

Analysis of Zabel Yesayan's "In the Ruin"

By

Batil Vartanian

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American University of Armenia Yerevan, Armenia

## **Introduction**

When reading accounts related to the subject of genocide, people often tend to perceive traumatic events in the way they prefer to imagine. However, people need to understand and comprehend genocide through the eyes of the victims who witnessed it. Many survivors of genocide claim that those who did not experience genocide will never imagine or understand what happened in reality. Although jarring, it is sometimes necessary to read about such atrocities from an eyewitness or those who went through such circumstances.

One of the most prominent Armenian writers who witnessed and narrated the atrocities was Zabel Yesayan. Yesayan was an activist, feminist and one of the most prolific writers of the Western Armenian literature, who managed to escape the Armenian Genocide in 1915. She is perhaps best known for her book “In the Ruins” in which she gathered and published testimonies of the survivors. Yesayan’s “In the Ruins” will give the readers the feeling or the idea in such a way that they are among the victims and thus will make them live through a genocide that is triggered by her beautifully written agonizing words she used in order to document the atrocities committed against the Armenian population living in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 20th century. Moreover, at the beginning of the 20th century, there was no specific term to refer to the systematic barbaric crimes. In general, they defined it as “a crime without a name.” Later in the mid-20th century, the “crime without a name” had finally received the name “Genocide”. However, prior to these definitions, Zabel Yesayan was the first to invent a new term in Armenian known as “aghed” or “աղբւոյն” meaning catastrophe in English, to define the tragic Cilicia massacres that occurred in 1909.

“In the Ruins” not only illustrates the personal voices of the victims of the persecution, but also Yesayan’s personal thoughts and contemplations about the catastrophe. The aim of this

paper is to understand Zabel Yesayan's book at a more profound level. This paper will specifically examine the genre as well as the theme and will utilize psychoanalytic theory to discover Yesayan's personality and character. Moreover, this book was chosen because it is the first Armenian book that dealt with the 1909 massacres in which it gives a detailed account of the victims' painful stories. "In the Ruins" is one the greatest and yet the most terrible books ever written in Western Armenian in which Yesayan devoted herself to the welfare of the survivors in the aftermath of the 1909 massacres.

## **Literature Review**

### **Genre**

A genre is usually the first element someone wants to know about a book. Genre is a label that characterizes elements a reader can expect in a work of literature; sometimes a book is difficult to classify because it has elements of several genres. To begin with, there has been much debate among literary critics about the specific genre of Yesayan's "In the Ruins." Zabel Yesayan's book has confounded the literary community, because it is not very clear whether it is a work of literature, art, memoir, chronicle, psychological novel, non-fictional essay or a testimony. Literary critic Marc Nichanian carefully examines Zabel Yesayan's work in the context of how she deals with the question of mourning. In his book, "Writers of Disaster," Nichanian questions the genre of the book, "Is it a testimony? A reportage? A chronicle?" and comes to the conclusion that the book is a testimony. It is a "testimony that can be transformed into a work of mourning. That is the lesson of the entire book. She creates a work of mourning for herself and for the others" (Nichanian, p. 217). However the book may also fall under the category of a memoir because Yesayan writes about the moments and the events that took place in her life. She not only writes about the stories of the survivors but also about her own

tormented emotions and the trauma she experienced while traveling through historic Cilicia and listening to their stories. Hagop Oshagan, an Armenian writer, playwright, and novelist, places the book “In the Ruins” under a very particular title - “The chronicle.” Chronicle writing is a historical account of facts and events arranged in chronological order. This is also what Yesayan does in her book. She composes historical facts that took place in her life in chronological order. Last but not least, Rubina Perroomian, a writer and lecturer of Armenian language and literature places “In the Ruins” under the category of non-fictional essay. She claims that the artistic element is too strong for this work to be considered a report or a chronicle (Perroomian, p. 93). As demonstrated, the specific genre of Yesayan’s “In the Ruins” has been a debated topic amongst the literary critics. However, does the question “which genre fits best” still hold, or as Oshagan stated, should “In the Ruins” adapt a new genre?

## **Theme**

In literature, the term silence symbolizes and is associated with fear, emptiness, apathy, powerlessness, and failure. Typically, silence is used to convey an abstinence or forbearance from speech/utterance (Miller, 2007). In other words, silence is the intentional or imposed state of muteness, and denotes an inaudible condition or moment of complete stillness (Miller, 2007). However, silence is not just the absence of sound, but in fact it is a statement that conveys several meanings. Silence for instance, might also denote agreement, anger, disagreement and a variety of other emotions. The role of silence as a theme is present in Yesayan’s work. The role of silence has been researched before on other genocidal books but no further studies have been done before on Yesayan’s “In the Ruins” with the same theme. According to Elie Wiesel, the role of silence has several different meanings. There is the destructive silence of the ignorant or

forgetful; the silence of victims who have chosen to carry their truths with them to the grave, in the face of torture and injustice; the silence of the world during the Holocaust, and finally the inexplicable silence of God (Lazarus, 59). Yesayan constantly repeats the word silence in almost all the chapters and most importantly, she emphasizes on God's silence. Moreover, she describes the silence of the victims as well as the silence around her. According to Dori Laub, "Silence is for them a fated exile, yet also a home, a destination, and a binding oath. To not return from this silence is rule rather than exception. The listener must know all this and more. He or she must listen to and hear the silence, speaking mutely both in silence and in speech, both from behind and from within the speech." Yesayan managed to deal with the silence surround her; but the question is why is the role of silence crucial as a theme in "In the Ruins"?

### **Psychoanalytical Theory**

Psychoanalysis, according to Sigmund Freud is a method used to investigate and treat personality disorders, human behavior and its relation to the human mind. The origin of the unconscious and personality disorders begins in childhood and can contribute to the way they later function as adults. Zabel Yesayan, as a child grew up hearing the horrendous stories of Hamidian massacre which caused an immense effect and impact on her life and in her writing career. In her book Yesayan worries about the early psychological trauma that afflicted the children for the rest of their lives. Dori Laub, the author of the book "Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History" explains from his experience that the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself (Luab.p, 57). The aftermath of the horrific events affected Zabel Yesayan's unconscious state of mind mentally as well as

physically. According to Lois Tyson, the unconscious is the storehouse of those painful experiences and emotions, those wounds, fears, guilty desires, and unresolved conflicts we do not want to know about because we feel we will be overwhelmed by them (Tyson. p. 12). Tyson argues that our unconscious desires are served by our defenses. Defenses are the processes by which the contents of our unconscious are kept in the unconscious. The functions of defences include selective perception and avoidance which were discovered in Yesayan's work.

## **Methodology**

This capstone will collect, analyze, and interpret data by utilizing qualitative methods. Several different methods will be conducted for this qualitative research paper such as; literary theory, psychoanalytic theory, and trauma theory. Literary theory is chosen to evaluate and interpret the content of the book. This paper will examine the words the author uses to see if there is a more profound meaning other than the literal meaning that is on the surface. Moreover, literary analysis of the genre is chosen to comprehend the unknown genre of the book. Three important critics' analysis are included in order to observe the differences and similarities that each one has to say about the genre. As for the theme, another literary analysis will be conducted to find the main message and the insight the author discussed in the book. The chosen theme of "In the Ruins" is silence. By analyzing the theme silence, readers will understand Zabel Yesayan's thoughts that she expressed in her book. The other part of this thesis paper will discuss the psychoanalytical approach of Zabel Yesayan's personality through the words she uses to describe her mental state of mind in the aftermath of the 1909 massacres. Psychoanalytical theory is chosen to focus on the texts in order to get into the mind of Zabel Yesayan. There are a collection of Zabel Yesayan's thoughts or quotes taken from "In the Ruins" to develop the process of psychoanalytical approach. Last but not least, within the psychoanalytical theory lies the trauma theory. Trauma theory is chosen to discuss the effects of trauma and the atrocities through the body and mind. By using trauma theory and Psychoanalytical approach, this paper will identify the kinds of disorders such as PTSD/PRE-TSD or defence approaches Zabel Yesayan had.

## **Research questions**

The purpose of this study is to comprehend “In the Ruins” at a more profound level. Three elements will be analyzed -- genre, trauma, and theme, therefore my research questions are the following:

1. Since many critics argue about the genre of Yesayan’s work, which genre fits the most for “In the Ruins”?
2. Since Yesayan constantly repeats the term “silence” in her book; what is the role of the theme Silence.
3. How did the psychological trauma effect Yesayan during the aftermath of the catastrophe?



## **About the author**

Zabel Yesayan a writer, activist and a feminist, was born in 1878 in Skutari, Constantinople, in an era of political upheaval for Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Growing up with the horror stories of Hamidian repression, she learned to aspire and struggle for the ideals of the nation (Peroomian, 89). At the age of 17 she began her literary career and published her works in local newspapers. Likewise the rest of the Armenian intellectuals Yesayan traveled to Paris to pursue her studies in literature at the Sorbonne University. While she was in Paris, she met and married the painter Dickran Yesayan in which she bore him 2 children Sophie and Hrant. When the massacres started, Zabel Yesayan hid and escaped to Bulgaria and from there she managed to reach the Caucasus. In 1933 she immigrated to Armenia for good and published many books, novels, articles regarding social issues as well as feministic pieces and books of autobiography and satire (Nichanian, p. 31-53). Yesayan is mostly famous of her fascinating book "In the Ruins". "It is commonly agreed among the Armenian literary historians that Yesayan's "In the Ruins" is the best artistic achievement inspired by the horrors, aristocrats, and aftereffects of the Cilician massacres of 1909" (Peroomian.p, 89).

## Analysis

### **Psychoanalytic and trauma theory**

In 1909 Yesayan was appointed to a delegation sent to the Ottoman city of Adana to provide aid to orphans and assess conditions in the aftermath of the bloody massacres of Armenians by the Turks that had taken place a few months earlier. She begins the first paragraph of the first chapter by informing the readers about her internal conflicts before even reaching the ruins of Cilicia and Adana.

“The steamship was taking us to Cilicia’s port city. The last night we were to spend on the Mediterranean filled me with concentration and dread. The closer we came to threshold of the catastrophe, the more the reality of it seemed to elude my understanding. I couldn’t really believe that we would be in Mersin in the morning. Adana! Cilicia! For weeks, these names had been sounding in one corner of my brain; there was an open wound there, and touching it provoked a painful shudder that shook me to the depth of my being” (Yesayan, p. 7).

It is very clear that before even reaching Cilicia, Yesayan still couldn’t believe what had happened. She couldn’t bear to believe that the massacres happened “on soil fertilized by her nation’s sweat” (Yesayan, p. 3)! She couldn’t bear to envision what she was about to witness and experience. Yesayan was in fear but not in fear of risking her life by traveling to Cilicia. She was rather in fear of seeing innocent scattered refugees, miserable and helpless souls, children, and mothers. Before even witnessing the survivors, Yesayan was already in an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeded her ability to cope, or integrate her emotions with what she was about to witness. Before reaching, Yesayan claimed that her wounds would open every time she hears the names Adana and Cilicia in one corner of her brain. Yesayan was evidently facing what is now called pre-traumatic stress disorder. Pre-TSD is a very serious psychological disorder; it is when the episodes occur before the stressful situation ever takes place.

No one can endure the amount of dread and fear Yesayan experienced during the Catastrophe. “The closer we get to Mersin, the greater the mysterious pain I feel in my heart” (Yesayan, p. 8). The Catastrophe not only triggered and affected her mentally but also physically. The amount of stress she experienced became so tiring as it caused her almost physical pain and agony. Yesayan was dealing with chronic pain which was accompanied by feelings of hopelessness, depression, and anxiety. Dori Laub, a survivor of the Jewish Holocaust and the author of the book “Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History” claims “the listener to the narrative of extreme human pain, of massive psychic trauma faces a unique situation” (Laub, p. 57). When Yesayan visited Cilicia in 1909, she did not witness the atrocities to see the actual killing take place, but instead, she witnessed something even more excruciating which was hearing the victims’ testimonies. Not only were the victims psychologically traumatized, but so was she. By listening to their stories Yesayan experienced trauma within herself. It is said that the relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels (Laub, p. 26). Yesayan mentioned Hajji Sara’s painful story about the loss of her three brave sons that left her fatigued. After hearing her story, Yesayan asked “did we still have the strength to feel and suffer? What new things, what atrocious scenes awaited us? We felt as if we had been paralyzed by an immense fatigue, as if in our grief we longed to sleep forever” (Yesayan, p. 154) . Yesayan was traumatized every time she heard a mournful narrative. In this passage, she describes her psychological/mental pain manifested into a physical pain. She felt paralyzed due to the excruciating pain and the fact that she did nothing about it. At that moment, she felt helpless and all what she was capable of doing was simply listening to their remorseful stories.

Dori Laub mentions in his book “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening” that “the listener, however, is also a separate human being and will experience hazards and struggles of his own, while carrying out his function of a witness to the trauma witness. The listener, therefore, has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself. It is only in this way, through his simultaneous awareness of the continuous flow of those inner hazards both in the trauma witness and in himself, that he can become the enabler of the testimony - the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum” (Luab, p. 58). Yesayan’s role is very significant in the process of bearing witness. Laub explains the necessity and the importance of the listener in the testimony as follows:

“The victim’s narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. [...] The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to—and heard—is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the “knowing” of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge de nova. The testimony to trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. By extension the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself” (Felman and Laub 1991: 57).

Zabel Yesayan becomes a witness to those who witnessed the atrocities by accompanying the survivors in their tough journey into the midst of brutality, to the edge of humanity. The victims had been waiting for someone from outside to finally reach them and at the time they did not know Yesayan would be that person. Unfortunately, in order to accept the infants in the orphanage, they had to meet certain criteria. Yesayan’s task was to register orphans who had lost both parents. She asked the mothers of the infants inquiries in order to check if they met the criterion. When the survivors began to share their wounds and agonies of the traumatic events, it

took Yesayan to a journey through painful stories, thus in this way Yesayan was able to document their narratives. Some of them did not elaborate much, but some spoke to inform people of the truth out of responsibility. After all, with the help of Yesayan the survivors spoke about the brutality of the ottomans.

“Our unconscious desires not to recognize or change our destructive behaviors— because we have formed our identities around them and because we are afraid of what we will find if we examine them too closely—are served by our defenses. Defenses are the processes by which the contents of our unconscious are kept in the unconscious. In other words, they are the processes by which we keep the repressed repressed in order to avoid knowing what we feel we can’t handle knowing” (Tyson p. 15). Among the defences include selective perception and avoidance that were discovered in Yesayan’s work. To begin with, selective perception is defined as hearing and seeing things only what we feel we can handle. We all wish to hear and see things only we can handle, but when it comes to Yesayan, she saw and heard things that she could not handle. She accepted this dangerous task in order to spread the world about the agony of the Armenian for herself and for her nation. The other defence as mentioned is the avoidance which is defined as “staying away from people or situations that are liable to make us anxious by stirring up some unconscious—i.e., repressed—experience or emotion” (Tyson p. 15). Yesayan never avoided the people who needed aid the most. She was always there for her nation and made every effort to give the people the help they needed. However, sometimes she did want to avoid and escape the painful situations she was experiencing. For instance, when she said “ I was physically and mentally oppressed and closed my eyes in an attempt to escape the abiding nightmare (Yesayan, p. 96) or when she said “ We did not talk about the gallows even among ourselves, even when we felt closest to each other. We could sense, however that we all had that

horror on our minds but were avoiding the sinister word, for fear that uttering it would make the thing materialize, would make it possible and real” (Yesayan, p. 96). Yesayan’s avoidance was within her self and mind. In other words, she avoided her thoughts by keeping it to herself. In the second passage, she knew she was going to witness the gallows and the prisoners, but she chose not to talk about it or bring up the matter or as she claims “the sinister word”; that is because she wanted, for a moment, to believe it did not happen .

In the the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter “ The orphans” Zabel says, “In the imagination of these tender innocents, grown -ups all looked alike. They saw a criminal in every adult male, they were deluded by terrifying resemblances, imagined ghastly scenes and wanted to flee-- panicked, horror stricken, stupefied and shocked” (Yesayan, p. 25). During the catastrophe, men usually participated in the killings of the Armenians and due to that, a certain type of phobia afflicted the children which is called Adrophobia. A negative or traumatic event is most likely responsible for this fear. Similar to many other phobias, the fear of men might continue into adulthood. The sufferers typically refuse to be left alone with a man, despite his being a close friend or relative. This can greatly affect the quality of life, especially if they refuse to step outside, fearing an encounter with a man. (fearof.net) One of Yesayan’s utmost concern was the children’s early psychological trauma. “ The early psychological trauma, the indefinable ordeal represented by that uncomprehended, unassimilated disaster, the hatred and unrevealed resentment on her young, pale, emaciated face formed a picture that unmoored everything in my soul, and I felt drained by an unsteady, tremulous emotions” (Yesayan,p. 30). What Yesayan is conveying or trying to address in this passage is that the children were the most ones affected by these horrific events. Moreover, mostly she worries about their psychological trauma that will haunt them

forever like a nightmare. Witnessing innocent victims, especially children, was not an easy task for Yesayan because clearly it affected her psychologically through the rest of her life.

## **Genre**

Writing about lamentation, horror and repression is a very sensitive matter, especially when it is about historical events that took place in times of widespread real horrors. According to Oshagan, Yesayan's "In the Ruins" is a stream of tragic impressions in which she wrote with her body. Because the book is not entirely about the survivors but also about her own tormented emotions she experienced, therefore there has been much debate among the critics about the genre.

According to Peroomian, the outpouring of feeling, the psychoanalytic approach to characters, emotions, and behavior, the rich metaphor, imagery, and hyperbolic expressions, all come into play to elevate the work to the level of artistic creation, closest to a genre of non-fiction essay (Peroomian, p. 93). Peroomian believes that "In the Ruins" is neither a novel nor a collection of short stories or memoirs. Nor it can be considered as reportage as Oshagan labels it. She believes that the artistic element is too strong for this work to be considered a report or a chronicle. In other words, Peroomian believes that her work deserves something more than just a journalist report about the horrific massacres. In fact, Yesayan's task was not to provide a testimony of the survivors, but rather to provide aid to orphans and assess conditions in the aftermath of the bloody massacres. However, Yesayan herself volunteered to write down what she witnessed for the sake of the survivors' voices or narratives to be heard. According to Peroomian, "Another link is formed by the author's presence throughout the work" (Peroomian, p. 93). As a narrator, the author describes what she herself has seen and because of that Peroomian believes the book should not be categorized under chronicle or reportage. Yesayan

expresses her feelings and emotions in the book which is making it appear less like reportage or chronicle and more of a non-fiction essay.

Oshagan characterizes Yesayan's great work "In the Ruins" by placing it under a very particular title "the chronicle". A chronicle is a historical account of facts and events ranged in chronological order. Oshagan believes that "In the Ruins" is a chronicle because she wrote about what she witnessed in chronological order. In addition, he also believes that it is a testimony and reportage because the book contains records of eyewitness accounts. He believes that the writing of catastrophe was in need of testimony that at least is clear (Nichanian, p. 11). Oshagan is against her work to be categorized as literature because he believes that a chronical and testimony only express the hesitation of the writer-historian before a work which can only with difficulty be qualified as "literature" (Nichanian, 197). He suggests that new categories must be invented when writing enters into the poorly explored regions of interdiction of mourning and the catastrophe. This, however, states that he is still feeling ambivalent whether the book should be categorized as a testimony or a chronicle.

Writing of a catastrophe was in need of testimony says Marc Nichanian in his essay about "The Subject of Testimony" (Nichanian, p. 11). Marc Nishanian strongly agrees the book should be categorized as a testimony and strongly condemns the book to be considered as literature. He believes that her book confronts the interdiction of mourning only in the form of direct testimony and a challenge of witnessing (Nichanian, p. 206). Nichanian says, she transcribes and thus she witnesses, she keeps the trace of their narratives. He believes that "the testimony can be transformed into a work of mourning. That is the lesson of the entire book" (Nichanian p. 217). According to Nichanian, literature did not intend to speak reality. Its intention, its function, its task were the redemption of testimony (Nichanian, p. 11). He claims that testimony



has nothing to do with literature and proves his statement by providing a quote from the preface of Yesayan's work "In the Ruins". She says " I considered that it would have been a sacrilege to transform into a literary subject of the sufferings in which a whole people agonized the unutterable story of the profaned girls and the wrecks of a civilized nation that has been reduced to the level of animality. Consequently, I approached this work with utmost simplicity and respect." Nishanian says these words can even be understood as a farewell to literature" (Nishanian,p. 21).

The book is most likely closest to the genre of testimony also commonly known as testimonio in Spanish. Typically, "a testimonio is a first-person account by the person (narrator) who has faced instances of social and political inequality, oppression, or any specific form of marginalization. As opposed to other forms of narrative research, where the researcher helps mold the narrative or becomes a conduit to voice the stories, in testimonio it is usually the narrator herself/himself who is the research tool, with an interest in telling the story from that individual perspective which, in turn, represents a larger, collective story that took place in the community that the narrator inhabits " (Mora, 2015). This is exactly what Yesayan does in her book; she narrates the stories of those who witnessed oppression through their perspective. However, the main purpose of writing a testimony is to help the outsiders learn about the local history of the community that have suffered marginalization (Mora, 2015). Nevertheless to be more specific and precise, "In the Ruins" is more about the mass killing and suffering of a large ethnic group than marginalization oppression. Oshagan's suggestion on inventing a new category when writing about the interdiction of mourning and catastrophe should be taken into consideration because "In the Ruins" deserves a genre for its uniqueness and extraordinary

matter; a genre very similar to Testimony but instead should deal with topics related to tragedies such as a catastrophe or genocide.

## **Theme**

Commonly known, the concept of silence means the absence of voice, but in fact silence is a much more complex and diverse phenomenon. When it comes to trauma, silence can be viewed as a positive or negative connotation. In most of the chapters, Yesayan used the word “silence” constantly to describe and comprehend her thoughts. For instance, when she says “No answer. No answer. The silence was as heavy as lead” (Yesayan, p. 63). In this context, Yesayan expresses her thoughts by utilizing a simile. The concept of silence here is associated with something as heavy as a lead. This sentence carries a negative connotation because silence is symbolized as a painful tool or as she claims “a heavy lead.” Sometimes something as simple as silence can transform into something as heavy as lead.

Zabel Yesayan dedicated chapter 4 “The Orphans” to the Armenian mothers who lost their children in the horrific tragedy. Yesayan says “ They were often silent, and often remained mute when we asked them questions” (Yesayan, p. 26). For these unfortunate children and mothers, silence was their only way to survive. Yet when they did speak, every word afforded a glimpse of a moment of mortal agony, a world of ineradicable anxieties, sorrow, and above, yearning (Yesayan, p. 27).

Yesayan’s religious status is undetermined, however, in her memoir “ The Gardens of Silhidar” her thoughts may grasp the feeling that she was rather a non religious and a secular person unlike her family. In addition, she clarifies her political status as a feminist-socialist-pacifist woman, which identifies she is against theocracy. Despite the fact that she was a secular

person, she believed in maintaining her Armenian identity, values, and tradition. Moreover, in her book "In the Ruins", she accentuates and focuses on God and religion. For instance, in the third chapter titled "The Church Service" Yesayan questions the absence or presence of God. "Why did those saints, in whose power they had always believed, remain stonily indifferent to their suffering? what curse, what punishment had they been marked out for? In retribution for what long trains of sins had god remained mute and blind, as if He were altogether absent from that sanctuary" (Yesayan, p.18)? It is very clear that from this context Yesayan is questioning the presence of God. Usually when a person is encountering a traumatic situation people find it hard to have faith in God because of His cruelty by permitting such brutalities to occur. Thoughts such as doubting God crossed the minds of many victims during the catastrophe, but for Zabel Yesayan it did a long time ago when she was a child. Of course, not everyone abandoned God during the catastrophe, many of the victims believed that God was their only strength and hope. One of the victims said "For the atonement of what sins has God remained deaf and mute as if he were absent from the holy place." (Yesayan, p. 38) Again, not only Yesayan was questioning the presence of God but also the victims. However, the difference is that the victims, who questioned the presence of God, had faith in God before the catastrophe, whereas Yesayan had lost her faith long before the horrific events in 1909.

## Conclusion

As Wiley Blackwell stated, “experiencing trauma is an essential part of being human; history is written in blood.” The process of writing about a tragedy takes a tremendous courage and effort to deliver the main message behind it. Zabel Yesayan spent a year and a half writing her book “In the Ruins” and soon became one of the greatest pieces of work of Western Armenian Literature. She approached “In the Ruins” with utmost simplicity and respect because it would have been a sacrilege to transform into a literary subject, the suffering in which a whole people agonized. What Zabel Yesayan witnessed in the aftermath of 1909 massacres exceeded the limits of the human imagination. She opened up her heart and expressed her tormented emotions given the limits on human capacities, the terrible scenes that presented itself to her. As Nichanian said, Zabel Yesayan creates a work of mourning for herself and for the others (Nichanian, p. 217). Yesayan’s intention was to make her Turkish compatriots understand and admit that “we” the Armenians are human too-- that we have died for them (Nichanian. p, 7). This book was written in order to bear witness, of course, but above all – and in a very personal manner – in order for the author to liberate herself from the terror, from the submersion, from the too- great identification with the stricken (Nichanian. p, 190). Throughout her lifetime, Yesayan fought for freedom and justice, for herself, for all women, and for all the deprived classes of society. She moved to Soviet Armenia in 1933 and unfortunately in 1937 she was captured by Stalin’s forces in which she died in exile in Siberia around 1943. Nevertheless, fortunately Armenians around the world have preserved her texts, books, essays, and articles in hopes of transmitting them to future generation for her and for the sake of the victims’ testimonies to be heard globally and more specifically for Turkey to recognize their brutal crimes against an entire nation.

## Annotated bibliography

Laub, F. S. (1991). *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge.

Chapter 2 of this book deals with bearing witness or the vicissitudes of listening. The author, a Holocaust survivor expresses his opinion about the importance of witnessing a genocide and how it affects the listener or the interviewer psychologically by experiencing trauma within themselves. I used this source to elaborate more on the psychoanalytic theory section. Moreover, I used this source because it includes instructions on how an interviewer should behave and respond to the testimonies of the victims in a genocide. I proved my statements about Zabel Yesayan by including the instructions that are mentioned in this book.

Mora, R. A. (2015). Testimonio . *Center for Intercultural Dialogue*.

This article gives a brief summary of the genre of testimony and why people choose to write testimonies. The author defines the term as “witness account”, and a narrative research methodology. Moreover, this article deals with the concept of testimony and the goal behind writing a testimony. I chose this source to support my opinion about the genre of Yesayan’s “In the Ruins”

Nishanian, M. (2002). *Writers of Disasters*. Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute .

Writers of disaster is a monograph that deals with the historical phenomenon of the national revolution which is the movement of national uprising among Armenians at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Nishanian, in his book dedicates one chapter to Zabel Yesayan. The chapter is entitled The end of testimony and the catastrophic

turnabout. Nichanian begins by giving a historical background about the pogroms targeting the ethnic Armenian population in Turkey. He also gives a brief summary about Zabel Yesayan's life and her role as a woman during the pogrom. Nichanian argues about the genre of Zabel Yesayan's work *In the Ruins* and includes passages from different authors that is linked with her work. Nichanian's focus is mainly on Zabel Yesayan's book "In the ruins" by which he comes up with specific themes and discusses them through criticism.

The book "Writers of Disaster" is one of the major and most important source for my capstone because it deals with plenty of topics that I discussed in my paper. It deals with the historical phenomenon of the catastrophe as well as genre and style of writing. I used this source to support my evidence specifically in the genre analysis.

Nishanian, M. (2010). Zabel yesayan, women and witness, or the truth of the mask. *New perspective on turkey*. 31-53.

The essay deals with Zabel Yesayan's supposed feminism, both in her literary production and her political activity. Nichanian begins his essay under the title of literary gender, where he discusses her role as a woman in the 19th and 20th century. The author also includes letters that Zabel Yesayan has sent to her siblings, husband, friends, and analyzes them by proving his points. In the last section of the essay, the author discusses Zabel Yesayan's 4 novellas ("The last cup", "Hours of anguish", "Meliha Nuri Hanem", and "My soul in exile") which were all written in the first person and have a woman as their main protagonist. I used this source to learn more about Zabel Yesayan's background and the pogroms that happened at the end of the 19th and 20th century. Moreover, I chose this source to use Psychoanalytic theory to explore Zabel

Yesayan's character and her inner conflicts.

Nishanian, M. (n.d.). The subject of testimony.

(This essay is not published anywhere) The 29 page long essay is about the subject of testimony or in other words the definition of testimony. The essay concentrates on Zabel Yesayan and other Armenian survivors' narratives. The author in the essay emphasizes on the genre of Zabel Yesayan's books and questions the importance of testimony "why do we call this a testimony and what is the use of writing a testimony". The author also brings examples in his essay about other works of testimonies such as Hayg Toroyan, in which he told his story to Zabel Yessayan and transcribed his narrative. I used this source to support my evidence about the genre and the writing style of Zabel Yeseayan. I also used this source to define the term testimony, according to Marc Nichanian.

Peroomian, R. (1993). *Literary responses to Catastrophe*. Atlanta Georgia : Scholars Press .

Equity & Excellence in Education.

The book is about a comparative dimension between the Armenian and the Jewish experience. It deals with the metamorphoses of the Armenians and the Jews literary responses to catastrophe. The first section of the book deals with the traditional responses to catastrophe and the impact of the renaissance on the paradigm of responses. The second part of the book mainly focuses on Armenian writers and how they discuss genocide in their works. The writers are; Zabel Yesayan, Suren Partevian, Aram Antonian, and Hagop Oshagan. I used this book to comprehend and find out Peroomian's perspective about the genre of Zabel Yesayan's "In the Ruins." I used her interpretation to compare and contrast it with different critics such as Oshagan and Nichanian about the genre of the book.

Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical Theory Today*. New York: Routledge.

This book deals with critical theories and provides explanation and concrete examples of complex concepts. This book focuses more on common approaches to literary analysis today such as feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, reader response theory etc... I used this source to elaborate on the psychoanalytic theory. I only chose chapter two which deals with “psychoanalytic criticism ” to help me discover the defenses, anxiety, and core issues of Zabel Yesayan and her unconscious state of mind.

Yesayan, Z. (2016). *In the Ruins*. Watertown, MA: AIWA press.

The book is about Zabel Yesayan, a female writer and an activist who was appointed to a delegation sent to the Ottoman city of Adana to provide aid and support to orphans and survivors of the catastrophe that was organized by the Ottomans. In her book Zabel Yesayan chronicles the aftermath of the Adana massacres of 1909 by conveying the horror and destructions she witnessed. As Marc Nishanian says “It is one of the greatest works of western Armenian literature”



## **Additional links**

Akkent, M. (2012) Istanbul Kadın Müzesi. Zabel Yesayan First Ottoman-Armenian socialist-feminist pacifist female writer.

<http://www.istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/en/zabel-yesayan>

Association for Psychological Science: Press Release. (2004).

<http://www.psychologicalscience.org/media/releases/2004/pr041208.cfm>

Babbel, S. (2010, April 08). The Connections Between Emotional Stress, Trauma and Physical Pain. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/somatic-psychology/201004/the-connections-between-emotional-stress-trauma-and-physical-pain>

Fear of Men Phobia – Androphobia. (2014, March 13). <http://www.fearof.net/fear-of-men-phobia-androphobia/>

Miller, C. (2007) Silence. University of Chicago.edu retrieved from

<http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/silence.htm>

Sim, S. (2007) Manifesto for Silence. George square, Edinburgh. Edinburgh University press.

What Is Psychological Trauma? (n.d.). Sidran. <https://www.sidran.org/resources/for-survivors-and-loved-ones/what-is-psychological-trauma/>

Witnessing and Testimony of Traumatic Events and the Function of Cultural and Collective Memory in Harold Pinter's Ashes to Ashes. Yenigul, A. (2012) Dissertation. University of Barcelona.

<http://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/bitstream/2445/28894/1/M.A.%20Dissertation.%20An%C2%BF1%20Yenig%C3%BCL.pdf>