you practiced in Voskehask that you still remember?
  3. How were holidays or gatherings celebrated?
  4. Tell me about the gender roles or responsibilities in the household?
  5. Do you follow those traditions today? How?
- 

### **Losing the Childhood Home**

1. What did it mean to leave your childhood home physically and emotionally?
  2. How did you decide to leave Voskehask and why?
  3. How that memory of the home in Voskehask stayed alive in the family after leaving it?
  4. How did that loss affect your sense of belonging or identity?
- 

### **Generational Transmission and Identity**

1. What values or life lessons did you receive from that home?
  2. How did you continue those values when raising your children or grandchildren?
  3. What do you think I (as your grandchild) should know about that home and your childhood?
  4. If you could send a message to future generations about that house, what would it be?
-

## **Visualization and Storytelling**

1. If you were to draw the house, what would you include first? Why?
  2. Let us recreate the house through drawing or models. What would you want to see included?
  3. How do you think storytelling and visuals can help preserve memories that words can't?
  4. How would you feel seeing a physical reconstruction of that home today?
- 

## **Conclusion**

Is there anything else you would like to add that we didn't touch upon?

## Appendix #2 Consent Form

### **Համաձայնության հավաստագիր**

Համաձայնագիր մասնակցելու դիպլոմային ծրագրի իրականացման Հայաստանի ամերիկյան համալսարանում: Սույնով հավաստում եմ, որ համաձայն եմ մասնակցել ՀԱՀ Հումանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների ֆակուլտետի դասախոս դոկտոր Հուրիկ Ադդարեանի (հեռ.՝ 060 612769, էլ. հասցե՝ [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)) ղեկավարությամբ Միլվի Գևորգյանի կողմից դիպլոմային աշխատանքի նախագծի հարցազրույցին:

### **Նախագծի նպատակը**

Տեղյակ եմ, որ այս նախագծի նպատակն է հասկանալ, թե ինչպես է ձևավորվում տուն հասկացությունը մանկուց և ինչպես է ազդում անձի հետագա կյանքի վրա: Միլվի Գևորգյանի անցկացրած հարցազրույցի նպատակը իմ հիշողությունների միջոցով ընտանիքի առաջին տան մակետի կառուցումն է ընդհանուր նախագծի համատեքստում:

### **Ընթացակարգը**

Հասկանում եմ, որ հարցազրույցը անցկացվելու է մասնակցի տանը կամ մեկ այլ պատշաճ վայրում, և տեսագրվելու և/կամ ձայնագրվելու է: Որպես մասնակից ես պատմելու եմ իմ մանկության հիշողությունները տատիկիս և նրա հիմնած երկու տների մասին, ինչպես նաև խոսելու եմ իմ անձնական հուշերից: Տեղյակ եմ, որ հարցազրույցները տևելու են մոտ մեկ ժամ, բայց այդուհանդերձ մասնակիցները կարող են որևէ պահի դադարեցնել հարցազրույցը, հրաժարվել պատասխանել որևէ հարցի, կամ որևէ պահի դուրս գալ նախագծից: Հասկանում եմ, որ եթե ցանկանամ հարցազրույցը երկու ժամից ավելի երկարաձգել, ինձ այդ հնարավորությունը կընձեռվի:

## **Ռիսկեր և օգուտներ**

Հասկանում եմ, որ այս հարցազրույցը իր մեջ ներառում է իմ անձնական արժեքների և կարծիքի կիսում, որին կվերաբերվեն առավելագույն խնամքով և հոգատարությամբ:

Տեղյակ եմ, որ ազատ եմ կանգնելու, դադար տալու և չարունակելու ցանկացած պահի: հարցազրույցին մասնակցելը չի ներառում որևէ ռիսկեր:

## **Մասնակցության պայմանները**

Որպես մասնակից ինձ հասանելի կլինեն ձայնագրված և գրի առնված տվյալները՝ դրանք ստուգելու նպատակով: Նախագծի ամբողջ տևողության ընթացքում, ես հնարավորություն կունենամ վերանայել ու հաստատել անգլերեն թարգմանությունը, եթե նյութը հայերեն է:

\_\_\_ Հասկանում եմ, որ որևէ պահի կարող եմ հետ վերցնել համաձայնությունս ու հրաժարվել մասնակցել նախագծին՝ առանց բացասական հետևանքների:

\_\_\_ Հասկանում եմ, որ այս նախագծի տվյալները գիտատնտեսական նպատակներով կարող են հրատարակվել՝ տպագիր կամ թվային տարբերակներով:

## **Իմ հարցազրույցի ինքնության բացահայտման և վերարտադրման առումով**

— համաձայն եմ **բացահայտելու իմ ինքնությունը**: Հասկանում եմ, որ իմ ինքնությունը կարող է բացահայտվել այս հարցազրույցի արդյունքում հրատարակված նյութերում կամ ելույթներում:

— Համաձայն եմ գիտաուսումնական նպատակներով այս հարցազրույցի նկարների ու ձայնագրությունների վերարտադրմանը որևէ հաղորդամիջոցով (վեբ կայքեր, վավերագրական ֆիլմեր, և այլն):

## **ԿԱՄ**

\_\_\_ Հասկանում եմ, որ իմ մասնակցությունն այս ուսումնասիրությանը **գաղտնի** է: Հասկանում եմ, որ իմ ինքնությունը չի բացահայտվի, այլ ցանկացած հրապարակման կամ ներկայացման մեջ, կօգտագործվի ծածկանուն:

\_\_\_ Համաձայն եմ, որ չնայած իմ հարցազրույցից որոշ նյութեր կարող են հրատարակվել, սակայն ոչ մի ձայնագրություն կամ պատկեր չի կարող վերարտադրվել:

## **Այն դեպքում, երբ ընտանեկան լուսանկարներ կամ փաստաթղթեր են նկարվել կամ սկանավորվել**

\_\_\_ Համաձայն եմ, որ ուսումնասիրությունն անող ուսանողը պատճենահանի ընտանեկան լուսանկարներ ու փաստաթղթեր նախագծի շրջանակներում օգտագործելու համար:

**ՈՒՇԱԴԻՐ ԿԱՐԴԱՅԵԼ ԵՄ ՎԵՐԸ ՇԱՐԱԴԻՎԱԾԸ և ՀԱՍԿԱՆՈՒՄ ԵՄ ԱՅՍ**

**ՀԱՄԱԶԱՅՆԱԳՐԻ ԿԵՏԵՐԸ: ՀՈԺԱՐԱԿԱՄ ՀԱՄԱԶԱՅՆՈՒՄ ԵՄ ՄԱՍՆԱԿՑԵԼ**

**ԱՅՍ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՍԻՐՈՒԹՅԱՆԸ:**

Մասնակից՝

Անուն ազգանուն (Խնդրում ենք գրել տպատառ) \_\_\_\_\_

Ստորագրություն \_\_\_\_\_ Ամսաթիվ \_\_\_\_\_

Հարցազրույց վարող՝

Անուն ազգանուն (Խնդրում ենք գրել տպատառ) \_\_\_\_\_

Ստորագրություն \_\_\_\_\_ Ամսաթիվ \_\_\_\_\_

Եթե որևէ պահի հարցեր կունենաք ձեր իրավունքների վերաբերյալ, որպես դիպլոմային ծրագրի մասնակից, կարող եք կապվել ՀԱՀ Հումանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների ֆակուլտետի դասախոս դոկտոր Հուրիկ Ադդարեանի հետ (հեռ.՝ 060 612769, էլ.հասցե՝ [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)):