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From Pre-Bolshevik Baku to the Post-Soviet Camp: Emigree Post-memory in the Works of Banine and Gunel Movlud

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Abstract

This paper explores Azerbaijani émigré and refugee literature through the prism of memory, violence, and trauma. It focuses on two women writers separated by nearly a century: Ümül Banine (Baninee), who left Baku after 1920 following the collapse of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and settled in Paris, and Günel Mövlud, who fled her native Jabrayil in the 1990s as part of the displaced generation of the Karabakh war. These **two figures frame two historical moments that mark, respectively, the beginning and the end of the Soviet era.** Their literary works are examined through the lenses of **collective and individual memory, trauma and post-trauma, pre- and post-bolshevik historical rupture, and the neurobiology of violence.**

Alongside them, the paper briefly considers a third voice – Dilbar Axundzadə – whose memoir of life with the repressed poet Mikayıl Müşfiq reflects a different condition: not exile, but internal survival under Soviet repression. Although connected to the same cultural space, these women represent distinct historical periods and modes of displacement, revealing how personal destinies are **shaped, remembered, and narrated** under radically different political regimes. While Banine's narrative preserves an episode of internal displacement experienced by her mother in 1905, during the early phase of the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict in Baku and other Azerbaijani territories, **Mövlud's narrative presents a different configuration of violence and memory: not cosmopolitan exile but internal displacement in the post-Soviet period**.

Research methods:

Both **individual and collective memory are selective and interpretive**; they are never static but always reconstructive. Émigré and refugee literature foregrounds this process with particular clarity. Banine's *Days in the Caucasus* transforms *childhoo*d upheaval into an ironic and reflective narrative, while Mövlud's *The Camp* fragments refugee experience into intense sensory episodes – mirroring neurobiological research on trauma, which shows that violence imprints memory in sharpened yet discontinuous traces. Stress hormones heighten certain recollections while disrupting narrative coherence, and adolescence, as a period of neural plasticity, renders such memories especially enduring.

Banine's memoir reveals generational tensions within a multicultural household: her grandmother's conservatism, her father's cosmopolitan aspirations, and the coexistence of German, Russian, and English alongside Azerbaijani traditions. Christmas trees stand next to Novruz celebrations, and a German governess introduces Christian rituals into a Muslim family home. At the same time, the text exposes darker layers of postmemory: the Armenian–Azerbaijani clashes of 1905 and 1918-1920 resurface in children's "games" played with their half-Armenian friend Tamara. What adults leave unspoken, children reenact symbolically. As Marianne Hirsch defines it, **postmemory transmits trauma to those who did not directly experience it but nonetheless inherit its emotional weight.**

While Banine's narrative preserves an episode of internal displacement experienced by her mother in 1905, during the early phase of the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict in Baku and other Azerbaijani territories, **Mövlud's narrative presents a different configuration of violence and memory: not cosmopolitan exile but internal displacement in the post-Soviet period**. Her camp narrative depicts weddings reduced to survival strategies, improvised libraries in cramped "kletka" rooms, and mosques built by foreign sponsors. Here, the rupture is not between generations but between two historical conditions – the stability of the Soviet past and the fragmentation of post-war displacement. Trauma becomes embodied: Mövlud describes a paralyzed girl repeatedly abused while others avert their gaze. This scene resonates with trauma theory's "freeze response," in which neither fight nor flight is possible and the body and psyche enter a state of paralysis.

Keywords: autobiographic post-memory; female writing; neurobiology of trauma; cultural taboo; disruption and refugee; collective and cultural memory

Introduction, or one country, two historical eras in memory, violence, and trauma

Émigré literature is rooted in memory, drawing on early life experiences and their later reinterpretation. In *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), Maurice Halbwachs explained that individuals remember within "social frames" (*cadres sociaux*) such as family, religion, and nation, which give structure and meaning to memory (Halbwachs, 1925, p. 38). The mechanism of this memory is dialogic: personal experiences are constantly interpreted through collective symbols, narratives, and rituals, which in turn reinforce group identity. Collective memory differs from history in that it is selective, emotional, and oriented toward present needs (Halbwachs, 1925, p. 52). Ernest Renan similarly argued that nations are what they remember. His lecture "What Is a Nation?" (French: *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*), delivered in 1882 at the Sorbonne, figured out that a nation is "a daily plebiscite" and that nations are shaped as much by shared forgetfulness as by collective memory, what people jointly forget (*to get rid of some unpleasant associations*) as on what they remember. In this context, what we remember and we forgot, as collective/ society (Renan, Ernest. *What Is a Nation?* Translated by Martin Thom, in *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi K. Bhabha, New York: Routledge, 1990, pp. 8-22)

It means that memory is not *static but a selective, interpretive process that* shapes identity (Assmann, 2003, pp. 495-503). This is developed the ideas are constructed through both shared memories and collective forgetting. To maintain unity, societies often suppress

In Azerbaijani émigré writing, two authors from opposite ends of the twentieth century illustrate this dynamic. **Banine (1905-1992)** left Baku to Paris after the Soviet takeover in 1920 and later published *Days in the Caucasus* (1946), a memoir of her pre-adult years. Her recollections, colored mostly by irony rather than by nostalgia, portray youth through sensory detail, transforming personal upheavals into literary memory (Banine, 2017, pp. 228-36; Cultural Legacy, 2018, p. 12). In contrast, **Gunel Movlud (b. 1981)** fled her hometown Jebrail in Nagorno-Karabakh as a child during the 1990s war which served as a catalysator for collapsing of Soviet Union. Her novel *The Camp: A Little Girl from Karabakh* (2019) depicts refugee life by the eyes of a child with stark realism, its reflecting the neurobiological imprint of trauma: intense, sensory episodes preserved without linear sequence (van der Kolk, 2-14, pp. 139-51).

Émigré literature emerges as a literary representation of memory forged under social disruption, transition and following individual stress. By transforming youthful

recollections of exile into narrative, Banine and Movlud illustrate how personal memory a contribution to collective cultural remembrance.

Ultimately, **neurobiology** helps explain why harsh memories dominate émigré writing. Stress hormones during trauma sharpen some memory traces while disrupting coherence, leaving vivid fragments alongside gaps (Washington Coalition, 2-16, pp. 43-48). Adolescence, a critical period of brain plasticity, makes such experiences particularly enduring (McGaugh, 2000, pp. 72-80). Furthermore, individual memory interacts with collective memory: **cultural narratives shape how the past is encoded and recalled** (Zadbood et al. 2019, ppp.79-84).

Banine and Movlud both demonstrate this, their works blending individual reminiscence with shared Azerbaijani history of exile and displacement throughout 20th century (Zhukova, 2015, pp. 180-84).

Part 1. Literary Historiography and Refugee Memory and Chronicle Writing

1.1. Banine/ Kurban Banine/ Kurban Said, and Movlud/ Goltz parallels – From the Fall of Empire to the Collapse of the Soviet Union

Banine's *Caucasian Days* (1945), written in exile, offers a memoiristic lens on early twentieth-century Azerbaijan, reconstructing identity through memory and generational conflict. A parallel fictionalized account of the same historical period appears in Kurban Said's novel *Ali and Nino* (1937), which intertwines personal destinies with the political upheavals of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918–1920). Both works belong to literary historiography, shaping how Azerbaijani history is remembered and narrated in diasporic or semi-fictional forms.

Gunel Movlud's *The Camp* (2016) represents a later, internal émigré voice, depicting violence and displacement during the post-Soviet wars in the Caucasus, particularly the experiences of refugees in makeshift camps. Thomas Goltz's *Azerbaijan Diary: A Rogue Reporter's Adventures in an Oil-Rich, War-Torn, Post-Soviet Republic* (1998) complements this perspective by offering a journalistic chronicle of the early 1990s. This historical moment – captured vividly by **Thomas Goltz** in *Azerbaijan Diary* – was marked by the **"collapse of a state and collapse of everyday life"** (113). Both Movlud and Goltz document the process of *expulsion* and the beginning of refugee life, a type of migration largely internal to Azerbaijan, as hundreds of thousands were displaced within the country's borders (UNHCR).

Taken together, these texts illustrate a continuum: from Banine and Kurban Said's literary reconstructions of the early Republic to Movlud and Goltz's testimo-

nies of collapse at the end of the Soviet Union, showing how narrative forms – memoir, novel, reportage – interweave in documenting the Azerbaijani experience of exile and refuge.

Both writers testify to loss. Banine, from a wealthy oil family, *lost material privilege but gained access to freedom and intellectual life in Paris*. Movlud lost her "small homeland" – a Karabakh village – before losing the security of the Azerbaijani state itself. Banine's home education with literary works of German, French, Russian, and Azerbaijani authors reflects the style of school education priorities of her childhoodera, while Movlud's imagery of her later life in the camp reflects the fragmentation of a nation *after perestroika*. Yet both **center their narratives on defenselessness** – a shared echo of violence endured in youth, later reshaped into literature that reveals the fragility of human life under political collapse.

1.2. Banine: Post-Memory, Generational Conflict, and Cultural Shift

Banine recalls exile both as the loss of privilege and as the possibility of freedom. Banine's (born in 1905 as Umm-El-Banine Assadoulaeff, granddaughter of two Baku oil billionaires) memoirs demonstrate how memory reconstruction often reflects **conflict between generations,** as younger desires for autonomy clash with traditional expectations.

One generational clash emerges in the presence of fräulein **Anna, as the family's German governess**. The grandmother did not approve of Anna's influence, but tolerated her. Anna secretly took Banine and her three sisters to Mass in the German kirsch in Baku and introduced them at home to the Christmas tree (*yolka*). For the children, this "Christianized" holiday became a source of joy alongside their celebration of Novruz, the Zoroastrian-rooted spring festival embraced in the Muslim world, including Azerbaijan. Banine recalls with affection how both holidays coexisted in her household, where family members accepted parallel traditions despite their private reservations. The *household itself became a space of reconciliation, embodying the coexistence of change and continuity.*

Another episode within generations conflict context is related with **marriage cases in the family**. At fifteen, *Banine's marriage* to a Belgian-graduated Azerbaijani intellectual, but much older, became a part of her family's survival (his dad, as ADR minister was released from a prison by her husband's help) strategy, a choice that reveals both generational continuity and rupture (she left him after arriving to Paris). A parallel episode appears in *her father's marriage to Amina.* Though Amina did not fit the conservative family's rules – her Muslim identity was enough to satisfy the elders- she was divorced after six months of marriage, had grown up in a European

style, had lived in Paris, and came from a modest background with a simple (by opinion of the family members) engineer father. ***Banine's father acted as an intermediary between the old and the new:*** he did not give up and married the woman he wanted while still showing respect to his powerful mother, never openly confronting her authority.

The new generation also introduced **new (European) languages** - Russian, German, and English – into the household (replacing Arabic alphabet and language). This linguistic expansion marked another subtle form of cultural transformation, tolerated by the elders as part of the family's adaptation to modernity. Through these language priorities, one can trace how the great powers of the period were symbolically reconstructed in Baku. Among them, German cultural prestige was especially influential for the young elites. Banine's father, for instance, admired and imitated Kaiser Wilhelm, cultivating a large, carefully styled beard. After each trip to Europe, his beard appeared more refined, serving as a visible marker of cosmopolitan aspiration and European orientation. This fascination with German models extended beyond personal style: the Soviet Union's education system later adopted key features of German pedagogy, and even during the short-lived Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the German system of schooling was highly respected and emulated.

Among these conflicts, at the same time, the family elders accepted without protest **the presence of Tamara, a half-Armenian girl, within their home**. Here, no generational conflict appeared at the level of the adults: Tamara was welcomed. Yet, among the children, she became the target of secret "games" reenacting ethnic massacres, concealed from the elders' eyes. The divide between adult acceptance and childish cruelty reveals how the generational conflict was displaced: while the elders attempted reconciliation within the household, children internalized historical traumas and expressed them covertly.

Banine recalls how, as children, she and her cousins, together with a half-Armenian girl Tamara (her father Azerbaijani and her mother Armenian), invented a game that reenacted the Armenian–Azeri clashes. They played Armenian-Azerbaijani "war" inside Banine's own home, without the knowledge of the adults, including her grandmother and her German governess, Anna. What for the elders was a traumatic and silenced history resurfaced in the children's "play" some years later. The "play" with Tamara, their half-Armenian friend, ***serves as a kind of justification*** that such stereotypes could be reproduced even among children who had not lived through the violent events of 1905. That maternal death, occurring during the Armenian–Azeri clashes in Baku, functions as the founding trauma of Banine's memoir, setting the stage for a narrative shaped by **inherited memory of post-memory:**

Banine's novel-memoir also recounts ***a prehistory that sheds light on the workings of post-memory***. Banine was born in Baku in 1905. Her mother died in childbirth, an event she herself could not remember but which framed her life story from the beginning. Among the surrounding period of turmoil is also the Armenian–Azerbaijani clashes, which lies outside her own conscious memory, since she was a child, but depicted post-memory as a reason for the next stage of this conflict in 1918-1920: she left Baku in 10920 while she was 15, so, memories from the eyes and feeling of this age.

Baninee does not analyze its origins but depicts its results – how communities behaved under pressure, how coexistence unraveled. Violence appears as a social reaction to turmoil, a phenomenon that can be read through the prism of Stanley Milgram's experiment. Milgram observed that "ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process" (*Obedience to Authority* 6). Similarly, Baninee's portrayal of teenagers acting out aggression reflects the echo of broader political manipulations rather than innate hostility.

Furthermore, this striking detail illustrates how communal violence seeps into the *imagination of the next generation*, not through direct memory but through symbolic reenactment (as analogue of rituals, remembrance grief days, as to say, Ashura for Shia's[1] or Purim for Hebrew.[2] It is what Marianne Hirsch terms *postmemory*: "the way in which descendants 'remember' events they never lived, through transmitted fragments of family and cultural narrative" (*The Generation of Postmemory* 5).

1.3. Gunel Movlud: Memory Reconstruction, Cultural Shift and the Confined Space of the Camp

The autobiographic memoir of another Azerbaijani female - Gunel Movlud's novel *The Camp: A Little Girl from Karabakh* is based on real events within the context of the re-emerging Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict, one of the most painful epi-

[1] **Ashura**, observed on the 10th day of Muharram in the Islamic lunar calendar, is most sacred to Shi'a Muslims as the day of *Imam Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala in 680 CE*, a pivotal event that shaped Shi'a identity.

[2] The Jewish holiday **Purim** commemorates the rescue of the Jews from Haman's plot in the *Book of Esther*. It is marked by eating *hamantaschen* pastries, symbolically called "*Haman's ears,"* as a ritual remembrance of the defeated enemy. Its origin comes from the *Book of Esther*, describing events in the 5th century BCE under the Persian king Ahasuerus (commonly identified with Xerxes I). The "ears" symbolize the humiliation and defeat of Haman, the enemy of the Jews in the *Book of Esther*, by ritually consuming them, celebrants both mock and remember the downfall of the oppressor.

sodes in the chain of historical ruptures that ultimately contributed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Her narrative resonates with earlier upheavals, drawing implicit parallels to the years 1918-1920, when the collapse of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic marked another moment of disruption in twentieth-century Azerbaijani history.

The novel situates violence within a confined space: a refugee tent-city during the first Karabakh war. Unlike Baninee's cosmopolitan exile to Paris, Movlud's displacement is internal, within the borders of her own country. In this microcosm, no "other" identities exist – everyone is a refugee, defenseless and stripped of stability.

The **contrasting depictions of Ashura in** Banine and Movlud highlight not only regional differences but also the religious duality of cultural reception that characterizes Azerbaijan. In Banine's memoir of Baku, the day is portrayed as a communal spectacle marked by eating, gatherings, lamentations, and even acts of self-flagellation. By contrast, Gunel Movlud recalls that in her native region, which was predominantly Sunni rather than Shia, such rituals were unfamiliar. When refugees from her occupied by Armenaians district were resettled in a camp in the Shia town of Sabirabad, their failure to observe Ashura marked them as outsiders. This episode illustrates religious difference, reminding that Azerbaijan's population has always been shaped by both Shia and Sunni traditions within Islam.

Gunel Movlud's **observation of weddings** contrasts sharply with Banine's descriptions. In Days in the Caucasus, Banine recalls ceremonies marked by wealth, abundance, and the display of status, where fine clothing, jewelry, and plentiful food underscored the prosperity of Baku's elite of her era. Movlud, by contrast, situates her narrative in the refugee camps of the 1990s, where weddings reflected poverty and displacement. Almost all camp residents were forced to wear second-hand clothing, and the same applied to brides, whose dresses came from donated supplies. Food distributed as charity intended for refugees, was often of poor quality. This scarcity shaped also wedding feasts. Under such conditions, weddings were less occasions of joy than strategies for survival. Families sought to secure stability for their children – for example, marrying a daughter into a Sabirabad family that owned a home, since those in the camps faced little chance of acquiring housing in the foreseeable future. In Movlud's account, the wedding ritual is transformed from a symbol of familial joy into a negotiation for security amid deprivation.

In Gunel Movlud's recollections of the camp, conflict is not between generation like described by Banine, but **between two lifestyles -before and after refugee life**. The adults had grown up during the Soviet period, when **education** was both free at all levels, from primary school (obligatory) to university – and it was consi-

dered a matter of shame if one did not study. This respect for learning continued in exile: a school was established within the camp, and education became one of the few continuities with the past. In one family, two sisters transformed their *"kletka"*(the room-like space where refugees lived, so named by people who had once known real homes) into a library. When forced to flee, these sisters had carried with them their books, preserving the long-standing tradition in pre-refugee life times at the end of Soviet era, in which a family library was seen as a marker of education and prestige, more valued than luxury clothing. The sisters ran this improvised library on a volunteer basis, and it became a formative space for the young Gunel (author of the memoir), who borrowed books there during her primary school years.

Alongside this continuation of the educational tradition, a new practice arose: the construction of **a mosque** within the camp. Built by Iranian curators od the camp, it offered a warm, clean, and communal refuge, in stark contrast to the dirt and harshness of daily camp life. Later, when German administrators replaced the Iranians, the mosque was converted into an office. These two spaces – the volunteer-run library and the mosque – embodied the tension between continuity and change, sustaining cultural identity amid displacement.

In the post-Soviet period, religion increasingly became a dividing factor for new generations, reflecting the *Zeitgeist* of the time. Under the Soviet system, most people had grown up far removed from religious identity, since the principle of unity – constructed through socialist ideals such as the "brotherhood of all nations" – was intended to transcend confessional or ethnic difference. After the collapse of this unifying framework, however, religion resurfaced not only as a private belief but also as a marker of cultural distinction, often shaping how communities redefined themselves in the absence of Soviet ideology.

Gunel Movlud's *The Camp* portrays a parallel form of violence in the context of forced displacement

She describes a physically invalid girl, her legs nearly paralised, confined to a makeshift *"kletka"* in the refugee camp. The girl "could not run away or resist, and the same man entered her cell again and again" (Movlud 56????-*Düşərgə*. Roman-bioqrafiya, 2020). Movlud underscores the indifference of others: "no one helped her, everyone only tried to stay away" (Movlud 56- *Düşərgə*. Roman-bioqrafiya,2020).). She contrasts this with "Nigar's video-khana," where young women escorted from outside the camp were exploited nightly, blurring distinctions between coercion, helplessness, and complicity: they did not want to see the difference between the di-

sabled girl and the girls brought in for the men, even they knew it (Movlud 58 - *Düşərgə*. Roman-bioqrafiya, 2020).). Here, physical immobility and social stigma combine to mirror the neurobiological freeze: the girl is trapped both in her body and in a cultural system of taboo that silences victims and help from the others.

No confined space, but with violence tension, echoes with Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, where Hassan, a Hazara boy, becomes the defenseless victim of ethnic prejudice. Kh.Hosseini notes, "In the end, the world always wins. That's just the way of things" (Khaled Hosseiniş *The Kite Runner*, 252), capturing the **inevitability of violence against the vulnerable.**

In Banine's *Days in the Caucasus*, the victim is Tamara, a half-Armenian neighbor. Banine recalls – based on Tamara's later confession – how teenagers lured her into an abandoned garage, away from the eyes of the elders, and subjected her to humiliating "games." She was not directly raped, but was stripped halfnaked and mocked, the boys' "mocking laughter [making] the shame heavier than the act itself" (Banine 112). Tamara's vulnerability lay not in disability but in her ethnic identity, marked by the lingering tensions of the Armenian–Azerbaijani massacres. The abuse unfolds under this shadow of layered violence, where inherited and lived memories converge, shaping how children re-enacted ethnicized trauma as "games."

Banine herself carried the memory of this violence in two ways: first, through family trauma – her mother had died giving birth while the family fled the 1905 pogroms on the Apsheron peninsula without medical help; and second, through her own lived experience as the 1918–1920 wave of massacres and the collapse of the short-lived Azerbaijan Democratic Republic forced her, at fifteen, to escape Baku in 1920.

Together, these excerpts show how **helplessness precedes the physical act of violence.** Banine highlights the ironic normalization of ethnicized abuse under the shadow of massacres that spanned two generations, while Movlud documents the stark immobility of camp life.

In both narratives, the victims' bodies and voices are immobilized before the violence itself occurs. This convergence of literary testimony, postmemory, and neurobiology reinforces that in émigré literature, trauma often begins *before* the act of violence – when fear, shame, and generational memory already paralyze.

Part 2. Social and Neurobiological Prisms of Violence: Memoir, Experiment, and Postmemory in Azerbaijani Émigré Narratives

Violence, Situations, and Experiments

The dynamics inside the camp recall the **Stanford Prison Experiment**, where situational roles generated cruelty. As Philip Zimbardo reflects, "Situations exert powerful influences over human behavior, more so than we recognize or want to acknowledge" (*The Lucifer Effect,* p. 211). His Stanford experiment, like Marina Abramović's performance *Rhythm 0* (1974), was conducted in developed societies among educated individuals, not marginalized groups, yet both revealed how quickly latent aggression escalates when social boundaries dissolve. Abramović presented 72 objects – ranging from a rose, feather, and grapes to scissors, a scalpel, and even a loaded gun – and stood passive for six hours in a Naples gallery (Museum of Modern Art). The performance began with cautious gestures but escalated into violence: her clothes were cut, her skin pierced, and at one point a gun was placed in her hand with her finger on the trigger. Abramović later reflected: "If you leave it up to the audience, they can kill you" (qtd. in Westcott, 2010, p. 156).

These experiments resonate with literary explorations of institutional violence. In Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the psychiatric ward functions as a microcosm of authoritarian control. Patients are stripped of individuality, and Nurse Ratched's regime mirrors what Reicher and colleagues describe: "immersion in the group should reinforce the salience of the corresponding social identity at the expense of personal identity" (Reicher, Spears, and Postmes 164). Such examples demonstrate that cruelty emerges not only in marginal settings but also in central institutions of modern societies.

Taken together, Baninee's and Gunel Movlud's memoirs, Abramović's performance, Zimbardo's experiment, and Kesey's fiction underscore that cruelty and deindividuation are not only confined to marginal settings but emerge even within developed, intellectual contexts when social structures dissolve or exert authoritarian control.

Neurobiological Explanations of Violence and Trauma

Neurobiology provides another lens for understanding violence. When the amygdala detects danger, it floods the body with cortisol and adrenaline, preparing for fight-or-flight. But when escape is impossible, the nervous system may shift into a freeze or collapse state: "trauma is produced when the brain is unable to move the body" (Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs 2). As the WCSAP report explains, this state is "a last-ditch effort to conserve all energy because the danger is

unavoidable" (3). Survivors often describe feeling "paralyzed by terror" or a "helpless/ hopeless horror" (4). Importantly, this research helps explain the embodied helplessness narrated in women's memoirs of exile and violence.

Memoir, Post-memory, and Exile

Banine's *Days in the Caucasus* departs from the conventional nostalgia of émigré memoirs. Instead of idealizing her past, she employs irony, critiquing her family's wealth and behavior. Her narrative reconstructs memory as a generational conflict: between her grandmother's world, her German governess Anna (who replaced the mother Banine lost at birth), and the Europeanized aspirations of her own generation. The backdrop is the Armenian – Azeri clashes of 1918–1920, events Banine was not born as well her cousins, so not was an evident, but which shaped through transmitted memory as her birth fact itself as a family trauma. As Hirsch defines, post-memory is "the way in which descendants 'remember' events they never lived, through *transmitted fragments* of family and cultural narrative" (*The Generation of Postmemory* 5).

Banine recalls how she and her cousins played "war" with a half-Armenian friend in their home, reenacting clashes that had led to her mother's death. What for adults was a traumatic silence resurfaced in children's games. The presence of Tamara, the half-Armenian playmate, confirms how stereotypes were absorbed even by **those who had not lived through the violence.**

Gunel Movlud's *The Camp* continues this trajectory in a late-Soviet and post-Soviet context. Whereas Banine emigrated to Paris as part of a wealthy oil family displaced by the fall of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, Movlud became a refugee in Georgia and later Norway, writing not from privilege but from marginalization.

Her novel depicts violence in a confined refugee space where identity is reduced to bare survival, recalling Zimbardo's experiment and Abramović's *Rhythm 0*: defenselessness triggers both compassion and cruelty. Yet violence is inherent not only to marginalized groups but also to the elites of developed societies: Abramović's experiment unfolded in the cultural capital of Naples, at the heart of Europe, while Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment was staged at an elite American university. These cases underline that cruelty is not the exclusive domain of the socially excluded but a latent possibility within modern, educated, and privileged contexts as well.

Placed alongside literary and artistic testimonies – Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, where Hazara children become targets of cruelty, or Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* – the memoirs of Banine and Movlud highlight recurring dynamics of violence, defenselessness, and memory. Whether in camps, psychiatric wards, performance art, or fiction, the mechanism is the same: once social constraints collapse, latent aggression resurfaces, and the defenseless body becomes its target.

Part 4. Negotiating Memory: Pejorative, Traumatic, and Idealized Pasts Across Generations: Banine, Gunel Mövlud and Dilbar Akhundzade

1.1.The Romantic Symbol of the Rose in Günel Mövlud's *The Roses of My Motherland*

Banine presents her youth in as a **pejorative past.** Her memoir depicts her past with irony, bitterness, and even contempt. Through irony and sarcasm, she distances herself from her background, as if ridiculing her past were the only way to regain strength and assert independence. Here, autobiography becomes an act of resistance rather than idealization: the past is not preserved as sacred but dismantled as absurd.

Like Banine, but in a different transitional context, **Gunel Movlud** in *The Camp* (*Laqer*) narrates her traumatic past as a refugee within her own country, during the collapse of a previously stable order. On the fragments of a once-secure past emerged the terrifying life of displacement. Movlud depicts elderly people, women, and children in the refugee camp, each fated to endure suffering in different forms. These moments of violence, deprivation, and helplessness reveal how the human psyche reacts when stripped of protection.

In contrast, her short story *"Mənim vətənimin qızılgülləri"* ("The Roses of My Motherland") exemplifies the intersection of diaspora writing and gendered memory. The story follows the narrator's displacement after the First Karabakh War, foregrounding the tension between memory and present reality. Central to the narrative is the rose, a symbol of her childhood garden in Mehdili, Jebrail district (later occupied by Armenians). Roses – once used domestically for tea and medicine—become a mnemonic bridge linking the narrator to a lost homeland.

In refugee camp life, roses reappear in fragmented form, sold for jam-making, symbolizing continuity amid deprivation. Later in Norway, during her after-refugee normal life, dried petals smuggled by her mother allow the narrator to relive the sensory memory of her garden: "I feel my heart calm down… the petals from the bushes that I planted with my own hands in the yard I will never see" (Mövlud). The rose thus functions as a conduit of memory and belonging across time and space, aligning with her native land's rituals and remembrance in a new homeland in Norway.

Romantic idealization of the recent past with nostalgic notes can be trace in another **post-memory m but from non-émigré Azerbaijani female author Dilbar Akhundzade, who is in-between Banine and Movlud by the historical time of the same country.** Just as Dilbar Akhundzade reframed the violence of the Red Terror

through romantic idealization of Müşfiq, Mövlud transforms exile into a narrative of roses, where intimacy and everyday care preserve cultural identity.

4.2. Post-memory of non-émigré female author: Dilbar Akhundzade between Banine and Gunel Movlud

Importantly, this text is not émigré literature but rather an autobiographical memoir of a woman writing within the Soviet context. Akhundzade recounts her life with poet Mikayıl Müşfiq (1908-1938), who was repressed and executed during the Stalinist "Great Terror" of 1937-1938. She herself became a victim by association, labeled the wife of a *"vraq naroda"* ("enemy of the people"). She largely avoids describing her personal suffering. Instead, she focuses on portraying Müşfiq as a gifted, generous, and noble author, thereby transforming her memoir into a cultural and personal act of remembrance. Her memoir can be read as an attempt to safeguard the memory of her husband, and to paint a portrait of their once-happy – or, from a cultural perspective, 'idealistic' shared life. Reading Akhundzade's account, one senses her constant effort to align lived reality with what *should have been.* Throughout her narrative, she portrayed her marriage as exemplary through the lens of her husband's virtues. In this process, her own identity dissolves either into the collective memory of Soviet society or into the figure of her husband. Such a portrayal demonstrates how autobiographical memory can operate as an act of idealization, turning biography into a cultural narrative of perfection.

This makes the memoir *Müşfiqli günlərim* distinct from émigré memoirs: it is not literature of exile, but a female autobiographical testimony written after the period of repression, in the same country, yet with social values different from those of the Red Terror. By the time Dilbar Akhundzade composed her account, Müşfiq had already been officially rehabilitated in 1956 during Khrushchev's "Thaw," as were many other writers who had suffered during the Stalinist purges. The memoir, first published in Baku in 1968, reflects this new cultural climate, allowing Akhundzade to frame his life within a narrative of admiration and romantic remembrance.

Violence in the mirror of Milgram experiment

From another prism, **the violence of the Red Terror** can also be read **in parallel with the mechanisms of Nazi repression during World War II**, both of which demonstrate how ordinary individuals, under authoritarian command structures, could become agents of cruelty. In this sense, the dynamic resembles the findings of Stanley Milgram's obedience experiment, which showed how people, when instructed by an authority, often override their moral resistance and participate in acts of

harm. Neurobiological explanations of stress and obedience help us see how systemic violence imprints itself not only on its direct victims but also on the cultural memory preserved in autobiographical texts.

The Bolshevik project of *raskulachivaniye* (раскулачивание) – the forced dispossession of so-called "kulaks" (qolçomaq) – was legitimized in the early Soviet period as an act of justice: the expropriation of wealth from allegedly parasitic elites to empower the poor. Soviet propaganda explicitly cast the kulak as a villainous exploiter, thereby mobilizing a cultural archetype reminiscent of Robin Hood's or Kyor-oglu's redistributionist myth, though in this case enacted by the state rather than a folkloric outlaw (Viola, 2007, p. 23). In the ideological narrative of the 1920s and 1930s, kulak liquidation became a heroic struggle for collectivist justice.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, this process **has been reinterpreted in the opposite moral register** – as an act of violence and injustice inherent to bolshevism, a state-sanctioned robbery that destroyed individual enterprise, philanthropy, and cultural foundations (Figes, 1997, p. 151). The fate of Hacı Zeynalabdin Tağıyev (1838-1924), the Azerbaijani oil magnate and philanthropist, epitomizes this temporal dichotomy. During Soviet rule, his expropriation was justified under the rhetoric of "class justice" and erasure of bourgeois symbols (Swietochowski, 1995, p. 172). In post-Soviet Azerbaijan, however, Tağıyev has been revalorized as a national benefactor,[1] cultural hero, and symbol of civic philanthropy (Hasanova, 2019, p. 64). Thus, the very same *raskulachivaniye* once celebrated as "good" is now condemned as "bad."

This inversion reflects not only the collapse of Soviet ideology but also the reconfiguration of moral categories across time: what is praised as redistributive justice in one era becomes condemned as violent dispossession in another. The Bolsheviks' "mythic" recasting of redistribution echoed the heroics of Robin Hood or Köroğlu, but in the post-Soviet period, national narratives instead reclaim entrepreneurial and philanthropic figures like Tağıyev as true "heroes." This tension demonstrates how heroic tropes – whether of dispossession or protection—are mobilized differently depending on historical context, political ideology, and claims to "historical lands" or ancestral legitimacy.

[1] The films about Hacı Zeynalabdin Taghiyev are a multi-part series, including "Taghiyev: Oil" (2024) and "Taghiyev: Tsar" (2025). Produced by the Baku Media Center with support from the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, these films commemorate the 100th anniversary of Taghiyev's passing and showcase his significant contributions to Azerbaijan's industrial development, philanthropy, and establishment of the first girls' school in the East. **Tağıyev film | 2-ci hissə:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2DO2juNRMo

The Soviet film *Берегись автомобиля* (*Beware of the Car*, 1966, dir. Eldar Ryazanov, starring Innokentiy Smoktunovsky) is a brilliant **literary-cinematic representation** of the *Robin Hood/Köroğlu* archetype in the Soviet cultural imagination.

The heroic prism of redistribution – taking from the rich and giving to the poor – was not only a tool of Soviet political rhetoric but also became a motif in Soviet cultural production. A telling example is Eldar Ryazanov's film *Beregis avtomobilya* (*Beware of the Car*, 1966), starring Innokentiy Smoktunovsky as Yuri Detochkin, a modest insurance agent and amateur actor who secretly steals cars from corrupt officials and profiteers, only to donate the proceeds to orphanages.

Detochkin is explicitly portrayed as a Soviet Robin Hood: he quotes Hamlet, hesitates morally, and remains a tragicomic figure who embodies both justice and criminality. As one critic put it, *"Ryazanov's hero is neither a villain nor a saint; he is the Soviet conscience dramatized in a stolen car"* (Rudnev 74). In this way, the film served as a cultural attempt to grapple with the ambivalence of redistribution: when is theft moral, and when is it simply crime?

This cinematic allegory mirrors the ideological dichotomy of *raskulachivaniye*: in the Soviet 1930s, dispossession of the kulaks was framed as legitimate "Robin Hood justice." By the 1960s, however, the same trope was already treated ironically, as a comic paradox. Detochkin's thefts embody what Köroğlu had once sung – *"I shall take from the tyrant and give to the poor"* – but in a late-Soviet key that revealed discomfort with absolute categories of "justice" and "crime."

Placed beside the revalorization of Hacı Zeynalabdin Tağıyev after 1991, *Beregis avtomobilya* demonstrates how cultural products mediate the tension between heroic myth and historical reality. Detochkin, like Tağıyev, becomes a vessel for collective negotiation of morality: should justice mean redistribution, or should it mean protection of individual achievement? The answer changes with time.

Postscript: Bolshevism and Post-Bolshevism between Zeitgeist, or Violence Beyond Ideology: A Zeitgeist Perspective

Bolshevism and post-Bolshevism, as other ideological and political processes, shaped by different zeitgeists, define one of the most contradictory periods of the twentieth century. If we move beyond the contemporary tendency to present communism, by extension the USSR as the primary bearer of historical guilt, and instead examine it in parallel with other political formations of the same historical moment, a more complex picture as emerges.

In the same period, Germany witnessed the rise of fascism, a regime grounded in totalitarian aesthetics and racial ideology, while in the Soviet context mass repression was carried out within the ideological framework of communism. This simultaneity raises a fundamental question: at what point do violence, total control, and the annihilation of the individual become less the consequence of a specific ideology and more an expression of *the spirit of the time itself - that is, the zeitgeist*? Although fascism and Soviet communism articulated through formally different ideological languages, both emerged from a broader crisis of modernity and relied on similar mechanisms of war, neurobiology of fear, and the normalization of violence.

This interpretive framework aligns with zeitgeist theory as articulated by Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, and Michel Foucault, for whom violence is not an ideological anomaly but **a historically contingent mode of power** embedded in the administrative, technological, and epistemic structures of a given epoch rather than in any single doctrine (Benjamin; Arendt; Foucault). From this perspective, the *post-Bolshevik period* does not signal the disappearance of ideological violence but rather its semantic transformation: ideological terminology has shifted, while the structural logic of conflict persists. The contemporary era, from the 2020s onward, may thus be interpreted as a condition of 'permanent war,' in which Bolshevism and communism no longer function primarily as coherent belief systems but as retrospectively moralized or at times unmoralized historical labels, depending on the temporal perspective. Within this framework, one can also examine the interpretation between violence and heroism, as in cases of taking from the rich and giving to the poor, both in historical events and their narrative representations.

This becomes evident when violence in the middle of twentieth century is examined across parallel contexts: fascism's expansion across Europe culminating in *World* War II; systemic racial violence and the denial of civil rights in the United States; and earlier colonial violence perpetrated by France in Algeria, including mass killings during the Algerian War and the long-term preservation and exhibition of severed heads of killed Algerian resistance leaders in French museum collections[1].

[1] The *Musée de l'Homme* preserved the severed heads of Algerian resistance leaders as anthropological objects. Their display exemplifies how French colonial violence was epistemologically legitimized in public memory, transforming acts of extreme brutality into objects of scientific and cultural authority (Shepard; Sinha). In 2011 Algerian historian Ali Farid Belkadi rediscovered large numbers of Algerian skulls of resistance fighters taken to France during the nineteenth-century colonial conquest and stored as anthropological specimens, many of which were repatriated to Algeria in 2020 after years of advocacy (*France Returns Remains of Algerian*

These cases demonstrate that violence cannot be reduced to a single ideological cause; rather, it emerges as a recurring political technology employed across divergent systems. Consequently, the present should not be understood merely as a post-ideological phase, but as a new zeitgeist in which violence continues to be reproduced under altered names, narratives, and justifications.

Conclusion

This paper has examined **explores Azerbaijani émigré and refugee literature through the prism of memory, violence, and trauma.** I focus on two women writers separated by nearly a century, and embrace two historical eras – **beginning and the end of Soviet Union: Banine** (1905-1992), who left Baku after 1920 during collapsing of Azerbaijani Democratic Republic, represents a ***pre-Bolshevik*** world lost to Sovietization and remembered from exile in Paris, and Gunel Movlud (b. 1980), displaced from Jabrayil during the First Karabakh war (1988-1994), writes from a *post-Soviet* condition marked not by cosmopolitan exile but by prolonged refugee marginalization. Alongside them, I also briefly consider a third voice – Dilbar Akhundzade (1914), whose memoir of her life with the repressed poet Mikayıl Müşfiq reflects a different cultural context, not of exile but of internal survival under Soviet repression (a peak of violence of the USSR).

Together, these voices reveal a spectrum of Azerbaijani women's autobiographical memory across the Soviet century – before, during, and after Bolshevism.

Banine portrayed a homeland lost to Sovietization; Movlud, displaced after the Soviet collapse, chronicled refugee life in own country. Read together with Zimbardo, Milgram, Abramović; Khalid Housseini, their works reveal the ***social, neurobiological, and cultural mechanisms of violence.*** Memoir and fiction thus serve not only as records of trauma but also as lessons: they warn against repeating cycles of cruelty and highlight how memory – whether lived or post-memorial – shapes the transmission of violence and resilience across generations.

Together, their works illustrate how trauma – whether generational (postmemory) or immediate (neurobiological freeze) – shapes narrative forms.

Gunel Movlud's *The Camp* continues this trajectory in a late-Soviet and post-Soviet context. Whereas Banine emigrated to Paris as part of a wealthy oil family displaced by the fall of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, Movlud became a refugee

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Anti-Colonial Fighters." Al Jazeera, 3 July 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/ 2020/ 7/3/france-returns-remains-of-algerian-anti-colonial-fighters.)

in Georgia and later Norway, writing not from privilege but from marginalization. Her novel depicts violence in a confined refugee space where identity is reduced to bare survival, recalling Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment and Abramović's *Rhythm 0*: defenselessness triggers both compassion and cruelty. Yet violence is inherent not only to marginalized groups but also to the elites of developed societies: Abramović's experiment unfolded in the cultural capital of Naples, at the heart of Europe, while Zimbardo's experiment was staged at an elite American university. These cases underline that cruelty is not the exclusive domain of the socially excluded but a latent possibility within modern, educated, and privileged contexts.

Expanding this line of thought, the rare example of Norway's humane prison system – where violence is nearly absent – invites us to question whether structures of justice, rather than inherent "national character," determine human behavior in captivity. In other words, Milgram's insight into obedience to authority can be extended: under different institutional and cultural conditions, the potential for violence may be minimized, though never entirely erased.

What is at stake today is not only identifying who is "good" or "bad," but understanding how societies justify territorial expansion, war, and killing. A "before and after" approach asks not simply what happened but why it happened, which reasons were invoked, and what consequences followed. This prism shifts our attention from the bare facts of war or genocide to the cultural, ideological, and institutional frameworks that allowed such acts to occur in the first place.

Finally, it is worth remembering that these questions are not new. Already in antiquity, Euripides' *Lysistrata* (411 BCE) staged a dialogue on the futility of war, showing women's collective resistance against male-driven violence and territorial ambition. To forget such early reflections is to risk repeating cycles of destruction without learning from humanity's own cultural archive.

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