LANDSCAPES OF LOSS: GRIEVING A CHANGING CITY IN ARA GÜLER'S ISTANBUL PHOTOGRAPHY AND ZAVEN BIBERYAN'S NOVELS

by
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ABSTRACT

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Keywords: loss, grief, Istanbul, Ara Güler, Zaven Biberyan

This thesis explores Istanbul as a landscape of loss and both the human and more-than-human dynamics of grief and remembering through the novels of Zaven Biberyan and the Istanbul photography of Ara Güler. Both Biberyan's and Güler's works deal with the representation and residue of political and systemic violence as it crystallizes in events such as those of 6-7 September 1955 and its disastrous consequences as they manifest through generations in a period marked by major transformations around the city. I try to argue that this kind of violence is not divorced from the more-than-human landscape: the scale of ecocide taking place in Istanbul and around Turkey today is an extension and continuation of economic, political and historical violence, exile and genocide enacted upon those bodies and communities othered by the state. I argue how the way Biberyan and Güler navigate the loss of the intimate material relationships with the city opens a doorway into grief and offers a potentially reparative response to the exhaustive logic of Marc Nichanian's definition and formulation of Disaster. By framing grief as a reparative lens, I trace how Biberyan and Güler's human subjects open up to transcorporeal becomings with the more-than-human landscape of Istanbul, and argue that these relationships form the basis of feelings of "belonging". I conclude the thesis by thinking about the ways of imagining and writing reparative stories of survival in the face of loss, destruction and accretive disasters that frame the imaginative ways both artists bear witness to and story the changing landscape of Istanbul.

ÖZET

KAYBI MANZARADA İMLEMEK: ARA GÜLER'İN İSTANBUL FOTOĞRAFLARI VE ZAVEN BİBERYAN'IN ROMANLARINDA DÖNÜŞEN BİR ŞEHRİN YASINI TUTMAK

NEBİLE EKİN KURTDARCAN

KÜLTÜREL ÇALIŞMALAR YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, HAZİRAN 2024

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Sibel Irzık

Anahtar Kelimeler: kayıp, yas, İstanbul, Ara Güler, Zaven Biberyan

Bu tez Zaven Biberyan'ın romanları ve Ara Güler'in İstanbul fotoğrafları aracılığıyla dönüşen bir şehri ve bu şehirdeki insan-insan ötesi ilişkilerini kayıp, yas ve hatırlama dinamikleri üzerinden inceliyor. Hem Biberyan'ın hem de Güler'in işleri, İstanbul'un hızla dönüştüğü bir dönemde, 6-7 Eylül gibi olaylarda tezahür eden siyasi ve sistemik şiddetin ve bu şiddetin kuşaklararası yankılarının temsilini ve tortusunu araştırıyor. Ben burada, bu türden bir şiddetin insan ötesi çevreden ayrı düşünülemeyeceğini savunuyorum: Bugün İstanbul'da ve Türkiye'de gerçekleşen ekokırımın devletin ötekileştirdiği bedenler ve toplumları maruz bıraktığı ekonomik, siyasi ve tarihsel şiddetin, sürgünün ve soykırımın devamı ve uzantısı olduğunu öne sürüyorum. Biberyan'ın ve Güler'in şehrin dokusuyla kurulan ilişkilerin kaybını işleme biçimlerinin yasa açılan bir kapı olabileceğini inceliyor ve bunun da Marc Nichanian'ın kurduğu Felaket tanımı ve çerçevesine onarıcı bir müdahale oluşturabileceğini gösteriyorum. Yası pasif bir duygu olarak incelemektense onarıcı bir mercek olarak ele alarak, Biberyan'ın ve Güler'in işlerindeki insan öznelerin İstanbul'un manzaraları ve şehrin insan ötesi unsurlarıyla birlikte bedenlerarası oluşumlara ve dönüşümlere açıldığını, bir yere "ait olma" hissinin de bu ilişkiler üzerinden kurulduğunu savunuyorum. Tezi, bu iki sanatçının tanıklık ve hikâyeleme biçimlerini çerçeveleyen kaybın, yıkımın ve gitgide katlanarak artan felaketlerin karşısında hem bugün hem gelecekte onarıcı, hayatta kalmaya ve doğru ilişki kurma biçimlerine dair ne gibi hikâyeler yazılabileceğini düşünerek tamamlıyorum.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Like many pieces of writing that touch the very real places inside us, this thesis did not come together in a linear way but rather through a constellation of moments that drew my attention to the strange relationship between loss, grief and belonging. Back in early 2019, when I was still an undergraduate student in London, I was visiting Istanbul on a short break when I found myself wandering around the newly reconstructed, gentrified streets of Karaköy. Having been introduced to an exciting curriculum of postcolonial literature during my studies, determined to write my thesis on identity and belonging in women's autobiographies in Turkey and Algeria, and discovering the writings of Zabel Yesayan, my newfound political consciousness cast an angry and melancholic light on everything that surrounded me. I was neither from Istanbul nor did I grow up there; as a student studying abroad looking at Turkey from the outside in, Istanbul became an imaginary landscape for me, an object of fascination that planted a strange, secondhand grief and nostalgia into my consciousness through the works of writers like Orhan Pamuk, illustrated by the black and white images of Ara Güler.

That day in Karaköy, in a passing glance, I noticed the massive reproductions of Güler's monochrome cityscapes stretched around the perimeter of the construction site of what was to become Galataport. I was struck by the irony of the fact that the photographs of an artist who had dedicated his life to documenting a disappearing city was now used to cover up a massive construction project complicit in the very disappearance of it. It was a poignant moment, the first clear example of how images could be appropriated, implicated in the crime they aimed to document; it was the crystallization of a feeling of despair, or something akin to betrayal.

One and a half a year later, I had graduated, moved to Istanbul and started working at Aras Yayıncılık, when, during the height of the COVID pandemic, I got to see Zeynep Dadak's documentary film *Invisible to the Eye* (*Ah Gözel İstanbul*). The film ends on an uncanny note, with the narrator —the fictional voice of seventeenth century historian Eremya Kömürciyan— stating that "only graves remind us that

once we lived together. Now you can mourn, rejoice, or rage if you will."[1] As the narrator takes the viewer through Istanbul, starting from Kumkapı, along the Bosphorus and ending on the Prince's Islands, tracing the shadows of historical events as they map onto the city's iconic venues today, being confronted with the irreversibility of loss caused by historical, political and ecological violence in the most matter-of-fact way possible was a feeling difficult to process. Kömürciyan's text overlaying the visual reality of the city today not only presents an interplay between absence and presence, but also offers a stark image of urban transformation: the camera panning over half-erected concrete blocks, crumbling, derelict buildings and the ongoing construction of massive residential sites next to precariously exposed historical structures. As much as the film evades falling back on a nostalgic gaze while capturing the scale of change and destruction, the viewer cannot help but wonder whether even the graves that Kömürciyan put his faith in will survive being swallowed up by the violence of the urban sprawl. With the current ecological disaster unfolding in the Marmara Sea, and the recent discussion around the laws regarding the imminent earthquake (Afet Yasası) that threaten to provoke a wave of arbitrary expropriations in potentially rentable areas in Istanbul and around Turkey, what are we to do, other than mourn or rage against what is and will be lost?

This thesis, which aims to explore Istanbul as a landscape of loss and both the human and more-than-human dynamics of grief and remembering, sprang from this very question, from the overwhelming despair of witnessing and trying to grasp the scale and changing definitions of Disaster. It aims to trace the intersections of multiple violences that echo through generations— some which are not even acknowledged or considered violence proper. Construction and urban renewal projects became bigger and more ambitious over the course of the twentieth century and well into the twenty first, and the affective resonance of lost landscapes seems to weigh more on different generations of Istanbulites than the promises made by the narrative of progress and economic growth. The recent proliferation of "cultural mapping" of cities, through applications such as Hrant Dink Foundation's Kardes, shows a growing interest in "recovering" and remembering spaces and places that have either been purposefully neglected, reappropriated or demolished altogether. Considering this intergenerational narrative around loss, home and belonging, I define this somewhat tentative notion of violence and loss of landscapes in terms of both "ecocide" and what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence": "a violence that occurs gradually [...] a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."[2]

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[1] Zeynep Dadak *Ah Gözel İstanbul* (Turkey; Germany, Fenafilm, 2020)

[2] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011), 2.

I use ecocide to highlight the loss of not only the material landscape but also the sense of belonging, interdependent relationships between communities and the more-than-human landscape through massive and violent interventions, and slow violence to denote how this kind of violence has lasting effects on generations. I focus on the photography of Ara Güler and the novels *Meteliksiz Âşıklar* and *Karıncaların Günbatımı* by Zaven Biberyan, two Armenians who lived and created in Istanbul roughly around the same time, a period marked by major transformations around the city. Their works deal with the city not only as a passive backdrop for historic events and narratives, but as a landscape imbued with affect and agency, constantly in dialogue with its human inhabitants. To a certain extent, both Güler's and Biberyan's works deal with the representation and residue of political violence, revealing the interplay between political violence as it crystallizes in "spectacular" events such as the Wealth Tax and the events of 6-7 September 1955 and its disastrous consequences as they manifest through generations — in human and more-than-human bodies, places and landscapes. I try to argue that this kind of violence is not divorced from the more-than-human landscape: the scale of ecocide taking place in Istanbul (and around Turkey) today is an extension and continuation of economic, political and historical violence, exile and genocide enacted upon those bodies and communities othered by the state.

While writing this thesis, positioning myself in relation to my research material proved crucial and insightful in thinking about loss and grief in terms of witnessing, accountability and reparative possibilities. Identifying as a Turkish Muslim, carrying the cultural legacy of perpetration, I am aware of how engaging with the works of non-Muslim artists and writers, even within critical and academic contexts, can easily slip into a nostalgic, revivalist tendency, "occurring in a way that fetishizes 'the cultural heritage of Turkey'" and "stories of difference", expressed through the way Turkey "[mourns] over the cultures which it [destroyed]".[3] Güler's photography has often been used and misused to reproduce this nostalgic discourse, most poignantly in instances of artwashing legitimizing urban projects detrimental to the city's ecosystem.[4] Reading Biberyan and Güler's works together, therefore, not in search of "stories of difference", but to understand how identity plays into the tension between belonging, displacement and the material relationships with the more-than-human landscape can help us frame "belonging" as a practice of creating

[3]Melissa Bilal, et al, "Longing for Home at Home: Armenians in Istanbul," in *Diaspora and Memory:Figures of Displacement in Contemporary Literature, Arts and Politics*, ed. by Marie-Aude Baronian, et al, (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2007), 59.

[4]Deniz Özgür, "Çöküntü kente doğru," *Bir + Bir*, 25 September 2018, https://birartibir.org/cokuntu-kente-dogru/. During my research, I could not find any images of how Güler's photographs were used to cover up the construction site of Galataport, so much so that I had begun to question whether I had misremembered the entire situation. This article thankfully provides us with an image, documenting this case of artwashing.

the right relationships with the land and its inhabitants rather than an essentialist claim on an imaginary homeland. An exploration into how Bibeyan and Güler deal with the loss of these relationships is therefore at the heart of this thesis — and how this loss opens a doorway into grief, a potentially reparative possibility within the exhaustive logic of Disaster[5] that supposedly destroys any kind of reparative possibility from the outset. By tracing how Biberyan and Güler's human subjects open up to transcorporeal becomings with the more-than-human landscape of Istanbul, I try to show how both writers/artists pave the way for multilayered ways of bearing witness and storying the city in today's reality of loss, collapse, and accretive catastrophes.

1.1 Definitions and Foundations

1.1.1 Ecocide and Slow Violence

Before diving into the Güler's photographs and Biberyan's texts, it is important to define and clarify some of the concepts and fundamental assumptions that I will be frequently returning to throughout this thesis. What I refer to as "loss" is the affective and, at times, palpable echo of violence enacted upon the human and more-than-human bodies and landscapes of Istanbul. To frame violence, I use both the terms "ecocide" and "slow violence" in dialogue with each other, even though they might seem like contradictory terms: ecocide, being derived from genocide, implies destruction on a massive, spectacular scale while slow violence denotes an invisible, hard to perceive form of violence. But as I aim to explain, ecocide and slow violence are terms more intertwined than we think, challenging our assumptions around what we consider as "violence", complicating the victim/perpetrator binary, who or what counts as witness, and our expectations around the *visible* effects of violence on a massive scale.

In their article exploring the conceptual framework around ecocide and its effectiveness as a term, Kübra Kalkandelen and Darren O'Byrne define ecocide as "killing" or "demolishing" Earth, or more literally, "killing the home", derived from the Greek word *oikos*.[6] Although they state that the link between ecocide and genocide is not a straightforward one, they point out that the name suggests that ecocide is a

[5] I refer to Marc Nichanian's definition of Disaster throughout this thesis. This definition and framework will be explored in depth in chapter three.

[6] Kübra Kalkandelen, Darren O'Byrne, "On ecocide: toward a conceptual framework," *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 18 (2017): 334, https://doi.org/10.1080/1600910X.2017.1331857.

derivative of genocide and therefore the "research into ecocide should appropriate the conceptual tools utilized within the now-established field of genocide studies."[7] The term was coined in the 1970s, in response to the demands to create within international law mechanisms to prohibit the massive use of chemical herbicides, and to prohibit parties during wartime from engaging in "military or any other hostile use of environmental modification techniques" that would have widespread, long-lasting effects as the means of destruction.[8] The writers further expand on this term by referring to scholar and activist Richard A. Falk's proposal to the International Convention on Ecocide in 1973. Falk's proposal, which was never put to vote for "unknown reasons", highlighted the limitations of the 1948 Genocide Convention and called for the acknowledgement "that man [sic] has consciously and unconsciously inflicted irreparable damage to the environment in times of war and peace".[9] What Kalkandelen and O'Byrne draw attention to is the fact that Falk aimed to establish "a legal doctrine covering acts of ecocide during peacetime, rather than simply as a consequence of war".[10] This brings to the forefront the issue of visibility and immediacy when thinking about violence, and this point is crucial if we are to weave ecocide and slow violence into each other. As Nixon states:

> Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. We need, I believe, to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales.[11]

Thinking of ecocide and slow violence together, therefore, requires that we think about the ways of identifying and talking about the serious repercussions that occur on different timescales. Nixon draws our attention to the "representational challenges" of calamities "that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effect", particularly those that are not considered as "violence" in a conventional sense.[12] We will see this in chapter two, particularly in relation to the Armenian fishermen of Kumkapı, when the construction of the coastal highway —a seemingly "minor"

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[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 2.

[12] *Ibid.*, 10.

development on the urban landscape— had a calamitous effect on the vibrant fishing community of Kumkapı, completely cutting off the direct access the village had to the sea, forcing people to find other livelihoods, and erasing the lived experience and knowledge that came directly from the relationship with the more-than-human landscape.

Therefore, as thinking about Disaster in relation to ecocide and slow violence requires weaving together different temporalities, layers and scales, the question of "whether people can survive culturally and physically in their lands after environmental degradation"[13] becomes crucial in thinking about genocide or destruction of a community not only in terms of the eradication of physical human bodies but also rendering their environment uninhabitable. According to Kalkandelen and O'Byrne, although there is an emerging interest in the criminalization of environmental destruction within international law, "no practical mechanisms exist to protect individuals or groups from its severe effects".[14] Yet, several attempts have been made to fully embed ecocide within a genocide framework. The Ecocide Project of the Human Rights Consortium reevaluates Raphael Lemkin's original definition and highlights its limitations focusing on the physical and cultural destruction of a people:

> Lemkin's original definition crucially identified the destruction of people by means other than direct physical extermination, which could include the destruction of the environment [...] Ecocide can and often does lead to cultural damage and destruction; and the direct destruction of a territory can lead to cultural genocide. For example, destroying an indigenous peoples' territory can critically undermine its culture, identity and way of life.[15]

The Ecocide Project's reframing of Lemkin's definition highlights the interdependent relationship between people and the environment, and how they co-create with each other. It also falsifies the assumption that humans and the environment exist in separate spheres and the distinction between what has been vaguely classified as "nature" (as ecocide is assumed to only belong to the domain of "nature") and "culture". As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen rightly points out, "nature" often refers to "something at once 'everywhere and nowhere'". Cohen suggests that if the term nature was understood as transcorporeal and transmaterial, "our ethical connect-

[13] *Ibid.*, 335.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] The Ecocide Project, quoted in Kalkandelen and O'Byrne, 335.

edness to the nonhuman would become more tangible".[16] What I aim to express throughout this thesis is this fact that what we call the environment, or landscape, is not an abstract concept that is at once everywhere and nowhere; any kind of intervention to it affects us deeply. What forms the basis of ecocide is that the scale of change in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, both "major" and "minor" interventions on landscape that constantly disregard their environmental, social and cultural effects to such an extent, becomes a form of intentional violence and destruction. Therefore, I aim to emphasize that ecocide does not only refer to the destruction of a physical environment but to the various relationships and relational becomings within that environment: livelihoods that depend on the cultivation of land or sea, sacred spaces of ritual and community, landmarks or spaces pertaining to communal memory. Moreover, in relation to the texts and images I analyze in this thesis, I choose to use and emphasize the term ecocide to draw attention to the habitus of denial surrounding postgenocide Armenian belonging and to the denial and occlusion of the term "genocide" itself. This connection reminds us that the will that destroys and consumes landscapes, turning every piece of soil into rentable space without regard to cultural and biological integrity is not so different from the will that unhesitatingly commits genocide, and vice versa.

1.1.2 Istanbul: The Intersection of Othering and Belonging

One thing that demands our attention in the Ecocide Project's definition is the notion of *indigeneity*, which brings up questions around the ownership of land and identity. Is it meaningful, or even possible to frame indigeneity in an urban context, and in a multilayered, complex one such as Istanbul?

In their article, "Eski Mahallelerin Sahibi Kim?", Ayfer Bartu summarizes the problems around discussing cultural heritage and claims to space in cities like Istanbul with multilayered histories.[17] Focusing on Pera as a case study, Bartu poses questions such as who owns history, and which history/legacy is preserved for whom, taking into account the changing symbolic and political meanings attributed to particular places and neighborhoods. We can also ask whose (hi)story has been erased and whose experiences and iterations of loss has been silenced.[18]

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[16] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 12.

[17] Ayfer Bartu, et al, "Eski Mahallelerin Sahibi Kim? Küresel Bir Çağda Tarihi Yeniden Yazmak," in *İstanbul: Küresel ile Yerel Arasında*, ed. Çağlar Keyder, translated by Sungur Savran (Istanbul: Metis, 2007), 44.

[18] *Ibid.*, 46.

Pera is an interesting case in this context, and worth thinking about in terms of identity and indigeneity. An independent Genovese trade colony during the Byzantine period, Pera became the home of local non-Muslim communities within the Ottoman Empire, namely Greeks, Armenians and Jews, along with the Levantines who quickly became the area's dominant population in the nineteenth century. Pera signified the "European" or "foreign" aspect of Istanbul with its signifiers of modernity — banks, theatres, arcades, and multi-story buildings. After the capital became Ankara, and Istanbul the seat of a bygone empire, as Pera became an object of occidentalist desire for the Turkish bourgeoisie, it also became the symbol of transition from empire into the monolingual and monocultural nation-state with the loss and exile of its non-Muslim population.

The discussion around heritage and identity comes to the forefront especially in the 1980s, with then-mayor Bedrettin Dalan's massive "revival" project of the neighborhood. What figured prominently in this project was the construction of Tarlabaşı Caddesi, which foresaw the demolition of many buildings from the nineteenth century and the relocation of their inhabitants.[19] According to Bartu, with the heavy opposition from Mimarlar Odası, although this conflict was framed as a struggle between those who pushed for "modernization" and those who wanted "conservation", it actually revealed many questions around identity and "authenticity" — what Beyoğlu "really" looked like and which Beyoğlu was going to be "revived" and for whom.[20] For many opposing these demolitions, this was also a struggle against the neoliberalist aim to make the city rentable to multinational corporations, which would create even more environmental problems, and many were also "alarmed by" the racist tone underlying the reasons for demolition and renewal; they were demolishing the buildings because they belonged to Greeks and Armenians.[21] However, as Bartu points out, the leftist, anti-capitalist wing was not immune to racism either: to many, these buildings and the cultural legacy of the neighborhood were a reminder of nineteenth century European capitalism and imperialism, and its alliance with the local population.[22] Pera had "nothing to do with Turkishness" and these buildings designed by Armenian architects could only be considered mere imitations— not much would be lost from their destruction. Pera provides a great example of how the question of "local identity", "authenticity" and cultural heritage is entangled with economic development and profit-seeking and how anti-capitalist

[19] *Ibid.*, 47

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Ibid.*, 48

[22] *Ibid.*, 49.

viewpoints constantly bump up against the limits of nationalism and racism. In this context, what often gets lost in the conversation about identity and belonging is what we understand from the term "local" and what constitutes "indigenous" ways of being.

If we trace urban transformation further back to the 1950s, with mass migrations from the villages of Anatolia into the cities, we see how the discourse around "loss" and "reclamation" echo that of "invasion" and "conquest". One of Bartu's interviewees, an elderly man hailing from an established family, draws a stark comparison between migration and "conquest" — people arriving from Anatolia are "conquering" Istanbul.[23] This is similarly echoed in *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, where "Saraygil" Azniv Hanım says: "Eh, gitgide İstanbullu kalmıyor İstanbul'da. Bu Bizans'ın gerçek ve son çöküşü olacak".[24] Although Bartu's interviewee is critical of those who "bring to the city their own customs" and seem to only care about "making enough money to buy a summer house"[25], this comment actually reveals something more than the fear of "invasion" or the "Other". It demonstrates on the migrants' part how the fundamental precarity underlying the struggle to make a place for oneself in a new environment manifests in the need to obtain a house — in a more symbolic sense, a need for safety, security and belonging. Displacement creates more displacement and non-belonging, as spaces and landscapes become uninhabitable through overconsumption, overpopulation and degradation. This is what I mean by ecocide and slow violence: the vicious cycle of consumption, degradation and displacement that is perpetuated incrementally by a system that capitalizes on imaginary notions of homeland, safety and belonging, becoming so engrained in our existence, our bodies and our ways of being in the world through many generations that we cannot think outside of it; the ways through which we try to address this precarity further perpetuates this cycle thus creating more precarity and on and on it goes. We go about the world totally disconnected not only from our landscapes and the Earth-body but also from other human and more-than-human bodies, enabling the ways in which they can be "consumed", devalued, eradicated for "our safety", our sense of belonging, our home — those bodies deemed unworthy of being honored, remembered, mourned. In thinking about belonging and indigenous ways of relating to our landscapes, how can we take responsibility, be mindful of the way we exist in the world, and at whose expense? In our cities with multilayered histories, can we look for ways to speak to and honor the memory of those who lived here before

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[23] *Ibid.*, 50.

[24] Zaven Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, translated by Sirvart Malhasyan (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2019), 480.

[25] Bartu, "Eski Mahallelerin Sahibi Kim?" 50.

us? Can we decouple the idea of a home, a homeland, and belonging from seizing or "ownership" of land and lean into an intimate relationship of "stewarding"? How can we think with our cities? How can we speak with the buildings, the sidewalks, the stones, lean into the memory of the hands that carved them?

When the rooted, material relationships with the landscape are removed from the discussion, it becomes easier to mobilize fears and insecurities around abstract notions of homeland, nostalgia, identity and belonging, turning them into something that constantly needs to be controlled, reclaimed, conquered and protected against "foreign enemies". Therefore, it is not surprising that the nostalgia for a "lost" city fueled the idea of "reclaiming" or "reconquering" Istanbul, which took on a more Islamic facet in the 1990s and 2000s, and continuously occluded or downplayed the racist reasons behind urban transformation and migration — the question of why the non-Muslims had to leave the city in the first place. As, during a moment when the demolition of the historic Byzantine city walls was being considered, a Refah Party representative made it clear, "We do not want the Byzantine Istanbul".[26]

1.1.3 Armenian Belonging in the Twentieth Century

Parallel to this transformation of Istanbul's landscape in the twentieth century, considering the wider context of Armenian belonging in relation to Biberyan's and Güler's ideas of being an "Istanbulite", we must undoubtedly look at how Armenians became a diaspora and minority community in Turkey, which is inextricably bound to the habitus of denial surrounding the legacy of genocide. In *Armenians in Modern Turkey*, Talin Suciyan traces this process back to the ending of Armenian presence in Asia Minor and Northern Mesopotamia through systematic and institutional destruction. She draws particular attention to the fact that the term "minority", belonging to the framework and terminology of the nation-state, cannot be considered as an issue concerning the "minority" group alone —namely, Christians and Jews—, as the nation-state itself has been built upon the very destruction of those groups.[27] The term "minority" obscures the history of genocide, exile and expropriation, creating a framework that legitimizes the "nation" as the majority, and the "minority" as its "other".[28] As Suciyan notes, these are imaginary categories, and the governing structures of non-Muslim communities have not always fit into those of the nation-

[26] *Ibid.*, 56.

[27] Talin Suciyan, *Modern Türkiye'de Ermeniler: Soykırımsonrası Toplum, Siyaset ve Tarih*, translated by Ayşe Günaysu (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2018), 56-57.

[28] *Ibid.*

state. This process of minoritization, in the light of Istanbul's transformation and violence against non-Muslims in the twentieth century, compels us to reconsider what we understand from indigeneity: while the majority becomes the "rightful owner" of the land, the minority becomes the "other", the "foreign". This is seen clearly in Biberyan's autobiography, when, in the 1940s, discussions around Soviet Armenia's decision to accept diaspora Armenians reverberated through Armenians in Turkey: "Bizi burada istemiyorlardı [...] Ermenilerin onca imparator verdiği Bizans'ın, kalıntılarında hâlâ geçmişin tanıklıklarının görüldüğü Doğu illerinin, bu ülkenin gerçek sahipleri, yerlileri biz değildik; sanki asalaktık."[29] The "minority" is doubly severed from its home, both physically (through exile and genocide), and symbolically (the denial prohibiting them to recognize their loss, since they do not "really belong" here).

Reading Suciyan, we can also understand that Istanbul and the Armenians of Istanbul occupy a different place in the diaspora. Suciyan locates the origins of the Armenian diaspora in 1915, suggesting that, categorically, there should be no difference between Armenians living in Glendale, San Francisco, or Istanbul. Although Istanbul was a destination for many displaced Armenians from Anatolia, those that stayed in Turkey do not define themselves as "diaspora".[30] However, Khachig Tölölyan, founder of the academic journal *Diaspora*, considered Armenians of Istanbul as diaspora even before 1915:

> Birkaç yüzyıl boyunca en büyük ve en önemli Ermeni diaspora cemaati olan İstanbullu Ermeniler, Türk devleti tarafından baskı gördükleri zamanlar dışında, kendilerini diaspora olarak değil, daha çok İstanbul'un kozmopolit dünyasında yaşayan, tarihi bir geçmişe sahip, [...] örgütlenmiş ve kurumsal olarak doygun bir cemaat olarak gördüler.[31]

Tölölyan's words show that the idea of belonging is emphasized through institutions and communal organization; the living, experiential information is acquired through community and institutions at whose center lies the Patriarchate. However, as Suciyan notes, the Patriarchate became a reference point for Ottoman Armenians only in the middle of the eighteenth century.[32] Although it gained power and influence from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, it never turned Istanbul into a veritable

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[29] Zaven Biberyan, *Mahkûmların Şafağı: Özyaşamöyküsü 1921-1946*, translated by Deniz Kureta (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2021), 333-334.

[30] *Ibid.*, 58.

[31] Tölölyan quoted in Suciyan, *ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*, 59.

"homeland" for Armenians (as Istanbul was also never a part of the historical Armenian kingdoms). Yet, as noted previously, Armenians of Istanbul do not consider themselves diaspora, believing that "they have not left their homeland."[33] So, how do postgenocide Armenians conceive Istanbul as a homeland? According to Melissa Bilal, whom Suciyan also quotes, what characterizes the minority experience and belonging in Turkey is the feeling of being at home and in exile at once.[34] Bilal particularly emphasizes the lived experience as "crucial for understanding the way Armenians [in Istanbul] practice and perceive their senses of belonging and displacement in their 'homes'", rather than holding out for a "myth of return" to homelands in Anatolia.[35]

How does this "lived experience" shape Biberyan and Güler's idea of belonging and identity as Istanbulites? Lived experience plays an important role for these two artists who do not particularly align themselves with or are extremely critical of their community's institutions. In the first pages of his autobiography, Biberyan feels the need to draw his genealogy, even though he says that he is not particularly interested in ancestry.[36] Biberyan traces his family's origins to Ankara and Van, yet he makes it clear that his parents and their parents were all Istanbulites. He defines himself more specifically as from Kadıköy: "Ben Çengelköy'de doğmuşum ama daha çok Khalkedonluyum çünkü üç yaşımdan itibaren Kadıköy'de, söylenceye göre körlerin yaşadığı bu antik, hatta tarih öncesi kentte yaşadım."[37] His emphasis on being not only "Kadıköylü" but "Khalkedonlu" demonstrates his attention to the historical and mythological texture of the city, and his lived experience enters into a "deep time" conversation with the layers of history embedded in the landscape. Moreover, Biberyan reifies his relationship with the landscape in his autobiography through evocative descriptions, when he feels homesick during his Nafia service:

> Akhisar'da tükeniyordum. Nehirde yüzmeye çalışıyordum [...] Dipteki her tondan yosunlarla suyun parıldaması, Moda sahilindeki kabinlerin suya yansıması ya da Kalamış koyunun yemyeşil sahil şeridi ya da hatta gümüşümsü parıltıların, serpiştirildiği geniş örtünün Burgaz ya da Büyükada'nın yüksek yarlarından görüntüsü, sancılı bir fikrisabit gibi gözümün önünden gitmiyordu.[38]

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[33] *Ibid.*, 60.

[34] Bilal, "Longing for Home at Home", 61.

[35] *Ibid.*, 56-58.

[36] Zaven Biberyan, *Mahkûmların Şafağı*, 18.

[37] *Ibid.*, 25.

[38] *Ibid.*, 269.

Similarly, Güler, too, builds his identity as an Istanbulite through his lived experience and relationship with the landscape. Although Güler's mother's family came from Istanbul, his father was from Şebinkarahisar, migrating to Istanbul at age six to receive an education.[39] Güler's touching story "Babamın Hikâyesi"[40] opens with his father Dacat sarcastically remarking that his son has travelled the world as a photojournalist yet never once took him back to his village. Güler is surprised by this request — by the fact that he had never imagined his father would want to go back to see the house he was born in. Although this is the story of his father's return, it actually reveals Güler's understanding of home and belonging through his attention and sensitivity to details regarding the landscape and his father's relationship with it. He watches his father find the old house —now in ruins— drink fresh water from the source, ride a cart pulled by oxen and drink ayran with the villagers. Through these details, the idea of homeland and belonging crystallizes in the very material relationship with the more-than-human landscape. Yet, the reasons for his father's leaving, or why the house was left there to crumble, casts the shadow of the fate of many Armenians in Anatolia on this touching narrative. The sense of loss and grief that emanates from his father's story must have undoubtedly influenced Güler's perspective and photographic practice in the city he feels he belongs to: "Ben kaybolmakta olan İstanbul'u kaydediyorum, bitmekte olan bir şehri. Biliyorum çünkü yok olacak ve göstermek lazım."[41]

From both Biberyan and Güler, we see that the idea of home and belonging is very much rooted in these material and tactile relationships rather than an imaginary notion of homeland, or a myth of return. The immediacy of these relationships underlying the palpable sense of loss and grief triggered by Istanbul's rapidly changing and disappearing landscapes, turns Biberyan and Güler's craft into grief work. They demonstrate how belonging and indigeneity do not stem from an essentialist identity or a claim on land, but is rooted in a practice of relating to landscape, to be in the right relationship with it, and to "story" it. Viewed this way, ecocide then becomes not only a material destruction of landscapes, but an erasure of memories, lived experiences and stories; destruction of landscape under the guise of economic development and modernization signifies a rupture from those memories and stories of people accumulated and embedded in the land over generations. So, what to do

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[39] Ali Akay, et al, *Islık Çalan Adam*, ed. by Sevim Sancaktar (Istanbul: Ara Güler Arşiv ve Araştırma Merkezi, 2018), 57.

[40] Ara Güler, *Babil'den Sonra Yaşayacağız*, translated by Sirvart Malhasyan (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2018), 134.

[41] Akay, et al, *Islık Çalan Adam*, 176.

indeed, other than to mourn and rage in despair? Biberyan and Güler, too, ask this question. How are these spectacular demolitions, massive construction and industrialization projects indicate a much more sinister, poisonous and invisible kind of violence that permeates human and more-than-human bodies and landscapes? How do their affective echoes live within and around us? How do we navigate these losses and reclaim our agency? Trying to see environmental destruction from a wider, intersectional perspective in dialogue with other forms of social, political and historical violence undoubtedly brings us to the question of the complexity of victim/perpetrator relations, multiple layers of implication and complicity and ways of witnessing. In the light of these questions, I try to explore throughout this thesis how photography and literature, image and text differ or work together to tell stories, to bear witness and to grieve. I aim to question the ambivalence of photography and the complicity of images considering the circulation and consumption of Güler's archive today (which belongs to Doğuş Holding, one of the partners of Galataport) in a way that perpetuates an uncritical nostalgia that obscures the violence against non-Muslim minorities of the city; and try to read Biberyan's novels through a reparative lens, questioning the established interpretations of his work solely focusing on the dark, claustrophobic, exhaustive logic of Disaster. What can literature and narrative do that photographs can't, or can they enter into a dialogue to create an ecosystem of storytelling, a different and more comprehensive way of bearing witness? These are some of the many questions I will return to throughout this thesis.

1.2 Notes on Framework

1.2.1 Intersectional Approaches

Although the question of gender is not the main topic of this thesis, my approach to grief and navigating loss, the relationship between the human and the more-than-human landscape, and intersecting historical, political, ecological violences are very much rooted in ecofeminist frameworks. Ecofeminist and feminist-environmental approaches enable us to focus on relationships and mutual becomings rather than look at objects of inquiry as separate and self-contained subjects, exploring embodied ways of knowing without privileging a Western, hypermasculine rationalism. As they accommodate spiritual and animist viewpoints within material realities, they explore emergent ways of thinking, moving away from an either/or logic to multiple possibilities. Environmental humanities and their critical toolkit that builds connections between trauma and memory studies, phenomenology, ecology, somatics and mythopoetics form the foundations of this thesis, as they focus on the importance of local, situated knowledge, showing how "land and culture" are interrelated.[42] The intersectional framework offered by ecofeminist approaches locates destruction in the connection between capitalist development, racism, individualism and the patriarchy.[43] While ecofeminism "situates environmental feminism in global intersecting systems of capitalism, globalism and patriarchy, [it] offers an emphasis on material factors" and suggest reparative possibilities, rather than deepening injustices.[44] This reparative approach is crucial to my thinking of the possibility of grief in relation to Disaster. Although Güler's work does not reveal much of his politics, Biberyan's leftist views indicate his intersectional thinking. At the end of *Mahkûmların Şafağı*, right after his release from prison, he is offered a job to write for the leftist newspaper *Nor Or*. About this Biberyan writes: "Artık komünist fikirlerimden emin olduğumdan, solcu bir gazete olan *Nor Or* bana daha uygundu [...] Artık yazılarımın beslendiği kaynak Ermeni cemaati değil, daha geniş sorunlar olacaktı."[45] A much less studied aspect of his life and work, perhaps a more in depth look at Biberyan's leftist politics in relation to the reparative possibilities of grief can help us re-examine some of the key assumptions of trauma studies and identity-based

[42] Penny Weiss and Wynne Moskop, "Ecofeminist manifestos: Resources for feminist perspectives on the environment," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 83 (2020), 5.

[43] *Ibid.*, 6-7.

[44] *Ibid.*, 1, 2.

[45] Biberyan, *Mahkûmların Şafağı*, 434.

political movements to write "better stories" of survival, resistance, resilience and community. I conclude this thesis on this question, encouraging further research into and critical examination of the lesser-known aspects of Biberyan's works, and opening to the very exciting and fruitful relationship between grief, re-enchantment and storytelling.

1.2.2 Grief as a Lens

While grief is the main focus of this thesis, the reason I frame it both as a topic of inquiry and as a lens through which I look at violence, trauma and memory, is twofold. First, grief acknowledges the paradoxes in the logic of Disaster while also creating a space within that impossibility for a reparative approach. Although this will be discussed more comprehensively in chapter three, what I mean by "reparative" is not a facile narrative that offers a clean closure, but one that approaches paradox and impossibility with curiosity, seeing it as an invitation. This approach enables a response towards Disaster that is neither pessimistic or foreclosing, nor simply reconciliatory.

Second, although I frame grief as a lens, grief is not a "critical framework" in the academic sense, or an all-encompassing theory to look at loss, witnessing and Disaster. This framing is a conscious choice on my part; grief is an embodied and practice-based way of engaging with the affective echoes of loss, which demands awareness, presence, attention, and most of all, fierce compassion. The nature of grief overturns memorized/learned ways of navigating and speaking about loss: it demands we show up every day to its shifting currents and poses a challenge to set, conventional ways of writing and thinking. This is why I often refer to the works of psychotherapists, grief workers, animist worldviews and my own experiences and reflections as a student of death and grief learning hold space as a doula, engaging and cocreating in spaces of bereavement. This connection to lived experience consolidates my connection to joy and to community as well as the pain that loss brings. Through this work, I reclaim resilience and agency as part of my feminist framework, and try to read Güler and Biberyan's works from here. Can joy and the erotics of aliveness be found in our understanding of belonging and ways of relating to homeland? I believe that this dialogue between joy and precarity could take human and more-than-human trauma studies and storytelling into surprising and exciting places. It can help us imagine new ways of relating to landscape, kin, and home, and help us reclaim our imagination as a way of remembering and telling stories that disrupt the logic of Disaster.

2. IN THE THICK PRESENT OF LOSS

In a photograph taken in Ataköy in 1971, an old man walks along a graveled path among the patches of dried grass and brushwood. He looks in the direction of the camera and behind him hover new, orderly and clean-looking residential buildings, like ghosts of a future signaling the modern, ideal urban identity of the city. Difficult to discern at first glance, a cat emerges at the bottom of the image from between the twigs and the leaves, as if directly responding to the photographer's gaze. Behind the cat are some stones half-buried in the grass, perhaps pieces of an old edifice or leftovers from the construction of these new buildings. Thin branches of an unseen tree (most likely behind the photographer) creep into the frame from above, playfully disturbing the sense of orderliness created by the buildings in the background.

The contrast between the upper half and the lower half of the photograph is striking. The messiness of the foreground and the sleepy gaze of the cat creates an ironic contrast to the neatly lined apartment blocks in the background, revealing the effort to modernize and "clean up" the city, giving it a new façade in response to its growing and changing population. This spatial tension figures in many photographs of Ara Güler. The poignancy of this image in particular lies in the fact that it reminds me of another photograph, the photograph of a woman kneeling and praying by a gravestone at the Surp Agop Cemetery in Taksim (Figure 2.2), expropriated during the early Republican period.[46] The way images interpellate other images affect the way we see and interpret photographs, regardless of their chronology of appearance, and give us an important tool to explore affective resonances of loss in the thick present. If we consider "thick time" as a way of thinking about time and space in terms of "a transcorporeal stretching between present, future and past"[47] we might be able to read how the intimacies between human bodies and

[46] The date and the photographer of this image is unconfirmed. For a discussion on the unlawful expropriation process of the cemetery, see: Tamar Nalcı and Emre Can Dağlıoğlu, "Gezi Parkı'nın yanı başındaki Ermeni Mezarlığı," *Agos*, June 5, 2013, https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/2794/gezi-parki-nin-yani-basindaki-ermeni-mezarligi.

[47] Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Loewen Walker, "'Weathering': Climate Change and the 'Thick Time' of Transcorporeality," *Hypatia*, 29 (2014), 561.

more-than-human landscapes affect and are affected by memory, grief and feelings of belonging. To imagine how this material interconnectedness unearths troubling memories of violence through thick time is always an uncanny experience as it explores the boundary between familiarity and strangeness, calling forth the ghosts of a foundational violence hiding in plain sight.

Figure 2.1 Ara Güler, Ataköy, 1971

Figure 2.2 A Woman at the Surp Agop Cemetery in Taksim

The loss of a sense of belonging, both to one's own body and to the familiar spaces and landscapes etched in one's memory, shapes the precarious and troubling notion of home that underlies all of Biberyan's novels. Biberyan's writing works like a photograph: bodies that are surveilled and encountered in images become spaces where personal and collective histories converge. The human body can be considered a "home" itself, a (porous) container that shapes the way we relate to our environment, a boundary between survival and death; it carries the timeless ghost of Disaster within itself. As Zeynep Sayın writes in *Ölüm Terbiyesi*, everybody carries within themselves their corpse, and the recognition of our image — what we call the self— is at the same time, the recognition of our corpse.[48] As uncanny encounters with bodily images trigger traumatic memories for Biberyan's characters and turn the body into a space of ongoing historical violence, they create certain "punctures" —like Roland Barthes's idea of *punctum*— in the text, making the reader question, as if staring at a photograph, what they are looking at.

Just as Biberyan's novels enable a "photographic" reading, Ara Güler's work, like *Armenian Fishermen at Kumkapı*, puts image and narrative in dialogue with each other. Compared to his other photographs, such as those documenting the events of 6-7 September, *Armenian Fishermen at Kumkapı* shows how the text goes beyond merely contextualizing images in photojournalism and enables us to understand photographic documentation in terms of process rather than an endpoint, illuminating the transcorporeal relationships between humans and the more-than-human land-

[48]Zeynep Sayın, *Ölüm Terbiyesi* (Istanbul: Metis, 2017), 61.

scape. Looking at both Biberyan's and Güler's works to understand the relationship between the text and the image is to explore the tension between dissociation and intimacy with life in the face of ongoing violence and destruction that Istanbul as an ecosystem has been facing over the past century. Thinking about this intimacy with life is necessary if we are to understand the interconnectedness of human bodies with the more-than-human landscape, to learn "to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings".[49] This intimacy passes through grief and death work — through an "ethics of boundaries" that chips away at dominant systems of language and representation.[50]

2.1 Uncanny Encounters

In Biberyan's novels, loss and its uncanny resonances are closely tied to human bodies and the home. In his 1919 article of the same name, Freud suggests that the uncanny, or *unheimlich*, is related to the home, as the root of the word —*heim*— signifies. Freud's semantic exploration of the relationship between *unheimlich* and feelings of familiarity, of being "at home" signified by the words *heimlich* and *heimisch*, leads him to the conclusion that the prefix "un-" implies a repression rather than an antonym, a repression that turns the familiar into the strange.[51] There is also a second meaning to *unheimlich*, one that is closely linked to the word *geheim*, meaning "secret". And so, *unheimlich* signifies the anxiety that is not caused by something completely strange or foreign, but by something that is inherently familiar: it is the return of the repressed, a revelation of that which should have remained a secret.

In her book *İkinci Hayat*, Nurdan Gürbilek draws our attention to another layer of meaning behind the relationship between *unheimlich*, *heim* and *geheim* — the "homeland" or "nation" (*Heimat*). Gürbilek writes that the nation's "secret" inevitably passes through the home.[52] In this sense, the "inside" of the home does not just become the domain of a sheltered, domestic life, nor does the "outside" become

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[49] Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulhucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.

[50] Sayın, *Ölüm Terbiyesi*, 67.

[51] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, translated by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003).

[52] Nurdan Gürbilek, *İkinci Hayat: Kaçmak, Kovulmak, Dönmek Üzerine Denemeler* (Istanbul: Metis, 2020), 51.

its social and political counterpart. The uncanny is the shocking realization that the outside has penetrated the inside: the foundational secret of the *Heimat* has manifested within the home and the body. If we consider these layers of definition in Biberyan's novels, we can see that the uncanny manifests in those moments when the ghost of past and future disasters, the Wealth Tax, Aşkale and the events of 6-7 September emerge from the margins of our plane of vision, through a traumatic recall that pierces the characters' bodies and their consciousness. It is when, in *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, Baret, "having forgotten all those years what it meant to be Armenian [...] only to remember now, after living through the first shock [of realization], began to understand what it means. It was to take on his Armenian identity without wanting to [...], to realize that it is better to 'not be Armenian'. But it was impossible to not be Armenian."[53]

The intersection of the "inside" and the "outside" figures in the way postgenocide Armenian society considers gender as a "survival kit" and gendered bodies as a part of its social and mental repertoires to be able to continue living in the newly formed Turkish Republic after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.[54] Identifying 19th century nationalist and modernist discourses that often employ familial tropes in Armenian society's postwar communal self-understanding, Lerna Ekmekçioğlu writes that these repertoires "that informed how Armenians responded to genocide and the subsequent 'minoritization' followed a gendered blueprint".[55] Within the national project of a people faced with extinction in the public space, "these inventories of worldview and habit relied on the Armenian family and the homespace" for the continuation and the reproduction of those things that made a person "Armenian".[56] Things such as language, memory and socialization practices that constitute the building blocks of cultural identity "had to spring from the homespace whose heart was a mother."[57] The dichotomy of the "world" and the "home", the "inside" and the "outside" conjured by the nationalist imagination further "located the nation's 'inner core'— that which has to remain the same in the face of humiliating outside intrusion—with women, making 'mothers constitutive elements and transmitters of the nation's critical difference, a common good otherwise known as 'culture,'

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[53] Zaven Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, 479.

[54] Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 8-9.

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *Ibid.*

constructed as a fortress against penetration from the 'world.'"[58] We see this in a particular moment in *Meteliksiz Âşıklar*, where Sur recalls a paragraph from a book he recently read, on how the purity of daughters is "capital" for the family.[59] This worldview structures the tense relationship Sur has with his mother Meline, who prides herself on "not having been touched by any man" except her husband. Meline's strong disapproval of Sur's relationship with Norma, who is a working girl belonging to the "outside world", is enough to make Sur feel like a "stranger [*yabancı*] in his own house".[60] The relationship between the "inside" and the "outside" is further troubled by the gendered nature of 1915. The women and children who were forcefully taken from their families into Muslim households, kidnapped, raped and converted to Islam, and later rescued after the war in operations by the Armenian community that was acting on "a masculinist language of protection, honor, and vengeance"[61], and those women who could not return to the community at all constitute the great foundational secret, the repressed, denialist legacy of the Turkish Republic.

The relationship between home and the female body in Biberyan's novels shape Baret's and Sur's problematic relationship with "Armenianness" that is structured by postgenocide societal discourse, memories and affective echoes of personal and historical traumas. Biberyan's novels bring into question how much the homespace remains a private domain, considering the internalization of the habitus of denial that represses the memories and embodied legacies of state violence. So, what could reading the images of the body and the home like photographs tell us about the memories of violence that shape the consciousness of Biberyan's characters? Would a photographic approach to the text, an alternative way of seeing lead Biberyan's characters home? According to Marianne Hirsch, images act as "ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world", a kind of "spectral evidence" that reveals "the striking gap between what we can see and what we can know".[62] Photographs and images are spaces where the past and the present intersect, "points" of memory bridging personal and transferred memory. The traces of what has happened and forced into oblivion, buried and repressed lie somewhere, waiting to be discovered by an attentive eye.

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[58] *Ibid.*, 10.

[59] Zaven Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Âşıklar*, translated by Natali Bağdat (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2017), 158.

[60] *Ibid.*, 150.

[61] Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 12.

[62] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 32, 59-61.

2.2 Ghostly Images

In *Meteliksiz Âşıklar*, when Sur and Norma are at the Yörükali Beach in Büyükada, Norma begins telling Sur the story of how she and her family migrated from Greece in 1944. An unsettling image appears before Sur's eyes:

> Sur Norma'yı ince kolları ve bacakları ile hayal etti. Bir yerde iskelete dönmüş çocuk resimleri görmüştü. Savaş kurbanları veya Nazi kamplarıyla ilgili bir yazıda. O zaman üzerinde pek bir etkisi olmamıştı. Şimdi bu karşılaştırma dokundu ona. Kolları bacakları dal gibi kalmış, eriyip bitmiş kızların görüntüsünün yarattığı sarsıntıyı başka türlü hissetti içinde. Ve kendisi de, Norma'nın babası gibi, "Alman" kelimesinden bile nefret etti. Masaya eğildi, Norma'nın elini, kolunu tuttu ve sağlıksız çocuk görüntüsünü aklından uzaklaştırmak için, onun sıcak, sağlıklı vücudunu doyumsuzca seyretti, dokundu.[63]

Where did this disruptive image of children, emaciated bodies from the Nazi camps come from? These photographs, which hadn't left a particular impression on Sur at the time, suddenly manifest on the body of the woman he loves. Recalling Susan Sontag's idea that "photographs echo certain photographs",[64] the reader is confronted with a palimpsest. The uncanny effect created by the overriding images of the emaciated children and Norma's body create a shock in Sur, and the reader is led to look through this "puncture" that Biberyan has pierced in the text to trace a disaster, a "secret" with almost no visual or photographic documentation, indexed by another, more recent disaster leading to the Nazi death camps.

The tension between tenderness and resentment, dissociation and a desire for connection seen in this passage appears many times in Biberyan's texts. When the recollection of this unsettling image, the involuntary connection between two disasters *touches* Sur, he immediately feels the need to physically *touch* Norma. However, this is an ambivalent moment where the touch turns into an "insatiable" desire to watch her body, blurring the line between a desire for connection and a desire for consumption —a voyeuristic tendency— that lies at the heart of photography. Sur's tenderness turns into a paternal protectiveness towards Norma that infantilizes her body. No matter how compassionate this scene might seem, the fact that Norma tells Sur a moment later about a marriage proposal she had received from a boy

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[63] Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Âşıklar*, 81.

[64] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 67. Accessed February 4, 2024. https://www.scribd.com/read/182571896/Regarding-the-Pain-of-Others.

she had previously been with, changes the image of Norma's body in Sur's head. Norma's warm, healthy and childlike body "that belonged to Sur" a moment ago is now "writhing with pleasure" under someone else's body, being invaded by someone else's [*yabancı*] hands.[65] The estrangement, disgust, pain and rage that Sur feels rips him out of a moment of potential intimacy, echoing what Lerna Ekmekçioğlu writes in *Recovering Armenia*. Norma's body becomes a space to be protected against foreign "invasion", an image of a child victim of traumatic violence overriding that of a woman capable of pleasure in her body. Whereas the shock created by this uncanny recall could have led Sur to trace this feeling of unease to its source, it is instead displaced by the gendered tropes that Sur encounters both in his family and community.

The feeling of loss is especially palpable in *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, in Baret's grandmother's house in Büyükada. It is a space suffused with fractured memories of the past, memories Baret struggles to access that walk the line between dream and reality. The relationship between dream, reality and image becomes a recurring motif for loss and grief in Biberyan's novel. Just as the image of Norma's body had the image of the emaciated children from the concentration camps mapped on it like a palimpsest, the landscape of and around the island in *Karıncaların Günbatımı* carries the uncanny traces and dream-like visions of a not so distant past and eerily foreshadows future events.

Towards the beginning of the novel, arriving in Büyükada to see his uncle, Baret enters a quasi-magical world bustling with more-than-human life, where the trees are blossoming and the butterflies quietly fluttering in a weather that seems more like spring than winter.[66] Baret's attention is turned towards minute details, to a horse grazing, to a chicken and a rooster silently picking worms on the ground. The emphasis on silence not only heightens the meditative state Baret enters as he walks along the paths into the forest, but also signifies a quiet contemplation of the landscape, which becomes a kind of pastoral painting unfolding in front of him. With each step, the scenery reveals the memory of something familiar, a tree, or a stone, the buzzing of bees — a familiar sense of home, the comfort of an unchanging essence, a world coming alive, and along with it, Baret himself. However, Baret finds himself confused when he encounters "the massive wooden structure" on a turn that shakes him so much that it "arrests his thinking". Biberyan makes

[65] Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Âşıklar*, 85.

[66] Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, 50-51.

another reference to this "monstrous" wooden structure towards the end of the novel,[67] when Baret returns from the Southeast to deal with the house after his uncle's death. Without clear identification of what this building is, the reader is left unsure as to whether this is Baret's house or the Greek orphanage in Büyükada, the biggest wooden structure on the island. This ambiguity is an uncanny one for us reading Biberyan's works today, as the orphanage, which was under the patronage of the Greek Patriarchate, was closed and the property sealed in 1964 by the General Directorate of Foundations, on the grounds that the building constituted a "fire hazard". The orphans were left without a home, forced to vacate the premises immediately "carrying their books, clothes and dishware".[68] Unsurprisingly, 1964 was the year the major part of the Greek population in Istanbul was unlawfully deported and displaced, and their properties seized due to the tensions over Cyprus. Publishing *Karıncaların Günbatımı* as a serial in the *Jamanak* newspaper in 1970, Cyprus was undoubtedly a current issue for Biberyan, an issue that is also vocalized by Saraygil Azniv Hanım towards the end of the novel. Therefore, it is interesting to see how Biberyan plays with temporality here, how the orphanage —which was functioning during the 1940s when this novel takes place— becomes an uncanny reminder foreshadowing a "future disaster", a monument becoming an image, a memory of its future disuse and disintegration. Baret's sudden encounter with the building creates a bridge between dream and reality, the present and the future. This strange, confusing realization clouds Baret's memory: on the brink of an arresting clarity, he is pulled back into the present moment — the trees begin to "obscure his vision", and the mud sticking to his feet reminds him that the season is not yet spring, it is still winter.[69] Like the dynamic between Sur and Norma, where a possibly tender moment was soured by feelings of rage and disillusionment, Baret too finds himself distanced from that connection.

The wooden structure functions similarly to the image of the body in Biberyan's novels, reminding the reader of the boundary between survival and destruction. The building, which now stands as a reminder, a monument of its own "death in the future"[70] becomes its own "double of death". In *Ölüm Terbiyesi*, Zeynep Sayın writes that these doubles, like the Greek colossi or the Central Asian *balbals* (which, in Mongolian, means "to disintegrate", as Sayın points out) inhabit such thresholds

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[67] *Ibid.*, 445.

[68] Stelyo Berberakis, "Büyükada Rum Yetimhanesi: 1964'te kapısına kilit vurulan ve restorasyonu başlayan binanın hazin öyküsü," *BBC Türkçe*, October 3, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-54401378.

[69] Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, 51.

[70] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2020), 117.

and gravesites, on the intersection of life and death. They establish the relationship between the living and the dead, letting the dead die and "permitting the living to mourn" after them.[71] No wonder not only the house in Büyükada, but also the Tarhanyan family house(s) in Kadıköy are often described as "ruins" or "graveyards".[72] Although Sayın writes that these uncanny doubles watching over these liminal spaces put the dead to rest by turning them into a part of our imaginary ("hayal") so that they won't return as ghosts ("hayalet"), the massive wooden structure, or the houses in *Karıncaların Günbatımı* have no possibility of being carried into that symbolic plane within a system that denies any meaning to their death and disintegration. Within the perpetuating and indefinite logic of Disaster, ghosts will have to return: ghosts of past and future destructions, of expropriation and exile, half-formed, never fully dead or alive. Reading the ambiguity between the orphanage and Baret's house further consolidates the feeling of homelessness and the loss of belonging, as the orphanage denotes a rupture or precarity of familial ties and familial memory, be it within the biological family or the nation as a "family". And for Baret, one of the moments when he attempts to name this death is when he finds himself trying to explain his loss to Tonietta: "Fakirim Toni, ama önceleri fakir değildik. Varlık'tan oldu. Bir gün seni Ada'ya götüreyim, bizim evi görürsün. Şimdi bir harabe, zamanında koca binaydı."[73]

The images of past and future disasters are always present, hidden within the landscape that unfolds in front of Baret's eyes "like a dream".[74] From the house in Büyükada, Baret's eyes scan over the Marmara Sea towards Maltepe like a camera, then to Yakacık, Bostancı and beyond. "İstanbul'un uzak silüetindeki parıltılar Moda'nın ışıkları olmalıydı. Hava saldırılarına karşı konuşlanmış bir çift projektör Çamlıca'nın üzerinde çaprazlar çiziyordu. Savaşın izleri tümüyle silinmemişti." While the traces of the recent past reveal themselves, the shadow of imminent events suffuses the minute details of the landscape. The way Biberyan associates the bright yellow mimosa flowers with fire throughout the novel is an example of such revelation. On the island, Baret does not fail to notice how the flowers on top of the trees were "lighting up" or "burning" ("Yalnız kalmış bir ağacın tepesinde mimoza kalıntıları yanıyordu").[75] In another moment, when he is traveling on the ferry, he realizes that:

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[71] Sayın, *Ölüm Terbiyesi*, 64-65.

[72] Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, 235, 423.

[73] *Ibid.*, 213-214.

[74] *Ibid.*, 245.

[75] *Ibid.*, 51.

> Heybeli Ruhban Okulu'nun ormanından bir duman yükseldi. Sarı bir duman, yanan kükürt gibi. Kuzeye doğru yayıldı. Çamdan çama, tepeden tepeye tüm adayı sardı. Rüzgârın kaldırıp yaydığı çam polenleriydi bunlar. Baret bu uyanış ve üreme tozunu seyretti. Küçükken elleriyle dalları silkeler ve bu sarı yağmurun altında dururlardı. Anası da çok kızardı.[76]

This moment foreshadows the very end of the novel where the reader is told that smoke was rising over Kadıköy, a fiery color lighting up the sky.[77] Although Biberyan does not explicitly state it, the readers realize that it is the eve of the events of 6-7 September 1955. However, the poignancy of this moment on the ferry lies in the fact that the yellow "smoke" caused by the pollens does not belong to a "fire" of violence and destruction, but to a fire of birth, reproduction and rejuvenation. Once again, Biberyan's protagonist drifts into a memory of touch, a memory of intimate connection with the landscape, when Baret recalls his mother's anger. Just as in *Meteliksiz Âşıklar*, the disruptive image of a woman, be it the mother or the lover, becomes a *punctum* within the narrative, a way into the "subtle beyond — as if the image launched a desire beyond what it permits us to see".[78] This perhaps becomes more evident towards the final third of the novel when Baret moves out of Lula and her mother's house after quitting his job, which marks the beginning of his own "disintegration". After Haybeden hesitantly suggests that there might be a place where Baret can stay at Mastori's barber shop in Kemeraltı —the seedy underbelly of the city— the reader begins to follow Baret as he descends into the dark, filthy labyrinthine streets of Karaköy (and of his own psyche), leaving the bright lights and gaudy confectionary stores, cafes and cinemas of Beyoğlu behind. In the dark alleys of Kemeraltı, Baret enters a state where he "forgets himself" and begins to "engrave these landscapes to memory".[79] This idea of moving beyond the conscious mind to a space where the eye begins to record like a camera echoes the desire to understand beyond what the image in front of Baret permits him to see. Baret's journey through the landscape littered with rusty railways, dark workshops and junkyards with ruins of houses so old that they seem like they have been there since the Byzantines becomes an archeological excavation into the darkness of his own unconscious, where only a detached eye (like a lens) can roam and record without risking a piercing insight that might open the floodgates of emotions surrounding

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[76] *Ibid.*, 130.

[77] *Ibid.*, 523.

[78] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 71.

[79] Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, 379.

traumatic events. After Baret witnesses men gazing at half-naked women sitting around a stove, legs parted, behind "naked windows", we see that this voyeuristic tendency is transposed into the following scene, as Baret enters Mastori's barber shop.

> Baret'in bakışları eski, solup sararmış, isten kararmış, yer yer yırtık eski taşbaskı resimlere takıldı. Eski İstanbul'dan manzaralar, laternalı, panayırlı tablolar. On dokuzuncu yüzyıl sonu giysileri içinde çıplak göğüsleriyle güzel kadınlar. Bir şey, bir şey hatırlatıyordu bu tombul tipler. Evet, ninesinden kalma teneke bir kutunun kapağında, aynı o saçı topuzlu, çıplak korsajlı kadın resmi vardı. Zımaro'dan da önce, o havalı kadının resmi olmuştu büyük aşkı, ama aradaki bağlantı sadece bu kutu değildi, ya da bu kutunun üzerinden başka bir bağlantı olmalıydı. Bu, insanı huzursuz eden göğüs, bir şey... başka bir şey hatırlatıyordu sanki ona. İçini hem haz, hem de acı veren bir huzursuzluk kaplıyor, o da bir yandan bir şeyi kendisine yaklaştırmaya çalışıyordu. Evet, bir şey, kaçıp giden, ama var olan, ve her ne ise, kendisi tarafından var olduğu bilinen bir şey... [80]

In this scene, although Baret is not staring at the women outside, but at the *images* of women and the cityscape of old Istanbul on the wall, we see this voyeuristic gaze turn into something uncanny, a deep desire to see an unnamable, disturbing "something" that is suffused into both human bodies and the landscape. As these images seep into Baret's memory, particularly into the memory of his grandmother's box, he tries to grasp what the images of the women's breasts point towards, something that is always a little out of focus. Susan Sontag writes that "the familiarity of certain photographs builds our sense of the present and the immediate past." Images serve as references, as totems that crystallize around them certain sentiments, and help "construct —and revise— our sense of a more distant past".[81] Similarly, these images of naked women that mobilize Baret's memory and trigger an uncomfortable feeling find its meaning in a later scene. Under the influence of drugs, in a hellish dream-world between sleep and wakefulness, Baret sees a young girl, shivering from the cold, caked in mud, repeating, "Çok korkuyorum... Ne yapacağım?" Although this phrase was repeated in the previous chapters by Lula, who fell pregnant and died after an unsuccessful abortion, the girl is not Lula anymore in Baret's hallucination. This young girl is taken by her grandmother to a place where "there would be no more fear", but "o büyükannesini hatırlamıyordu. Nasıl tanıyacaktı onu? [...]

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[80] *Ibid.*, 380.

[81] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 69.

Onun odun sobasını biliyordu, Ada'daki evin. Artık Ada'ya hiç gidemeyecekti."[82] The way Biberyan uses the gender-neutral pronoun "o" to make a subtle transition between the girl's grandmother and Baret's own opens a tunnel in Baret's memory. His grandmother, the one he remembers by her tin box, indicates a kind of memory that is transferred maternally, a bodily memory of intimacy and belonging. However, that line is broken; Baret does not remember his grandmother(s). The photographs in Mastori's barber shop push Baret to lift the veil off a kind of knowledge not identified by consciousness but deeply felt within the body. But since he does not remember his grandmother, he will not be able to go back to the island; he will not be able to "return home". Moreover, in his hallucination, the crystal-clear waters around Büyükada are becoming dirty, like the industrially polluted waters of Haliç.[83] The breasts on the photograph suddenly appear on the water's surface, yet these breasts that constantly fall or "pour" out ["dışarı taşan"] of the bathing suit do not belong to the beautiful women in the photographs but to Baret's mother, Arus. "Ayıp, bakma!" shouts Arus. "Utanmıyor musun, bakma!"

Here, Biberyan punctures the text once more, but who is he telling not to look, and not to look at what? What is being kept out of Baret's and the reader's sight? This question does not leave the reader in a comfortable position, as it challenges our expectations of what we hope to see. But as hard as Arus tries to push her breasts into her bathing suit, the more they overflow, the more they haunt our line of sight, before everything dissolves into darkness and a deafening silence in Baret's mind.

This recurring problematic of sight and the dissociation between the eye and the body is worth returning to in order to understand the connection between loss, Disaster, bodies and landscapes and how it is woven into the relationship between photography and literature. There is a telling moment in *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, where we witness Baret and Lula have sex: a scene that clearly demonstrates the oscillation between intimacy and dissociation.

> Lula kendisini seyrediyordu. Bakışları sabitti. Sanki kendisi değildi de başkasını, başkalarını seyrediyordu. Baştan beri seyretmişti, sinema seyreder gibi. Hiç kapatmamıştı gözlerini, asla erimemiş, girdaba kapılmamıştı. O bir gözdü, kulaktı, dildi. Objektifti. Ten değildi. Et değildi. Kan değildi. Dikkatle kendisini seyrediyordu. Bitmesini sabırsızca bekliyordu. Bir görev gibi.... İnceleyen gözlerle kendisine bakıyordu... Unutmuyordu. Baştan beri kendisinin hareketlerini izlemişti. [84]

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[82] Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, 409-410.

[83] *Ibid.*

[84] *Ibid.*, 345.

This idea of the eye being a "lens", constantly, even obsessively watching without blinking, being unable to turn away renders sight itself as a kind of malediction, an inability to unsee one's own destruction that is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's angel of history. Just like the angel, Baret sees what we consider as a chain of events as one single disaster, wanting to stay a moment longer, to speak to his dead, to assemble all the broken pieces of his memories.[85] He does not want to have "lenses" for eyes but wants to live with his "fingertips", touching and feeling through the sensations on his skin.[86] On the other hand, Lula's detached gaze studies, judges and records Baret's every movement, but the fact that she does not only watch him but also others depersonalizes her, emphasizing her "dismemberment"— she is no longer flesh and blood, just an eye, a nose and a tongue. Lula as an "assemblage" of parts, almost like a photomontage, reveals a tendency in Biberyan's novels to constantly assemble and disassemble pieces of memory, history and traumatic recall, culminating in the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the desire to feel and connect deeply and the instinct to withdraw and dissociate. As Marianne Hirsch writes that "trauma, in its literal meaning, is a wound inflicted on the flesh",[87] this kind of "detachment" that the photographic gaze offers provides a protective distance from the disasters felt too intensely on the flesh ("6-7 Eylül'ü teninde hissetmişti"[88]). However, as we have established previously, the way images leave a ghostly trail of "*touching*, *piercing* insights that traverse temporal, spatial, and experiential divides"[89] lets photographs serve as affective triggers for memory, prompting a bodily response that precedes any kind of narrative.[90] Biberyan's novels, which read like photographs, hold these two contradictory qualities together; the capacity to hold both desires —connection and dissociation— carries within itself a reparative potential that opens a door into thinking about grief. Subtly shifting the question of Distaster from one of representation to sensation, Biberyan turns narratives into photographs, allowing "the [reader] to enter the image, to imagine the disaster 'in one's own body', yet to evade the transposition that erases distance, creating too available, too direct an access to this particular past".[91]

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[85] Walter Benjamin, *Son Bakışta Aşk: Walter Benjamin'den Seçme Yazılar*, ed. by Nurdan Gürbilek (Istanbul: Metis, 1993), 48.

[86] Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, 344.

[87] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 80.

[88] Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Âşıklar*, 127.

[89] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 61-62.

[90] *Ibid.*, 38-39.

[91] *Ibid.*, 98.

A similar dynamic is also present in Ara Güler's photographs of 6-7 September. These documentary images taken during the events give us a good example how photography holds an ambivalent position as both a mode of witnessing and a mediator of a different kind of violence enacted upon that which is being witnessed.

Figure 2.3 Ara Güler, Beyoğlu, 1955

In his photographs, Güler, who witnessed the events unfold in Beyoğlu, explores the relationship between directness and indirectness in documenting the violent destruction taking place in the streets. In Figure 2.3, the viewer gets a bird's eye view of a crowd, a mix of onlookers and those rummaging through the destroyed and looted material scattered on the street. While the Turkish flag dominating the upper third of the frame makes an ironic statement, implying that the looters and the perpetrators of this violence are "protected" by the Turkish state, the tiny, depersonalized figures remind us of the "ants" in *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, shapeless and nameless figures running to and fro, with various degrees of implication and indifference towards the violence and destruction taking place in the city. These "ants" figure in other photographs of Güler as well, particularly in those documenting the

demolitions in Karaköy and Eminönü. Güler's preoccupation with documenting the ongoing demolitions throughout the city *along with their witnesses* seems to demonstrate a self-reflexive approach to his craft, around the question of what it means to see these multiple processes of destruction and erasure without being able to intervene physically. As Figure 2.4 shows, Güler's approach to these differences between witness positions —to both bystanders, and himself, standing further away, mobilizing the camera's lens as an eye— becomes an attempt to reclaim a kind of agency in the face of irreversible loss. Documenting becomes a way of grieving an ongoing process of destruction enacted on the landscape, and unlike the static contrast offered by before-and-after images which depict sudden and radical change within landscapes,[92] Güler's dynamic photographs bridge the gap between what-has-been and what is, offering us the tools to question not only *what* happened, but *how* it happened.

Figure 2.4 Ara Güler, Karaköy, 1958

[92]Eyal and Ines Weizman, *Önce ve Sonra: Felaketin Mimarisini Belgelemek*, translated by Baran Bilir (İstanbul: Lemis Yayın, 2021), 8.

Going back to the images of 6-7 September, in Figures 2.5 and 2.6 we see the aftermath of the destruction. Both photographs evoke an uncanny feeling of emptiness: there are only a couple of figures scattered around the frame, hinting at the ongoing chaos somewhere just beyond our field of vision. While this does not necessarily mean that the events were also out of the photographer's line of sight, the strange sense of absence permeating both photographs, heightened by the lifeless pieces of cloth from nearby shops scattered on the ground, signifies the ghostly trace of the traumatic event that will eventually cause many people from the non-Muslim communities of Istanbul to leave their homes for elsewhere. This is further consolidated by the two solitary figures in each photograph, a soldier and a cleanly dressed man —possibly a shopkeeper— standing amidst these remnants. In Figure 2.5, the soldier, standing upright with his hand resting on his gun, stares at something just beyond the frame. We can only assume what he is looking at: if there is an ongoing attack, or an approaching mob, why is the soldier so still, silently watching? An even stranger detail that pricks the eye is the figure on the upper left corner of the frame, a bystander perhaps, surveying the whole scene with his hands in his pockets, which seems to echo Güler's preoccupation with witnesses and the act of witnessing. However, if both figures are looking at something *behind* the photographer, why does Güler, who is present on the scene as a photojournalist, looking *away* from it?

Figure 2.5 Ara Güler, Beyoğlu, 1955

Figure 2.6 Ara Güler, Beyoğlu, 1955

Figure 2.6 indicates a more private moment: a man in front of his destroyed shop. It is difficult to read the man's expression as he sorts through a roll of cloth, and the viewer feels the photographer's desire to keep a certain distance and his uncertainty whether to engage with him. Writing about distance in photography, Sontag finds the distance between the photographer and their subject a necessary one, though admitting that a camera could also abuse, maim, violate, and even— to take the metaphor of "shooting" further— kill.[93] While the distance in Güler's gaze could be a response to the tension between self-preservation and the inability to turn away from the scene at hand, it highlights the ambivalence of photography as an act, what Sontag calls the complicity between the photographer and what is deemed worthy of being photographed. This is evident in Güler's account of a moment during the events, tinged with a bizarre sense of humor, as he recounts a scene in front of a store:

[93]Susan Sontag, *Fotoğraf Üstüne*, translated by Osman Akınhay (Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2011), 15.

> Japon mağazasıydı. Birinci katta, yukarıda bir kuyruklu piyano var. Vitrin kırılmış, adam piyanoyu aşağı atacak ama, piyanonun ön ayağı bir şeye takılıyor, bir türlü düşmüyor. Ben de aşağıda bekliyorum. Atarsa resmini çekeceğim. Adamlara, "Dur" diyorum. "Hazır değilim, ayar yapıyorum." Sonra "Tamam, ben hazırım, istiyorsan at" diyorum. İtiyorlar itiyorlar, neyse piyanoyu havadayken çekiyorum. Böyle olaylar işte.[94]

Although taking a photograph lets the photographer in on its subject's mortality and vulnerability, this idea of turning event into image reveals the ambiguous position of the photographer as a possible accomplice in the violence. Exploring this relationship between distance and engagement is meaningful only if it leads us to the fundamental question behind what it means to be an "eye" and whether we should cultivate other ways of seeing. Integrating the detached and wandering eye of modernity into a wider ecosystem of perception, sensation and storytelling could offer us new ways of engaging with the world in the face of attritional violence and ongoing disasters.

2.3 Landscapes of Memory

Situating sight within a wider ecosystem of perception and embodied experience brings me to think about how photographs as "points" of memory can open to wider "landscapes" of memory. Photographs "highlight the intersection of spatiality and temporality in the workings of personal and cultural memory",[95] and although these points of memory reveal powerful and piercing insights, they consolidate our understanding of photography as essentially fragmentary — a frame snatched from a moment in time and space that can be mobilized out of context. The fragmentary nature of images is an appropriate metaphor for feelings of loss, for severed connections and familial memories, but thinking of photography in terms of "landscapes" could help us explore their role in weaving narratives of grief, home and belonging, and the reparative ways of engaging with bodies and the more-than-human landscapes that are threatened by more fragmentation and erasure every day. According to Sontag, due to their fragmentary nature, photographs also do not create an explicit ethical position themselves; they can only consolidate or contribute to existing ones, as they can easily be used out of context and become material to

[94] Nezih Tavlaş, *Foto Muhabiri Ara Güler'in Hayat Hikâyesi* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2014), 85.

[95] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 61.

much speculation and projection.[96] Yet, thinking of photographs as immersed in a wider landscape of memory, in dialogue with other forms of expression and sensation could help us imagine different possibilities for belonging, kinship and identities for traumatized and disconnected bodies. If grief is a way of alchemizing and narrativizing loss, landscapes of memory offer us a possibility of actively seeking out, forming and weaving intimate connections between human and more-than-human bodies, re-rooting bodies and stories within their landscapes from which they have been severed.

Jessica Rapson writes that thinking about the relationship between memory and landscape "affirms the centrality of space and place to the way people think about the past" and that groups and their environments are "mutually responsive".[97] Landscapes, rather than being a static archive where meanings are extracted, "are always in the process of becoming [...]"; they are not places "which embody memory", but work as "co-ordinates in dialogue with others that produce it. Where 'site' implies stasis, 'landscape' implies metamorphosis".[98] Loss of belonging and the possibility of transforming it into grief is intimately connected with how bodies work together, or "become with" landscapes. What makes the tension between dissociation and connection an uncanny experience for Biberyan's characters is the very fact that opening the body to the landscape is to invite and stay with pain and the feelings of loss, to fully acknowledge the painful desire to live "by touching and feeling, to live with one's fingertips, with the touch of one's skin".[99] It is what Baret's uncle Dırtad means when he speaks of living "intensely", to feel life on Earth on one's skin and in one's blood, to feel part of the universe. It is an intimacy with one's life and one's body-in-the-world that brings life to everything around oneself, from the stone under one's feet to the fish in the sea, from the insects to the weeds in the garden.[100]

To embed photography into a landscape of memory is to follow what lies beyond the frame and to ask the image to enter into dialogue, to co-create with language. If images are too readily available for projection and appropriation, thinking about the relationship between image and narrative could offer us a third way between the constant desire to see, to project our own desires onto the image and to dissociate

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[96] Sontag, *Fotoğraf Üstüne*, 21, 28.

[97] Jessica Rapson, *Topographies of Suffering: Buchenwald, Babi Yar, Lidice* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015) 6.

[98] *Ibid.*, 9.

[99] Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, 344.

[100] *Ibid*, 124.

and turn away. This third way invites us to explore different ways of seeing rather that privileging sight, to dare to connect with the landscape knowing that we might not be able to alleviate the pain of loss and destruction. It is to stay with the loss, to stay with the trouble, to dare to be present with disaster and destruction.

A good example of embedding photographs in landscapes of memory can be seen in Güler's early work: a reportage he did in collaboration with Vartan Ozinyan for the *Jamanak* newspaper in 1952 on the Armenian fishermen of Kumkapı. Although the piece was serially published between 21-26 May 1952, here, I will be looking at the book published by Aras in 2010, titled *Armenian Fishermen at Kumkapı*. As well as bringing together the text and the photographs of the original work, the book contains additional photographs taken by Güler on his various visits to the neighborhood. The distinction between the original piece of photojournalism and this book is important, as where and how we encounter images affects the way we relate, interpret and contextualize them.

The book *Armenian Fishermen at Kumkapı* constitutes an archive within itself by gathering the complete text and Güler's photographs in one place; a book has a more enduring quality compared to newspaper serials. Here, the work is framed by forewords by Güler and Murat Belge, written in 1993 and 2010 respectively, which reflect in retrospect the precarity and the future destruction of the humble yet lively fishing village after the construction of the coastal highway a couple of years after Güler conducted the interviews. As readers and spectators engaging with this book over the years, we become part of the layered temporality the book presents us with, the images and interviews taken and conducted in 1952, framed with Güler's and Belge's words almost half a century later, thus being offered an opportunity to re-engage and reinterpret the archive through the concerns we are facing today.

Güler's foreword is an interesting one, as he writes that he had "absolutely forgotten" this photo-reportage he had done with the fishermen 41 years earlier, only to be reminded of it one day when he was looking for something in his archive.[101] Just as this chance encounter with the black and white photos takes Güler back to 1952 when "Kumkapı was still a small fishing village", he states that no one knew at the time that the coastal highway would completely demolish the village. The shadow of a destruction cast on the past reminds the reader of another layer of uncanny surrounding the *punctum* that Barthes suggests: the way of looking at photographs with the knowledge that whoever or whatever is in the photograph "is going to die" —the simultaneity of "this will be and this has been".[102] The horror of an

[101] Ara Güler, *Armenian Fishermen at Kumkapı*, 1952 (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2010), 15.

[102] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 116.

anterior future (a double-temporality that Marc Nichanian also refers to in *Edebiyat ve Felaket*), "whether or not the subject is already dead" turns every photograph into "a catastrophe".[103] With this knowledge of death in the future, Güler states that at the time, when he had heard that the fishing village would be demolished, he went back several times throughout the years to take photographs, even colored ones. The preoccupation with future death perhaps prompted this reflex to record, to document, as preparation for a future grief. This issue with the black and white photographs is an interesting one: while the colored images in Güler's archives were ruined over time, the black and white ones were preserved, and thus "perhaps these black and white photographs are the only witnesses to a world long gone" and perhaps these fishermen would always remain black and white; in a liminal, twilight space with the shadow of destruction cast on them.[104]

Armenian Fishermen at Kumkapı, which has been, for a long time, out of print, thus becomes an archive that enables us to engage with the thick present, the layered temporalities of a certain place, a certain ecosystem within the city, to think about how landscapes and how we read what remains of those landscapes are changing. Engaging with these multi-faceted questions and grounding ourselves in the materiality of the archive and the stories and images of the landscape helps us move beyond a wistful and uncritical nostalgia of a time past and reminds us that these were very real people who experienced and depended on the more-than-human landscape for their survival. This materiality of connection is evident from the outset in Vartan Ozinyan's introduction, "Fishermen's Quarter Acemdağı, A World Unto Its Own". Güler and Ozinyan begin by tracing a path from Kumkapı square towards Hagop's gazino by the sea, stating that they aim to recount what they have seen and heard, the lives lived by people, their needs and their desires in this corner of the city. Although Ozinyan is from Kumkapı, ("he knew his way around"), a sense of entering a new and mysterious world, a sense of feeling at once familiar (the interviews were conducted in Armenian, and this could have been a source of trust among fishermen as they were willing to talk to Güler, seeing that he was a journalist) and foreign (since Güler is not from the area and is not familiar with the realities of the fishing trade) permeates the narrative. This oscillation between the two positions, an intimacy and curiosity arising from being "a familiar stranger", both inside and outside permits Güler to inhabit a threshold that highlights the relationship between grief and witnessing, which will be discussed in chapter three. The images and the

[103] *Ibid.*, 117.

[104] Güler, *Armenian Fishermen at Kumkapı*, 16.

text weave into each other: fishermen's words and voices are directly interjected into the narrative without being mediated or interpreted by the narrator ("Storm is coming tonight"[105]) and the way Güler is teased by Dacat Reis because he cannot keep up with terms such as *goygoycu*, or *gırgır* ("*Oğlum*, şimdi işi gücü bırakıp sana *balıkçı lisanı* mı öğreteceğiz?"[106]) lets us witness how heteroglossia surfaces within this ecosystem of multiple voices woven into the photographic narrative. Neither in the text nor in the photographs does Güler romanticize the lives of the fishermen; he lets them speak for themselves and photographs them often at work.

Figure 2.7 Ara Güler, *Armenian Fishermen at Kumkapı*, 1952

In Figure 2.7, there is no single point of focus that draws our attention, no stand-alone subject; the fishermen at work with the nets and the tiny figures at the back carrying baskets of fish are all on the same plane as the wooden cabins at the back and the sea below. In Figure 2.8, there is a closer attention to the fishermen

[105] *Ibid.*, 34.

[106] *Ibid.*, 78. The italics within the original text indicate the Turkish words within the Armenian dialogue. I choose to keep them here as well, as they reveal how these fishermen navigate multiple layers of human and more-than-human language: Armenian, Turkish, fishermen's lingo, and the way they read the sea, the wind and the movement of the fish.

themselves; however, the central dominating figure in the photograph is the net, with men, probably exhausted from work, lying on it. There is an emphasis on this exhaustion caused by physical labor in Güler's observations, on "motionless bodies of men napping on wooden chairs most uncomfortably —knowing hours of struggle at sea were ahead", at the local coffeehouse at three o'clock in the morning.[107] The photograph demonstrates how these lives of the men are quite literally "woven" into the nets and the sea, letting us into the intimacy of some stolen moments of rest before another day of labor.

Figure 2.8 Ara Güler, *Armenian Fishermen at Kumkapı*, 1952

[107] Güler, *Armenian Fishermen at Kumkapı*, 66.

The focus on the act of fishing is significant, not only because it demonstrates the material relationship with the landscape, but also how this relationship is connected with the transmission of memory through generations — the transference of the knowledge of "reading the wind and the leaves".[108] In the criticisms voiced by the fishermen, there is a contempt towards economic pressures and new regulations by the government regarding taxes, licensing and fines: "The government used to license us for the year... We knew what was what, who was who and where we stood... Now they've eliminated the fine. No license, no fine: anyone and everyone can be a fisherman."[109] Rather than a mere complaint regarding competition and accessibility to the trade, it implies a concern for the dissolution of a trade with changing conditions that make the transference of intergenerational knowledge more difficult, from certain rituals and principles to literacy regarding the landscape, like how to spot fish in the dark. Just like Dacat Reis expresses to Güler: "İşte, gördün mü? Balıkçılık dediğin şey son yıllarını yaşıyor artık. Senin aradığın balıkçılar eskilerdi. Bak, babam eskilerdendi işte. Sabahtan gece yarılarına kadar, çift kürek, yalınayak açılırlardı denize. Şimdi öyle mi ya?"[110] With regards to their prospects, Dacat Reis further states:

> Gün gelecek, bir tane Ermeni balıkçı kalmayacak; halbuki Kumkapılı Ermeni dedin mi akla *balıkçılık* gelir. Ama, dediğim gibi, bu iş de bitti *artık*. Biz de bir gün gözlerimizi *hıp diye* kapatırsak, bu memlekette Ermeni *balıkçı* da kalmayacak. Ama ne yapayım? Doğrusunu söylemek gerekirse, oğlum olsaydı, bizim gibi oyuncak olmasını istemezdim kabzımal denen adamların elinde. [111]

This acute awareness on the fishermen's part about the imminent end of their own trade refers back to Barthes's understanding of the photograph as indexing "death in the future". What makes it very uncanny is that it is not only us imposing a retrospective reading on these photographs, knowing that the coastal highway will completely cut Kumkapı off from the sea, but that the fishermen themselves intuited what was coming. So, although in his foreword Güler states that no one expected it, I find it somehow unconvincing: could it be a willful forgetting, considering Güler's rather ambivalent politics? The only remaining photographs of the fishermen being black and white does not seem like an ironic coincidence: in Figure 2.9, perhaps

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[108] *Ibid.*

[109] *Ibid.*, 60.

[110] *Ibid.*, 96.

[111] *Ibid.*, 88.

one of the most famous images from the series, the fishermen set off in twilight, the time of the day when they go out on the sea. With the shadows and the misty silhouette of the city in the background, the fisherman at the front gazes into the distance to an uncertain yet, almost certain future. Twilight as a liminal space holds multiple temporalities, the uncanny oscillation between the past and the future. In A*rmenian Fishermen at Kumkapı*, to let the images speak, to let them enter into a dialogue with voices from the past and the future is to stay with that awareness of future death, to cultivate an ethics of seeing that allows multilayered, multi-temporal memories of landscape and landscapes of memory. Learning to witness and hold space for the pain of loss and erasure of these landscapes make archives meaningful to return to over and over again.

Figure 2.9 Ara Güler, *Armenian Fishermen at Kumkapı*, 1952

3. ON GRIEF AND POSSIBILITY

In the final pages of *Meteliksiz Âşıklar*, Sur is sitting on top of Burgazada with Norma, watching the seagulls glide down to the sea from the edge of the forest. Sur finds himself in a bittersweet moment of serenity, despite the voyeurs that appear from every corner of the forest and do not hesitate to harass the lovers. However, in that moment Sur feels his discomfort fade, while also being vaguely aware of the familiar, creeping feeling of imminent disaster. He experiences an unusual sense of wholeness and freedom, a feeling of "aliveness" that permeates all that surrounds him.

In the novel's preface, Marc Nichanian states that this scene is quite unconvincing, that there is no other example of such a moment anywhere in Biberyan's oeuvre.[112] Indeed, it is an unexpected moment: in the dark and claustrophobic novels of a writer who vividly portrays the hatred and resentment bubbling among the members of an Armenian family and the psychosis and self-destruction that consumes his characters in the shadow of multiple, intersecting violences in Turkey in the 1940s and 1950s, it is no surprise that Nichanian considers this final scene as an "accident". As a matter of fact, there are many moments that do not present a neat, affective coherence within Biberyan's "dark and claustrophobic" narrative, not only in *Meteliksiz Âşıklar*, but also in *Karıncaların Günbatımı*. These unexpected affects are intimately connected to the landscape in both novels, namely, to the Prince's Islands. The island is a landscape, a container where Biberyan's characters navigate grief in the face of irreversible loss and the many (oftentimes conflicting) affects that grief entails. I argue that the relationship between the characters and the more-than-human landscape offers us a way to reimagine and frame grief as a disruption to Disaster, the very event that, according to Nichanian, eliminates the possibility of grief and mourning itself.

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[112] Marc Nichanian, "Zaven Biberyan ya da Çilekeşlik," preface to *Meteliksiz Âşıklar*, translated by Sosi Dolanoğlu, 15.

Considering grief not only as an emotional response to loss, but as a *lens* that enables us to "stay with the trouble" that slow violence and the accumulating, inter and transgenerational effects that disasters present, we might reimagine a reparative and resilient response to seemingly exhaustive and at times —in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's terms— "paranoid" readings that theorists and critics of Disaster give us. Grief is a transformative process of alchemizing pain that, to borrow Donna Haraway's words once again, "[makes] trouble, [stirring] up potent response to devastating events, as well as [settling] troubled waters and [rebuilding] quiet places".[113] In the face of genocide, ecocide and state violence, can grief contain the ambivalences and contradictions of human and more-than-human becomings, offering a response to the impasse of language and representation on the threshold of "limitless collapse"? Could grief as a lens help us explore a way out in Biberyan's novels, a reparative possibility of seeking out those quiet places within and out of the texts without denying the paradoxes that Disaster presents us?

3.1 The (Im)Possibility of Grief

In *Edebiyat ve Felaket* (*Littérature et catastrophe*), a series of lectures presented in Istanbul in 2009, Marc Nichanian treads a theoretical minefield riddled with paradoxes and ambiguity to understand the nature of Disaster, the problems entailing its representation and its relationship with grief, forgiveness and reconciliation. "What we seek to understand is loss, undoubtedly," writes Nichanian, "but the loss of what?"[114] In order to define "Disaster" with a capital D, he circles back to the "death of the witness", which makes all attempts to narrate or represent "a reality that far exceeds its factual elements" futile.[115]

To understand the relationship between Disaster and witnessing, Nichanian asks what such an event exposes those affected by it to in the first place. Here, it is useful to refer to Giorgio Agamben and his writings on the survivors of the extermination camps during World War II. Referring to the survivors' narratives of their experience, Agamben writes that the tension between silence and speech, and the idea of "living so that one could bear witness" characterizes these accounts and the

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[113] Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1.

[114] Marc Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, translated by Ayşegül Sönmezay (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2011), 176.

[115] Giorgio Agamben, *The Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 12.

survivors' justification for their survival.[116] To make some kind of meaning out of the experience and to go on to recount that experience thus becomes essential to the role of the witness — the position that the survivors find themselves in.

Circling around the notion of meaning, Agamben returns to the root of the word "witness", which is *martis*, or martyr. He emphasizes the problematic relationship between witnessing, "martyrdom" and "sacrifice", writing that "the doctrine of martyrdom justifies the scandal of a meaningless death, an execution that could only appear as absurd".[117] This unjustifiability and absurdity of what happened at the camps is echoed in survivor accounts, in the unimaginability of the event and failure of all attempts at an explanation. And according to Agamben, this is where the "lacuna" of witnessing and testimony lies: witnesses, by default, are a privileged minority that cannot recount the experience of the "common prisoner", since, in fact, the common prisoner has not survived.[118] The true witnesses are the ones who have "drowned", and this is a kind of destruction that is impossible to be borne witness to precisely because "no one has ever returned to describe his own death".[119]

Nichanian builds upon this thought, writing that at the core of what we mean by Disaster is not the perpetrator's desire to inflict pain on the victim, but to eliminate the witness — to throw the witness out of the event, beyond the threshold of humanity and human language. Bearing witness; verbalizing or narrating the experience essentially betrays the experience itself, because it denies the fact that the integrity of language has been irreparably threatened. "The value of testimony lies in what it lacks"; it contains what cannot be borne witness to.[120] And since no one can bear witness from inside of death, survivors are not the true witnesses; the true witnesses are those who have died or "died" without dying (in the case of the Muselmann) — those who have "touched the bottom". Therefore, any attempt at bearing witness must be in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness; there is no voice for the disappearance of voice. The event —Disaster— that Nichanian refers to is this elimination of the witness, the destruction of the integrity of human language rendering any kind of representation impossible that might give us any idea of the nature of the event itself.

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[116] *Ibid.*, 16.

[117] *Ibid.*, 27.

[118] *Ibid.*, 33.

[119] *Ibid.*

[120] *Ibid.*, 34.

If witnessing is predicated on language, how do we bear witness to the impossibility of witnessing, Nichanian asks. How does human language confront its limits in the face of Disaster? Going back to his first question on trying to understand loss, we understand that Disaster essentially destroys our capacity for meaning-making, causes us to lose the language that enables us to name that loss.[121] Thus, the inability to name a loss, the usurpation of this symbolic domain makes grief and mourning impossible from the outset. The only way to bear witness to the impossibility of bearing witness is through a linguistic act that positions itself on the fringes of language, one that experiences its boundaries and limitations when faced with Disaster. According to Nichanian, this act is *literature*.[122] However, if literature is the only way that can give us an idea on the nature of Disaster, it could only do so in negative terms.[123] "In short, anything other than the failure of literature would not give us any idea about Disaster. Once we have established this, it becomes clear that in the face of Disaster, the only possible success is the failure of literature."

Since my preoccupation in this chapter is not the representation of Disaster per se, but the possibility of grief, there are two paths I will take with Agamben and Nichanian's formulations. However, I think it is important to first note the many layers of witnessing and the different positions witnesses take according to the immediacy of the event. Agamben and Nichanian are writing in relation to the first-hand experiences and testimonies of the victims of genocide — the people who have experienced the physical, immediate threat of death. The fictional and artistic material I deal with in this thesis are derived mostly from the experiences of second or third generations, people who are perhaps not in immediate physical danger (except when systemic violence is crystallized in events such as 6-7 September), yet carry its legacy which manifests in affective and somatic responses in the face of the loss they experience in their own lives. I think it is important to make this distinction as, in many cases, speaking of grief in reparative terms in the immediate aftermath of a devastating event is not realistic; it often takes survivors of atrocities and intense traumatic events many years to process and speak about their experience. As writer and psychotherapist Francis Weller writes, the soul moves in "geological speed", in a way akin to deep time, and not in a linear fashion.[124] Moreover, as I have tried to frame it in the Introduction, ecocide and Disaster within the context of slow, intergenera-

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[121] Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, 153.

[122] *Ibid.*, 33.

[123] *Ibid.*, 156.

[124] Francis Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2015), 60, Kindle edition.

tional violence work on a different timescale than what Rob Nixon calls "spectacular and instantaneous" events, where human and non-human witnesses may or may not be impacted immediately or face an immediate threat upon their survival. Tracing the intersections of many different disasters requires an attunement to these nuances of what different witness positions entail. In this latter position, and perhaps what also distinguishes second and third generation witnessing is, how grief can weave together many different temporalities —past, present and future— demanding us to cultivate responsibility and a response-ability towards what we are witnessing today and towards the legacy of genocide as it lives on through generations. Grief work helps us reclaim agency in conversation with the experiences of our ancestors —both honoring and perhaps regretting what they could and could not do— and aligns us with *what we choose to pass on.* As Weller emphasizes that grief is not passive in the sense that "it is our responsibility to be available to this emotion",[125] it is also somewhat scary that grief destabilizes the static victim/perpetrator binary, calling us into our agency in view of how we can fight better, love better, weave networks of care and hold each other better in the face of attritional disasters. Grief is "a powerful form of soul activism"[126] that moves us away from an "either/or" formulation into the possibilities of "and/and": it reminds us that the movement of difficult and frozen emotions is necessary for the transformation of binary positions and identities, while bringing us back to the fact that we will continue to carry these losses within us. In a way, grief is uncanny and uncomfortable precisely because it does not adhere to a facile narrative of forgiveness and reconciliation; is not a linear path to clear resolutions and "moving on". A beautiful example that illustrates this nuanced reality of grief was offered to me by one of my teachers, an experienced death doula, in one of our sessions. She approached the whiteboard in the spacious conference room and drew a small, black ball — and around it, a square container. "This ball is your feelings around your loss," she said, "and this container is you. The container is small and narrow in the beginning, so whenever this ball moves and bounces around, you feel its impact often and with a lot of force. But if you are willing to stay with the grief and let it guide you, this container will grow wider. The ball will never disappear; that ache will never go away. Only the container will get bigger to allow for many different feelings and experiences to arrive inside."

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[125] *Ibid.*, 113.

[126] *Ibid.*

Coming back to Agamben and Nichanian, first, I want to think about the discourse around the "impossibility" and "paradox" of witnessing. I suggest that the insistence on the failure of language and the impossibility of grief when confronted with Disaster often tends to lean towards what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls "paranoid reading". I am aware that to make such a claim is to tread a precarious ground, as, to borrow Sedgwick's words, "in a world where no one need be delusional to find evidence of systemic oppression, to theorize out of anything but a paranoid critical stance has come to seem naïve, pious, or complaisant".[127] Moreover, in terms of genocide and the reverberating effects of many other crimes that require deep sensitivity to the many different social, political, judicial, traumatic and affective dynamics at play, theorizing out of the "paranoid" framework might also come across as adopting a simplistic narrative that relegates what has happened to the past, urging victims to forgive and forget — something that writer Jean Améry criticizes in his writings on resentment. However, Sedgwick also makes it clear that "to practice other than paranoid forms of knowing does not, in itself, entail a denial of the reality or gravity of enmity or oppression."[128]

To define what she means by paranoid reading, Sedgwick takes up Melanie Klein's notion of "positions". I find the emphasis on positions as a flexible to and fro movement taken up with respect to the object of critique helpful in approaching theory as, first and foremost, a *practice*[129] rather than a static, single-minded stance aiming for an all-encompassing explanation. This also keeps us aware of the fact that over-identification with theories and theoretical stances carry the risk of becoming ossified. Having said this, I want to clarify that I am not contesting the necessity of theorizing on the ethics and possibilities of representation and remembrance in the case of such disastrous and critical moments in history by presumptuously stating that critically thinking about such issues and therefore the event itself is a matter of differing "opinions" or that the paranoid/reparative positions are just ways of seeing a situation one way or the other. I am rather agreeing with Sedgwick that the paranoid position —primarily a reading for negative affects— which has been dominant in social critique could block out other emergent, unconventional and non-academic ways of thinking and theorizing about questions and topics that have been, perhaps unconsciously, deemed "untouchable" or gatekept by critical and academic circles.

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[127] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 125-126.

[128] *Ibid.*, 127-128.

[129] *Ibid*

Sedgwick argues that the paranoid position forestalls pain by anticipating pain and failure at all times. Quoting Tomkins, she writes that in the paranoid position "little is left to chance", and the attention is focused on "wherever it may seem that the enemy might attack".[130] This is evident in many of Nichanian's paradoxes and foreclosing statements in *Edebiyat ve Felaket* ("Onlardan geriye hiçbir şey kalmadı [...] Ermenilerin içi tümüyle boşaltıldı [...] İçiniz tamamen boşaltıldığında geriye ne kalır? Cevap: Bunu söylemek kalır geriye") or, when he criticizes Primo Levi's "faith in the possibility of a retrospective reconstruction of the witness" as, at best, a misguided optimism.[131] I argue that this kind of hypervigilance and anticipation (a tendency we can also trace in Biberyan's novels) that underlies most of the painstaking theorization about Disaster "forestall pain" by often falling back on a purely rational state (and one might go as far as to argue, a distanced/dissociative one), reproducing in the process the very trauma responses that these theories are trying to understand. The over-reliance on (often very masculine) rational thought and argumentation that entails separating and distancing oneself from the object of investigation oftentimes relegates rooted and embodied experiences to the background, silencing or deprecating other ways of knowing and explicating bodily realities, precisely because these ways of knowing run the risk of touching the raw and unfathomable reality of pain and the fear of unraveling. This is why, instead of diving into the heart of the unravelling that paradox and impossibility present us, we are asked to stop and take a step back, to say that there is simply nothing left to say. On the other hand, the reparative position, which I aim to explore when looking at the possibility of grief, questions when the paranoid position is putting too much faith in the exposure of systematic/hidden violences (and in this case, in the impasse of paradox) and the exacerbation of people's pain without really diving into what this knowledge *does*. At this point, it is important to point out that Sedgwick also notes that the reparative arrives through the paranoid position, reiterating the fact that these positions are not different ways of seeing reality, and that the reparative position does not advocate a superficial optimism. I believe that arriving at a reparative position is necessary because we need an approach that can hold the terrifying tension between paradox and possibility in flesh and blood bodies and realities shaped by accretive disasters in real time, imagining creative and risky ways of theorizing without confining ourselves and the practice of theory to the realm of purely rational thought. As Francis Weller puts it: "It takes outrageous courage to face outrageous loss".[132] Grief as a reparative lens is able to hold contradiction,

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[130] *Ibid.*, 135.

[131] Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, 180, 90.

[132] Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, xxii.

generating embodied ways of knowing that does not privilege rational thought but sees it as a part of a wider ecosystem, in conversation with somatic and intuitive ways of knowing. It encourages us to be present with life and our connection with the world, guiding us in the ways of how to stay with the pain — to stay with what this knowledge of violence, oppression and impossibilities does to our bodies and how our bodies inform our thoughts.

If bearing witness and the possibility of grief is predicated on human language and some kind of capacity to make meaning as Agamben and Nichanian suggest, then we can take the "failure of literature" as an invitation to fundamentally question what literature means and what we expect human/verbal language to do. When confronted with disaster, if the domain of human language carries the constant risk of disintegration, then what does this disintegration open to? Where does loss find expression when confronted with the limits of language? This leads me to the possibilities of paradox. Here, I want to go back to Agamben and his critique in *The Remnants of Auschwitz* of Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub's failure to investigate the testimonial effort as a simultaneous positioning on "the inside and outside" in relation to Lanzmann's *Shoah*. Felman and Laub write that "the testimonial effort of the film as a whole is to be, precisely, neither simply inside nor simply outside, but paradoxically, *both inside and outside*."[133] According to Agamben, it is precisely this threshold that Felman and Laub fail to investigate, which could have given us an idea of the structure of testimony. Agamben writes that instead, they "derive an aesthetic possibility from a logical impossibility" by falling back on the "deus ex-machina of song" to explain the paradox of testimony, thereby "aestheticizing" it:

> What makes the power of testimony in the film and what constitutes in general the impact of the film is not the words but the equivocal, puzzling relation between words and voice, the interaction, that is, between words, voice, rhythm, melody, images, writing, and silence. Each testimony speaks to us beyond its words, beyond its melody, like the unique performance of a singing.[134]

I cannot say I agree with Agamben on this point. I wrote about this threshold of the inside and the outside, the boundary between survival and death in chapter two. This is the boundary where testimonial effort in terms of narrating one's experience ends and another kind of expression begins — the expression of loss

[133] Agamben, *The Remnants of Auschwitz*, 35.

[134] Felman quoted in Agamben, 36.

and the beginning of grief. Perhaps contrary to other theorists writing on grief, I argue that grief does not necessarily require any kind of meaning-making —like the discourse of martyrdom— because it is also able to hold the "meaninglessness" and terrifying fact of death, and perhaps because it is *born out of it*. Even in the case of traumatic loss, on a very basic level, as Weller writes on the "five gates of grief", the very first doorway into grief is the fundamental fact that "everything we love, we will lose."[135] Narrative and meaning (and we can even argue that theory) often act as a buffer for the raw and unbearable pain of loss — and as humans, we need them. However, I argue that grief actually is born out of this raw pain, when the domain of meaning becomes unavailable; it is born out of the pain of this unavailability. In this threshold, when language breaks down, other non-verbal ways of expression emerge. Song, rhythm, voice, and even silence are tools and modes of expression of embodied cognition, not deus ex-machinas or aesthetizations of testimony that Agamben is quick to dismiss. When the verbal language of testimony disintegrates, or when logic reaches an impasse, grief allows for the "maimed, non-language",[136] a language behind language to emerge into the gap between the "representation" of an experience and its sensation; these sounds, rhythms and song arise from that space. What is being borne witness to perhaps, is not the event in factual terms, but the reality of the pain of that loss. In the context of grieving the loss of both human and more-than-human landscapes in Biberyan's novels and Güler's photographs, the insistence on verbal language as the only mode of representation is to dismiss the other ways through which these traumatic experiences live in our and more-than-human bodies and seek expression. When we privilege verbal language and theorize Disaster solely within an abstract domain of logical argumentation, we run the risk of missing these very real and present echoes of how such events live on in our bodies and landscapes, transferred from generation to generation.

Ecophilosopher David Abram presents a potent argument on how different modes of language, particularly verbal, written language, do to our perception and the way we relate to both the human and more-than-human landscape. This preoccupation with representation reifies a subject-object relationship, as it implies taking a certain distance, an act of standing back and "surrounding" the object of representation, be it a more-than-human subject, or something less tangible like an experience. According to Abram, in this subject-object relationship, not much attention is paid to what is going on *in-between*, to the threshold of inside and outside, the interstitial

[135] Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, 23. Weller calls the "Five Gates of Grief" the doorways that lead into grief, helping us understand the ways that loss touches our hearts. The five gates in order are, (1) Everything we love, we will lose, (2) the places that have not known love, (3) the sorrows of the world (4) what we expected and did not receive, and (5) ancestral grief. I touch upon all of these gates to varying degrees throughout this thesis as they can be traced in the works I deal with it, albeit implicitly.

[136] Agamben, T*he Remnants of Auschwitz*, 38-39.

space between different bodies. The distinction between speaking *about* something and speaking *to* or *with* something is that in the former we see language close in on itself,[137] robbing other subjects of their expressive potency, subjects who do not have access to this domain of "exclusively human meaning and verbiage". The reason I problematize the possibility/impossibility of representation as an end to itself is precisely because of this relationship: the human subject closing in on itself, leaving little room for a deep inquiry into what the poisoned sea, the uprooted trees or the traumatic experience itself wants to speak *to* me and *through* me. Disaster, as I would expand on Nichanian's definition, is not that we are robbed of our expression or our capacity to grieve, or that "we have been emptied out", it is the fact that we as human subjects are being closed in on ourselves, when we are left to only hear our own words, as our bonds and somatic, intuitive conversations with our human and more-than-human kin are being severed. It is when our language no longer "resonates" (in the full meaning of the word) with other bodies, other beings, and we cannot hear anything other than ourselves. This is why I find voice, rhythm, sound and image important, not because they claim a testimonial effort, but because they reverberate, resonate and do something to our bodies and act *in between* bodies to move pain and other sensations seeking expression when words break down, when that theoretical and symbolic domain is not available. Weller writes that "inhabiting the body as our primary way of sensing and knowing the world remind us that we are in a state of intimate relations with all that is."[138] Remembering these connections is *disruptive* to the logic of Disaster.

In *The Body Keeps the Score*, writer and psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk talks about two modes of self-awareness in the context of trauma when we "rediscover ourselves in language" and narrate our experiences. The first mode is one that keeps a record of "I" through time, what van der Kolk calls the "autobiographical self". The second mode records the Self in real time; it is one that is based in sensation, where the narrative and the felt experience overlap.[139] According to van der Kolk, the first mode creates a narrative to recount to the outside world, and if we recount it enough times, we begin to believe that it represents the whole truth. Yet the second one records a whole other reality: of how we really experience the subject of our narrative. It is in this second mode that the emotional mind can be transformed, moving into a reparative possibility. If grief is our capacity to work

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[137] "The Ecology of Perception: An Interview with David Abram," *Emergence Magazine*, July 20, 2020, https://emergencemagazine.org/interview/the-ecology-of-perception/. Abram also writes about how the phonetic alphabet reflects humans back to them this in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous*.

[138] Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, 99.

[139] Bessel A. van der Kolk, *Beden Kayıt Tutar: Travmanın İyileşmesinde Beyin, Zihin ve Beden*, translated by Nurdan Cihanşümül Maral (İstanbul: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2021), 236.

with and metabolize pain, it is also what makes us return, tune in, time and time again, to the line between narrative and experience, representation and sensation. It is on these thresholds of loss and disintegration that we become aware of the interpenetrative reality of ourselves and experiences; it is on the thresholds that we are faced with the possibility to overflow and transgress the confines of our selfhood.

To borrow Weller's words again, "we cannot figure our way out of grief. We cannot use information or concepts to somehow reduce our experience of pain".[140] Paradoxically, we can only arrive at a reparative position if we are willing to fall apart and to be present with the loss and the painful ways of the wound. Moreover, I think that different modes of expression are oftentimes considered or conflated with "aesthetization" because grief is very much "suffused with life force", riddled with an uncanny energy. Grief finds its way in even when our losses are not considered losses or our grievances are denied; it is active in the sense that "it implies an ongoing practice of deepening, attending and listening" to the moments and places of disintegration where the human language overflows its limits. Grief opens up to mutual becomings and entanglements, inviting us to shapeshift and forgo the idea of a monolithic "I" that tries to testify to its experiences. It is the witness being willing to be moved, broken apart and put together within a wider ecosystem of relationships. It is an invitation to feel, to be *affected*. It is, as Ara Güler writes in his 1955 short story, to find new ways of "living after Babylon"; it is in the erotics of existence in Biberyan's novels, those moments Nichanian finds unconvincing.

Exploring grief as a lens is to be willing to stay with the trouble. The present is thick with the ghosts of the past, memories and disappointments of unrealized futures and imminent collapse. We must learn to grieve *with* to reclaim a multilingual, multidirectional and multilayered memory when some losses are not considered as losses, when meaning and storytelling has to be made with a different kind of literacy. Nichanian asks, "What use is it to bring up the very thing that is impossible?"[141] It is to encourage us to explore a different kind of language permeating the thick present, emerging through the ruins Disaster and the victors of history leave in their wake, a language that makes itself known through whispers, murmurs, songs and wails, always ready to burst, transgress and overflow.

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[140] Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, 99.

[141] Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, 200.

3.2 The Hum of the Forest

The moments of disruption in Biberyan's text, which Nichanian calls "accidents", are always in dialogue with the landscape of the Prince's Islands. The different affects that Biberyan's characters grapple with are very much rooted in their material engagement with the landscape — a relationship that facilitates some kind of transformation for them. The islands, and in particular, the forest, however, is not an idyllic space where Biberyan's characters seek refuge from the ongoing demolitions in the city, violence against minorities, and Istanbul's changing façade due to migration, but a liminal, interstitial space riddled with ambivalence and possibility in the face of overwhelming change and loss. Reading the island in Biberyan's novels is difficult because the relationship between loss, human and more-than-human landscape contains many contradictions in terms of affect and the conflicting desires of his characters. However, this complexity is what makes it possible for us to read for grief as it breaks the affective oscillations out of the positive-negative binary and invites us to look at the paradox of Disaster in a way that can hold states such as joy, anger and paranoia together.

In both *Meteliksiz Âşıklar* and *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, the island is often used within a discourse of "escape" and "returning home" by Sur and Baret. However, this "return" always points to a place in ruins, quite literally; yet this is a fertile space bustling with life and memories:

> [Baret] Sık sık Ada'ya, o kararmış, virane eve gitmek istiyordu. O evde hâlâ her gece tüten gaz lambası eski, gürültülü gecelerin neşeli hayaletlerini çağırmaktaydı. Taze balıkları elleriyle ateşin üzerine dizmek, bereketli topraktan elleriyle yeşillikler koparmak. Gitmek, hatta orada kalmak, her şeyi unutmak, bir şekilde üç buçuk yıllık yaşamı devam ettirmek istiyordu.[142]

In this passage, Biberyan holds the tension between escaping and staying, remembering the ghosts of a seemingly distant past and a desire to forget all that has happened: the memories of the Wealth Tax and the Nafia conscription. In the previous chapter, we have seen how Biberyan's characters experience this desire to escape through dissociation. However, here, it is important to note that this tension, the memory of a different life and the connection to the landscape is held by Baret's tactile relationship to the fish, to the soil and to the house. The notion of

[142] Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, 61.

"escape" that Biberyan presents here is actually to *remember*, and ironically to *be present* with the relationship to the soil, to appease the ghosts of the past through this haptic connection when loss signifies being severed from that intimacy in the advent of large corporations, new roads, glamorous automobiles and apartments.[143] It is to keep returning to that ruin of a house which has become a "graveyard" and to be willing to stay with the trouble of collapse and disintegration. Biberyan's effort to understand the nature of Disaster and its effects vibrates between what writer Sophie Strand calls "the nodes of life and death"; it is not just to live among the ruins but to *become* a ruin.[144]

Svetlana Boym writes about the significance of ruins and collapse in terms of "remainders" rather than "reminders", noting the fact that ruins highlight a temporal ambivalence that "makes us think of the past that could have been and the future that never took place".[145] Ruins speak to us about the possibility of grief and human/more-than-human becomings because "ruins give us a shock of vanishing materiality" which prompt a shift in our critical lens when "we begin to notice weeds and dandelions in the crevices of stones, cracks on modern transparencies". As our attention shifts from "marveling at grand projects and utopian designs" to these small details, we are both confronted with decomposition and the irreversibility of time, and simultaneously the *thickness* and cyclical nature of it. Boym writes that the contemporary "ruin-gaze requires an acceptance of disharmony and of the contrapuntal relationship of human, historical, and natural temporality", an exploration into the "side-alleys of twentieth-century history at the 'margins of error' of the major theoretical and historical narrative". If we consider ruins as a "graveyard", spaces that weave an ongoing, messy and entangled relationship between the living and the dead —unlike monuments which often erase certain pasts while trying to remember others— ruins draw us into a "living memory": a memory that constantly reifies the material relationship between the past and the present and embeds traces of human activity into a larger more-than-human context, at times even complicating the victim/perpetrator binary, as often discussed in the environmental histories of the Holocaust.[146] I would also push Boym's formulation further: rather than a

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[143] *Ibid.*, 433.

[144] Sophie Strand,"Becoming a Ruin: Decomposing and Regrowing the Mythic with Sophie Strand," interview by Joshua Michael Schrei. *The Emerald*, September 2021. Audio, 1:13:4. https://open.spotify.com/episode/5oixO2fjBZg40BesZJl1hO?si=21e3af969f2e43c1.

[145] Svetlana Boym, "Tatlin, or Ruinophilia," *Cabinet Magazine*, Winter 2007-2008, https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/28/boym2.php.

[146] For an interesting discussion around the politics of memory and nature at Auschwitz, see Jacek Małczyński, "The Politics of Nature at the Former Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp," *Journal of Genocide Research* 22 (2020): 197-219; Jacek Małczyński, Ewa Domańska, Mikołaj Smykowski & Agnieszka Kłos, "The Environmental History of the Holocaust," *Journal of Genocide Research* 22 (2020): 183-196; Tim Cole, "Expanding (Environmental) Histories of the Holocaust," *Journal of Genocide Research* 22 (2020):

"ruin-gaze", which implies a certain distance and anthropocentrism reiterating the subject-object relationship, I suggest turning to Sophie Strand's idea of "*becoming* a ruin". To understand how grief responds to ecocide and the intersecting disasters, we must think about how ruins make and unmake us (and vice-versa), and how the trouble of pasts and futures "that could have been" can guide us into new ways of *grieving with* and storying "the entangled, chaotic experience of being alive".[147]

An image that navigates the space between ruin-gaze and ruin-becoming is a photograph by Ara Güler, taken in the courtyard of the Kilise Camii in Vefa in 1956. In this photograph, we get a detailed view of an ironwork attached to the stone wall of the church-mosque. Just below this detail is the blurry figure of a child, caught mid-jump through the rubble and into the courtyard.

Figure 3.1 Ara Güler, Child in the courtyard of Vefa's Kilise Camii, 1956

273-279. In these articles, the ambivalence of the more-than-human as "witness" is illustrated with the example of the trees at Auschwitz, where they are considered both witnesses to the horrific crimes yet also "mask" them. W. G. Sebald also touches upon this problematic of masking in "Air War and Literature" as he tries to think about "the natural history of destruction": "At the end of the war, some of the bomb sites of Cologne had already been transformed by the dense green vegetation growing over them — the roots made their way through this landscape like 'peaceful deep set country lanes'". W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, translated by Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2003), 39.

[147] See footnote 146.

Recalling how Orhan Pamuk writes somewhat ruefully in *Istanbul* that we do not preserve the remains of lost empires in museums, but rather live among them,[148] Güler's photographs of loss actually move away from the melancholy that many spectators so eagerly attach to his black and white images. Children playing among ruins is a recurring motif in his photography, not only because the contrasting effect brings up symbolic connotations regarding the old and the new, how the shadow of old empires still lingers over the young republic, but because this movement and energy of the children captured on camera, as seen in Figure 3.1, adds a whimsical quality to his "ruin-gaze", reflecting how the sense of loss is entangled with the experience of being alive, and how grief can equally be suffused with a powerful life force.

The fact that the photograph has been taken at the Kilise Camii, a Byzantine church converted into a mosque after the conquest of Istanbul, evoke the complicated, palimpsestic relationship between the conqueror and the conquered, and it illustrates the contrapuntal relationship Boym speaks about. The focus on the perfectly intact iron detail in contrast to the rubble in the background holds light to the tension between the vanishing materiality and the minute, almost tactile attention to what remains among the ruins. As I have explored in chapter two, although Güler uses the lens as a tool of distancing when confronted with the unrepresentable, here, his image-making becomes an act of "speaking with" the more-than-human landscape rather than "speaking about". There is a palpable desire to lean in, to touch, to listen to the disappearing traces and voices hidden in the material: the proximity of both figures in the frame (the iron detail and the child) and the odd angle of the photograph (also implying the photographer's proximity to the detail) evokes a certain intimacy, guiding the viewer's eye through the movement across bodies, which reminds me of what Stacy Alaimo calls "transcorporeality".[149] By moving across different sites and bodies in real life through the physical act of taking the photograph and on the image plane, Güler opens up "a mobile space" that acknowledges the intermeshing of human bodies with the more-than-human landscape. Güler's images contain different layers of encounter that help us trace how the "ruin-gaze" becomes "ruin-becoming" — the representational gesture pushing towards the immersive, the relational. By weaving human and more-than-human bodies and the ruins of pasts and futures into a contrapuntal yet porous relationship, Güler's images "tell stories about the dead and dying that draw them into a relationship with the living".[150]

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[148] Orhan Pamuk, *İstanbul: Hatıralar ve Şehir* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2016), 102.

[149] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.

[150] Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia University

Going back to Biberyan, if the island denotes an "escape", an inevitable "return", then where do the paths into the island's forests lead us? In both *Meteliksiz Âşıklar* and *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, the forest itself seems to have metonymic relationship with the island. Particularly in *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, the winding streets of Karaköy and Beyoğlu appear as a kind of forest, a labyrinthine space seething with "ants" making their way from one shop window to another. The forests of the island seem to be a mirror reflection of the sinuous city — yet this uncanny mirror turns its dark streets into paths that end in cliffs, the noise into a hum, bodies into trees. Forms dissolve, and the inner lives of the characters become ever more conflicted, complicated and ambivalent. On the island, "everything was different" for Sur. "Yalnız kalabileceğin bir diyar... Farklı bir diyar... Yabancı bir diyar [...] Tüm varlığını bir yaşama sevinci kaplamıştı [...] Ellerini cebine soktu, ıslıkla Ti'ne Afto çaldı, dalların altından geçmek için arada sırada eğiliyordu. Böyle eğildiği bir sırada, bodur bir çamın gövdesiyle bütünleşmiş olmasına rağmen adamı gördü".[151] While Sur goes back and forth between a desire for solitude and the feeling of being constantly watched, he also goes between feelings of alienation and safety, joy and discomfort. At the end of the novel, he realizes that he is no longer afraid of the forest, and that he hasn't experienced such a "perfect" joy, the "joy of being human" for a very long time.[152] In the end, did all the clouds really disperse, all voyeurs disappear, the weight of being invaded gone, and paranoia give way to utopia? Given that Biberyan was active in left wing politics, it is not surprising that Nichanian interprets this scene as a "miraculous return to a 'state of nature'", a victory of political utopia and brotherhood of humankind. Nonetheless, Biberyan shows us that that this sense of freedom, belonging and the desire to escape is more complicated than we think. We are not free of the fact that we are being surveilled, as our voyeurs permeate the landscape, with the shadow of disasters ever-looming above us. Watching the seagulls glide down toward the sea, no matter how calm Sur feels, a sadness lingers on Norma's face. The feeling of freedom Biberyan tries to make sense of is not about being completely free of the paranoia, of the voyeurs, of the family and of the city drifting into a utopia. It is about insisting on trying to unravel these to see how they affect our feelings of belonging; it is about being able to make sense of and accommodate the conflicting states of being and our multiple entanglements. For Sur, the thing that creates within him a sense of lightness, a precarious joy despite the expectation of imminent disaster is "taşların arasında ayağını nereye basacağını kestirmek, kayaların üstünden atlamak, çalılıkları yarıp geçmek, yandaki uçurumdan

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Press, 2014), 126.

[151] Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Âşıklar*, 172.

[152] *Ibid.*, 214.

aşağı martılarla alay etmek, tepeye tırmanma telaşı içinde bir şarkı mırıldanmak [...] Ormanın düz ve yumuşak zemininde yürümek".[153] To touch, to move along the trees, the rocks, the shrubs, to hum, to continue walking, to be conscious of the forest underfoot is a way of exploring more intimate ways of belonging and entering into a conversation with the more-than-human landscape when Biberyan's characters are constantly severed from their "home" on social, political and historical levels.[154] This feeling of lightness is not about being free of the body, the shocking transparency that the text brings us into,[155] but, ironically, about rooting deeper into it. Perhaps Biberyan is trying to a find a third way within the paradox of Disaster and within a system of representation that cannot think beyond the subject-object dynamic. The solution to "being invaded" by family, by voyeurs, by state violence is not hiding, or assuming the position of the voyeur yourself — Biberyan points to another possibility in between these binary positions. By problematizing sight, form and language shaped by "the obsession of being watched by voyeurs," Biberyan hints at an "escape" out of a traumatizing system that traps us into an isolating self-consciousness culminating in psychosis.

Deleuze and Guattari's "line of escape" could be useful in exploring how Biberyan subverts this notion of escape. In *Toward a Minor Literature*, they explain the notion of the line of escape in the context of Kafka's works (and in Kafka's own words) as thus: "The problem isn't that of liberty but of escape. The question of the father isn't how to become free in relation to him (an Oedipal question) but how to find a path there where he didn't find any."[156] As Nurdan Gürbilek further clarifies, the line of escape is not a simple matter of being free of the father's house, but going beyond a system of representation that has coalesced into the father's house, "to reach that region where the voice no longer does anything but hum."[157] This region is a threshold where forms dissolve, an interstitial space of possibility —collapse as possibility— and transcorporeal becomings. Kafka's animals inhabit this region: Red Peter enters a space where he is neither monkey nor human to escape captivity, Gregor Samsa turns into an insect to create an escape within the

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[153] *Ibid.*, 172.

[154] "Senin memleketin değil oğlum. Sana, sen bu memleketin insanı değilsin diyorlar [...] sen yabancısın, senin hakkın yok...". This passage comes from a deleted excerpt from the original manuscript of *Karıncaların Günbatımı*. Many passages that boldly and explicitly illustrate the effects of racism against non-Muslims and the loss of a homeland were deleted from the first editions only to be added in later in 2013 and 2019. These excerpts can be found at the back of the more recent editions of the novel.

[155] Nichanian, "Zaven Biberyan ya da Çilekeşlik," 20.

[156] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, translated by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 10.

[157] Gürbilek, *İkinci Hayat*, 74.

inescapable, to find possibility from impossibility.[158] If, according to Nichanian, Biberyan had to translate the psychosis and Disaster into its own language to be able to "represent" collapse and disintegration, "to choose to write in Armenian" even though there was no other choice,[159] then the grief born of this impossibility, on the threshold of this impasse of language, thrusts us onto this escape route, demanding that we become a ruin, something not quite human, something *more-than-human*. The landscape of the island points to this line of escape, a language not completely invaded, a language of ruin, rot and disintegration, a language beneath verbal, human language, a "hum" that dissolves the boundaries of the individual and becomes transcorporeal. In *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, this language makes itself heard to Baret in the house in Büyükada:

> [Baret] Ormana hayat veren tüm sesleri net olarak işitti. Çam ağaçlarının hışırtısı yabancı değildi ona. Yıllarca, uyumadan önce bu müziği dinlemişti. Evet, bu evde! Kapılar doğru dürüst kapanıyordu o günlerde, kepenkler rüzgâra terk edilmemişti ve binanın ölümcül yaralarından tahta parçaları sarkmamıştı henüz [...] Başını binaya yasladı, hâlâ çok sağlamdı. Güven duygusu bir sevinç yarattı.[160]

Describing the old house as a "wounded body", Biberyan emphasizes the contact and connection between Baret's body and the house, how he almost feels it as an extension of his own body. Baret's relationship with the house and his memories there is very material and haptic, and, as Biberyan shows in this passage, it is accessible to him through deeply listening to its sounds, to its dialogue with the landscape of the forest. Whereas the fragments of a traumatic past that was mostly inaccessible to Baret returned to him in the shape of fractured images and hallucinations, touch and sound seems to help him ground and feel into his lost connection to the past and the grief that accompanies it in a way that he can approach and communicate with his ghosts. Although Baret is wracked with the pain of loss, of his desire to return to the past and demand what had happened be reversed, he feels a poignant sense of comfort and safety in this contact, a feeling of identification and belonging with the ruins of the house. However, no matter how familiar the sounds of the forest feel to Baret, it contains within it an uncanny feeling that poses a threat to his sense of comfort and security. As we have seen, holding these affective contradictions is evident in the way Biberyan's characters navigate loss. To Baret, the ruins of the

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[158] *Ibid.*

[159] Nichanian, "Zaven Biberyan ya da Çilekeşlik," 17.

[160] Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, 246-247.

house speak the language of mold and dust, of rotting wood, of moss-covered walls, of the bedbugs that attack his body and leave blood stains on the bedsheets:

> Tahtakurularına yem olmak kötüydü [...] İnsan ölmeden de böceklere yem olabilirdi. Böcekler... Ormanın içine gömüldü [...] Ağaçların ilk sırasına çarpıp kırılan rüzgârla beraber büyüyen seslerden, gözle görülmeyen milyonlarca böceğin verdiği korkudan titriyordu. Bir kuş cıvıldadı, fark etmedi. Başka bir kuş cevap verdi, bir karga bağırıp dalı kırdı, fark etmedi. Denizi gördüğünde gün doğumunun yakın olduğunu anladı. Orman birden son bulmuştu. Ayaklarının altında zor fark edilen bir uçurum esniyordu. Yarım saat önce kıyısına varmış olsa da boşluğa basmış olabileceğini düşündü. Her şey biterdi. Aslında ne bitmiş olurdu? Çok emin değildi. Bitecek ne vardı? Başlangıç neydi ki? [...] Baret'in vücudu ısınmaya başladı. Işık mucize yaratıyordu. İçinde bir mutluluk doğdu, yaşama mutluluğu, "iyi ki yaşıyorum"un gizli hazzı, bütün acılarını derin bir iç geçirişte boğarak dünya ile barışma keyfi...[161]

The language of rot that moves between the "secret pleasure of being alive" and the fear of being consumed by bugs, becoming something lesser than an insect and more than human is the space where Biberyan hints at a possibility whether this dissolution and disintegration into the soil, into the forest can open to a new sense of home, a new sense of belonging. Could wounded human and more-than-human bodies and landscapes create new and reparative ways of relating to one another, grieving together in this liminal space as a disruption to limitless collapse? This language carries Baret towards the edge of a cliff, not to a place where beginnings and endings melt into a vague timelessness but to a point where we can look at the relationship between human and more-than-human bodies, memory, history, trauma and subjectivity in a deeper time. What turns Biberyan's writing into grief work is this willingness to question whether another, more reparative language is possible through the impossibility and paradox of Disaster, the tension between the desire to escape and to stay, to remember and to forget. Baret *hears* this language, the voices of birds and crows, but he does not register it. It is surprising for the reader who has been granted intimate knowledge of Baret's thoughts and feelings throughout the novel, that Biberyan suggests that there are still things that escape the protagonist's attention. This is an invitation to let go of the effort of trying to see; it is an invitation to *listen*. Whose voice is this, the one that goes unregistered, that escapes our senses? Although neither Baret nor the reader can make sense of this voice, it is there, waiting to be heard. Perhaps this is why, towards the end of the novel, upon returning from the Southeast, when Baret decides to forgo his right

[161] Biberyan, *Ibid.*, 247-248.

to the house in Büyükada after his uncle's death, leaving it to rot, the plot takes a surprising turn like the ending of *Meteliksiz Âşıklar*. A giant hole appears in the garden wall and pieces of it are used for a shack that has been built right next to the house. This hole "destroyed the identity of the house on the Island. The outside had made its way in."[162] But what is this "identity" exactly, and what is destroying it? This final scene could give us an idea about this question:

> "Babamın babası yaptırdı bunu," dedi Baret. "Kendisi toprak oldu, amcam toprak oldu. Bu toprakla, taşla yaptılar. Yıkılırsa yıkılsın. O da yeniden taş olsun, toprak olsun. Böyle kalsın, yıkılsın. Ama yıkılmayacak. Kalacak, dünyanın sonuna kadar kalacak. Bin sene sonra da buraya gelen, temellerini görecek, bak, burada bir ev varmış, insanlar varmış diyecek. Duvarın içinde baca deliğini görecek, büyükannemin yaktığı odunun isini, parmaklarıyla silecek. Bu bir piramit değil, bir karınca yuvası. Geceleri yine gaz lambası yanacak mı o zaman? Gölgeler dans edecek mi yine duvarlarda, tavanlarda, merdivenlerde? Deliklerden, kovuklardan gelecek mi yine sesleri?[163]

The memory, the relationship embedded in materiality founds the idea of "Adalılık" in *Karıncaların Günbatımı*. Whereas in the hallucination after Lula's death Baret did not remember his grandmothers, here we see the ruin-house as a very concrete connection to his paternal ancestors. It is a connection, a sense of belonging deeply embedded in the walls of the house, the soil, and the stone. The sense of loss permeates and lives on in the landscape; and the language of rot and ruins reminds us that it is not only Baret who remembers the house but the house remembers him too. It reminds us that our human and more-than-human grief is entangled, that it lives on in the cycles of death, disintegration — and emergence. Despite, and perhaps *because of* the hole in the garden wall, the voices, the hum of those ghosts that came before us and will come after us make themselves heard through the forest, through the cracks in the house.

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[162] *Ibid.*, 443.

[163] *Ibid.*, 446.

3.3 Seeing in the Dark

In Ara Güler's 1955 short story "We Will Live After Babylon", the narrator introduces himself as the "uzun boylu denizci. Tanıdığınız uzun boylu denizci".[164] He claims that he belongs to many races and was born in many places: New York, Sulukule, Nagasaki. We have surely encountered him, he insists, for he is the man who wanders in the streets at night, whistling — a ghostly flâneur. Although he suggests that we know him intimately, he says, "Bugün denizciyim, yarın tüccar, ertesi gün katil. Her gördüğünüze inanmayın, güvenmeyin."

Güler's cryptic narrative is a good example of how his unique and multifarious —visual and literary— storytelling holds the threshold between collapse, possibility and emergence. We have seen how both Güler and Biberyan problematize sight in both their works and compel us to look into those places where we are told not to look, to draw all our senses into the darkness, both literally and metaphorically. Darkness as a theme and a symbol figures prominently in grief work and in Biberyan and Güler's works, be it Baret navigating the island's forest at night, or Güler's iconic, dark, heavy-contrast black and white photographs. In the thresholds of collapse and transformation, navigating grief is "learning to see in the dark".[165] Throughout this chapter, I tried to argue that a more reparative, grief-oriented way of thinking about Disaster could be valuable in these times of endless conflicts and climate disasters, honoring the memory of victims of genocide, ecocide, exile and expropriation and keeping in mind that we also owe it to them and their struggle for justice to envision better ways of remembering and telling their stories, highlighting how these struggles and grievances are interrelated. Even if Disaster is the very event that destroys our capacity to narrate, to story or to represent the event, it both positively bewilders and fascinates me that time and time again we return to storytelling, be it verbal or visual, problematizing language, representation, survival and resistance. In that case, is it possible to speak of an inherent intelligence of a story, decoupling it from the impossible testimonial effort?

When asked to define our times marked by a great unraveling, by COVID, the climate crisis, genocide and war, storyteller and mythologist Michael Meade speaks of a "falling out of story".[166] In the face of accretive disasters, the gap between the

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[164] Ara Güler, *Babil'den Sonra Yaşayacağız*, 36.

[165] Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, 126.

[166] "The Soul of Transformation: Michael Meade," interview by Maurizio and Zaya Benazzo. *Science and Nonduality*, December 15, 2020. Video, 47:49. $https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFgqFId_QBw$.

reality of terrible events and finding ways to narrate them is ever increasing. Yet, what does leaning into the intelligence of a story mean? To explore this question, I turn to story not only as a tool of narrating events, but as a mode of thinking — to the idea of the "mytho-logical". When we refer to "mythology" or to "the mythological", what often comes to mind is individual mythologies (Greek, Hindu, Sumerian, etc.) as the foundational "templates" of more complex modes of storytelling today, or how they have been often appropriated by fascist regimes to fortify their claim on power and justify atrocities, as did the Nazis. But to return to the term "mythological" itself, what it offers us is, literally, "storied-thinking". As opposed to a more discursive expression, storied thinking reveals its layers of meaning over time, compelling us to consider storytelling as a web: an ecosystem of narrative, image, symbols, voices, interspecies becomings and metamorphoses. As Meade says, storied thinking "speaks to people in their own way" yet that is also its unifying quality: it contains many worlds in one — like Güler's "uzun boylu denizci", a character we all recognize but speaks to us through different identities and voices. If we indeed return to stories in times of darkness and grief, how do we reclaim mythology and re-story our thinking if we have "fallen out"? What stories do we need to tell, urgently? What shapeshifting, more-than-human, transformational stories do we need in times of despair and resistance? What stories do we want to pass on?

"Becoming new is never safe. Survival is never safe. It is always a breach. A break in the skin. It is a leap across the abyss," writes Sophie Strand in her essay "We Must Risk New Shapes".[167] And Ara Güler's story "We Will Live After Babylon" reiterates this fact — *survival is never safe*. The story explores this threshold of shapeshifting: our narrator as a sailor today, a merchant tomorrow, and a murderer the next day. With the shadow of a recent disaster seeping into the narrative (the narrator receives a letter from Nagasaki, from a friend supposedly recovering from his wounds caused by the atom bomb), what makes survival and shapeshifting uncanny is how the victim and the perpetrator come dangerously close to each other, how that threshold of encounter contains a deep ambivalence — how easily the victim today can become the perpetrator tomorrow. This ambivalence is suggested in Biberyan's works through "ants" as a symbol, particularly in that moment when Baret recognizes that it is "the first New Year's Eve without war" and feels a deep resentment towards the "crazed" crowds shuffling from one shop window to another:

[167] Sophie Strand, "We Must Risk New Shapes," *Make Me Good Soil*, June 4, 2022, https://sophiestrand.substack.com/p/we-must-risk-new-shapes.

> Onların acelesini, bir şeyler yapma, bir şeyler becerme, bir yerlere yetişme telaşını, dükkânlara girip çıkmalarını [...] kızgınlıkla izledi. Çocukken sayısız karıncanın bir tepecikten diğerine, bir delikten ötekine hummalı koşuşturmasını hayretle seyrettiği gibi, yüksek bir tepeden baktı caddeye. Karıncalar, karıncalar...[168]

It is also interesting to note that Sebald too compares this "incomprehensible" behavior to that of insects in "Air War and Literature" in the aftermath of bombings in German cities, the "absurdity" of trying to resume business as usual:

> You do not expect an insect colony to be transfixed with grief at the destruction of a neighboring anthill, but you do assume a certain degree of empathy in human nature, and to that extent there is indeed something alarmingly absurd and shocking about continuing to drink coffee in the normal way on Hamburg balconies at the end of July 1943.[169]

So, is it possible to think of grief as the alchemical line of encounter between the victim and the perpetrator? If grief is, as Judith Butler writes, "agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say submitting to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance",[170] how do we reclaim the willingness to shapeshift on the unstable and uncertain terrain of grief? Survival through shapeshifting is terrifying because of its inherent ambivalence, yet it carries within itself an incredible liberatory potential because it refutes the ossification of identities and positions and reframes resilience as resistance. Navigating the dark waters of grief through story invites us into a deeper attunement to the patterns and intersections of disasters, to how we relate to and envision the past, present and the future — how they form a deeper, thicker understanding of time.

It is the shapeshifter that, by becoming no one, by not holding onto any one identity, becomes everything and everyone; Güler's "whistling man" wanders the dark streets of Istanbul at night, melting into to the darkness, into the sounds of the city. This character translates to his photographs as well, particularly to the darker ones where the city becomes nothing more than a silhouette.

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[168] Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, 289.

[169] Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, 42.

[170] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 21.

Figure 3.2 Ara Güler, the old Galata Bridge, 1956

Figure 3.3 Ara Güler, Tosbağa Sokak, 1954

The anonymous solitary figure in both photographs seems to be a figure that the photographer identifies with. It is a figure at once wandering and watching, yet also dissolving into the darkness to become one with the city. This figure seems to be more than a flâneur that aims to capture fleeting impressions; he feels into the sounds, whispers from the cracks and crevices of the buildings, appeasing the ghosts that inhabit buildings disintegrating to ruins. It is a flâneur who sees in the dark and *into* the darkness, who sees the gap between the horrors of Disaster and the ways of representing it, yet a flâneur who insists on re-storying the landscape and the city. Perhaps this is why Güler's photography has found such emotional resonance in his spectators: it insists on re-enchanting the changing and disappearing city, evoking the way grief, love and belonging are inextricably bound to each another.

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Undoubtedly, in the lacuna of testimony, something stirs. If, as Sophie Strand writes, "each death opens up a wound —and a song",[171] Güler's rather mystical photograph of the sea as seen in Figure 3.4 seems to speak to the very last page of Karıncaların Günbatımı. This photograph carries the feeling that the photographer completely melts into the seascape, into the vastness and the depths of darkness; it is an image that overflows its frame. And in the last page of Karıncaların Günbatımı, a sailboat sails through the Marmara Sea in the moonlight. The dark waters feel like tar and smell of rot. Here, we move away from Baret's perspective, whom we have followed throughout the novel and feel that we have lost our sense of time: "Geçen dakikalar, saatler, yoksa asırlar mıydı?"[172] We are obliquely made aware of the fact that it is the eve of 6 September 1955: "Bizans'ın ışıkları kızarıyordu." Biberyan makes it seem as though it is the definitive end of an era, what Saraygil Azniv Hanım calls, "Bizans'ın gerçek ve son çöküşü".[173] Not only does Biberyan's reference to the Byzantine Empire in this moment draw a parallel with the conquest of Istanbul, it is a singularly apocalyptic moment: "Sanki toprak sarsılıyor, çatırdıyordu." But it is in this moment that Baret shivers with a strange desire, and hears the growing hum before him. He does not stare at the lights over the city — Biberyan directs our attention not to the commotion rising in the landscape but into the darkness: "Suyu seyretti. Zifti seyretti. Ziftin ulaşılmaz rahmini…" As we only get an idea of the scale of destruction through sounds, Biberyan once again repeats and circles

[171] Sophie Strand, *The Flowering Wand: Lunar Kings, Trans-species Magicians, and Rhizomatic Harpists* (Inner Traditions, 2022), 83, Kindle edition.

[172] Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, 523.

[173] *Ibid.*, 480.

around this inability to see: “Işıklar birer birer sönüyordu... görünen her şey, gören bütün gözler sönüyordu.” Yet, “Kapkara sularda görünmez bir yaşam kaynaşmakta mıydı?” Is something stirring in the darkness, waiting to be born?

As all eyes melt into darkness, the sailboat drifts away and disappears into the horizon. Where does this line of escape lead to? Biberyan leaves us with this question. How do we find ways to “live after Babylon”? How do we write stories of survival, of the life after? Perhaps these are the stories marked by wounds, songs and reverberations of grief and loss, traversing uncertain, unmapped terrains that demand that we show up again and again and be willing to be transformed — to turn survival into a practice of deep listening, of staying with the trouble. They demand that we put our faith once again in the ability of stories to revive themselves, to be willing to be re-enchanted once again, just like Baret, who, among the ruins of his house, felt the deep and secret pleasure of being alive.

Figure 3.4 Ara Güler, the Marmara Sea, 1975

4. CONCLUSION

After his release from prison in 1946, Zaven Biberyan was offered a job to write for the left-wing newspaper *Nor Or*. Already gaining recognition for his provocative opinion pieces in newspapers such as Vahan Toşigyan's *Nor Lur*, an incident with a headline due to a baseless accusation had landed him in the police headquarters, ironically, at the Sanasaryan building, an edifice expropriated by the government from the Armenian community and used by the police for interrogations and torture. Biberyan was twenty-five years old at the time, relentless and uncompromising, unafraid of the consequences of his provocative journalism. About the day of his release, he wrote: "Artık komünist fikirlerimden emin olduğumdan, solcu bir gazete olan *Nor Or* benim için daha uygundu [...] Artık yazılarımın beslendiği kaynak Ermeni cemaati değil, daha geniş sorunlar olacaktı."[174] The reactions to his first piece on the effects of the social and economic policies on Anatolian villagers was not received warmly among his Armenian readers. Why would he care about Turks now, when he had spent some years responding to topics concerning his community and could not even conceive of equality and camaraderie, a common struggle where there could be an alliance between Armenians and Turks? What did the aftermath of the disastrous World War II demand of him as a writer?

Although a less studied aspect of his life and work, Biberyan's leftist politics and his desire to think and write about "wider concerns" reflect a desire to shift, expand the confines of his ascribed identity within a system of denial where "it was impossible to not be Armenian", where there was no space for him to become anything other than an Armenian. Years of active politics in TİP, committing himself to a struggle and moving beyond the confines of his community, Biberyan was writing himself "a better story". He published novels from the 1960s onwards, parallel to his politics. While his autobiography shows single-minded young man with strong convictions and opinions, he explores grey areas in his fiction, the darkness within the human soul and all its complicities, culminating in his masterpiece, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*.

[174] Biberyan, *Mahkûmların Şafağı*, 434.

In *The Better Story*, Dina Georgis writes that "stories give us access to the deeply human qualities of how political histories get written from the existential experience of trauma, loss, difficulty, and relationality." They provide resources, a different kind of exploration into an emotional intelligence that lays a foundation for "political imagination and renewal because they allow us to understand struggles that lead to devastating conflicts."[175] Framed as a way of making sense of our experiences of struggle and survival, every story is a "better story", "the best possible story we have invented to go on living."[176] Georgis chooses to ask how reading stories "not for what they say but for what they psychically perform" affect our way of responding to devastating events[177]; and this thesis, too, was an attempt to look at not only what narratives reveal and obscure from our sight, but also at what narratives and different mediums of storytelling in relation to violence and Disaster *does* to us. I tried to explore how loss shapes the troubling notions of home and belonging, revealing the deep interconnectedness of human bodies and the more-than-human landscape. I focused particularly on the intimacy with life and how the landscape of Istanbul was key in Biberyan and Güler's works, a relationship necessary we understand to be truly present with the trouble of ongoing destruction and accretive disasters in real time. This relationship lay the foundation of grief work, which I offered here as a reparative, transformative lens that can hold the trouble of loss while helping us attune to emerging possibilities through the "mytho-logical", or what I referred to here as "storied thinking".

Georgis rightly points out that healing the injuries of past and ongoing struggles, injustices and violence is important, "yet the question of how remains".[178] Just as Wendy Brown writes that injury and recognition of injury "has overdetermined left politics", it has been the similar case for the struggle for justice and recognition of the Armenian genocide and many other injustices towards marginalized communities in Turkey's denialist context. Brown argues that "rather than contest systemic problems, such as global capitalism, the prevailing left has turned its attention to liberal humanist inclusion of historically marginalized identity groups", converting "politics into an essentialized private interest."[179] This too, undoubtedly has had an effect on the way we think about and within trauma studies. While there is a growing literature and interest around grief, particularly now in the light of the

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[175] Dina Georgis, *The Better Story: Queer Affects from the Middle East* (Albany: Suny Press, 2013), 1.

[176] *Ibid.*, 2.

[177] *Ibid.*

[178] *Ibid.*, 20-21.

[179] Brown quoted in Georgis, 20-21.

climate crisis, with the emergence of new terms such as ecological grief, or solastalgia, there has also been an over-emphasis on trauma, which runs the risk of reducing people to the sum of their grievances. The proliferation of new "diagnoses" such as "ecosickness" and "pre-traumatic stress disorder", and the eagerness to label and "medicalize" these uncomfortable affects implies that they are individual problems that require some sort of intervention or "treatment". I find pre-traumatic stress disorder particularly problematic, which is defined as a psychic disorder of "how we imagine things are going to be", "a gnawing sense" of what could be done, with the emphasis on the "traumatizing power of anticipation".[180] We must be mindful of the fact that the way we think about the affective resonances of what is happening in the world and labelling everything as a "disorder" is a very Western medicine-oriented way of thinking. And, as Stef Craps notes, as many fictional examples of the victims of pre-traumatic stress disorder are "all white Western males", we should ask whether this anticipation or anxiety masks or bypasses the fear of other emotions such as guilt, responsibility or accountability. Moreover, over-emphasis on the trauma narrative could actually have a debilitating effect on the idea of agency, resilience and fluidity, deepening and constantly reproducing victimhoods as the fundamental or dominating aspect of one's identity.

Perhaps, in Georgis's framework, the trauma narrative is the "better story" today: to make sense of what happened to us, to demand recognition for our suffering, an explanation to where we are coming from and the factors that have shaped the way we respond to everything around us. Yet, going forward, the trauma narrative should only be the base of our storytelling and not the ceiling, particularly if we want to orient our storytelling away from anthropocentric standpoints into more relational, queer, trans-species, more-than-human ways of imagining our futures. Perhaps, going forward, rather than writing and telling stories of our unending grievances from the confines of what we perceive to be our monolithic "Self", we can practice a deeper listening, what Georgis similarly calls "ethical listening": "occupying a state of humility and curiosity towards the other", attending to the story "yet not wanting to master" what is seen and heard.[181] We can practice asking for stories, pay attention to what pricks our ears, to what wants to be heard and expressed through others and through us — a process akin to midwifing than to that of an omnipotent writer who holds the key to a symbolic domain not everyone has equal access to. Throughout this thesis, I tried to frame grief as both the lens through which we can look at these relational ways of telling stories and as the mortar of our

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[180] Stef Craps, "Climate Trauma," in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma.* ed. by Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 277, 278.

[181] Georgis, *The Better Story*, 18.

emergent, more-than-human communities, which open us up to queer encounters, transformations, surprising, disruptive, alchemical processes. I imagine grief as the basis of "a community that meets on the threshold of death",[182] a community that evades symbolic fixities, fixed identities, always in excess of meaning, constantly in an ongoing process of forming and disintegrating, co-weaving wildly imaginative ways of survival and becoming.

Yet, would it be possible to frame this as an act of resistance against Disaster, destruction and violence? Just as we see it in Biberyan's autobiography, and according to Georgis, resistance has always been a "better story" for the left, an important theme for postcolonial representation and subjectivity, yet it is also "not immune to psychic life".[183] With so much suffering, death and accretive disasters in the world today, resistance does not always appear to us in the most creative and "heroic" of ways, and there are moments when there are more things lost than gained. At this point, I feel the urgency of questioning time and time again the weight and meaning behind our words, concepts, ideas, terminology, and political fantasies. If we want to look for the better stories of the better stories in our imagined futures, we must start with its building blocks: words. In relational thinking with our human and more-than-human landscapes and kin, I return to "community", a word which has appeared in so much of our stories of survival and resistance. What does it *really mean* to be in community? How does this word resonate within and between us? How are we paying attention to the micro-relationships of care, tending to each other and our grief, holding space for our creative and necessary transformations? If the frequent, discursive use of words like "resistance" and "community" erase the real and concrete dynamics behind them, if communities keep reproducing those dynamics of oppression and aggression, then is it meaningful to speak of community, and similarly, of home and belonging?

I have faith in a community that comes together, makes and unmakes itself on the grounds of grief, because it casts a light on the relationship we have, and the relationship we want to cultivate with what is lost or what will be lost in the future. As we tread through the difficult terrain of pain, the imaginative, "better stories" of grief and survival re-enchant our inner and outer landscapes. As Silvia Federici writes, in "a world in which our capacity to recognize the existence of a logic other than that of capitalist development" is constantly being tested, re-enchantment "reconnects what capitalism has divided: our relation with nature, with others, and

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[182] Sayın, *Ölüm Terbiyesi*, 67.

[183] Georgis, *The Better Story*, 21.

with our bodies,", enabling us to "regain a sense of wholeness in our lives."[184] I find the idea of re-enchantment an exciting place to think, be, and write from. As we reclaim those needs, desires and connections that have been severely degraded and devalued by a system that not only colonizes our material existence but also our imagination, we restore the fundamentally erotic and intimate connection we have with the world. We go on to tell our stories and sing our songs despite, and perhaps, because of Disaster, and search for the erotic amidst the ruins. Just like the way Biberyan defined his own life: "Çünkü yaşamak mücadele etmek ve sevişmekti."

[184] Silvia Federici, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019), 188-189.

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