MARC NICHANIAN'S DEAD WITNESS REVISITED THROUGH "MOURNING AND MELANCHOLY": FROM HISTORICAL LOSS TO STRUCTURAL LACK

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From Historical Loss to Structural Lack

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Sesil Artuç, certify that

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ABSTRACT

Marc Nichanian's Dead Witness

Revisited Through "Mourning and Melancholy":

From Historical Loss to Structural Lack

This study has two main objectives: The first aim is to produce a comprehensive secondary source on Marc Nichanian's theoretical framework. And the second aim is to explore the potential results of an encounter between Marc Nichanian's theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis. In this thesis, I examine the debates around the interdiction of mourning, the death of the witness and the disintegration of language, locate them with regard to the literature on mourning and melancholy, and demonstrate that the impossibilities made visible by Nichanian lie beyond a historical loss, in a more fundamental level, in the repetition of a primordial impossibility that is the structural lack in the Other. I argue that Lacanian psychoanalysis enables us to better comprehend Nichanian's approach to loss, mourning, and melancholy and endows us with conceptual tools to formulate a different conceptualization of mourning.

ÖZET

"Yas ve Melankoli" Üzerinden Marc Nichanian'ın Ölü Tanığını Yeniden Düşünmek: Tarihsel Kayıptan Yapısal Eksiğe

Bu çalışmanın iki temel amacı, Marc Nichanian'ın teorik çerçevesi üzerine kapsamlı bir ikincil kaynak sunmak ve Marc Nichanian ile Lacancı psikanaliz arasında bir karşılaşma yaratmanın olası sonuçlarını araştırmaktır. Bu tezde, Marc Nichanian'ın yasın yasaklanması, tanığın ölümü ve dilin parçalanması üzerine yürüttüğü tartışmaları ele alıyor, bu tartışmaları yas ve melankoli literatürü içerisinde konumlandırıyor, ardından Lacancı psikanaliz üzerinden Nichanian'ın işaret ettiği imkansızlıkların tarihsel bir kaybın ötesinde, daha başat bir düzeyde, herhangi bir sembolik yapının barındırmak zorunda olduğu temel imkansızlığın tekrarında, yani büyük Öteki'nin eksiğinde yattığını gösteriyorum. Lacancı psikanalizin Nichanian'ın kayıp, yas ve melankoli kavramlarına yaklaşımını daha iyi idrak etmemizi sağladığını ve yasa dair farklı bir kavrayış geliştirmemize olanak tanıyan kavramsal araçlar sunduğunu öne sürüyorum.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Marc Nichanian is undoubtedly one of the most important and controversial figures in the field of Armenian studies mainly due to his unique philosophical approach**.** He, in the face of the Armenians who are struggling against denialism and, toiling to prove that what happened was a genocide to the whole world, states that the term genocide is absolutely inadequate to stand for this event, and he even goes on to assert that Armenians who are devoted to proving the genocide speak the language of the exterminator, and they are in self-denial. Undoubtedly, this is a difficult position to digest.

The primary condition to understand Nichanian's theoretical propositions is to keep in mind at all times that he is a literary critic. He has devoted himself to reading the written material produced by Armenians, especially from the nineteenth century onwards. He produced many studies that reflect on diverse fields from philology to archaeology, and from ethnography to art. I must state that *Mourning Philology* (2004) is a necessary read for anyone interested in the Armenian language and the stages that the literature written in Armenian has gone through. Nichanian, especially in *Writers of Disaster* (2002) among others, reads with the same meticulous approach the texts, testimonies, letters, and literary works written before and after 1915. Through this material, he explores the traces of what had happened. He tries to convey how the authors could and could not express their experiences, where their discourses were blocked and where they were fluent, what kinds of problems they had to wrestle with, and ultimately, what destroyed their language beyond repair. From 1895 pogroms to the Adana massacre of 1909, then from there

to the Catastrophe, as he calls it, he strains through an immense quantity of the written material in a process that he calls “a phenomenology of the survivor” (2016a, p. 157) and reaches this conclusion: “genocide is, from the first, Catastrophe” (Nichanian, 2003, p. 133). In other words, the consequence of the genocide with regard to the survivors—as I am going to explore throughout this thesis–is the Catastrophe, namely, the death of the witness, in other words, “the disintegration of the language” (2016a, p. 150), the loss of the capacity to mourn. But before developing an understanding of the concept of Catastrophe, which Nichanian has brought to the Armenian Studies literature, it is necessary to understand the reasons behind his adoption of the word genocide, which he finds "ominous and disgusting" (2003, p. 128), only when considering a certain aspect of the event, namely its historical and legal dimension.

“Genocide is not a fact" (2009, p.1). It took me months, to be honest, to properly understand what this sentence means. To put it mildly, it was an astonishing experience to pick up a book written by an Armenian literary scholar on the discipline of history and see that its first sentence was “Genocide is not a fact”. When I first read it, I thought that Nichanian was quoting genocide denialists and the book would offer a theoretical rejection of denialist arguments. I was correct about my guess that the book was about denialism, but I made a mistake thinking that that sentence belonged to denialists. Nichanian was openly saying that the genocide could not be a fact. But what did that mean exactly? According to Nichanian—and here he is definitely following Walter Benjamin—genocides are phenomena belonging to the twentieth century, the era of the archive, where memory is transmitted through documents rather than stories or epics. As the Shoah and the Catastrophe demonstrated, the destruction of the archive or the disposal of all evidence proving

the crime is an indispensable component of any genocide. Advancing one step forward the thesis that genocides are followed by a process of denial, Nichanian claims that denial is *inherent* to genocide, that exterminators acted knowing this from the very beginning as if they were "powerful philosophers" (2016a, p. 143). So, in Nichanian's parlance, genocide is a double-negation process that negates the negation caused by genocide, it thus kills death. The aforementioned double-negation certainly involves the destruction of any document proving an intention to commit genocide. But that is not the whole story, as Nichanian speaks not about the destruction of this or that document but also the impairment of the notion of factuality as such. And this is where the Catastrophe takes place.

The Catastrophe is not death. It is not rape. It is not mass murder, nor is it endless suffering. And it is not even the genocidal will itself. The Catastrophe is the effect of the will of the perpetrator on the victim. The genocidal will not only commits the crime, but also denies the crime, and more fundamentally removes the symbolic ground on which the crime will be accepted as a crime. Denialism condemns the survivors to a struggle for recognition, which is still going on, namely the game of proving one's own death. Mourning has also become impossible, because in this game there is no place to face loss in real terms. The only thing to do is to prove death. According to Nichanian, Armenians will never see what they really lost as long as they dedicate their lives to prove their own death, and in so doing they will continue to struggle in a game set by their executioners. The reward promised for winning this game is the unanimous recognition of the genocide by the whole world, registering it to the book of history as a genocide. But the game is rigged from the start since it is the perpetrator who established the game in the first place. According to Nichanian, naming the event as the "Armenian Genocide" is a blatant

insult and it is a part of the Catastrophe, as the Catastrophe is equivalent to falling prey the legal language, to getting lost in the struggle against denial, unable to see what denial is doing to oneself in the first place. Nichanian states that the notion of genocide, let alone showing the self-denial which is the reflection of denial on the part of the victim, leads Armenians to drag themselves around tribunals and parliaments, postponing mourning indefinitely. The signifier "genocide" can designate the event only in the field of history and politics. Yet historical and political explanations can say nothing about the truth of genocide, namely the Catastrophe. Since history is based upon facts, it cannot ever hope to account for something which, as a result of the aforementioned mechanism of denial inherent to it, cannot become a fact. Politics, on the other hand, is nothing but the order of reconciliation, calling the survivors to a scene where they will speak of their loss, as if they can ever speak of their loss.

The first aim of this thesis is to present a comprehensive analysis of Nichanian's writings, with a special focus on the concepts of the Catastrophe, loss, and mourning. I elaborate on the questions that drive Nichanian such as how and why the remembrance of the extermination of Armenians became catastrophic. Nichanian's suggestion, obviously, is that to answer this question, it is necessary to understand the nature of loss. That is why he asks the inevitable question: what exactly has been lost? Furthermore, can the word "genocide" signify that loss? How do the victims deny their own experience of this event? What are the pillars of the obstruction of mourning? Nichanian has several answers to these questions: first, he talks at length about the inability to distinguish a genocide and the Catastrophe, i.e., the object of historians and a "real" event. The attempt to make the Catastrophe a fact, to prove one's own death, the denial of the death of the witness, the obsession

with recognition, the illusion that one can recuperate the death of the witness through art or therapy… All of these, which I am going to elaborate on in the following chapters are manifestations of the self-denial of the victims, and, in connection with this, the failure of mourning.

The idea to write a thesis on Nichanian began to take shape in the spring of 2018. I wanted to do something in the field of Armenian Studies, but unlike most scholars in the field, I was neither a historian nor an anthropologist or a literary scholar. As a sociology student interested in philosophy and psychoanalysis, I was looking for theoretical discussions about the Armenian genocide, and especially at a time when I was thinking about the concepts of mourning, melancholy, and loss, I came across *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (2003), a compilation of essays that reflect upon the good old Freudian distinction between mourning and melancholy and quest for empowering ways of forging relationships with the past and of dealing with traumas. I must say that I was very excited to see that the editor of the book was Armenian. Then an article called "Catastrophic Mourning" caught my eye, and I was sure I was familiar with the author's name. Then I recalled that there was a scholar named Marc Nichanian who taught at Sabancı University, that his lectures attracted a great deal of attention. After I read the article in *Loss,* the first thing I did was to read *Edebiyat ve Felaket* (2011) [Literature and the Catastrophe] which is a translation of Nichanian's lectures. And so, I encountered Marc Nichanian.

I should admit that it was very difficult to grasp Nichanian's theoretical framework systematically, as it was hidden between the lines since the voices of the writers he worked through were often mixed up with his own voice. For example, while recounting Zabel Yesayan's experience, he treats some concepts she uses as if he speaks Yesayan's language. While reading his texts, sometimes you feel like it is

Tanyel Varujan or Hagop Oshagan who is speaking through Nichanian. I often wondered whether it was Nichanian who was the author of a statement, or whether it was the author of the text that he was reviewing, and often I could not find an answer to this question. Likewise, sometimes Lyotard and sometimes Derrida spoke while Nichanian was sharing his conceptual framework.

As a result of this sense of confusion, I looked for secondary texts on Nichanian and I came across many scholars who drew on Nichanian's conceptual framework. Especially seeing that Nichanian is a constant reference in the dissertations of young scholars from Turkey made me realize the great impact of the lectures that he gave in Sabancı University (Tataryan, 2011; Yıldız, 2012; Halavut, 2012; Şekeryan, 2015; Akın, 2016; Binici, 2016; Dalyanoğlu, 2016; Gebenlioğlu, 2019).[1] Of course, there are many theses and publications that engage with the work of Nichanian outside Turkey, most of which deal with the Armenian literature (Baronian, 2010; Avagyan, 2012; Anahit; Gulesserian, 2015, Garibian, 2016; Pifer, 2016).[2] When I read through these recent theses and articles in the field of Armenian

[1] The first text that I read in this field was Nora Tataryan's master's thesis written in 2011. In this work, in order to explain the impact of the assasination of Hrant Dink on the Armenians living in Turkey, she utilizes the discussion of the interdiction of mourning put forward by Nichanian. In another thesis, written by Hazal Halavut (2012), by drawing from Nichanian's observations regarding the archive, she calls for a literary interpretation focusing on what is absent rather than what is present, and proposes to read the literary encounters between Zabel Yesayan and Halide Edib through this lens. Written in the same year, Burcu Yıldız's Ph.D. dissertation (2012) analyzes the practices of music making of Armenians in Turkey through an engagement with Nichanian's work on philology. Elif Binici (2016) surveys how the impossibility of mourning is dealt with in the novels of Mehmed Uzun and Haydar Karataş, she analyzes silence and absence through Nichanian's framework. Duygu Dalyanoğlu's work (2016) on the other hand, deals with "the theatrical activity of Armenian North American Diaspora in the twentieth century" (iii) by using Nichanian's conceptualization of the Catastrophe. The notion of the Catastrophe also informs other theses; Ararat Şekeryan (2015) tries to find the traces of the Catastrophe in Shant Weekly and the Poems of Vahan Yardjanian, whereas Artun Gebenlioğlu (2019) searches it in Zaven Biberyan's works. In another context, Abdülhamit Akın's master's thesis (2016) analyzes "the representation of 1915 and Armenians in Kurdish Literature" through the views of Nichanian of the limits and possibilities of literature.

[2] Shushan Avagyan (2012) analyzes the diasporic literature of the Armenian genocide through Nichanian's insights on the impossibility of representation or translation of trauma. Lisa Ann Gulesserian's Ph.D. thesis (2015) can also be given as an example, which deals with Micheline Aharonian Marcom's works with an emphasis on the impact of the absence of the archive to the practices of remembering, with the help of Nichanian's framework. As to the published articles which draw on Nichanian, one can mention Michael Pifer's article, "The Forgetful Figure: Armenian

studies, I saw that Nichanian's concepts were adopted especially by young generation scholars. These texts helped me a lot as I was grappling with Nichanian's key concepts, but some of my questions remained unanswered as they do not take Nichanian's theoretical framework itself as an object of study. What caught my attention during this survey is the fact that literary analyses comprise the overwhelming majority of the theses written in Turkey that cite Nichanian, and his framework is rarely considered with its full theoretical impact. With the exception of Umut Tümay Arslan's *Kat: Sinema ve Etik* (2020) in the last chapter of which she tackles the question of the (im)possible representation of the Catastrophe by analyzing various movies that dealt with this issue, with a special focus on *Ararat* (2002) by Atom Egoyan, and *The Cut* (2014) by Fatih Akın, I unfortunately could not find any conceptual engagement with Nichanian's arguments. As I kept looking for more critical analyses of Nichanian I found a review of Nichanian's *The Historiographic Perversion* (2009) by Berel Lang, in which he was criticizing Nichanian by arguing that Nichanian's approach to the Armenian genocide was basically contesting the uniqueness of the Holocaust, offering instead "a version of the Uniqueness Hypothesis, with uniqueness extended here to many Uniquenesses" (2010, p. 289). However, the review was too short, and Lang did not explain why he made such a critique.

Representations of Trauma in Aṛakʿel of Tabriz and Shahan Shahnur" (2016) which examines the ways in which trauma is experienced, informed by Nichanian's reflections about the effect of the establishment of traumatic experiences as facts on the traumatic experience itself. In her article "Image, Displacement, Prosthesis: Reflections on Making Visual Archives of the Armenian Genocide" (2010), based on Nichanian's assertion that denial is intrinsic to genocide, Marie-Aude Baronian writes on how one could relate to an event that left no traces through a fictional image. In her article entitled "'He is Armenian but he was born that way; there isn't much he can do about it': exploring identity and cultural assumptions in Turkey" (2015), Helin Anahit, by drawing on Nichanian's concept of the interdiction of mourning, contemplates on collective memory. In "Ravished Armenia (1919): Bearing Witness in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. Some Thoughts on a Film-Ordeal" (2016), Sévane Garibian, with reference to Nichanian's claim that genocide essentially kills its witnesses, thinks about to what extent Aurora's testimony could be taken as the proof of genocide.

In the end, I decided to address this lack of secondary literature that I myself felt while reading Nichanian by writing this thesis which primarily aims to create a comprehensive analysis of Nichanian's conceptual framework. As an Armenian sociologist from the younger generation, I felt it was a responsibility to know what Nichanian said and to understand the impact of those lectures on the ways in which 1915 was spoken and not spoken, and I got myself involved in this endeavor to read Nichanian.

But of course, this is a very difficult endeavor and I have significant limitations. First of all, I could only partially read Nichanian's texts that were not translated into English. Therefore, the theses he develops in the *Le Roman de la Catastrophe* (2008) [The Novel of the Catastrophe], *Le Sujet de l'Histoire* [The Subject of History] (2015) and *Պատկեր, պատում, պատմություն* [Image, Narrative, History] (2015) are not within the scope of this thesis. I hope other scholars will work on these books, developing new theses based on his arguments that I cannot recount in this thesis. The second limitation of this thesis is its scope. I particularly focus on his approach to mourning and loss, his critique of psychoanalytical approaches to trauma, and his reading of Yesayan, leaving aside his analysis of many other writers, as I think that the way he approaches *Averagnerun Mech* [*Ավերակներուն Մէջ*; Among the Ruins] (1911) provides the greatest opportunity for us to grasp the relation between mourning and loss.

As I was reading Nichanian, I had the chance to listen to Nora Tataryan's presentation in *Yesayan Salonu,*[3] titled "Felaket ve Estetik" [Catastrophe and Aesthetics] in which, drawing on the impossibility indicated by Nichanian, namely, the impossibility of witnessing in consequence of the disintegration of the language

[3] Yesayan Salonu was founded in 2009 by Aras Publishing, in their own words, as "a place for art and thought, a room open for discussion, dialogue and collaboration; an island 'of its own' but not 'on its own'". Retrieved from: https://www.yesayansalonu.com/hakkimizda/

of the subject, she explored how the means of aesthetics could deal with this impossibility. In this presentation, something she said made me think so much that it triggered a very long process of pondering, some of the results of which I present in this thesis. She said that though Nichanian insists on the impossibility of representation, we can find ways through fiction to sort of deal with this impossibility without falling back to denying the traumatic aspect of the Catastrophe. Moved by this proposal, I decided to focus more on this impossibility.

After having read many of Nichanian's articles and books, I can say that all of his writings aim at developing an approach to the Catastrophe, and, related to this, they are all about the (im)possibility of mourning since the interdiction of mourning lies at the very core of the Catastrophe. He states: "The Catastrophe is the usurpation of mourning from the victims" (2014, p. 273). One of the main goals of this thesis is to grasp why Nichanian thinks of the Event as the interdiction of mourning, how he conceives of mourning. I think that the following sentence by Nichanian neatly summarizes his approach to the extermination of Armenians: "at the core of the genocidal will there was the erasure of the fact or, more precisely, the erasure of the factuality of the fact, and *therefore* [emphasis added] the elimination of the witness as such" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 141). Here, the conjunctive adverb "therefore" conjoins the two main sources which inform Nichanian's theoretical framework. On the one side, there is the critique of historiography, and on the other side, there is trauma studies especially centered around the Holocaust. This division also reflects itself in the work of Nichanian. Some of his works are solely focused on the critique of historiography, whereas other texts focus on what he calls the death of the witness. He himself emphasizes this division in his 2016 text "Death of the Witness, or, The Persistence of the Differend" in a retrospective remark on his own position back in

his 2009 İstanbul lectures: “I had not yet understood the ‘therefore.’” (Nichanian, 2016a, p.143).

Thus, Nichanian follows two different trajectories in his establishment of the difference between genocide and Catastrophe. The Nichanian of the first trajectory mainly draws attention to what remains excluded by the discourse of history and law, and to the limits of a political struggle aspiring after reconciliation and recognition, indicates the inability of these discourses to capture the real effect of the genocide, and argues that the most devastating effect of the genocide is the self-denial of the survivor, manifesting itself in the “compulsion to prove.” The Nichanian of the second trajectory, on the other hand, emphasizes the impossibility of narrating and mourning the Event, and, as we are going to discuss at length, criticizes what he sees as the basic tenets of psychoanalytical approaches to trauma.

Hence, through my readings of Nichanian, trying to understand his conceptual framework, I have come to the realization that this task demands knowledge about the discussions around mourning and narrativizing losses, with which Nichanian engages. This engagement with the psychoanalytical notions of mourning, narrativization, and loss helped me in formulating answers to the following questions that occurred as I was reading Nichanian: what does the determination of the Catastrophe as the disintegration of language tell us about the specificity of the loss and the implied mourning process? Or, how can we theorize the idea of the impossibility of mourning? What kind of mourning process is implied in the stance which makes it one’s duty to show how mourning is prohibited? Finally, and most importantly, is it really the case that the only possible definition of authentic mourning comes to be the acceptance of the impossibility of mourning?

It is worth mentioning that Antigone, which is one of the main ethical figures in Lacanian psychoanalysis, is also a point of reference for Nichanian's writings. However, Nichanian is not optimistic about the role psychoanalysis can play today. In his dialogue with post-Holocaust trauma studies, Nichanian argues that the psychoanalytic notion of narrativization is doomed to betray the truth of the event. He states:

> If Antigone (as a theatrical figure) is a witness, today there is no possible location, no possible stage, on which she could appear and present the limit that she represents. No possible stage, I insist, and psychoanalysis as the modern repetition of the Greek effort for another politics cannot be this stage and this scene. Why not? Because the twentieth century has been the time favored by the gods when something like the genocidal will was brought forth and in the wake of this discovery nothing has remained as it was before. Theater is not theater anymore (I mean, theater as the other politics that it used to be in ancient times). Psychoanalysis cannot inhabit its philosophical tradition anymore (and cannot take the place of theater as other politics). (Kazanjian & Nichanian, 2003, p. 141)

Through this, we arrive at the second aim of this thesis. By recourse to Lacanian psychoanalysis, I will tackle Nichanian's criticisms to psychoanalysis and demonstrate that contrary to what he thinks, there actually is an understanding of psychoanalysis that can provide us stage for presenting the limit that Antigone represents and that can present us another way of doing politics. In one of his articles Nichanian is addressing his readers as follows: "What we have to do, is to understand how the Greeks could have an experience of the Catastrophe, 25 centuries before the emergence of the genocidal will" (Kazanjian & Nichanian, 2003, p. 143). Perhaps the idea of intersecting psychoanalysis—which focuses on the figure of Antigone—and Marc Nichanian, who declared Zabel Yesayan to be "a modern Antigone" (Nichanian, 2002, p. 190), will be a productive encounter to answer this call of Nichanian; as the importance of psychoanalysis will be revealed thanks to Marc Nichanian, and that of Marc Nichanian through psychoanalysis.

I argue that Lacanian psychoanalysis enables us to better grasp Nichanian's approach to loss and mourning and also to formulate a different conceptualization of mourning. And most importantly, it enables us to rethink Nichanian's argument about the disintegration of language and decide whether this disintegration is to be regarded as resulting from a historical loss, or whether its cause lies at a more fundamental level, beyond the confines of historicity, namely in the repetition of a primordial failure that is the fundamental impossibility of any symbolic structure. I read Nichanian especially within the conceptual set presented by the Ljubljana school of psychoanalysis, which brings together Marxism, German idealism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and structuralism, emphasizing the ontological primacy of negativity, which, as we will discuss at length, is conceptualized as lack in psychoanalysis.

Thus, this thesis has two main objectives: Firstly, I want to produce a comprehensive secondary source on Marc Nichanian, focusing on the theoretical insights and implications of his work. And secondly, I want to explore the potential results of an encounter between Marc Nichanian's theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis. To give an outline, in the following, second, chapter, I am going to address the notion of the destruction of the factuality of the fact, which constitutes the core of Nichanian's critique of historiography. In the third chapter, I discuss the second line that informs Nichanian's theoretical framework, namely, post-Holocaust trauma studies which shape his definition of the Event as the death of the witness and the concomitant interdiction of mourning, and I reflect on his relation to the literature on the impossibility of witnessing the Holocaust. After presenting Nichanian's key concepts, in the fourth and fifth chapters, I will go through the psychoanalytic framework to the concepts of mourning and melancholy, which will bring us to a

post-Holocaust discussion about the difference between the sufferings caused by historical losses and the structural lack characteristic to language. This distinction between loss and lack, as it will become clear, is going to help us elucidate the core of the melancholic attachment to particular losses, which, in turn, will provide the background for my argument that Nichanian has a melancholic framework. Whereas Nichanian champions negative designation of the event as the only ethical and authentic approach to the Catastrophe, Lacanian psychoanalysis, as we will discuss, points out the melancholic core of such an account and also shows what kind of an ethical approach can lie beyond only negatively designating the Event. Thus, having developed the ground for my analysis, in the last chapter, I will try to formulate the possibilities of an encounter between Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marc Nichanian can produce. At the very place of the impossibility of testimony, I will part ways with Nichanian's own reading, as Lacanian psychoanalysis enables us to tread a different type of path that will hopefully make us see Nichanian's shortcomings.

The flow of the thesis can be summarized in the following way: we will start with discussing denialism. Then, we will see how history deals with that denial. History will unfortunately fail at telling the truth of the event, at which point law will intervene, which also will fail. After that, we will come to see how testimony and literature will tackle the Catastrophe, and how their failure differs from the failure of history and law. Nichanian will stop at this point, disclosing the impossibility at the core of the experience of the Catastrophe, declaring the death of the witness. I, on the other hand, will explore whether there is something beyond this impossibility.

Concurring with Nichanian, I think it is obvious that we should not get stuck in "the g-word" and rather we should recognize the limits of history and law, or in psychoanalytical terms, the limits of the symbolic order to inscribe the Real. But we

part our ways at the point where he turns the impossibility of language into the result of a historical event, makes the Catastrophe into an exceptional trauma, and argues that there is no possibility for struggle within history, law, and politics. Turning genocide into something so overwhelming, namely the cause for the disintegration of language, is, as I will try to explain, not only theoretically impalpable but also politically debilitating, as we can only be crushed by and victims of something so powerful.

CHAPTER 2

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FACT:

GENOCIDE AS A HISTORICAL AND LEGAL TERM

In *Edebiyat ve Felaket* (2011), Marc Nichanian summarizes his project in the following way: "My objective is the event of the Catastrophe itself. I am not interested in the facts about the genocide, I am not even interested in the anguish or experiences of the victims" (Nichanian, 2011, p. 20).[4] He differentiates "genocide," which for him is a judicial-historical-political term, from the Catastrophe which he thinks *is* the real event. He avows: "To do otherwise, to adopt the generic name 'genocide' and make it into a proper name, that is, 'the Armenian Genocide,' would be 'the supreme insult" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 8), the realist insult of the fact. Of course, we are used to the word genocide being considered an insult to the Turkish state and traditions by denialists, but how come can an Armenian philosopher who has devoted his life to the Catastrophe reject "genocide" as the name of the event?

In his rejection of the adoption of the generic term, genocide, Nichanian follows Lyotard's employment of *Auschwitz* as a sign that attempts to designate a case of *différend*, an event that lies beyond the horizon of the existing discourses. Lyotard defines différend in the following way:

> A case of differend between two parties takes place when the 'regulation' of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom. (Lyotard, 1988, p. 9).

Holocaust is a case of différend since the existing frames of knowledge do not let the victims grasp or narrate what they went through. Where factual discourses fail, states Lyotard, "its name [Auschwitz**] . . .** marks the confines wherein historical

[4] All translations from this book are mine.

knowledge sees its competence impugned" (as cited in Nichanian, 2009, p. 83). By indicating the confines of the current symbolic framework, the sign *Auschwitz* denotes "the meta-reality that is the destruction of reality" (as cited in Nichanian, 2009, p. 81). Auschwitz, Lyotard states, would be "a non-negatable negative" (as cited in Nichanian, 2009, p. 5), "a name without a speculative 'name,' not sublatable [*irrelevable*] into a concept" (Lyotard, p. 88). Thus, the sign enables us to move away from making destruction a historical fact, which would be a futile effort, towards denoting how destruction is also the destruction of reality itself.

Nichanian interprets Lyotard's concept of sign in the following way: What Lyotard is telling is that we cannot grasp what really happened when we think of Auschwitz as a fact. Here is Nichanian's reiteration of Lyotard's assertion that what took place was not a fact but a sign: '"Auschwitz' would then be the name of a sign and not (or not only) that of a fact" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 87). It seems like Nichanian thinks of two different aspects of the event: one aspect is about factuality which is the topic of law and history, and the other side is about the event as a sign which marks the limit of existing discourses (e.g., law and history), which requires another approach.

Nichanian appreciates Lyotard's refusal to use the generic word "genocide," and following in Lyotard's footsteps, he never uses the word "the Genocide" or "the Armenian Genocide" when referring to the event. He argues that one should distinguish an event from a fact. The event cannot be conceptualized in terms of fact. It must be considered via different terms, "outside the coordinates of the fact" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 8). Genocide is "a common noun" (2012a, p. 255), "the historians' object" (2009, p.102) the factuality of which can only be established by the law; Catastrophe, on the other hand, is "the proper noun" (2012a, p. 255) of the

event. Criticizing Armenians for naming the event as the "Armenian genocide," Nichanian reproves them for disregarding the uniqueness of the event:

> Today they are using a common name as a proper name. They do not respect the identity of the Event that has shaped them for the last eighty years. They do not respect their own memory of the Event. They are repeating every day, everywhere, in all places, the original denial of the Catastrophe. But this is part of the catastrophic structure of the survivor. By using the word "Genocide," we survivors are only repeating again and again the denial of the loss. We probably cannot help it. We are doing what the executioner wanted us to do, from the beginning on. We claim all over the world that we have been "genocided"; we relentlessly need to prove our own death. We are still in the claws of the executioner. We still belong to the logic of the executioner, through and through. (2003, p. 127)[5]

The Catastrophe in its total uniqueness is defined by Nichanian as "the death of the witness in man" (2016a, p. 143), of "the disintegration of language" (2016a, p. 150), of that which "befalls the very capacity of mourning" (2012a, p. 254). It is, as it will be explored in this and next chapters, the point where one encounters the limit of humanity, mourning, speech, language, representation, testimony, and imagination. But before elaborating on all these aspects of the Catastrophe, I want to give an account of how and from where Nichanian inherited the word *aghed.* In the exchange between David Kazanjian and Nichanian, which takes place in the edited book titled *Loss*, Kazanjian's first question to Nichanian is why he prefers using the word, the Catastrophe, to which the latter answers by reminding that before the genocide was coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944, Armenians used words like *Aghed* [*Աղէտ*; Catastrophe], *Yeghern* [*Մեծ եղեռն*; Great (Evil) Crime], *Darakturiun* [*Տարագրութիւն;* Deportation], *Aksor* [*Աքսոր*; Exile], *Chart* [*Ջարդ*; Massacre],

[5] Because of his lectures in Sabancı University, Nichanian has become a widely known figure in the academic circles in Turkey. And, of course, the fact that an Armenian scholar puts into radical interrogation and dispute the concept of genocide might have some unwanted, or unforeseen consequences in the land of denial that we live in. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention if those who use the concept of the Catastrophe instead of genocide are defending the official arguments of the Turkish state, if they neglect the comprehensive nuances and points of intervention of Nichanian's arguments and twist his discourse and struggle for their own agendas. As it will become clear as we proceed, why Nichanian chooses not to use the signifier genocide is not that what happened was not a genocide but because what happened was far more tragic, traumatic, and terrifying than what the legal language could ever capture.

Vocir [*Ոճիր*; Crime], *Voghperkutiun* [*Ողբերգութիւն*; Tragedy], and later, *Tseghasbanutiun* [*Ցեղասպանութիւն*; Genocide]. Among all these proper names, Kazanjian asks, why Nichanian prefers the word "Catastrophe?" Nichanian's answer is as follows: The history of this word goes back to Zabel Yesayan who used this word (*aghed*)[6], though not capitalized. Following Yesayan, Hagop Oshagan[7] uses *Aghed* as the proper name of the event and Nichanian follows Oshagan whom he characterizes as his teacher.[8] As a result of Nichanian's choice of *Aghed* as a word that might capture what befell Armenians and his translation of *Aghed* into "the Catastrophe," he says, the latter starts circulating among intellectual circles. However, Nichanian thinks that *Aghed* has not attained a status like *Auschwitz* has; in other words, it has not become an emblematic name yet. The emblematic name is absent; it "remains to be produced" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 10), he says, or wishes.[9]

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[6] The word is analogous to *Shoah* in Hebrew.

[7] Oshagan (1883-1948) is one of the most important figures of modern Armenian literature, a writer, novelist, and playwright, mostly acclaimed for his ten volume *Hamaynabadger arevmdahay kraganutyan* [*Համապատկեր արեւմտահայ գրականութեան*; Panorama of Western Armenian Literature]. For an analysis of the effect of the disintegration of the Ottoman empire on Oshagan's identification processes and mourning practices, see Kebranian, N. (2014). Lost in Conversion: Mourning the Armenian-Turk. In *Middle Eastern Literatures, 17*(3), 238-262. For a brief introduction to the story of the Oshagan family, see the interview Agos newspaper conducted with Oshagan's grandson Ara Oşagan, a photographer. Retrieved from http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/7170/osagan-mirasina-sahip-cikmak-ve-onu-reddetmek-benim-mesuliyetim

[8] Though Nichanian credits Oshagan for the invention of the name *Aghed* as the proper name of the event, Vartan Matiossian's research on the bibliographical evidence demonstrates that *aghed* was used before Oshagan by Setrag Shahen and Teotig. Retrieved from: https://armenianweekly.com/2013/08/02/what-our-words-mean-towards-the-vindication-of-medz-yeghern/
For a series of discussion on the terminology on the Armenian genocide, see other articles of Matiossian on the Armenian Weekly.

[9] While making these discussions about the naming of the event, I think we need to ponder on the unintended consequences of Nichanian's translation of the word *Aghed* to Catastrophe. Instead of using it in the original language, Nichanian translates this name into French and English, and when it is translated from the latter into Turkish the word becomes *Felaket*, and we need to consider what kind of connotations this concept has in the Turkish political context. For years, the Turkish state made great efforts for American presidents not to use the word genocide. As Vartan Matiossian demonstrates in a series of articles on the terminology of the Armenian genocide, the fact that *Medz Yeghern* adopted by the US presidents in 24 April statements is translated into Turkish not as Great [Evil] Crime but as Büyük Felaket [Great disaster/catastrophe] tells us that when compared to the names Genocide and Great Crime words like Calamity and Catastrophe do not offend denialists too much as "neither the word Catastrophe nor its Turkish 'equivalent' *Felaket* includes the element of agency" (Erbal, p. 85).[9] *Felaket* is as a non-legal word that is much more acceptable for denialists

This absence of the emblematic name brings us to a debate about the temporality of the Catastrophe. Nichanian repeats in various articles that the Catastrophe does not belong to the past, that the only tense that can approach the Catastrophe is the *futur antérieur*. The event *will have been* only when we acknowledge it as such, only when we face it, only when we start mourning. "*Aghed* is the name-to-be, the name that will come in the future, in a nonassignable future. *Aghed* is the name that will come at the end of history, when history as a series of denials will come to an end" (Kazanjian & Nichanian, 2003, p.128). The event has not met its name yet but will meet it retroactively when we genuinely grapple with it, that is, stop trying to make sense of it within the confines of factuality. Accordingly, in order to understand why Nichanian thinks it is necessary to adopt the concept of Catastrophe, we will first try to tackle the history of the concept of genocide, what this concept has captured and failed to capture in reality. As we proceed it will become clear that Nichanian wants to show us what it takes to try to fit the event into the concept of genocide; precisely in order to bring us face to face with the Catastrophe.

2.1 The genocidal machine: A machinery of denial

According to "The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1948, the existence of an *intention* and *decision* to exterminate is sine qua non for an event to be defined as genocide.[10] Proving the intention of committing genocide, then,

since it puts the place of accountability in brackets, as it strongly connotes a natural disaster rather than a crime, rendering the perpetrators unknown and anonymous.

[10] In the Convention, genocide is defined as follows:
"genocide means any of the following acts committed *with intent to* [emphasis added] destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:
(a) Killing members of the group;

amounts to proving a genocide. The United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention also draws attention to this aspect of genocide:

> The intent is the most difficult element to determine. To constitute genocide, there must be a proven intent on the part of perpetrators to physically destroy a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group. Cultural destruction does not suffice, nor does an intention to simply disperse a group. It is this special intent, or *dolus specialis*, that makes the crime of genocide so unique.[11]

This chapter had to start with the definition of genocide for the simple reason that the way it is defined occupies a very special place in Nichanian's framework, also and relatedly, as it has drastic consequences for the survivors. On several occasions does Nichanian poetically and powerfully describe how those who strive for proving the extermination of Armenians read thousands of accounts of the survivors, how they lose themselves in the archives; but nowhere can they find *the* proof of the genocide, *the* proof of the intention and decision to exterminate. Survivors look for such a document left by the executioners that would please the law, yet they cannot find it. And they will not be able to find it. Nor will the endeavors of "well-intended historians" (2011, p. 209) who strive hard to make the Armenian genocide a fact be successful because the perpetrators already destroyed all the documents necessary for proving the *intention* to commit genocide, and did their best to render the documents that they were not able to destroy invalid so that they would not count as proof.

Nichanian states that perpetrators were wise enough to destroy the documents that could give a clue about their intentions: "In the case of the Armenians we know

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(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group"
Retrieved August 10, 2020, from https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml
For a critique of the concept of genocide as it is defined by the 1948 UN Convention, see Boghossian (2010). Besides drawing attention to the analytic problems entailed by the concept, Boghossian calls for Armenians to stop taking the adoption or non-adoption of the word as the sole criterion for discussing the event.

[11] Retrieved August 10, 2020, from https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml

that the executioners did not leave official or unofficial documents behind that would reveal their intentions and decisions . . . From the beginning, they [the executioners] made the genocidal machinery work as a machinery of denial" (Nichanian, 1999, p. 256). The extermination of proofs, that is, the destruction of the archive, whether it is achieved or not, is then the key to understanding 1915, or, in fact, what any genocide is. At the beginning of *The Drowned and the Saved,* Primo Levi alludes to a passage from Simon Wiesenthal's memoirs, in which Wiesenthal, a Shoah survivor, depicts a scene in which they were humiliated by an SS official who told to the inmates that no one was going to believe them, even if they survived. In *Edebiyat ve Felaket* (2011), Nichanian reiterates this quotation from Levi which clearly lays bare what Nichanian is trying to point at:

> No matter how this war ends, we have won the war against you. No one will be left to testify, but even if one of you escapes to survive, the world will not believe you. There might be suspicions, discussions, historical research, but there will be no certain facts, because we will destroy both you and the evidence. And even if a few evidence should remain and some of you do manage to survive, people will say the events you describe are too monstrous to be believed: they will call them exaggerations of Allied propaganda, and they will believe us, who will deny everything, and not you. We are the ones who will dictate the history of the concentration camps. (as cited in Nichanian, 2011, p. 89)

The peculiarity of the genocidal intent or what Nichanian calls "the genocidal will" is that it not only exterminates, negates the existence of a people, but it also negates this very act of negation. As opposed to the assertion that denial *follows* genocide, Nichanian asserts that denial is *intrinsic* to genocide[12]. Let us recall a well-known statement from Heinrich Himmler: "The annihilation of the Jewish people . . . this is an unwritten and never-to-be-written page of glory" (as cited in Trezise, p. 51).

[12] For a recent and excellent work on the history of the denialism, see: Turan & Öztan (2018). Turan and Öztan present an examination of the commonalities and difference between forms of denialism in Turkey, beginning from the Armistice period to the early Republic, the Cold war years, and the AKP period.

Denialism, then, is not an answer *to* genocide. Genocide is not only the negation of the existence of a people but also the negation of this very act. Developing Derrida's concept of the law of the archive, Nichanian speaks of the destruction *of* the archive, in double genitive. The archive is destroyed (objective genitive), yet it also destroys, or, it is what makes destruction possible (subjective genitive). Nichanian argues that "the power of the archive is what has made possible the genocidal will as such" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 16).

Grasping the centrality of the archive in the field of facts and their validation requires addressing a very simple question posed by Nichanian: "how, generally speaking, does a human community proceed to validate facts?" (1999, p. 254). His argument is that whereas until modern times the validation of facts had required "consensus" based on narrations, that is, the sum of testimonies about any occurrence, in the modern era, the validation of a fact is contingent upon "the archive in the most general possible sense of this term" (1999, p. 255). Here is what he perceives as the consequence of this change for the validation of facts for genocides: if an event might be erased from history once its proof is obliterated, this means that there could have been "genocides" only in the age of the archive since genocide as such is what the archive can never account for. And this also means that "there have been 'genocides' only in the twentieth century" (1999, p. 256), "in accordance with the modern requirements of validation by the archive" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 143).

One of the earlier texts Nichanian writes on the significance of the archive for genocide can be found in *Remembrance and Denial: The Cases of the Armenian Genocide* (1999), a book in which fourteen scholars from different disciplines and perspectives address the extermination of Armenians and the long history of denialism. Nichanian contributes to this book with an essay entitled "The Truth of

the Facts: About the New Revisionism" in which he elaborates on the roles of law and history, and scrutinizes the arguments brought forward by the leading figures of the new wave of negationism (such as Bernard Lewis) taking the stage in the 1990s, this time not of the Turkish state but of European historians.

His masterpiece *The Historiographic Perversion* (2009), which is mainly a development and extension of the arguments outlined in the aforementioned article, starts with two astonishing propositions: First, "genocide is not a fact;" a very simple but staggering dictum that, however, Nichanian needed "an entire life" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 3) to write. At first sight, this claim sounds negationist. However, the second proposition demonstrates that he is actually attempting to make an intervention in the definition of genocide as such, by including the dimension of negation to its core: "genocide is not a fact because it is the very destruction of the fact, of the notion of fact, of the factuality of fact" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 1).

We have previously stated that the destruction of the archive is a fundamental aspect of genocide. But Nichanian is not simply pointing out the destruction of this or that document or fact. He argues that factuality as such has been undermined by the very form of this crime because when we have the equation between the destruction of the archive and the fact's losing of its status as a fact, we are faced with a phenomenon which is "destined to erase itself as a fact" (Nichanian, 1999, p. 259); in other words, Nichanian states that the ground which makes it possible to declare a fact as a fact is lost: "The erasure of the archive is, in fact, the destruction of that which constitutes the condition of possibility for a destruction to become a historical fact" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 33). That is why genocide is an attack against the very ground on which humanity stands. Genocidal will "is not (or not only) a will to eliminate lives or to destroy the social texture of a living community;" it is rather

"a will to eliminate facts or rather the factuality of facts as the basis of everything that is known under the name of humanity" (Nichanian, 2008, p. 44).

If that is the case, what can history tell us about genocide? If history as a discipline is interested in facts, if it is based on facts, as Nichanian presumes it to be, what can it do against genocide, which is the very destruction of facts? What can a discipline based on the archive do against the destruction of the archive? According to Nichanian, it can basically do nothing. When I was reading Nichanian's critique of history for the first time, I remember asking myself whether Nichanian was talking about historicism as a particular viewpoint or the discipline of history in general. His answer is clear and disconcerting: "history is denialist in its very essence" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 144). As Gil Anidjar states in the afterword to *The Historiographic Perversion*, "the task Marc Nichanian has long set for himself, then, is explicitly to counter history, not simply to criticize it toward an elusive and self-correcting goal" (Anidjar, 2009, p. 146). For him, history is incapable of grasping the destruction of the archives since the archive is its very foundation. "One cannot ask them [historians] to understand a world grounded on the destruction of that which is their very essence, and not only their profession: the archives" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 41).[13] Nichanian is not imagining a different kind of history, he is not yearning for a discipline that could recognize the factuality of the genocide. He is basically disclosing the negationist essence of a discipline based on a "realistic will" (2016a, p.

[13] I want to quote here a statement by Erdoğan shared by Halavut (2012) in her discussion on the relation between the archive and denialism, as I think it helps us grasp Nichanian's point on the role of the archive: "Conferences, symposiums may be held. These are not in my area of interest. I am not a person uncomfortable with these issues. The only thing that I am uncomfortable with is this: *if the people of this country who should be protecting their nation's values more than everyone evaluate the issue without relying on the archives, on documents, without a scientific perspective, but only through rambling interpretations, this would be a disrespect to our country's and nation's past*. And on this issue, *the state has opened all its archives to the publi*c. The Turkish Armed Forces, again, is opening its archives. I think that if work is conducted by relying on these, it would be more appropriate because we should have a few words to say against those who are trying to create a conflict between Turkey and its history. So I say 'the archives.'" (Erdoğan, May 28, 2005, as cited in Halavut, p. 14).

158). History, according to Nichanian, presumes that what cannot be proved by the archive does not exist. Since genocide challenges the limits of factuality, it cannot be seen from the perspective of history. There is no hope for history. There can be no struggle in the field of historiography. "One would have, in effect, to renounce history" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 54).

2.2 History: From absolute denial to revisionism

In *The Historiographic Perversion* Nichanian discusses the negationist essence of history by citing the Bernard Lewis and Gilles Veinstein affairs, which left their marks on the philosophical and historical debates in the 1990s.[14] These two events prompt Nichanian to dwell on the boundaries of the discipline of history and what law could do in the face of negationism, and after these cases he concludes that a new form of denial emerged alongside traditional denialism. I would like to briefly mention these two cases because they occupy an important place in his intellectual journey.

To summarize the first affair, renowned historian Bernard Lewis asserts in a 1993 interview with *Le Monde* that the concept of genocide cannot be adopted in the case of the extermination of Armenians. As a result of reactions coming from Armenians and historians, he is put on trial, which sparks series of discussions on the right of historians to express their opinions about the past.[15] The Veinstein controversy, on the other hand, takes place six years after the Lewis affair, when Gilles Veinstein, a historian specialized in the Ottoman Empire, is nominated to be a professor at the Collège de France. His nomination instigates a reaction for he was

[14] For an extensive discussion of the Lewis affair, see Ternon (1999).

[15] Though the court does not have any jurisdiction over judging negationism, Lewis is not directly acquitted. The court finds him guilty of not living up to the standards expected from a historian, stating that Lewis "failed in his duty of objectivity and prudence in expressing himself without nuance on such a sensitive subject." Retrieved from: https://www.voltairenet.org/article14133.html

known for his negationist theses on the Armenian genocide. In response to this, many intellectuals defend him by launching petitions, exclaiming that the determination of what happened in history should be left to historians. In the end, Veinstein gets accepted to the Collège de France. These two affairs have deeply affected Nichanian for he had to face first how even figures very close to him could support a negationist, and second, how those scholars who made great contributions to the literature on the Holocaust did their best to deny the genocidal status of another event, as most of the intellectuals supporting Lewis and Veinstein did so for the sake of protecting the unique status of the Holocaust.[16]

These affairs lead Nichanian to make a distinction between good old denialism and revisionism. The main difference between absolute negation and what Nichanian sees as the new wave of denialism is that whereas the former either retreats into absolute silence or denies all of the facts, the latter acknowledges that many Armenians died in horrible conditions, that awful things happened, that Armenians were erased from Anatolia and so on. However, historians belonging to this new wave think that the event resembles a natural disaster, occurring in wartime conditions. Again, what befell the Armenians was not a genocide. Thus, unlike traditional denialists whose main principle is "proof by silence" (2009, p. 47), which can be summarized as a silent treatment simply denying the allegations through "the manipulation of facts" (p. 47), revisionist historians such as Lewis very well accept the extermination of Armenians; adding that no one has ever found any evidence demonstrating the intention to exterminate. Revisionists do not accept even the totality of testimonies as proof, stating that testimony cannot provide proof. This is a

[16] For an analysis of the debate revolving around the uniqueness of the Holocaust, see Rosenfeld, G. D. (1999). In this article Rosenfeld presents the arguments both of scholars who defend the "historicization" (p. 30) of the Holocaust as well as scholars who assert its uniqueness. See also the chapters in the third part entitled "The Politics of Exceptionality" of the following book: Fogu, Kansteiner, Presner (ed). (2016). *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture* Harvard University Press.

denialist tactic which Nichanian calls “proof by proof” (p. 48). Accordingly, since there are no documents and since testimonies cannot prove the intent to genocide, there is no genocide. No proof, therefore, no genocide.

When Nichanian explores the theoretical foundations of revisionism, he finds out that Hannah Arendt’s distinction between “crimes against humanity” and “inhuman acts” informs their arguments (p. 48). In this framework, a crime must be inexplicable to enter the first group; otherwise, it will merely be another one among various inhuman acts committed throughout history. Terrible things indeed happened to Armenians, but they cannot speak about a crime against humanity insofar as the events are not inexplicable. Accordingly, revisionists are perfectly capable of explaining why all the awful things had to happen: there was a war, there was famine, Armenians had rebelled, and so on. They assert that what befell the Armenians was completely different from the fate of Jews since Nazis had no motives for killing these people. Contrary to this, they could explain why Armenians were murdered. This is what Nichanian calls “proof by motive” (p. 52) or “proof by sacrifice” (p. 52): “they all sacrificed a collective to a reason, an idea, or an ideology. This is true of all collective murders, except those of the Jews of Europe” (p. 52).

In a third case, Nichanian mentions, the way to deny the genocide is achieved with the “proof by sense” argument. Nichanian notices this form of argumentation after Eric Hobsbawm argues that the characterization and interpretation of the events as genocide do not fit into the “wider context of history” (as cited in Nichanian, 2009, p. 42). Hobsbawm asserts that considering the context of the time (war conditions, famine, etc…) it did not make sense at all to argue that the extermination of the Armenians was the result of a deliberate plan exercised by the Ottoman central government. Reminding the reader of the Hegelian equation suggesting that “what

makes no sense has no existence" (p. 47), Nichanian asserts that crimes against humanity from the point of view historians like Hobsbawm seem to be an exception to the Hegelian equation, as the existence of a crime against humanity is established over the fact that it does not make sense.

In short, historians had all sorts of excuses not to call what happened genocide. Actually, "excuse" is not a correct word here, as denialism is inevitable for the discipline of history because, as I have mentioned, history is based on fact, and genocide is based on the elimination of fact. But why does Nichanian call the denialism inherent to history "historiographic perversion?" Nichanian takes this concept from Derrida and explains it in the following way: historians, in the guise of upholding the objective criteria of factuality, drive the discussion into a vicious cycle by asserting that the existing evidence is not sufficient for interpretation and continuously demanding new evidence, without ever realizing that their criteria are impossible to fulfill in the first place. Yet this does not mean that they reject particular facts like the extermination of Armenians; they both accept the facts and reject categorizing the event.[17]

So, if historians cannot call the event a fact, is there any other institution or discipline that can enable historians to make the event into a fact? Or, who can be said to have the last word in this game? Is there an authority above history? As we have argued in the Lewis and Veinstein affairs, historians fight the idea that history

[17] Nichanian draws attention to the perverse character of this discourse by stating how it resembles "Freud's kettle logic" (p. 22), yet he does not explain what it is. Slavoj Žižek (2004) explains it in the following way: "We all remember the old joke about the borrowed kettle which Freud quotes in order to render the strange logic of dreams, namely the enumeration of mutually exclusive answers to a reproach (that I returned to a friend a broken kettle): (1) I never borrowed a kettle from you; (2) I returned it to you unbroken; (3) the kettle was already broken when I got it from you. For Freud, such an enumeration of inconsistent arguments of course confirms per negationem what it endeavors to deny—that I returned you a broken kettle." Retrieved from: https://www.lacan.com/zizekkettle.htm. Following this we can state that the enumeration of inconsistent arguments such as "there was famine due to war" and "Armenians were rebelling all the time" *confirms per negationem what it endeavors to deny*—that there was indeed a genocide.

should be left to historians and that law should not interfere with historians. Indeed, where historians are silent, the law will have to speak.

2.3 On the function of the law

Nichanian, being utterly tired, nauseated, and frustrated by the unending debates of the historians, asserts that "only jurisdiction and jurisprudence can cut short the contradicting opinions of historians" (Nichanian, 1999, p. 258). The thought process behind this assertion is the following: Since there would be "generalized insanity" (2009, p.38) in a world in which the fact is destroyed by genocide, and historians cannot establish the factuality of the fact, "there had to be a law to recognize something that no one had recognized till then, that in the extreme conditions of humanity only the law can tell the fact" (2009, p. 39). When viewed from this standpoint, "all genocidal projects . . . have been first and foremost a challenge to law" (Nichanian, 1999, p. 258). As an example of the answer of law to this challenge, Nichanian points out the Gayssot Law enacted in 1990 in France, which makes the denial of crimes against humanity a punishable act.

If genocide is the destruction of the fact, this means that this event has lost its factuality, that it is not representable under the current system of knowledge, that history cannot say anything about it, that it does not find a place for itself in the hegemonic representation of reality. Nichanian asserts that "the decision about a genocide is essentially a decision against undecidability" (2009, p. 44), which can only be performed by the law. The knowledge produced by history, as long as the law does not make its decision, is bound to be blind to the Armenian case, which we know very well from the long history of the prevalence of denialism among not only Turkish but also non-Turkish historians. It is not a coincidence after all that it was

not historians but the Nuremberg trials which declared the extermination of Jews to be recognized as genocide. Accordingly, courtrooms have become where past crimes are evaluated and settled.[18]

The conclusion Nichanian draws is thus: "in the extreme conditions of humanity" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 39), to be more precise, in the genocidal situation, "only the law (*le droit*) can establish facts; only the law can decide that the fact is a fact" (Nichanian, 1999, p. 258). Genocide, then, is primarily a legal rather than a historical term.[19] Accordingly, it seems plausible to summarize the main argument of *The Historiographic Perversion* with the following words: "In the Armenian case, no law has ever stated the fact. It is not, therefore, a genocide" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 45).

But does this mean that Armenians should strive for their extermination to be pronounced as a fact? Is Nichanian calling the law to intervene as an authority? He explicitly states that "there where the fluctuation of the very notion of fact could lead to generalized insanity" the law "has no choice but to intervene in order to posit a fact as such" (2009, p. 39). If that is the case, should we all devote ourselves to making the law recognize the genocide? Does Nichanian argue that we need the law to recognize a genocide so that the interdiction of mourning can cease and that we can finally start dedicating ourselves to mourning?

It is very difficult to formulate an answer to this question. In order to grasp Nichanian's position, we need to go back one more time to the Lewis and Veinstein affairs and grasp the following statement by him regarding the impact of these cases

[18] For a discussion of the role of history and the law in determining historical truth after the Holocaust, see Traverso (2009, pp. 82-83).

[19] Although Nichanian does not mention this, it should be noted that the emergence of the Gayssot Law is actually the result of a process that developed after the Second World War, in which the belief that the state should intervene in situations where the violation of human rights became widespread. After WWII law has received a very central role in establishing and maintaining the new order based on the restrictions on states and protection of human rights by international institutions, an order which crystallizes in the formation of the United Nations. For a discussion on the rise of human rights, see Traverso (2009) and Badiou (2001).

on him. Nichanian states: “the two affairs made it possible for me to understand that an *event* could fail to be a fact and that new categories were necessary in order to think the ‘genocides’ of the twentieth century” (Nichanian, 2009, p. 4). Then, what exactly would the declaration of the event as a fact solve? Or what would it teach us about the event? To recapitulate, Nichanian follows Lyotard’s assertion that “with Auschwitz, something new has happened in history (which can only be a sign and not a fact)” (Nichanian, 2009, p. 2). One of his main arguments, then, is that it is simply not possible to think of this event within the confines of the category of fact. Even if the law could establish the extermination of Armenians to be a fact—which is practically impossible for there is no such international law—it would not be able to say anything about the event, which is nothing but the Catastrophe.

The truth established by the law, Nichanian states, “will only be the truth of history, of course, nothing else” (Nichanian, 2013c). The essence of 1915 cannot be designated with the term genocide, which, as Nanor Kebranian elaborately summarizes in her review on *The Historiographic Perversion*, “attempts to lend meaning to the indefinable, transforming it into a criminal object in order to proceed with its due prosecution” (Kebranian, 2006). Neither history nor law can tell us anything about the event. That is why, though Nichanian admits the role of the law in the debate around factuality, he is not interested, or better, not involved in the efforts for the legal or political recognition of the genocide: “To want to inscribe the crime as fact,” he avers, is “to ignore the nature of the event” (Nichanian, 2013c).

2.4 Obsession with recognition

When Nichanian is arguing that only the law can posit the Armenian case as a fact, he is merely describing how things work in the twentieth century, in the century of

the archive, that is, the genocidal century. As I said before, I do not think he is calling the victims and those who identify with the victims to struggle to make genocide a fact. On the contrary, he makes a sound critique of the belief held by many Armenians that the recognition of the Genocide is the panacea for all their problems. Nichanian argues that the demand for recognition drives Armenians away from the truth (or the Catastrophe); and criticizes the firm belief that recognition can compensate for the extermination of Armenians. I want to quote a passage from his exchange with Kazanjian, for I think it displays clearly Nichanian's problem with a struggle focused on recognition:

> In the common denial of the Catastrophe that we encounter among survivors, . . . in the common use of the word "Genocide" as a designation of what happened, we observe a common desire for recognition by the laws of the state and a familiar result: the optimistic and happy oblivion of the disseminating force of the Catastrophe. In the very improbable case of a happy end, thanks to the recognition of a genocide by the laws of the states (and even by an anticipated and nonexistent international law, but this is another question that I entirely put aside in the present context), the fact that we are ultimately founded on the law of mourning remains strangely dismissed, negated, condemned to be forgotten, to never appear as such. (Kazanjian & Nichanian, 2003, p. 142)

What Nichanian is trying to evince is that even if what happened is designated as "Genocide" by the law, this would not amount to a real work of mourning which ought to amount to facing the Catastrophe.[20] The law can give a decision on the factuality of the genocide, however, it cannot ever designate the Catastrophe.[21] Armenians evade mourning by fixating on the tribunals and also parliaments, which, according to Nichanian, can never help them to grasp what they have really lost.

[20] See Marian (2015) for a discussion of the switch in Armenians' agenda from legal struggle to political struggle. Marian suggests that as a result of giving hope that the international law could recognize the Armenian Genocide, Armenians started focusing on the public recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and also making Turkey accept it (pp. 32-56).

[21] See Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999) for his advocacy of the necessity for distinguishing legal and ethical categories, as the conflation of the two leads to the penetration of legal terms like responsibility and guilt into the realm of ethics, which makes it impossible to evaluate historical events outside the perspective of law.

In order to exemplify the fantasy of recognition criticized by Nichanian, I would like to refer to an article by Anahid Kassabian and David Kazanjian. In their analysis of documentary films produced in western diaspora, they argue that these documentaries epitomize the catastrophic remembrance of the Armenian genocide. These documentaries approach the Catastrophe in judicial terms, devote themselves to displaying documents proving the genocide, and ask for reparations to compensate for the ideal and lost past, suggesting that "the work of mourning the Genocide could finally be completed, and the call to do justice to the Genocide could fully be answered, with juridical recognition and redress" (Kazanjian & Kassabian, 2005, p. 126). Kazanjian brings about this issue also in his exchange with Nichanian, suggesting that "the remembrance of 'Genocide'" repeats "the denial of the unnameable" as Armenians pursue "a complete admission by or a guilty verdict against Turkish defendants for a documentable and juridically determinable crime, followed, of course, by the crude calculation of reparations" (Kazanjian & Nichanian, p. 130).

Trapped in the logic of proof, "Armenians continue to believe that the work of mourning cannot occur as long as the denial continues. In other words, they hold the executioner responsible for their own lack of interpretation, their lack of sense and hence of mourning" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 47). With "the compulsion to prove" **(**Kazanjian & Nichanian, 2003, p. 134**)**, Armenians become ensnared by history, law, and politics, condemned to focus on only the recognition of the genocide by law and parliaments. As I'll discuss in the next section, in addition to postponing mourning indefinitely, Nichanian thinks that this captivity in the hands of the truth of history chiefly damages the reception of the testimonies of the victims, since the testimonies are reduced into mere documents that can be used to prove the crime.

2.5 Testimony as document: The realist insult of the fact…

In line with his opposition to approaching the event from a realist perspective intending to prove the genocide, Nichanian argues against putting testimony at the service of historiography and reducing testimonies to "quiet remnants that could help reconstruct the facts or traces of a tragic experience left behind for survivors for future generations" (Nichanian, 2008, p. 45). However, as Kebranian nicely articulates, "each attempt at using testimony to prove the genocide duplicates the survivor's objectification instead of investigating the perpetrator's crime" (Kebranian, 2006). Since testimonies are assumed to represent a reality, they are adopted as mere vehicles for making the Other, "the civilized world" (Nichanian, 2008, p. 53) face this reality.

When Armenians or "well-intended historians" (Nichanian, 2011, p. 209) gather testimonies and use these as evidence for the genocide, they call the civilized world: "'Look what was done to us…' says the survivor" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 96). The survivor wants to prove the murder, whereas the executioner wants to prove his innocence. The survivor competes with the executioner to attract "the gaze of the Other" (p. 98), he wants his own scream heard, but the voice of the executioner drowns it out. As long as Armenians invoke the Other's gaze to recognize their pain, to really see them, to acknowledge their history, Armenians depend on "the civilized world" for the constitution of their own identity, in a competition with the executioner to get the attention of the gaze of the civilized world.

As an instance of this competition, Nichanian points out how after 1915 many Armenian novelists ceased producing literature and devoted themselves to writing their own eye-witness accounts or to gathering testimonies, translating them to languages like French, that is, to the language of the civilized world, with the

intention of archiving the exterminations. As I will elaborate in the section on literature and Yesayan, especially from the Adana massacre onward, there took place a huge debate among Armenian writers about the relation between testimony and art. Some authors like Levon Şant were totally against aestheticizing testimonies for they were afraid that any divergence from a realist description would undermine faith in their historical truthfulness. Famous satirist Yervant Odyan (1869-1926) wrote that he "wanted to be truthful [chshmartapatum] and tell everything precisely as it happened, without falsifying any fact, without exaggerating any event" (as cited in Nichanian, 2009, p. 106). In brief, the consequence of the competition for attracting the gaze of the Other concerning the testimonies is that they are treated only as proof, as instruments.

For Nichanian, there is a firm connection between the discourse of the executioner, testimony, and politics of reconciliation. The scene of reconciliation, Nichanian suggests, is where instrumentalized testimonies will be adopted. In his article "Mourning and Reconciliation" published in *Living Together: Jacques Derrida's Communities of Violence and Peace* (2013) Nichanian takes issue with what he calls "the manipulation of mourning" (p. 192) in the South Africa reconciliation processes and with Barbara Cassin's analysis of post-apartheid reconciliation processes. He observes that the idea "that reconciliation can be accomplished only by way of an enunciation of the truth, that is to say, purely and simply by way of avowal and testimony" (Nichanian, 2013b, p. 195) predominates the mindset of the Commission and also the philosophy of Cassin. Against this framework that makes testimony the protagonist of the scene of reconciliation, Nichanian argues that "testimony always speaks the language of the executioner" (Nichanian, 2013b, p. 203).

Mentioning Derrida's description of The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission as "the theater of reconciliation" (Nichanian, 2011, p. 198), Nichanian avers that the end-goal of reconciliation is actually "castration of truth," and "expropriation of mourning" (Nichanian, 2011, p. 198). He asserts that behind each act of reconciliation there lies an interdiction of mourning. For instance, Antigone's brothers, Eteocles and Polynices reconcile after they die lest the political unity, the *Gemeinwesen* breaks down. Antigone, on the other hand, is never going to reconcile and will stay forever in her grave as "die Ironie des Gemeinswesens," the irony of politics as such (Nichanian, 2011, p. 183), in other words, Nichanian conceives Antigone as the symptom of the political order that aims at reconciliation, which requires the repression of any elements that might endanger that reconciliation, or better, expose the false character of it.

Following the same line of thought, Nichanian (2011) criticizes the apology campaign launched by Turkish intellectuals in 2008 by stating that an apology must include a consideration of why one apologizes, from whom one apologizes, and whether the victims are capable of listening to this apology, whether the victims are aware of what happened to themselves. Otherwise, the apology is to become a part of reconciliation projects doomed to repress the truth.[22] In Arslan's terms,

> Without taking into account the imbalance of power, without speaking about the privileges we gained at the expense of the century-long solitude of Armenians, without naming this incomprehensible racist violence which could not be passed over by saying that "let bygones be bygones," without recognizing the indignation of the victims and without respecting the rupture of bonds here; any invitation to friendship is bound to remain as a lie that states "we are all brothers and sisters," ultimately as an ethos subject to the present relations of power. (p. 306)[23]

[22] For an extensive analysis of the debates revolving around the apology for the crime, see Ayda Erbal's article "Mea Culpas, Negotiations, Apologias: Revisiting the 'Apology' of Turkish Intellectuals" (2012). See also Marc Mamigonian's article in the Armenian Weekly: Retrieved from: https://armenianweekly.com/2009/04/21/commentary-on-the-turkish-apology-campaign/

[23] Translation mine.

On this basis, I contend that a genuine confrontation with the Catastrophe should always consider how reconciliation jeopardizes the work of mourning as it precludes a real engagement with the past, and also blames the survivors for dedicating themselves to prove the crime and thereby for not being mature and calm enough to be able to talk to those who seek to come together and tell narratives about their "common" pain, or to put it concretely, for not subordinating the confrontation with the past to the improvement of the economic and political relations between Turkey and Armenia.

Furthermore, I want to put forward that a proper critique of reconciliation should also consider the pathologized and criminalized forms in which diaspora and recognition politics are imagined and described by the Turkish state. As Erbal and Suciyan demonstrate in their perceptive analysis, diaspora Armenians seeking justice are often treated as "sick", "obsessed" and "psychologically disturbed" people: "they are demonized as radicals and nationalists" (Erbal & Suciyan, 2011). This discourse on the diaspora in its less explicitly nationalist form manifests itself as "the screening, choosing, and separating of the 'good Armenians' (Turkish Armenians plus a small number of Diasporan Armenians who don't prioritize genocide recognition) from the 'bad Armenians' (who push for keeping the recognition issue on the international agenda)" (Erbal & Suciyan, 2011).

At this point, I also want to note that while reading Nichanian's, Kazanjian's and Kassabian's criticism of the politics of recognition and reconciliation, it should be considered that this criticism mostly finds its reason and condition of existence within the political debates in the European and North American diaspora contexts, that we cannot simply take this criticism and stitch it on to the discourses of Armenians in Turkey in a patchwork fashion without any consideration of the

conditions in Turkey, as recognition politics in the scope of the Armenian genocide have almost never been an agenda here, as even the word genocide was barely mentioned for such a long time. As Melissa Bilal elegantly states**,** "survivors who continued living in various parts of Turkey either secretly talked about the violence they witnessed or preferred never to mention them to anyone" (2019, p. 198).[24] Armenians in Turkey began to discuss the genocide more openly in the 1990s and especially after Hrant Dink's public appearance, that is, almost 80 years after 1915.[25] So, while criticizing the politics of recognition, one needs to be very prudent, as the critique of struggles for recognition is one of the favorite topics of genocide denialism which to this day persists. It is also definitely necessary to take into account how Hrant Dink's words criticizing the struggle for recognition in the diaspora[26] are used by the nationalists in Turkey by bending and twisting his arguments in a way that supports the official denialist theses of the Turkish state.[27]

[24] See Melissa Bilal's MA thesis (2004) for an analysis of the ways in which the experience of being an Armenian in Turkey is affected by denialism and for a sound critique of how liberal discourse on cultural politics perpetuates denialism by erasing the history of violence through representing minoritized communities as dead cultures. See also Bilal (2005, 2019) for a critique of the commonalities between racist and liberal multiculturalist discourses in their address and dealing with the "minoritized" communities living in Turkey.
See Talin Suciyan's *The Armenians in Modern Turkey: Post-Genocide Society, Politics and History* (2015) which is an excellent work about the history of denialism and the way living in perpetual denial affected the Armenians living in Turkey). Suciyan, by drawing upon a meticulous archival work**,** exposes the experience of being an Armenian in the postgenocidal habitus of denial. Interestingly, the epigraph of the book is a quotation from Lyotard's *The Differend:* "The 'perfect crime' does not consist in killing the victim or the witnesses… but rather in obtaining the silence of the witnesses, the deafness of the judges, and the inconsistency (insanity) of the testimony."
[25] See Tataryan's MA thesis (2012) for an analysis of the effect of Hrant Dink's assassination on the affect of being an Armenians in Turkey.
[26] See Dink, H. (2019). *Bu Köşedeki Adam.* Hrant Dink Vakfı Yayınları.
[27] See for instance Ergan U. (2002, April). Türkiye Ermenisi olmaktan gururluyum. *Hürriyet.* Retrieved from https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/turkiye-ermenisi-olmaktan-gururluyum-67020
The author states: "As the Armenian diaspora mobilized against Turkey as we get close to April 24, the best response to the diaspora's policy based on 'hostility came from Istanbul." [24 Nisan'ın yaklaşmasıyla birlikte Ermeni diasporası, Türkiye'ye karşı seferber olurken, diasporanın "düşmanlığa" dayalı politikasına en güzel yanıt İstanbul'dan geldi.]

2.6 … with a compulsion to prove

Let me summarize the arguments laid out so far in this chapter. I have started with outlining Nichanian's criticism about the UN definition of genocide, namely that one has to prove the intention to genocide in order to prove genocide itself; and I have also stated his assertion that genocides can only emerge in the age of the archive. Then I explored his argument that since history is based upon factuality and facts, in the situation of the genocide in which the factuality of the fact gets undermined, the only institution that is thought to be able to establish the fact is the law.

At this point, I want to briefly introduce the psychoanalytical concept of the big Other, which helps us to grasp this debate around the relation between factuality and the archive. Defining the big Other *qua* the "socio-symbolic field" (Zupančič, 2008, p.3) as that which "guarantees the consistency of the field of meaning" (Zupančič, 2008, p.31), thereby providing the basic coordinates which support the construction of reality and factuality, in other words, enabling us to determine the "objective" status of something, can we state that genocide is doomed to be devoid of the guarantee or support of the big Other? According to Nichanian, this indeed is the case, as genocide cannot be inscribed into the symbolic order because its inscription is dependent upon an institution—the archive—which cannot give any guarantee for any knowledge of the event to be produced.

I think that Nichanian's analysis of the inability of history to establish the factuality of the genocide perfectly exemplifies the logic of the master signifier in the functioning of the big Other as the guarantee of meaning: "Only law can put an end to the contradictory opinions of historians" (2009, p. 11), he states. A psychoanalytical overview of this instance of decision by the law can be given in the following way: the symbolic order is comprised of signifiers that ultimately refer to

other signifiers, which are denoted as S_2. As signifiers (the contradictory opinions of historians) cannot produce meaning by themselves, the latter can only emerge when signifiers are articulated in a structure, in an operation called quilting, by a master signifier (the law), which is denoted as S_1. In other words, meaning is produced in the relations between signifiers through the establishment of certain *points de capiton* [quilting points]" (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 60). Thus, when an event does not make sense, that is, when, the chain of signifiers (S_2), the existing frame of knowledge falls short of establishing a fact by itself, a master signifier (S_1) comes as a supplement to determine the meaning of the other signifiers by structuring the "multitude of 'floating signifiers' […] into a unified field" (Žižek, 2008 p. 96). According to Nichanian, in the case of genocide, only law might perform this function of the Master, pronouncing the fact, which means that only law can make the signifier "genocide" the master signifier, establishing a fact and thus recuperating the factuality of the fact. However, as there is no law that could have established the factuality of the Armenian genocide, Nichanian invites his readers to give up on their expectations for a master to make their extermination an internationally approved fact.

In this chapter, we have seen that the compulsion to prove which is the result of the destruction of the archive and the non-existence of an international law that can declare 1915 to be a genocide have led the survivors to dedicate themselves to prove the crime and we have noted Nichanian's dissent against the adoption of testimonies as proof as it instrumentalizes and thus insults the survivors. Consequently, I have drawn attention to Nichanian's warnings against focusing on proving the genocide as it traps Armenians in the struggle for recognition. Nichanian refuses to answer negationism with an affirmation of the existence of the crime.

Against those denialists who keep crying out "no, it did not happen," it is pointless to insist on trying to prove and say "yes, it did happen." He thus argues for leaving this perspective focused on factuality behind and invites us to approach the Catastrophe—which for him is the proper name of the event—without trying to confine it to factuality.

I think that the most significant intervention of Nichanian to Armenian studies and in general to genocide studies is his assertion that genocide which is a historical, legal, and political term, cannot ever capture what really befell Armenians. According to him, the Catastrophe, which is the effect of the genocide on the victim, "*stricto sensu* consists in this necessity to provide proof," (2003, p. 134). As long as they content themselves with history, survivors will have no other choice than to play the game of documentation, verification, demonstration, and finally reconciliation, a game the rules of which are determined by the very will of the perpetrator. Insofar as Nichanian points out the injunction to prove, I think that with this position he is making a genuine political intervention to Armenian studies and also to the struggle for recognition.

Let us look at an actual example. Though Taner Akçam is undoubtedly one of the most important contributors both to the production of knowledge and to the germination of public discussions about the Armenian genocide, the way his discovery of the latest documents from the archives is presented in the news should be considered carefully, as they contain an emphasis like "*the* document has finally been found."[28] Looking at these kinds of sensational news, from the perspective Nichanian provides, necessitates to say that they give the impression that there *still* is

[28] See the following examples: Akçam, T. (2017). Soykırımın şifresi çözüldü. *Agos.* Retrieved from http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/18348/soykirimin-sifresi-cozuldu; Gazete Duvar (November 01, 2016) Taner Akçam'dan Büyük Felaketin Belgesi. Retrieved from https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/kitap/2016/11/01/taner-akcamdan-buyuk-felaketin-belgesi

a debate around the crime of genocide, that historians are *still* looking for a document to end the discussions. This impression itself, from Nichanian's perspective, is already in compliance with the wish of the perpetrator, as it once again brings the discussion into the vicious cycle of the (in)adequacy of the documents to prove the crime.

Seeing how the extermination of the Armenians has become a subject of controversy in the hands of denialist historians, especially in the 90s, thinking that history and law have been incapable of making any statement about the unique trauma of the Armenians albeit the victims have pursued the decisions of the courts and parliaments; Nichanian invites us to move away from questions like "how can we prove the genocide" and confront the loss itself, to acknowledge the traumatic character of what happened. Considering the fact that the recognition of the Armenian genocide has become the most important agenda of some organizations in the diaspora, Nichanian makes very important interventions and invites Armenians to confront "self-denial." He reminds Armenians that there is no international court that can adjudicate in the Armenian case and that this crime cannot be prosecuted in today's conditions. At this point, I think that the political significance of Nichanian's intervention cannot be underestimated as he invites the heirs of the survivors to stop imagining a scene in which this crime can be justly and adequately punished, and the loss can be recuperated.

When we consider that the Armenian literature is not being read, the language of Western Armenian gradually being forgotten, and that the most important agenda of some organizations, especially in the diaspora, has become petitioning the various senates for the acceptance of the Armenian genocide, we can easily see that Nichanian is making an urgently needed, critical political contribution and calling the

Armenians for a self-confrontation. While doing that, he shows not only that the demand to conform our acts to the perpetrator's will comes externally from the perpetrator, but also that negation forces the victim to internalize and conform to the perpetrator's will. Thus, he invites all his readers to a reevaluation of their stances towards this, to rethink if they have taken a part in this self-denial.

In psychoanalytical terms, Nichanian demonstrates that both the survivor and the executioner have the same Ego-Ideal, namely they symbolically identify[29] with the same Other, i.e., the Western gaze, though their imaginary identifications are different. Nichanian rightly criticizes having to appeal to the civilized world—that gaze that is supposed to see the victims and recognize their suffering—to try to be admirable to that gaze, that is, of having to tell the truth in a way that the gaze can validate. He describes the demand for recognition which is an appeal to the Other (Ego-Ideal) on the part of the subject to validate their symbolic position. But psychoanalysis also teaches us that this game of recognition is unwinnable, that there is no Other that could guarantee our symbolic identity. When Nichanian opposes defining, positioning, and evaluating oneself through the gaze of Other, I think he makes a proper Lacanian intervention, because he is inviting Armenians to emancipate themselves from the rule and reign of the logic of proof, and stop confining themselves to a struggle in the name of the fact. To quote Arslan, Nichanian demonstrates that "The task of facing or overcoming 1915 . . . has to also entail a struggle which doesn't expect recognition from the Other, from symbolic authority." (Arslan, p. 308).

This logic put forward by Nichanian reflects what is known in psychoanalysis as the logic of the superego, which is the name of a vicious circle in which a subject

[29] Žižek defines symbolic identification as "identification with the very place from where we are being observed, from where we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love" (2008, p. 116).

confronted with a demand (to be something, to do something, to prove something, etc.) which is impossible to fulfill; yet this impossibility transforms into inadequacy (on the part of the subject, which usually manifests itself as guilt) which paradoxically drives the subject to commit harder to this demand, which further fuels the cycle: Lacanian psychoanalysis teaches us that the more we obey the superego, the more guilty we feel. And this guilt, then, makes us want to obey more. Nichanian, in turn, argues that the more we comply with the injunction to prove, the more we deny ourselves. At the end of *The Historiographic Perversion* Nichanian claims that the endless game of proof that victims have to play if they want to prove their own death condemns them to the feeling of shame. He himself avows: "As long as I remember myself, in fact, I have felt shame" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 117).[30] Here we have to clarify that the impossibility of recognition takes on two forms: viewed from the side of Ego-Ideal which in Nichanian is described as the gaze of the civilized world, it leads to shame. The Western gaze, by ostensibly giving a stage for the survivor to speak, in effect leads the survivor to feel shame in the *gaze* of the Other, for not being able to appear as a proper victim bringing the required proofs of her victimhood. And viewed from the side of the superego which is the obscene underside of the Law, or the voice of the perpetrator, it leads to guilt. The genocidal will, by teasing the survivor with its constant injunction, saying "prove if you can," pushes the survivor to guilt for not being able to prove.

However, in reading all this, we should always keep in mind that when Nichanian criticizes the struggle for recognition, he is not doing so for the sake of reconciliation but because of his frustration and weariness caused by the long history of denialism which seems not to be ending in the near future. He is vehemently

[30] For a detailed account of the difference between the superego and the Ego-Ideal, see Žižek (2012, p. 702).

against all so-called political projects that contribute to the denial of the trauma, that attempt to bring together victims and perpetrators at the table of reconciliation. Therefore, the critique of recognition should not be conceived as an invitation to reconciliation. As neither recognition of the genocide nor reconciliation with the perpetrator can promise a real confrontation with the event, Nichanian invites Armenians to at least suspend the discussion about genocide and accept the actuality of the trauma, and approach it in different terms. How this can be attempted will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEATH OF THE WITNESS / THE INTERDICTION OF MOURNING

In the previous chapter, the topic of the discussion was how genocidal will brings about the destruction of the fact through denialism, and how history, law, and politics play their own roles in the game of proof. In this chapter, I will try to give a general explanation of the thesis that the genocidal will results in the Catastrophe, namely the interdiction of mourning, the disintegration of language, and the death of the witness. As I stated in the introduction, the following statement forms the core of Nichanian's theoretical framework: "At the core of the genocidal will there was the erasure of the fact or, more precisely, the erasure of the factuality of the fact, and *therefore* the elimination of the witness as such" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 143). In the second chapter I analyzed the first part of this sentence, that is, Nichanian's analysis of the concept of genocide and his critique of historiography. This chapter, in turn, attempts to understand how the "therefore" is established, how the genocide manifests itself as a Catastrophe for the victim, that is, how the destruction of the fact translates into an interdiction of mourning. As Nichanian heavily draws upon the literature on Holocaust, I will first recount and analyze the main tenets of the examination of the Holocaust in trauma studies and Nichanian's criticisms towards them. Second, I will try to present Nichanian's own standpoint on trauma and post-traumatic mourning by focusing upon his analysis of *Averagnerun Mech* and also on the relation he detects between philology and mourning.

3.1 Events without witnesses

In his definition of the Catastrophe as the death of the witness, Nichanian, first of all, draws on the writings of Giorgio Agamben who, especially in his book *Remnants of Auschwitz*, conceptualized the status of testimony after Auschwitz. Another conceptual framework that informs Nichanian's definition is to be found in the analysis of the Holocaust in Shoshana Felman's famous essay "In an Era of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah" (1991) and the book she co-authored with Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992). Nichanian also engages with Idelber Avelar's conceptualization of torture as that which eliminates the possibility of narrativization in his book *The Letter of Violence: Essays on Narrative, Ethics, and Politics* (2004). All these names, as I will elaborate in the subsequent sections**,** point out an impossibility, however, they also try to reconstruct the witness through the very impossibility of testimony, which is exactly the point where Nichanian draws himself apart and accuses them of giving way to an illusion, "the transcendental illusion" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 147). Felman resorts to art, Laub to therapy, and Agamben to a testimony which bears witness to the impossibility of testimony. Nichanian, on the other hand, makes it crystal clear that all attempts to narrate the event "as if the witness had been there" (2016a, p. 151) are fated to betray the event. For him, any narrative betrays the event.

Giorgio Agamben, who is one of the most important scholars in the literature on testimony, builds his own approach to the issue by making the figure of the Muselmann his focus. Agamben's analysis of Auschwitz heavily draws from Primo Levi, a Holocaust survivor who attempts exactly to name the injury of testimony. In one of his most famous books, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), Levi invites us to read the memoirs of the survivors, however, he also notes that one could approach

them carefully since "in the inhuman conditions to which they were subjected, the prisoners could barely acquire an overall vision of their universe" (Levi, 1989, p. 17).[31] In the introduction of the book, Levi refers to testimonies and thinks about who can testify and to what extent they can do so. He concludes:

> I must repeat: we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses . . . We are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the "Muslims," the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance. They are the rule, we are the exception. (1989, pp. 83-84)

These figures, somewhere between life and death, incapable of speaking, standing in stunned silence, moving around as if they are merely breathing automata, described in the testimonies of survivors as "a staggering corpse," "mummy-men, the living dead" (as cited in Agamben, 1999, p. 41), were called Muselmann.[32] For Levi, the Muslims, "those who have seen the Gorgon" were the real witnesses, and since they could not talk, it was his own ethical duty to speak of and for them: "we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses…We speak in their stead, by proxy" (as cited in Agamben, 1999, p. 34). Levi keeps describing the Muselmann, strongly arguing for talking in his name. While pointing out the distance between the survivors and the "real" witnesses, Levi tries to approach what they experienced. He takes it as his ethical obligation to testify to the muteness of the real witnesses.

[31] For instance, sometimes the inmates could not even know where they were, mostly unaware of who was killed and who survived.

[32] The origin of the term, Muselmann, is explained by Agamben as follows: "The inhabitants of the camps apparently thought of Islam as an unconditional obedience to the will of Allah, and this is associated with fatalism. Whatever happens to us is coming from Allah. Those in Auschwitz seem to have submitted to their destiny, showing no signs of any will and consciousness" (Agamben, p.45). This meaning given to the word Muselmann is congruent with the fact that etymologically, the root of the word Muslim means the one who has surrendered.

Agamben has written extensively on this figure, establishing it as the truth of Auschwitz,[33] that which one must face in order to understand Auschwitz. Levi had grasped the truth of Auschwitz because he had dared to approach the Muselmann, "to gaze with him upon the Gorgon" (Nichanian, 2008, p. 52). But what exactly is the Gorgon? What does it mean to see it? First of all, Gorgon is not a positive entity. "The Muselmann has neither seen nor known anything, if not the impossibility of knowing and seeing" (Agamben, 1999, p. 54). Facing the Gorgon amounts to facing this impossibility, entering a zone in between life and death, humanity, and non-humanity. According to Agamben, this in-betweenness is the very truth of Auschwitz.[34]

Daring to look at the Muselmann, then, is the only way to say something about the Gorgon. Those who speak in the name of the Muselmann might not be the complete witnesses, however, they are the ones who testify to the impossibility of testifying. "Whoever assumes the charge of bearing witness in their name," Agamben argues, "knows that he or she must bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness" (Agamben, 1999, p.34). Following Levi and Agamben's reading of the former, Nichanian states:

> They were 'experiencing' a limit of humanity, this is very clear. But like all 'experiences' of limits, this one was paradoxical as well, because there is (there should have been) no return from this limit. And you have to return in order to witness the limit, to insert it into an audible discourse for civilized humanity. (Nichanian, 2003, p. 140)

[33] Auschwitz is the word preferred by Agamben. He refuses to use the word "Holocaust" because of the history of anti-Semitic connotations of the word. See *Remnants of Auschwitz* (Agamben, pp. 28-31).

[34] I want to note down that Agamben strictly opposes the dehumanization of the Muselmann, arguing that dehumanization is actually the very will of the perpetrator. The Muselmann is in "a zone of the human" (Nichanian, 2008, p. 63) where "morality and humanity themselves are called into question" (Nichanian, 2008, p. 63), which obliges those who try to understand them to question the distinction between humanity and animality. As Žižek concisely explains, The Muselmann is "not simply outside language (as is the case with the animal), he is the absence of language as such" (Žižek, 2002, p. 77) which is why it leads us to interrogate the inhumanity "inherent to 'humanity'" (p. 77).

In a similar vein**,** Felman and Laub define the Holocaust as "a radical historical crisis of witnessing" (1992, p. xvii) and they argue that the uniqueness of the Holocaust stems from its status as "an event without a witness" (p. 200) as it was a crime targeting first and foremost the murder of its own witnesses. Even though Felman and Laub follow different trajectories—as the former is a literary critic and the latter a psychoanalyst—both of their frameworks are informed by the concept of trauma. Accordingly, what renders an event traumatic stems from the inability of the victim to grasp the event as part of reality. Traumatic events take place outside usual parameters such as "causality, sequence, place and time" (p. 69) which makes them timeless, without a beginning and an end. As categories to grasp the event are unavailable for the victim, an absolute otherness prevails, which makes it impossible for the victim to narrativize what exactly happened. Therapy, in turn, is built upon the promise that narrativizing the unnaratable, speaking about the unspeakable, giving meaning to the meaningless will help the victim heal.

But what exactly differentiated the Holocaust from an ordinary trauma, what made it unique according to Laub? The uniqueness of the event lay in the way it made witnessing impossible. According to Laub, the Nazis didn't only physically kill the victims, they also interfered with their psychological capabilities. "The inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own witnessing, even by its very victim" (p. 80). In order to observe and bear witness, survivors needed to throw away the frame of reference imposed by the Nazis, which was impossible to do, especially in a concentration camp.[35] Laub

[35] Laub explains this impossibility as the result of the dialectic of the subject and the other. In order for a human being to bear witness to themselves and what they experience, Laub asserts, they need others that will help the subject to perceive relations of identity and difference. When one is deprived of others to whom one can call out or by whom one is recognized, one cannot bear witness to themselves or the others for that matter. He argues that the world of Holocaust is "a world in which the very imagination of the Other was no longer possible" (p. 81). When the frame of reference is

asserts that the intervention to identification makes the Nazi system "foolproof" (p. 82), because this system, on the one hand, makes external witnessing impossible—people either don't see or they act as if they are not seeing—and, on the other hand, convinces the witnesses of their "inhumanity," their inability to communicate. The witnesses become solely victims whose cognitive capacities are targeted by a machine. According to Laub, it is impossible to understand what happens to oneself within the camp: "it was beyond the limits of human ability" (p. 84).

Since the event cannot be integrated, it "continues into the present and is current in every respect" (p. 69). Using Lacanian terms, Laub suggests, "the real is that which always comes back to the same place" (Laub, p. 68). So what is the solution for Laub? He fundamentally stresses the need for an other who will listen to the survivor, and recommends a therapeutic process which he defines as "a process of constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and eventually, of re-externalizing the event" (p. 69). According to this viewpoint, it is necessary to "reconstruct" and "reaffirm" the "historical narrative" (p. 69). In addition to therapy, Laub advocates for autobiographical accounts of trauma, which he also took part in. In both methods, he suggests, the presence of a listening other makes "re-externalization" and "historicization" possible.[36] Why the need for an other? Because, he states, one can only construct their identity by propping it up to an other. And according to him, Holocaust precisely erased the possibility of an other who could listen to, and recognize one's subjectivity. The subject devoid of the other is invalidated from being a subject, because subject is defined by Laub as the capacity of being the witness of one's own experience. The aim of the therapeutic process is,

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taken away, identification is no longer possible. The breakdown of symbolic identification also makes any kind of imaginary identification impossible, which in turn results in the failure to differentiate between "I" and "you."

[36] He doesn't elaborate on the differences between these two methods but only asserts that there is a common point between them: the listening process.

then, to reconstruct the other and make narrativization possible again, in order to belatedly bear witness to the event which couldn't be properly witnessed as it happened, therefore curing the survivor.

In short, Laub sees therapy or listening in general as a way to retroactively recuperate witnessing. Felman, on the other hand, draws attention to the power of literature and art in general to bear witness to what she conceives as the unsayable. Let us recall the main argument of Felman's proverbial essay, "In an Era of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah" (1991), which, as the title suggests, is about Lanzmann's *Shoah*, a 556-minute film made of testimonies of witnesses of the Holocaust, which Felman defines as "an event without a witness" (p. 82). According to Felman, what makes *Shoah* unique is that it does not simply try to create a total narrative or a theoretical conceptualization of the Holocaust for instance by collecting testimonies to add up different details from different positions to make a whole. On the contrary, *Shoah* is more about how the participants of the disaster had their own ways of not witnessing which brings Holocaust "as an event essentially unwitnessed" (p. 45), "both because it precludes seeing and because it precludes the possibility of a community of seeing" (p. 45). Felman admires the film for she thinks that Lanzmann makes us closer to the experience of not-understanding-what-is-going-on, which, according to Felman, is the very core of the experience of the Holocaust. Through this state of incomprehension, Felman describes the situation that Laub names as a state of not being an authentic witness to herself.

According to Felman, what makes *Shoah* unique is that it lays bare "the incommensurability of different topographical and cognitive positions" (p. 42). *Shoah* introduces three perspectives from three different groups: victims (the surviving Jews), perpetrators (ex-Nazis), and bystanders (the Poles), each having

witnessed and not witnessed the disaster in dissimilar ways, in line with different codes and possibilities of visibility and invisibility. However, Felman does not suggest that *Shoah* simply and only points out how seeing was precluded; on the contrary, she scrutinizes and embraces the film precisely because it both hints at an impossibility and "calls upon a witnessing by seeing" (p. 42). What makes *Shoah* unique is that it succeeds in making the spectator bear witness by resorting to various methods peculiar to film, varying from the nature of the questions asked by Lanzmann to his positioning himself as a narrator and inquirer, and to many other techniques employed by Lanzmann, to which I will not refer here. Furthermore, *Shoah,* she states, is about the present rather than the past, as it does not take the event as something belonging merely to history and the past but explores the relationship between history, art, and testimony, which makes it a film "about the witnessing of a catastrophe" (p. 40), a film which "embodies the capacity of art not simply to witness, but to take the witness's stand" (p. 41), a film which "calls upon a witnessing by seeing" (p. 42). Lanzmann does not include any historical footage but lends his ear to witnesses speaking here and now. It makes people speak, it makes silence visible, and it invites the spectator to be a witness, to encounter the Shoah. Drawing on this documentary which via different techniques makes the viewer experience the inability to bear witness, Felman argues that art makes testimony possible by making its audience bear witness to the impossibility of bearing witness.

As Nichanian surveys this impossibility and the relation between survival and denial, he focuses on the methods that the psychoanalytic literature has invented to treat the victims of torture, his main reference being Idelber Avelar's writings on torture and violence in the context of Latin-American dictatorships.[37] Nichanian

[37] See Avelar, I. (1999, 2004).

explains his admiration of Avelar in the following way: Avelar discusses torture by relating it to witnessing and its impossibility, and he demonstrates that the ultimate aim and result of torture is "that it excludes him [the subject] from his humanity once and for all" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 148).

When we read the relevant chapter from Avelar's book in the light of Laub's approach discussed above, it can be seen that Avelar's arguments about torture echo Laub's argument about the Holocaust: He states that "torture produces a world in which one can no longer be a witness, since the very act of imagining the other, the very postulation of a 'you' has been canceled in advance" (Avelar, 2004 p. 48). The reason behind Nichanian taking Avelar as a reference point is Avelar's insistence on the point that the therapeutic processes based on narrativization has to imply or include self-denial.

Their difference, as I am going to discuss in the next section, stems from the fact that Avelar insists that narrativization is absolutely indispensable for properly dealing with trauma. He argues that the idea that what survivors went through is explainable or easily understandable provokes resistance from traumatized subjects, that victims of torture resist language and narration; and he declares the ultimate goal of therapy to be the dismantling of this resistance. But how does therapy overcome this resistance? What use is there to therapy in the case of torture? The method Avelar is advocating for is healing through narrativization, advocated also by Laub, which is based on the idea that by speaking, that is, by means of a "diegetic organization of the past monstrosity" (Nichanian, 2016a, p.150), the victims can distance themselves from what they went through, from "the world of insanity" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 150) they were dragged into and from "the destructive guilt" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 149) they feel. Avelar's suggestion, to sum up, is basically "a

retrospective construction of the witness, at the very place where every act of witnessing has been eliminated" (as cited by Nichanian, 2016a, p.150). Thus, Avelar and Laub, respectively drawing on torture and Holocaust, argue that narrativization during therapy can recuperate the witness in a human destroyed by a traumatic event. Nichanian agrees with Avelar insofar as he exposes this deadlock and asserts that survival is denial, yet their views stop being congruent as Nichanian insists on the impossibility of testimony.

3.2 The death of the witness

All these scholars inform Nichanian's own approach to trauma and testimony, though he criticizes them insofar as they recuperate the witness of the trauma. For him, they all get caught up in a "transcendental illusion" which makes them believe in the possibility of "a retrospective construction of the witness" (Nichanian, 2016a, p.147). Let us start with his critique of the premise of narrativization: Both Avelar's and Laub's arguments state that the post-traumatic intervention should be the recuperation of the witness, retroactively through narrativization of the traumatic event. Nichanian's objection to this solution is that it disregards the fact that this particular event, that is, torture, "does not obey the usual laws of reception of events, *even traumatic ones*" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 149). Nichanian argues that the trauma caused by the torturous/genocidal will is different from all other traumas, therefore parting his way with trauma studies. He draws attention to the illusory character of this promise of healing in the following way: "Through psychoanalytic therapy . . . one acts *as if* [emphasis added] the witness had been there, making the narration possible after all" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 151). He asserts that whereas we normally can heal through narrativizing a traumatic event, in the case of torture and genocide,

this is simply impossible. Because once the victim of the torture starts narrativizing the event, he automatically "betrays the fact that the event (here, the very act of torture) was *destined* [emphasis added] to destroy the language that usually receives events, metabolizes them, and integrates them into its symbolic chain" (p. 149).

In both torture and genocide, the goal is to damage the language of the victim, to prevent them from witnessing the imposed situation. "There is no possible cure for someone who has been tortured" (p. 149), that is to say, for someone who has been deprived of language. Whereas all other traumas would normally be integrated into language by symbolization, "no narration, no narrative, no story can integrate into language the disintegration of language" (p. 150). Thus, Nichanian's point is that the disintegration of language inflicted by the will to annihilation poses an exception to all traumas in that it does not allow any narrativization of itself. But how does this happen exactly? How come that the event cannot be narrativized? Nichanian's response to this proceeds from two streams of thought: historiography and post-Holocaust trauma studies.

The argument built upon the critique of historiography is the following: As I discussed in the second chapter, Nichanian states that historiography, as the genocidal will destroys the traces of its own destruction and guarantees that the remnants of the crime—the testimonies or this or that document—are not to be counted as evidence for the crime. Genocidal will, he states, knows very well how history flows, how knowledge is established, what is counted as proof and what is not. Genocidal will, as it negates which was negated by it, destroys all the documents and sweeps away all the evidence for the genocidal intention, induces the survivors to prove their own destruction. Survivors, in turn, become slaves to the "compulsion to prove" which prevents them from seeing the truth of what befell them.

Even beyond proving the genocide, they think they can express what they went through by means of testimony or literary narratives. They suppose that they can talk about what happened to them. But, drawing upon post-Holocaust trauma studies, Nichanian argues that what has happened is beyond speech. Insofar as survivors cannot witness their own experience, as they cannot narrate what they lived, they cannot be witnesses, ergo they cannot be subjects. The genocidal will fundamentally aims to deprive its victim of their subjecthood, and it succeeds in this, at least according to Nichanian.

What about acknowledging that the compulsion to prove drives our actions, or what about truly grasping the goal of the genocidal will; could these recuperate the witness? Nichanian's response is in the negative. Here we come to the point where Nichanian's inspiration and departure from trauma studies starts to manifest itself. According to Nichanian, trauma studies have correctly identified that the Holocaust, or torture as events without witnesses, but they betrayed this insight by assuming that narrativization and the recuperation of the witness are possible. Nichanian opposes this line of thought by arguing that the witness died once and for all, because it is impossible to bear witness to the experience of being the victim of the genocidal will. The experience of the Catastrophe cannot be witnessed, there is no way to revert it: "The survivor's experience is that of a loss beyond repair, both particular and extreme" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 147). What has the survivor lost for Nichanian? The capacity to bear witness, namely the language which would symbolize the event. "The witness's death amounts to a disintegration of the language that could have integrated the event, the destruction as event." (p. 147), and the disintegration, in turn, amounts to the loss of subjecthood. A human being, in so far as she cannot testify to her own experience, is not a subject, therefore, survivor is not a subject of

her own history. If the survivors have lost "the very capacity to speak the loss" (p. 147) will they ever be able to tell what they went through? The answer is negative.

Nichanian compares the witness and survivor figures in order to demonstrate that survivors cannot ever be witnesses, that they can only end up as dead witnesses. Survivors, he states, cannot bear witness to the event, for the genocidal will has killed their capacity to bear witness. For Nichanian, psychoanalysis is doomed to fail to provide a cure for someone who has been tortured and in general, for someone who is subject to a will that aims at destroying humanity in its victim. So, if healing ordinarily comes through narrativization, because the narrativization of the disintegration of language is impossible, it seems like Nichanian conceives of no other choice for the psychoanalyst but to act *as if* language has not disintegrated, and to force the survivor "to deny his very experience" (p. 149). In fact, Avelar argues that therapy has to intervene in the victim's firm belief that she will never be able to tell what she went through: "any true therapy has to labor against the effects of the perception that the cleanliness of language has been compromised" (as cited in Nichanian, 2011, p. 28). Since language has actually been compromised, the task of the therapist is to sort of deceive by confirming the survivor that his language has actually been not compromised.

Nichanian argues that making the victim believe that his language has not disintegrated boils down to betraying the event for the sake of "normality" (p. 28), however, he also admits that a therapist cannot offer anything else, for "there is no possible cure for someone who has suffered torture" (p. 28). Betrayal, then, is a necessity. There is no other way. No survivor can say that he is deprived of his language. He even goes as far as to argue that victims irretrievably lost their language and humanity: "no one can actually accept being excluded forever,

irreversibly from humanity. No one can accept that the event was an 'event-without-a-witness" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 151). The death of the witness which is at stake in torture and the Catastrophe poses an exception to the general procedures of therapy in that one must betray and deny the event.

Thus, we are once again talking about denial, but this time, denial, though in a different form, is performed not by the perpetrator, but by the survivor. There is a crucial distinction in Nichanian's framework*: denegation* of the exterminator and *self-denial* of the victim and of those who identify with the victim. Denegation, the various forms of which we have discussed at length in the second chapter, is peculiar to the executioner and its defenders, and it is based on denying one's own act. Every time Nichanian talks about the denegation of the perpetrator, he immediately moves toward the implications of this denegation for the survivor, as denegation and self-denial are inextricably linked.

"Denial is the price that must be paid for survival" (p. 151), Nichanian states. In order to survive, survivors have no other option than to deny their status as dead witnesses. As it is impossible to narrate, as long as they believe that they can narrate, they automatically deny the event. And if they do not deny the event and choose to refute all kinds of narration, madness awaits at their door. "The event is beyond all reason, all history, certainly all memory as well. That is why the survivor cannot escape madness" (2002, p. 15) unless he behaves as if (s)he has not lost the capacity to narrate his experience. The survivor, therefore, is "the figure of self-denial par excellence" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 143). He is "close to betraying himself at every moment. He is radically ignorant of the Catastrophe. He asks for recognition and justice. He appeals to the tribunals, sometimes even to national legislations" (p. 163). This complete unawareness of the death of the witness is "unavoidable" as it is

"inherent to the structure of the Catastrophe" (Nichanian, 2012a, p. 265). The survivor "has to live on as a ghost, as the ghost of the dead witness, who has no place for himself on this earth any more unless he denies being the ghost that he actually is" (p. 255). In fact, the witness must deny this experience to survive: "to survive means to deny" (Nichanian, 2011, p. 31).

But if the witness is dead, what do the testimonies written by survivors tell us about the Catastrophe? Nichanian's answer is clear: "Testimony cannot say anything about the Catastrophe" (p. 157). Though historical testimony gives the impression of bearing witness to the Catastrophe, it can never succeed in this, since any narrativization is a betrayal of the experience of the event. The meaning that the event gets after narrativization is not the same as "the nature of the event" (p. 31) which consists of eliminating the witness. Thus, Nichanian once more asserts that the reality established by the Symbolic is founded on eliminating the truth of the event.

If the Catastrophe has the effect of making the signification of the event impossible, if the witnesses cannot talk about "the event in itself," they are, then, nothing more than subjects supposed to witness (p. 33). That is exactly why Nichanian disagrees with Agamben's transformation of the impossibility of testimony itself to the very possibility of a true testimony, which is a betrayal seen from the standpoint of Nichanian's own project that constantly emphasizes the impossibility of bearing witness.[38] The witness has died, he states, and it is an illusion to believe that one can recuperate it. In a similar vein, Nichanian disagrees

[38] In addition to this, Nichanian criticizes Agamben's attempts to make Levi's paradox the proof of Auschwitz. For instance, Agamben states that "If the witness bears witness for the Muselmann, if he succeeds in bringing to speech an impossibility of speech—if the Muselmann is thus constituted as the whole witness—then the denial of Auschwitz is refuted in its very foundation" (Agamben, 1999, p. 164). In response to this, Nichanian asserts that he is uncomfortable with the juxtaposition of testimony and concepts such as proof, reality, and refutation, no matter what: "There is still something troubling (for me, it is exceedingly troubling) in seeing the vocabulary of *proof,* of *reality,* and of *refutation* used in the context of the significance and vocation of testimony, well beyond their function in the establishment of the fact" (Nichanian, 2009, p.86).

with Felman's views insofar as Nichanian, unlike Felman, does not cast art in the role of the witness of trauma. In fact, he criticizes Felman for ascribing to art the capacity to witness, which amounts, according to him, "to ignore the significance of the witness's death" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 142).

How are we going to read testimonies, then? We have already seen that Nichanian refuses to regard testimonies as document. Isn't there another option? If the witnesses are not really witnesses, survivors denying the truth of the very event which befell them, and if testimonies cannot even be utilized as documents, what are we to do with them?

3.3 Testimony as monument

Nichanian argues that testimony has to this day been adopted in two different ways: as document and especially since the 1990s, as monument. The first one—the realist option—obeys the logic of the archive, whereas the second one, the emblematic option, is the product of a quite contrary approach to testimony, which became possible only in the last couple of years following series of philosophical, political, and historiographical debates revolving around the testimonies of Holocaust survivors. Whereas testimony as document, that is, defined in the sense of reading testimonies as representations of reality, is "always instrumentalized" (Nichanian, 2008, p. 45), that is, doomed to be used as an instrument for the genocidal will, which as Nichanian adds is a horrendously humiliating experience for the survivor, "testimony as monument" he suggests, exists "only for itself" (p. 45), which means that they can be studied "as such, in their structure, their temporality, their narrative devices, their claims, their historicity, their representational function" (pp. 13-14).

As to the historical background of the emergence of this new kind of approach to testimonies, Nichanian describes how especially since the 1970s memory studies and testimony projects rise around the world, which is a process with two different outcomes: on the one hand, historians like Carlo Ginzburg attempt at making testimony into valid evidence just as any document. On the other hand, testimony begins to be seen as that which will protect victims and their reality against the proof-demanding-injunctions of positivist and negationist historiography, as that which will enable survivors to share their experience. Nichanian criticizes Ginzburg for being blind to this "testimonial revolution" (p. 2) which Nichanian celebrates since it cut testimony loose from the injunction to prove: "once they have become monuments" testimonies "can finally be considered for what they are, independently of any reconstructing gaze and any will to make them function as evidence" (p. 6).

For instance, Lanzmann's *Shoah* took "into account testimony as monument and no longer as document" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 95). And if we come to the theoretical stage, names like Felman, Agamben, and Lyotard ultimately go after the possibility for testimonies to be read differently, not according to the rules of factuality, that is, apart from their value as document or evidence. Against the state of the countless tones of documents which were collected for documentation and then abandoned in archives, Nichanian himself outcries: "Testimonies as monuments will have, perhaps, a chance to be read. With no spectral presence. Finally rid of the fact and of the historians' history! Finally rid of the reality principle!" (p. 104). In parallel to this cry in his article "Testimony from Document to Monument" he himself defines his aim as "an abridged account of the production of Armenian

testimonies in the twentieth century, read as monuments and not as documents" (Nichanian, 2008, p. 7).

Let us try to understand how testimony as document was adopted among the Armenian literary circles, by investigating the discussions and controversies between them: When Nichanian looks at the Armenian literary circles he sees that those who cared about archiving the events adopted the documentary option, that is, they either wrote eye-witness accounts or gathered and translated testimonies, excluding every kind of narrative form or content that would overshadow the brute reality of the facts. But there is an obverse to testimony as document with which it always coexists, namely the literary option. Armenian writers faced with the Catastrophe were stuck between employing testimony as evidence and looking for ways to '"sublimate' testimony" (Nichanian, 2009, p.114), to redeem it from its documentary function, in order words, to literalize it. Thus, those who wanted to get rid of the shame brought about by witnessing and those who thought literature was more effective for grasping the truth, or for making the Western gaze turn toward the sufferings of Armenians embraced literature, and they produced texts with shocking and gory details, which Nichanian holds in contempt.[39] All in all, only the documentary and the literary use of testimony were available to Armenians, and both of these options aimed at making the Other witness the suffering of Armenians, though in different ways.

He argues that neither testimony as document nor the testimonies claimed to be literature or art could bear witness to the Catastrophe. "These pseudo-artistic descriptions are nothing other than a sheer abuse of the events" (Nichanian, 2011, p. 25). Even though they did what they did in order to escape the discourse of history, what they did, he states, is merely exploiting cruelty. They could "not escape the

[39] An appropriate example is Souren Bartevian's book on the Adana massacre. Although it is addressed to Europeans, it is written in Armenian and not translated to any foreign language. See Nichanian (2014, p. 137).

dichotomy of literature (art) and testimony (history), which is itself conjured and regulated by the archive" (2009, p. 111). In fact, here we see how history and literature are defined and separated from the point of view of archival logic, the distinction between fact and fiction being the founding element of the two disciplines, that is, both disciplines defining themselves through their difference from the other.[40]

When we take into consideration that Nichanian defines his project as a "phenomenology of the survivor," which basically aims to grasp how the survivor experiences herself, the importance that he gives to reading testimonies as monuments becomes more apparent as they might give an understanding about the experience of survival. But what is confusing is that Nichanian also admits that he is reluctant to adopt testimony as monument as something totally different and distinct from testimony as document; for testimony, regardless of whether it is document or monument, is ultimately doomed to be subjected to the gaze of the Other. Testimony, as it ultimately is written or pronounced for an other, desires visibility. So, testimony as monument might also not be able to approach the Catastrophe as it is constantly prone to be entrapped by the executioner's desire which is to drag the victims into a Western-refereed competition of visibility, which it hopes to achieve by preventing the victims from noticing that the Catastrophe is invisible. As opposed to the doxa which "made the possibility of the event contingent on the possibility of testimony" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 101), Nichanian, let aside reaching the event through witnesses, defines the event as the very erasure of the witness. This erasure cannot be represented; it is doomed to be invisible. That is why any attempt at visibility which appeals to the gaze of the Other, regardless of how well-intentioned it is, is prone to

[40] See Anidjar (pp. 127-128) for a discussion of this reciprocity of history and literature.

tame the traumatic character of the event. As it was put above, the death of the witness constitutes in Nichanian's perspective an exception to all events, insofar as the death of the witness, in addition to his own biological death, is the only thing that an individual cannot bear witness to.

3.4 Mourning the Catastrophe

If the Catastrophe is the death of the witness, the breakdown of linguistic integrity, and if history, law, and politics cannot say anything about Catastrophe, can we at least testify to the impossibility of testimony? Nichanian asserts that "only a linguistic act which is beyond witnessing can bear witness to the impossibility of the witnessing" (Nichanian, 2011, p. 33). Such a linguistic act can only be performed by literature, which, in its failure in the attempt to represent the Catastrophe, bumps into the Catastrophe. "The Catastrophe is not an empirical event" (Nichanian, 2002, p. 246), that is why it can neither be described positively nor approached directly. When Nichanian defines the Catastrophe as the death of the witness, he is not making a *positive* definition but shows how it can be designated only *negatively*, as that which cannot be put into language. The Catastrophe is "neither an object nor an instance, nor a fact . . . As soon as a discourse claims to appropriate it, as an object, instance, or fact, it shies away, disappears from the horizon." (Nichanian, 2002, p. 166). Since the Catastrophe amounts to the shattering of language, how literature fails, how it hits the limits of language, can give us a glimpse of the Catastrophe, for it enacts a similar impossibility. Hence, we cannot bypass literature and aim for the objective truth by following so-called realist disciplines; truth itself arises out of the failure of literature.

However, when Nichanian argues that "only literature could speak about the Catastrophe" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 141) he is not talking about narration, since the Catastrophe is not something that can be narrated. And I want to repeat once more that Nichanian does not define the Catastrophe as the sum of atrocities. For him, speaking about the Catastrophe has nothing to do with describing horror or depicting scenes of rape, etc. But he is not merely objecting to the content of the description, because the Catastrophe is already not something to be described. Literature has the potential to speak about the Catastrophe solely and exclusively through its failure. But what kind of a failure is he talking about?

As I elaborated on the documentary and literary adoptions of testimony, I had mentioned that Nichanian cites famous novelist and playwright Levon Shant (1869-1951) as one of the pioneers of the front against the literarization of the extermination of Armenians. He says that Şant had no idea about the fact that literature, or better, the failure of literature was the only thing that could say something about the Catastrophe. Armenian literature faced with the Catastrophe had to make a choice between objectively testifying to the reality and narrativizing the events by literature. The language of literature fell short for the writers who were trying to convey the Catastrophe. Should they write literary works, or should they try to be objective? This question, Nichanian recounts, has occupied many authors. Yet, since the Catastrophe is ultimately about the failure of language, it is precisely this indecision that will tell us something about it.

Nichanian assigns himself the task of reading how literature fails. He is calling this kind of reading, "reading that which has never been written," "the supreme science" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 141). So, there are two different practices: the first one is literature, which *speaks* about the Catastrophe, and the second one is

what he calls the supreme science, which *reads* the failure of literature. His three-volume studies on Armenian literature could be considered as an example of this science. In the next section, I will present Nichanian's reading of the book *Averagnerun Mech* and try to show both how literature can approach the Catastrophe and what this supreme science as it is done by Nichanian can be like.

3.4.1 Averagnerun Mech

Averagnerun Mech is a testimonial account of the aftermath of the 1909 massacres of Armenians in Adana, written by Zabel Yesayan (1878-1943).[41] In his writings on this book, Nichanian mainly asks why and how Yesayan was able to write *Averagnerun Mech* which he describes as "a monument of mourning" (Nichanian, 2011, p. 54) and "a book of testimony" (Kazanjian & Nichanian, 2013, p.135): "Bir tanıklık kitabıdır ve kuşkusuz, tanıklığı edebiyata dönüştürebilen *tek* [emphasis added] Ermenice eserdir" (Nichanian, 2011, p. 42).

In order to grasp why this book holds a place so unique for Nichanian, I want to refer first to his survey of the Armenian literature from 1895 onwards. Nichanian states that after 1895-6 pogroms, almost no testimonies were published, one of the main reasons for which must have been the intensive censorship during Abdülhamid II's reign (1876-1909). In this period, only a few works of literature were written, most of them being full of blood and terror, describing the horrors experienced by the victims in great detail. According to Nichanian, these authors became incapable of understanding what was really going on, so there was

[41] For Yesayan's life and work, see Bilal M. & Ekmekçioğlu L. (2006), *Bir Adalet Feryadı.* Aras Yayıncılık; Rowe, V. (2003) *A History of Armenian Women's Writing, 1880-1922*. Gomidas Inst.; Bilal, Melissa and Lerna Ekmekçioğlu. *Feminism in Armenian: An Interpretive Anthology* (Stanford University Press, Forthcoming 2023). See also Tataryan, N. (2020, April). Zabel Yesayan Feminist Miydi? *Çatlak Zemin.* Retrieved from: https://www.5harfliler.com/zabel-yesayan-feminist-miydi/ I also would like to mention the documentary by Talin Suciyan and Lara Aharonian, named "Finding Zabel Yesayan," which I think elegantly captures how Yesayan was forgotten, and how she is or might be refound. Retrieved from https://vimeo.com/160420510

nothing for them to do but to describe the suffering of the victims, for example by depicting harrowing scenes of rape at length, with the intent of shocking and debilitating the readers. Though testimonies and articles were being written and translated to several European languages, literature was not yet capable of recounting what was going on, for "the time of mourning has not yet come" (Nichanian, 2003, p. 99).[42]

After 1909, thanks to the relatively free environment provided by the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, more books were written which could be regarded as fitting examples for the literary option; "none of them, however, succeeds in describing the horror of death and survival" (Nichanian, 2003, p. 100). Alongside describing the sufferings of the Armenians, these works attempted to call out to "the representatives of human justice" dwelling "beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire" (p. 100). According to Nichanian, these books are not authentic works of literature. Apparently, "barred from mourning" (p. 100), Armenians were incapable of producing art.

Nevertheless, Nichanian points out a notable exception to this aridity: Yesayan's *Averagnerun Mech,* which, in Nichanian's view, is an authentic book of

[42] Nichanian states that after the Catastrophe, for a long while, nobody could approach the Catastrophe, and it took many years before someone to actually attempt it. And to substantialize his claim, he gives two novels as examples, Kurken Mahari's *Burning Orchards* (1966) and Zareh Vorpuni's *The Candidate* (1967). He thinks that "Mahari's novel was the first serious attempt at mourning after the Catastrophe" (2002**,** p. 146). Mahari, through his confrontation with his father's death, faces the "paternal catastrophe," defined as "a death with no possible mourning" (p. 168). According to Nichanian, what makes Mahari's work exceptional is that he depicts the Van Revolt without any nationalist or heroic undertones, disregarding any kind of utilitarian calculation; and he instead draws attention to the failure of the revolutionaries, weaknesses of human beings and the destruction. What makes Vorpouni's novel exceptional, in turn, is that literature and the possibilities its form presents enable the dead witness to speak, which actually represents the power of "fictional testimonies" as opposed to "real testimonies" (Nichanian, 2016b, p. 165). In this example, the dead witness speaks through a letter. After murdering his Turkish friend, an Armenian man decides committing suicide and writes a letter to his friend, stating that he is writing as a dead witness, as a human who witnessed his own death, as he realizes that that the murder of their friend meant his own death. I want to note here that since I am not a literary scholar, I cannot make an analysis of Nichanian's choice of writers and cannot elaborate further on the reasons why he picks especially these particular texts and writers, but I think that these questions should definitely be asked. For example, why among all female writers only Yesayan's name is mentioned is a question that needs to be asked.

mourning. Let me summarize the story behind this book: After the massacres in Adana, Yesayan was assigned by the Armenian patriarchate of Istanbul as a member of the delegation sent to Adana to recount the events and tend the stricken, especially, the orphaned children. She stayed there for three months, and two years later, she published *Averagnerun Mech*. What makes this book so peculiar for Nichanian is that Yesayan neither narrates the massacres—for she was not there at the time—nor does she try to fictionalize what she herself witnessed. She merely voices what she, after the massacres, bears witness to, what the people she talks with tell her. Nichanian avers that Yesayan's exceptionality in the sense of "approaching" the Catastrophe, among other things, stems from the fact that she does not "contend herself with making 'literature'" as it was being practiced at that time, but writes "in the form of a direct testimony" (p. 111). However, Yesayan does not write it for the purpose of proving the massacre. For Nichanian, Yesayan is not pursuing a realist testimony that can be adopted to attract the gaze of the foreign countries which supposedly could bring justice by listening to her voice. He says that this book "is in no way a political response to the interdiction [of mourning]" (p. 109). The justification for this not being a political response comes for Nichanian from the fact that Yesayan is neither trying to create an archive, nor she is trying to reach out to Western states.

But which genre does the book belong to? Undoubtedly it is a testimony, but what kind of testimony? Does it have similarities with other testimonies written in those days? According to Nichanian, it is not a work of literature according to the literary standards of its day. In fact, Hagop Oshagan, in *Hamabadger arevmdahay kraganutyan* [*Համապատկեր արեւմտահայ գրականութեան;* Panorama of Western Armenian Literature] characterizes Yesayan's book not as a work of literature but as

a chronicle, and sometimes as a testimony, with the acknowledgment that the book defied easy labeling. Nichanian himself avows that he himself, just like his master Oshagan, is confused about the genre of the book: "I myself do not know what to call the genre adopted by Esayan" (Nichanian, 2002, p. 210). Thus, though he does not explicitly assert that the book is a work of art, he definitely regards it as a book of testimony. At one point, he says that "*if* it is art, then . . . art is mourning" (Nichanian, 2003, p. 101). It seems like Nichanian cannot decide upon this issue. Even though he doesn't declare a certain opinion on this point, the very discussion of genre makes the book very important in the eyes of Nichanian. It is such a novel text written in response to such a unique event as Catastrophe that it cannot find a genre of its own.

The question Nichanian asks is: why then does Yesayan write this book? Is it to provide evidence for the massacres? Obviously not, for that would not enable her to attempt to approach the Catastrophe. She writes this book, at least in Nichanian's viewpoint, because "if she does not bear witness to her experience of the unnameable, she too will be carried away by delirium and irrationality" (p. 101). The keyword in this sentence is "the unnameable," for Yesayan does not bear witness merely to what she has seen, but "she bears witness to an experience, that of the Catastrophe. No one before her had tried to do this" (p. 101).

But why or how exactly does she succeed in doing that? Alongside recounting what she bears witness to, Yesayan "recounts how at each moment she is submerged, engulfed by the horrifying misery of the stricken" (p. 101). Yesayan tries to imagine how the stricken could endure all these sufferings, which is a very painful process. She writes the book, according to Nichanian, because that is the only way for her to "liberate herself from the terror, from the too great identification with the

stricken" (p. 101). In other words, as Yesayan tries to imagine what happened, she identifies with the victims to such an extent that she feels obliged to write in order to get rid of the destructive effect of this identification.

Nichanian hints at an indissoluble bond between imagination and identification when he suggests that "to imagine is, of course, to identify with" (p. 110). But what is it exactly that Yesayan is trying to imagine? She emphasizes several times in each chapter that what is impossible to imagine is "the *sum* [emphasis added] of sufferings, . . . precisely as a totality" (as cited in Nichanian, 2003, p. 111). Or, she says: "I was unable—despite superhuman efforts—to grasp the totality of their misfortune, and still today I cannot" (as cited in Nichanian, p. 110). But why is she trying to do that? Why does she feel the need for imagining the totality in the first place? Nichanian argues that the Catastrophe "calls for, it demands, an image of the totality, the *sum*" (p. 111). "The event is such that it must be pronounced as a whole" (p. 112). This call and this demand "for an image of the totality of sufferings," Nichanian claims, "are a constitutive part of the catastrophic[43] experience" (p. 111). That the event is beyond imagination means for Yesayan that "it is beyond all representation *for an identification* [emphasis added]" (p. 110). Nichanian argues that Yesayan thinks of representation always in relation to identification. Imagination, identification, and representation: one cannot do one of them without succeeding in the other two. But the event is not only beyond imagination but also beyond speech. It is not symbolizable, for the language of the survivors is stricken:

> This something beyond the representable, beyond all possible narration has no name. One cannot fix it, look at it directly, make of it an idea or a concept, nor can one make of it an object of science or knowledge. No discipline could account for it in its essence and wholeness. (p. 113)

[43] The word "catastrophic" is not capitalized for he refers to Yesayan's usage.

"Wholeness" is the keyword here. Yesayan is not alone in her inability to say it all; the witnesses too "can tell it only in bits and pieces" because "the event has annulled in them the possibility of recounting the totality" (p. 112). So, we are not talking about a situation where the author is incapable of understanding what the victims first-hand live, see, and feel since she has not experienced what they went through. According to Nichanian, the victims of the massacre are as desperate as Yesayan. The meaning of the events is not transparent to them either. None of them can account for the Catastrophe, their language has been shattered. The speech of the survivors "inhabited by the totality of the event" is "reduced to a fragmentary state" and that is exactly why "the survivors are here 'the stricken.' They are stricken in language" (Nichanian, 2002, p. 206).

The uniqueness of Yesayan, on the other hand, stems from the fact that "despite everything, Zabel Yesayan tries to name the unnameable" (2003, p. 115). She is looking for ways to "fix the Catastrophe," "to say it, when one knows that it resides in the shattering of language and that no narration can take account of it" (p. 113). Nichanian points out the following paragraph as an example of Yesayan's endeavor to name the unnameable:

> And what seems irreparable and irremediable in this indefinable catastrophe are not the houses reduced to ashes, the ravaged orchards, nor is it the immensity of the number of the dead. It is this feeling of despondency that hangs around everyone's eyes, pitiably, desperately: the feeling of having been trampled collectively, of having been crushed by savage claws. These heads that had risen up humanly for an instant, in search of light and freedom, had been smashed with incomparable cruelty. (as cited in Nichanian, 2002, p. 209)

"The irreparable in the Catastrophe," then, is "the feeling of having been trampled collectively. It is from this that one cannot recover" (Nichanian, 2003, p. 115). Nichanian's commentary on this feeling of having been trampled collectively is that

it is not the direct consequence of violent acts such as rape, murder, and so on. What is dreadful and incomprehensible is not the annihilation but the will to annihilation**:**

> everything can be said with human speech, everything can be understood, pardoned, accepted, even loved. Only *one* thing remains beyond all speech, beyond every power to integrate, beyond all human apprehension. This thing is not death, it is not murder or burned houses, it is not even extermination. It is the will to extermination. (Nichanian, 2003, p. 115)

The will to extermination, or, genocidal intent, "cannot be integrated into any psychological, rational, or psychical explanation whatever" (Nichanian, 2003, p. 116). Mourning is impossible because violence is "without any assignable measure" (2003, p. 114); the genocidal will cannot be comprehended. The element that will enable the totalization of the event is the genocidal will. Since the genocidal will is beyond explanation, the event cannot be grasped in its totality. So, the reason Yesayan wrote a book of mourning is that she realized that the Catastrophe was impossible to articulate, and she tried to precisely convey this impossibility.

However, there is one more thing that makes this book so peculiar and exceptional for Nichanian. In the preface he wrote to *Averagnerun Mech*, he contends that "Yesayan wants to give a meaning to the Catastrophe, she wants to make sense of to all those deaths, all those horrible and senseless deaths, and thereby certainly providing for herself a justification for the act of writing and the things she wrote" (Nichanian, 2014b, p. 22). It is in the preface of the book that Yesayan bestows a sense upon the massacres. Before recounting the specific meaning she finds, and Nichanian's commentary on this interpretation, we should comprehend the relation Nichanian draws between death and sense. Nichanian argues that normally, what gives meaning to death is the mourning that enables one to deal with death. By mourning, you start accepting death. However, the exact opposite is true when it comes to the Catastrophe which actually corresponds to "the loss of the law of

mourning" (Kazanjian & Nichanian, 2003, p.127). "Everywhere, mourning is sufficient to make sense; faced with the Catastrophe, on the contrary, *a sense is necessary so that mourning can occur* [emphasis added]" (Nichanian, 2003, p.105). When one faces the Catastrophe, one first needs to find a meaning, an idea, in order to be able to mourn. Unable to make sense of what she witnesses, Yesayan has to realize her desire to give meaning to the Catastrophe, to the dreadful deaths. She has to do that, for "madness" takes the stage where there is no sense. The meaning to which Yesayan clings is that the dead were sacrificed for a better order, for a more democratic state. In the preface, which had been written after she had finished the book, Yesayan writes:

> My project was therefore to communicate to those who belong to our people, but also to our [Turkish] compatriots, who have remained strangers to our reactions and to our sufferings, the infinite misery I contemplated in deepest darkness for a period of three months . . . no one will ever again dare to approach with contempt and hatred these humble people who, armed with an unshakable faith, despite the intolerable injustices, despite the gallows raised on still-smoking ruins, will offer blindly, instinctively, their blood-stained and crumbling existences to all the currents of *progress*, in order to rise against the greatest danger threatening the fatherland, against the return of dictatorship, in whatever form and behind whatever mask it manifests itself in the future. (as cited in Nichanian, 2003, p. 104)

Yesayan, then, regards her book as a demonstration of the hideousness of the ancién regime, and as a call for a new, supraethnic, democratic order based on the equality of citizens. Nichanian draws attention to the difference between the preface and the rest of the book which by revealing the incessant, horrifying, and meaningless violence, remains alien to the interpretation in the preface which suggests that Armenians were sacrificed for a better order.[44] The question is whether Nichanian would count *Averagnerun Mech* as a book of mourning if Yesayan had not written this kind of a preface. Though Nichanian contests the content of the meaning

[44] Of course, Yesayan knew very well that the Committee of Union and Progress was involved in the massacres; in fact, in the conclusion of the book, she calls for the Committee to extract the executioners and bring them to justice.

Yesayan attaches to the catastrophe, he nonetheless sees meaning as a necessary component of mourning. It seems like *Averagnerun Mech* owes its status of a book of mourning to this interpretation in the preface. In fact, Nichanian argues that Yesayan's "experience and discovery" was the insight that "a death without meaning" was equivalent to "a death without mourning" (Kazanjian & Nichanian, 2003, p. 140).

After 1915, however, Yesayan cannot write another book of mourning. After 1915, incapable of mourning, Yesayan's only aim, or rather, the only thing she can do, is collecting, compiling, and translating testimonies. She herself writes in the introduction to Hayg Toroyan's memoirs that she could not turn the pain of her people to literature (Nichanian, 2011, p. 76). With her new purpose of providing proof for the extermination, she became, in Nichanian's words, an "artisan of an 'archivization' of memory," (Nichanian & Kazanjian, 2003, p. 133). The crime and the violence were so "immeasurable" (Nichanian, 2003, p. 107) that Yesayan's generation, Nichanian suggests, becomes divested of their capacity to use their faculty of imagination as regards to the Catastrophe, to make sense of it, to mourn. For them, and, in Nichanian's viewpoint, for us as well, the Catastrophe is **"**a pure experience—the experience of *pure destruction* [emphasis added], of an infinite loss, without mourning, without dialectic" (p. 120).

As seen from this quote which is the last sentence of "Catastrophic Mourning," the text ends with a very dark and pessimistic sound, leaving the reader with the question of what kind of resistance or even mere existence one can imagine through Nichanian's framework against this pure destruction. In the exchange between Kazanjian and Nichanian, the latter depicts a way out of this dead-end in which he finds himself in: "If there is a new, unheard of politics that takes into

account this experience and at the same time the impossibility of accounting for it, it will be (it should be) a politics of the witness" (Nichanian & Kazanjian, 2003, p. 140). It is up to us to think about what such a politics would be, as Nichanian does not explain it. But one thing is clear: the challenge for Nichanian is "how to live in a world in which the death of the witness has *happened* once, henceforth, once and for all" (Nichanian, 2016a, p.151). In that sense, Nichanian thinks that the only way of approaching the Catastrophe is accepting that it cannot be grasped as such.

In short, Nichanian evaluates Yesayan's perspective on the Catastrophe in two separate lines: on the one hand, Yesayan demonstrates the impossibility of mourning and says that the event is unimaginable, unrepresentable, and unspeakable. On the other hand, she makes her interpretation in the preface, that is, she gives meaning to what happened, albeit the content her interpretation is flawed. However, giving meaning will not be possible after the events of 1915: "there can be no memory and, subsequently, no mourning for the extermination" (Nichanian, 2002, p.14). To repeat the quote I made above, Nichanian argues that the Catastrophe is "the experience of pure destruction, of an infinite loss, without mourning, without dialectic" (Nichanian, 2003, p. 120).

In the face of this claim, a series of questions arise: if it was pure destruction, without any remainder, without any dialectics, how can we even tell that there was destruction in the first place? Doesn't any destruction have to leave traces, i.e., symptoms? Is such a thing as pure destruction possible? Doesn't a material embodiment of destruction have to always remain? Could it be possible to erase the traces of destruction? Formulating answers to these questions requires that we better grasp what mourning actually means for Nichanian. This by itself is a difficult task for he nowhere makes a succinct definition of it. And what makes the issue more

complicated is that Nichanian also notes several times that the reason for us not to know how to mourn is not only the genocidal will, but also philology. He states:

> we have no mourning left, no capacity for mourning left, either because of the will of the perpetrator, or because the concept of mourning that we have to even understand what happened to us is historically determined by two centuries of philology, and is not enough to understand what the Catastrophe is. (2014, p. 273)

Having explained the first part of this assertion, that is, the effect of the perpetrator on the mourning of the victim, I now want to explain the role of philology in the impossibility of mourning, which will help us to better formulate Nichanian's conceptualization of mourning and melancholy.

3.4.2 Philology: The institution of mourning

In his works on Armenian philology, Nichanian basically claims that philology contains mourning at its core. He elaborates on the appearance and development of Armenian philology at the beginning of the nineteenth century, culminating in the establishment of *Mehyan* published in 1914 in Istanbul, a literary journal that was the epitome of the collaboration between philology, art, and nationalization, and a project of the making the native into its own philologist. Reflecting on the appearance among Armenians of geographical archeology, ethnography, and art inspired by German Idealism and Romanticism, Nichanian traces the constitution of the Armenian nation as a process guided by philology.[45] He describes how the nation is constituted by the invention of the traditions of the native as that which belongs to the past and future of the nation. The native, he asserts, is a figure that is both "the invention" and "object" of philology (Nichanian, 2012a, p. 260), which implicates

[45] For an analysis of the development of Armenian musicology that takes into account the role of philology, see Bilal M. & Yıldız B. (2019). *Kalbim o viran evlere benzer-Gomidas Vartabed'in müzik mirası.* Birzamanlar Yayıncılık.

that since there is no native before the philologist, the native "needs the philologist in order to remember himself as a historical being" (2012a, p. 261).

Though philology, at least in its nationalist discourse, claims to discover and recover the intact past, Nichanian shows the hidden truth of philology which is that philology is an "institution of mourning" (2012a, p. 267) insofar as it "discovers" the past at the very moment the traditions are about to dissolve. To restore a language philologically means to accept its loss at the outset, which means that philology mourns as long as it operates. The native must then mourn "the loss of tradition" which is invented by philology, the myth which is "discovered as lost by philology" (2012a, p. 267). The nation is created together with its past, that is, by the same gesture which mourns the past. This process reveals how a "myth" can be created only retroactively "discovered (invented) as lost" (2014, p. 5). We see the same process of mourning in art, for instance in Tanyel Varujan's "poetic paganism," which mourns the loss of the gods by taking them into the realm and language of art.

For Armenians, the process of becoming a philological nation, "a nation of natives made philologists, made into the philologists themselves" (2012a, p. 263) is achieved with the *Mehyan* journal's collaboration of art and philology. The *Mehyan* generation both criticizes and embraces philology by suggesting that art and philology must work together for nationalization. These writers attempt at keeping the oral tradition by making it enter into the realm of art, as they perceive this transformation as the key to its preservation and nationalization. For instance, Oshagan writes *Panorama,* a philological work reviewing the history of Western Armenian literature; in his poems, Taniel Varujan—another important representative of the journal—mourns "the lost tradition of mythical religion" (p. 267), by enacting

the "completion of religion . . . as mournful memory," that is, by mourning the pagan gods.

But here is the crux of the matter: Nichanian argues that Varujan experiences something else than the loss of the tradition. This experience, Nichanian suggests, stems from a moment of understanding that sometimes mourning itself can also be lost, which means that there is no language left to mourn loss. And what exactly does make him think that mourning might not be possible at all? Varujan interprets the loss of the pagan gods as the devastation of mourning, as gods were those who kept the memory of the nation. Thus, Varujan's poems give us a glimpse of "the default of mourning, the experience of catastrophic mourning, the disaster as a loss of mourning, as a loss of the possibility of mourning" (Nichanian, 2014, p. 173). Varujan's exceptional status as a poet then resides from this sensation of truth by him, that he sees the loss of mourning, that "the catastrophic default is always an imminent threat within mournful memory" (p. 200). This truth will of course make itself felt much more radically after the Catastrophe, called by Nichanian "a pure destruction."

What can one do when everything, including mourning, is devastated? What remains when one experiences "a devastation without any possible mourning" (2014, p.105)? What language is there for "the impossible mourning *of* mourning" (p. 118). Nichanian suggests that there must be a language to articulate the loss of mourning, however, he, unfortunately, does not make a theoretically palpable explanation but only calls it "the last language, a dead language, a language in the ashes, a language of the end" (p. 195). I can only presume that he is thinking of merely designating that there took place a loss and *full stop*. When everything, including mourning, is lost, one can only say that everything is lost. Just as approaching the Catastrophe is about

acknowledging that mourning is forbidden and facing loss, approaching the disaster and the disappearance of the traditions requires an insight into how the framework for grasping loss itself is lost. For Nichanian, the real issue in both the disaster and the Catastrophe is how the loss itself can be lost.

In *Melancholia Philologica,* which is the headline of the speech he gives at the *Anywhere but Now* conference in 2009, Nichanian asks the same question about the loss of mourning in another form: what could happen to the native and its culture if the philologist did not come and save it? He then calls the fear that the past will be forever lost, that the native will be undeciphered *melancholia philologica*. "The language of melancholia," he further states, is the common language of victims and perpetrators, united "in the reiteration of their common loss and their common mourning" (2012a, p. 254). As I mentioned in the section on reconciliation, the language of the scene of the reconciliation in which the perpetrator and the victim come together and speak about the past is melancholy. Considering the African case, Nichanian states that the meeting point of the colonizer and the colonized is grief, that the language of loss is always bound to be melancholy, which is the language of the perpetrator; and to give an example from history, he states that nobody today knows the language of the Trojans, and all our information regarding them comes from Greeks, that the language in which the common loss is spoken is melancholy.

It seems like Nichanian does not make a clear conceptual distinction between mourning and melancholy, and names the mourning of philology as melancholy**.** In fact, one of his two important works about the relationship between mourning and philology is called "Melancholia Philologica," and the other is "Mourning Philology," so it is no coincidence that he uses these concepts interchangeably. But though in the paper he delivers at the conference melancholy is discussed in terms of

philology and reconciliation, in the questions-and-answers session that follows the panel, Nichanian gives a sudden twist to his argument by stating that melancholy which he for the first time defines as "to ask constantly, again and again, what *remains* when you have even lost the language for saying the loss" (2012b, p. 276) "is the only possible resistance" (p. 276).

Nichanian does not explain how melancholy as the language of the perpetrator can at the same time be the only way to resist and only mentions that we owe this duality to Benjamin's *Theses on History*. Unfortunately, I did not come across any text of Nichanian in which he reflects on this duality. From the limited material, I think that the following point can be made: On the one hand, there is the form of mourning imposed by philology, namely restoring the past while constructing the tradition, native and the nation, in other words, finding positive answers to the question "what remains;" and on the other hand, there is the insistence on asking the question "what remains" and giving negative answers. In a word, there is the possibility to insist on saying how nothing has remained.

We can discern from his definition of melancholy that he thinks that resistance to devastation involves asking "what *remains* when you have even lost the language for saying the loss" (p. 276). Though this situation is inflicted by the genocidal will as it interdicts mourning; catastrophic mourning, it seems, is the only thing one can do against what he calls pure devastation without remainder. It seems like we have nothing but to ask over and over again what remains only to answer that nothing has remained. As opposed to the denial performed by survivors which would amount to reconstruct a narrative from the remainders, Nichanian sees it as his duty to proclaim the ultimate failure of such projects as there is no remainder except the possibility for us to say that,

> there is no remainder, no lan guage in which the terrible silence of Zabel Essayan after 1917 could be transformed into a voice . . . The only thing that remains to do is to understand what happened, to denounce our being in the grasp of the perpetrator's will, always and again. (p. 142).

So how to denounce the perpetrator's will then? The answer is simple: By demonstrating how we are in the grip of the perpetrator's will. Whereas denialists try to give *positive* answers to the question "what remains" by constructing narratives from traces, Nichanian insists on the *negative* side. For him, there is no positive proposition that can be given about the Catastrophe. Every single proposition that we can make about the Catastrophe has to be about how something is lost, absent, negated. According to Nichanian, the transcendental horizon is an absolute limit, the only thing we can do is to negatively refer to it. The only thing we can say about that thing is that we do not have access to that thing, or how we are unable to mourn. This framework implies that the Catastrophe can be mourned only by mourning the loss of mourning, as the event is the very interdiction of mourning. Then, it is necessary to look after the remains, however, one can approach the core of the Catastrophe only when one accepts the irretrievable loss of mourning. I think that Anidjar captures the core of this stance as he describes it, following Derrida, as a call to "keep silent with (and about) a certain silence" (as cited by Anidjar, p. 139).

If that is the case**,** any attempt at a critique of Nichanian's theoretical framework requires asking the following questions: is a purely negative designation the only alternative to discourses that claim to grasp the Event in its totality? Is pointing toward the loss of loss the only authentic stance that can be taken in the face of the Catastrophe? Is the only way to mourn the Event to accept the impossibility of mourning it? How exactly can the genocidal will strip the victims of their humanity? How can the will of the perpetrator be so powerful? What is the theoretical backdrop of the assertions that the language of the victim has disintegrated once and for all and

that the witness died? Is mourning the loss of mourning the only ethical way of mourning? Is it impossible to go beyond declaring the death of the witness, but without denying the Catastrophe? Or can psychoanalysis present a different solution to this problem? For that, we have to survey the origins of mourning and melancholy, and then we will come to Lacanian analysis.

CHAPTER 4

REVISITING "MOURNING AND MELANCHOLY"

As we have seen in the third chapter, Nichanian regards mourning as consubstantial with humanity and language. He posits that without the former, the latter two also cannot exist and that the genocidal will targets all of them at the same time which results in the disintegration of language and the death of the witness. He develops a line of thought against the promise of healing through narrativization advocated by the trauma theory, arguing that this approach is invalid in the cases which aim to destroy the humanity of the victim, like torture and genocide, that psychoanalysis is powerless against these kinds of traumas; and he states that the most psychoanalysis can do is to make the victims believe that they can narrate, which is equivalent for Nichanian to engage in self-denial, and through that save the victims from the grasp of madness and deliver them to normalcy. Through this argument, he reaches the conclusion that mourning understood in the sense of symbolizing the loss is useless in the case of the Catastrophe, because what has to be done consists in mourning the mourning itself, namely the acknowledgment of how the ability to mourn is taken from survivors, and hence he makes the Catastrophe into an exceptional event for which the usual processes of mourning cannot be actuated.

The aim of the present chapter is firstly to provide background on the various literature on mourning and melancholy which will prepare the ground for situating Nichanian's approach to loss and mourning. To give an outline, I am going to revisit the concepts of mourning and melancholy and sketch out the positions of scholars that stand out in the fields and literature on loss, mourning, and melancholy, which follow Freud's distinction of these concepts in different ways. The chapter consists

of three main sections. In the first section, I will study at length the proverbial Freudian distinction between mourning and melancholy. Though referring to various writings from Freud's oeuvre, I am going to put the widest coverage to Freud's "Mourning and Melancholy," because, first, this is the text in which he brings together the two concepts and examines their relationship, and, second, it is almost the exclusive reference for the literature of mourning and melancholy. Undoubtedly, understanding this text is of utmost importance in terms of being able to follow the discussions that come afterward. After summarizing Freud's essay on the topic, in the subsequent sections, I address the later interpretations of Freud's concepts in various fields. Here, as we read through significant commentators of Freud's distinction, what strikes our eye is that melancholy begins to be seen as the precondition of mourning. After presenting my critique of this tendency, in the fifth chapter, I am first going to discuss the difference established between historical loss and structural lack which comes to the fore in mourning studies after the Holocaust and then introduce the Lacanian intervention to the debate.

4.1 "Mourning and Melancholy"

In 1917, Freud published "Mourning and Melancholia," an essay which has provided the basic coordinates of the debates of the twentieth century that revolved around notions like loss, lack, melancholy, and grief. In this essay, Freud defines mourning in the following way: "Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (p. 3041). That is to say that, in mourning the ego is detached from the world and it devotes itself to contemplating the lost object, taking a trip down the memory lane; and this process hopefully ends when the

libido attached to the lost object becomes free and gets transferred to another object. As to melancholy, Freud contends that in some people the very conditions that lead to mourning trigger melancholy instead of "the normal affect of mourning" (p. 3041), which makes him suspect that melancholy is a pathological condition. At first glance, Freud seems to make a very clear distinction between mourning and melancholy: whereas he extols mourning as a normal, healthy process that one must go through after one loses something—be it a loved one or a political ideal—he denounces melancholy as a pathological response to the loss of the object. Accordingly, the mourning subject recognizes the loss and eventually overcomes this painful fact by displacing the released libido onto another object. The melancholic, on the other hand, is unable to recognize the loss and therefore she is unable to come to terms with reality or to locate herself in the world. Melancholy, then, can be defined as the failure to mourn.

Freud's work undoubtedly lends itself to diverse and mutually incompatible readings, however, what I have described in the paragraph above would be a cursory reading of the text reducing Freud's arguments to a simple binary opposition of the ability and the inability to mourn, overlooking the conflictual statements and rudimentary lines of thought scattered in the text. Here, I want to emphasize that Freud puts forward different and sometimes conflicting statements that do not necessarily form a coherent unity. In fact, throughout the essay, Freud himself repeatedly stresses the incompleteness and inconclusiveness of his findings. For example, while he defines melancholy as a pathological disposition, he also notes that the reason for him to think so might be because he does not have much empirical information about it. So, the first ambiguity in the text is about the status of melancholy, namely, whether it is a pathological disposition or not. Then another

problem arises, which involves the relation between melancholy and loss: is melancholy merely a painful and longwinded reaction to loss, or is the loss of the object not a necessary component of melancholy at all, in other words, can one have a melancholic relation to an object without losing it in reality? A third subject matter which is not presented clearly in the text concerns the relation between narcissism and melancholy. As will be explained below, Freud initially argues that melancholy might occur as a result of a "narcissistic type of object-choice," however, he regrets that this conclusion "has unfortunately not yet been confirmed by observation" (p. 3048). As to mourning, it seems like he depicts mourning simply as the substitution of the lost object with another object, unfortunately without elaborating much on the mechanisms of *the work* of mourning.

All in all, the text is sort of a mixture of theoretical deductions and empirical observations, often not harmonious with each other. As a result of this incompleteness, as will be discussed below, different interpreters adopt different parts and conclusions of the text and exclude the parts that don't fit with their framework, which makes the literature of mourning and melancholy very heterogeneous and eclectic. What complicates the field furthermore is the elaborations of this distinction in later texts of Freud, especially his take in *The Ego and The Id* (1923).

As Freud elaborates, the distinguishing mental features of melancholy are as follows:

> a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (p. 3042)

We must note that all these features, except the last one, appear in mourning as well. The end of mourning, according to Freud, is very clear: the object-cathexis, which is

the Freudian term for the investment of the libido on an object, shall come to an end, and the libidinal investment be redirected into a new object. Mourning, then, appears to designate a process of commemoration and then holding back onto life after a certain amount of time has passed. What makes melancholy different is first and foremost "the disturbance of self-regard" (p. 3042). The ego of the melancholic seems to be split, one part scrutinizing the other, drowning the other with incessant reproaches. This critical agency might even be "split off from the ego" (p. 3045); it is clear that what Freud is describing here is actually what in his later writings will be called superego (*Über-ich*). A very harsh, aggressive critical agency is operative with melancholy, devaluing the person. The melancholic incessantly criticizes herself and she does this very loudly and openly, the criticisms being so intense and torturous that this process can culminate in suicide. But why would someone start hating and accusing oneself after a loved one is lost?

First, I want to note that, as opposed to mourning, Freud does not count bereavement as a necessary step for melancholy, which complicates the definition of melancholy as a failed mourning. In fact, the possible causes for melancholy extend well beyond those of mourning. Whereas the causes for mourning are said to be "the loss of a loved person" or "the loss of some abstraction" (p. 3041), the cause of melancholy, beside including situations like death and break-up, also extends to "all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointment" (p. 3046). Regardless of whether there occurred a "real" loss or not, the distinctive character of melancholy is an unawareness of what has been lost: the melancholic "knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him" (p. 3043). Freud asserts that it is not clear what exactly the melancholic is working through, which is the reason why it is so difficult to discern what is absorbing the melancholic. He concludes that "melancholy is in

some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious" (p. 3043). In other words, feelings of ambiguity and elusiveness which are hallmarks of melancholy make it hard for the melancholic and also for people around them to grasp what causes so much pain to the melancholic.

Right after designating self-reproaches as the distinguishing feature of melancholy, Freud argues that a closer examination of the self-accusations of a melancholic reveals that the reproaches are in fact applicable not to the melancholic but to the lost or disappointing object: "everything derogatory that they say about themselves is at the bottom said about someone else" (p. 3046).[46] The reason for this is that in the case of melancholy, the ambivalence between love and hate which is necessarily part of any relationship[47] is so intense that it does not permit the ego to displace the free libido onto another object and leads the person to incorporate the lost object into its own ego. The object-loss is preserved by being "transformed into an ego-loss" and the conflict between the ego and lost-object is transformed "into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego as altered by identification" (p. 3047). This also explains why the melancholic is "not ashamed" (p. 3046) at all while publicly humiliating herself; she can do this only because all the reproaches are actually about someone else**.** An ambivalent nature of the relation to the love object, then, though it is not peculiar to melancholy, is one of its preconditions.

Considering the relation of the ego to the love object, the preconditions for melancholy are bilateral: First, there must be "a strong fixation to the loved object"

[46] To give an example, when someone is complaining about how long she sleeps and how difficult it is for her to wake up, deep down she might be referring to her lover's sleep problems, and/or to the fact that her lover is not helping him with her problems, that she does not try to wake him from sleep, etc.
[47] One of the fundamental principles of Freudian psychoanalysis is that no love relationship is bereft of hate, "almost every intimate emotional relation . . . contains a sediment of feelings of aversion and hostility" (Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, p. 3794).

since the libido cannot be displaced onto another object. But contrary to this fixation, because the ego does not keep the object as a love-object but incorporates it, and also that the smallest mark of slight or neglect directly indicates separation or the feeling of loss for the melancholic; Freud infers that the ego apparently does not make any effort to sustain its libidinal investment in the object. In other words, "the object-cathexis must have had little power of resistance" (p. 3047). In *On Narcissism* (1914) Freud explains this lack of resistance by resorting to the concept of *narcissism*. He asserts that melancholy must arise as a result of the narcissistic character of the object-choice[48] in which case "what possesses the excellence which the ego lacks for making it an ideal, is loved" (p. 2954). The object's function is, then, to support the relationship of the ego to its ideal, which explains the paradox mentioned above, namely, the coexistence of a strong fixation to the loved object and the fragility of the object-cathexis. If the object-choice has a narcissistic basis, this means "the aim and the satisfaction in a narcissistic object-choice is to be loved" (p. 2951). The loss or even the possibility of the loss of the object will then be experienced as a drastic and bitter blow for the ego, for the object was actually serving as the guarantee of the consistency of the self-image of the ego from the beginning; which is why, to cope with the loss, the melancholic narcissistically identifies with the object, that is, sets up the object in the ego, as it was explained above.[49]

[48] In *On Narcissism* Freud distinguishes between two types of object-choice: the narcissistic type and the anaclitic (attachment) type: In the narcissistic object-choice, a person may love "(a) what he himself is (i.e., himself), (b) what he himself was, (c) what he himself would like to be, (d) someone who was once part of himself." In anaclitic object-choice, on the other hand, a person may love "the woman who feeds" or "the man who protects," "and the succession of substitutes who take their place." See p. 2944.

[49] When discussing the role played by narcissistic identification in melancholy, we should always remember that Freud viewed melancholy as a narcissistic disorder: He divides psychoneuroses into two main categories: transference neuroses and narcissistic disorders: "In the former (hysteria and obsessional neurosis) the subject has at his disposal a quantity of libido striving to be transferred on to extraneous objects . . . ; on the other hand, the narcissistic disorders (dementia praecox, paranoia, melancholia) are characterized by a withdrawal of the libido from object" (p. 3925). Stating that the identification with the object can be also seen in transference neuroses, Freud distinguishes

The incorporation of the object into the ego, in the case of melancholy, is then, a definition of narcissistic identification. Freud says that when "the object-choice has been effected on a narcissistic basis," "the object cathexis, when obstacles come in its way, can regress to narcissism" (p. 3048). "Then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering" (p. 3048). However, as it was explained above, since this unconscious rage cannot be admitted by the melancholic, an unending and painful loop of self-reproaches will be waiting for her. The narcissistic basis of the object-choice, then, elucidates why the disappointed or abandoned ego suffers so much from feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness, and trashiness.

To sum this part of the argument up, according to Freud, whereas mourning is a "normal" process that one goes through after loss, the relation between melancholy and loss is not that clear and palpable. At the outset, melancholy seems to be a failed mourning. However, as Freud starts elaborating on the concept, it becomes apparent that melancholy is much more than a simple failure of the work of mourning. Melancholy is conceived by Freud as a narcissistic disorder that entails the replacement of the narcissistic-object choice with a narcissistic identification, resulting in the incessant humiliation of the ego by the lost object which starts playing the role of the critical agency once it is incorporated into the ego. The cause of all these processes, in turn, is to be found in the essence of the relationship between the subject and the object-cause of desire, which, as we are going to see in the next chapter, is discussed at length by Lacanian psychoanalysis.

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narcissistic identification from hysterical identification as follows: "whereas in the former the object-cathexis is abandoned, in the latter it persists and manifests its influence" (p. 3048).

4.2 Melancholy: Precondition of mourning?

As it was put above, there is a tendency in mourning studies to assume a linear progression from melancholy to mourning, making the former the precondition of the latter. Though some see melancholy as an unavoidable but undesirable necessity, others openly embrace melancholy. One of the main reasons for this reading is the following: Freud reflects on his former views on melancholy in his article titled "The Ego and the Id" written in 1923 and reinterprets the identification with the lost object in melancholy as a fundamental component of ego formation. Mourning studies that interpret melancholy as a precondition for mourning are based on this reflection in "The Ego and the Id," taking it as a major revision in Freud's take of melancholy, which seems to leave aside the pathological aspect of melancholy.

If we remember from the earlier chapters that Nichanian's theory is very much informed by the theoretical developments in the face of Holocaust, it becomes clear that we need to pay attention to the literature on post-Holocaust Germany in order to understand Nichanian's interventions to the field. Therefore, I will start out by analyzing *Stranded Objects* (1990) by Eric Santner, which presents a panorama of the Germany of the 1980s, building on the remarkable analysis of how Auschwitz was mourned and neglected in Germany after WWII by Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich (1967). Besides giving illuminating insights into the ways for grieving Auschwitz, Santner's book also introduces an intricate and inextricable link between the Holocaust and postmodernism. After that, I take up Judith Butler's theory of gender melancholy for she is one of the pioneers of the trend of depathologizing melancholy. I will also address *Loss* (2003) which as I mentioned in the introduction, is a collection of essays dedicated to analyzing different aspects of loss, the theoretical framework of which not only depathologizes melancholy but also invites

the reader to embrace melancholy. By examining this literature, I will try to demonstrate the reasons for the tendency in the literature to turn away from mourning and gravitate towards melancholy arises. After presenting each work, I will present my objections to some of the assumptions grounding this tendency. Finally, I will attempt to undertake a critique of this literature before I embark upon introducing the stance of Lacanian psychoanalysis with regard to the Freudian distinction between mourning and melancholy.

4.2.1 Auschwitz unmourned

In *Stranded Objects* (1990) Eric Santner focuses on the mourning practices in 1980s Germany. Besides giving illuminating insights into the ways by which Auschwitz was grieved, Santner's book also introduces an intricate and inextricable link between the Holocaust and postmodernism which forms one of the mainstays of the discussion on the distinction between the historical and the structural suffering. The principal sources that underlie the theoretical outline of Santner's book are Freud's "Mourning and Melancholy" and the Mitcherlichs' *The Inability to Mourn* (1967) which follows Freud's distinction and revises it to a certain extent, by assuming a linear progression from melancholy to mourning.

According to the Mitcherlichs, in Germany, after the legal recognition of the genocide, there were no "deep feelings of contrition," "shame," "a genuine urge to heal injury," "the desire to remember," in other words, no sign of "any sustained emotional confrontation with the Nazi past" (p. 1). Mitcherlichs' main thesis is that the lack of mourning was actually the result of a resistance against melancholy: in order to be able to mourn the extermination of the Jews, Germans were first

supposed to fall into a melancholic state and work through it. But what exactly do they mean by a melancholic state?

Following Mitscherlichs' approach to the concepts of mourning and melancholy, Santner argues that the most important factor distinguishing the two is whether the separation between "self and other" is achieved, in other words, whether the object is loved "for its intrinsic qualities as separate and distinct from oneself" (p. 2). Accordingly, melancholy occurs when the object that is loved "as a mirror of one's own sense of self and power" (p. 2) is lost. As it was put above, Freud designates narcissistic object-choice to be a component of melancholy; and Mitscherlichs mainly focus on this aspect of it, namely that in melancholy "the object-choice has been effected on a narcissistic basis, so that the object-cathexis, when obstacles'' such as a future separation or death "come in its way, can regress to narcissism" (p. 3048). The narcissism in question here is secondary narcissism, that is, the incorporation of the object to the ego and the withdrawal of libido from the object to the ego, which is sort of a return to primary narcissism, which is defined as the inability on the part of infants to differentiate themselves from others (the parents for instance) leading to an illusion of omnipotence. Following Freud's theory closely at this point, Mitscherlichs also refer to two different types of narcissism: primary and secondary, the former related to infants and the latter to adults, or rather, melancholics as adult narcissists. Secondary narcissism is defined here as "a residual resistance to the perception of the separateness of self and other" (Santner, p. 3), which must be worked through so that one can bid farewell to fantasies of omnipotence the origins of which is the very inability to recognize the otherness of the other.

The melancholic, in Mitscherlichs' framework, is not someone who simply cannot mourn; rather, the difference between mourning and melancholy is determined by the function of the lost-object in one's life, that is, whether the object is loved for its "intrinsic qualities," or, whether the otherness of the object is denied or not. In the case of melancholy, the loss of the loved one will be experienced as "the loss of a fantasy of omnipotence" (p. 3) which is why the first and necessary step towards the work of real mourning is a more primal form of mourning which is first deployed to overcome melancholy itself, which in this case could be exemplified with a collective depression resulting from the death of the Führer. Thus, since in narcissism, the love-object is merely a vehicle for self-love, the melancholic should grieve "not so much for the loss of the other as for the fact of otherness and all that that entails" (p. 3). The work of mourning necessary to overcome melancholy is a sort of a repetition of "the fragmentation of one's primitive narcissism" (p. 3).

Mitscherlichs' analysis of German society can be presented as follows: Germans have to comprehend the nature of the relationship with Hitler before they can mourn the extermination of the victims of the Nazi regime. According to Mitscherlichs, Hitler was the ego-ideal of the Nazis, and with the fall of Hitler, it was obvious that those who placed him as their ego-ideal were suffering from "a central devaluation and impoverishment" (as cited in Santner, p. x) so it was natural to expect a melancholic state after "the loss of an object so highly cathected with libidinal energy" (as cited in Santner, p. x). But that didn't happen. People have not come to face "the defeat in 1945," "the facts of the Holocaust" and "the loss of Hitler as The Führer" (Santner, p. 1). "By breaking all affective bridges to the immediate past" (p. 26), in other words, by collectively denying the past via sundry methods such as viewing Germans as the real victim of war, relativizing the crimes, accusing

the Holocaust itself of injuring German identity, etc., Germans got away from melancholy, which made it impossible for mourning to take the stage.

So, according to this line of argument, in order to mourn over the victims of Nazism, Germans first had to go through a melancholic state, work through their relationship to the Nazi ideals, face what kind of a bond they had with Hitler, understand what kind of a role the Jews had in the establishment of their conception of Germanness, and, in this way, "consolidate the boundaries between self and other" (p. 7). The reason for this developmental succession, to put it once more, is that "the capacity to feel grief for others and guilt for the suffering one has directly or indirectly caused, depends on the capacity to experience empathy for the other as other" (p. 7). Overcoming melancholy, this primal mourning, becomes the precondition for mourning.

Following from where Mitscherlichs left off, Eric Santner concerns himself with how Germans confront and avoid the Holocaust and fascism, focusing on the west Germany of the '80s, and he makes the argument that not much has changed in Germany since the publication of Mitscherlichs' book in 1967 and that postwar generations still can't face their past for they have inherited from the older generations not guilt but various forms of denying guilt, impeding them from going through both melancholy and mourning. By analyzing interviews conducted with war and postwar generations, historians' discussions on the Holocaust and war historiography, and the literary works that deal with the various aspects of war, Santner reflects on the conditions of a real work of mourning. Though Santner agrees with Mitcherlichs' prioritization of the primitive tasks of mourning in the case of Nazi ideals, he does not prescribe a temporal succession between melancholy and mourning, arguing that "it might make more sense to speak of a continuum or a

layering of more primitive and more mature modes of mourning in any specific experience of loss" (p. 3).

4.2.2 Gender melancholy

Just like the Mitcherlichs and Santner, Judith Butler regards melancholy as the prerequisite for mourning, though her focus is not on narcissism but the constitutive role of loss for any ego-formation. Butler puts forth her theory of gender melancholy first in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and develops it in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997). In these books, she contends that the initial formulation of mourning and melancholy as it was put by Freud in "Mourning and Melancholia" has undergone a major transformation in "The Ego and the Id" (1923), and she favors and adopts this distinction as interpreted in this later article. Before delving into Butler's theorization of melancholy, I want to touch upon this article written eight years after "Mourning and Melancholia," in which Freud speculates about the prevalence and universality of the replacement of an object-cathexis by an identification, as it is constitutive of ego formation. Hence, he seems to leave behind his former thoughts about melancholy as a pathological condition. Freud says in this article:

> We succeeded in explaining the painful disorder of melancholia by supposing that an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego—that is, *that an object-cathexis has been replaced by an identification* [emphasis added]. At that time, however, we did not appreciate the full significance of this process and did not know how common and how typical it is. Since then we have come to understand that this kind of substitution has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called its 'character.' (p. 3962)

The replacement of an object cathexis by an identification, according to this new formulation, is a process that takes place in all ego formations, first of all because the ego of any child is formed as a result of the loss of the first love object and its subsequent internalization, and secondly because each and every loss has an effect of

the ego. Freud says that “it may be that this identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects” (p. 3963).

The conclusion Butler draws from this is the following: “there can be no ego without melancholia” (Butler, 1997, p. 171). The ego, inaugurated by a constitutive and unacknowledged loss, is troubled from the start. There is no necessary temporal sequence between loss and melancholy; loss, identification, and ego formation occur simultaneously. Not only can there be no ego without melancholy, there can be no mourning without “melancholic identification” either, but that does not mean Butler praises or decries melancholy. In Butler’s framework, melancholy is constitutive of subjectivity and it is actually a term she resorts to in order to explain the functioning of subjectivity or power mechanisms; she argues that “power becomes ‘internal’ only through the melancholic production of the figure of internal space” (p. 197). In other words, what she calls “melancholic identification” constitutes “the internal and external worlds” (p. 75) by taking an outer object into the psyche. If the ego is established through loss, the questions like what is it that the ego loses, and what kind of an effect loss will have on the person’s critical agency become extremely important in the social and political context. That is why Butler explains how power is internalized with the concept of “melancholic identification.”

Butler makes this discussion in order to argue that melancholy’s determining role in the ego formation also contributes to the determination of gender. She states that any kind of “rigid forms of gender and sexual identification, whether homosexual or heterosexual” (1997, p. 144), is melancholic, that is, “the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition” (1990, pp. 86-87). Even though Butler states that any discourse establishing a sexual orientation as a closed identity

is grounded on what she calls foreclosure[50] (which is used differently than the usual Lacanian sense), because we live in a heterosexual society, she confines her analysis mainly to the "foreclosure" of the homosexual disposition, in other words, the repudiation of same-sex desire and the denial of this loss. She argues that whereas the loss of the same-sex parent is "sustained through a melancholic structure," the loss of the opposite-sex parent is "borne as grief" (1990, p. 88).

If we return to the distinction between mourning and melancholy as laid out in "The Ego and the Id," the innovation this text brings, according to Butler, is as follows: Whereas Freud argues in "Mourning and Melancholia" that mourning comes to an end when the attachment to the lost-object is severed, in "The Ego and the Id," he seems to designate "melancholic identification," that is the introjection of the lost-object into the ego, as the sole condition for mourning, defined by Butler as the id's giving up of its objects. In the section I laid out the main arguments of "Mourning and Melancholia", I stated that Freud did not write much about the mechanisms of mourning and how it works, but that he confined his definition of mourning to the withdrawal of the libido from the lost object and its investment to a new object, in conformity with the reality principle. Butler argues however that in his "The Ego and the Id," revising his position in "Mourning and Melancholy" which separated mourning and melancholy, Freud intermingles mourning with melancholy by offering "melancholic identification" as what is part of any loss and thus as what necessarily precedes mourning. Of course, mourning does not follow melancholy automatically, but '"a verdict of reality' must be accepted for melancholia to become

[50] Butler distinguishes repression from foreclosure (Verwerfung) in the following way: "Distinguished from repression understood as an action by an already-formed subject, foreclosure is an act of negation that founds and forms the subject" (1998, pp. 212-212). I think that Butler is actually referring to primal repression as the whenever she adopts the term foreclosure. The following definition of *Urverdrängung* by Zupančič, besides being very precise, helps us to see how Butler's conceptualization of foreclosure is actually much closer to primal repression: "*Urverdrängung* is not a repression "performed" *by* the subject, but coincides with its emergence" (2017, p. 11).

mourning, and for the attachment to the lost object to be severed" (1997, p. 192). So, whether it is the loss of homosexuality or a loved one, or, whether one is aware or not of *what* exactly one lost, the melancholic state is actually "the effect of unavowable loss" (p. 170) and changes in the ego are actually "a necessary response to or 'defense' against loss" (p. 169). And to get out of this state, she asserts, it is necessary to understand what has been lost.

While Butler says that melancholy is the precondition of structurally precedes mourning, she does not glorify melancholy, on the contrary, as she explicitly states in her book *Precarious Life,* she describes melancholy as "the repudiation of mourning," (2004, p. 29). Against those politicians who called for banning melancholy after September 11, who declared that the mourning process should be completed as soon as possible, and actions taken immediately, Butler responds: "as if the repudiation of melancholy ever did anything other than fortify its affective structure under another name, since melancholy is already the repudiation of mourning." (2004, p. 29). In this book, Butler says that melancholy is both the repudiation of and the prerequisite for mourning. What seems to be a contradiction in the first look actually represents the core of Butler's take on melancholy: it is not possible to start mourning without going through melancholic identification. Even in the most "successful" mourning, one can observe the traces of an identification with the lost object, which must be worked through. Since what is called ego formation goes through melancholy and what our losses will be is related to power relations as in the case of the "foreclosure" of homosexuality; melancholy, according to Butler, is one of the ways that power works in the psyche. Unlike what Freud said in "Mourning and Melancholy," mourning, in turn, is not something to be accomplished by finding a replacement for the lost object, but by confronting the losses that

constitute the ego, which necessarily entails working through “melancholic identification” with the lost object.

4.2.3 Remains of loss

Neither Mitcherlichs nor Santner or Butler embrace melancholy; Mitcherlichs and Santner only see it as a necessary step toward the real work of mourning, and Butler sees it constitutive to ego, alongside experiences of loss. 10 years after Santner’s and Butler’s books, we see that *Loss* (2003), one of the most important books that come to mind when talking about mourning and melancholy studies, through which I encountered Nichanian’s work, this time embraces melancholy due to its creative and political potentials. Eng and Kazanjian, who wrote the introduction of the book, claim that they are pursuing a “politics of mourning” (Eng & Kazanjian, p. 2), which will enable a creative engagement with loss and the past, and they assert that the way to do so is first and foremost through melancholy. As I have said before, at one point Freud claims that melancholy is pathological, but he also admits that melancholy may seem pathological because he is far away from explaining it adequately. Reminding us of this confession of Freud, Eng and Kazanjian say the goal of *Loss* is to better understand melancholy and thus show what kind of a potential it carries.

Eng and Kazanjian read Freud’s distinction in the following way: mourning is a process in which the lost-object is forgotten in time, where the past is “declared” as “resolved, finished, and dead,” while melancholy requires “an enduring devotion” to the lost object for the past in melancholy is not “fixed or complete” (p.3), making it is possible to constantly engage with the past in different ways. So, while in mourning the past remains in the past—since “mourning abandons lost objects by laying their histories to rest”—"in melancholia the past remains steadfastly alive in

the present" (p, 4). Melancholy means "continuous engagement" with the past, loss, and what remains of them, rather than being stuck in the past. But this does not mean that they are *against* mourning; drawing on Butler's theory of gender melancholy and her reading of "The Ego and the Id*,"* they assert that melancholy is constitutive of the ego and also part of mourning. Drawing attention to the constitutive aspect of melancholy which they define as perpetual mourning, they call for an ethics of mourning by suggesting that we should unceasingly mourn our losses and the loss of the others. In fact, Eng and Kazanjian only briefly resort to Butler's framework as their theoretical framework is rather based on the history of melancholy as a concept. In the introduction of the book, Eng and Kazanjian trace the transformation of melancholy—ancient times, late Antiquity/the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance—and they acquire different terms and approaches from these three periods in order to contemplate loss.[51]

Kazanjian and Eng embrace the history of the concept of melancholy and show how melancholy was always intertwined with pain and truth throughout history. The conclusion that Kazanjian and Eng draw out of the deep-rooted history of the concept of melancholy is that in itself, melancholy is not simply a pathological and negative state. The same thing goes for loss: loss does not have to be a negative experience. Each and every loss might carry within potentials for creative and political engagement. Especially focusing on Agamben's reading of melancholy in the context of the oscillation of the medieval monks suffering from acedia, which is a state described as being in-between pain and salvation, and based on Agamben's definition of melancholy "as the imaginative capacity to make an unobtainable object appear as if lost" (Agamben, 1993, p. 20), Eng and Kazanjian claim that "this

[51] For the history of melancholy, see Jouanna, J. (2012) and Radden, J. (Ed.). (2000).

prescient melancholia" opens "a politics of ideality" (Eng & Kazanjian, p. 13), namely that the constant engagement with the past is not only about the past but also about the future as it entails an immense imaginative capacity.[52] They thus define the aim of the book as an exploration of what kind of constraints and potentials are produced as a result of sociohistorical losses in cases like genocides, massacres, slavery, and racial segregation.

4.3 A Criticism against the rehabilitation of melancholy

As I have tried to show up until this point, the desire to recuperate melancholy seems to have gained itself much ground in the century since Freud's work which deemed melancholy pathological. Obviously, scholars like Mitscherlichs, Santner, Butler, Kazanjian, and Eng are making a significant intervention to the field by showing that melancholy is not a dead-end that is impossible to work through. However, there are some problems with their unanimous assertion that Freud formulated melancholy as the precondition of mourning. First of all, as I explained in the section on "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud saw melancholy as a narcissistic disorder, which makes the assertions that melancholy can be followed by mourning, doubtful. Indeed, in "The Ego and the Id," following the part quoted by Butler, Freud goes back to melancholy, draws attention to the "merciless violence" (p. 3987) inflicted by the superego upon the ego, and he uses words like "sadism" and "rage" to describe the two. He states that "in melancholic the object to which the super-ego's wrath applies has been taken into the ego through identification" (p. 3985). Freud reconsiders what he calls "the condition of melancholia" in his *New Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis*, written in 1933, that is, eighteen years after "Mourning and Melancholia" and ten

[52] To give an example, Eng and Han's essay in *Loss*, entitled "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia," perceives racial melancholy as a way for Asian Americans not to assimilate totally to whiteness.

years after “The Ego and the Id.” In the 31st lecture, he calls melancholy an “illness” the most striking feature of which “is the way in which the super-ego . . . treats the ego” (p. 4669). I am going to make a long quote from this text to illustrate Freud’s position more clearly:

> While a melancholic can, like other people, show a greater or lesser degree of severity to himself in his healthy periods, during a melancholic attack his super-ego becomes over-severe, abuses the poor ego, humiliates it and ill-treats it, threatens it with the direct punishments, reproaches it for actions in the remotest past which had been taken lightly at the time—as though it had spent the whole interval in collecting accusations and had only been waiting for its present access of strength in order to bring them up and make a condemnatory judgement on their basis. The super-ego applies the strictest moral standard to the helpless ego which is at its mercy; in general it represents the claims of morality, and we realize all at once that our moral sense of guilt is the expression of the tension between the ego and the super-ego. (pp. 4669-4670)

As we can see, Freud continues conceiving melancholic attacks as immensely inhibitive and conceives of melancholy mainly as the cruel, merciless, withering, piercing punishment of the ego by the super-ego. Considering Freud’s emphasis on the sadism of the superego, I disagree with Butler’s interpretation of Freud’s revision in “The Ego and the Id” and her universalization of what she calls “melancholic identification” as constitutive of subjectivity. I argue that rather than generalizing melancholy, what Freud aims to do in this article is to show forth how the replacement of the object-cathexis with an identification which he explained as a fundamental mechanism of melancholy is actually not peculiar to melancholy. In doing this, he does not say that ego formation is melancholic, but displays that narcissistic identification is not peculiar to melancholy. Thus, contra Butler, I argue that what Freud universalizes in “The Ego and the Id” is not melancholy but the type of identification structuring this condition, and as Butler’s theory is premised upon the truth of the former proposition, it becomes untenable. Butler does not differentiate melancholy from this type of identification, namely, the introjection of

the lost object, and declares melancholy to be constitutive or universal, disregarding the exceptional role of "the excessively strong super-ego" (p. 3987) in melancholy, and thus all the remarks of Freud drawing attention to the debilitating, disorienting, and consuming aspects of it. In light of later writings of Freud, Butler's theory of gender melancholy can be understood only when we accept from the outset that what she is talking about is narcissistic identification and not melancholy as such. In the next chapter, we will see that almost completely different conclusions are drawn from the very same article by Freud and that the idea of a constitutive melancholy is challenged as it is not loss but lack that structures the subject.

Here I would also like to include a critique by Greg Forter, directed against the attempts for the rehabilitation of melancholy, which is the common point of those scholars we have discussed above. Forter, in his book *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism* (2011) reflects on the literature on mourning and melancholy and suggests that many of Freud's interpreters have distorted his arguments. Evidently, Forter is not very optimistic about the implications of the state of melancholy in terms of political possibilities. In the third chapter of his book, he traces the transformation the formulation of the distinction between mourning and melancholy went through, from Freud to contemporary theorists, and he lays bare how these concepts have been grasped by different authors in quite different and on certain occasions in contradictory ways.

Forter contends that the most important work among all of the first adoptions of this distinction is Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlichs' book, *The Inability to Mourn* (1967). According to Forter, the importance of this book can be stated as follows: as opposed to the general tendency to treat melancholy simply as a pathological state, Mitscherlichs emphasize its necessity in the face of narcissistic

losses, for the alternative of melancholy is nothing but denial. However, Mitscherlichs view melancholy only as an "unavoidable necessity" (p. 135) that has to be worked through. According to Forter, this view is in contradistinction to the contemporary trend in critical theories which celebrates melancholy, about which he has considerable reservations.

Forter observes that since the 2000s melancholy has come to the forefront in the context of historical catastrophes. He gives several examples for what he calls the rehabilitation of melancholy in studies mostly about subcultural groups. For instance, Philip Novak (1999) embraces melancholy as a way for African Americans to remain faithful to their culture repressed by the dominant whitehood and racism. Michael Moon and Jose Munoz (1993) view it as a means for queer communities to embrace their dead such as those who died because of the lack of treatment for AIDS. *Loss,* as I discussed above, is another representative of this genre. The assumption that mourning amounts to meeting the demand of the dominant culture to bid farewell to their own culture and political problems underlies these works.[53]

Forter presents his reservations about the aforementioned embrace of melancholy under three headings: First, he argues that the advocates of melancholy equate mourning to forgetting or "ceasing to care about the object" (p. 139), and only by overlooking the unconscious dimension of melancholy which impedes recollection can they extol it as "the only method of faithful preservation" of the object (p. 138). I think this objection provides a good perspective for reflection on the position in *Loss,* as it oversimplifies Freud's analysis by reducing it to a simple binary and by inverting Freud's prioritization of mourning–favoring melancholy

[53] See Novak, P. (1999). "Circles and Circles of Sorrow": In the Wake of Morrison's Sula. *PMLA* 114, 184–93; Moon, M. (1995). Memorial Rags. In G. E. Haggerty & B. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Professions of Desire: Lesbian and Gay Studies in Literature*. New York: Modern Language Association, pp. 233–40.

rather than mourning which they reduce to abandonment of the object behind and to plain forgetting. As opposed to this view, Forter draws attention to the unconscious status of loss in melancholy, which is totally omitted by these scholars. Forter's second objection to this literature is that all the attempts to depathologize melancholy ultimately end up celebrating it. Melancholy, according to Forter, is far away from providing an affective state that one would like to embrace and make the center of political engagement with history and loss; on the contrary, melancholy brings with it a paralyzing disconnection from the world, harsh criticism toward oneself and a crippling aggression. Forter points out how these authors overlook the affective specificity of melancholy. Third, he asserts that the literature embracing melancholy turns a blind eye to the conservative utilization of melancholy for sustaining existing power relations.[54]

All in all, he warns his readers against the celebration of melancholy, draws our attention to its debilitating effects, and calls for an exploration of possibilities about novel ways for cutting loose from it. Forter, building on Santner's aforementioned work *Stranded Objects,* argues that the tendency of contemporary thought to neutralize or celebrate melancholy has its roots in the postmodernist discourses which emerged after World War II. In the next chapter, first I will elaborate on this relationship between the Holocaust, postmodernity, and the embracement of melancholy, which I think enables us to grasp the context in which Marc Nichanian makes his intervention by theorizing the impossibility of mourning the Catastrophe. Afterwards, I will introduce the Lacanian intervention to this context.

[54] He provides two examples in order to prove his point: Judith Butler's theory of gender melancholy and Juliana Schisari's analysis of the gendered forms of melancholy in Western culture. Both of these scholars reveal how melancholic subjectivities are called into play in order to preserve and maintain compulsory heterosexuality. See Schiesari, J. (1992). *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell UP.

CHAPTER 5

FROM HISTORICAL LOSS TO STRUCTURAL LACK

Freud starts out with discussing loss, but throughout "Mourning and Melancholy" he gradually detaches melancholy from loss and arrives at the argument that melancholy cannot be simply understood as prolonged mourning or a response to a loss; rather, it is an affect that arises from the very structure of the relationship with the object of desire, which in turn depends on the idea that the object can remedy the lack of the subject, therefore making her whole. Thus, as we proceed from Freud's writings to recent debates, *lack* as another term enters the field, as melancholy starts to be analyzed especially concerning the relation between structural lack and historical losses. In this chapter, I'm going to try to trace out this detachment of the concept of melancholy from the idea of a loss happening at a temporal point in reality, and explore the theoretical strain which departs from the contemplation of loss and arrives at the concept of lack. The implications of this distinction concerning Nichanian's definition of the Catastrophe as the death of the witness and the disintegration of language will be the sixth chapter's subject. In short, Nichanian's theory and criticisms towards the trauma literature, and an analysis of his position from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis through the conceptual couples mourning/melancholy and loss/lack, is the subject matter of the last chapter of this thesis.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned the role Mitcherlichs assign to the distinction between self and other, i.e., the importance of the disintegration of fantasies of unity in any work of mourning. On this basis, that is, by extending Mitscherlichs' thesis which was solely focused on the case of Nazism, Santner

addresses criticism of unity, totality, and purity in postmodern discourse, and claims that the vision and goal of postmodern theorists can only be understood by considering the fact that they are writing after the Holocaust, that is, after a crisis of identity which has marked this era, and he sees postmodern theory as an attempted work of mourning for this crisis.

According to Santner, if we really want to understand the period in which this book, *Stranded Objects*, itself, is written, i.e., Germany of the ‘80s and the ways in which the second and third generations fail to face the past and to mourn Auschwitz, we have to consider that the context in question is not only *post*holocaust but also *post*modern. Santner points out that since postmodern theory emerged after WWII, it can only be understood by considering the impact of Auschwitz: “The postmodern destabilization of certain fundamental cultural norms and notions, above all those dealing with self-identity and community, cannot be understood without reference to the ethical and intellectual imperatives of life after Auschwitz" (p. xiv). Thus, talking about post-war makes it mandatory to talk about two separate “post”s: postholocaust and postmodernism.

Santner summarizes the postmodern reflection on Auschwitz in the following way: according to postmodern critics, modernism itself is about destroying difference, rootedness, and so on, the culmination of which can be located at Auschwitz. Postmodernism, on the other hand, is mainly about accepting and “tolerating” difference, decenteredness, and nomadism. The main argument to be found in postmodern theory, according to Santner, is that the inability to tolerate structural suffering leads to historical suffering, which is in parallel to Mitscherlichs’ assertion that working through melancholy is the precondition for mourning**.** Thus, Santner argues that the praise of melancholy is integral to postmodern theory.

The structural suffering, which is the name Santner gives to the suffering induced by symbolic castration, the name of the impossibility that necessarily insists in all symbolic structures (such as any kind of individual or collective identity, all kinds of narratives which provide a stable meaning, or any kind of reality in general terms), a direct implication of being a speaking subject, if not faced and worked through, paves the way for a desire for eliminating difference. In this vein, Santner argues that the "amnesia with respect to Auschwitz" can only be grasped by looking at "the repression of the failures of European modernity more generally to deal with difference" (p. 13).

Santner considers Paul de Man and his views on "the essentially bereft condition of the speaking subject" (p. 13) as a representative of the perspective which concerns itself with the structural, formal, non-historical aspects of suffering. According to de Man, entering into the order of signification and the concomitant condemnation to eternal lack is actually the "primal disaster or catastrophe" sentencing the speaking subject to perpetual mourning; "for the referent, for beauty, for meaning, for home, for stable terms of orientation" (p. 15). Thus, the origin and cause of all historical catastrophes are founded in this primal catastrophe.

But Santner argues that even though postmodern theory can show us the importance of melancholy, it is unable to pass from primary mourning to secondary mourning, unable to make the necessary jump from the preoccupation with lack to confronting historical losses. Santner's objections to this line of thought emphasizing the need for working through primal losses, are as follows: can one approach the "postmodern ethics of impossibility" and mourning the Holocaust with the same terms? Isn't there a difference between mourning structural and historical losses? Is merely comprehending the lack introduced by signification sufficient to face our

responsibility in the death of millions of people? Santner argues that the error of de Man is that "he sought to displace and disperse the particular, historical tasks of mourning which for him, as is now known, were substantial and complex, with what might be called structural mourning, that is, mourning for those 'catastrophes' that are inseparable from being-in-language" (p. 29). As an empirical proof of this error, Santner points Paul de Man's wartime writings which came to light posthumously and inaugurated a series of debates about his life, his theoretical framework, and about postmodernism in general, for de Man had supported the Nazi regime in these writings. Whereas many thinkers such as Derrida pointed out de Man's theoretical work as a sufficient evidence of his confrontation with his past, many people, like Santner, interpreted the lack of an open and public confrontation as the proof of the insufficiency of postmodern arguments against "real" losses and for taking "real" responsibility. In fact, Santner cites the case of de Man as valid proof for the necessity for distinguishing between structural mourning and historical tasks of mourning.

Santner criticizes what he sees as the overvaluation of melancholy by "postmodern theoretical discourses" and the concomitant confinement with impossible mourning as the key to explaining and dealing with historical traumas. In that vein, Greg Forter concurs with Santner's critique of the conflation of structural mourning with historical tasks of mourning in postmodern theory, stating that "the emphasis on structural loss as constitutive of human subjectivity marks the emergence in critical discourse of a recuperated melancholy, according to which 'surmounting' bereavement becomes a kind of specious denial of our predicament as linguistic beings" (p. 136). Though he does not mention Butler's role in the prevalence of this line of thought, Butler might actually be counted as *the* proponent

of ethics of perpetual mourning, as she considers melancholy as a fundamental condition of subjectivity.

According to Forter, "one could trace a conceptual line . . . from the strand of modernist literature examined here, through the emphasis on constitutive or 'structural' (insurmountable) bereavements in Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and to the 'melancholia thesis' in contemporary mourning theory" (p. 10). He argues that "poststructuralist descriptions of . . . a 'melancholic subjectivity'" imply that human subjects are doomed to melancholy, for they see melancholy and the direct result of human subjectivity as such, and suggest that any attempt to get rid of this constitutive melancholy would lead either to absolutist fantasies of erasing difference or to "psychotic delusions of a linguistically unmediated possession of the real" (p. 136), in other words, to deny our captivity in the symbolic order. Though both Santner and Forter adhere to the basic premises of these theories such as the necessity of getting rid of fantasies of unity and totality, they point out the limitation of a theory reducing historical losses to structural losses when faced with events that require processes of working through. To put it differently, they argue that though it is necessary to admit and mourn the structural lack one is forever condemned to, this alone is not enough for facing and working through historical losses.

In a similar vein, Dominick LaCapra criticizes in his article "Trauma, Absence, Loss" (1999) the conversion of structural lack, which he calls absence, into loss and vice versa. The conversion of structural lack "constitutive of existence" into loss, he suggests, would only result in "nostalgia and utopian politics" as it leads one to seek "a new totality or fully unified community," for this very conflation is possible because of the assumption that "there was (or at least could be) some

original unity, wholeness, security, or identity which others have ruined, polluted, or contaminated and thus made us to lose" (LaCapra, 1999, p. 707). When loss is converted into absence, on the other hand, "one faces the impasse of endless melancholy," which means that "the impossible mourning" (p. 698) of aporias of language preoccupy one to such an extent that historical losses lose their significance. As I will explain in the last chapter, this quotation by itself very elegantly captures what I see as the approach of Nichanian to mourning.

LaCapra asserts that this latter conversion of loss into lack is a characteristic pervasive in many contemporary and diverse theoreticians such as Paul de Man, Lawrence Langer, Slavoj Žižek, and Judith Butler, and he argues that there is a tendency in the works of these theoreticians to see "endless mutability," "fragmentation, melancholia, aporias..." as the only possible alternative against all kinds of "phantasm of total mastery" (p. 717). But since this point is universal, i.e., encompassing both the victim and the perpetrator, and indifferent to the particularity of historical conditions and situations, LaCapra argues that these scholars are neither able to see the specificity of historical events nor are they able to provide a framework which would enable us to differentiate the suffering of the victim from that of the perpetrator.

Santner, Forter, and LaCapra are right in pointing out that one should distinguish these two terms, structural lack, and historical loss, and I share their concerns about the inadequacy of a melancholic preoccupation with structural lack for a historical task of mourning. However, I object to Forter's and LaCapra's equalization of the strand embracing melancholy, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and "Derridean poststructuralism," and I think they group them together hastily. Though I concur with their warnings against the embracement of melancholy, I disagree with

the juxtaposition of all these positions which I think differ from one another in numerous ways. As I will demonstrate in the next section, Lacanian psychoanalysis has a different approach towards melancholy; most importantly, unlike the proponents of the celebration of melancholy that we have discussed, it does not attribute an ethical or emancipatory value to melancholy but regards it as a symptom formation which makes us unable to act; and although it appears to be dealing with the lack, its ultimate function is to obscure this constitutive lack in the symbolic order by preoccupying itself with loss.

From a Lacanian point of view, the criticism of postmodern theory as elaborated by Santner, Forter, and LaCapra, namely disregarding the historical formations for the sake of "pure" structure and its lack, can also be found in Žižek's writings. Žižek calls this stance a "'false' eternalization and/or universalization" that "produces a quasi-universal Image whose function is to make us blind to its historical, socio-symbolic determination" (2008, p. 50). As I will elaborate, in the Lacanian framework, contemplating structural lack is not a purely theoretical endeavor disregarding historical sufferings, as the key to grasp the former can only be found in an attempt to approach the latter because the structural "timeless" lack shows its effects only in the "local and temporal" manifestations of the symbolic structure, e.g., in historical events.

Structural lack or antagonism *qua* real refers to the impossibility of (symbolic) identity/totality which prevents any social-historical-political structure from fully constituting itself; yet, this fundamental impossibility is covered over or eliminated by fantasy "by providing a particular 'solution' to the organization of *jouissance* in the figure of an external cause that brings social harmony into ruin" (Özselçuk & Madra, 2014, p. 21). In other words, fantasy provides a way to cope

with the trauma of antagonism by turning its cause into an excessive intruding element which threatens the organic unity of the structure.[55]

Žižek explains this logic of blaming an external and "different" element for the structural impossibility of the ideal of a harmonious ("German") society succinctly, by pointing towards the ideological figure of the Jew in the Nazi ideological universe: "the 'Jew' is just the embodiment of a certain blockage—of the impossibility which prevents the society from achieving its full identity as a closed, homogeneous totality" (2008, p. 143). In other words, the impossibility of the "German society" as a harmonious whole, is transformed into a disturbing external element which is embodied in the figure of the Jew, thus the impossibility immanent to society is externalized into an intruding element which is to be eliminated; to sum it up, the desire for eliminating castration, the impossibility of identity, is transformed into the desire for eliminating (sexual) difference interpreted as the cause of castration. In this sense, Lacanian psychoanalysis demonstrates how the desire to obfuscate the lack translates into historical sufferings, and goes beyond merely pointing towards the universal and eternal character of the lack.

However, Žižek also warns us against what he calls "over-rapid historicization," which is the stance of those who preoccupy themselves with the particular and historical dimension of loss, which would make us "blind to the real kernel which returns as the same through diverse historicizations/symbolizations" (Žižek, 2008, p. 51). This stance, I think, is exemplified by Butler's and Kazanjians' ethics of endless mourning and also by Nichanian's ethics of impossible mourning. Though I concur with Nichanian's critique of the discourses that conceal the traumatic kernel of the genocide; viewed from a Lacanian psychoanalytical

[55] See McGowan (2007) and Stavrakakis (1999) for the role of fantasy in providing support for the construction of ideological reality, i.e., in all kinds of narratives that conceals the trauma of antagonism by projecting the impossibility of a harmonious society into an external element.

perspective, I argue that the framework he inherits from trauma studies, namely the assertion that an evil act like torture or genocide can strip one of subjecthood, language, and humanity, ultimately historicizes the structural lack by turning the impossibility constitutive of all three registers into the necessary effect of a will to annihilation, which in turn elevates the act to a perfect crime, turns the perpetrator into a omnipotent entity, and reduces the victim to a bare victim. In the afterword to *The Historiographic Perversion,* Anidjar demonstrates this elevation explicitly, as he states that "genocide is akin to the perfect crime, that is, to a crime intent on leaving no traces" (p. 143). I want to refer here also to Laub's description of the crime as "foolproof" (p. 82), which I mentioned in the third chapter. It is as if the proponents of the "death of the witness" almost face the structural lack through extreme events like genocide, and then conflate it with a historical condition. This conflation is the very reason why I am proposing the thesis that Nichanian's theory displays a melancholic structure. Thus, in the last section of this chapter, I address the Lacanian approach to this delicate relation between historical and structural sufferings, which I hope will also enable us to disclose the melancholic character of Nichanian's framework.

5.1 Melancholy: The conflation of loss and lack

In his essay on melancholy, titled "Melancholy and the Act"[56] (2000), Slavoj Žižek argues that one of the two important unwritten rules in the academy is the imperative to embrace melancholy, contrary to the stance of Freud.[57] In this regard, Žižek seems to be concurring with Forter's objections to this literature according to which

[56] This article was republished in *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (2002) in a revised and extended form. All the quotations are from this book.
[57] The second rule, he suggests, is the compulsion to sanctify Hannah Arendt and adopt her concept of totalitarianism.

mourning actually indicates a betrayal of the lost object since the object is ultimately left behind and melancholy entails an endless loyalty to the lost object. As it was put above, Freud suggests that the melancholic "knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him" (p. 3043). Žižek elaborates on this statement and builds his explanation of melancholy on the distinction between loss and lack. His question is: What is it really that the melancholic has lost in its object? How come does a particular loss occupy such a crucial place in one's life?

In order to conceive better of the distinction between lack and loss, I want to resort briefly to *What is Sex?* (2017) by Alenka Zupančič, who is one of the prominent thinkers of the Ljubljana school of psychoanalysis. In the book, she explains this distinction by addressing Lacan's reading of Freud's conceptualization of the difference between humans and animals, and in addition to this, the difference between need, surplus-enjoyment, and loss. Freud indeed distinguishes humans from animals by detecting in the former a surplus-enjoyment arising after or simultaneously with the satisfaction of organic needs. In his early works, Lacan is "skeptical of Freud's attempt at explaining this deviation by a kind of linear causality starting with organic needs" and attempts to "replace the Freudian surplus with loss" (Zupančič, 2017, p. 48). Deviation, or surplus-enjoyment, according to this early framework of Lacan, does not start from organic needs but with "'pure loss' induced by the signifier on the part of the body," (p. 48). This means one must lose some enjoyment in order to enter the order of the signifier, and surplus-satisfaction will be the reward of entering the symbolic order and organizing desire according to its rules. However, in his later works, Lacan distances himself from the idea that "the presence of the signifier induces a loss"—which constitutes the foundation of the trend celebrating melancholy—and adopts the view that the signifying order itself is

lacking, ridden with a fundamental deadlock called “the lack in the Other” (Zupančič, 1998, p. 199), “the ontological minus” (Zupančič, 2017, p. 55), or, the structural lack.

The name for this necessary structural gap, this impossible kernel, this point in which the conditions of the possibility and the impossibility of the Symbolic order coincide, is the Real in Lacanian psychoanalysis. If structural lack, as discussed above, does not come *after* the field but is the constituting principle of the symbolic order; what we observe in melancholy is a confusion of this primal, fundamental lack with a particular loss, as a strategy of coping with this gap: “insofar as the object-cause of desire is originally, in a constitutive way, lacking, melancholy interprets this lack as loss, as if the lacking object was once possessed and then lost” (Žižek, 2002, p. 143). The melancholic compensates the lacking object, *objet petit a*, by transforming this lack to the loss of a particular object which sort of became the Thing for herself. In this way, she can sustain the illusion that she once experienced or could have experienced herself as a whole, and that she lacks this feeling now since she has lost access to a particular object. The fallacy of melancholy consists in the fact that the melancholic denies the fundamental impossibility, that is the lack in the Other, by conceiving it as a loss, transforming the impossibility into a particular lost object. This, in turn, manifests as an inability to act on the part of the subject, who can only view the situation as an inescapable impossibility. As I will discuss in the next chapter, if we recall the result of the historicization of the lack in the case of Nichanian, namely the elevation of the act to a perfect crime, the perpetrators into omnipotent actors, and the victim into a helpless passive being, the connection between historicization of lack and melancholy as the conflation of lack and loss becomes clearer.

So, what happens when we consider the relation of melancholy to mourning through this Lacanian framework? According to Žižek, "the work of mourning has the structure of the 'sublation [Aufhebung]' through which we retain the notional essence of an object by losing it in its immediate reality" (p. 143).[58] In this regard, mourning understood as working through particular losses has to entail forgetting, however, this act of forgetting is not a betrayal to the loss—contrary to the stance that rejects mourning on the basis that it amounts to forgetting—but an act of ultimate fidelity to the traumatic experience as it entails an encounter with the structural lack or antagonism as such which is the truth of that experience. This *Aufhebung* disrupts the endless devotion to the particularity of the lost object and brings about a cut between the chain of lost objects and the place that they occupy. Only through a minimal "forgetting" of the "historical" lost object, one can come to see the timeless empty place of that object, namely the structural lack or the lack in the Other. That is why, as opposed to melancholy which Zupančič defines as "a never-ending grief that keeps alive, through pain, the memory of what was lost," mourning stands upon creation of metaphors, and is a "presupposing the power to forget" (Zupančič, 2003, pp. 60-61). Žižek also points towards the "radical overlapping of recollection and forgetting" (Žižek, 2014, p. 230) as the core of the work of mourning.

We can see the difference of the Lacanian understanding by showing how Žižek's conclusion from Agamben's reading of Freud is almost directly opposed to that of Kazanjian and Eng, which was discussed above in the fourth chapter.

[58] Let us also note here psychoanalyst Darian Leader's argument in *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia, and Depression* (2008) that the process of "reshuffling and rearranging" of memories which is an essential component of a work of mourning cannot continue forever but needs to be interrupted at some point by creation of metaphors that will enframe the stream of memories with unending depth and details, which means that mourning is not only about remembering, but it also entails forgetting.

Agamben's definition of melancholy, as I stated above, argues that "melancholia offers the paradox of an intention to mourn that precedes and anticipates the loss of the object" (Agamben, 1993, p. 20). Whereas Kazanjians saw this anticipation as the emancipatory potential of melancholy, Žižek detects here an over-attachment to loss. He asserts that the error of the melancholic is not that she cannot sublate or that she repudiates symbolizing, but that she locates the resistance to sublation "in a positively existing, albeit lost, object" (Žižek, 1989/2008, p. 143). The melancholic in his framework is fixated on the object supposed to be lost, precluding the desire of the melancholic to be subjected to metonymic sliding, that is, moving from one object of desire to another. Alenka Zupančič takes this up in an essay titled "Mélancolie et certitude" [Melancholy and Certitude][59] (1998) and demonstrates through the example of Hamlet that melancholy can be defined as the conflation of lack and loss.

5.2 Hamlet's melancholy: "Time is out of joint"

In her reading of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholy," Zupančič argues that Freud determines two major differences between mourning and melancholy; the first difference concerns the duration—as mourning ends after a while, and melancholy is a never-ending process of mourning—and the second difference resides in "the nature of the lost object" as **"**the lost object of the melancholic is the self itself" (1998, p. 195). Starting from the first of the two major differences given above, Zupančič argues that melancholy is "a work of mourning in which the moment of conclusion is lacking" (p. 195); which is to say that it is an interminable process of grief. Then she explains this inability of the melancholic to act or to conclude the

[59] All translations from this text are mine.

mourning process through the second point given above, which is the fact that the melancholic transforms the impossibility of grounding herself in a consistent symbolic edifice, the non-existence of the Other, into a lost object. In situations where any direct guarantee, injunction, or sanction from the Other is absent, which is to say situations in which the lack in the Other transpires, the melancholic is utterly unable to assume the responsibility and act for herself without any direct orders; on the contrary, she is fixated on the supposed loss which brought about this situation rather than seeing that the impossibility is on the side of the Other, thus she is unable to confront or assume the lack in the Other. Traumatized by this deadlock, the melancholic cannot ever reach a conclusion or give a decision.

So, how does psychoanalysis explain the process of attachment to a particular loss in the case of melancholy, and does it propose a way out of its vicious circle? In melancholy, "the subject loses its footing (for example, because of the loss of a loved one)" (p. 199) and the only thing that can free the subject from its attachment to the particular loss, namely what can resubjectivize the melancholic subject, is for her to make "a subjective gesture of precipitate identification" (p. 202) at the very place of the lack in the Other, which is to assume the radical contingency of deciding without a guarantee that one can rely on. Indeed, this is the place subject can show itself, because "if we were [to be] dealing with a 'full' Other, i.e., with an Other (the symbolic order) where all our actions and their results would be determinable in advance, there would be no room for the subject" (p. 199). The only place in which we can speak about the subject, as the gesture of a pure decision, for instance, is the lack in the Other. In the case of melancholy, however, this subjective gesture becomes impossible because the indeterminate and timeless lack is occluded by a particular and temporal loss.

After this exposition, Zupančič presents two hypotheses on melancholy: The first thesis goes like this: “The loss likely to lead to melancholy is not the loss of what we have (had), but the loss of what we are, the loss of what constituted the very core of our being, a loss that therefore requires resubjectivation” (p. 199) which is explained above as the fixation on the lost object, which ultimately turns out to be the sense of a consistent self, or “the very core of our being” (p. 199). And secondly, she argues that “the melancholic prefers, in a way, to continue to maintain a relationship with the lost object (or with the object as lost), since the pain she feels in maintaining this relationship constitutes the last support of her being” (p. 199) which explains the interminability of the cycle of grief in melancholy, except through an act in which subject fully assumes the consequences of the non-existence of the Other.

Contrary to the usual interpretation of melancholy as a refusal to accept loss, Zupančič argues that the melancholic “accepts it only too willingly, erasing the difference between loss and lack (as a constituent of desire)” (p. 200). For the melancholic the lost object practically embodies the *objet petit a* which is the Real object that marks the gap in the midst of the Symbolic, and “thus fills the lack and closes its function, the foundation of desire” (p. 200). The reason for the over-attachment of the melancholic to the loss is that “the melancholic possesses the object by its loss” (p. 200), which is to say that through deeming it lost, she can keep the fantasy of its possible existence (usually in the past). Thus, the melancholic is unable to differentiate loss and lack, the lost-object and the Real object as an empty place.

To sum it up, Zupančič defines melancholy through the relationship of the subject with the lost object, citing melancholic’s inability to give up the last support of its being, which is the enjoyment derived from this painful relationship, and

therefore her inability to move on to a new identification. This enjoyment emerges from the mechanism by which the impossibility of direct access to the Thing ("the very core of our being," i.e., enjoyment) is transformed into surplus-enjoyment through the repetition of the trauma of loss in the cycle of grief. The melancholic keeps her fantasmatic connection to the impossible enjoyment only through attachment to its loss. Melancholy ultimately consists in an inability to subjectivize loss or an inability to objectivize lack, which means that in melancholy, the particular and historical character of loss is not recognized as such; as the lost object cannot be separated from the *objet petit a* as its place. Zupančič expands on this discussion by analyzing Hamlet. But, first, let us remember the prevalent symptoms of melancholy listed by Freud:

> a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (p. 3042).

Zupančič argues that Hamlet bears all of these symptoms, and he has plunged into melancholy since his encounter with the ghost of his father. The lost object with which Hamlet identifies, which he cannot give up, and which prevents him from acting, is the ghost of his father. We realize that Hamlet identifies with the lost object from the fact that he is drawn into a different temporality, that of the between two deaths, never finding the right time to act. And by stating that "time is out of joint," Hamlet himself acknowledges this change in temporality. We observe this change in temporality, this short-circuit between different times, from his father's debt catching up with him from the past. Since the injustices done to his father are not avenged, which is to say that the debt of the past has not been settled properly, the father returns as a ghost and Hamlet finds himself indebted. On one hand, there is the

crippling guilt troubling him because he couldn't pay off the debt of his father, i.e., couldn't take his revenge, and on the other hand, there is the doubt about his father, if it is "an honest ghost" or not, he constantly seeks proofs to ratify this issue which point towards the non-existence of a guarantee of Other as discussed above. In the end, it is not "more precise proof" of his uncle's crime but an act of contingent subjective gesture, an imaginary identification with Laërtes that provides Hamlet a way out of melancholy. The moment he identifies with Laërtes and assumes his mourning over Ophelia's death, which is to say, when he realizes that he is the one who recognizes Laërtes' pain, which amounts to a realization of a subjective decision on the part of Hamlet, symbolic identification becomes possible for him. After that point, he "accepts the unknown of the present" (p. 206), which is to say that he assumes the responsibility of his actions without any recourse to a figure of a substantial Other, and finds a way to act without relying on any solid and sound basis, after which the ghost never appears again.

5.3 Beyond the originary loss

As we have seen, the relation of the subject to the lack in the Other is a core issue in the melancholic disposition. In *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia, and Depression*, published in 2008, Darian Leader comprehensively explains the constitutive role the lack in the Other plays in melancholy. He demonstrates at length how the work of mourning should proceed, both at the individual and social levels. What makes his framework valuable for this discussion is that he conceives mourning not only as the narrativization, that is, the symbolization of loss, but also as a process that bears a Real dimension. Mourning, he states, is a process in which one starts with a particular loss, thinks about what one has lost through that particular

loss, and ultimately arrives at the absolute loss which is the lack. The aforementioned connection Žižek draws between mourning and sublation, I think, constitutes the essence of what Leader is arguing for. Mourning is not only the symbolization of loss but also the sublation of loss, whereby by traversing the loss, one arrives to lack as the ultimate loss. Melancholy, on the other hand, amounts to a reduction of the Real, (in other words, the constitutive failure of language, symbolic castration, lack in the Other, and so on) into a particular loss, which is then endlessly contemplated and grieved for, a repetitive process through which the melancholic subject derives surplus-enjoyment. Nichanian's insistence in preserving the loss by refusing any kind of attempt at approaching it except declaring that we have lost it, as I explain in the next chapter, exemplifies this reduction. We can remember the omnipotence that Nichanian attributes to the perpetrators and the impotence which falls to the victim's share since the language is disintegrated. In contrast to this, psychoanalysis criticizes the practice of endless mourning in the sense of a vicious cycle of grief and self-punishment, or the attitude of resignation in the face of impossibility.

For an authentic work of mourning to take place, it is imperative that the object is separated from the place that it occupies. The problem with melancholy is that this separation cannot be performed:

> It is as if a real empirical object like a person has come to embody the dimension of lack. Rather than different people going into the place of a lack, one person has become completely identified with it. That's why losing them is the same as losing everything. (p. 193)

For the melancholic, there is "no difference . . . between the object and the place it occupies" (p. 193). Therefore, the loss of the object amounts to a traumatizing encounter with an unbearable hole, which cannot ever be filled with other objects. A particular loss, in this way, is equated with the fundamental lack in the symbolic Other, from which the melancholic tries to escape. Az Zupančič promptly

demonstrates, in his (mis)encounter with the lack, Hamlet also goes down this path and mistakes the injustice done to his father for the cause of his castration.

What happens in melancholy is that an event like the loss of a person triggers an experience of the collapse of the whole world, which in turn puts into work a defense. The melancholic's clinging to the dead, the inability to leave the deceased, is actually a sign indicating that a defense mechanism is working. The melancholic, whose symbolic position is shaken after loss, takes the lost person and loss as a reference point on which to ground herself. "The dead cannot be relinquished because without them one would be left at the mercy of something even more terrible" (p. 186). And what is this terrible thing? It is the Real kernel insisting in the middle of the symbolic order, namely, its constitutive lack that no determinate object could ever fill that lack or remedy. Or if we translate this into Nichanian's terms, the original "disintegration of language," which is not an event but the fundamental condition of language.

In her article "The Sickness of Tradition: Between Melancholia and Fetishism" Rebecca Comay nicely articulates the causes of this fear/aversion from the Real. She argues that there is a "gain" at place in melancholy for the melancholic smooths over the traumatic character of lack by turning it into loss, which in turn becomes a source of surplus-enjoyment for her: "Melancholia would thus be a way of staging a dispossession of that which was never one's own to lose in the first place" (2016, p. 22). Comay does not define melancholy solely as the loss of and loyalty to an object but as "the unappeasable attachment to an ungrievable loss" (2005, p. 88) which underlines the vicious character of this deadlock. Thus the definition of melancholy is broadened as it becomes concerned not with this or that object but with loss as such; that's why even the acceptance of an "originary loss"

can function as a melancholic trick to obscure the lack: “the preoccupation with an originary loss (‘as such’) logically preceding the loss of any determinate object could function equally as a pre-emptive denial of loss which would mask the real inaccessibility of its object by determining it in advance as lost–thus negatively appropriable in its very absence” (p. 89).

In that case, we can argue that the originary loss that Butler seeks to point out as what we should recognize, or the structural suffering which Forter, Santner, and LaCapra designate as (and criticize) what postmodern theory never ceases to mourn, would, in Comay’s terms, be the purest appearance of the fundamental lack from the perspective of the melancholic. And the difference between the two positions reflects the difference between endless mourning, which is a cycle of grief, and mourning as proposed by psychoanalytical theory. As Comay demonstrates, we do not and cannot conceptualize lack as any kind of determinate loss, even if primordial, as lack at the most basic level means that there is a signifying order that cannot be totalized. The subject does not lose anything, as the Other is constitutively lacking. It is not the case that there initially was something and afterward it, or some part of it was lost, but rather the signifying order starts with negativity, this pure expenditure of something which did not exist. Lack itself is what enables signification to take place in the first place, with its mechanisms like metaphor and metonymy. In other words, lack is both the precondition for any space of desire/meaning and at the same time, it is the name of the impossibility of this space to consolidate itself, which opens up the place for desire/meaning in the first place.

The obstinate, endless mourning of the melancholic, then, stems from her loyalty to a real object that is impossible both to retain and to lose. “Precisely by occluding structural lack as determinate loss” melancholy “would exemplify the

strictly perverse effort to assert a relation with the non-relational" (Comay, p. 89).[60] We have previously established that "the Real is in itself a hole, a gap, an opening in the middle of the symbolic order–it is the lack around which the symbolic order is structured" (Žižek, 2008, p. 191). As opposed to this Real character of lack, loss is a symbolic determination to which we can relate. To repeat Comay's terms, when one claims to have lost the real object, as in melancholy, "one asserts a relation with the non-relational" (Comay, p. 89) which points to the aforementioned gap between the Symbolic and Real. Similar to Forter's objections to contemporary approaches to mourning and melancholy, Comay interprets the standard inversion of Freud's prioritization of mourning over melancholy, which is discussed above as the glorification of melancholy and endless mourning as the true ethical stance in the face of loss, as a simplification of Freud's theory, and criticizes the approbation of loyalty to the experiences of loss.

If melancholy is this conflation, and if mourning is the name of the process in which one starts out from loss and arrives at lack, we can argue that the only way to

[60] Though Comay reads melancholy in relation to fetishism and perversion, many clinical psychoanalysts see melancholy as a sub-category of psychosis. Though the relation between melancholy and psychosis is not within the scope of this thesis, I think it would be a very productive path to pursue, as Nichanian views the self-denial of the survivor as an escape from the universe of the omnipotent genocidal will which causes madness and delirium. For the works of clinicians defining psychosis as the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father and taking melancholy as a sub-category of psychosis, see: Verhaeghe (2004), Grigg (2015, 2016). This categorization is indebted both to Freud– as Freud takes melancholy as a narcissistic disorder–and to Lacan's Seminar VI, *Desire and Its Interpretation,* in which Lacan reflects on Freud's "Mourning and Melancholy." The analysts mentioned above point to this seminar as the only text in which Lacan openly approaches these concepts. Though Lacan does not make any explicit statement about melancholy, confining himself to comparing mourning and psychosis, his reading of mourning as the inverse of foreclosure leads his interpreters to take melancholy as a sub-category of psychosis. Žižek, Zupančič and Comay, to whom I owe the definition of melancholy, do not reference this earlier text of Lacan when they discuss melancholy, read Freud's concepts primarily through a philosophical rather than a clinical perspective, and do not reflect on melancholy's ties with the category of psychosis.
For a reading that focuses on the transformation of the concept of psychosis in Lacan's oeuvre, and takes psychosis not as the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father but as an alternative way of intermingling three registers of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary, see Vanheule (2011). Chiesa's *Subjectivity and Otherness* (2007) which reads Lacan's take of the subject by dividing his writings into three main stages is also worth mentioning as he elaborates on how Lacan's approach to psychosis changes over time. See also the 13th chapter of *Less than Nothing* (2012) for an analysis of the differences between the four versions of Freud's *Ver-: Verwerfung* (foreclosure), *Verdrängung* (repression), *Verneinung* (denial) and *Verleugnung* (disavowal).

confront structural lack is to start by a historical/particular suffering, i.e., encounter and work through a particular symptom, which is incidentally the method of psychoanalysis. My argument is that one can arrive at the dimension of structural lack only if one starts out from historical manifestations of that lack, i.e., historical sufferings. One cannot simply cut the corners and directly face lack while disregarding loss, which also constitutes the core of Santner's criticism against de Man's dismissal of the historical dimension in favor of the structural, for the only way to get a grasp of the lack is working through the loss itself. Consequently, a historical loss can be mourned only when one moves towards structural lack and realizes the inextricable link between them. Lacanian psychoanalysis argues that to arrive at the lack of any social formation, for instance, we should look at the sufferings of all kinds of oppressed groups, like the proletariat, women, queers, and the colonized, as lack manifests itself through the particular instantiations of historical suffering and social antagonism. It is not like you disregard all historical suffering and you contemplate pure lack and you don't have to deal with any historical decision or responsibility.

Following this, we should state that the conflation of loss and lack in melancholy has its own political implications as even if it deals with the sufferings and does not try to cover them up, it cannot relate these sufferings to the structural antagonism of society and therefore it makes political action almost impossible. That is why I can understand why Forter and LaCapra criticize those who propose impossible mourning and cling to an endless cycle of melancholy, though as I explained, I do not think that that is the position of Lacanian psychoanalysis as interpreted by scholars drawing on the later works on Lacan. As I will explain in the last chapter, Marc Nichanian's declaration of the witness to be dead, language to be

disintegrated beyond redemption, his insistence on signifying loss beyond repair, when read together with his praise of melancholy as the only way of resistance, has a lot of affinities with this front embracing melancholy; and I propose that through a psychoanalytical framework we can both formulize the melancholic core of his framework and also try to broaden it with insights and derive from it more possibilities.

CHAPTER 6

MARC NICHANIAN IN-BETWEEN LOSS AND LACK

The genocides of the twentieth century engendered serious problems regarding the representability of forms of violence that were pushing the limits of human imagination and understanding, plunging humanity into an unprecedented situation that could not be framed within the existing discourses. It led up to historians organizing conferences over conferences, pushed jurists to reexamine the extent and nature of their jurisdictions, provoked crises among many artists and authors, caused many books to be published on the subjects of mourning and melancholy, which started discussions, as Santner cites, about the distinction between structural and historical suffering, or led many thinkers to argue that the language was destroyed and bearing witness was made impossible, as we saw in Agamben, Felman, Laub, and Nichanian.

Nichanian undoubtedly brought forward many important conceptual discussions and made many contributions to these debates. To grasp these contributions, in the second chapter, I focused on his critique of historiography, and in the third chapter, we saw how he is influenced by post-Holocaust trauma studies. In these two chapters, I established that all of Nichanian's writings can be regarded as an attempt to conceptualize the intimate relation he detects between genocide as the destruction of the factuality of the fact and the Catastrophe as the death of the witness. In the fourth and fifth chapters, I surveyed the literature on mourning and melancholy by focusing on a particular distinction that sheds light on the melancholic structure, namely the difference between structural lack and historical loss. To elaborate further, in the fourth chapter I demonstrated that the tendency to

view melancholy and primary mourning as the precondition of mourning historical sufferings has gained popularity in the last years, especially after the trauma of the Holocaust. In the fifth chapter, I discussed how Lacanian psychoanalysis differs from the literature prioritizing melancholy. In contrast to them, we have seen that Lacanian psychoanalysis doesn't view melancholy as a universal condition, doesn't attribute an ethical value or necessity to it, and most importantly, doesn't give in to the criticism against mourning which equates it with simple forgetting or dismissal of loss, since the definition of proper work of mourning in Lacanian psychoanalysis is radically different from a conceptualization of fidelity to the loss as perpetual grief as an endless contemplation on the lost object. As demonstrated above, all these other views regarding melancholy either fall into the trap of pseudo-universalization (which is the stance that disregards the particular in favor of the structural), or they fall into the opposite trap of over-rapid historicization (which is the stance that loses the universal character of the lack and preoccupies itself with the particularities of the loss, either by advocating endless contemplation of the lost object or by advocating for the full symbolization of the loss). On the contrary, as I have shown, Lacanian psychoanalysis suggests that the very conflation of lack and loss is the very hallmark of a melancholic structure and that proper mourning requires a movement from the analysis of the historical loss to the realization of the structural lack which by its definition is structural and non-temporal.

As we have seen, Nichanian conceives the experience of being the victim of a will to annihilation as an exceptional trauma, suggesting that such an experience cannot be symbolized by any rational, psychological, historical, or political explanation, and he claims that human reason cannot ever comprehend being exposed to a will to annihilation. In the following chapter, having established some

basic psychoanalytical concepts, I am going to demonstrate that the conflation of lack and loss—as was discussed in chapter five—lies at the bottom of Nichanian's exceptionalization of the Catastrophe, which we can detect in three main points: the absolutization of genocidal will as what we will never be able to grasp; the historicization of the death of the witness with reference to phenomenology; the refusal of narrativization *in toto*, deeming it as a betrayal to the event.

6.1 Genocidal will: Radical evil?

Nichanian's claim that melancholy means "to ask constantly, again and again, what remains when you have even lost the language for saying the loss" (2012b, p. 276) elegantly captures how working through the past entails an encirclement of the remains, at which point he might be very close to a proper psychoanalytical mourning, as he points out a way out of a mere designation of impossibility by showing that one needs to trace the remains even if it seems to be impossible. However, this call in the question-and-answer session at a conference for challenging impossibility remains unexplored and unfortunately does not manifest itself in other works of him as he insists on the impossibility of symbolizing the loss, emphasizing again and again that what happened was without any remainder and beyond all reason, something we can't know anything about, something we can barely refer to.

Nichanian often emphasizes that the Catastrophe is "ungraspable" (2002, p. 209), "immeasurable" (p. 201), "incommensurable" (p. 224), and "irreparable" (p. 209) that it could never be narrated; and he asserts that the experience of the Catastrophe is "an experience of madness" (p. 190) and "the end of all history and politics" (2003, p.142). He argues that what happened was "beyond the human possibilities of mourning" (p. 126), that against this kind of devastation historical and

political explanations can be “at best contextual” (p. 116) and they can ultimately say nothing about the Catastrophe.

We have seen that almost all of these adjectives Nichanian uses to describe the Catastrophe are used by Laub, Felman, and Agamben when describing Auschwitz and trying to convey the victim's experience. When I was reading all this literature, the questions that occupied my mind and that I could not find an answer to were as follows: what was Nichanian’s position on those who deny any attempt at explanation regarding the Holocaust, giving it the status of an absolute Evil? Does he also think that we were faced with such an Evil that the human mind cannot and even should not try to comprehend? What exactly is the meaning of the statement that the Catastrophe is “ungraspable”? Is this argument simply an extension of the view, which is criticized often in the writings of scholars, such as, Badiou and Žižek, that declares the Holocaust to be beyond politics and deems it a “radical evil” (Badiou, 2001, p. 62)?

The first name that should be considered in the light of these questions is Agamben, especially if we consider that he is a name Nichanian refers to often. When I was reading Nichanian, I tried to keep the following duality Agamben developed in his book *Remnants of Auschwitz* in the back of my mind. According to Agamben, there is a clear-cut distinction within the Holocaust studies: One camp views the Holocaust as only one of the events in the book of History and claims that everything potentially has a historical explanation, and the other camp insists that the attempts to understand or discuss Holocaust rationally would justify what happened, and therefore they made the Holocaust into a taboo object by asserting that this event was so evil that it could not and ought not to be understood. Žižek summarizes this line of thought as a “prohibition against questioning the causes of the Holocaust”

(Žižek, 2002 p.65). Accordingly, Holocaust is incomprehensible, "transcendent, or unsayable" (Badiou, 2001, p.62); neither witnesses nor historians can understand what happened.[61] One can only silently stand before such an irrational and unapproachable manifestation of pure Evil. Žižek demonstrates this in a concise manner:

> the Holocaust is referred to as a mystery, the heart of darkness of our civilization; its enigma negates all (explanatory) answers in advance, defying knowledge and description, noncommunicable, lying outside historicization–it cannot be explained, visualized, represented, transmitted, since it marks the Void, the black hole, the end, the implosion, of the (narrative) universe. Accordingly, any attempt to locate it in its context, to politicize it, is equivalent to the anti-Semitic negation of its uniqueness. (pp. 66-67)

Agamben, by arguing against the first group that Holocaust was indeed unique and against the second group that it was not unsayable, tries to open a third line of thought in the field. According to him, it is certain that Auschwitz was radical evil, hence it was unique, but it was not unsayable at all. I pondered on the question for a long time where exactly Nichanian fell in this distinction, and whether if he repeats the attitude mentioned in the quote above, called "academic Holocaust industry" (2002, p. 66) by Žižek, in the case of the Armenian genocide. Nichanian repeatedly argues that the genocidal will is beyond any explanation and reason. At this point, Nichanian's argument is very much reminiscent of the resistance to explanation displayed by the Holocaust survivors like Levi and Davit Rousset. Especially in his writings on Yesayan's experience, he argues that the experience of Catastrophe lies beyond imagination and speech, and he emphasizes the non-understandable and non-integratable character of the Event by asserting that the Catastrophe is beyond reason. Even though Yesayan eventually finds a meaning in the idea that Armenians were sacrificed for a better order, she really struggles with apprehending and

[61] See Badiou (2001), Traverso (2009), and Zupančič (2000) for a discussion on the interpretation of the Holocaust as radical evil.

explaining and swings back and forth between giving meaning to what she witnesses and showing its ultimate meaninglessness. All of these oblige us to underline the intensity of the horror that was gone through, which was to such a degree that its symbolization appeared to be impossible.

Certainly, Nichanian does not *prohibit* explaining for example by arguing that we should stop studying history, or that explanations justify the Event. In my readings, I have not seen him using the word "evil;" he in fact criticizes those who interpret the Event by referring to "the barbarity of the perpetrators" (Nichanian, 2002, p. viii). However, as he claims the effect of genocide to be the destruction of humanity and the shattering of language, he obviously views genocide as a very peculiar kind of crime, capable of destroying language itself. To the declaration of Auschwitz as a unique and unsayable crime, Nichanian answers, it seems, by declaring that ours (the Catastrophe) is unique as well. One of the best indicators of this stance, I think, is his refusal to use the generic word genocide and insistence on the proper name of the Event. Another indicator might be his reproach to Lyotard, Nancy and Labarthe, as though they insist on the singularity of genocide as a crime they can only think of Auschwitz and cannot see the possibility of multiple uniquenesses, which he expresses at the beginning pages of the *Historiographic Perversion* (pp. 5-6). Nichanian seems to extend the uniqueness endowed in general to the Holocaust to many such events of uniqueness by arguing that the Catastrophe is beyond any explanation as well. In his reading of *Averagnerun Mech*, he states that "the only thing beyond all speech" is "the will to extermination" (2002, p. 210) therefore designating that the genocidal will lies beyond language. In this sense, *Aghed* can be conceptualized as a traumatic sublime that crashes the survivor. Considering his assertion that any attempt at making the genocidal will into an

explicable fact is futile, I think Nichanian is close to this viewpoint. In this respect, it seems like he detects an epistemological impossibility and thinks that language is not adequate to express such a horrific act. Therefore, he argues that we should not behave as if we can tell something about the trauma and simply concede that we cannot ever say it all, that we lost the language to say it all.[62]

Accordingly, the extremity of the genocide is related to the limit of language. Nichanian summarizes the circumstances in the post-Catastrophic time in the following way: "Language is *no longer* [emphasis added] capable of symbolizing violence or of working for the identification of the subject" (2014, pp. 137-138). That the event is ineffable is not because it is so horrible that the human mind cannot ever grasp it but because the genocidal will shatters the speech of the survivor. Nichanian claims that what cannot be spoken is the experience of being the object of the genocidal will, as the event is the very loss of the ability to interpret, name, mourn and forgive the loss.

As I explained in the second chapter, the event is not a fact but the very failure of the survivor to speak of the Event, as "the survivor has lost the very capacity to speak the loss" (2016a, p. 147). But why exactly did the ability to symbolize and imagine disappear? According to Nichanian, it is because the executioner wanted it. The purpose of the genocidal will, from the very beginning, was to disintegrate the language of the victim. And how did it succeed in shattering the language of the survivor? Nichanian's answer to this question draws first of all on his critique of history and its inherent denialism, as we discussed in the 2nd

[62] Lyotard, who has a very strong influence on Nichanian, also draws attention to the unsayable character of trauma: '"After Auschwitz' it is necessary, according to Eli Wiesel, to add yet another verse to the story of the forgetting of the recollection . . . *All I know how to do is to say that I no longer know how to tell this story* [emphasis added]. And this should be enough. This has to be enough." See Lyotard, J-F. *Heidegger and "the Jews*. University of Minnesota Press, p. 47.

chapter. Accordingly, the genocidal will first destroyed all the evidence and then turned to the victim and mocked her by saying “prove now if you can.” The genocidal will obliged Armenians to prove their own death by crying out for universal justice. In this way, Armenians experienced the Event in an awry way, everything they lived through, they understood and narrated them with the West as an addressee in mind.

However, Nichanian explains the drive to prove also by referring to the irreversible death of the witness, the destruction of humanity and language; and by asserting that no one can bear witness to its own death as a witness, he excludes the survivors from the categories of subject and human. He develops this line of thought he develops through post-Holocaust trauma studies and phenomenology**.** Now we will examine this second line more closely as it will draw the line where his thought stops being in line with the psychoanalytical understanding, especially with regard to mourning, namely what should we do in the face of the impossibility.

6.2 Witnessing oneself: On being a phenomenological subject

In *Edebiyat ve Felaket* and the article “Death of the Witness,” points out the common properties of genocide and torture, and building on the analysis of torture by Avelar which was covered in the third chapter, he argues that the ultimate aim of the torturer is, just in the case of genocide, to kill the humanity of the witness. He goes on to argue that the survivors of torture are unable to mourn to the extent that they lose their humanity:

> The most horrifying aspect of torture is the obliteration of the witness. Since the ultimate wish of the torturer is to exclude the witness from the act of torture, and the ultimate aim of the torture is to kill the witness; torture makes the victim lose their humanity irredeemably, excluding the victim from humanity forever. (2001, p. 31)

Therefore, according to Nichanian, the exclusion from humanity is irreversible, just like the death of the witness. According to him, the victims of torture and genocide are expunged from humanity, witnesshood, mourning, therefore from subjecthood, as "it is impossible to survive torture and remain human" (2016a, p. 148).

Nichanian associates the negation of death with the destruction of humanity, and even with madness. For him, the law of mourning, i.e., the acceptance of death, is the constitutive principle of humanity. Accordingly, the negation of death becomes a maddening experience insofar as it makes the victim deprived of the ground of humanity. If survivors do not want to become insane, they have no other choice than to deny their own experience, that is, deny that the witness in them died once and for all. As mourning necessitates making sense of the event, and as symbolizing an event is for him the most basic feature of being a human being, Nichanian declares the death of humanity as the necessary result of the interdiction of mourning. I think Nichanian accurately ascertains and criticizes that survivors are forced to approach their own experiences through "the compulsion to prove," and, as demonstrated at the end of the second chapter, his argument captures the logic of the superego elegantly. Here, although Nichanian seems to be making a point that is akin to the psychoanalytical understanding of the absence of the guarantee of the big Other, insofar as he exceptionalizes it into the effect of a particular historical event and regards it as madness, I argue that he incorrectly attributes the effect of structural lack to a loss caused by being exposed to the genocidal will.

This tendency of Nichanian to absolutize and exceptionalize the historical shows itself in his designation of the experience of being the victim of the genocidal will as an exceptional trauma, which asserts that there is no kind of rational or psychological explanations that can be made about the will to exterminate, that the

experience of being exposed to it cannot be symbolized, that what happened was "beyond the limits of human apprehension; human imagination" (2003, p. 126). Accordingly, the ethical duty is the acknowledgment of the fact that we can only negatively designate what the Catastrophe is, in other words, we can only say how we cannot say it. According to Nichanian, "the Catastrophe is well and truly a 'horizon' from which all discourse becomes possible or impossible. As soon as a discourse claims to appropriate it, as an object, instance, or fact, it shies away, disappearing from the horizon" (Nichanian, 2002, p. 166).

At first sight, this argument of Nichanian seems to echo the logic of the impossibility of the symbolization of the Real that there is an incommensurability between the Real and the Symbolic so that the Real can only negatively manifest itself through the cracks and glitches of the Symbolic, we cannot determine anything positive about it. But the true logical conclusion that is to be derived from this impossibility takes us a step further: not only that the Real is always absent, only present through traces and marks which indicate it negatively and so on; but that the Real is *nothing but* the objectification of this negativity, this impossibility itself. The point is not that we cannot ever know or say it, that it lies beyond language or our mental capacities; but it is the impossibility of knowing or saying itself, which is not beyond language but designates its internal limit. Therefore, while Nichanian's claim is congruent with psychoanalytical theory to the extent he detects the impossibility, he nevertheless cannot take the last step and objectivize the lack, i.e. see that the impossibility for us to reach an X is the impossibility of X itself, or the guarantee is absent for the Other as well, and instead, he becomes trapped in the melancholic state in which there is no option but to say that it is impossible, because his position cannot properly pass from loss to lack.

Nichanian is stuck with pointing out that whatever gets said about the Catastrophe has to be distorted. Language: disintegrated. Mourning: interdicted. Witness: dead. Humanity: eradicated. It can be easily argued that "limit" is one of the most frequently used concepts by him. This leads to another point in which the psychoanalytical account contradicts Nichanian's framework, namely Nichanian's refusal to see the inability or impossibility to give meaning as a human trait. Without stretching his arguments, we can argue that according to him, if you cannot give meaning, if you cannot bear witness to your own experience, you are not a human. An external force such as the genocidal will can come and strip you of your humanity. Nichanian regards failure of identification, or failure to become fully subject as an impediment to qualifying as a subject, whereas Lacanians argue conversely that the very impossibility of the subject to express itself is the precondition of any kind of subjectivity, and the subject is ultimately the impossibility of subject to be fully itself. Here we can state the argument from the fifth chapter in a different way: a historical (diachronic) event cannot ever be deemed to be the cause of failure of complete symbolization because this failure is structural and as such timeless (synchronic); and this structural lack opens the space up for the theatre of history/identification in the first place.

From what was discussed so far we can infer that the reduction of the shattering of language into a particular loss, hence its historicization, is a common point of Nichanian and those who assert that the Holocaust was a unique example of radical evil. According to this framework, what caused the death of the witness, what made bearing witness impossible is a historical act. Conversely, according to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the witness is constitutively impossible, and there can be no point of view without a blind spot, and since this lack is structural, it cannot be the

result of any historical event. As was discussed in the fifth chapter, the lack in the Other names the impossibility which decentralizes the subject and makes it impossible for any experience to constitute a meaningful totality. At this point, we are confronted with the disagreement between the definitions of the subject in phenomenology and psychoanalysis. What makes Nichanian argue that the witness died in consequence of a historical act against psychoanalysis which argues that witness as such is impossible, is his understanding of the subject, which comes from phenomenology, and differs radically from Lacanian definition.

Badiou compares the subject of phenomenology and of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the following way: "From its invention by Husserl, phenomenology folded the thought of the subject back onto a philosophy of consciousness. It is rooted in lived experience, immediate and primitive. The subject is confounded with consciousness and the transparent comprehension of what happens to me" (Badiou & Roudinesco, p. 7). In other words, the subject of phenomenology is defined by its ability to experience her own experience. Nichanian, in turn, presents the survivor as the opposite of the subject. Conversely, the Lacanian subject, as Badiou explains, "hinges on an irreflexive and in certain ways transindividual structure: the unconscious, which for Lacan depends entirely on language" (p. 7). Accordingly, subjecthood is not defined based on the ability to become the witness of one's experience but conversely defined based on the necessary non-witnessing of some things which take place on another plane as the unconscious or the discourse of the Other always derails the subject.

Let us clarify the difference between phenomenology and Lacanian psychoanalysis by way of examining Nichanian's equation of subject and witness. Nichanian argues that the Catastrophe is "an anaphoric object" that cannot be made

into “an object, instance, or fact” (Nichanian, 2002, p. 166). The Event which for him is beyond speech, representation, imagination, mourning and humanity, takes the place of the *objet petit a*, and the witness which cannot ever reach the impossible object is the subject. The witness cannot ever reach the Event and make it into an object as the witness is dead.

According to Nichanian, the subject, by its very definition, can bear witness to her own experience. But the Catastrophe is an exception to this general condition as the subject dies and the experience cannot be narrated. In psychoanalysis, on the other hand, the gap between the subject and *objet a* is always unbridgeable since they are the same impossibility viewed from different sides. In other words, the subject cannot ever grasp the full meaning of an experience, and this impossibility is the thing which opens up the space for different narratives in the first place, and that’s why each and every narrative must always be partial. From a psychoanalytical point of view, it seems like Nichanian seems not to object to the “transcendental illusion” as long as the issue at hand is not genocide. Namely, whereas narration of experience is possible in all situations, it becomes an illusion in the case of the Catastrophe.

6.3 Narrativization: Betrayal or not?

Nichanian defines being a witness in the following way: “being present at an event that occurs here, now, before my eyes, and being able to give an account of it through a narrative. Nothing more” (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 162). On the other hand, he defines the Catastrophe as a “loss beyond repair,” and “without dialectic,” arguing that “no narration, no narrative, no story can integrate into language the disintegration of language” (p. 150). As I discussed above, unlike psychoanalysis, Nichanian does not detect any fundamental impossibility in narrativization except in

the case of the death of the witness. In order to explicate further this difference between Nichanian and psychoanalysis, I will briefly outline the transformations in the status of narrativization in Lacan's oeuvre with regard to three main stages in the development of his thought, and we will try to situate Nichanian's critique to trauma theory in relation to different approaches to narrativization.

In the early, phenomenological approach to language, psychoanalysis is conceived by Lacan as "the field of meaning" (Žižek, 2008, p. 146), and the aim of analysis is to enable the analysand to narrate his history "in full speech" (p. 147). Cure comes when the symptoms have been symbolized and when the subject can narrate her own experience without interruptions. As an example to this first approach, we can give Laub's understanding of therapy. If we recall, Laub also argues that in the presence of a listening figure, the narration of their full stories by the survivors could heal them.

But in the course of his studies and theoretical development, Lacan comes to realize that this idea of a complete narrative is in fact phantasmatic, and he revisits his theory especially with regard to the difference between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, privileging the latter over the former. In this second, structuralist period, Lacan conceives language not as the field of meaning but as "a differential system of elements" (p. 146), a "meaningless," "senseless" mechanism that while it "produces meaning as its effect" (p. 146), mainly induces a "fundamental loss" (p. 147) on the part of the subject as "he becomes part of a strange automatic order disturbing his natural homeostatic balance" (p. 146). The aim of analysis, in this framework, is for the subject to accept symbolic castration, what is, "the fundamental loss" (p. 147) imposed on him by language. At times, Nichanian comes close to this point, as we will see below.

In the third period embraced by Žižek, Zupančič, and Comay, the concept of the Real as impossible comes to the fore. Whereas in the second period it was the subject who lost something as a result of the signifier, or, the loss of enjoyment had to be accepted for the sake of the signifier and desire, in this later period, Lacan points out an internal deadlock in the very midst of the symbolic order which does not allow the subject to put her story into a plain narrative. "The symbolic order is striving for a homeostatic balance, but there is in its kernel, at its very center, some strange, traumatic element which cannot be symbolized, integrated into the symbolic order—the Thing" (p. 147). The aim of analysis then becomes to shift the focus of the subject from the language-induced primordial loss to the internal impossibility of the symbolic order and realize that the Other itself is ridden with an impossibility, that there is no guarantee of meaning, or, in Zupančič's words, "the signifying order could be said to begin, not with One (nor with multiplicity), but with a 'minus one"' (Zupančič, 2017, p. 42). The end of analysis, which demonstrates the structure of the Lacanian approach to mourning that we discussed, is then an encounter with the fundamental lack and "going through the fantasy" (Žižek, 2008, p. 148), as fantasy is what keeps the subject from encountering the lack by putting imaginary objects into its place (even if this imaginary object is loss itself).

With this three-period framework in mind, let us return to Nichanian's conceptualization of narrativization as a betrayal to the Event, which at first sight seems to resonate with Lacan's second period. Nichanian opposes pretending that narrativization itself is the solution to the trauma. In this sense, he is critical of the early Lacanian idea that the analysand will recover meaning at the end of narrativization, and sees accepting loss and symbolic castration as the basic condition for resisting the denial of the Catastrophe. Though he does not use Lacanian terms,

we can say that Nichanian's arguments accord with Lacan's criticism developed in his second period against the idea that a full symbolization of loss and trauma is possible, as the idea that full symbolization would resolve the symptom or alleviate trauma is based on the denial of the fundamental impossibility of the Symbolic. As I explained in the second chapter, Nichanian opposes all kinds of reconciliation projects bringing together the victim and the perpetrators for symbolizing the loss. Lacanian psychoanalysis too does not opt for reconciliation, recognition, or restoration of reality (and praises Antigone for her insistence against giving in to the reconciliation what Nichanian calls "the castration of truth). So far, I think, Nichanian's intervention is very crucial, because he helps us to think about the problems and limits of the existing ways to deal with the genocide.

The melancholy of Nichanian's framework starts manifesting itself when Nichanian makes "symbolic castration" into an exception, which arises only under extreme or limit-conditions. He has the idea that normally people can narrativize what happens to them; except those who are subjected to extreme conditions such as torture or genocide. By arguing this way, he makes symbolic castration, which is the most fundamental fact about the signifier, into an exceptional case. Since he defines the death of the witness as the irretrievable shattering of language, can we say that being a witness corresponds to a non-castrated state in this phenomenological framework? Nichanian is actually accepting that there is no way to fully symbolize the Real, that there is a certain blockage in the midst of the symbolic order, but he seems to historicize and exceptionalize this by asserting that the death of the witness has taken place in the twentieth century, as a result of the genocidal will. This, I argue, is the melancholic core of the concept of the death of the witness. If lack is constitutive of the symbolic order, why should the Catastrophe be exceptional?

The situation Nichanian describes, that is, the fact that a person cannot fully describe the event that happened to him, already designates a characteristic of language, namely structural lack, as explained in the previous chapter. Indeed, we cannot fully integrate trauma, but this is already due to the nature of language itself. Every speaking subject is castrated according to psychoanalysis, be her a victim of torture or not. Of course, in the cases of trauma, the mechanisms to cope with symbolic castration fail, and the subject encounters the Real directly, as trauma is "the violent intrusion of something radically unexpected, something the subject was absolutely not ready for, something the subject cannot integrate in any way" (Žižek, 2009, p.10). I think it would not be wrong to assert that Nichanian encounters the Lacanian Real through the genocide, and interprets it as the effect of the genocidal will.

If we are to recall the perpetrator's wish as put forward by Nichanian, I think it could be translated into psychoanalytical terms by showing how it works precisely by hiding the fundamental truth about the structure of the language, which is the structural lack, in order that survivors would assume that perpetrators were so powerful that they were able to inflict this upon them and thus the survivors would be crushed in the face of the force of trauma. Of course, we know that survivors felt that they would never be able to tell what they went through. Of course they thought that the genocidal will stripped them of their humanity. Of course they felt like they lost their dignity. But is it theoretically and politically palpable to validate these thoughts and tell them that they are not subjects anymore? I argue that against the perpetrator's mockery that "you will never be able to tell," it should be asserted that any narrative must be lacking, that all texts from testimony to literary texts are valuable for trying to share an experience, and that any narrative is unable to tell the

Catastrophe in its totality, not because the language of the survivors has shattered irretrievably but because there is no such thing as Catastrophe in itself, or Catastrophe as a totality.

Nichanian points out how all narratives betray the Event as the witness has died and as the Event cannot be witnessed and symbolized from a transcendent point of view. For him, the only thing that we can do is acknowledge how language is disintegrated, and he goes against psychoanalytical insights insofar as he argues that if the Catastrophe had not happened, the language would not be disintegrated. Though his objection to the possibility of a full integration of the Event is congruent with the Lacanian idea of the impossibility of a complete narrative, he digresses from this Lacanian perspective for he exceptionalizes the Catastrophe as the effect of a genocidal will occurring in a historical event. This attitude of Nichanian of accepting the loss but refusing to work through or symbolize it in any positive or determinate way, and thus his insistence on only externally referring to the Catastrophe, is again an indicator that his theory follows a fundamentally melancholic structure by only dwelling on the loss without ever encountering the lack. Psychoanalysis, conversely, argues that language is always riddled with an impossibility, and particular traumas are situations in which we encounter this impossibility directly; in other words, traumatic events do not cause symbolic castration, but it is symbolic castration that makes possible for an event to be traumatic.

As it was discussed in the third chapter, Nichanian argues that after the Catastrophe, we can only mourn the loss of mourning, the death of the witness, and the disintegration of language. With reference to the writings of Agamben, Felman, Laub, Lyotard, and Avelar, he announces the death of the witness and claims that the survivor, as she is not a witness, is not a subject. However, whereas all the

aforementioned authors tackle the radical crisis of testimony in the twentieth century, Nichanian differs in his abstention from all projects dedicated to recuperating the impossibility of testifying. Against the belief in the reconstruction of the witness, Nichanian insists on the impossibility of bearing witness. He says:

> it is so very indecent to want to reestablish the witness, to want to restore the possibility of history and, above all, to believe that this could be done by means of narration, of historiography, or of art, to believe, in sum, that one has already refuted the murderer. (Nichanian, 2013a, p. 34).

He declares our task as reading what remains of the death of the witness, and he warns us to read it against history and against the subject of history which is defined as "the witness of himself" (Nichanian, 2016a, p. 150).

Throughout this chapter, we have in fact explored three different stances that can be taken in the face of traumatic events. First of them, exemplified by scholars like Laub and Avelar, promises healing through the narrativization of the event. Against this position, Nichanian's criticisms are very valuable, as Nichanian exposes the desire for normalcy and a desire to escape from the traumatic nature of the Catastrophe behind the promise of narrativization. However, I argue that Lacanian psychoanalysis can offer us a third way.

The argument that the concept of genocide cannot capture reality in its totality is valid, however, the definition of witnessing as the ability to narrate what one went through and of the Catastrophe as the death of the witness, is from a Lacanian perspective, not sustainable. I argue that Nichanian, through the trauma of the genocide, comes across with the Real as the void of every symbolization, yet he takes it as the effect of the will to annihilation. If we recall that melancholy is the conflation of lack and loss, it becomes apparent that Nichanian's discourse is melancholic, as instead of attributing the castration to structural lack, he attributes it to a particular loss. As a consequence of this melancholic framework genocide turns

into an exceptional crime stripping the victim of its humanity, trauma turns into an exceptional trauma never to be surmounted, and the perpetrator becomes an all-powerful entity.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

I hope that at the end of this long journey I was able to present a map of Nichanian's conceptualization of genocide, loss, and mourning. In my opinion, where Marc Nichanian stands in Armenian studies and how he intervenes in the field should be the subject of many more discussions. The experience of writing this thesis during the Karabakh War reminded me once again of this need and necessity, as I was, on the one hand, reading an Armenian scholar crying out that the most vehement effect of the genocide was the compulsion to prove the genocide, and on the other hand, witnessing on my Twitter page the hard struggle of thousands of Armenians trying to show the whole world pieces of evidence to prove how they were slaughtered, once again.

Nichanian's critique of historiography presents a very crucial lesson for all those who work on history and historiography, for he points to the inadequacy of fetishistic approaches to documents and archives. Chasing after one single document that could prove the genocidal intent, building historical research solely on official documents, undoubtedly harms genocide studies and obviously, all the victims of these genocides. I argue that reading Nichanian first and foremost enables us to become aware of the harm *the injunction to prove* brings about, to grasp the reasons behind the uneasiness, inadequacy, shame, and nausea one feels even when one is competent on one's history. In this respect, I think that reading Nichanian might have an empowering effect on Armenians and in general on all the victims of various kinds of violence who are demanded to prove their own destruction; as Nichanian

exposes the genocidal will at the root of all those feelings and invites us to embrace our knowledge and feelings beyond the grasp of the perpetrator.

Undoubtedly, Nichanian does not only intervene in Armenian studies and politics. He also lays bare how historians seeking to declare the uniqueness of the Holocaust ignore other genocides. He invites us to think of the power of the archive. He exposes us to the limits of history, law, and politics. He provides insights into the relation of the victim to the crime, illuminating the situation of all oppressed groups in the face of law and police violence. He makes us confront the violence inflicted upon survivors by the injunction to tell their stories to prove the crime. He warns us against the entanglement of struggles for recognition with the will of the exterminator. He gives very well-formulated responses to some of the basic assumptions of post-Holocaust trauma studies, such as the promise of healing through narrativization. As he thinks that the only alternative of impossibility is going back to the original unity between the event and the witness, which he states is shared both by objectivist historiography and also in trauma studies as they insist on the recuperation of the witness, he insists on designating the impossibility that is destined to reside in all kinds of discourses that deal with the trauma of the genocide.

Against the idea that we can positively symbolize the Event, Marc Nichanian responds by designating a transcendent position for the Event, outside of language, therefore the only option against denial remains for him the negative designation of the Event, since the Catastrophe always eludes our grasp. He goes on to argue that the damage inflicted by genocide and torture is beyond reason and declares torture and genocide to be exceptional. In addition to these, he also gives a transcendent status to the genocidal will by arguing that its mechanism or secret is beyond explanation. He takes the Event as beyond repair and argues that dialectics is invalid

here. And yet again, by regarding the perpetrators as very powerful philosophers, he gives a sublime status to the Event.

If *lack*—as I tried to explain in the fifth chapter—indicates the fact that the symbolic order is ridden with a fundamental impossibility, and that castration is not peculiar to traumatic situations but to the condition of the speaking subject as such, I argue that Nichanian is historicizing a transhistorical condition that marks the incompleteness of any narrative by declaring it to be an exception brought about by the genocidal will, in the twentieth century.

And what is the political consequence of such a historicization? I argue that representing genocide as such a devastating and omnipotent force can only condemn its victims to victimhood forever. Nichanian envisions the survivor as a figure who lost her humanity, the genocidal will as an omnipotent power, and the experience of being the victim of the genocidal will as the only thing "beyond all speech, beyond every power to integrate, beyond all human apprehension" (Nichanian, 2003, p. 126) and ultimately, that is why he cannot offer a political line other than to point out our failure to approach the Catastrophe, namely, that "there is no recovering from this loss" (p. 127).

Thus, against Nichanian, I argue that genocide is not the reason *for* the disintegration of language, but it is a symptomal knot through which we can see how the big Other, taken as any kind of consistent totality—such as nation or society in our context—is barred or constitutively impossible. And this summarizes the position of Lacanian psychoanalysis, called "the objectivation of lack" by Zupančič, or with its general name, viz. "traversing the fantasy" (Comay, 2016, p. 35) by Comay, which proposes that instead of explaining to the victim the extent of her victimhood, one should demonstrate how this condition is not peculiar to the victim, and before

her is not a horrifying and omnipotent will, but at most a power which exploits the structural lack in its behalf; and thus, by separating the particular loss from the structural lack, this approach advocates for a true work of mourning as a way out of melancholy. In this way, psychoanalysis offers an alternative to both the tendency to over-rapidly universalize sufferings criticized by Santner, Forter and LaCapra, and the tendency to over-rapidly historicize sufferings which I think is shared by these three scholars and Marc Nichanian. In the psychoanalytical framework, as Žižek points out,

> the quasi-transcendental lack and particular traumas are linked in a negative way: far from being just the last link in the continuous chain of traumatic encounters that reaches back to the "symbolic castration," catastrophes like the holocaust are contingent (and, as such, avoidable) events which occur as the final result of the endeavors to OBFUSCATE the quasi-transcendental constitutive lack. (Žižek, 2004)

Hence, for Lacanian psychoanalysis, in the beginning there is not loss, there is lack. Not temporally, but logically; lack is the precondition of loss. In other words, the historical event/loss can only be a concrete manifestation of the structural lack. I argue that only such a perspective which, by designating *the* trauma as Real, accepts the priority of lack to loss and can give us possibilities other than merely designating how traumatized we are.

Reading testimonies as monuments, analyzing how literature "fails," are undoubtedly important steps for confronting the Catastrophe. But we cannot ignore the fact that these concrete proposals are almost exclusively relevant for literary circles, and Nichanian seems not to have any suggestions on what can be done in a wider context; for instance, he does not envision any kind of resistance within history, law, and politics, which I link to his melancholic framework that makes it difficult to envision a way out of the impossibility.

For instance, Nichanian utterly dismisses the possibility of any struggle or renewal within history and law. I also should mention that he never refers to conceptual discussions in genocide studies, as if the article about the genocidal intention in the Convention has not ever been discussed, as if all historians, judges, and scholars working on genocide unanimously expect a single document to prove the genocide. This omission makes Nichanian's framework fragile for there arises numerous questions about this total denial of history, law and politics which is epitomized by his statement: "we had to fight against politics in general and most importantly *against history*" (Nichanian, 2011, p. 13). Though he mentions here politics in general, what he actually refers to are the reconciliation projects; thus, his assertion, once again, makes me think that Nichanian takes *one* kind of approach to a field and makes it into a rule. This tendency to absolutization manifests itself also in his critique of recognition, as he does not see any emancipatory potential in it, and also in his absolute refusal of the word genocide. I think it would be a proper question to ask why he does not merely distinguish genocide from Catastrophe, as the two refer to two different epistemologies, politics, and histories of naming the event, but instead chooses to absolutely refuse to use the word genocide.

All in all, even though Nichanian exposes the falsity of the existing frames that take the recognition of the genocide as the sole end of the struggle, Nichanian seems not to have a vision of resistance in the fields he criticizes, namely in history, law and politics, except accepting how we became the victim of a genocidal will. However, as the importance of Nichanian's determinations and objections is undeniable, I think that what we really need is a space of discussion for a serious engagement of Nichanian's arguments by scholars who are competent in these areas.

I want to reiterate here a quote I made above when I was discussing what Nichanian calls the melancholy of philology:

> we have no mourning left, no capacity for mourning left, either because of the will of the perpetrator, or because the concept of mourning that we have to even understand what happened to us is historically determined by two centuries of philology, and is not enough to understand what the Catastrophe is. (2014, p. 273)

I view this thesis as a response to this invitation to formulate a way of mourning freed from the will of the perpetrator and rules of philology as I attempt to articulate another concept of mourning, by starting out from Nichanian's critique of the existing approaches to mourning and by drawing on the Freudo-Lacanian distinctions between mourning and melancholy, on the one hand, and historical loss and structural lack, on the other hand.

To sum up, I argue that Nichanian does not realize that he has actually come face to face with the structural lack through historical loss, that the loss of language is actually not a loss but an indication of the very structure of language itself, that every kind of narrative must be partial, that no one is a true witness of one's experience, that no one can give a complete and definitive account of one's experience, that the trauma of the survivor is actually a repetition of the primal trauma, '"the 'real' of our civilization which returns as the same traumatic kernel in all social systems" (Žižek, 2008, p. 50). As opposed to denialism which makes the victim responsible for the primal trauma by degrading their testimonies as inadequate and unworthy, I argue that the structural lack is part of every narrative, that each narrative has to be partial, that each narrative tells us something about the real, that truth speaks through the very lack intrinsic to every narrative. Furthermore, I argue that drawing such a connection between loss and lack or antagonism, namely, grasping the repetition of the will to obfuscate the structural lack in particular

historical sufferings, enables us to conceptualize a work of mourning that takes into account the commonalities between different forms of sufferings and makes it harder to exceptionalize our own sufferings and turn our back to the sufferings of others.

I think that I have presented throughout this thesis four major positions in relation to the event: The first one is the stance of objectivist historiography, claiming that one can establish the factuality of an event if there is enough evidence for it. The second one is the stance of post-Holocaust trauma studies, insisting on the traumatic character of the event which is doomed to elude objectivist discourses disregarding the experience of the survivor, which can only be retroactively recuperated by listening to the voice of the survivor. The third one is the stance of Nichanian, drawing upon trauma theory yet parting his way as he insists on the transcendent, unreachable, ineffable character of the event. The position of Lacanian psychoanalysis, on the other hand, conceives the unsayable character of traumatic events as the repetition of the primal trauma, namely, the lack of symbolic order and opens up the question of the different libidinal structures of evading, or relating to it.

Nichanian conceives of limit-events like torture and genocide as experiences that are beyond reason, describes the perpetrators as powerful philosophers who knew everything about the mechanisms of history and reality, exceptionalizes the Event into a traumatic sublime that will forever haunt us. That is why he thinks that what we need to do is to point out how we will never be able to say the Catastrophe directly, how we will never be able to reach it.

In her book *Mourning sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (2021) Comay analyzes the melancholic reaction of German Idealists to the French Revolution by referring to Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise: "Germany is to the French revolution, then, as Achilles to the tortoise—forever postponing its

encounter with an object that it had already overtaken, and constantly running ahead of a thing with which it could never quite catch up" (p. 23). I think that Nichanian's project aims in its essence to demonstrate how the witness can never reach the tortoise as the impossible object. We can see this most clearly in his reading of Yesayan, as he constantly emphasizes how Yesayan attempts to approach the Catastrophe and how she is doomed to fail each time. From the psychoanalytical viewpoint, on the other hand, what makes *Averagnerun Mech* a book of mourning is not merely that Yesayan is pointing out the impossible distance between her and the Catastrophe. Yesayan does not only describe despair and despondence, but she also lets the survivors speak of their anger, of rage, share their views on who is responsible and what should be done next. If Yesayan is a modern Antigone, it is not merely because she indicates the impossibility of grasping the ungraspable, but because she insists on encircling the ungraspable, because she repeats the gesture of attempting at describing the event over and over again, with the full knowledge that there is no way to say it all. This is how I think a Lacanian reading of Yesayan's endeavor would be: fully acknowledging the impossibility, but also challenging the melancholic resignation towards it, by fully assuming the absence of any guarantee and taking upon herself to act in the face of this impossibility by way of bringing it into relief in the act. Nichanian's claim that mourning requires "to ask constantly, again and again, what *remains* when you have even lost the language for saying the loss" (2012b, p. 276) elegantly captures how working through the past entails a repetitive encirclement of the remains, at which point he might be very close to a proper psychoanalytical mourning. The only touch this encirclement needs, I argue, is that we not only need to point toward impossibility but also to transform the field which causes this impossibility.

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