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WAYS OF GOING HOME IN THE DARKNESS OF DENIAL:
A MONOGRAPHIC STUDY ON ZAVEN BIBERYAN

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Ways of Going Home in the Darkness of Denial:

A Monographic Study on Zaven Biberyan

İnkâr Karanlığında Eve Dönüşün Yolları:

Zaven Biberyan Üzerine Monografik Bir Çalışma

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- 1) Denialist Habitus
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is designed as a monographic study on the literature of Armenian writer Zaven Biberyan, one of Turkey's greatest writers, yet he is neglected for a very long time. The literary output of the writer is read and examined in the light of both his personal life and the collective memory of Armenians in Turkey. While focusing on what kind of damage the collective traumas leave on individuals, it is also examined how these traumas are represented in the novels.

The study consists of three main parts. In all three chapters, the author's novels (*The Lonely Ones*, *Penniless Lovers* and *Sunset of the Ants*) and life are examined from different perspectives. In the first chapter, a detailed biography of Biberyan is presented based on his autobiography (*Dawn of the Prisoners*), the life of the author and the history of the country will be discussed together, and the parallels between the novel characters and the author's own life will be revealed. The second part is focused on the places in the novels, it is analyzed how the city of Istanbul and the houses where the characters live in are represented and how the characters establish relations with these places. In the last chapter, four main emotions common in Biberyan's novels, namely repulsion, hatred, anxiety and fear, will be examined on a philosophical and sociological basis, and how these emotions manifest in the characters will be discussed.

Keywords: Denialist Habitus, Catastrophe, Deterritorialization, Philosophy of Emotions, Western Armenian Literature

ÖZET

Bu tez, uzun süre görmezden gelinen, Türkiye'nin en güçlü kalemlerinden biri olan Ermeni yazar Zaven Biberyan'ın edebiyatı üzerine monografik bir çalışma olarak tasarlanmıştır. Yazarın eserleri, hem kişisel hayatı hem de Türkiye'deki Ermenilerin kolektif belleğiyle birlikte okunup mercek altına alınmaktadır. Kolektif travmalarının bireylerde ne gibi tahribat bıraktığına odaklanılırken, bir yandan da bu travmaların romanlarda nasıl temsil edildiği incelenmektedir.

Çalışma üç ana bölümden oluşmaktadır. Üç bölümde de yazarın romanları (*Yalnızlar*, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar* ve *Karıncaların Günbatımı*) ve hayatı, farklı açılardan mercek altına alınmaktadır. İlk bölümde Biberyan'ın otobiyografisi temel alınarak bir biyografisi çıkarılacak, yazarın hayatı ve ülkenin tarihi birlikte ele alınacak ve de yazarın romanları ve karakteriyle kendi hayatı arasındaki paralellikler ortaya konulacaktır. İkinci bölümde, romanlardaki mekanlara odaklanılacak, bu romanlarda İstanbul şehrinin ve karakterlerin yaşadıkları evlerin nasıl temsil edildiğine, karakterlerin bu mekanlarla nasıl ilişkiler kurduklarına bakılacaktır. Son bölümdeyse yazarın romanlarında ortak olan dört ana duygudan tiksinti, nefret, endişe ve korku, felsefi ve sosyolojik temelde incelenecek, bu duyguların karakterlerde nasıl tezahür ettiğine odaklanılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnkâr Habitusu, Felaket, Yersiz Yurtsuzlaşma, Duyguların Felsefesi, Batı Ermeni Edebiyatı

*To my dearest K. Oğuz Canbek, who had contributed to every single line of this
thesis,*

And to my beloved mother, who has always supported me...



INTRODUCTION

“There are sores in life which slowly erode the mind in solitude like a kind of canker”.¹ After I finished my thesis on Zaven Biberyan and came back to the beginning of the study to write an introduction, I was thinking about what the first sentence should be, and then this incipit, this one of the most striking, dark and famous opening sentences in the history of literature suddenly came to my mind. Then another phrase crossed my mind, which refers to the 1915 Armenian genocide: “Some wounds do not heal in time”. So, I had two wounds/sores on my mind, but were these wounds the same? On one hand, there is an existential crisis, an expression of an unfillable void in which one finds oneself, an alienation and lack of belonging to other people. And on the other hand, there is a very concrete wound, a wound inflicted on lives marked by the Catastrophe. When we talk about Biberyan’s literature, we are actually talking about some kind of wound. The characters in all of his three novels have incurable wounds, wounds that cause them unendurable and intolerable pain. Later, I realized that these two sentences that came to my mind were not a coincidence, because throughout my thesis, I had actually examined this wound in Biberyan’s literature, trying to understand what kind of wound it was.

The main reason for this wound was “the impossibility of not being an Armenian” as Baret, the old and exhausted main character of Biberyan’s magnum opus *Sunset of the Ants* puts it. In other words, the reason of this wound was to live in a country where one’s nation was subjected to genocide. It was to live in fear at every moment. Therefore, in my thesis, I have involuntarily come across this Catastrophe with a capital C. Biberyan’s literature cannot be separated from this Catastrophe, from the collective memory of the Armenian community and the traumas they had experienced. I have used Talin Suciyan’s seminal book *Armenians in Modern Turkey* as a theoretical framework to understand the historical, cultural and political

¹ Sadeq Hedayat, *The Blind Owl and Other Stories*, translated by D.P. Costello and Deborah Miller Mostaghel (Richmond: Alma), p.3.

background of the novels. In this book, Suciyan explains the conditions of the Armenian community that remained in Turkey after 1915. What Suciyan shows is this: Although the Ottoman Empire collapsed and the Turkish Republic established, the minority policies did not change. Therefore, nothing changed for the Armenians.

I would like to start my study by making a literature review on this one of the most important, interesting and politic literary figures of modern Armenian literature. As it is known, he was neglected for a long time in Turkish intellectual milieus. In addition to his three masterfully written novels, he also wrote several short stories which are collected under the title of *Dzovi* [The Sea], poems, and a great number of newspaper articles about a broad range of topics.

Despite all this productive and prolific presence in both political and literary fields, as mentioned earlier, he was ignored for a very long time. The underlying reasons of this fact will be discussed in the upcoming chapters, but the interest and attention that his works attract has become considerable during the recent years. Therefore, it is possible to claim that a whole new field of academic level literature about Zaven Biberyan is about to sprout.

The very first studies on Biberyan are the ones that analyse the image of Turk in his novels. His first novel, *Lıgırdadzı* [The Slut/ The Lonely Ones] received considerably more attention than his other works since this novel is translated (or in a way, re-written) to Turkish by Biberyan himself. This is one of the reasons why this novel had especially found a place among studies that focus on the Armenian writers who write in Turkish. According to my research, Yıldız Deveci's thesis which was published in 2006 is the oldest study. Here she argues, just like the title indicates, the "Turkish image in the novel of Zaven Biberyan titled 'Yalnızlar' and Barbara Frischmuth entitled 'Pembe ve Avrupalılar'"². However, while the first two chapters of the thesis are focused on the comparative literature's methodological approaches and the image of Turks in the East and the West, there is no analyses or

² Yıldız Deveci, *Turkish image in the novel of Zaven Biberyan entitled Yalnızlar and Barbara Frischmuth en Titled Pembe ve Avrupalılar*. 2006. Yıldız University, MA thesis.

comments about Biberyan in the better part of the study. Finally in the third part, Deveci summarizes the lives of the two authors and she compares the two novels' characteristics in terms of content and style. She indicates that *Yalnızlar* can be regarded as a naturalist novel since Biberyan writes about the individuals who are trying to cope with the society they live in, and also he makes long descriptions of places, and lastly, pessimism, which is one of the most important characteristics of the naturalism and which is also present in Biberyan's novels. Deveci then summarizes the plot of the novel and she examines the main characters and themes as well as the stylistic techniques. After a sub-chapter dedicated to the other novel, she comes back to Biberyan again and analyses the "otherness" and the image of Turk in *The Lonely Ones*. Deveci claims that the Turks have rather negative roles in the novel in comparative to the Armenians. She also mentions that Biberyan talks about the Wealth Tax which has a major role in all of his novels as if it was applied only to the non-Muslims; according to Deveci, "Wealth-Tax was a one-time tax applied to all wealthy people". This claim could be refuted by checking the seminal work of Ayhan Aktar, *The Wealth Tax and the Turkification*, published in 2000.³ As Ayhan Aktar demonstrates very rigorously in this book, the main target of this tax was the non-Muslims and transform the capital from the minorities to the Muslims.

However, this tendency to regard the Armenian writers' representation of the Turkish characters as hostile was actually very common in the academic studies focused on Armenian literature. Among these studies, Murat Yusuf Önem's thesis, titled "The Images of the Turks and Armenians in the Armenian Writers Who Writes in Turkish", may concern us here because he also dedicates a chapter to Biberyan and *The Lonely Ones*.⁴ Önem claims in his study that the image of Armenians is much more positive than Turks by summarizing the plot and quoting passages from the book. Unfortunately, these two theses on Biberyan lack both

³ Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve Türkleştirme Politikaları* (Istanbul: Aras, 2021).

⁴ Murat Yusuf Önem, "Image of Turk and Armenian in Armenian authors writing in Turkish (Zaven Biberyan, Kirkor Ceyhan, Agop Arslanyan, Migirdiç Margosyan, Markar Esayan". 2009. Gaziozmanpaşa University, MA thesis.

literary viewpoint and academical depth which is much needed when analysing an author like Biberyan whose texts have multiple layers, all the characters differ from one and another; far from being a “type”, they reveal not only many sides of human psychology, they also work as the representations of the collective memory. That being the case, studies focused on the “images” of Turks or Armenians fail to exhibit and analyse the genuineness and the originality of Biberyan’s works. Nevertheless, these two theses are written in a relatively early time when Biberyan was not known in the Turkish literature as he is now and they have an important role in the field.

According to YÖK’s website, there are four thesis (among which I mentioned the two in the previous paragraphs) on Biberyan’s literature; however only one of them is a monographic study on Biberyan: “Life On The Sky Road: Reading Zaven Biberyan On The Horizon Of The Catastrophe” by Artun Gebenlioğlu.⁵ The study of Artun Gebenlioğlu can be considered as a precursor in the field, since it provides not only a lot of information about the writer’s life but it also criticizes and adds a new wrinkle to Biberyan’s literature by historicizing his writings in Turkey’s social conditions and by trying to understand Biberyan’s place in this political atmosphere. Gebenlioğlu composes his thesis in three chapters, in the first chapter titled “A Life Dedicated to Struggle”, he narrates Biberyan’s life in details by the means of the manuscripts from his auto-biography of the author which was then unpublished. In addition to this auto-biography, he also uses the information he obtained from Biberyan’s daughter. Since this auto-biography is the only source about Biberyan’s life and since it was unpublished and remained unknown for the public back then, especially this first chapter of the thesis had a crucial role in Biberyan’s literature. Here, Gebenlioğlu often superimposes the life story of Biberyan with the collective memory of the post-genocidal Armenian people. To give an example to this statement, I can mention the part where he talks about Biberyan’s serious illness while he was labouring in Gümüşhane:

⁵ Artun Gebenlioğlu, *Life On The Sky Road: Reading Zaven Biberyan On The Horizon Of The Catastrophe*. 2019. Bilgi University, MA thesis.

The specter of mass killings revolve around the minds of the elderly. Although it had been twenty-five years since the Catastrophe, the sequence had just begun. The signals coming from the depth of collective memory in such moments of insecurity and danger were taking up a huge space in the literary works of Zaven Biberyan.⁶

I specifically wanted to quote this passage because I also intend to do the same thing in this study as well: I will show the intersection of the personal and collective memory in Biberyan's literature. However, I think that for this project of memory, having only the auto-biography as a source as in Gebenlioğlu's case, seems insufficient, and this can also be regarded as a weakness of the study, because not only the auto-biography, but the novels and the stories even provide us a huge opportunity to draw a correspondence between on the one hand the life and the fiction, and on the other, between the individual and collective memory. That's why I hope I will be able to fill this gap in the literature by investigating Biberyan's literature through the lens of collective memory and cultural trauma and the effects of these concepts on the development of personal and cultural identity. As in each novel, we can see that the characters wait for a disaster, that the collective memory of the Armenian population is traumatised, and these traumas are passing on from generation to generation by multiplying.

In the last title of the first chapter called "The 'Knight' of Armenian Press", Gebenlioğlu depicts a portrait of Biberyan as an Armenian opinion leader and as both a journalist and politician who is devoted to his cause. This chapter is of significant importance for two reasons. First, it shows Biberyan in a different angle, it shows that apart from being merely a man of letters, he is also a successful journalist who had no reservations in claiming the oppressed one's, especially the Armenian community's rights by criticizing and opposing not only the government and its discriminatory policies, but also the provocative columnists such as Murat Sertoğlu or Peyami Safa. As a matter of fact, this opposition was one of the main reasons why he had to go on to exile to Beirut, since he wrote his very famous article in 5 January 1946 titled "Al Gı Pawhe" ["Enough is Enough"] after which

⁶ *ibid*, p. 24.

he was sentenced to imprisonment. The second reason of the importance of this chapter is that other Armenian journalist and writers occupy a considerable place. Gebenlioğlu speaks of the members of *Nor Or* Generation who had to exile to different countries in both Europe and Middle East such as Avedis Aliksanyan, Jak Ihmalyan and Hayk Acikgoz. We also have the opportunity to read at least the summaries of some of Biberyan's famous articles he wrote in Aisor. Gebenlioğlu uses these articles and Biberyan's letters to draw the panorama of the writer's life after the first twenty five years of his life which is covered in his unpublished memoir. He also uses the interview he made with Tilda Mangasar (Biberyan's daughter) as a main source, this interview also makes a huge contribution to the portrait of Biberyan as a father. "It was hard to live with [him]" she would say to Gebenlioğlu, and it is obvious that to reach such a conclusion is quite impossible by reading the author's novels. Here, one can bring up the question of the difference between the author and the text and ask oneself whether the writer's private life is relevant with his literature or not. To give an answer to this highly problematic and much debated issue is way outside the scope of my study, however I find it necessary to underline the fact that when it comes to a writer like Biberyan, all the external factors matter, and it is quite impossible to read Biberyan without making references to the Catastrophe, or by ignoring the fact that the trauma show itself in every aspect of daily social life. In the same way, Biberyan's daughter's words become important in such studies, the claim that he was hard to live with brings to mind the famous "bitter taste" that Biberyan says he always had. As a matter of fact, this bitterness reveals itself also in Baret, towards the end of the novel (*The Sunset of Ants*), he becomes more and more like Biberyan. In short, as Gebenlioğlu did and as I plan to do, Biberyan's literature certainly demands a biographical reading by drawing analogies between his life's turning points and his literature. Gebenlioğlu draws attention to the neglect of the literature produced by Armenian language faces with. He claims afterwards that it "loses its feature of being a literary language" and he also mentions that this is one of the reasons why he had read the entire corpus from the Armenian original.

In the second chapter he examines Biberyan's literary output from a realist perspective and analyses the three novels and the story book one by one in chronological order. For *Slut*, he examines the way how Biberyan depicts the Armenian perception on the minds of the Turks and vice-versa and underlines the rarity of this book by having a young woman as a main character. He then introduces all the characters in the novel and makes some obvious observations such as the insecurity of the Armenian community or the impacts of social and economical differences and explains the political/historical background. He then passes to *The Sea*, which is the collection of the author's stories, published in 1961. The most important and remarkable observation he made in this part is the comment that the stories' atmosphere and general structure are way more hopeful and heart-warming than the novels. According to Gebenlioğlu, "we can safely assume that these stories were the products of a special period in his literary career".⁷ He examines three stories from the book: "Those Who Returned", "The Sea" and "It Turns Out He Was Not a Maverick". This book of stories deserves attention, because they occupy a very important place in Biberyan's literature, not only because they have a quite different mood in comparison with the "suffocating" atmosphere of the novels, but also they provide us a panorama of Anatolia which is actually a rarity of his corpus. This is the first and the last time we look into the province (*taşra*) from Biberyan's eyes. Then he passes to the *Penniless Lovers* and focuses on the theme of *röntgenci* (voyeur), and he underlines the fact that "the whole city becomes a trap" (p.52). He closes this sub-chapter with the statement that this novel paves the way for his masterpiece, *The Sunset of Ants*. In this last part, he touches upon the fact that Biberyan does not hesitate to picture Armenians as they are, without victimizing nor purifying them. He underlines the opposition (and the inevitable resemblance) between Dırtad and Suren and in general, he reads this novel as a representation of a "habitus woven by denial".

In the last chapter, Gebenlioğlu examines both Biberyan's life and literature "on the horizon of the catastrophe", and he uses a psychoanalytic approach to explain "the

⁷ *ibid*, p.51.

bitter taste” that we mentioned above. He talks about the impossibility to bear witness to the catastrophe, the devastation that the Armenian community had to face with, the city as a space of recollection, and finally the denialist habitus that the novel characters and also Biberyan himself had to live in. I think this chapter is the most interesting and eye-opening part of the study since here Gebenlioğlu makes the connection between the trauma and the literature and discusses this relation in psychoanalytical terms and presents us a new perspective by reading author’s life, the political/social atmosphere he lived in and his literary output as if we are looking through a kaleidoscope. To conclude, Gebenlioğlu’s monographic study offers us an extensive reading of Biberyan and consolidates the place he occupies as an intellectual Armenian writer in Turkish literary milieu. This study could be regarded as an homage to an author neglected for a very long time.

One of the most obvious reasons of this neglect and oblivion consists in the language barrier: even though he had a brilliant mastery of French which he learned in Saint-Joseph High School, Biberyan deliberately chose to write in Armenian, in a language which he is not comfortable at first. The story of the publishing process of Biberyan’s novels are quite interesting and it also gives us hints about the silence he encounters while also explaining the constant insecurity of the Armenian community in post-genocidal Turkey. In this respect, the article published in the February of 2019 written by the editor-in-chief of Aras Publishing Rober Koptaş, titled “Make Room for Biberyan Please” is important, he explains the rather complicated adventure of the publishing of Biberyan’s novels.⁸ This article can be considered as the first popular article about Biberyan, although it is focused on *The Sunset of the Ants*, it covers more or less the entirety of his novels. One of the features which makes this article particular is the information it gives about the publication process of the novels. In the Turkish translation of the novel, some parts are removed, or rather censored. Koptaş, as an Istanbul Armenian, says he was also always aware of “what could be said and how it could be said”. After they

⁸ Rober Koptaş, “Biberyan’a Bir Yer Lütfen!”, 21 February 2019. Available at <https://www.t24.com.tr/k24/yazi/karincalarin-gunbatimi,2170> (accessed 16 June 2022).

recognized these differences between the original and the translation, they reintegrate these removed parts. Koptaş explains this “obliviousness” as lapsus, as a self-defence mechanism which is very familiar to Istanbul Armenians. This article is very important in order to understand this silence and denial that the author and his works experience. Koptaş also claims that Biberyan should have a place in both Turkish and “world” literature.

Biberyan was also demanding a room for himself, although he wanted to write in Armenian since he is Armenian, he then regretted it, as he writes to his friend Hrant Paluyan in his letter dated 1962.⁹ This effort to find himself a place among Turkish writers and intellectuals can be found in his translation of his first novel *The Lonely Ones*. He wanted to translate, or to rewrite this novel in Turkish; he also wanted to make a movie out of it. On this matter, Vivet Kanetti Uluç’s article titled “*Yalnızlar ve Azınlık Edebiyatı*” [“*Yalnızlar* and Literature of the Minority”] is important.¹⁰ In this article Uluç makes a connection between Deleuze’s and Guattari’s notion called “minor literature” and Biberyan’s translation of *The Lonely Ones* and she deplores the ignorance in Turkish intellectual milieus.

If the number of studies about the work of Biberyan is growing more and more each year, and if one can say finally that Biberyan had his rightful place in literature, we have another very important name to be thankful to: Hervé Georgelin. He is not only the translator of *Lgirdadzı* (from Armenian to French) under the name of *La Trainée*, but also he collected and edited writer’s autobiography under the title *Car vivre, c’était se batter et faire l’amour*. In his article written in 2016, he recounts how he came across with Biberyan’s works for the first time.¹¹ Here he underlines how Biberyan uses Armenian language skilfully, and how international and global his works are. He compares very briefly works and life of Orhan Kemal with Biberyan’s and confesses that he believe that the Armenians need more writers like

⁹ Rober Koptaş, “Çöpe Attıysanız Bir Şey Kaybetmezsiniz”, Letter To Hrant Paluyan, 28 March 2019. Available at <https://t24.com.tr/k24/yazi/cope-attiysaniz-bir-sey-kaybetmezseniz.2228> (accessed 16 June 2022)

¹⁰ Vivet Kanetti Uluç, “Yalnızlar ve Azınlık Edebiyatı”, 2 December 2022. Available at <https://t24.com.tr/k24/yazi/yalnizlar-ve-azinlik-edebiyati.3481> (accessed 16 June 2022)

¹¹ Hervé Georgelin, “Karıncalar Gibi Huzur Kaçıran”, in *şerhh*, no: 3-4, 2016, pp. 124-128.

Biberyan who is courageous enough to criticize their own community. He also refers the lack of secondary literature on Biberyan and mentions few titles like Marc Nichanian's article, Minas Tölölyan's reference to this article, and reminds us that Biberyan was unfortunately not an important writer for Armenian people, and this absence was due to this neglect and disregard of the community. I find these early dated articles very important and I prefer to give them a special place in my literature review because if today I am able to write a thesis about Biberyan, these rather short articles are the reason. They paved the way of this work.

Unfortunately, I couldn't find Marc Nichanian's article that Georgelin mentions titled "*Zaven Biberyan'ın Karıncaları*" [Zaven Biberyan's Ants]. However, his canonical article – which constitutes the preface of *Penniless Lovers* – on Biberyan titled "*Zaven Biberyan ya da Çilekeşlik*" [Zaven Biberyan or Suffering] brought up lots of discussion topics such as the collapse of the family, hatred towards its members, impossibility of any kind of return, and most importantly, the principle of hope. Here Nichanian asserts that *Penniless Lovers* can be read as a political utopia which has Rousseauistic features, and thus Biberyan positions utopia as the opposite of paranoia, which has played major role in that very novel. As I already said, I think this article has a very important place in the secondary literature on Biberyan, nevertheless, unlike Nichanian, I think that Biberyan means to show that as long as the Armenian community forgets the common history and traumas, continue to deny the truth of the disasters that are waiting them and consider them as the products of paranoia, they will move far away from all possible political utopias.

The general tendency in the studies on Biberyan is to read the author's work in the light of Talin Suciyan's post-genocidal denialist habitus. It is so obvious that Biberyan's characters, like the rest of the Istanbul Armenians, had to live in the hard conditions created by this very denialist atmosphere which surrounds not only the Turks, but also the Armenian community. Gebenlioğlu mentions this habitus in his thesis, Koptaş also touches upon this by referring the difficulties to live in a "homeland where experiences are denied". Before these two articles, Nazan

Maksudyan wrote for *şerhh* Magazine in 2018 an article titled “Zaven Biberyan Romanlarında İnkârın Şiddeti” [“The Violence of the Deny in Zaven Biberyan’s Novels”], in which she claims that Biberyan’s works offer a wide panorama of the ongoing violence which targets the Armenians in Turkey, and she discusses and examines Biberyan’s novels within the context of denialist habitus¹². According to her, this post-genocidal generation is living under a constant anxiety and with the suspicion of always being watched. She also claims that while the older generation (fathers) represents this denial, younger generation (sons) represents the desire of confrontation. I find this observation precious, and I also agree with her: Biberyan has in his mind a very sharp distinction between the two generations, and one of the most important reasons of this difference which also causes and provokes the anger and hatred in the novels lies in the tension between the necessity to deny and the urge to confront. However, this scheme that Maksudyan draw, doesn’t work for the last novel; in *Sunset of the Ants*, Baret’s hatred and anger are directed to mother (and sister) rather than father. In this regard, Özge Leyla İspir wrote an article titled “Analar ve Oğullar” [“Mothers and Sons”] in *Agos* in 2019.¹³ She claims that Biberyan’s real target is the mothers, moreover, she says that Biberyan, just like in Melanie Klein’s theory, puts the Mother in the center of oedipal complexity and consider her (i.e. the Mother) as the backbone of the destructiveness in the human nature. According to her, in Biberyan’s novels, class struggle and the violence against the Armenian people manifest themselves in the family, and the bosses, the masters, the powerful ones in the novels are not the fathers but the mothers. She sees Baret as an exception, she claims that Baret is the one who chooses to detach himself from family and start to grow up, unlike the other male protagonists. However, even though I find this interpretation interesting, I think the relationship between the mother and the son are quite complex and deeper than this.

2021 was particularly an important year since it was the 100th birthday of Biberyan. *Notos*, *K24* and *Duvar*, which are among the most popular and prestigious literature

¹² Nazan Maksudyan, “Biberyan Romanlarında İnkârın Şiddeti”, in *şerhh*, no: 7, 2018, pp. 17-27.

¹³ Özge Leyla İspir, “Analar ve Oğullar” 15 April 2019. Available at <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/22321/analar-ve-ogullar> (accessed 16 June 2022).

magazines of Turkey, dedicated their December issues to Biberyan. In this year, towards the end, Turkish translation of Biberyan's auto-biography was published under the title of *Mahkûmların Şafağı* [The Dawn of Prisoners].¹⁴ This book has a crucial importance in the understanding of the author because it gives readers a lot of clues about the political, economical and social background of the novels. By dint of the auto-biography, we may say that Baret and Biberyan have some fundamental resemblances, and even that Baret is a kind of representation of the author himself. Three important articles were published recently: the first one was written by Sevgül Sönmez for *Notos* Magazine, this article was published before the release of the book, so it is a rather brief article.¹⁵ Sönmez touches upon the language and style that Biberyan practises in his writings and she also mentions the connection between the auto-biography and the novels. Second article on the auto-biography was written by Behçet Çelik and published in *K24* in which he also underlines the resemblances between the life and the fictions of Biberyan, by focusing especially on Baret.¹⁶ He also does not hide his admiration for Biberyan's political, intellectual and literary life. Another writer who wrote an article about the autobiography was Feza Kürkçüoğlu, it was also published in *K24*.¹⁷ In the first part, he majorly summarizes the book, but in the second part, he compares two Armenian socialists, Hrant Dink and Biberyan, by underlining the fact that they were both journalists who dedicated their lives to make their homeland a fairer and more peaceful place. In the third part, he continues to summarize the important events of Biberyan's life.

Although it is not mentioned until now, Biberyan's main male characters are in general always hostile towards women, and this hostility requires a new critical perspective: we also need to read Biberyan through feminist criticism. Until now,

¹⁴ Zaven Biberyan, *Mahkûmların Şafağı*, translated by Deniz Kureta, (Istanbul: Aras 2021).

¹⁵ Sevgül Sönmez, "Otobiyografiden Toplumsal Anlatıya", in *Notos*, no: 89, December 2021, pp. 64-65.

¹⁶ Behçet Çelik, "Biberyan'ın Çok Yönlü Hayatı", 2 December 2021. Available at <https://t24.com.tr/k24/yazi/zaven-biberyan-in-cok-yonlu-hayati,3479> (accessed 16 June 2022).

¹⁷ Feza Kürkçüoğlu, "100 Yaşındaki Ermeni Bir Sosyalistin Hayat Hikayesi: İrade, İnanç ve İnat", 2 December 2021. Available at <https://t24.com.tr/k24/yazi/100-yasindaki-ermeni-bir-sosyalistin-hayat-hikayesi-irade-inanc-ve-de-inat,3480> (accessed 16 June 2021).

the only article which discusses Biberyan from this point was Melike Koçak's article published in K24 titled "Zaven Biberyan'da 'Kolektif Tiksinti'nin Nesneleri" [The Objects of the Collective Disgust in Biberyan's Novels]"¹⁸. Here Koçak focuses on the three main female characters of the three novels: Gülgün, Norma and Lula, and uses the terms of "performativity" (borrowed from Butler) and the "abjection" which are conceptualized by Sara Ahmed in her seminal work *Cultural Politics of Emotions*. However Koçak does not consider the repulsion or disgust as emotions reserved just for women; she also claims that these emotions keep moving through every character in the novels, in that way, every single character can become at any time the object of repulsion. I also agree this observation, I think the hatred, resentment and rage constitutes the fundament of Biberyan's characters' existence. Nazan Maksudyan wrote in *Notos* an article titled "İnsanlar Mezarlarda Yaşamaya Devam Etmiyorlardı" ["People Were Not Continue to Live in Graves"] in which she also focuses on the decomposed body parts which have a major place in Biberyan's novel, but unlike Koçak, she considers this decomposition (such as the feet of Gülgün or the legs of Norma) as a representation of the Catastrophe, i.e. as an euphemism of the Armenian genocide¹⁹. Ekin Kurtarcan offers an alternative reading of Biberyan in her article titled "Bu Resme Bakmaya Dayanabilir Misiniz?" ["Can You Stand Looking at This Picture?"] published also in *Notos*²⁰. Here she draws a parallelism between the representations of the female body and the "home" in Biberyan's literature by defining both as "uncanny". I find this way of using the Freudian term "uncanniness" brilliant, and I think in that sense, Koçak's and Kurtarcan's analyses show parallelism with each other.

Biberyan's novels also provide a panorama of the city of Istanbul, they can easily be regarded as city novels which gives readers the opportunity to trace back the

¹⁸ Melike Koçak, "Zaven Biberyan'da Kolektif Tiksintinin Nesneleri: Gülgün, Norma, Lula", 2 December 2021. Available at <https://t24.com.tr/k24/yazi/zaven-biberyan-da-kolektif-tiksinti-nin-nesneleri-gulgun-nora-lula,3482> (accessed 16 June 2022).

¹⁹ Nazan Maksudyan, "İnsanlar Mezarlarda Yaşamaya Devam Etmiyorlardı", in *Notos*, no: 89, December 2021, pp. 56-60.

²⁰ Ekin Kurtarcan, "Bu Resme Bakmaya Dayanabilir Misiniz?" in *Notos* no: 89, December 2021, pp. 40-44.

urbanisation of Istanbul. The “experience of the city” for a habitant, as Benjamin refers, was quite different than today. The first study about the city in Biberyan’s novels was Hilal Yavuz’s thesis titled “Approaching the Limit of Experience: Memory and Imagination in Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar and Zaven Biberyan”²¹. As the title suggests, in this study she compares Tanpınar and Biberyan by focusing on the way how the protagonists experience the city. She divides her thesis in three chapters, in the first part she makes a general introduction about the early republican period of Turkey and the life of Tanpınar. She then makes a distinction between the terms “experience”, and “*terkip*”, and she argues that “Tanpınar’s concept of *terkip* has some similarities with Benjamin’s elaboration of experience in the sense of *Erfahrung*”, and finally she reads *Mahur Beste* as a *terkip*. The second part focuses on the memory; both the collective and individual one. Here she dwells on the experience of the term “Catastrophe”, in the way which Nichanian conceptualized, and after reciting the biography of Biberyan and some articles from the newspapers of the period, she finally focuses on *The Sunset of the Ants* and claims that this novel can be regarded as the return of the Catastrophe. In the third and the final chapter, she examines the experience of the city, and she claims that, “the image of the city cannot be thought separated from Baret’s confrontation with the boundaries of the city that makes him feel uncomfortable with repulsion”. Thus she suggests that Biberyan’s main characters can be considered as “the man of the crowd”, so in a way as a *flaneur*, as Benjamin formulates. At this point, I must say I disagree with Yavuz; although Biberyan’s novels are called city novels/ Istanbul novels, it is not possible to call any of his characters a *flaneur*, they do not have the chance to watch and observe their surroundings without being noticed and without being inconspicuous, and this contradicts with the requirements of *flaneurism*. On the contrary, they are the ones who are under constant observation, they are surrounded by the voyeurs (*röntgenci*) all the time. So I think we need to distinguish the way that a Turk and an Armenian experiences the city. Other than this thesis, there are two articles on the city in Biberyan’s novels, one of them is written by Tanıl Bora

²¹ Hilal Yavuz, *Approaching the Limit of Experience: Memory and Imagination in Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar and Zaven Biberyan*. 2019. Şehir University. MA Thesis.

in the form of an essay for *Beyond.Istanbul Magazine*²², in which he remembers Istanbul of his childhood through the novel *The Lonely Ones*, and the second one is written by Behçet Çelik for *Notos*²³. Here he claims that in *The Sunset of the Ants*, the city of Istanbul functions almost as a multi-dimensional and dynamic map, which consists of different layouts. I also think that in Biberyan's novels, the city becomes a palimpsest; although it is impossible to completely erase the traces of the past, it has become somehow difficult to read what was beneath the new.

Biberyan is also an author who has written in different genres such as poetry and short stories. Aras Publishing published his collections of poetries and stories in their Armenian originals. I didn't have the chance to read his poems except two which were written in French, and I also didn't come across any article written on his poetry, though Sevan Değirmenciyan, the editor of Biberyan claims his poems are not as powerful as his prose. On the other hand, his short stories are translated to Turkish, but they are not published yet. Until now, as far as I can see, except Gebenlioglu, only Mehmet Fatih Uslu wrote about one of his stories titled "Anonk vor Veratartsan" ["Those Who Returned"] in *Notos*²⁴. This story is based on Biberyan's life, he writes in his autobiography as such: "In my story called "Survivors", I told about our life in there [Nafia]". Uslu draws attention to the fact that Biberyan misremembers the title of the story; instead of "Dönerler" [Those Who Returned], he writes "Hayatta Kalanlar" [Survivors]. Thus Uslu draws conclusion that Biberyan had already lost all the hopes or possibilities of returning back to "home", and this misremembrance demonstrates that the only thing rest for Biberyan to do is to survive.

As I mentioned in the beginning of my review, secondary sources on Biberyan's literature are unfortunately very limited. However, especially in recent years, his literature is attracting more and more attention each day and more studies are done

²² Tanıl Bora, "Mavera-yı Kadıköy", in *Beyond.Istanbul* no: 11, 2021, pp. 56-63.

²³ Behçet Çelik, "Sonsuzluk Kadar mı Eskilerde? Karıncaların Günbatımı'nda Şehir", in *Notos* 89, December 2021, pp. 45-51.

²⁴ Mehmet Fatih Uslu, "Çünkü Yaşamak Hayatta Kalmaktır", in *Notos*, no: 89, December 2021, pp. 61-63.

it. Since his works are multi-dimensional and have psychological, philosophical and political depth in many senses, it provides us a very rich field of study. I also hope to make a little contribution to this literature with my thesis. My work consists of three main parts. My intention is to carry out a monographic study that offers a detailed portrait of Biberyan. When it comes to a writer like Biberyan, I believe that the author's personal life and his literary production cannot be separated from each other. For this reason, throughout my work, I will focus both on the personal memory of the author and the collective memory of the Armenian community, and also look at how these memories manifest in the novels. In my first chapter, I will examine the issues of memory, identity and culture. In this chapter, I will mainly focus on Biberyan's autobiography. First, I will go over the important dates and events in his childhood before examining the political environment and social dynamics under which he grew up. Then I will bring up the question whose answers I will be seeking for throughout my whole study: What does it mean to be an Armenian and what does it mean to live in the "denialist habitus in post-genocidal Turkey"? After that, in the next sub-chapter, I will focus on the transition into adulthood and the construction of identity of Biberyan as a writer and as a political figure. Here, the period of Second World War and the collective memory of the Armenians will be at the center. Later, by following the same line, I will examine the magnitude of the social destruction which dragged each and every novel character into a downfall. Then I will analyse the resemblances and differences between Biberyan and his fictional character Baret. Finally, I will try to understand the impossibility of not being an Armenian by examining journalistic and political career of Biberyan in the light of Suciyan's work.

After the first chapter, I will focus more on fiction and examine how some of the dominant emotions in Biberyan's literature shaped his novels. In the second chapter, where I will focus on the places in the novels, especially the city of Istanbul and the home, I will deal with the relationships that the characters establish with these places, or rather the emotions they feel when they are inside these places. Basically, I will argue that these places have a dominant emotion in common: the uncanny. I will try to show that this uncanniness of the city and the house condemns

the characters in a constant state of fear and anxiety. That way, I will be able to move on to my third chapter, the chapter that I dedicated to emotions.

In the third and the final chapter, I will try to answer the questions I have brought up throughout my study. Here I intend to make an atlas of the emotions, and I will claim that there are four main continents, that is to say, there are four basic emotions in Biberyan's literature: Disgust, hatred, anxiety and fear. In order to understand how these emotions are created, I will use different sets of theoretical frameworks. For example, in the first chapter, where I will be examining the relationships between mothers and sons, I will draw on feminist and psychoanalytic theory, and then when examining the fear, anxiety and disgust ingrained in the characters, I will concentrate on the concept of ethic of resentment, which I borrowed from Jean Améry.

At this point, I need to explain why I chose to partition my thesis in this way. First of all, in order to understand Biberyan's literature, it is necessary to be acquainted with the period in which Biberyan wrote his novels, or the years in which the stories takes place, and the political atmosphere in Turkey in those years. My first chapter, "Memory, Identity and Culture", provides a historical and sociological background for my thesis. Also, as I have stated before, it is not possible to evaluate the literary production of an author like Biberyan separately from his life story. For this reason, the author's autobiography has been one my main sources in this chapter. This autobiography is a very valuable source both in terms of its literary value and in terms of mirroring the collective memory of Armenians in Turkey. In other words, to understand the main problematics of Biberyan's literature, it is necessary to first understand both the social and personal traumas. And then, I had to examine how Biberyan writes about this traumatic experience, which is almost impossible to describe. I preferred to do this through an examination of places in the novels and the emotions of the characters. I was seeking the answers for the following questions: How did this traumatic experience, this catastrophe shape places in the novels, and what effects did they have on emotions? I think that examining how the characters in a novel experience the city tells a lot about the period in which the

novel was written and about its author. On the other hand, the philosophy of emotions is a very useful tool in such literary studies. I believed that I could understand the main purpose of the author by examining the basic emotions that dominates his novels and examining the reasons behind these emotions.

I hope that thinking about emotions also would allow me to answer the questions about the wounds that filled my mind as I started to write this introduction. On one hand, there are the male characters who groan silently in a hole they crawled in and try to hide their wounds, which is actually a very major and dominant feature in modern literature. But on the other hand, we have a writer who refuses to withdraw into his own corner, on the contrary, he cries out in pain and anger, and shows his wound to everyone. So, it is possible to say that there is a call... And this is a call made not only to those who caused the wound, but also to those who have the same wound as him. My intention to write a thesis about his literature can be seen as a very delayed response to this call.

CHAPTER I

MEMORY, IDENTITY AND CULTURE: IN PURSUIT OF BIBERYAN BETWEEN REALITY AND FICTION

1.1. A CHILD CALLED ZAVEN IS BORN; ISTANBUL, 1921

1.1.1. A Narrative of Childhood: Important Dates and Events

Zaven Biberyan is the writer of unease and unrest, reminiscent of the ants that irritate, he agitates his readers. He does not only shed light to the deepest fears and desires of the humankind but also, in every single text he wrote, whether it is a novel or a journal paper or his autobiography, he offers a wide panorama of Turkey, by bearing witness to the political atmosphere of those years, discriminatory policies that the government implemented, social change of the country over the years... Among his entire corpus, his autobiography titled *Mahkûmların Şafağı* [Dawn of Prisoners] has a special place, since it reveals many aspects of Biberyan's life and identity both as an author and as an Armenian citizen living in post-genocidal Turkey. Before analysing the importance of this autobiography and making connections between his life and his literary output, I would also like to speak of the publication story and its process. As I mentioned earlier, we owe this book to the French academic Hervé Georgelin, who stumbles upon the nearly 800-pages-long manuscripts of this autobiography while he was trying to reach out the family in order to get further information about Biberyan's life. After finding the manuscript, he then enumerates and annotates the text. The book was first published in French, in its original language under the name *Car vivre, c'était se battre et faire l'amour* [Because Living is Fighting and Making Love] by Aras Publishing, before it is translated to Turkish by Deniz Kureta.

In this chapter, I will focus on the meaning of this autobiography for both the writer and the readers, and also, try to consider this book not merely as an historical document, but as an opportunity to see how Biberyan fictionalize himself, how does he place himself in the society he lived in. In that point, I would like to place

particular focus on the genre of autobiography, before offering a close reading of *Dawn of Prisoners*.

Autobiography means putting one's life into a text, problematizing it and converting it into a text. In this sense, the author turns back from the time he/she is writing it and looks at their past and textualize their life until the day they started writing with the help of their memory (or with any kinds of archival materials). Thus, they offer a coherent existence, they have the competence to choose which memories to recall, which to erase or which to dream up. In these texts we find clues of the identity and self-construction of the author, we trace how the writer becomes who he is. In other words, an autobiography is a narration of development, of evolution [*bildungs*], but here we are exposed to an alienated and fragmented subject.

We know that in the fictions, between the writer and the reader, there is some kind of an agreement which we can call "*pacte de lecture*" [reading pact], and this contract starts from the incipit. According to this "*pacte de lecture*", even though the reader is aware of the fact that the text they are about to read is fictional, they must ignore this fact. They accept to be affected, to be touched with the text as if it is real and they will behave in that way. On the other hand, Phillippe Lejeune, who is a specialist in autobiography, theorizes what he calls "*pacte autobiographique*" [autobiographic pact], according to which, reader agrees that the name of the author on the cover refers directly to the narrator, who talks about his life in the text.²⁵

Biberyan writes in the very beginning of his autobiography that "After the age of forty, the desire to take a trip to memory lane and review [his] life has emerged".²⁶ This book can be regarded as an embodiment of this desire. The autobiography also shows the need and the urge to witness and use the act of writing not only as the form of this witnessing process, but also transforming it to become a method of resistance. This autobiography covers the first 25 years of Biberyan; he obviously

²⁵ Phillippe LeJeune, *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, (Paris: Le Seuil, 2015), p.26.

²⁶ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p.17.

wanted to write his whole life in detail, but unfortunately this project remained unfinished.

Biberyan divides his autobiography into three main parts. In the first part called “Taking a Trip in the Memory Lane”, the writer narrates his childhood and his adolescence. He talks about how the turbulent business life of his father made their economic situation very precarious, his favorite books to read and films to watch during his childhood, his love of Büyükada... We could observe that as Biberyan graduates from Dıbar Gırtaran and enrolls to St. Joseph High School, his political awareness grows over time. There, first time in his life, Biberyan is discriminated because of his identity. The subsequent second part, which forms the main body of the book, is the most voluminous one. This part where he talks about his obligatory *Nafia* service is also very important for the topic of history of Turkey. This horrible experience also has a very deep mark on Biberyan’s personality. The last part of the book is called “After the War”. Here we encounter with the politic persona of Biberyan. After the war, he returns to Istanbul and writes political articles to various newspaper. The aim of these articles is to provoke and to upset both the Turks and the Armenian community. As Suciyan also mentions in her article in *Agos*, “We see a Biberyan who challenges and opposes everyone around him, an intellectual a cut above the rest with his obstinate revolutionary personality”²⁷.

One of the most interesting chapters of the book is the short prologue, in which he narrates, in a cold, serious and even almost bureaucratic tone, his family pedigree starting from the mid-nineteenth century, to the moment he was born. In that way, he underlines the fact that his existence and identity cannot be thought separated from the family and the society he was born in. He reminds his readers (or maybe to himself) that his life story and his existence, become meaningful and significant through his familial lineage.

²⁷ Talin Suciyan, “Zaven Biberyan’da Zaman: Felekten Çalınan, Bir Felaketten Diğerine Bir Hayat”, 25 December 2021. Available at <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/26569/zaven-biberyanda-zaman-felekten-calinan-bir-felaketten-digerine-bir-hayat> (Accessed 16 June 2022).

Throughout the prologue, Biberyan uses the third person-singular and simple present tense. At the end of this section, he refers himself as Zaven-Agop, as this was a time when he wasn't born yet. He only begins to use the possessive suffixes (*my grandfather etc.*) in the second chapter titled "Take a trip down memory lane". It is as if he pauses the time and the history of his family and places himself in that story as a subject. We understand from the first paragraph that the main goal of this initiative was, according to Biberyan, to pursue, and hopefully to find "the only truth" which "pushes one forward with their own inner power, which constitutes their spiritual, intellectual and moral existence"²⁸.

At the beginning of the first chapter, Biberyan writes briefly about the disasters that took place before he was born. He first mentions the story of resistance of Van, homeland of his mother, and how its people are stubborn and obstinate, how they fight for their land until the very last minute, instead of submitting to deportation and massacre. Then he talks about the great fire which devastated Pera, and how they lost their properties and grow poor. He also mentions the Armenian genocide which took place in 1893 during which his grand-uncle lost his life.

Biberyan recounts that his father also had his share from persecution, that he got arrested in the middle of a street and sent to Anatolia in 1914. His sister Lusi had paid the necessary price to keep his father exempt from military service, so he was freed from "the army", which is basically the Labor Battalion [*Amele Taburu*] where non-Muslims were sent. However, he couldn't come back to his home because Armenian people weren't allowed to come back to Istanbul. Eventually, as Biberyan writes, his father was among the survivors. All these incidents, these disasters that Biberyan's family was exposed to, demonstrates that being an Armenian in this land was, as Biberyan himself says, living between two catastrophes, waiting the next one to come. In other words, being an Armenian always meant first a struggle to survive, and secondly, an obligation to find a way back home.

²⁸ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p.17.

His first memories are about their family house in Bahariye Caddesi. Kadıköy has a special place and significance in his life, and he also mentions that this district had also an important place in Armenian intellectual life. At this point, as we will study the life of Biberyan through the lens of his novels, we should briefly talk about them. Biberyan's literary career starts after returning to Istanbul from his voluntary exile to Beirut.

His first novel *The Lonely Ones* (*Slut*, in its Armenian original title) is published in 1959, and in 1966 is translated to Turkish by Biberyan himself.²⁹ It is possible to interpret his choice of translating his novel himself and his wish to turn the novel into a script as a desire to be heard and recognized by the Turkish readers. The subject of the novel also indicates this same desire. There are two families presented in the novel: a Turkish one and an Armenian one. The father of the Turkish family, Osman Bey, is *nouveau riche* businessman who had obtained his fortune through deceit and dishonesty during the Democrat Party period. He is the representative of a newly forming social class that Biberyan hates. He has a wife called Mübeccel who is an arriviste housewife, and a son called Erol, who is a coddled and spoiled young man. Living with them, they have an orphaned girl called Fatma who serves them, but actually she calls herself Gülgün. In the other house, a mother lives together with his son and his sister. The mother and her sister, Yeranik and Pupul, had immigrated from Anatolia to Istanbul. The son, Krikor, is an introverted and nervous forty years old man. He could be characterized by his hatred towards his mother and his fear and shyness to the Turks he encounters on streets.

The second novel, *The Penniless Lovers*, focuses on the love of a young couple: Sur and Norma.³⁰ Sur is a 17-18 years old young man who lives with his parents and his two siblings. His father Kevork is among those who got rich during the Wealth Tax period. Sur usually tries to get some pocket money from his father to be able to hit the road and wander around. These two penniless lovers, meet in the unfrequented coves of Büyükdada to make love. There are always some eyes, some

²⁹ Zaven Biberyan, *Yalnızlar* (İstanbul: Aras, December 2020).

³⁰ Zaven Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, translated by Sosi Dolanoğlu, (İstanbul: Aras, 2017).

voyeurs around them who watch them sneakily. No matter what they do, they cannot escape from their gaze.

Biberyan's last novel and his masterpiece, *The Sunset of the Ants*, starts with the return of Baret from his three and a half years long Nafia service.³¹ The Wealth Tax, which went in effect during his service, had made his family destitute. His father Diran, to be able to not go to the concentration camps in Aşkale, had sold everything they had to pay his share of the tax fully. Life is no longer the same for the Tarhanyan family who had lost both their wealth and their social status. A new life for Baret starts.

We shall now come back to his auto-biography, here, he mentions that their maid, Despina, this "such an ugly woman", which could remind to readers Yeranik from *Lonely Ones*, is a kind of the representation of being a *taşralı* [provincial], who are unlike Stamboulites, don't waste their money but save them. This seems to affect Biberyan, as he says he always hated people who hoard money: in all of his novels, stingy, money-seeking, money-saving characters were despised. Krikor in *Lonely Ones*, Sur's father Kevork in *Penniless Lovers*, Suren in *Sunset of Ants*, are all, in different ways, representations of this prototype. In Biberyan's eyes, they represent also a new kind of people who, in times of war, by turning crisis into opportunity, misappropriate their friends' or other people's money to themselves. In sum, Biberyan's hatred towards the ones who are *becoming antlike* [*karıncalaşmak*] is based on an anger that originates from his childhood, which he had embraced as a building block of his existence.

In his autobiography, Biberyan takes a look into his life in a retrospective manner. He often makes comments about his childhood and his family. For example, he is very aware of his class privileges; when he talks about the time when his father was making good money, he admits that he had "always liked the beautifully lit restaurants with white tablecloths, plants, drinks, hors d'oeuvres and music".³² This

³¹ Zaven Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, translated by Sırvart Malhasyan, (İstanbul: Aras, 2019).

³² Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p. 24

passage below gives also an interesting example of this retrospective point of view which he employs:

A postcard-worthy picture of an ideal bourgeois family: happy and peaceful. This is, of course an insipid image, yet it also makes you happy, evokes the common idea of family happiness, and at the same time, does not deny the beautiful warmth of home.³³

These kinds of narratives of his childhood reminds us of Baret's childhood narrative in *Sunset of the Ants*. Biberyan, just like his character, remembers and depicts his childhood as a lost world that remained in the past and totally impossible to return to. It is kind of a fantasy world where he enjoys escaping when life gets suffocating. He refers to these days in his memories as "the pieces from the wonderland of my childhood". This wonderland becomes "the world of the songs"³⁴ in Baret's memory. When he goes to cinema for the first time after returning from *Nafia*, he runs into his ex-girlfriend Alis, who makes him remember his past, when everything was much easier, a time when their life standards was much higher. He sees suddenly this whole world behind his eyes, "this world belonged to him once upon a time", says the narrator, "and he was realizing how much he loved this world, how much he gets happy by feeling it again".³⁵

In his childhood memories, Biberyan also underlines the social and economical differences between the neighbourhoods. He writes about Nail Bey Street where their old house was located (actually it was in this very house where the postcard-worthy scene that he was referring to took place). This street was located in the periphery of a poor district named *Çarıkçı*, which no longer existed at the time when Biberyan was writing down this autobiography. According to him, this neighbourhood was occupied by the people who survived from the Armenian exile, those who find themselves in Istanbul after the First World War, those who migrated from Anatolia. "The children of these resentful families hated the

³³ *ibid*, p. 29.

³⁴ Biberyan, *Karıncaaların Günbatımı* p. 71.

³⁵ *ibid* p.70.

bourgeoisie of Istanbul, those well-dressed and well-fed little monkeys, and therefore me”³⁶ writes Biberyan. He admits that he had always envied their lives, but he never had a chance to join them, although he tried very hard to be friends with them. These lines demonstrate perfectly not only the class consciousness he gained over the years, but also the confrontation he had with his class and privileges he had when he was a child. This theme of social and economical differences between two parallel streets in the very same district appears in his novels again and again. His relationship with these “children of resentful families” will be transformed into the relationship of Baret with his friends from Nafia, Çamur and Haybeden, which is full of guilt, humiliation, and contempt.

The places that Biberyan mentions in his childhood memories had become the places he cherished the most during his life. Kadıköy, Bomonti, beaches in Fenerbahçe, and most importantly, Büyükkada. The sea is Biberyan’s greatest love, which has always been his true homeland. This love has its roots from the time when his mother had gotten him to swim regularly every day. He remembers his first time to dive in Büyükkada, when he was four or five years old; after that first time, he says, “I’ve lived my life as a seaman who can’t do without the sea.”³⁷ This love of the sea and Büyükkada appears in his books. As a matter of fact, the sea, the forests of Büyükkada, appears as the sole places where his characters, especially Baret, can find a little peace.

One of the characteristics which makes this autobiography even more interesting and delightful is the form of narrative chosen by Biberyan. Throughout the book, there are two different subjects: First one is Biberyan in the past, second one is Biberyan the author. The second, never leaves the first alone, as Sevgül Sönmez puts it, the one who experiences and the one who remembers are two different entities.³⁸ We have as a narrator a forty-years-old man who looks into the past; sometimes he reconstructs it, sometimes he remembers, and he often interprets the

³⁶ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p.30.

³⁷ *ibid*, p.33.

³⁸ Sevgül Sönmez, “Otobiyografiden Toplumsal Anlatıya”, in *Notos* no: 89, December 2021.

past with great candour. For example, when he talks about his first love, he mentions all of a sudden that he had met her years and years later, when he was an exile in Beirut. The little boy who engages in duels and tries to steal the girl's heart suddenly turns into a voluntary exile away from his hometown and his loved ones. In the same way, the little girl who plays coy games, turns into a resentful married and divorced woman. Thus, Biberyan constructs a non-linear, spiral time in his narrative. In this book, time is not made up of consecutive singular moments, but of intertwined memories.

In addition to that, as a result of the autobiography genre, the narrative also has a teleological perspective. He looks for the inception of the man he is now in the past, in his childhood. For example, he remembers the first time he touched the keyboard of a type-writer and how that encounter affected him; or when he talks about the first novels he wrote when he was ten or eleven years old, he says that since he was a little child, novels has always occupied his mind, and to put in his own words, "not just to read, but also to live them".³⁹ Most importantly, he often says that there are two situations in which he cannot help himself but resist: First the injustice, whether it is done to himself or someone else, and secondly, any attempt to subjugate him. In this way, he wants to show the reader that the political struggle he has been involved throughout his life, stems from a stubbornness and resistance against the injustices that have been ingrained in his bones since his childhood.

Also, we must admit here that an angry tone dominates the narrative. This is a tone that is not neutral, cannot remain calm. "As he looks into the past", he doesn't remember pure, childlike, peaceful moments, but he tells a lot of "survival" stories. When his father was in exile during the wartime, his mother had to stay alone and earn her living. That time, when they stayed in Çengelköy, where almost all of the inhabitants were Greek, in a house whose owner Mr. Dimo says not to worry to his mother about the rent, she didn't have "to give a penny as long as the gentlemen is in exile".⁴⁰ He tells there were also some Turks who wanted to help a Christian

³⁹ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p.39

⁴⁰ *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p.22.

woman, “even at that time when the army waged jihad against the infidels, when the government massacred and deported two million Armenians!”.⁴¹ While describing a period in which he was not yet born, he does not try to hide his righteous anger and resentment even for a moment.

His two passions, books and cinema were always omnipresent throughout his life, since he was a little boy. Beyond being influenced, he often identified himself with the heroes of novels. “Fighting and loving was making my head spin at that age”⁴² he writes. The reason why he is on the side of the oppressed and the reason why he opposes injustice, is the novels he had read during his childhood, such as *Rokambol* or *The Wandering Jew*. On the other hand, Süreyya Paşa Cinema was a meeting place of the bourgeoisie; Biberyan says that his “era of cinema”, which had a deeper impression on him during his growth when compared to the books, started there.

As I already mentioned, their house on Moda Caddesi was the most important place in Biberyan’s childhood, his most significant memories were spent in this house. His childhood was marked by the economic ups and downs. After his father’s business situation collapsed, the family went through a lot of turmoil. He also started St. Joseph High School here.

In his memories, his first school, Dibar Gırtaran, also has an important place along with his teacher Madam Sultanyan. This was an expensive school to which wealthy families enrolled their children. Biberyan says that his mother refused to send her kids to School of Aramyan, to which, on the contrary, children from Çarıkçı district went. With his words, at that time he was “rebellious, quarrelsome, stubborn, opinionated, touchy, arrogant or maybe simply too haughty”⁴³. He says that he made his teacher Madam Sultanyan wearied with his mischief, she also said one time to him that he would either be someone good for nothing or someone respectable. Compared to St. Joseph High school, to which he would go later, his days in this school was much brighter.

⁴¹ ibid, p.23.

⁴² ibid, p.43

⁴³ ibid, p.37.

His father had also have crucial place in Biberyan's childhood memories. Although he admits that his parents were unjustly authoritarian towards him, he had a strong compassion and respect towards his father. Between his father and Baret's father Diran, there is a significant resemblance. Just like Diran, Biberyan's father also loses his "main tool of power" by losing his money. Besides, just like Diran, his father also had chest angina.

When the war broke out, Biberyan's father was drafted into the army, more precisely to *Amele Taburu*, which was basically a kind of labour camp for the non-Muslims. There, the non-Muslim soldiers weren't allowed to carry weapons and they were used as a labouring force for road constructions. Before that time, Armenians didn't serve at the military until 1908. After the Young Turk Revolution, the new government recruited Armenians into the army by conscription, in order to make Armenians and Turks equal by right. Although Zaven's aunt paid his brothers *bedel* [price] for him to not go to these battalions, he was never allowed to come back to Istanbul during the war, so he stayed in Konya for four years. During that time, his partner in the importing business in Istanbul embezzled the valuable goods. According to Biberyan, this was the first time his father had been robbed by his partner, however it wouldn't be the last time. All his life, Biberyan writes, his father was deceived by his partners and by the ones whom he trusted.

This incident that happened to his father, reminds us of a frequent theme in his novels: the wartime snatchers. Uncle Dırtad tells Baret the story of Suren, how he got so rich in such a short time:

Suren had a friend, he used to work for him. There was a room upstairs where Suren worked. I don't know how many boxes of nails and... I don't know, something else his friend gave him. Because he has no place to put it. When they gathered Twenty Class soldiers, they took them away from the house, from the street, you know. Both Suren's and his friend's shops remained closed until their return. His friend was born in 1332. He was discharged a few months after Suren. He came and saw that his goods had increased from fifty *kuruş* to five hundred, six hundred,

seven hundred *kuruş*. He then ran to Suren, no goods. What happened? I sold it. [...] He said let me give the money. He took it out and calculated from fifty cents.⁴⁴

That is exactly what happened to Biberyan's father. Although the government had enacted the National Protection Law in 1940 in order to determine prices of certain products in state of emergencies, some people like Suren, turned these crises into opportunity and earned millions out of miseries of other people. Similarly, Sur's father Kevork in *Penniless Lovers*, is gathered on the street during the Twenty Class military service and forcibly sent to army. His wife Meline remembers those days as such:

Twenty Class military time. Kevork had gone to a funeral. When he came out of Yerortutyun, he was taken along with all the other conscripted men. What a day it was! A friend of her had come to tell her, out of breath, that all the men had been rounded up and taken away. *Deployment* days. Then the soldier's letters... No, not soldier. Nafia worker. She was alone with Sur.⁴⁵

However, Kevork is also one of those people who knew how to take advantage of opportunities. After the Wealth Tax, he was exempted from going to Aşkale and laid the foundations of his shop at that time. "One's tears become another's happiness", says Meline. These two incidents show that the situation of Armenians in Turkey has not changed at all. There has been no change in the policies implemented in the intervening twenty years.

At this point, it is time to close this section and move on to a new one, and to ask one of the main questions of my thesis: What does it mean to be an Armenian? Throughout my study, I will try to answer this question from different angles. In the next section, I will use different works of researchers such as Talin Suciyan, Füsün Üstel or Barış Ünlü as my theoretical framework, and I will try to understand what this question means by focusing on some of the incidents that happened to Biberyan in his childhood and adolescence.

⁴⁴ Zaven Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p. 137.

⁴⁵ Zaven Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, p. 119.

1.1.2. What Does It Mean To Be An Armenian? Living In The “Denialist Habitus In Post-Genocidal Turkey”

Biberyan begins to understand the bitter side of life when he starts St. Joseph High School. He admits that “Everything [t]here was different than in Dibar Girtaran, where [he] thought [he] was the center of the world, where [he] was feeling comfortable and at home, like a member of the family.”⁴⁶

First, he encounters a language barrier; for a long time he feels like he is living in the Tower of Babel. This feeling continues until he could speak French fluently with his classmates. But much worse than the language barrier, here at St. Joseph High School, he understands for the first time what it means to be an Armenian, what it means to be *gâvur* [infidel]. The things he endured there, the experiences he lived are like a rehearsal for what he will experience in the future. He feels vulnerable and alone. He is different from the other students in terms of both class and ethnicity: “I was no longer the son of a petty-bourgeois family, who was more or less equal to everyone else; I was the child of a *gâvur*, who had to study without attracting attention”.⁴⁷ He realizes this with pain and anger. He says that he knew automatically how to react, and this sentence tells a lot about being an Armenian in Turkey. Living and surviving becomes a second nature for Biberyan and for the Armenian community. The stories he tells and would tell are necessarily always about surviving and returning to home.

In St. Joseph, he experiences a double discrimination: He is neither European, like the *frères* [brother (monk)], nor one of the *owners* of this country. This passage below perfectly demonstrates the situation of Armenians in Turkey, especially in Istanbul:

I could do nothing but hand over the weapons in a manner worthy of the *reaya* class, who was grateful to the Europeans for their patronage, but also aware of their

⁴⁶ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p.44.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p.45.

worthless position vis-à-vis Europeans and their Turkish masters. Or I would walk away.⁴⁸

Biberyan writes about a boy who provoked him by drawing a cross on his desk and then punching the drawing during a class. When Biberyan reported this boy to a *frère*, he was surprised to see that the *frère* didn't bother with this incident and protected the other student. Biberyan cannot understand this, while he is not even a believer, maintaining his faith meant protecting his own Christian Armenian identity and his own dignity. On the other hand, the attitude of the *frère* meant that the *gâvur* has no right in front of the "masters of the country". Biberyan is wrong in thinking of doing what the Turks can do.

Füsün Üstel, in her seminal work "In Search of the Acceptable Citizen", argues that during the consolidation of the national state and the one-party regime, citizens are restricted to being "national citizens" and by using an ethno-cultural nationalism, a "state-based militant citizenship" is created.⁴⁹ Through the education system, this goal is put in motion and advanced, in the 1930s, when Biberyan was still a student. In his decree of 1931, the minister of education Esat Bey states as such: "Turkish schools are obliged to transform every Turkish child entrusted upon it to understand fully the psychology and the ideology of the Republican regime and to make them highly beneficial to the Turkish Republic."⁵⁰ Reader can find both this nationalist education policy and the school's efforts to "raise acceptable citizens" in Biberyan's memoirs.

As I mentioned earlier, while writing his autobiography, Biberyan places his experiences in the history of the Armenians, and does not ignore this historicity for a moment. Everyone in his family got their share from the oppression, abuse and persecution. The origin of this historicity is explored in detail in Talin Suciyan's book titled *Armenians in Modern Turkey: Post-Genocide Society, Politics and*

⁴⁸ *ibid*, p.54.

⁴⁹ Füsün Üstel, *Makbul Vatandaşın Peşinde* (İstanbul: İletişim, March 2021).

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p, 139.

History. ⁵¹ Here Suciyan claims that the “education system, property and landownership, civil engineering, administrative sciences (General Inspectorate etc), legislation, and social campaigns such as ‘Citizen Speak Turkish’, all melted together in a few decades, and formed a normalized social habitus, including an established history of racism and denial.”⁵² Constantly forced to live under the weight of this oppression and contempt, it is not only the genocide enacted upon the Armenian people that is not acknowledged but also their language and even their existence.

It is inevitable to find fragments of Biberyan’s youth in his male characters. For example, Sur’s adolescent irritability or Baret’s quiet anger and aggression parallels those of Biberyan. Just like Biberyan, Sur realizes that he is not the same as the Turks around him and does not have the same rights as them. He wants to believe that this is not the case at first, he wants to believe, for example, that he can chase the voyeurs and take revenge.

In the *Penniless Lovers* novel, Biberyan examines the Armenian society closely and presents an inside critique of daily life, familial customs, bourgeois habits, the church... In this novel, Sur has not yet been exhausted and ruined as much as Krikor or Baret; he is still hopeful and rebellious. However, the collective memory and trauma, and the souvenir of disasters haunt Sur, who says, by forgetting or rather ignoring everything, “does it matter if I am Armenian”. From the first line of the novel, we are shown how all the mechanism of power work without a hitch, how these mechanisms employ the state, the police and the informant citizen.

Biberyan, as he had repeatedly said in his memoirs about his youth, was quite angry and had no tolerance for any kind of injustice. He remembers how he chased into the corner the boy from school that drew the cross in the desk and beat him, how he left him in blood and how he was terrified by the possibility of having killed him. This specific incident, among the others, had caused him to drop school.

⁵¹ Talin Suciyan, *Modern Türkiye’de Ermeniler*, translated by Ayşe Günaysu (İstanbul: Aras, July 2021).

⁵² *ibid.* p, 144.

According to Biberyan, perhaps due to his deteriorating financial situation, his father did not insist that he continued his high school education.

As Suciyan shows in her study, this continuity of denial and oppression works not only through individual relations but also through collective structures. Biberyan experiences this institutionalization of denial all throughout his life. After he quits high school, he starts working at a shop of a rich merchant named Garabed İskenderyan who came to İstanbul from the province. This man resembles a lot to Keçeli of *Sunset of the Ants* as he is also a “self-made man” who became a businessman without even finishing the primary school. Iskenderyan’s shop is located in Mahmutpaşa, inside a commercial building. This is the first working experience of Biberyan. In his own words, this is the time when he first develops his hatred towards the bosses, which he describes as “someone against whom, like medieval serfs, you have innumerable obligations but no right of objection”.⁵³

His fictional character Baret shares his deep hatred towards any kind of authority, which had also shaped his identity and existence. Once again, the honest tone which dominates the narrative deepens with emotions: like Baret, Biberyan also comes from a bourgeois family, and as he says, he is a capricious and arrogant man who had a certain education. So he couldn’t bare someone like İskenderyan who was a *hamal* [porter] once to give himself lectures, to try to dominate him. Not only Keçeli, but Suren also bears traces of this man. Especially the scene that Zaven narrates, where his father talks to İskenderyan is very similar to the scenes between Suren and Diran. Just like Baret, Biberyan also couldn’t understand what this man and his father could have in common, how can his father talk to a man like this. During the time when Diran’s or Zaven’s father’s businesses were going well, both Suren and İskenderyan felt intellectually and economically inferior to them.

It is also a mystery with whom these men cooperated, and who knows how they made their fortunes during the war. At this point, the conversation between Keçeli and the statesmen who visits his shop, which Baret witnesses, is quite interesting.

⁵³ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p. 57.

Here Biberyan makes reference to the *millet-i sadıka* [loyal nation]; statesmen (one of them is perhaps an Armenian), proposes Keçeli to get into politics, however Keçeli refuses this proposition politely by saying even though he is a loyal subject of state and thankful to the government, he is not worthy of it. However the statesman's response is as such: "Armenians are our most valuable citizens. We are sure you will change your mind. We expect many benefits and services from our Armenian citizens for the country. You will see, everything will change in Turkey".⁵⁴ Thus Biberyan underlines the concepts of "acceptable citizen" and "acceptable Armenian" by making boundaries very clear.

All these issues that Biberyan is concerned with are placed at the center of the narrative of his first novel, *The Lonely Ones*. The topic of denial has a particular place in this novel. As early as 1966, Biberyan vehemently opposes both the mechanisms of denial created by the Turks and the denialist habitus in which Armenians continue to live by keeping their silence. On the other hand, how these denial mechanisms were operated by the Turks is also revealed through the attack of Aret. Erol and his gang directly say to Aret's face to "Get out of here and never set foot here again" and then they beat him to death. Again, Biberyan drew the border of the acceptable Armenianness in this novel through the characters of Aret and Krikor. Erol and his gang are the ones who can wander around the city as they want. On the other hand, Aret and Krikor should behave themselves, just like Biberyan writes in his autobiography, they shouldn't attract attention. Barış Ünlü, claims in his ground-breaking work that one of the most important articles of the "Turkishness Contract", which he theorized from the Whiteness Studies in USA that inspired him, is that one should not insist on "being someone else" (i.e. Kurdish, Armenian etc.) other than a Turk.⁵⁵ However, Aret, like Sur, is young, and has no intention of abiding to this contract. This will ultimately be an action that would be punished.

⁵⁴ Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p. 331.

⁵⁵ Barış Ünlü, "Türklük Sözleşmesinin İmzalanışı" (1915-1925), *Mülkiye Dergisi*, 38(3), 47-81, p. 55.

After two unsuccessful employment attempts, Biberyan returns to school. He gets accepted to *İktisat ve Ticaret Yüksekokulu* [School of Economics and Commerce] where he was both older and intellectually superior compared to his classmates. Here, he is not discriminated because of his Armenian and Christian identity; on the contrary, this school becomes one of the only places in his life where he feels himself at home. Two of his teachers have a special place and role in his life: Recai Galip and Mehmet Ali Aybar (Biberyan and Aybar will become candidates from the same political party years later).

During his time at his school, his teachers and friends had an important role in shaping his life and personality. However, in that period, two significant incidents happen. These incidents had a very deep impact on him and made him realize once again what does it mean to be an Armenian. First one happens during the Big Hatay Meeting. As it is known, Sanjak of Alexandretta, where the Armenians lived until 1939 under French rule, was an important and sensitive issue for the young Republic. Talin Suciyan dedicates a special subsection to this topic in her book and explains in detail that the reason behind this preoccupation and concern about this issue is, “as can be understood from the election results, the Armenians were still active in the regional politics during the annexation process”.⁵⁶ Although Biberyan’s best-friend refuses to go, he attends to this big march which takes place between Beyazıt and Taksim Square, and he narrates how he walked that road by shouting patriotic marches and slogans. At the end, mounted troops attacked the crowd with swords but Biberyan somehow managed to escape. However, he was feeling hugely disappointed at the end:

Some demonstrators from the dispersed crowd, along with an unidentified mob who joined them, had begun to attack non-Muslim shops. A patriotic demonstration against the enemy had once again degenerated into hatred aimed at citizens. All of a sudden, I had a strange feeling of abandonment in the middle of the crowd. Feeling like a total stranger. The feeling of being fooled, the feeling of being deceived. In any case, the

⁵⁶ Talin Suciyan, *Modern Türkiye’de Ermeniler*, translated by Ayşe Günaysu (İstanbul: Aras, July 2021), p.128.

beautiful, exciting, romantic saga of the young people fighting with the armed forces for the honour and interests of the country were long gone. The heroes of the day were having fun by scaring the mild-mannered, fainthearted non-Muslim shopkeepers who had nothing to do with Hatay.⁵⁷

This feeling of being left alone would never leave Biberyan. That is one of the reasons why he is angry with the Armenian community who became part of this denialist habitus. He constantly criticizes this baseless optimism both in his novels and his newspaper, as we will see later.

The second incident happened in class, during their French lesson. Biberyan kept telling his friends that their teacher doesn't speak French very well, and one day, when their teacher learned about his claim, he comes next to him and says: "So what? Do you want someone else to replace me? A Garabed, an Artin for example?" Biberyan writes that this was a total devastation for him, "he chooses the weapons which could only be used against the *gavur* to insult me" he says. At that moment, he realizes how *vulnerable* he is as a *gavur*...

In this sub-chapter, we focused on the childhood and adolescent memories in Biberyan's autobiography and how certain events and traumas affected the author's life. We examined how all these traumas find their echoes in the novels. At this point, by focusing on the autobiography again, we will examine how the author constructs his identity as both a writer and a political figure. In the next part, I will focus on the effects of the incidents he experienced when he was becoming an adult, the collective memory of the Armenian society in which he lived, and the memories of the Second World War on both the author himself and his novels.

⁵⁷ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p.66.

1.2. TRANSITION INTO ADULTHOOD: CONSTRUCTION OF THE IDENTITY

1.2.1. Days of Second World War and The Collective Memory of Armenian Community

Memory, in both individual and collective level, is the guardian of the identity. The collective, the society which we live in, is the determinant of our identity, we are conditioned to think and to exist in these relationships. As Maurice Halbwachs, who had made a great contribution to the concept of “collective memory” puts it, even the most personal memories are constructed upon the communication and the interaction between social groups. Subsequent to Halbwachs, Jan Assmann develops the concept of “cultural memory” by distinguishing it from “communicative” or “everyday” memory. In his seminal article cowritten with John Czaplicka, Assmann asserts that the “cultural memory preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity. The objective manifestations of cultural memory are defined through a kind of identificatory determination in a positive (“We are this”) or in a negative (“That’s our opposite”) sense”.⁵⁸ Thus, the concept of cultural and collective memory forms the backbone of the identity. However, this memory is certainly highly manipulable and selective; in other words, what we forget, what we are forced to forget or even what we choose to forget as a society is as important as what we remember. Collective memory, which is determined by individual memory, is carried in every single individual, for we “recall, recognize and localize [our] memories”⁵⁹.

In this section, I will examine the traumatic collective memory of the Armenian community during the Second World War, and while doing that, I will also examine how this collective memory has shaped Zaven Biberyan’s individual memory and identity, both as a writer and a citizen. First of all, I should underline again the fact

⁵⁸ Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity” in *New German Critique*, no. 65, 1995. (Accessed September 2, 2021). doi:10.2307/488538.

⁵⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 38.

that being an Armenian in Turkey means being a part of a community whose history and existence is ignored as a whole. Biberyan writes in his autobiography how shocked he was when he learned about the history of Armenian people and the representation of the “Armenian issue” in official history. He narrates this oblivion and ignorance as following:

From the beginning to the end of the history book, there was no mention of Armenia or the Armenians on a single page. There has never been such a country; there were never any Armenians who lived in that country, founded kingdoms, empires, civilizations, struggled, suffered and lost their lives. And then, towards the end of the previous century, this name suddenly appeared on the pages with all its venom, as if from the nowhere. At the brink of the twentieth century, Armenians, who must have come from Mars, stabbed Turks, Turkey, in the back, and eventually paid the price for their betrayal with the justice-dispensing sword of the Turks they had sacrificed!⁶⁰

In order to understand the vulnerability of the being *gavur*, in the sense that Biberyan using, we need to examine the establishment and institutionalization of denial. According to Suciyan, we need to discuss these starting from the cultural politics and materials that the Turkish state established and created, since 1916. Suciyan basically emphasizes two important points: Firstly, the international approval of denial (by USA, French and English governments), enabled the Turkish Republic to reproduce and institutionalize denial⁶¹; secondly, the institutional, managerial, political and cultural continuity between the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic played a crucial role in the creation of this denialist habitus.

In the 1930s, government intervention to non-Muslim community institutions began. From schools to foundations, the state had a say over all kinds of non-Muslim institutions. The disastrous effects of the world war on the economy caused the emergence of black markets in big cities and the concentration of the capital in certain hands. The Wealth Tax, which government brought as a solution, made the

⁶⁰ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p.71.

⁶¹ Talin Suciyan, *Modern Türkiye’de Ermeniler*, translated by Ayşe Günaysu (İstanbul: Aras, July 2021), p.137.

dynamics in the society very tense. In 1950, with the Democrat Party (DP) winning the elections, multi-party system was started for the first time in Turkey. With the DP in power, Turkey was rapidly becoming economically liberal. The rapprochement with USA and the money coming from there through the Marshall plan brought a serious economic relief. Finally, with the Truman Doctrine, the political atmosphere also seemed to be more optimistic for the Armenian community. Some of the Armenian newspapers like *Marmara*, believed that the government was eager and ready to solve the problems of non-muslims. But that wasn't the case. According to Suciyan, the Armenian community lacked the delegates who can defend and demand their rights in front of the Turkish authorities and press members.

Zaven Biberyan, wrote his most famous articles after the second half of 1940s. In his article titled “Al Gı Pave”, [Enough is Enough], he writes:

Are we equal citizens of the Republic of Turkey, or are we people living here with a temporary residence permit? Are we free and equal citizens, or are we people whom the journalists often consider themselves entitled to speak in a contemptuous and threatening manner?⁶²

These two questions were crucial and central for both Biberyan in particular, and for Armenians living in the post-genocidal Turkey in general, Biberyan didn't accept the partial captivity accepted by the community, and demanded equal citizenship. Because non-Muslims were continued to be suppressed and silenced in all the areas of social life for a long time, by various mechanism and practices of the state and the social life. One of the most significant practices that created the post-genocidal denialist habitus in Turkey was the law that bans “Insulting Turkishness”. As Suciyan demonstrates, personal animosities resulted too often in an arbitrary accusation of “insulting Turkishness”. As it was very easy to sue a non-Muslim, this law had become a tremendous tool of silencing and suppression where the state and its citizen informant were collaborating.

⁶² *ibid*, p. 141.

Another practice which helped consolidating the denialist habitus was the “Citizen Speak Turkish” campaigns, which were initially started by *Darülfünun Hukuk Fakültesi Talebe Cemiyeti* [Student Society of Istanbul University Law Faculty] in 1928. One of the intuitions which supported this campaign was the *Türk Ocakları*, which would later transform into *Türk Tarih Birliği*. At that time the statesmen, senior officials and journalists supported this campaign in the speeches they gave, or in the articles they wrote. These two practices had aimed to silence the non-Muslims, to imprison them in their houses and erase their existence in the social and political areas. Biberyan, on the other hand, refuses to be pushed and locked down into the house, against all these policies. Just because of this, he stubbornly learns (or rather improves his) Armenian, his mother language, and writes all his books (except his auto-biography which he wrote in French) in Armenian (although he later would say that he regretted it in the letter he wrote to Hrant Paluyan). He wants to show with great faith and stubbornness that Armenian is not a language that can be ignored or erased.

Another practice targeting non-Muslims was the Twenty Class military service. This became prevalent during the First World War; according to this discriminatory practice, non-Muslim men were recruited during the war for precautionary purposes, but they were not given weapons and were used as workers in road constructions. Biberyan frequently underlines in his autobiography that this practice was only implemented with racist motives, and it was implemented to keep all non-Muslims, especially the Armenians away from Istanbul during the Second World War. He understands this very well during his Nafia service. For example, he learns that one day they will be transferred from Akhisar to Adana. And that there will be no one left in Akhisar. “What about the Sındırgı-Akhisar road where we have been doing earthwork?” he asks to himself. This is actually a rhetorical question, Biberyan knows the answer very well: “I knew that the purpose of this implementation was not to build strategic roads all around the country, as they were claiming, but to serve as a concentration camp for us”.⁶³

⁶³ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p. 287.

With the Wealth Tax implemented one year later, the non-Muslims who were silenced and ignored in the public sphere were also destroyed economically. The main goal here was to create a Turkish economy by transferring the assets of non-Muslims to the Muslims. Biberyan constantly cries out “the still bleeding wound of the Wealth Tax and mobilization of Twenty Classes, which are actually acts of crimes” and “the humiliations that turned into unsatisfied rebellions” and “accumulated resentment” of all those years.

Lastly, according to Suciyan, one of the milestones of the period of post-World War II which exacerbate the discrimination and oppression against the Armenians was the founding conference of the United Nations which took place in San Francisco in April 1945.⁶⁴ Here, a group named Armenian National Council of America presents a statement in which they use the expression “Turkey’s Armenian counties”. This expression perceived like a land request and created even more hostile atmosphere towards the Armenian people, and both the government authorities and Turkish press created provocative news constantly. Biberyan speaks of this conference in his auto-biography in the following passage:

The youngest of the Nadi brothers, Doğan, was sent to the USA on the occasion of the San Francisco Conference, I guess. In one of his letters, he mentioned what the American Armenians did; they demanded Turkey’s compensation for the 1915 Genocide and the United Nations’ intervention to return their ancestral lands to them, and they were conducting an active campaign against Turkey in this direction. On this subject, Doğan Nadi [brother of Nadir Nadi, the owner of the Cumhuriyet newspaper and editor-in-chief] expresses belated regret that the Ottoman Empire had not completely eradicated the Armenians in 1915, and he finishes his article by saying, “As the USA did to the blacks...”⁶⁵

Thereupon, Biberyan wanted to make an interview with Nadi. He meets Nadir Nadi. Nadi says there must be a misunderstanding. However, according to Biberyan, “In every word that comes out of his mouth, in every gesture and expression he makes,

⁶⁴ Talin Suciyan, *Modern Türkiye’de Ermeniler*, translated by Ayşe Günaysu (İstanbul: Aras, July 2021), p. 208.

⁶⁵ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p.334.

there was a contemptuous attitude of an overlord, who wants to show how magnanimous he behaves to his slaves even though he is not obliged to do so”.⁶⁶ This attitude is exactly comes from the privilege of being a Turk that Barış Ünlü talks about. In fact, both in his articles and in his novels, in a very early date, Biberyan tries to take away these “privileges of not seeing, not hearing, not knowing, not being interested” that this contract granted to Turks. It is actually a tremendous revolutionary move. He continues to bother and disturb everyone, without exception, all the time.

Biberyan also attacks to this provocateur newspapers and its writers directly in his article “Verçin aztararutyen kırkriçnerun”:

If it is necessary to open the old accounts, we can do it as well. If it necessary to count each and every dead bodies of the past, we can count them as well; because like all off the nations in the world, even more than them, we have our dead bodies to count. And probably we have even more words for Tasvir and its supporters who are responsible for the millions of dead bodies around us.⁶⁷

These racist practices of the government during the Second World War were aimed to the non-Muslim communities, especially to the Armenians, to erase them from both the cultural and political public arenas and remove them from the economy. On the other hand, as Suciyan underlines, according to the *Nor Or* generation which includes Zaven Biberyan, the only hope could be found in the “nascent socialist parties and the ideal of internationalism.”⁶⁸

Nafia, despite all of its dreadfulness and the incurable wounds it left on Biberyan, it also raised the awareness of the writer about a very important topic: about what it meant to be an Armenian. At first he writes that, he was thinking and living like it was before 1915, but it wasn't the case so. He says repeatedly that more than 1.5 million people are exterminated and it is not possible to do a revolution with

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 336.

⁶⁷ Talin Suciyan, *Modern Türkiye’de Ermeniler*, translated by Ayşe Günaysu (İstanbul: Aras, July 2021), p.172.

⁶⁸ *ibid*, p.181.

ghosts.⁶⁹ Yet, he does not despair, his anger keeps him energetic. For him, “to live is to struggle and to make love”. Because of the mixed composition of the conscripts of *Nafia*, Biberyan starts to see and understand the ethnical composition of the country clearly: there are Greeks, Arabs, Assyrians and non-Muslims from Istanbul. He writes to his journal that Nafia was like a sort of a “‘national’ ‘Armenian’ institution”. He is among family.

He meets with Islamized Armenians and witnesses the Armenian history spread all over Anatolia, the churches, houses, numerous structures... Yet he comes back these places, in his own words, “as a captive of the new masters who dispossessed him”.⁷⁰ One day he joins Armenian church service in Adana Latin church in Adana. He was most surprised about this experience, as up until that day he had seen nothing but ruins and derelict buildings. “To share his identity and his past” was his reason for joining the church service.

As Suciyan states in her book, the Twenty Class incident had an unexpected outcome that the officials never think for: the prominent figures of the Armenian community would encounter and meet with each other. In the spring of 1943, Biberyan meets with Ara Koçunyan at Esece near Akhisar; Koçunyan was the editor in chief of the *Jamanak* newspaper which was the rival of *Marmara* newspaper where Biberyan used to work. Koçunyan tells Biberyan that he should write in *Jamanak*, as Suren Şamlıyan who is the editor in chief of *Marmara* is working for the *emniyet* [police headquarters]. Biberyan also don’t like Şamlıyan. He would later start writing for *Jamanak*. His first article called “End of Christianity” was an anti-religious essay. As an anarchist, he would attack everything sacred.

Şamlıyan’s pro-government attitudes and his belief that the meetings with the government would solve every kind of problem of the Armenian community were not compatible with Biberyan’s politic beliefs and his journalism. According to Biberyan, socialism was the cure for every wound. He believed that three major

⁶⁹ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p. 192.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p. 291.

changes were needed: the working conditions of workers and farmers, increasing the low wages and how the non-Muslims are treated.⁷¹

Nor or generation including Biberyan was always sceptical of the Democrat Party and their claims of higher social liberty. They were aware that even though their ideologies would differ, they will find common ground in the mechanism of denial they develop against the Armenian people. At this point, Biberyan believes that the Armenian community should also make some fundamental changes.

He longs for a solid community. He was very excited when he first published his article “Al Gı Pave”. He writes in his autobiography, “All that is remaining was a community that closes its ranks, singing jolly songs of victory, fellows and siblings to each other that trusts one another, that is a community that has all the good merits of a human.”. This scene reminds us the ending of *The Penniless Loves* and the comments of Marc Nichanian about this ending: According to Nichanian, Sur’s dream is a political utopia⁷². Upon this, it is worth remembering this famous passage from *The Sunset of The Ants*:

The word catastrophe woke Baret up. Saraygil Azniv Hanım, just like his mother and Haybeden, was waiting for a disaster. Yesterday it was Varlık, today Kıbrıs, tomorrow it will be something else. “Something will come out of it”, something. What bothers him was this, he was getting bored listening to it, this general psychosis brings back some scorched memories. During all these years, no doubt he had forgotten what it meant to be an Armenian. Now he is beginning to remember that, and as soon as he got over the initial jolt, he was beginning to understand what that meant. He was involuntarily masquerading as an Armenian again. This was giving him a new comfort and he didn't like it. He was realizing that “not being an Armenian” was better. However it was impossible to not be an Armenian.

⁷¹ Talin Suciyan, *Modern Türkiye’de Ermeniler*, translated by Ayşe Günaysu (İstanbul: Aras, July 2021), p.181.

⁷² Marc Nichanian, “Zaven Biberyan ya da Çilekeşlik” in *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, translated by Sosi Dolanoğlu, (İstanbul: Aras, 2017), p. 15.

In conclusion for Biberyan, just like Jewishness for Jean Améry, who is a survivor of Auschwitz and whose name will be repeated many times in the upcoming chapters, being an Armenian is an obligation.⁷³ Both in his political life, in his journalism career and as a novelist, Biberyan has always transferred his anger, which was born as a result of injustice, to the political arena and turned it into a struggle for rights. This is his biggest difference from his novel characters: instead of being resentful, sore or withdrawn, he is angry, belligerent and full of struggle. For him, as much as surviving and returning home, living also meant to struggle and a will to fight. Now, keeping in mind all these incidents in Biberyan's autobiography, I will move on to his fictional works. In the next section, I will examine how these racist policies and practices which I tried to give a short summary above, are reflected in Biberyan's novels and how they affect the characters of these novels.

1.3. MAGNITUDE OF THE SOCIAL DESTRUCTION WHICH DRAGGED EACH AND EVERY NOVEL CHARACTER INTO A DOWNFALL

In this part of the study, we will cross once again the bridge that we've built between the fiction and the real life step by step up until now and analyse the impacts of this denialist habitus we've talked about in the previous chapters on Biberyan's novel characters.

It is impossible to think and read Biberyan's literature separately from trauma and its representation. All three of his novels circle around the biggest traumas of Armenian community in Istanbul: Genocide, Twenty Class military service; Wealth Tax, Istanbul Pogrom. Even though these traumas are not directly referenced, they are hidden under the veils of oblivion, as we will see in the following chapters.

In each and every novel, Biberyan portrays a male Armenian character as the central figure of the story. Moreover, those figures, namely Krikor, Sur and Baret not only

⁷³ Jean Améry, "Yahudi Olmanın Zorunluluğu ve İmkansızlığı Üzerine", in *Suç ve Kefaretin Ötesinde*, translated by Cemal Ener (İstanbul: Metis, June 2019), p. 111.

have similar socio-economic backgrounds, but they also share similar temperaments and personal characters: They are all hostile towards women, self-enclosed, self-contained, silent, aggressive and most importantly restless and anxious.

In *The Lonely Ones*, Biberyan reveals social disconnection between people from different economical classes and different identities by recounting a story that took place in Erenköy in the 1950s. Here, Biberyan shows how the traumatic memory of Armenian community shows itself in every aspect of daily social life as well as how the privileged and dominant group constructs their own existence over the minority groups. In this novel, the story takes place on a weekend in Erenköy, a district of Istanbul where the summer houses of the Stamboulites used to locate. There are two separate narratives of two different houses: first one belongs to a Turkish bourgeois family (Osman, Mübeccel and their son Erol, and their housemaid Fatma/Gülgün) and the second one belongs to an Armenian family composed of a mother and a son (Yeranik and Krikor) and an aunt (Pupul). *The Lonely Ones* has a special place among Biberyan's novels as it is the only narrative that has Turkish characters from different socio-economic classes such as Erol, Ali and Osman Bey. Here, Biberyan demonstrates how the Armenians (in fact, not only Armenians, but as Osman Bey's wife Mübeccel said, Greeks, Jews, Armenians, "they are all the same") were seen as a homogeneous group by the Turks and turned into an "internal enemy" in their minds. Despite being set during summer and by the sea, this novel is the darkest and the most depressing novel in Biberyan's literature. Krikor is a resentful and withdrawn middle-aged man who still lives with his mother and aunt. The insecurity, lack of love, hatred, anger and fear that he constantly feels stem from the denialist habitus of which he is involuntarily a part. Traces of the old traumas are evident in every dialogue between him and his mother, at the slightest quarrel, his mother would say: "I did pay your shop's *Varlık*, didn't I? If it wasn't for me, you would be perished in Aşkale!".⁷⁴ Any subject unsaid and suppressed can suddenly become an insult.

⁷⁴ Zaven Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p. 37.

The novel is set during the 1950s, as I have mentioned above. It was a time when the devastation of the Wealth Tax was still there and the footsteps of the 6-7 September can be heard. The atrocious First and Second World Wars were long over, and the one-party period of Turkey was a distant memory. After the Second World War, the country entered a fruitful period “for the profiteers” as Yeranik says.

Just like the other main characters of Biberyan, Krikor is also a loser; he is a man who couldn't play his cards right and couldn't use the opportunities he had. Not only Krikor but every other character of the novel is true loner; whether it is Ali the provincial [*taşralı*] who came to İstanbul from Anatolia, or the foster child Gülgün who came from God knows where, just like Madam Verjin who endlessly complains about her bride or Krikor who holds a horrendous grudge against her mother....

Yet, everything had changed especially in the last three years. In one of the first scenes of the novel, Madam Verjin says the following sentence when she was talking to Yeranik: “It is a prosperous time with cash flowing from everywhere. Everything's forgotten. All people do is indulging themselves or partying around. Since the Democrats came”. Yeranik interrupts her abruptly: “God bless them, heaven forbid something happen to them. We heaved a sigh of relief at least, no one is minding about us.”. Upon Yeranik's response, Madam Verjin keeps her silence; she realizes that she feels the same loneliness she feels at Kınalı Island again in this very house. This scene reminds us Norma from the novel *Penniless Lovers* who keeps silent and turns her eyes away from the hollow optimism of Sur. Neither Norma nor Madam Verjin could not understand how everything is forgotten so easily.

Krikor is deeply troubled about his past and is struggling against life. He is disturbed that her aunt remembers their past as it is, without forgetting anything; he genuinely wants her aunt to forget their old house in Konya, this house without a bathroom, them being *taşralı* [provincial], just like her mother. “Why doesn't she

forget them?” he asks himself, “After all these years, she still hasn’t gotten used to her new life. You could see her old clothing under the new modern ones.”.⁷⁵ Hence, Krikor not only feels the burden of being an Armenian but also being a *taşralı*, which meant not being an Stamboulite and he feels smaller and smaller still. He constantly feels himself naked and defenceless. It is the defencelessness of being a *gâvur* that Biberyan speaks of in his autobiography. Biberyan underlines this nakedness with the following passage: “He went to the garden through the kitchen door. Suddenly, he realized that he was only wearing a shirt. All at once he paused. To go back in, to take his wool sweater... In this weather, in this stifling heat, while everybody else are out basically naked!”. He knows that he could never do what everybody else did, that he would always feel himself naked no matter what.

As a matter of fact, after this scene, Krikor encounters Ali in the street. Ali is butcher who came to Istanbul from Anatolia. Krikor hears a voice from behind, that calls “*müsü*”. He gets a chill in his body. He feels as if Ali will strike him on his head with a bat. He quickly salutes Ali and goes on his way. After he left, Ali mumbles to himself: “Son of a *gavur* (...) they were worthless during the war, at Yozgat (...) now we have to call them *müsü*, salute them politely. Money, they have all the money”.⁷⁶

Actually, Ali had never met or seen a *gavur* before coming to Istanbul. Yet after coming to Istanbul, he starts reading newspapers and through these newspapers, he has met with *gavurs*. With this detail, Biberyan underlines how the racist and hateful articles and their rhetoric set and propagate the denialist habitus among the social spheres. He shows that the state apparatus and mass media works together in their plan of publicizing the hate and anger against Armenians.

In this novel, we can see the fear and the oppression created by the campaign of “Citizen Speak Turkish” exerted upon the non-Muslims in its all fierceness. Krikor’s sister and his brother-in-law had come to their house for a visit. During

⁷⁵ Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p.58.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 89.

that visit, Turkish children knock on their door for the purpose of collecting money for the benefit of poor students. His brother-in-law Garo was telling them something in Armenian. Upon hearing the door and realizing that Garo was talking in Armenian, Krikor mortifies. He quickly runs to door so that Garo stops talking. Krikor avoids talking in Armenian even in his own house.

Another similar scene takes place before the murder of Aret, who is a young Armenian man. He is described as handsome and athletic and he is the lover of a young beautiful girl called Sevim. Erol, the son of Osman Bey who is a *nouveau riche*, and his gang want to teach Aret a lesson. They shout after Aret, calling him “*Ahpar*”. Meanwhile, an Armenian family was passing them by, talking among themselves in Armenian. They stop talking in Armenian and, in narrator’s own words, “start talking in Turkish with a natural reflex”⁷⁷.

In a similar vein, Biberyan shows how the law of “Insulting Turkishness” make Armenians defenceless in this novel. In the previous scene that took place in front of the door of the Krikor household, Garo says that they shouldn’t give the children any money because all the other Turkish neighbors don’t give any money to these children. Krikor and Yeranik have already an answer: “Turks don’t give any money. If we don’t, they blacklist us. (...). If you don’t give any, they tell that *gavurs* don’t give any money, no need”.⁷⁸ What this law meant, how it could endanger Armenian lives is shown much more explicitly in the scene where Aret is assaulted. Erol and his gang decide to tell, if anyone asks about the murder, “that they were agitated and beat him because he was insulting Turkishness, cursing profanities to their nation and religion”.⁷⁹ Hence, as Suciyan claims, this law could be easily and intentionally used as a tool of revenge for personal animosities.

Unlike *The Lonely Ones* and *The Sunset of The Ants*, in Biberyan’s second novel, *The Penniless Lovers*, the events take place after the Istanbul Pogrom. An uneasy

⁷⁷ Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p.198.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, p.177.

⁷⁹ *ibid* p. 219.

and uncanny atmosphere looms all over the novel. The novel opens with the sentence, “Sur suddenly felt uneasy”.⁸⁰ *Röntgenci*, voyeurs, citizen informants and possible assailants are all over the place. As we have stated before, Sur is a young, rebellious man who is not aware that he is marked by traumas. However, the narrator tells us again and again that “he stands on the threshold of life” and that “he stands just before a dark precipice”. Sur would like to ignore this dark precipice. To ignore and to deny. His lover Norma is Greek woman who fled from the Pire from the Nazis and come to Istanbul. She barely remembers what she had experienced there. She recalls Nazis killing a girl and a man and remembers the dead bodies from Pire. “Still today, I feel the same pain every time when I remember what I saw. I couldn’t get used to these. Let’s say I was just a child. My father even couldn’t get used to it. He is so disgusted with the Germans, he could not stand even hearing their name”⁸¹ she tells to Sur. Norma acts as the carrier of the traumatic collective memory in the novel. Through the character of Norma, Biberyan criticizes the Armenian community who accepts to be a part of the denialist habitus. One shouldn’t try to cover up or suppress this trauma but should try to never forget and never get used to it.

On the other hand, in the memoirs we can see that Biberyan’s hatred and anger is aimed to a group which Sur’s father Kevork is a representative of. The war had just broken off when Sur was born. It was the time of incident of the Twenty Classes. Kevork joins the army during that time when he didn’t have his shop yet. He barely escapes the Wealth Tax, thus he could stay in Istanbul and lays the foundations of his shop. According to her wife Meline, “[he] knew how to seize opportunities. Some people miss every opportunity”.⁸² Kevork feels a gratitude towards the Menderes administration, in his own words, Menderes is the greatest Turk after Atatürk. As opposed to Kevork, Meline is more cynical. “It was he, ultimately, wasn’t he, who caused the events of 6-7 September?”. Kevork opposes her, according to him, “it was the work of the others.”. Yet, he couldn’t do anything but

⁸⁰ Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, p.23.

⁸¹ Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, p. 80.

⁸² *ibid*, p. 119.

remember: “Talking about the Istanbul Pogrom made him excited. How many years had passed since? Kids would remember that day vividly. The sorry state of the store... We worked together for many days to clean, to organize the store again. They also felt the Pogrom, down to their bones”⁸³. Kevork shies away from recognizing the perpetrator of this trauma that they felt down to their bones. He sinks into a great denial. Probably, the newspaper Kevork reads was *Marmara*, which Biberyan also worked for a while and then quit with feeling of revolt and disgust. According to Biberyan, this was a sycophant newspaper that tried to show Armenians as *millet-i sadıka*. Furious to this kind of Armenian press, Biberyan writes in his autobiography the following passage:

The Armenian press is content with claiming that Armenians are innocent and are loyal to Turkishness and Turkish state. Whenever the Turkish press accuses Armenians with a disgraceful accusation, whenever they threaten the Armenians, our newspapers only respond with endless gripes and repeat stories of “Armenians who serve-our-common-homeland-in-unparalleled-ways” again and again. While “Turks” despise and scorn us, they continue unrelentingly to announce that we are and always had been Turks.⁸⁴

In *Penniless Lovers*, Biberyan accuses the Armenians who bury their head in sand, neglecting the affairs of the Armenian community and church while ignoring the disasters and the traumas, through the character of Hagopig who is Sur’s brother. Hagopig mocks his father’s head-in-the-sand manner while making up stories as if he was reading them from his father’s newspaper:

Menderes had visited the Patriarch for asking for advice. Do you know the Beyazıt Square case? Because he was unable to work it out. Patriarch then tells him, first you finish our church in Galata. Hearing this, Menderes weeps and apologizes from the Patriarch but Patriarch didn’t forgive him. He then told to Menderes, if you donate one hundred liras to Tıbevanık, I’ll forgive you, I’ll even make you a trustee, and also a chief to our people. Menderes replied to him, let me give you fifty, and

⁸³ *ibid* p. 127.

⁸⁴ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p.345

then they started to negotiate and find a middle ground at seventy five liras. So, Patriarch blessed Menderes and made him a member of the Advisory Committee. Then Menderes told him, call me your trustees, I'll make them members of parliament.⁸⁵

With this passage, Biberyan argues that Armenians should demand for equal citizenship rights and it is absurd to rely upon this new government. Again in this novel, the effects of the "Citizen Speak Turkish" campaign on the characters of the novel are clearly apparent. Kevork warns his kids to talk Turkish outside, Norma never talks Greek outside, Sur becomes reluctant to tell the police that his name is Sur. "Insulting Turkishness" again stands as an obstacle and threat against every action. Sur thinks about reporting the men who throws stones at them to police, but Norma warns him saying that "you'll get in trouble if they found out that you're an Armenian."⁸⁶ When the police came to collect a fine from Sur and his father Kevork, Kevork pays the fine without asking any questions to not get in any trouble.

In conclusion, in these two novels Biberyan reveals how denial takes roots and institutionalizes through the state and government policies and civil or social movements. He subtly conveys to his readers the devastations that acts upon the Armenians because of this denialist habitus without caricaturizing these events. As the main character of *Sunset of the Ants*, which is considered as the magnum opus of Biberyan, Baret's story starts with his return from his three year long *Nafia* service. We will thoroughly analyse this character, in the light of Biberyan's autobiography, in the next chapter.

⁸⁵ Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, p. 153.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, p. 125.

1.4. BARET AND ZAVEN: IN THE SEARCH OF A WAY BACK HOME

The Sunset of The Ants is a “homecoming story”. As Meltem Gürle justly states that, just like the hero of this genre Odysseus, Baret also goes through various adventures where he suffers a lot, learns from these experiences and becomes more mature.⁸⁷ It is time to go back to Ithaca; Baret yearns for his home profoundly.

The novel starts with one of the most unforgettable incipits of literature of Turkey:

“Who’s there?”

Baret raised his head and looked to his mother.

Arus repeated her question in a worried manner, “Who’s there?”

Baret raised his head once again and looked upstairs with restlessness.

An old face with a white veil wrapped over was bending over, looking down while squinting her eyes to see better the person downstairs.

“What do wa...?”

Her voice muffled and she got inside quickly. A great noise came from the upstairs. The woman came down the stairs with an increasing rumble and reached down to hall as if rolling down. Arus embraced her son while sobbing.

Baret couldn’t even understand her mother’s words that interweaved and interrupted with kissing noises. He felt a sorrow pressing his chest. He felt uneasy when he realized that two sets of eyes watching them curiously over the opposite window.

“Don’t touch me, I’m filthy.” he mumbled, “I’ve lice, don’t touch me.”⁸⁸

A hero’s journey concludes with him returning back home. When Odysseus would have come back to his home, he will again reign his kingdom. However, the journey he embarked upon had changed him so much that he is barely recognizable anymore. For him to take back his throne, people needed to recognize him. Just like Aksu Bora remarks, “Odysseus story completes with the gaze of Penelope. His home should stay put, unchanged so that the hero has a place to come back.

⁸⁷ Meltem Gürle, “Gençsen Senindir Dünya: Karıncaların Günbatımı’nda Oluşum Romanı”, 29 December 2021. Video, 41:28. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCpU4ZZaAvg>

⁸⁸ Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p. 15.

Penelope should recognize him, so that Odysseus becomes a king”⁸⁹. This issue of recognition is placed at the center of *Sunset of the Ants*; the same question is repeated two times, “who’s there?”, but Baret does not give an answer, he doesn’t say, “It is I”. Because the Baret who left his home three years ago is not the same Baret who had just returned home.

Biberyan had an intentional choice to start his novel with the return of Baret. Other than fragmented, murky memories about *Nafia*, no other experience is shared throughout the novel. He had become a character with post-traumatic stress disorder that have trouble sleeping and having nightmares frequently, who is easily irritated and get angry, a stranger to everyone and everything around him. Yet his trauma, his *Nafia* service of three and a half years, is never mentioned. For these experiences, we need to take a look at Biberyan’s autobiography which could be considered as an important primary source to this racist and discriminatory practice. A great portion of his memories are about his time at *Nafia* service.⁹⁰

We will come back to the traumas of the *Nafia* in the following paragraphs but now we will fast forward in the autobiography to the time that corresponds to the starting point of the novel. Finally, after three and a half years, Biberyan is discharged from his military service. At first he also doesn’t believe it, thinking he could be enlisted again any time soon. Long last, he asks himself, “what was the toll of forty-two months of captivity?” and starts to list his answers: “Constant malnutrition, which certainly affected the normal development of a nineteen-year-old man. Four teeth; either broken or pulled out and numerous cavities. Missing out the finest opportunities, missing *the best years of our lives*”.⁹¹ Then adds to the end of the list the following sentence: “On the top of it, moral and spiritual losses that could never be replaced. Perhaps this is the most important one yet as it took the goodness that could be found in the essence of man”.⁹² Hence, as her mother asks “who’s there?”,

⁸⁹ Aksu Bora, “Metafor olarak Ev”, in *Birikim*, 25 October 2021.

<https://birikimdergisi.com/haftalik/10761/metafor-olarak-ev>

⁹⁰ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, pp. 119-319.

⁹¹ *ibid*, p.319.

⁹² *ibid*, P.319.

Baret could not say “It is I” but resolve to just lifting his head and looking to his mother.

Primo Levi who is an Auschwitz survivor, in the preface of his book *The Drowned and The Saved* says that the most recurring nightmare of the prisoners of the concentration camps was that even if they could return to their homes one day, no one would believe to what they say about the camps and what they experienced there:

What is interesting is that this idea (“even if we tell, no one would believe us”) would appear in the dreams of the desperate prisoners during the night. Nearly everyone who returned from the war, in their written or oral memoirs, recounts the same dream that appear frequently during night-time, even though sometimes the details change it was the same dream in essence: They come home with a desire to relieve themselves by sharing their pain with a loved one; the other person does not believe them, sometimes not even listen to them.⁹³

Baret also comes home with the same desire of telling his story but the nightmare Levi talked about had become a reality, no one listens to him. He tries to relieve himself from the unbearable burden of his memories, he wants “not to forget but on the contrary to talk”. Hence, we should read Biberyan’s autobiography by keeping in mind this desire to recount, to witness.

Biberyan is conscripted to army in November 3rd, 1941 and he is discharged from service in March 24th, 1945. From the first moment he realizes that he need to sever his bond with his past, his home, his mother, basically everyone he knows and forget his past entirely. But this was impossible. He needed to forget his past, yet remembering his past becomes his sole support. In the remote regions of Anatolia, they are transported from place to place, in horrible conditions, becoming ill from various diseases such as malaria and typhoid, for three and a half years filled with lice. He writes that “we were wearing this country’s army uniform but we weren’t the children of this homeland.”⁹⁴ He feels disconnected from the place he calls

⁹³ Primo Levi, *Boğulanlar ve Kurtulanlar*, translated by Kemal Atakay (İstanbul: Can, 2015), p. 14.

⁹⁴ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p. 134

“home”. Primo Levi states that, it is impossible to ever forget humiliation and quotes the following passage from Jean Amery, another survivor of Auschwitz just like him:

A person who is tortured, is left tortured. (...) Those who are tortured could not accommodate themselves with the world around them, the nausea resulting from being treated like a no one could never disappear. The trust to humanity that is first shatter with the slap on the cheek and then annihilated with the torture could never be regained again.⁹⁵

Just like Jean Amery, Baret never forgets his humiliation. Between him and the rest of the mankind lies thick walls that could not be demolished. He trusts no one: not to his mother, to his father, her sister, to Lula, to bosses, not even his friends... Biberyan, on the other hand, while not forgetting the memory of the humiliation, contrary to Amery, he would place struggle to the center of his life, not rancor. Every time he comes face to face with death, in the moments when his unable to recognize himself in front of a mirror, when, in his own words, “sadist” corporals humiliating him relentlessly, Biberyan keeps reminding himself that “[he] should regain [his] health, especially to create great things [he] must survive”.⁹⁶ He does not lose his will to witness, not for a moment. For example, when he was seriously ill with malaria and he was allowed to leave to recuperate for three months, he first goes to courtyard to have a photograph. He says that he still keeps that photograph of him “looking like a train wreck”.⁹⁷ He bring back another souvenir from *Nafia* to Istanbul: a venomous and deadly spider with a very strong carapace.⁹⁸

In both his memoirs and the novel *Sunset of the Ants*, Biberyan underlines how the history of persecution repeats for the Armenians, or more precisely, how the oppression and denial politics that target the Armenian people are institutionalized and implemented systematically. Even though Biberyan from his father, and Baret from his uncle Dırtad had listened again and again their *Amele Taburu* memories,

⁹⁵ Primo Levi, p. 27.

⁹⁶ *ibid.* P. 218

⁹⁷ *ibid.* p.220.

⁹⁸ *ibid.* p. 296.

they still found themselves in a similar circumstances. Biberyan writes the following: “Approximately a quarter century ago, *gavurs* were destined to *Amele Taburs*; now, twenty-five years later, these battalions are resurrected for their children and great children.”

Both Baret and Biberyan, are filled with a tremendous class anger as a result of their time in *Nafia* service: It is a rage against the denial, and the people who deny and ignore. In particular this rage manifests itself during their encounters with the Other, that is the denialist. For example, during his time in *Nafia*, when Biberyan and his platoon were transported riding trains, they were encountering civilian trains with luxurious diner cars, in which people in furs and elegant clothing were having diners. About these encounters, Biberyan writes that:

This is where our inner pain and anger came from: being denied, being excluded from the luminous environment in which we spent our whole life, and being pushed into darkness where we can no longer even recognize ourselves.⁹⁹

They are estranged from the class once they belong to and to the members of this class. They are the ants. Baret realizes this when he came to Tünel square from Halıcıoğlu: “He was at the center of the city where everyone was eating and drinking, where each house was bright with lights”.¹⁰⁰ He holds a tremendous grudge against the people around him who are shopping, entering and leaving the shops, those rush around in a hurry to go to someplace. Unlike Biberyan, Baret does not have a home that he can go back, he has lost all possibility of it.

Biberyan improves his Armenian during *Nafia*. With great effort and determination, he learns his mother language; he writes, “I predicted that there will be a serious fight when I will return; and in order to resist every attack directed to me, I should become invulnerable”.¹⁰¹ He no longer accepts the “fragility” of the *gavur*. Becoming invulnerable and unbreakable is only possible through his mother

⁹⁹ *ibid.* p.291.

¹⁰⁰ Biberyan, *Karıncağın Günbatımı*, p.290.

¹⁰¹ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p.276.

language and writing. Writing had become a way of returning back home, to survive and to resist for Biberyan from that time forward.

Speaking of home and returning home, I think it is time to close this chapter and move on to a new one. In the next chapter, I will question what the home and the city mean in Biberyan's novels. Later in my study, I will focus on fiction rather than autobiography. I will look at the places in the novels, wander around different neighbourhoods of the city, and go inside the houses. I will observe how all these places shape the characters and try to examine what emotions they reveal in them.



CHAPTER II

UNCANNY PLACES: THE CITY AND THE HOME: HOW DOES THE GAZE SHAPES THE SPACE IN BIBERYAN'S LITERATURE?

Biberyan's novels provide a wide panorama of Istanbul and present lively and diverse descriptions of the city. Apart from the fact that all his three novels take place solely in Istanbul, Istanbul is far from being just a background in these novels. The city almost gains personality and becomes one of the protagonists of these novels. In this part of my study, I would like to examine the places and locations in Biberyan's literature by pursuing a trail that starts from the city and following it to the interior of the houses. But while doing this, I will also examine how the perspective of the author, and of course the gaze of his characters, through the lens of the Catastrophe, shaped all these spaces.

In the first part of the chapter, it is useful to talk about Istanbul first and foremost. All three novels take place mainly in Istanbul, on the Asian side. In all of them, Istanbul is a city that is on the brink of a big change. I've said that the 1950's were a milestone for Turkey. The reconstruction of Istanbul, which was a result of Menderes's big dream of Americanization, had created two opposite sides in the city. On one hand, there are new and luxurious apartments and buildings, as result of enthusiasm for westernization, and on the other hand, there are old, dilapidated neighbourhoods left to their own devices. The boundaries between wealthy and poor people had become very clear. As I mentioned, Biberyan's three novels take place on the Asian side, more specifically, near Kadıköy and its neighbouring districts. This neighbourhood also has an important place in Biberyan's life, he was born, grew up and went to high school there. Therefore, it is not surprising that he chooses Kadıköy as the setting for his novels. At this point, I think it is right and necessary to briefly examine the setting of Biberyan's novels one by one and draw a map of "Biberyan's geography", so to speak.

The Lonely Ones takes place in Erenköy, which was a *sayfiye* at the time. In this novel, characters never leave Erenköy, Biberyan locks his reader in one single

neighbourhood. The novel begins in Krikor's house, Pupul and Yeranik are spying on Gülgün, and gossiping about her. As Gülgün's stepmother Mübeccel sends her out for shopping for the dinner which will take place that evening, we as the readers begin to see the neighbourhood: she goes and returns constantly between the butcher, grocery store and patisserie. In Ali's eyes, this neighbourhood is full of girls, there are many opportunities for him: "[There are] Turkish girls, Jewish girls. They are like roses. They are rosebuds, they are flowers. From Çiftehavuzlar to Caddebostan, Suadiye and beyond. Well-mannered whores, naked gavur girls."¹⁰² We don't see much outside of Erenköy in this novel, but there are allusions to Kınalıada, to the beaches around or Bağdat Street. As Gülgün says to herself, everyone is "on the beach during the day, on the asphalt [Bağdat Street] in the evenings, at the cinema at night".¹⁰³ Compared to the other novels, the province [*taşra*] is mentioned more in this novel. Gülgün, Pupul, Yeranik, and Ali are all from the country. For all four of them, the province is a place that one wants to leave. It is the exact opposite of Istanbul. They all want to forget the time they spent in the province.

Penniless Lovers is mostly set in Büyükkada, but we can see many more neighbourhoods of Istanbul compared to the *Lonely Ones*. Besides the various bays, forests and roads of the island, we see Eminönü, the Grand Bazaar and Fenerbahçe. As we will examine later, in this novel attention is drawn to the change in Istanbul and the actions of the Democrat Party in the city. No place is the same anymore, Fenerbahçe has transformed for instance, as a result of Prime Minister Menderes's dream, which we've mentioned above, that is destroying everything about the past.

Sunset of the Ants, is the novel that presents the widest panorama of Istanbul, there are many neighbourhoods with different sociocultural and economic backgrounds. With the economic collapse of the Tarhanyan family, the rich neighbourhoods in the novel leave their places to the poor backstreets of the city. These two different faces of Istanbul continue to appear together in the novel. This

¹⁰² Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p.15.

¹⁰³ *ibid.* P.21.

creates the dramatic and tragic background of the narrative. The dilemma that Baret falls into, finds its echo in the city. He cannot belong to these two different parts of Istanbul, the city will eventually *detrterritorialize* him. He will gradually become alienated both from himself and the city.

Büyükkada has an important place in the novels, especially in *Sunset of the Ants* and *Penniless Lovers*. And just like Kadıköy, Büyükkada also plays a big role in Biberyan's life. As we will examine later, Büyükkada becomes a shelter where the characters can escape from the chaos of the city, where they can feel a little bit of comfort and get rid of the fear they feel in the city. In this sense, the island appears as the place where the characters in Biberyan's novels are closest to the concept of "home".

There is a very important place common to all three novels: the home. Biberyan focuses specifically on the interior of the house, because the majority of the traumas that the characters experience originates in the home. It is depicted as a hellish place in all three novels. However, although all three characters desperately want to escape from the house, they can't make it outside the house either. In this sense, it is needless to say that the home also has a very symbolic meaning: whatever the position of the characters in the country is, so is their position at home. They both want to escape from home, because it is like hell, and they cannot escape, because it is their home.

While examining the city and the home in Biberyan's literature, I will also try to think about the notion of the homeland and what this notion means for the Armenians who live in post-genocidal Turkey. So actually, I will seek the answer in Biberyan's literature for the question asked by Jean Améry, whose name I have mentioned often throughout this study: "How Much Home Does a Person Need?".¹⁰⁴ In this article, Améry discusses above all what exile and homesickness mean to him, to a man who is expelled from the Third Reich. He says that he is aware of the intellectual opportunities provided by exile, the experiences that

¹⁰⁴ Jean Améry, "İnsan Yurda Ne Kadar İhtiyaç Duyar?" in *Suç ve Kefaretin Ötesinde*, translated by Cemal Ener (İstanbul: Metis, June 2019), p. 63.

contribute to new and different thoughts, the opportunities to open up to the world offered by immigration are valuable, but as he claims, “in order not to need a homeland, one must first have it”¹⁰⁵. According to him, “homeland means a sense of security”, and “the real homesickness was not self-pity but self-destruction”. The reason I cite these quotes from Améry is that I think Biberyan’s characters are also in a kind of exile in Istanbul, the city where they were born and raised. Therefore, before focusing on Biberyan and Istanbul in his novels and the relationships the characters have with the city, I would like to examine the feelings that the characters feel predominantly in the city, namely the restlessness and uncanniness, so that we can see how the experiences of the city of the one in the dominant position and the one in the doomed position differs from each other.

Space, whether it is nature or the city, has always been one of the main issues of literature. The relationships between the characters and the spaces they are in have always been studied down to the smallest details in literature. It would not be wrong to say that one of the best ways for writers to introduce a character to the readers is to examine and reveal the relationship of that character with the places. The point I would like to emphasize in this chapter of my work is that Biberyan’s characters are not some kind of *flâneur* that we are accustomed to see in modern literature, wandering freely around in the city and experience it. On the contrary, these characters live in a state of constant fear and anxiety because of their identities. In her mind-opening article titled “Sükunetsiz Meskenler, Huzursuz Mekanlar”, Zeynep Uysal examines how space is handled in Turkish literature, by establishing her theoretical framework with Leonard Lutwack’s concepts which he develops in *The Role of Place in Literature*. Here Uysal claims that, “with the transition from romanticism to naturalism in Western literature, the natural environment in which the individual took shelter and feel safe before has been replaced by the environment in which he struggles. From that moment, we see an

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*, p.69

individual who has lost his way with industrialization and wars”.¹⁰⁶ Lutwack examines the transformation of the ideal space through all these changes and he uses three concepts: *locus amoenus*, that is basically a kind of heaven-space, *locus terribilis*, a place of disasters or terror, and finally *locus destructionis*, that is a place of destruction. But the author underlines that the latter can also have a positive function, namely, the space of destruction can also be an opportunity to create one’s own heaven-space. In the light of these three concepts, Uysal analyses Yakup Kadri’s, one of the canonical writers of the Republican period, novels titled *Kiralık Konak* and *Sodom ve Gomore*. Both of these novels tell the story of characters who are trying to find a place between the old and the new system in a country where great and radical changes are experienced. Here, the meanings of both home and the homeland have begun to change, and the characters try to keep up with these changes or stay out of them. However, at this point we need to underline that, unlike Yakup Kadri’s novels, the city in Biberyan’s novels is a real *locus terribilis*, and this place cannot have any positive function. It is not possible to return or create a new *locus amoenus*, because the characters lack the power, dominance and hope to transform, to change the city they live in.

In Biberyan’s literature, it is also very important to create a place and to find a shelter where one can feel safe. This issue has a decisive importance in Biberyan’s life as well. That must be the reason why, in all his three novels, he problematizes the relationships that the characters have with the places they are in. But the novel that puts the characters’ loose bond with the city at its center in the most explicit way is *The Sunset of the Ants*.

In modern literature, we are familiar with the grand narratives that begin with a moment of crisis and a homecoming story. In her article titled “What Place Calls: History, Memory, Identity in *Huzur* and *The Sunset of the Ants*”, Saliha Samanlı compares the city in *Huzur*, one of the most important novels of modern Turkish

¹⁰⁶ Zeynep Uysal, “Sükunetsiz Meskenler, Huzursuz Mekanlar: Kiralık Konak ve Sodom ve Gomore’de Mekansızlaşma, in *Journal of Turkish studies*, Kaf Dağının Ötesine Varmak, Günay Kut Armağanı IV yay. Haz. Zehra Toska, s. 262.

literature, in which the city of Istanbul is almost like a protagonist, with the city in Biberyan's novel.¹⁰⁷ After making the distinction between memory and history, she claims that *Huzur*'s protagonist, Mümtaz, remembers through history, while Baret remembers through memory. Indeed, throughout the novel, we see how Baret's gaze shapes all the spaces. All interior and exterior spaces are shaped not by traces of history, but the traces of memory. In his own words, when he takes off the *straitjacket*¹⁰⁸ he has been wearing for three and a half years and comes back to Istanbul, he is filled with a feeling of strangeness towards everything and everyone. In fact, Baret wants to live his life, he doesn't want to remember. However, he cannot help it, he keeps repeating that "everything was different in the past"¹⁰⁹, and now "he had lost the best days of his life"¹¹⁰. Even at the very beginning of the novel, he says that all the city of Istanbul is stranger to him. "Stranger, indifferent, even hostile".¹¹¹ When he feels like a stranger in his own house, he wants to go to *hamam* [Turkish bath], he hopes to shed his skin and be himself again.

In Biberyan's novels, the bond that the characters cannot establish with the city they live in inevitably causes them to experience a deep loneliness. But at this point, I think it is necessary to underline that the loneliness experienced by these characters is different from the loneliness of the *flâneur* who is in the dominant position of the city. Fatih Altuğ, in his article titled "The Social Dialectics of Loneliness in *Lüzumsuz Adam* [Unnecessary Man]", states that the loneliness is not a state of existence which is manifested suddenly and out of nowhere, but that it emerges from different historical conditions and social contexts.¹¹² Although the conditions of the protagonists and the main plots are very different from each other, the years which the "Unnecessary Man" and the *Sunset of the Ants* take place are same, and in this sense, the historical and social background of the stories are very

¹⁰⁷ Saliha Samanlı, "Mekânın Çağırdıkları: Huzur ile Karıncıların Günbatımı'nda Tarih, Bellek, Kimlik", in K24. <https://t24.com.tr/k24/yazi/mekanin-cagirdiklari-huzur-ve-karincalarin-gunbatimi-nda-tarih-bellek-kimlik,3592>

¹⁰⁸ Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p.63.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*, p.66.

¹¹⁰ *ibid*, p.67.

¹¹¹ *ibid*, p.23.

¹¹² Fatih Altuğ, "'Lüzumsuz Adam'da Yalnızlığın Toplumsal Dolayımı" in *Bir İnsanı Sevmek: Sait Faik* (İstanbul: Alkım, 2004), p. 127.

similar. “The Unnecessary Man” is written in 1947. World War II is over, and Istanbul has entered a serious metropolitanization process like all the big cities in the world, and the narrator of the story, in Altuğ’s words, “has been exposed to a migration experience without any physical displacement”.¹¹³ The main character cannot adapt to the city, cannot feel himself comfortable in it. These years were the years of great change for Turkey: the country has been rapidly turning into a capitalist state, the population was increasing, there were migrations from villages to the bigger cities and the demography and the social structure of Istanbul were constantly changing. The main character of the story, the Unnecessary Man hadn’t left his neighbourhood for seven years, and he hadn’t gone to the *hamam* in those seven years either. But when he goes to the city and returns back to his neighbourhood, he wants to go to *hamam* to get clean. Both in the *Sunset of the Ants* and in this story, the *hamam* has an important and symbolic significance. They feel themselves defiled and unclean because of their contact with the city. *Hamam* would be a place of purification for them, at least they hope so. But that doesn’t work either, after the *hamam*, Baret “doesn’t feel like he found himself, on the contrary, he feels that he lost himself”.¹¹⁴

At this point, we should also point out the difference between the Unnecessary Man and Baret. Firstly, as Altuğ also underlines, the Unnecessary Man bears more resemblance to the flaneur in the way Benjamin describes it. He does not have a job, he lives on rent money. He actually has plenty of time to observe the city and wander around. Also, although he may not feel comfortable and not feel that he belongs in Istanbul, this is still his city. However, everything is different for Baret, for instance he has to work. He is in fact in serious financial trouble. He also cannot feel himself at home because he has been told in various ways that this is not his city.

Uncanny, in Freudian sense, is the sudden transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar. Freud discusses in his famous article this concept of *unheimlich*

¹¹³ *ibid*, p.132.

¹¹⁴ Biberyan, *Karıncağın Günbatımı*, p. 22.

[uncanny], which means the situation in question which one finds themselves in is not familiar and comforting. He defines the uncanny as something new and strange which was once familiar. In this respect, the city in the *Sunset of the Ants* is literally uncanny for Baret. Aside from the change of the city, Baret's post-traumatic stress disorder makes everything he sees around him unrecognizable. The year 1940 had changed everything disastrously. "When you go back from 1940" says Baret, "one step was thousand steps. Five years before the war were five centuries".¹¹⁵ In these circumstances, going back and finding the old, familiar Istanbul is an "impossible ideal". The novel is built on this impossible ideal from the very beginning. The city of Istanbul that Baret dreamed of and longed for during his three and a half years in exile, does not exist. From the very first lines, he feels "a desire to run away and abandon everything". It is as if at the beginning of a tragedy, Baret comes to a city amid fires, in ruins: "He gave up the useless effort he had made to find the old Kadıköy of his dreams. He observed in astonishment that everything around him was pathetic, ugly and dilapidated. Kadıköy, the streets, his house, furnitures, his mother, Zımaro, everything, everything that had once seemed attractive and beautiful to him."¹¹⁶

Baret can only feel a little bit comfortable in Büyükada. He sees that only here nothing had changed. In his own words, this is a "mesmerizing country". Even though the narrator says that "he couldn't feel what he imagined he would feel at home on the island" at first, he still "wants to go to the island, to that blackened ruined house"¹¹⁷, "the only thing in his mind was the island."¹¹⁸ It is also the only place that evokes vague desires in him. Unlike in the city, here he feels confidence, not fear. In this sense, the city and the island are in opposition, and as he leaves the island and returns to the city, the desire to escape from everything intensifies. Uysal, in her article titled "Literature Rewriting the City"¹¹⁹, in which she examines the

¹¹⁵ ibid. P.71.

¹¹⁶ ibid, p. 23.

¹¹⁷ ibid, p. 61.

¹¹⁸ ibid, p. 66.

¹¹⁹ Zeynep Uysal, "Şehri Yeniden Yazan Edebiyat: Cumhuriyet Döneminden Beş İstanbul" in *Büyük İstanbul Tarihi* no: 7, pp.168-182.

city of Istanbul of five different writers and poets from the republican period, talks about Yi Fu Tuan, who works in the field of cultural geography. Tuan's book titled *Space and Place* begins as follows:

"Space" and "place" are familiar words denoting common" experiences. We live in space. There is no space for another building on the lot. The Great Plains look spacious. Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other.¹²⁰

Just as it is a need to create a place or places and take shelter there, it is also a need to have a space apart from there and to go to open spaces and to freedom. Baret's desire to escape from the beginning of the novel stems from this desire for freedom and spaciousness. Rather than a city with definite borders and moreover, where he is not accepted, he would prefer forests of the island, the "underground" in Dostoyevsky's terms, and finally a remote village in the east.

In the article I mentioned above, Améry focuses on the city's connection with remembering: "The city, as a reality in its entirety, still permeates our consciousness through the eye and undergoes a mental process we call remembering."¹²¹ The city is not a stand-alone structure. It is not just about the construction plans, sketches and maps. The place is determined by the person's gaze. The mood of the character is reflected in the environment he is in and the city he lives in.

If we think in the context of the city, it is possible to divide the novel into two main parts. The first part is the part where Baret is still searching for the memories of his wealthy pre-Nafia times and chasing the impossible ideal I've talked about. The second part begins with Baret's encounter with Çamur and Haybeden. From that moment, the trajectory of the novel will change completely, while searching for his own place of belonging, Baret will be thrown from a kind of non-belonging (rich neighbourhoods, expensive restaurants, offices) to another

¹²⁰ Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p.3.

¹²¹ Jean Améry, "İnsan Yurda Ne Kadar İhtiyaç Duyar" in *Suç ve Kefaretin Ötesinde*, p. 82.

non-belonging (Tarlabaşı, Tophane, Kemeraltı, cheap taverns, penthouses). This distinction is very sharp in the novel. The fact that Baret was at a turning point is implicated with the following sentences: "He felt that something inside of him was torn and worn out". "He had watched his own movements intently, like [he was] a stranger."¹²² As Orhan Koçak also puts it, Baret is condemned to a kind of "non-existence".¹²³ And this non-existence intensifies as the novel progresses. He remembers the sadness of the winter of Istanbul, which comes right after the long sunny days. "Maybe that's why the contradiction between Istanbul's magnificent summer and its grey winter was so shocking,"¹²⁴ he thinks. The alienation that he feels towards himself, towards his surroundings and towards the city will increase gradually.

Unlike most canonical Istanbul novels, in this novel, characters don't have the chance to contemplate the city.¹²⁵ Contemplation requires a great deal of attention and focus, and a character must be immersed to the landscape so much that they forget their own existence in time and space. However, not only in the *Sunset of the Ants*, but also in other novels, the characters are in a constant state of fear and anxiety, therefore, it is not possible to separate their experiences they had with the city from fear. The character of *flaneur*, who wanders around the big metropolis without being noticed and who watches people, is replaced here by fearful characters who look around in panic, who are afraid of being watched all the time. "He was becoming a suspicious and distrustful man"¹²⁶ says the narrator about Baret, he doesn't feel comfortable with his colleagues, "it was as if he was afraid. He expected some harm, some evil from them all"¹²⁷. Baret is afraid of both crowded and desolated places: when he sees a couple at the end of a path on the island, he thinks: "Why was the couple in this isolated place not afraid at all? Baret

¹²² Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, pp. 195,196.

¹²³ Orhan Koçak, Biberyan Üzerine Notlar (II), in K24, 28 April 2022. <https://t24.com.tr/k24/yazi/biberyan-ustune-notlar-ii,3678>

¹²⁴ Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p. 94.

¹²⁵ Fatih Altuğ, in his article titled "Istanbul in Modern Ottoman Literature", focuses on how the characters in some of the canonical novels contemplate city. <https://istanbultarihi.ist/249-modern-osmanli-edebiyatinda-istanbul-1870-1923>

¹²⁶ Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p.166.

¹²⁷ *ibid*, p. 176.

feared for them”.¹²⁸ As an example of Baret’s uneasiness in the city, we can think about the following paragraph:

In the middle of the crowd in the street, something caught his arm. It was a hand. That hand grabbed his arm and stopped him. He was caught unaware and scared. The first thing that came to his mind was the police [*inzibat*]. But Istiklal street was off limits to the military personnel. He realised his mistake. He laughed at himself.¹²⁹

Likewise, the following scene exemplifies Baret’s fear in the city: "He heard footsteps behind him. He suddenly shuddered. The road was so dark, he turned his head. He saw a pair of shadows. He slowed his pace to get ahead. He was afraid that they would attack from behind."¹³⁰ A very similar scene takes place in the *Lonely Ones*, Krikor comes across Ali the butcher in the middle of the street and suddenly he shudders. He has a feeling that Ali “is looking for a fight or rob himself or put a stick on his head.”¹³¹ As it is seen, the existence of those who are in a dominant position in the city threatens the existence of those who are in an oppressed position.

On the other hand, the war has just ended, Istanbul is living its first post-war years. “He looked at the crowd on the pier with estranged eyes. The cafés and restaurants were full, as if the war had not just ended. As if the men had never left their homes”.¹³² Diran is the only one who reads and tries to talk about the war at home, his mother is not interested at all, he says to Baret, "Your father had the newspaper in his hand until the evening. Did the Americans drop a bomb or what? He kept saying this. It's like they threw it at him! I said politics won't fill his stomach, he got up and went to his room."¹³³

¹²⁸ *ibid*, p.181.

¹²⁹ *ibid*, p. 205.

¹³⁰ *ibid*, p. 263.

¹³¹ Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p. 89.

¹³² Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p. 176.

¹³³ *ibid*, p. 205.

Not only the troubles experienced by his family members from a generation ago seem too far to Baret, but also the good days they lived seem to him as a part of this impossible ideal. The scene where his uncle Dırtad talks about a day from his youth is like a representation of this impossible ideal, because Baret will not be able to spend such a day, nor will he be able to experience Istanbul that way:

“Look, let me tell you with an example. Frankly, that day I learned to how to live intensely my life. One day we went to the Bosphorus in the morning. I had an Italian girlfriend. Don't look like that! I was young then. We crossed the Bosphorus and ate there. We got on the ferry and went to Üsküdar, where we drank coffee. From there, we drove down to Kadıköy and went to Haydarpaşa by boat. We could have gone straight to Haydarpaşa by car, but no! We took the train from Haydarpaşa and went to Pendik. We got on the ferry from there and went to Büyükdada, we made a small tour with a phaeton. We drank, danced, and did *sitos* with the *barbas* at the *Lunapark* [amusement park]. We went out into the forest. I took the girl home with the last ferry. Then we went to Pera with friends to have a playful night. It was three in the morning when I went to bed. That night, I felt what it was to live *intensely*. I pictured that day in bed. It was as if a week had passed since morning. I had done so much, experienced so many different things that the places I went to in the morning could be found in my memory. However, not even half a day had passed.¹³⁴

In this passage Istanbul is like a dream-city, it reminds us of Sait Faik's stories, and Baret's Istanbul has nothing to do with this. As a matter of fact, this day that his uncle told will seem incredible to Baret, and he will keep it in his mind like as a part of the impossible ideal, and then he will ask Lula if she wants to live such a day:

We'll go to the Bosphorus early in the morning. We'll come to Haydarpaşa via Üsküdar, cross the boat, and have dinner there. After that, we'll go to Pendik and drink coffee. Then we'll take the ferry to Büyükdada, have dinner and dance at the *Lunapark*. We'll wander in the forest. We'll be back late at night.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ *ibid*, p.122.

¹³⁵ *ibid*, p. 308.

Lula's answer will harshly remind Baret of the realities of his situation, it is impossible to compare Lula with the Italian lover of Dırtad, Lula is a poor girl who doesn't stroll around this much in a whole year. "I've never been to Pendik, you know? I've also been to Kadıköy once, to Aya Katerina for an offering"¹³⁶ she would say to Baret.

Pygmalion is a sculptor who wants to marry with someone, but there is no woman around to meet Pygmalion's expectations, so he creates a woman of perfect beauty and exactly as he wants, falls in love with her. Lula reminds Baret of this story of Pygmalion; will he ever be able to create such a woman out of Lula? Thus, he meets the impossible ideal once again.

Biberyan also examines the daily life of the female characters in the city and how they experience the city. Here, regardless of gender, the class to which women belong is also an important factor. All female characters have to be alert as they walk through the city, because they are all being watched, and they are aware of that. But also, to which class they belong affects the people around them, it affects how they react to these women. Let's take as an example three different women from three different classes in the novel: Hilda, Tonietta, and Lula. Baret has returned from Büyükkada to Kadıköy, and there, before he arrives Surp Takavor Church inside the bazaar of Kadıköy, he sees Hilda. Hilda doesn't recognize him, she keeps walking, and Baret follows her secretly. He follows Hilda's every move, "watching with mixed feelings" at those who look at her. She gets off the tram and takes the ferry, gets off at Karaköy, buys the newspaper *Realite* and goes to Tünel. Hilda feels that all the attention is on her, she does not take the tram from Tünel, she walks towards Galatasaray looking at the shop windows. Behind her there are the men who follow her "but they give up following her halfway". She goes from Galatasaray to Taksim, and then walk back from Taksim to Galatasaray again. She stops in front of the restaurant called *Degustasyon*, but she does not enter, instead she goes to *Hatay* and treat herself to a sumptuous breakfast. She neither meets a man, nor does anyone else come joins her. After finishing eating, she returns home.

¹³⁶ ibid, p.309.

Baret follows her sister to the street of their house. When he comes home, he finds his sister at the head of a chest containing some old clothes. She's wearing her old house dress and torn slippers. But she still has her lipstick and coiffured hair. "There's a glimmer in her eyes."¹³⁷ Hilda can only experience so much of the city. Like Cinderella, she goes out when her mother is not at home and tries to live the impossible ideal. As she walks the streets, she knows that all eyes are on her, she is content to be the object of desire. Everyone is watching her, including her brother. On the other hand, restaurants like *Degustasyon*, *Baylan* or *Hatay* have symbolic meaning: Hilda for instance, has left the house to go to these places even if only for a few hours, Baret is ashamed that he cannot take Tonietta to *Baylan*. Even if Tonietta accepts her proposal to go out, he thinks to himself: "Where will you go out? For how long can you go out? Let's suppose that she said yes. What then? You go out together every night. And then? Every evening you will go to *Baylan*, every evening you will go to the cinema, every Sunday you will go to the beach. Your salary wouldn't last for a week."¹³⁸ Tonietta is a middle-class working woman. She is a self-confident, very sincere woman. She feels relatively comfortable in the city. She doesn't hesitate joking around with men. Unlike Baret, she is from Beyoğlu, not from Kadıköy. And finally, Lula is a poor, uneducated, religious young woman who has never left her neighbourhood. Suna Kafadar draws attention to Lula's dreadful walks in the city.¹³⁹ She is very timid, afraid of the gazes around her, she agrees to go to the cinema with a man she doesn't know just because she thinks he might hurt her. In her relationship with Baret, she submits to everything and cannot object to anything that Baret says. After Baret leaves the house, they agree to meet regularly in Taksim Square. As Kafadar also underlines, the depiction of Lula's walk in this scene is very striking. This scene shows how insecure a low-class, non-muslim woman in this city:

¹³⁷ *ibid*, p. 141.

¹³⁸ *ibid*, p. 188.

¹³⁹ Hazal Halavut, Suna Kafadar, Nazan Maksudyan, "Biberyan'a Feminist Bir Bakış", 1:38:12, 25 January 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsPgHRjWUj0>

Lula was walking with uneven steps. It was like as if she was dancing. Two steps forward, one step aside, stop; two steps forward, one step back, stop again. She was unsteady, frightened, and everything seemed abnormal in her movements. She was walking, instinctively avoiding anyone who stood in her way. It was as if everyone was about to attack her.¹⁴⁰

As can be seen, the experiences that women and men had with the city are also unequal. Here, the public space is not a place that men and women can co-exist together, but this is a place where there is a possibility of conflict when they encounter each other. We see this when we think of Gülgün in the *Lonely Ones*. Her wandering on the streets, her attempt to “show herself” is interpreted by those around her as “something is going to happen to her”.¹⁴¹

I’ve said that in terms of the places, the novel is divided into two. The second part begins when Baret encounters Çamur in the İstiklal Street:

They descended from Ağa Mosque to Tarlabası. He shivered violently. He did not know this district, but he had heard it from his friends from Pera down to the smallest details. This district both fascinated and frightened him.¹⁴²

After this part, we begin to see a different Istanbul, towards the end of the novel, we gradually see the slums. The place of the novel is no longer Kadıköy, Mühürdar, Pera, *Baylan* but Tarlabası, Kemeraltı, cheap taverns. “He has never passed through Tarlabası, Sakızağacı, or the streets of Yenişehir which look like bad-smelling, rotten-toothed mouths.”¹⁴³ As soon as he sees Ağa Mosque, he is disgusted, but he still takes a kind of pleasure from going down from there, going to that filthy tavern. He knows he doesn’t belong there, but he doesn’t belong to the “Sky Road” [“Gökyüzü Yolu”] neither.

The Lonely Ones’ setting is restricted to a smaller area, we see only one district of Istanbul, unlike *Sunset of the Ants* and *Penniless Lovers* in which

¹⁴⁰ Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p. 389.

¹⁴¹ Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p. 225.

¹⁴² Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p. 192.

¹⁴³ *ibid*, p. 212.

characters wander around in all the corners of the city. Biberyan's intention to turn this novel into a movie may also have an effect on this. This restricted area adds to the novel a claustrophobic effect. Krikor and his family have little contact with the city. They don't come out of the walls of their house much. Their relationship with the outside of the house is limited to the gossips they heard from the guests who come to their house. Here both the neighbourhood and the house are the opposite of *locus amoenus*, which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

I have mentioned how Krikor lives in constant fear, and how he moves in the city with fear and uneasiness, outside the walls of his home. But the relation that not only Krikor but also the other characters in the novel have with the city is remarkable. With the migrations from small villages to big cities, the demographic structure of Istanbul began to change. Ali's Istanbul and Madam Verjin's Istanbul are not the same, obviously. Verjin complains about the change of Kınalıada, it has become an intolerable place now. Everywhere has become very crowded, and she feels alone in this crowd. Kınalıada has changed, it has become crowded, young girls and boys have started to flirt more easily with each other, Bağdat Street has become an entertainment place frequented by upper class people, Turkey is in a critical Americanization process, Istanbul is being restructured.

In *Penniless Lovers*, Istanbul has a very important place, it is almost as a main character, just like in *Sunset of the Ants*. For Sur, Büyükdada is the place of happiness and peace, just as it is for Baret. It is almost a magical place, he forgets his troubles when he goes to the island. Biberyan describes the scenes in the island idyllically:

For a moment, only the sound of the moon and the whispering of the closest couple were heard. A sudden wind came up from the hill of Hristos, while passing through the hill of *Lovers*, he too the arm of a drunk Rum who was praising stuff ranging from the coffee shop's record player to wine, from fish to dancing, and they came crashing to and fro, a fir tree stick out its tongue to them, they fell towards building

that paid no attention to them, and then they left away towards freedom of Marmara.¹⁴⁴

As Baret says, “here [Büyükada] is like another world”. But again, as we said before, in this novel, the city is not a place for the protagonist to walk around comfortably. Sur has to be constantly on alert because he is surrounded by *voyeurs*. It's as if the whole city has ambushed him. At any moment, there are people around them lurking in ambush to destroy this idyllic world. Like Baret, Sur feels uneasy even when walking on the streets, even though he refuses to admit it. He can't stand people in uniform, he gets scared whenever he sees someone in uniform. He is afraid that every uniformed person would shout at him, take him away and fine him. The following lines show what it means to live as an Armenian in Turkey:

One would say you looked at a woman, the other would say why did you put your hands in your pocket, how impertinent you are, another would say that you can't walk like that in the city, they would then all say you disrespected the authority of the state, you insulted the authority of the government, you are a bad citizen, you are not a patriot, you are a traitor, you are not one of us...¹⁴⁵

He constantly feels humiliated, as if everyone in the city is making fun of him. When he goes to Grand Bazaar to sell his father's coat, he realizes that all the tradesmen have ganged together and tricked him, he has been scammed. On the other hand, what he really wants is to wander around to his heart's desire, but he doesn't have enough money to live in Istanbul in the way he desires. He does not earn his own money, he receives pocket money from his father. Actually, Istanbul is a huge city, there are many things to do, there are many places to go, it contains all kinds of possibilities:

But who said that he has no place to go. The whole city was his, from one end to the other. And when you say Istanbul, what do you mean from one end of the city to the other? Think about it. From Yeşilköy to Rumeli Kavağı, from Anadolu Kavağı to Kadıköy, from Kadıköy to Pendik, from Büyükada to Kağıthane... You

¹⁴⁴ Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, p.77.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 167.

can travel for days, it will never end. You forget everything and sleep for ten hours. Especially if you had drink one or two glasses on the way back. But how much does it all cost?¹⁴⁶

On the other hand, it is possible to see how the city has changed, from the dialogues between Nora and Sur. For example, Fenerbahçe, where Norma grew up. When Democrat Party comes to power, Istanbul started to change completely. Sur wants to see Fenerbahçe which Norma told, he goes there, but he is disappointed, Menderes, whom his father calls “the greatest Turk after Atatürk”, had changed here too, and Sur gets angry with him. “But he hated him even more when he saw that dreamy street turn into a molehill, and instead of the villas on either side of the street, now rising seven floors above the ground.”¹⁴⁷

In novels, it is important where the gaze is directed: who and what the main character watches, what attracts his attention. Baret can only look at the bourgeois world from the outside and secretly:

Glossy linens, whipped chocolate cafe glase, a generous tip to the waiter, nice conversations. Cinema's lighted hall, velvet seats, music, love, wealth, jovial jokes. Wandering around arm in arm on the street. House, soft sofa, clean bed, a happy couple, calm, without quarrels, without arguments. Laughter, soft, quiet sleep, pink dreams. A happy awakening. A pleasant work.

While thinking all these, he passes by Siraselviler. By the way, we should also underline that these walkings have an important function in the novel: during these walks, we see different sides of Istanbul in the background. After this happy dream of bourgeois life, he caught sight of the night shift workers who were renovating the tram tracks on the Galata Bridge. Biberyan emphasizes labour. But he does it so subtly, that the bourgeois life in Baret's mind and the labour of the night shift workers he sees in front of his eyes suddenly become antipoles.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*, p. 112.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*, p. 145.

After his father's death, Baret goes to Mühürdar for the first time, "where was the border of his world once".¹⁴⁸ With this scene, his ties with the past are completely cut off. When he sees the house, he feels nothing. He watches everything with a tremendous emotionlessness. "He turned around the garden in a desperate search. Something to hold on to, something that makes him feel anything."¹⁴⁹

I have said that the characters reflect their own moods to the city. For instance, towards the end of the novel, as Baret gets more and more devastated, he sees everything around him as rags or his eyes are fixed on miserable landscapes. It's as if the city is being pulled from under his feet, trying to throw him out finally, from its sewers, as Koptaş puts it aptly.¹⁵⁰ The depiction of the new neighbourhood that Baret moved to after leaving Lula's house, is also a foreshadowing of the end of the novel: "Rusty tracks thrown into the mud of the pavement, huts with dark workshops filled with unimaginable scraps, rubbish buildings and houses perhaps from Byzantium times." When he comes back years later from the village in the east, he sees that Istanbul had changed completely, he is a total stranger in this city:

Baret was feeling dizzy because of the chaos of Karaköy. He had made up his mind not to take the Tünel. He had such a fear of Tünel, but he was exhausted until he found a stop and got on a tram. Everything had changed in this square. He sensed that he was no longer different from a villager who came to Istanbul for the first time, even his clothes were resembling to those of villagers.¹⁵¹

At the end of the novel, the city is completely destroyed. This is the last and the real downfall of Byzantium, as Saraygil Azniv Hanım says. This scene shows that there is no home to return to for Baret, he will be an exile wherever he goes. The novel, which begins like a tragedy, ends like a tragedy. The protagonist could not change his destiny no matter what he did. The city continues to burn:

¹⁴⁸ Biberyan, *Karincaların Günbatımı*, p. 232.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*, p.234.

¹⁵⁰ Behçet Çelik, Rober Koptaş, "Biberyan Bu Dünyadan Geçerken", 1:04:01. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nW07mvx_Xbs

¹⁵¹ Biberyan, *Karincaların Günbatımı*, p. 455.

And the fire balls were also disappearing into darkness. The peninsula was sinking, the tip of the peninsula was sinking, everything that could be seen, all the things that eyes that could see, was extinguishing. And whatever was on earth was buried in the ground.¹⁵²

In Biberyan's literature, the home is also a complicated and difficult issue. In a way, in all the novels, there is a search for a way back home. They problematize and question the meaning of the home, possibilities of leaving it and returning back. The main question is the following: "Is there such a place as home?". These houses in the novels are ruined and destroyed long before the present time of the stories. There is not much difference between the city that vomits themselves and the home in Biberyan, both are places of the uncanny, that is, as I've already said, both places of the familiar and of the foreign. This uncanniness and lack of belongingness are very evident in the *Lonely Ones*. The street with all its violence and aggression, have infiltrated the house. Krikor cannot sit comfortably in his own garden, cannot speak Armenian for fear of being heard from outside. The inside of the house is also a nightmare, the fear that hold the characters captive in the city exists in the mother-son relationship at home: Krikor beats his mother, in a figurative sense, "until he turns her into rags". As he looks at his mother, he feels a fear that he reminds from his childhood, that is an "old fear" as he puts it.

On the other hand, Pupul is also not fully settled, she always remembers their old house in Konya, in Krikor's words, she couldn't get used to her new life. Sevan Değirmenciyan claims that Gülgün/Fatma is one of the orphaned Armenian children who were taken from their families in Anatolia and brought to Istanbul.¹⁵³ This claim seems quite plausible. We have access to the memory of this orphan childhood twice throughout the novel, firstly, in the scene where Mista Bey, with whom she feels comfortable, comes to dinner. She remembers her childhood: "She vaguely remembers her mother, she was five or six years old back then, her mother handed her over to a foreign woman she did not know." This paragraph continues

¹⁵² *ibid*, p. 523.

¹⁵³ Artun Gebenlioğlu, Sevan Değirmenciyan, *Zaven Biberyan'ın Romancılığı: Panoptikonda Edebiyat*, in *Express*. 24 April 2022. <https://birartibir.org/panoptikonda-edebiyat/>

as follows: “On a country-like terrain... There was a building... a small building, but solid, made of stone... and the sound of a whistle... The same sound, the one that makes her shudder.”¹⁵⁴ This sound represents the state authority and the threat which is still on the table. Before she is killed by Ali, she hears the train whistle blow from far away and she shivers. She remembers the secluded, the endless Anatolian steppe. It is the state itself embodied by the “ashen station building” that makes her shudder with an undetermined fear. Gülgün is actually also in a state of an “instinctive anxiety”, just like the other Biberyan characters. In her own words, she realizes that “she is always waiting for a disaster, and that she never feels herself at home”.¹⁵⁵

In the *Sunset of the Ants*, Baret always feels a “desire to return to his own place” wherever he goes, but it is also unclear where this his own place should be. The homelessness is like a metaphor in the beginning of the novel, but throughout the narrative, it becomes actual. Baret tried to return to the house, he worked really hard at the beginning to enter inside the house, but in the end, he would find the house destroyed and would realize it is impossible to repair. We are faced with a house that has been destroyed both physically and symbolically. For example, at the beginning of the novel, narrator describes the collapse of the house, the railing in the house is shaking like a tooth that is about to fall out, on the other hand, on the other symbolic line, Baret experiences the destruction in his body: “he feels like a balloon suspended in the air, it was as if he will suddenly burst and will fall to the ground like a rag.”¹⁵⁶

Finally, let’s remember the scene at the end of the novel where Baret goes to his dead uncle’s house in the island. The house is in ruins, other strangers have come, looted the house and built another house in its garden. In this scene the house gains a personality, turns into an all-devouring monster. This ruined house is a call to witness, and as Baret says, it will stay there until the end of the world. Even if

¹⁵⁴ Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p.95.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 68

¹⁵⁶ Biberyan, *Karınların Günbatımı*, p.105.

thousand of years pass, people will come and see the ruins of the house, if not the house itself, and they will say that there was a house here, someone lived here once. And this house inevitably reminds us of the confiscated and looted properties of Armenian people in the post-1915 period. When Baret comes here after the death of his uncle, narrator says that there is a smell of putrid corpses everywhere.

The dialogue with the invaders is also quite meaningful, they don't want to deal with Baret's questions, they brush off Baret by saying that there is no owners of this house, it was already empty when they've found it. Therefore, in Biberyan's literature, it is not possible to think the notion of the home separately from the Catastrophe. The characters are in an endless exile. That's why they always talk about escaping, leaving home, but there is place they can go. In fact, the following sentence in Biberyan's diary summarizes what house means in the novels. Perhaps it would be appropriate to distinguish here the house from the home:

I went back to the house but didn't reach home, [*eve döndüm ama silya varamadım*] I didn't know where I was and I wasn't happy at all. It took time for me to regain my *joie de vivre*, to be my real self again. But until the last day, a bitter taste remained in my mouth that ruin even the most beautiful moments.

Therefore, at the end of this chapter, I think we are able to answer Améry's question that I quoted at the beginning: one needs a homeland. Every story ends with a return home. Otherwise, not being able to return home, not being able to find a home to return to, not being able to belong to a home, will eventually destroy the person, as can be seen in Baret's example. As long as a person does not have a home, they are in eternal exile. Being exiled in one's own homeland, as it is the case for Biberyan's characters, is perhaps the most destructive thing. The characters are constantly in a state of unease and fear. They do not know where their home and homeland is. They do not trust anyone around them, they are in a constant expectation of a catastrophe. They just can't get comfortable, they're on their toes all the time. As I have exemplified above, these fearful gazes turn the city and the home into an uncanny place, both familiar and stranger. Since these fearful gazes and uneasiness I've mentioned in this chapter deserve a deeper examination, I

would like to close this chapter and move on to a new one. In the last chapter, I will focus on the emotions in Biberyan's literature, how these emotions shape relations between the characters, by offering a close reading of each novel.



CHAPTER III

ATLAS OF EMOTIONS: CULTURAL POLITICS OF PASSIONS IN BIBERYAN'S LITERATURE

In the previous chapter, I tried to make a geographical map of the places in Biberyan's literature. In this section, my intention is to draw a kind of atlas of emotions of novels which are very rich in terms of emotions. I will basically focus on four main emotions in this chapter: disgust, hatred, anxiety and fear. These are the most basic emotions in the novels and they can transform into each other at any given moment. At a first glance, these characters parallel the male characters that we are accustomed to from modern western literature, who are full of disgust and poisoned by masculinity. The disgust within them is first directed to themselves, then to the outside world, and especially to women. Disgust and hatred quickly become interchangeable. What makes psychoanalytic and feminist readings and analysis possible is the hatred and revulsion towards the mother and the opposite sex. But there is more, as the matter at hand is more complicated than it first meets the eye. What differs Biberyan from other modernist writers, is that he shows with great mastery and delicacy the constant fear and uneasiness of being an Armenian in Turkey, which lies beneath this disgust and hatred. The traces of this constant fear can be seen in the behaviors of characters. This anxiety is what distinguishes Biberyan's characters from the male protagonists of modern literature, with whom they seem very similar at first glance.

For this reason, I will examine the feeling of disgust, which is often present throughout the novels in the first chapter, to underline the difference of Biberyan's characters, and then, I will focus on the father-son relationship, which is also an important issue in Biberyan's literature. In that part, I will examine the representations of masculinity in the novels and analyze how they affect the relationships between fathers and sons. But again, in that part, I will underline that the basis of every relationship in the novels is the uneasiness; the feeling of defeat and fear of being an Armenian, which is, being an *other* and oppressed. To do this,

I will refer some famous father figures in modernist literature and compare them with the fathers in Biberyan's novels. I think it would be very interesting to see the points at which the father figures of Kafka, Dostoyevsky and Atay differ from those of Biberyan, and to see how the fear created by the Catastrophe have an effect on every single relationship. In the third part, I will examine the class anger which is very evident in Biberyan's literature. I will analyze how a socialist author portrays the encounters of people from different social and economic classes, and I will observe how the hatred stems from these encounters shapes the characters of the novels. Finally, I will examine the fear that is the cause and basis of every single emotion. Thus, at the end of this section, we will have a complete atlas of different emotions in Biberyan's literature, and we will see how being an Armenian affects one's own emotions.

3.1. REPULSION, HATRED AND DISGUST: OBJECTS OF REPULSION AND CHANGING OBJECTS OF HATRED

Repulsion, the affection that we call "to be repulsed", is a very complex matter psychologically and philosophically. Essentially repulsion manifests itself as such: one encounters with an object, which is created in the imagination of one long ago and exaggerated and dramatized over time, in real life. With this encounter, repulsion, which lives inside the mind of the one, whether it be the most profound level or just below the surface, finds its exit. In another sense, repulsion works just like poison, a poison which is created by the body which corrupts itself. Then comes an urge to be freed of this repulsion, to throw it up. Otherwise, it will consume the body itself. One way or another, that black poison, like repulsion, should be expelled from the body.

It is beyond dispute that if ever we are going to create the atlas of emotions of Biberyan's literature, repulsion lies at the heart of this atlas. This literary world is drawn with such a projection model that the repulsion is not only placed at the heart of it, but it also occupies the widest place, because of the way the emotions are projected to this atlas. All the other emotions seem small compared to it, moreover, these other emotions which are placed far from the repulsion gradually transform,

begin to lose their shapes, they undergo some morphological and structural changes. Thus, in this projection model, repulsion is the emotion which dominates all the others, prevails over every emotion, exploits them, surrounds them and then structurally distorts them. Here repulsion turns into an emotion which shapes all perceptions.

In this chapter, I will examine how this repulsion that I was referring to in the previous paragraph shapes and transforms Biberyan's literature, and I will also investigate the source of this repulsion, the targets of it, i.e. the objects of this disgust.

It is possible to suggest that the whole literature of Biberyan is ruled by a sort of an economy of disgust. What I mean by this economy is disgust is this: Here disgust works as a vital activity, it is present in a certain amount within every person, and must be constantly transferred to the others (including oneself). This disgust-based economy, both forms the dramatic framework of the novels and plays a decisive role in the relationships that the characters in the novels establish with themselves and with each other. First of all, we should underline the fact that all of Biberyan's protagonists, especially Krikor and Baret but also Sur as we will see later in this chapter, to some extent, they all live with a disgust which is built into their souls, in other words, the source of this disgust does not originate from the outside world, these characters disgust themselves and their own existences. For this reason, as we mentioned above, it is not possible for the characters to get rid of disgust. And since the source or the object of the disgust must be destroyed, we can say that the characters are in a self-destructive relationship with themselves. At this point, it would be useful to look at what Nietzsche wrote on "disgust" in his *Genealogy of Morals*:

Read from a distant planet, the majuscule script [Majuskel-Schrift] of our earthly existence would perhaps seduce the reader to the conclusion that the earth was the ascetic planet par excellence, an outpost of discontented, arrogant and nasty creatures who harboured a deep disgust for themselves, for the world, for all life

and hurt themselves as much as possible out of pleasure in hurting: – probably their only pleasure.¹⁵⁷

It is possible to make a very similar suggestion for the situation in which Biberyan's characters live in. What is interesting here is that Nietzsche also identified many of the emotions that accompany the feeling of disgust: discontent, arrogance, and self-torture. Biberyan is also aware of this connection between disgust and arrogance, he shows this relationship to the reader much skillfully. Moreover, just like the characters that Nietzsche speaks of, they enjoy tormenting and also torment themselves and in other words, they find some pleasure in disgust.

Another fact that we should underline here is that the disgust in Biberyan, or rather, no other emotion in Biberyan can be considered separately from the Catastrophe, because as I emphasized in the previous chapters of my work, Biberyan's literature is inevitably shaped around this Catastrophe.

In fact, it is possible to say that these characters are also the objects of a disgust in a way; the state and the society they live in is disgusted by them. The state and society try relentlessly to throw these objects of disgust, namely the Armenians, out of their body and system. At every opportunity, they try to root out this source of revulsion with all kind of policies, laws, practices or acts of violence. Therefore, Biberyan actually portrays the disgust of the disgusted subjects.

I said above that Biberyan's literature is dominated by an economy of disgust. Sara Ahmed, using the same term "economy" for emotions, describes the functioning of this economy, which she took over from psychoanalysis:

That is, emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced as an effect of its circulation. I am using 'the economic' to suggest that objects of emotions circulate or are distributed across a social as well as psychic field, borrowing from the Marxian critique of the logic of capital. (...) Here passion drives the accumulation of capital: the capitalist is not interested in the use-value of commodities, but the 'appropriation of ever more

¹⁵⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, translated by Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.75.

wealth' (Marx 1976: 254). What I am offering is a theory of passion not as the drive to accumulate (whether it be value, power or meaning), but as that which is accumulated over time. Affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an effect of the circulation between objects and signs (= the accumulation of affective value). Signs increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more signs circulate, the more affective they become.¹⁵⁸

This term of “economics” that Ahmed uses in order to express the organization of hatred, is also valid in Biberyan’s literature. To put it in different way, what we find in Biberyan is a very liquid form of disgust and hatred, which constantly changes its form and its target. Therefore, it is very easy to make incomplete or erroneous criticisms of Biberyan’s literature if one superficially reads the texts or adopts literary theories with very strict borders.

For this reason, in this chapter I would like to introduce a concept which I call “labyrinth of emotion”. By this concept, I mean this: in Biberyan’s literature, emotions constitute both an economy as Ahmed mentioned where hatred and disgust are not directed at a single person and have no “subject, source or destination” but a nodal point, and on the other hand, these emotions can transform into each other very quickly. Thus these emotions, which Spinoza calls “bad passions”, constantly transform into each other and create an inescapable labyrinth. We can say that all the characters in Biberyan’s literature are governed by their emotions, or passions as Spinoza puts it. As Spinoza points out, it is this labyrinth itself that devours the characters and takes their “power of acting” from their hands.

Let me give an example of this labyrinth of emotion. In the *Lonely Ones*, Krikor is a very Dostoevskian “underground man”, full of resentment and anger, trapped inside a house, who has already lost his way out of this prison called “home”. He is a prisoner of all kind of emotions; disgust and anger most especially. This disgust he feels towards his own existence is directed and reflected mostly on his mother. Let’s take a look at the following scene from the very beginning of the novel:

¹⁵⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p.45.

He was depressed. Once again he felt anger mixed with disgust towards his mother. Once again her huge breasts and hips disgusted him. Every time he got angry with her and argued, this happened. This is what would have happened when he disgusts himself like this. It always happens the same thing when he wears wool in a hot summer day for fear of being cold, when helpless timidity prevented him from defending his most legitimate rights. He hadn't felt much changed since he was fifteen years old, other than his bald head and fat belly... He lacks self-confidence as much as before, perhaps even more so than before. He likes to blame his mother for that. He had scolded and insulted her so much, despised everything she did! When he remembers Yeranik's demeanors 20-30 years before, he still feels that old fear, and this fear encourages him to "scald" his mother. Even though now Yeranik was in rags, and he himself had been a tyrant instead. Now he is the one who is in charge, but sometimes he felt hopeless, thinking that he would never be able to get rid of this ingrained fear. And he hits. As every fearful man hits what frightens him. Blindfoldedly.¹⁵⁹

As can be seen, here we are faced with a series of emotions which are incredibly fluid and impossible to stop, we are drifting from disgust to anger, from anger to revulsion, from self-disgust to lack of self-confidence, then to insecurity, then to fear and finally to resentment. As I said, they are so unstoppable that these transitions happen with a tremendous speed, not only between emotions, but also between those to whom they are directed. For example, as Sur walks towards the pier where he will be waiting for Norma, his anger changes its target repeatedly until he reaches the pier, and this time, we enter this labyrinth with the emotion of embarrassment:

When the adventure in the Grand Bazaar occurred to him, his face turned red. His hatred towards his father was also deepening. (...) She had never been so angry that Norma was late. (...) Then Sur's anger changed direction. He thought hatefully of Norma's boss. He was probably a man like his father."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p.38.

¹⁶⁰ Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, pp.53-54.

Here the disgust is transmitted from father to Norma, then from Norma to the boss, from the boss to the father again. The moments when these emotional transitions are experienced most intensely are the times of existential crisis: the moments when the characters lose their own agency and ability to act. Losing agency, becoming passive, transitioning from being active to being passive is, of course, closely related to being surrounded by the disasters of previous periods. Here, the individual and social crisis are intertwined.

But at this point, we should say that the hatred and evil in Dostoevsky for instance, come from a different place of origin than the one in Biberyan. Although the results of disgust and malice in the novels are similar, Biberyan's heroes differ from Dostoevsky's protagonists, who are full of disgust and hatred, who have what can be called the "masculine disgust" that we are so accustomed to encounter in modern literature. Bataille, in his famous work titled *Literature and Evil*, says that evil acts without a cause and meaning, which is in short, an action within self.¹⁶¹ According to this, evil act has no meaning and aim other than itself. But paradoxically, Bataille also says that evil act is deliberately doing the exact opposite of what is accepted as good act. Therefore, it is possible to say that if there is an intention (deliberately doing the opposite), there is a purpose, so a rationality. When we think of Dostoevsky's characters, we see that the evil we are talking about here is related to a kind of freedom. The evil here is basically the desire to break the law. Of course, at this point, I should also talk about the arrogance, the hubris of these characters. This arrogance drives them not only to break the law, but sometimes to create their own laws. They think that by violating the law set by both God and society, they can be saved of being humiliated, being an insect and thusly they become free. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that evil can also be a means of establishing power in Dostoyevsky's novels, more precisely, his characters hope to establish their power in that way. Raskolnikov disobeys the order "not to kill", which is the very first rule of both the religion and the society. He desires to push the moral

¹⁶¹ Georges Bataille, *Edebiyat ve Kötülük*, translated by Ayşegül Sönmezay. (İstanbul: Ayrıntı, 2004), p.16.

limits of the society in which he is not accepted, he wants to see to what extent he can exceed the limits. The following argument has been said by many critics before, but we can repeat it here: The Underground Man's resentment which was a passive, theoretical resentment (he is not capable of acting), leaves its place to action in Raskolnikov. He thinks he has the right to kill, and he kills the moneylender. But he also kills the young Liza cruelly, with the same ax. Even though in the murder of the moneylender there is a motive, it is hard to find one in the murder of Liza, he kills purely out of malice, purely because he thinks he has the right to kill, because he is able to kill. Gradually, the legitimacy of this action becomes certain in his mind. It is right thing to do to eliminate those who cause his humiliation.

It is time to close this parenthesis and continue examining Biberyan's characters. What is more interesting is that these relationships, these family relations which Biberyan grounded on the basis of "disgust" represent also the power relations in the political and social sphere. Krikor's disgust for his mother is inseparable from the state, racist policies, the police, men like Ali the butcher, men like Erol, from newspapers, radio channels, in short, this disgust is related with the tools of power and the government itself. Krikor wants to attack what frightens him, he wants to attack blindfoldedly. The sentence which starts with "When a helpless timidity prevents himself from defending his most legitimate rights" is an expression of the Armenians' perennial *pigeon-like* uneasiness, fear and helplessness. And the anger and resentment which are the results of this fear and helplessness are expressed as the form of disgust. But this resentment is not directed to the outside, meaning to the real "power", to the real "strong ones" to the things that frightens him, but instead, it is directed to the inside of the house. The disgust in Krikor for his own existence chooses the most harmless object that it can easily transferred, his mother.

On the other hand, another reason for disgust in Biberyan's characters is envy. Again, to speak in psychoanalytic terms, envy is "an angry feeling caused by the belief that something desired belongs to someone else and gives pleasure to them and not to us; envious drive tends to take that desired thing from its owner and to

spoil it, to defile it”.¹⁶² This envious drive is very decisive in Baret’s relationships with women. When he goes to the cinema for the first time after he had returned from *Nafia*, he sees his ex-girlfriend Alis. Alis now belongs to a completely different world. First of all, he no longer belongs to the same class as Alice. But above all, Alice is someone who is completely inaccessible to Baret. This sense of inaccessibility makes Baret furious:

He felt a deep warmth in Alis’s eyes. His hatred gone away. He waited for the girl to say something else. For a moment he hoped that she would ask him to meet again. He knew it was a dream, but he waited anyways. Then he suddenly pulled away from her, perhaps to quell his despair. He hated her hussy behaviors, her movements she does with her head in order to attract attention.¹⁶³

As can be seen in this excerpt, he hates Alis again the moment when he is absolutely sure that she will not propose to meet with him. Here, the origin of hatred is envy.

A similar scene takes place between Baret and his colleague Toniетta. They walk together to Karaköy, from there they will both go up to Beyoğlu. Toniетta asks Baret how he would go to Beyoğlu, “By tram?”. Baret thinks that this is an invitation and says “yes”. But it turns out, in Baret’s own words, he was “trapped”, then Toniетta walks away after saying him “ok then, ciao!” and leave him alone. Toniетta’s words hit Baret’s face “like a slap”. Then he thinks:

Suddenly everything aroused the desire that he had forgotten. He was not thinking about money or anything else. There was only one thought in his mind. “She doesn’t want be seen with me.” Why? It wasn’t the usual evasion of an oriental girl. How many times he had seen her joking around with Vincent. She doesn’t have that cheerful mood when she was with him. Why? She doesn’t want to be indulgent with him, that was for sure. She doesn’t want him. (...) He felt a strong humiliation. It was something different from a outdated dress losing its old value.

¹⁶² Melanie Klein, *Haset ve Şükran*, translated by Orhan Koçak and Yavuz Erten. (İstanbul: Metis, 2011), s. 23.

¹⁶³ Biberyan, *Karınların Günbatımı*, p.69.

He would never have Vincent's wardrobe. (...) His mind was on Tonia. Now he finds him even more unreachable than before, and he hates him.¹⁶⁴

As we can see, almost exactly the same scene with Alice took place with Tonia. At first, he feels a sudden desire, after that he feels some kind of hope, then this hope turns very quickly into disappointment and at the end, we always have the same feeling: Hatred. As the object of desire becomes unattainable, it becomes an object of hatred. Just as he hated Alice's "hussy behaviors", he now calls Alice a "bitch". The moment when he realizes that he would never have Vincent's wardrobe is the moment when the envy begins. And envious drive, because of its very own nature, wants no one to have what it cannot reach. Biberyan had figured this dynamics of envy very skillfully. *The Lonely Ones* is actually the best example of how this feeling of envy leads someone to the destruction. It is very obvious in the double homicide in the novel. When both Ali and Erol realize that they cannot have what they want, they kill him/her. Because they want no one to have that thing that they can't have. In Ali's case, we should also consider the class antagonism and class hatred. That night Gülgün is alone at home, Ali goes to their house. When he entered the house, "all the hatred and grudge that this house and all its furnitures, all similar houses and their furnitures and objects had aroused in the depths of his heart disappeared as if by a miracle. Admiration, shyness and fear"¹⁶⁵ remained. All these feelings, namely "admiration, shyness, and fear", will quickly turn into envy. As Gülgün tries to pull him off, he keeps saying "Do you not like the smell of my flesh? What does Erol's flesh smells like?", "Does your son of a bitch Erol do that to you, slut?", "What kind of animal is your Erol? Daughter of whore!", "I'll fuck your Erol!... Your house! Your furniture! Your...".¹⁶⁶ Here there are two subjects which constitutes the source of hatred and causes the envy: one of them is Gülgün, with her flesh, body, beauty, naturality and sexuality, and the second one is Erol with his properties, his money, poshness... It is important to recall what Ali was saying from the very first pages: "All the women are half naked, all the women are

¹⁶⁴ *ibid*, p. 189.

¹⁶⁵ Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p.162.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 164.

whores. A city where all the women belong to Erols".¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, for Erol, Aret symbolizes all the things that he knows he cannot have: an athletic body, respect among friends, and most importantly he has the object of his desire, Sevım. That is why they beat Aret to death.

In Biberyan, the family is the compulsory union of a group of people who are doomed to each other's presence. Krikor's mother Yeranik says to him: "I ruined my life for you. I took care, wash you, make you eat... I said *amesos* for whatever you want! Look what you're saying now!". To this, Krikor's answer would be: "Oh! *Amesos*, really? To which desire of mine? You've tortured me all my life."¹⁶⁸ This scene shows how the mother is seen by the son as an obstacle in front of his desires, and in this sense, it makes a psychoanalytic reading possible and even necessary. This mother-son relationship, which is based between love and hate, or to express in psychoanalytic terms, between life and death leads to a never-ending conflict. As Klein puts it: "Both the faculty of love and destructive impulses are to some extent inherent, although their severity varies from person to person and interacts with external circumstances from the beginning."¹⁶⁹ This psychoanalytic dynamic of the relations with the mother (as well as with other women) is revealed by Biberyan very skillfully: The characters constantly oscillate between their impulses, aggressions, and their libidos. The fact that Biberyan specifically uses the word "desire" here supports our claim. What is even more interesting, according to Klein, "The aggressive and paranoid mother is one and the same as the beloved mother", and it is at this point that the feeling of guilt arises. Biberyan reveals very well this ambivalent situation of the mother, that is, the mother as a dual subject to be attacked and to be loved. The following scene illustrates this ambivalence very well:

If by mistake he caught unawares, he would immediately fall under the influence of his mother; her word is undisputable, her shadow is huge... He reacted in panic, blindly hitting and hitting to deny and destroy everything that came from Yeranik.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid*, p. 35.

¹⁶⁹ Melanie Klein, *Haset ve Şükran*, translated by Orhan Koçak and Yavuz Erten. (İstanbul: Metis, 2011), p. 22.

Even if he realizes that he has landed his blows on the back of a corpse. When he got tired, he would come, he would watch the ragged ruin and get worried. This ruin would inflict him pain instead of the euphoria of a victory. Because he would remember that this woman having one foot in the grave was his mother. Feeling guilty prematurely by the thought of killing someone he cannot help but torment. He went to the window absentmindedly, looked down. He wanted to make sure that her mother wasn't dead, that they will stay together forever even after all these arguments.¹⁷⁰

As can be seen, the mother is object of uncanniness, anger and love. The feeling of guilt arises from the possibility that the aggression may harm the loved object.

On the other hand, towards the end of the novel, Baret turns into a vicious, angry underground man, just like Krikor, but with a greater violence inside him than Krikor. The first sentence Baret says to his mother, which is "Don't touch [me], I'm filthy. (...) I've lice, don't touch.", reminds us of the opening sentence of *Notes From the Underground*: "I'm a sick man"... But there is even more. In the third part of the novel, Baret resembles even more deeply to the Underground Man, even his sentences are like quoted from him: "Let me go. I am a bad man," he says to Lula.¹⁷¹ In Dostoyevsky's literature, we also find characters who take revenge for their humiliation and contempt from a woman. This woman turns into a person that they can take revenge on, they torment them, and they hope that they can somehow get rid of their inferiority. This is how Dunya is for Svidrigaylov, who can be seen as Raskolnikov's other.

In Biberyan, desire, lust and sexuality are always interweaved with violence, aggression and death. Baret has an "instinct to do evil to Lula", but at the same time, "Nothing in his life has constantly provoked him with such a constant intensity".¹⁷² Or let's remember Ali's feelings to Gülgün: "A lust mixed with grudge. The desire to both possess and destroy. A fierce desire. To bite her fatty flesh, to eat it, to tear apart those underwear of hers which the laundry woman always talk about, to tear

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*, p.39

¹⁷¹ Biberyan, *Karınların Günbatımı*, p. 220.

¹⁷² *ibid*, p.271

Gülgün's body apart".¹⁷³ For a moment Baret also share this same desire with Ali, this is rather strange desire for Baret: "To kill Lula..." Moreover, just like Ali, he takes pleasure in the idea of killing her: "For a moment, at that moment, everything was so real that he felt like Lula is dead in his arms, and he felt an indescribable pleasure".¹⁷⁴ Similarly, but with less vehemence, Sur says that he wants to "be tormented and to torment" when he finds it "unmanly" to believe what Norma says about her ex.¹⁷⁵

The characters in Dostoyevsky's novels feel that they are in an absolute passivity, and they hate this passive position they are in, and try to change it. In this sense, murder or suicide is a method of transitioning from being passive to being active and being the perpetrator of any action. This act gives them agency. Ultimately, as Edward Hallett Carr explains this fact as following:

Raskolnikov, weakened by illness and demoralized by imprisonment, lowers his flag, confesses his fault, gives himself to Sonya, and reconciles with the morality accepted by the society he has attacked.¹⁷⁶

Biberyan's characters neither can cope with nor get rid of their disgust that they feel for their own existence, which is rooted in themselves. But as I already said, it is necessary to get rid of it somehow, so they drain this black liquid of disgust inside them to the closest one, they spit this in their faces. In this way they try to get rid of this inner disgust, but this is also a futile effort. As I mentioned before, there is a strong connection between disgust, envy and arrogance which is not easy to define. Every time Baret compares himself to a wreck, he "feels an unconcealed, grudge-filled satisfaction".¹⁷⁷

At this point we should examine how this disgust which is rooted in the characters existence and which the characters cannot dare to confront, is reflected to the

¹⁷³ Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p. 14.

¹⁷⁴ Biberyan, *Karınların Günbatımı*, p.328.

¹⁷⁵ Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, p. 87.

¹⁷⁶ Edward Hallett Carr, *Dostoyevski*, translated by Ayhan Gerçeker. (İstanbul: İletişim, 2014), p. 195.

¹⁷⁷ Biberyan, *Karınların Günbatımı*, p. 216.

outside world, and how it transforms the women around the characters. In order to examine this, it would be useful to first discuss the disgust which the male characters feel towards women. Especially the disgust towards the Mother is a physical and sensual disgust. This is the case in all three novels. Orhan Koçak uses a very striking expression to express this disgust: “an excess of flesh” [*et fazlası*].¹⁷⁸ Here Koçak claims that the son’s disgust for the mother stems not from the fact that the mother is a woman who has been raped by History, but from a purely sensual and physical disgust, and in this sense, this situation of the son presents “a perfect picture of obsessive neurosis”. Disgust towards the mother is then directed towards the lover. This is why the mother and the lover, which is the object of desire, are rapidly replace each other in the delusions that both Baret and Krikor had. It is necessary to get rid of this “excess of flesh” somehow,. First of all, the gaze of the protagonists in the novels has a disintegrating effect of the bodies, especially the female body. In Biberyan, we don’t see female body as a whole, we see it as limbs, which are constantly dismembered, divided into parts, and detached from the body. This fragmentation of the body creates both erotic and political tension. The gaze directed towards the mother, the lover, the sister or the girl next door are the same. This tension reaches at its peak in the scene in *The Penniless Lovers* where Norma tells Sur about her childhood in Piraeus:

Sur imagined Norma with slender legs and arms. He had seen somewhere the pictures of children looking like skeletons. In an article about war victims or Nazi camps. It didn't have much of an impact at the time. Now this comparison affected him. He felt differently inside, the shock of the sight of the girls whose arms and legs were like twigs and melting away. (...) He bent over the table, took Norma's hand and arm, and stared at her warm, healthy body breathlessly to distract the image of an unhealthy child from his mind. He wanted so much to hug, kiss, caress her...¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Orhan Koçak, “Biberyan Üzerine Notlar (II)”, in K24, 28 April 2022. <https://t24.com.tr/k24/yazi/biberyan-ustune-notlar-ii.3678>

¹⁷⁹ Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, p.81.

In these lines, Norma does not appear as a woman with an intact body, on the contrary, her legs, hands and arms are fragmented. Two types of violence cause this dismemberment of the body: on one hand, political violence in the past time of the narrative (what Nazis had done) and erotic violence in the present time, which tries to transform this undesirable body, which is deformed by political violence, into an object of desire again. Here, the vital and the mortal remarkably interchange. In this scene, the disgust cannot dominate the narrative.

Let's continue with this gaze of Sur, and let's give some more examples of how this gaze shatters the women's bodies: About the daughter of Margosyans, their neighbor, who bought a new dress, he thinks, "Look at those legs, if one would cut them, shape them, three girls would have legs. What about her butt? It is like they put two cats in a bag". While saying about girl's mother's having "mythical arms were sticking out from the holes of his shirt", he also dreams "of being buried upside down between the mother's breasts" on the other hand.¹⁸⁰ He thinks her sister Silva, "has neither an Armenian butt nor an Armenian leg", therefore he finds her beautiful.¹⁸¹

On the other hand, disgust is an emotion which also has physical effects. According to Paul Rozin and April E. Fallon, the four basic elements of disgust are: a characteristic facial expression, an appropriate action (getting away from the irritating object), a decisive physiological indicator (nausea), and a characteristic state of feeling (disgust).¹⁸² When Baret goes to his uncle Suren's office, his uncle buys him food, Biberyan especially names the dishes: *artichoke*, *doner kebab*, *rice salad and compote*. When the food arrives, Baret could not even move closer to the food, whereas Arto, in front him was "ruminating like a cow" but Baret "could not even swallow, every morsel he swallows ached his stomach. The scene ends with "[him] feeling nauseous". As can be seen, every scene where disgust is mentioned

¹⁸⁰ *ibid*, p. 107.

¹⁸¹ *ibid*, p. 151.

¹⁸² Paul Rozin and April E. Fallon, "A Perspective On Disgust", in *Psychological Review* 94 (1), 1987, doi:10.1037/0033-295x.94.1.23, quoted in Sara Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotions*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p.84.

is always accompanied by a pervasive odor, a sickening image, an annoying sound, or with descriptions of surfaces being sticky, oily etc. Disgust occurs both through the senses and stimulates the senses. When he enters the tavern in Tarlabası, he remembers the room in the brothel, “the bad air, its heavy smell”, “and he immediately starts to feel nauseous”. On the other hand, Lula, whom he could not turn into an object of disgust no matter how hard he tried, has a “spotless/stainless body” and “clean underwears”. Baret is afraid of “contaminating” them, because let’s remember what we learned about Baret before his name, his first sentence was, “don’t touch me, I’m filthy”. Dirt, filth, rags and wreck define Baret. After sleeping with Lula, he could no longer find any reason to be disgusted by her: “He remembered that Lula had pissed him off many times by clicking his tongue to clean her teeth after eating. Whereas she was now chewing with her mouth closed, without making slightest noise.”¹⁸³ But this doesn’t last long, disgust haunts Baret once again, the next morning he wakes up, everything that reminds him of disgust is there, more intense than ever: “Her nose was slightly damp,” “his feet were even dirtier than the mud that came through the hole of his shoe.” “He disgusted with himself. Everyone should disgust him.”¹⁸⁴ After all, Lula would again become the object of disgust, but again, as a reflection of his disgust to his own existence: “Never he had felt so disgusted with a female body. Maybe it was more against himself, this disgust.”¹⁸⁵

At this point, I will end this sub-chapter here and move on the next one, this time I will focus on the relationship between father and son. I will examine how the disgust that I’ve explored above manifests in the relationship with the father.

¹⁸³ Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p. 295.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid*, p.311.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid*, p.358.

3.2. IMMATURE SONS, FAILED FATHERS: FATHER AS THE SOURCE OF EXISTANTIAL ANXIETIES OF THE SON AND THE REPRESENTATIONS OF IMPOTANCY

As well as presenting a great panorama of representations of impotency, Biberyan's novels also present every kind of representation of potency. He puts under the scope every kind of being and existence of manhood. In one hand, Biberyan shows how societal gender norms restrain women, and on the other hand, he shows how the same societal norms imprison men into representations of fragile masculinity. According to Vandeollo and Bosson, who describe manhood as a norm that is hard to achieve and easy to lose, manhood is built upon three basic principles:

First, manhood is widely viewed as an elusive, achieved status, or one that must be earned (in contrast to womanhood, which is an ascribed, or assigned, status). Second, once achieved, manhood status is tenuous and impermanent; that is, it can be lost or taken away. Third, manhood is confirmed primarily by others and thus requires public demonstrations of proof.¹⁸⁶

There are plenty of representations of this fragile masculinity in the novels of Biberyan. Each novel presents distinctly and separately the masculinity built by the sons and the fathers. In this sense, he shows us how masculinity becomes distinct and is formed differently in different milieus of power. Sons are in rivalry with their fathers and fathers with their sons in the same manner, continuously. Instead of being a senior of the family, whom the son can ask for advice and lean on, the father is a rival, who sees his son as an opponent. But we can say that this is the norm, we can find plenty of rivalries between fathers and sons in the history of literature. What is different in Biberyan and his representation of father is that the power of father is actually a kind of impotency. The fathers of Biberyan are torn apart between the power and strength that they desire and the position of impotence, weakness and silence that they are bounded to. About this, we can remember what

¹⁸⁶ Joseph A. Vandello and Jennifer K. Bosson, "Hard Won and Easily Lost: A Review and Synthesis of Theory and Research on Precarious Manhood" in *American Psychological Association*, 14(2), 2013, 101-113. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029826>

Gürbilek had written in her seminal paper “Father and Masters” about the father figure in Atay’s writing: “In short, far from being the paterfamilias, the father looks like a refugee in the family photo”.¹⁸⁷ I would like to underline the word “refuge”, in Biberyan this “being a refuge in a family photo” becomes most complicated, in the oppositions between on one hand being present and on the other hand absent, between the father of the family and the father as a lawmaker (by this concept I mean, *Name of The Father* [Fr. *nom du père*], the symbol of the authority both legislative and punitive) between being an Armenian and being a Turk, between the condemned and the judge. Just like a refugee taking refuge in a foreign country, it is a similar situation for the father, in the household. Let’s remember Diran, who is exiled to the attic. In any case, the fathers of Biberyan, to quote Gürbilek, “are not fathers but imitate fatherhood”. In turn, the sons are drifted into existential crisis, against this power and impotency which the fathers fall into, living in an perpetual state of anxiety.

Let’s remember *The Penniless Lovers*. If the first thing we learn about Sur that he is uneasy, the first thing we learn about Kevork that he is (so the father) is outside the house: “When Kevork knocked on the door, there was a chaos going on inside”¹⁸⁸. Biberyan shows us Kevork trying to enter inside, not being inside. This motif will repeat itself throughout the novel.

The only position for the father to gain power in Biberyan’s novels is through gaining money. Money is everything. If one loses it, they lose their power altogether. Again, for the son, growing up and coming to power is only possible through money. It is just if he could gain money he could outgrow his father and establish his own power. “Of course, it is not you who gains money!”¹⁸⁹, this sentence will repeat itself throughout the novel. On the other hand, the helplessness, impotence and weakness of the father against the “lawmaker father” infects the son as well: the son feels himself alone and powerless against the miserable image of

¹⁸⁷ Nurdan Gürbilek, “Babalar ve Oğullar” in *Benden Önce Bir Başkası* (İstanbul: Metis, May 2012), p. 69.

¹⁸⁸ Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, p.30.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid*, p. 34.

the father who should have been potent and powerful: “Sur came home and felt like he understood the troubles of his father, feeling proud about him. (...) His bitter smile vanished. There was no end in sight. It was a lost battle. He needed to stand tall, to struggle and fight. He became cold hearted. (...) He honored his father with a disdainful look who expected him to tremble with fear instead, to have some respect”.¹⁹⁰ In Biberyan, the fears and weaknesses of the fathers are repeated in their sons. The father sees himself in his son, and vice versa. For this reason, Sur, for example, “hates himself as much as his father hates him.” In other words, we also see that the example given before not always hold true, we see that the son is an equivalent of the father instead of a rival. Biberyan shows with great mastery and subtlety how the father is equalized with the son against the “father as a lawmaker”, which is actually in position of real power. In turn, all transform into symbols denoting the absence of power. Both Sur and his father hits the same wall, the wall built by those in position power, by the real owners of this country.

Because there was a scary, huge and terrifying wall in front of him. There was no way to move this wall. It was useless to hit one's head, it would only break one's head. His fists would bleed. Still, the wall would remain a wall. The wall has no logic, no mercy, do not justify, do not understand. It was a rock, it was made of stone. It would say *forbidden* again and again. There was no use in banging his head against the wall.¹⁹¹

Against this wall, all feel the same despair. Kevork, while only having authority on his own turf, when he is outside the house “warns everybody repeatedly ‘Talk Turkish, talk Turkish’”. *Sunset of the Ants* is the best example where the father and the son are condemned to the same despair, how they become equals against the “power as law-maker”. Diran asks meekly for a job from Suren for his son, with him losing all his money after *Varlık*, after refusing to go to Aşkale and giving all his money, he had lost all his power. He is mocked continuously by his wife and his daughter inside, in his home, and by the Suren family, outside, who are *nouveau riche* and act as the peons and symbols of this new age of pillage and plunder. Suren,

¹⁹⁰ *ibid*, p. 35.

¹⁹¹ *ibid*, p. 167.

on the other hand, has he the “air of a judge”. Diran feels a void inside all the time, “he had no foothold, yet he wasn’t also hitting the bottom.”. Biberyan frequently uses this motif of “void”. Here lacking power does not mean being crushed like an insect, feeling small, being torn apart but falling and falling through an endless and timeless void, and never to hit the ground: “He felt an immense abyss in himself. Inside everything becomes lost, even Baret too. He himself was also suspended midair, confused, powerless even to die.”¹⁹² In the next chapter, Diran leaves Suren’s shop and Baret enters. These two sections are consequent, and the way Suren greets the father and son with the same words underline the similarity of Diran and Baret against those who are in position of power. Baret also starts freefalling to this void. Once started falling, there is no exit from this void, this becomes the source of his existential crisis: “Would it change the reality? Void is void. You cannot fill this void of a life by bluffing.”¹⁹³ What is the bluff here? According to Biberyan, it is becoming Kevork from *Penniless Lovers*. The *bluff* is, thinking that, with the little capital obtained during war time, he can be just like Mista Bey or Osman Bey from *The Lonely Ones*. Biberyan shows what *Kevorkness* means, being a Kevork, bluffing life and life seeing his bluff with this minuscule detail from the following sentence: “Kevork seethed with rage, but seeing there is nothing he can do, he paid. In front of the clerk, *with his pitiful Turkish*, he started to swear to Sur for breaking the law and getting on the ferry.”¹⁹⁴ Biberyan’s characters swear with their *pitiabile* Turkish, *in front of* the clerk, the police, Erol and his family, the state, in short in front of every kind of lawmaker, but *to whom*? To the nearest person around, to the ones who are less powerful than them, who they can pick on. Instead of the clerk to Sur, instead of Ali, to Yeranik...

Once again we can make a comparison between Dostoyevsky and Biberyan. Both the underground man and Biberyan’s characters cannot hold those who wronged them accountable, as we have said before. For example, they do not reflect their anger on the officer or the society living in the post-genocide denialist habitus, but

¹⁹² Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p. 83.

¹⁹³ *ibid*, p. 176.

¹⁹⁴ Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, p. 166.

they direct their resentment to themselves and as a result, they disgust themselves. It is possible to find traces of the underground man in Raskolnikov up to a point, he also retreats from society, but in Raskolnikov, we find courage instead of cowardice, action instead of passivity. The resentment and anger of the underground man are directed to the moneylender, and here this moneylender becomes the symbol of the whole society and moral rules.

These emotional ups and downs and the wounds in his soul become more and more unbearable, life becomes more painful every day, and eventually, self-pity and being belittled become pleasurable feelings, being humiliated gives them some kind of pleasure. Raskolnikov constantly humiliates himself, belittles himself, beats himself up, and takes pleasure in it. Biberyan's characters, on the other hand, want to silence this self-pitying voice inside them. They want to suppress the pleasure of this "masculine disgust" that we talked about above. So the characters live reclusively but the reason behind this is not due to the pain of being humiliated like Vanya or Natasha in *Humiliated and Insulted*, but it is about the fear of the outside world. Biberyan's characters' disgust is not related with their arrogance as in Dostoyevsky's characters. They cannot oppose or rebel against the social values which pushed them underground, so they cannot raise their voices even from the underground they're locked in. While Dostoyevsky's characters are aching for to be seen by the others, Biberyan's characters, as we've said before, want to be seen and at the same time not be inconspicuous, not to attract attention. Therefore, they are different from Dostoyevsky characters who humiliate themselves at every opportunity, draw attention of the others by humiliating themselves, or by rebelling against the law. The confusion created by these two desires (the desire to be seen and not to be seen) would dominate all of Biberyan's novels, structures the narratives, furthermore, it would differentiate Biberyan's characters from Dostoevsky's fifth-degree officers, and would make these characters more like the tightrope walkers with their uneasy moods of acrobats. As we said, it is not because they feel degraded that they refuse to go outside, they are actually afraid to step outside. It is possible to say they want to be ant-like someday, they make efforts for

that, but from the very beginning, they know that their Armenianness is inflicted on their bodies a very deep and incurable wound.

We have already established that the father figures of Biberyan are strawman figures, they just “imitate fathers”. In a sense, they are figures who are present physically but absent symbolically, who does not have any power. Here, we should examine *The Lonely Ones*, where the father is physically absent as well. Moreover, we never hear anything about the father, not even once, in the internal monologues of Krikor, neither in the conversations between Yeranik and Pupul, nor between his sister Hilda and Krikor. Here, mothers and aunts are the representations of power that represent the authority of the father and that inspire fear. Krikor could never separate himself from his mother and he never grew up. Just like the other characters, “shyness prevents him from defending even his most legitimate rights”. In constant fear, he harbors both envy and gratitude to his mother. Earning money, bringing money to the house is seen as a means of establishing power in this novel, too. Krikor believes that money should be a symbol of transitioning from childhood to fatherhood: “Wasn't having a source of income the only guarantee of not being a child or being punished?”¹⁹⁵ The lack of a father to compete with has imprisoned Krikor in an eternal childhood. He often turns into a child who needs his mother's attention and cannot bear the indifference: “[In front of his aunt and mother] he became the same timid child. With a reflex from years ago he frowned, he fled home in panic, took refuge in his room. The 'man of the house', who scolded his mother and whose shout trembled the earth, was wiped out in an instant.”¹⁹⁶

He is filled with the sadness and resentment of a little boy all left along and forgotten when the guests come: “Krikor looked bitterly at the door [behind his mother]. Yes, he was already forgotten. He would have no more linden tea.”¹⁹⁷ It bears repeating, Pupul, with his authority, anger and contempt, is the closest person to a father figure in Krikor's eyes. The anger directed at the father in other novels is

¹⁹⁵ Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p. 87.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid*, p. 61.

¹⁹⁷ *ibid*, p. 117.

directed at Pupul here. Krikor "doesn't like to be around men, to socialize with men", "he feels a strange fear and shyness". "He thought he is being mocked by the person he is talking to".¹⁹⁸ (134) The feeble power that he can establish at home thanks to money is completely destroyed outside by men, those in position of real power, and this is the reason why Krikor avoids these encounters. He says he is comfortable with women, only they consider him a man, but the narrator quickly adds: "Except Pupul".

There are very striking dream/delusion scenes in which Biberyan deals with desire in both *Sunset of the Ants* and *The Lonely Ones*. In these scenes, the object of desire shifts from mother to lover with a tremendous speed and fluidity. Let's look at one of Krikor's hallucination from *The Lonely Ones*:

Krikor opened his eyes, looked at the door, then stood motionless at the blackened planks of the ceiling. Yeranik continued: "You are already a wimp!" Krikor was sweating, not responding. The girl was laughing and having fun. His green eyes were smiling. His shapely body shook with laughter. The tabby was laughing. All the cats were laughing in a circle. Cina was laughing: "Wimp! Wimp!"... "Shut up, Cici!"... "Wimp! Wimp!" Garo was laughing aloud, and the whole village was booming. The girl's cheerful face was changing, the tips of her mouth drooping. He blinked his eyes with such mockery that Krikor wanted to sink into the ground. He no longer had the strength to rebel against his mother. Yeranik also sided with the bride-to-be and mocked his son: "A man must have a little intelligence. Don't you have eyes? Look at your body, your face, a man like. You will you wear heels, huh? You're already a wimp." (...) Krikor tried to tell his mom that he never desired someone like this ever in his life, that he is feeling just like the kid he was when he desired to own a thing. He must have owned her. (...) "You have already hindered my desires all my life." (...) The girl was looking sarcastically at Yeranik. (...) She was pointing at Krikor's belly sticking out of his pajamas with the tip of her finger. As Krikor tried to hide his belly, it was getting bigger and bigger like a balloon,

¹⁹⁸ *ibid*, p. 134.

tearing his pajamas. Yeranik cried out; “Go, go, take your wife, go!” ... “Don't cry!”... Why do you sit with me? Go after your wife.”¹⁹⁹

Krikor is also in the void that we talked about earlier. He is almost a representation of the fragile and wounded masculinity. He thinks that the whole world, the women he desires, his brother-in-law who makes a lot of money and can challenge the world (unlike Krikor, he can speak Armenian without a worry and not give money to Turkish children), his nephew and even the cats in the garden, are making fun of him. It is his mother who, at the same time, forbids him what he desires, and who can satisfy his desire. In this void he fell into, he will neither find a branch to hold on to, nor will he hit the ground to fall into pieces, just like Diran. He is stuck as a forty-year-old adolescent boy between the will to power that he desires to have (i.e. women and money) to prove his masculinity, and the tremendous powerlessness and impotence he is condemned to.

Now we can examine Baret's situation. Under the influence of his mother, his sister and Suren, Baret slowly begins to despise and humiliate his father. Gradually, Diran is falling from his grace and losing his power (“Now he was doubting. He wondered if his father could really do it, but he was lazy or incompetent?”²⁰⁰). As he lost his power, the father becomes an object of hate, just like in other novels, for his son. With this, he will want to run away from home, so he could return to his childhood when the father was strong and he was a child, but “neither he can be that child anymore, nor they, his family in their former glory”.²⁰¹ As he sees his own weaknesses reflection in his father, he starts to hate him. The father is imprisoned in the attic, he is left to be forgotten. Baret sometimes hears his voice: “There was a moaning sound from above time to time, which lasted a while, and then there was silence.”²⁰² In the episode that starts right after this sentence, Baret goes to Büyükada, to his uncle's house. There he sees a lame seagull, which is Baret's subconscious representation of his father:

¹⁹⁹ *ibid*, pp. 211-12.

²⁰⁰ Biberyan, *Karıncağın Günbatımı*, p. 86.

²⁰¹ *ibid*, p. 97.

²⁰² *ibid*, p. 104.

He had never seen such an ugly bird, such a repulsive, such an ugly way of walking in his life. He hated this animal. One of its wings was broken and its feathers were falling out. As such, he was like a shabby old man who was forlorn and scavenging for a living, but “Shoo off!” he didn't dare to say. He felt a heavy fear before this silent, poor creature.²⁰³

The name of this animal is Quosimodo, the notorious bell-ringer of Hugo's, famous for his ugliness, muteness, deafness and misery. This figure is used as a representation of the father here. Baret's anger towards the animal will gradually give way to pity. The son has to grow up somehow, to oppose his father, but the father will only remind him of his own weakness:

How did Suren do it? His father couldn't. He can't do it either. (...) He, like his father, had not learned how to fight. (...) They were saying that you have become a man, you have grown. No one asked if you wanted to grow up. He should have acted like an adult, like a man. Like a man. Maybe that's what he was missing.²⁰⁴

It's not a coincidence, after all these thoughts going through his head, he goes to a brothel and sleeps with a woman. This is the surest and easiest way to prove your masculinity. But this "first woman" turns out to be not at all what he had imagined. As the woman says, "come on quick", Baret gets nauseous. Çamur is waiting in line in the same room. The power he wants to establish, the masculinity he wants to prove is damaged this time by the presence of Çamur: "Fear of Çamur, or rather, of himself..."²⁰⁵ When he came home from the brothel, after seeing how his father Diran is despised by his sister and mother, and recognizing the despicable position of his father, this time the pity and hatred turns into sheer disgust: “He was disgusted with this man, his drooping chin, his pleading eyes. It was torture to have a father with that kind of image.”²⁰⁶

But after his father, that is, the figure he can compete with and replace, dies, he cannot find “no negative feelings towards his father in him”. “There is no desire to

²⁰³ *ibid*, p. 105.

²⁰⁴ *ibid*, p. 189.

²⁰⁵ *ibid*, p. 195.

²⁰⁶ *ibid*, p. 200.

judge him. On the contrary, there was a strange admiration, a secret appreciation deep in his heart, and a vague jealousy.”²⁰⁷ Let us return to Gürbilek again. Here, Baret's situation is very similar to Atay's "Letter to My Father":

His father, whom he once thought to be 'hard, callous and selfish', is now an underappreciated 'man of silence virtue'; as a 'grumpy child' with his sincerity, naivety and accountability; he even wants to see him as a *tutunamayan* [disconnected], wanting to believe that he inherited his own disconnectedness from his father. There are several things to note here. First of all, the conflict with the father leaves its place for a sorrowful understanding.²⁰⁸

We can say the same thing for Baret as well. With the death of the father, not only the possibility of reckoning with the father disappears, but also the figure that the son blames for all his failures and weaknesses disappears as well. Both his rival, his enemy, and his own reflection and image are dead. He is now mourning multiple persons: He has lost his childhood forever, he has lost his power, the possibility of establishing power forever, this time the house in Büyükkada reminds the father: “He leaned his head on the building, it was still very solid. This feeling of confidence sparked a joy in him. He felt like he was leaning on his father's chest.”²⁰⁹ “In Baret's words, inside the home, is “like hell” and inside this house, no one knows anyone completely, as in Biberyan's other novels, everyone is a stranger to one another (“Nobody knew my uncle, he said. They didn’t know my father either. Nobody knows anybody. Who knows me? Who knows who? Everyone is stranger to one another.”²¹⁰). Baret also learns the details about his father’s life and he knows him truly after his death, with a notebook he left behind, which is his father’s accounting book. That notebook is the only place where a genuine dialogue between father and son is possible, but it is a possibility missed. Gürbilek's question is also valid for Baret: "Did the son grow up in Atay because the father was not 'too strong', or because he finally grew up and then he was able to see his father in his desperation

²⁰⁷ *ibid*, p. 231.

²⁰⁸ Nurdan Gürbilek, “Babalar ve Oğullar” in *Benden Önce Bir Başkası* (İstanbul: Metis, May 2012), p. 70.

²⁰⁹ Biberyan, *Karıncağın Günbatımı*, p. 247.

²¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 245.

‘blundering’? Do we fall apart because we grow up; or do we grow up because we can endure ‘some people inside us’?”²¹¹. It's hard to say whether it can be called growing up, but it is certain that Baret is no more the rebellious adolescent boy at the end of the novel. He saw both the "blunder" of his father and the reason for this blunder. The reason for this fragmentation is the “impossibility of not being an Armenian” from that famous passage...

When we talk about sons' relations with their fathers, we must return to Dostoevsky and Kafka, as well as to Oguz Atay. It can be said that these four novelists have handled the complex relationship of sons with their fathers and the hatred and love of sons for their fathers in a very skillful and profound way. But again, at this point, we need to examine how and in which points Biberyan differs from this major line of modern literature, which is the hatred toward the father. In the work mentioned earlier, Bataille argues that Kafka wanted to stay as a child who refuses to grow up in the presence of his father. In the same article, he says that a sense of joy prevails in Kafka's work:

Only when he is in misery, therefore, is Kafka filled ‘with a joy which is more than [he] can really enjoy, more than [he] can give.’ Then the joy is so intense that it is from the joy and not from the struggle that he expects death.²¹²

The price of this joy would always be death in Kafka. Carr, in his comprehensive study on Dostoevsky, says that Dostoevsky's characters have a great passion for life. Biberyan's characters have neither such joys nor passion. They seem to know that their means of seeking justice have almost completely disappeared. On the other hand, in Kafka, sons become insects or condemned to die from the very beginning in the face of the absolute sovereign, omnipotent father. For instance in the following passage, the father covers the whole map:

Sometimes I imagine a map of the earth laid out and you stretched diagonally across it. And then it seems to me that I can only lead my own life in those areas

²¹¹ Nurdan Gürbilek, “Babalar ve Oğullar” in *Benden Önce Bir Başkası* (İstanbul: Metis, May 2012), p. 72.

²¹² Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, translated by Alastair Hamilton (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 70.

that are neither covered by your body, nor within your reach. And given the impression I have of your size, that leaves me with only a few, not very welcoming areas (...) ²¹³

In the “Judgement”, the father suddenly gets up in the bed, he becomes huge, and he shouts at his son:

“No!” cried his father, cutting short George’s answer to the question. He threw back the covers with such force that in an instant they had completely flown off, and stood upright on the bed. He steadied himself with only one hand lightly touching the ceiling. “You wanted to cover me up—I know that, my little offspring—but I am not yet under the covers. And even if this is the last strength I have, it’s enough for you, too much for you.” ²¹⁴

And then he adds: “Stay where you are, I don’t need you! You think you still have the strength to come here but are holding yourself back just because it’s your will. That you are not mistaken! I’m still the much stronger one.” In *Karamazov Brothers*, father wants to kill son, son wants to kill father. The father is a rival to the son in every sense, he is the strong one. When it comes to Atay, the father is not as strong as in Kafka, the son also feels compassion for the father. However, both Kafka and Atay have hope of reconciliation with the father, albeit at a symbolic level. In Biberyan’s literature, fathers, far from covering the map, are defeated and defeated in the eyes of the son from the very beginning. Therefore, compassion for the father leaves its place to despair in Biberyan’s literature. The father constantly reminds the son of his own weakness. He is also a coward, even more coward than the son.

Up to this point of this chapter, we mostly stayed in the house, we examined the power relations in the house, and the hatred and disgust they cause. We have seen how the weakness of the father makes the son impotent, and how the self-disgust is reflected on the outside world, especially on women. Now, it is time for us to go outside the house, to wander around the streets for a little while. We will

²¹³ Franz Kafka, *Dearest Father*, translated by Hannah and Richard Stokes (London: Oneworld Classics, 2008), p. 80.

²¹⁴ Franz Kafka, “The Judgment”, translated by Ian Johnston, <https://www.kafka-online.info/-the-judgement.html>, p.7.

see a different form of hatred while examining how Biberyan, as a socialist writer, describes the encounters of people from different classes and how he describes the class anger that arises from these encounters.

3.3. CLASS HATRED: ENCOUNTERS, ENVOUSNESS, RESENTMENT, HUMILIATIONS

There are many encounters between people from different classes in Biberyan's novels: The worker encounters the boss, the maid encounters the landlord, the butcher the customer, the upper class the lower class, the middle class the upper class... But what is more interesting and important at this point is the way Biberyan shows how easy and sudden the transitions between all these social and economic classes happen, that people can abruptly and devastatingly lose their social status and lose their privileges coming from the economic class they belong to. Or, to the contrary, he also shows ingeniously how to seize opportunities and how to get rich quickly overnight, obtain all kind of privileges in an instant and move up in the social ladder. These are all the results of 50s Turkey, of the conjuncture of that period, which I've talked about in the previous sections. This conjuncture and these transitions created by the zeitgeist are very important in terms of understanding how the dramatic framework, tension and structure of the novels.

Let's start with the *Lonely Ones*. We are in the 50s, in a summer resort in Istanbul, Erenköy. It is worth pausing here and think about the *sayfiye* (summer house in the countryside) for a bit. About *sayfiye*, Aksu Bora says the following:

Sayfiye, is in fact, perhaps more of a the middle class' 'thing' than of the bourgeoisie – a middle class idyll. It is an instrument, a training and display arena for the middle classes to feel safe and 'fine'. As a gain from social welfare state, the country house is also a gateway to the middle class status opening to the safe and secure part of the working class population.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Aksu Bora, Tanıl Bora, "Sunuş: Sayfiyedeki gibi serazat", in *Sayfiye: Hafiflik Hayali*, ed. Tanıl Bora (İstanbul: İletişim, 2014), p. 9.

Considering what Bora said, Biberyan has set a very suitable scene to describe class encounters and the hatred and anger that arises from these encounters. I especially use the word scene here, because *Lonely Ones* has very strong cinematographic elements; we read the novel almost as if we were watching a theater play, and throughout the novel, the *sayfiye*, with its summer heat, with its casinos and restaurants, constitutes a perfect background to the story. Throughout the novel, tension is always high and what we've just mentioned about the *sayfiye* suddenly turn into elements of suspense. "The air was smothering dense outside. It was hard to breathe."²¹⁶ The second part where the murders are going to take place, which were obvious from beginning but also unexpected in a way, begins with Yeranik's sentence: "Hot as hell", and continues with the following: "When this wind blows, the Arabs shut their doors and windows tightly and they would not go out for weeks."²¹⁷ This sentence foreshadows that the murders to be committed will be ignored, that people will turn a blind eye.

About Biberyan, Tanıl Bora says that: "As a socialist, he is a unique observer of the experiences of moving up and down the social ladder, fears and disgust related to one's social class, encounters between different classes, problems of classes in Turkish literature."²¹⁸ This hierarchical structure, these experiences of moving up and down the social ladder and encounters between different classes are very evident in *The Lonely Ones*. According to Aksu Bora, *sayfiye* was a gateway to middle class status, and a tool for this class to feel safe and fine. In the scene where Yeranik has an internal monologu when she is half asleep in their garden justifies exactly what Bora said:

She said to herself, that life is good, like this. (...) She was the owner of their house. She didn't have to think about money. She had money in the bank. (...) They didn't have luxurious lives, but maybe one day they would. (...) She had a comfortable flat in the city for the wintertime. It didn't have a central heating yet, but maybe

²¹⁶ Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p. 73.

²¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 107.

²¹⁸ Tanıl Bora, "Mavera-yı Kadıköy" in *beyond.istanbul* no:11, p. 56

one day they would have it too. For the summertime, this unique garden... yes she was happy, she really was. (49)

Yeranik and Pupul are from the countryside [*taşra*], they migrated from Konya to Istanbul. While Yeranik wanted to believe that hers was a noble family, in fact they weren't: his father was "a peasant cook who wears a nightgown in the house", and his husband to whom she was forced to marry was an "old shopkeeper in the bazaar".²¹⁹ They grew up in a house without a toilet, and they could only go to *hamam* every few months. Unlike Yeranik, Pupul does not ignore her class: "I like to know my place. Why would I be ashamed? I was born in a village."²²⁰ She remembers that his father smelled of oil.

Their upstairs neighbor, Madam Verjin, comes from the upper class. Unlike Yeranik, she complains about the Democrat Party and what they have done, about this era where money flows from everywhere, about the corruption everywhere. Yeranik is afraid that her family would humiliate themselves in front of Madam Verjin, that they would act vulgare and that Madam Verjin would despise them: "Yeranik was going all shades of red. She wanted to rage, to join her daughter's side, to intimidate his son-in-law, but Madam Verjin's presence was forcing her to shut up."²²¹ As a matter of fact, Yeranik is not wrong in her concerns, Madam Verjin really thinks that "If Garo had been a little more educated, he would not have tolerated Hilda for even an hour".²²² The Armenian family of the novel, which consists of Yeranik, Pupul and Krikor, is a perfect representation of the middle class with its callousness, hypocrisy, and constant ignorance and denial because of their fear of losing their privileges which they have acquired by chance. (It is useful to repeat one more time at this point what we have said before on various occasions in this study: The privileges of a middle-class Turkish family and a middle-class Armenian family would not, of course, be the same, even though they belong to

²¹⁹ Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p. 57.

²²⁰ *ibid*, p. 58.

²²¹ *ibid*, p. 144.

²²² *ibid*, p. 144.

same class; but since this topic is outside the scope of this chapter, we can close this parenthesis here.)

Furthermore, the novel is built on an inside-outside and indoor-outdoor duality from the very beginning. On one hand, there are the bright and dazzling indoors, on the other hand, there are those who look inside the house from outside the windows, those who are on the streets. In the previous chapter, I've mentioned how Ali the butcher came from the village and his social position, his countryside background and his lack of money caused feelings of envy and anger inside him. On the other hand, Gülgün's situation is more ambivalent, she can never feel herself at home. The only thing that remained from her previous life is her feet, they remind her that he doesn't belong to this house. Even if her feet are enough to make the owners of the villa say, "This girl is not from us", they can no longer make Ali say "She is one of us". In short, "Gülgün was dying to be one of them". Ali can't stand the possibility for the woman he desires to move up in the social ladder. When he thinks that Gülgün sees him as a "butcher's apprentice", he gets angry. He feels and knows that the obstacle which will stand between him and Gülgün will be the thick walls of Gülgün's new class. That's why Ali is always "outside the walls", "Osman Beygil's *curtains* are drawn all the time", he hears laughing voices from inside, "along with all the voices, a bright light was bursting out". *Outside* represents darkness, lack of money, provincial life; while *inside* represents a dazzling flood of light, laughter, money... According to Ali, "all these lights, the glimmer of chandeliers, the doors opening to the terrace, all these brightness" are "driving Gülgün away from himself."²²³ We can give some more examples. Ali's anger doesn't subside, this time he is outside the house of the "Müsügils". This place is not in a flood of light like Osman Bey's house, it is "under the diffused light of a single bulb", but still Ali is in the dark again. It has been years since Ali came back to Istanbul. Nowadays, he reads the newspaper every day, and now he knows very well who these "*gavurs*" [infidels] are. "Who knows how rich the rascals were! How many times had he read in the newspapers that they own all the trade, and that

²²³ Ibid, p. 91.

the helpless Turkish and Islamic people were living in misery because of them.”²²⁴ However, his hatred for Erol is different from the hatred he feels for Müsü. His hatred for Erol is “something mixed with fear and despair.”

What is worse, in these encounters between different classes, the gaze is always one-sided: from “down” to “up”. The one who is higher in the social and economic hierarchy is not even aware of the one who is below. The anger of the those in the lower rungs grows every time that the other doesn’t recognize them. Ali gets angry that they send Gülgün repeatedly out for shopping, “in his voice there was a grudge against those in that house”.²²⁵

As I said, Gülgün also doesn’t feel herself at her home. From time to time she also looks from the outside to the inside: “She looked at the glass-covered façade of the villa from the corner of the street.”²²⁶ There are times when she is inside, but even when she is inside, the gaze is necessarily towards the inside of the house: “She watched herself in the window.”²²⁷ Neither Erol nor his father nor his mother are aware of Ali, whereas for Ali, Erol and his family are objects of hatred and envy on which he built his identity and existence. In the same way, Gülgün is ready to sacrifice everything in order to live as the young American girl she saw in the patisserie, who must be either the daughter of a “diplomat”, a “Marshall technician” or a “Nato colonel”, who looks like the girls from magazine covers. However, the girl doesn’t even notice Gülgün, but “all the eyes are on her”, and then she gets in her car and goes.

I have said that the zeitgeist of the period allowed the transition between classes. The ways of accessing to a higher class can be found by those men who “know how to seize opportunities”, as Meline says in *Penniless Lovers*, or those who know someone who knows a “man capable of doing anything” in Ankara, as Osman Bey said in *Lonely Ones*. It is possible to find many examples to these transitions in *Sunset of the Ants*, since the dramatic framework of this novel is created by the loss

²²⁴ *ibid*, p. 92.

²²⁵ *ibid*, p. 75.

²²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 62.

²²⁷ *ibid*, p. 93.

of social status of Tarhanyans'. A new kind of men has come into existence in those years, like Suren and Keçeli, who became enormously rich in a few years during the war. And now, between Baret and people like Çamur and Haybeden, who work for people like Keçeli and Suren, "there stands a huge gap again. A gap where they changed their sides."²²⁸ However, this new social and economic position does not cause anger, resentment or envy in Baret. We can find the reason of this fact in the monologue of Dırtad on the ants, which gives the novel its name:

Emotion? What emotion do you have in your world? What morals are there? Is there anything you didn't do to earn two cents more? You are a merchant. You have a car, what wouldn't you sacrifice for your car! Would your wife sacrifice her fur for an emotion? Is there anything she wouldn't sacrifice for a jewel? Young man, you are deceiving yourself. What do you think life is? You think it is signing *bonds*? You are satisfied with yourself, your job, your life. With life, with the world, with the order of the world. You are satisfied with everything. This shows that you don't feel anything. You're like a straw man. You neither understand, nor know anything, you don't like anything because you don't curse about anything. You are neither loved nor you love anyone. The sponge you call the brain does not work. You wouldn't have thought about what a disgraceful thing life is. Because you have a car, you have a refrigerator, your wife has a fur, she has an apple, your child have a full stomach without any worries. You have an apartment, you will have your mother-in-law's inheritance. You see everything through rose-tinted spectacles, you are the happiest man in the world.²²⁹

Throughout the monologue which begins with "Our society does not like philosophers, all the people like ants", Dırtad gets more and more angry and resentful, his hatred is directed towards the middle class, which he hates for their morality and hypocrisy. Baret also tries to be ant-like at first; he starts working in a company, earns money. In short, he tries to be like everyone else. But he can't. With all the experiences and encounters he had, he becomes more and more like Dırtad as he also starts to disgust the people who are ant-like. "Would you rather be an ant

²²⁸ Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p. 463.

²²⁹ *ibid*, p. 126.

or a cricket?” he asks Lula, and when he learns she would like to be a cricket, he belittles Lula as well. At the end of the novel, in Baret’s eyes, people who had been through all kinds of disasters but didn’t say a word, who build everything over and over “after every destruction”, are basically ants.²³⁰

Behçet Çelik underlines the fact that Biberyan narrates and shows the same places, same streets, bridges or the same squares at different times of the day when they are occupied by different groups of people from different economic and social classes of the society in order to underline the distinction between different classes in the city.²³¹ In this way, Biberyan allows us to see all the layers of the social structure by superimposing the space (places) and time (different times of the day). What I want to say is exemplified through this passage:

He walked from the Golden Horn Pier to Tünel, over the bridge, jostling through the crowd. He watched Cenyo, Tokatlı, Santa Clauses of the Republic, Bonmarşe with foreign eyes. Tünel and the people in Tünel were different at this hour. For months he had gotten used to the Tünel after eight or nine. Tiny children workers between the ages of twelve and eighteen would be returning to their homes after this time, coming out of the damp workshops of the *Perşembe Pazarı*, covered with metal dust, dirty and tired. They all had lunch boxes wrapped in oiled newspaper.

At this hour today, decent people were coming to Tünel. The kind of people he used to see when his family went out to Pera. All of them had packages and boxes, nicely wrapped and tied. (...) In his heart, he felt a grudge against all these crowds, these shops, lights, packages, glittering trees, visual entertainment, this nonsense, these stylish ladies and gentlemen.²³²

The street is the same street but actors and the decor are now different. Meal containers [*sefertası*] wrapped in oiled newspapers in the evenings are replaced during the daytime by beautifully wrapped and tied shopping bags. Although Baret remembers his family’s old wealthy days throughout the novel (we can remember

²³⁰ *ibid*, p. 477.

²³¹ Behçet Çelik, Rober Koptaş, “Biberyan Bu Dünyadan Geçerken”, 1:04:01. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nW07mvx_Xbs

²³² *ibid*, pp. 288-89.

the various scenes between him and Tonietta and Lula), towards the end of the novel he himself recognizes how the masks worn by middle/upper class families fall and realizes that the family as a bourgeois foundation is a very corrupted structure. In the end, he abandons everything worldly and went somewhere in the East, possibly joined a cult. We can find the clues of this transformation of Baret in Biberyan's autobiography. Of course, unlike Baret, Biberyan did not give up on anything, on the contrary, he always lived an engaged life, as I have mentioned in the previous chapters. But what I mean is that both Biberyan and Baret realize that there are great gaps between them and the members of the class they came from. Following lines from the autobiography of Biberyan reminds us Baret and his friendship with Çamur and Haybeden; Baret feels also very uncomfortable with the fact that he has privileges coming from the class he belongs to, and at the end of the novel, Baret feels relaxed because of the fact that they swapped their places, meaning, Haybeden and Çamur are now economically and socially in a much more better place than him. Biberyan writes in his autobiography as follows: "There was something in me that I had lost. I identified myself with the brute and vulgar men which we call wild, put myself in their shoes for the first time, and I understood them very well."²³³ Biberyan writes about two encounters in his autobiography, the first of which was during his military service. During one of his awfully long journeys, the ship he was on anchored at the Galata dock, next to the Kadıköy pier. Biberyan wears his dirty uniform, carrying his bag and water bottle... At that moment, a car passes in front of him, this is the very first thing he sees in the street, there is a woman wearing a fur coat adorned with jewels. The car passes by. Many years later, a second encounter would shake him, this time he is going to İskenderun, he is at a station, his train has stopped to give passage to another train. He describes the inside of this other train as follows:

Right across from our car, there was a dining car floating in lights. Passengers, men and women, ate dinner at tables with softly glowing nightlights. We were hungry, we were cold, we were tired, we were sleepless. Twenty men and six horses; we

²³³ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p. 184.

smelled bad, we were itchy throughout the day because of lice. I looked at the ladies and gentlemen eating, chatting and laughing in the pink-yellow light of those little tables. They were ignoring us. Everyone ignores the privates. Everyone runs away from them. Privates are stinky, dirty, primitive, frightening, brutal. This situation hurt me even more because I was from that other life, I came from among those who lived that life, and those who lived were now ignoring the group I belonged to. That's why I hated them.²³⁴

Being in that car once is both painful and transformative for Biberyan and Baret: From now on, they would hate the “ants”, meaning ant-like men. Again, these class encounters, where the gaze is one-sided, directed from outside to the inside, from the one who is in a lower position socially and economically to the one who has a higher place in the hierarchy, will constitute the main source of resentment and disgust, and will play an important role in Biberyan’s political engagement and his literature.

Finally, I will examine how the class differences are represented in Biberyan’s literature through furniture and especially foods. It is possible to say that Biberyan investigates some feelings very skillfully through some objects. For example, foods, tables, meals, drinks and beverages turn into effective tools to show social status, to show the impoverishment or enrichment. Coffee for instance is no longer something easily accessible, it is something of a luxury. So is sugar. When Baret comes to the Island for the first time, Dırtad says to him, “I was almost going to say ‘Let’s drink coffee’. We’ve already forgotten. Let’s have some tea, with some grape molasses. We use molasses instead of sugar here”.²³⁵ Or Norma says to Sur, “I wish we had some coffee”, but “it is impossible to find good coffee”.²³⁶ His father bought two hundred- and fifty-grams of coffee because her mother loves it very much. Nobody in the house drinks coffee in order to save it to her mother. Cigarette is also an important indicator of the social and economical class; there must be cigarettes when the guests come, so nobody smokes in order to save it for guests. With the

²³⁴ *ibid*, p. 185.

²³⁵ Biberyan, *Karınca*ların Günbatımı, p. 54.

²³⁶ Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, p. 71.

money Sur had from the old coat that he stole from his father, Sur can buy Norma a fish. A fish would cost at most 5 liras, but he can't afford crab for instance. Also in *Lonely Ones*, food is a very important indicator of the social class. Biberyan especially pays attention to food in this novel. Yeranik's daughter and her son-in-law will come to their house for lunch, so it is necessary to do grocery shopping:

The left over pepper stuffings from yesterday wasn't enough. His mother was going to make "meatballs" at noon. But now three more [people] have been added [to the table]. It wouldn't be enough if they ate the meatballs they reserved for dinner. No appetizers, no drinks. The fruit they had wasn't enough for six people. This event would not end with a melon. The guests needed a more "noble" fruit. A kilo of peaches wouldn't be enough, would it? But they can only have four. Two kilos... What if that man eats two? Finding beer on a Sunday... If it's not found, you need raki. Half a liter. Garo could pay. When there were men around, his aunt would drink too. "As if she was looking for opportunities, that [*dinine yandığım*] woman!" He made a quick calculation and his face had a troubled expression.²³⁷

Fortunately, his brother-in-law Garo does all this shopping and Krikor gets rid of the trouble of spending money. On the other hand, the preparations and shopping made for the evening when Mista Beys will be hosted at Osman Beys' house are also noteworthy: "Petit-four, niçoise, okay... Bagel, okay... Pyramid cake, okay... Puff pastry, okay... Where is baton salé?" Moreover, peanuts seem not enough, "buy two hundred and fifty grams more", says Mübeccel to Gülgün. At the beginning of *Sunset of Ants*, Diran wants to have a feast in honor of Baret's return, buys bread from the bakery, buys fruits and fishes. We understand from the conversations between Arus and Diran that they haven't eaten such foods in years. Arus asks Diran if he had money to buy such things, why didn't he buy them before? "What do you want from me?" says Diran to Arus, "What can you expect from a miserable man like me?"²³⁸ The poverty and the loss of status they fall into can be read from the tables as they drift more and more to the outskirts of the city, as they move from Mühürdar to Kuşdili. As we've said before, at the end of the novel all

²³⁷ Biberyan, *Yalnızlar*, p. 113.

²³⁸ Biberyan, *Karıncaların Günbatımı*, p. 38.

that's left of the table is burnt, charred potatoes and moldy cheese hidden under the bed.

We have seen how a socialist writer like Biberyan, portrayed different neighborhoods of the city and the people living in these neighborhoods. We examined where the writer's gaze wandered, and how the encounters between people from different economic and social classes create anger and hatred, and how this anger emerges. It is possible to multiply these examples, but for now, I will end this chapter and move on to the last part of the atlas of emotions, which consists of fear and anxiety. I intend to show that every emotion we have examined so far is actually caused by fear and anxiety. At the bottom of all of the emotions, disgust, hatred or resentment, is the state of constant fear caused by being an Armenian in Turkey.

3.4. FEAR AND ANXIETY AS A PART OF THE DAY-TO-DAY LIFE: THE UNCERTAINTY OF TOMORROW LIVING BETWEEN TWO CATASTROPHES

At the very beginning of this chapter, I intended to make a kind of atlas of the emotions in Biberyan's literature, and I said that the *continent* placed at the center is disgust, all other emotions develop around this center, that disgust overrules and dominates other emotions, that it exploits them and feeds on them. The last dominant emotion that feeds disgust in Biberyan's literature, which we will examine in this subsection, is fear. We are talking about a fear that has become the building block and foundation of the characters' existence and (naturally) determines all their behavior, their communication with their environment, their social relations, and their positions in society. In fact, in the previous chapters, I have inadvertently mentioned how the daily life of Armenians in Turkey is shaped by a habitus of denial, so how all these situations affect the characters in the novels and make them fear. Therefore, what I want to do here is to philosophically theorize this feeling, which we call fear, whose outlines still seem unclear, and then show how Biberyan represents this fear in his novels by showing some examples.

Before that, I would once again open a last parenthesis about Dostoyevsky and examine how and at which points Biberyan differs from him. I've already underlined the fact that the assumptions we've made on Dostoyevsky are not quite valid for Biberyan's literature because Biberyan's characters lack the agency that Dostoyevsky's characters have, they are rather stuck in the more Kafkaesque, in the non-action thought. There is no way they can justify any act of killing, of extermination because as Armenians, they are the ones who were eliminated, sent into the attic or underground. Therefore, let alone killing, they lack a ground of right to create the legitimacy of any action. So, what do the Biberyan characters and the Dostoevsky characters have in common? One thing is certain, they all have in common the hope of living in another world that is fairer, to live under more reasonable conditions, and most importantly, in a world they will be seen and respected by the others.

On the other hand, it is useful to focus on a point that Nurbilek repeatedly underlines: She says that Dostoyevsky's characters are stuck between two places, which are underground and the feast.²³⁹ According to her, the reason for their anger and hatred towards the society is that they are condemned to one, and not invited to the other. The characters both want to attend the feast and cannot admit it because of their arrogance. This is also the reason for the illness of the underground man, he wanted to participate in the feast very much, he attempted to do so, and even he forced his friends to invite himself. He becomes ill because of this feast to which he is not invited. However, Biberyan's characters have no intention of interfering with the world of the feast (Sur is an exception in a sense), they are characters who are not even allowed to live in their own underground.

All of Dostoevsky's characters struggle to be seen and heard by the others. Murder and suicides are the result of this desire. On the other hand, Biberyan characters do not want to be seen, or rather, they want to be inconspicuous. They don't want anyone to mess with them, that's all they want.

²³⁹ Nurdan Gürbilek, "Horlanmanın Acısı" in *Mağdurun Dili* (İstanbul: Metis, 2008), p. 35.

Lars Fr. H. Svendsen, in his book *The Philosophy of Fear*, says that fear is perfectly logical from an evolutionary point of view, because a creature without fear would have a very low chance of surviving.²⁴⁰ But on the other hand, says Svendsen, fear can also render a person dysfunctional, that is, as we said earlier, it can take away one's power to act and froze them in their tracks. At this point, we will have to make a distinction between fear and anxiety, or rather, we should point out that these two emotions are closely related to each other and can be substituted for each other. Although psychoanalytic theory has developed a more ambivalent and more complex view for anxiety, in this study I will stick to the general consensus in the distinction between anxiety and fear and proceed from the view that while fear has a specific object (we can say what we fear and why), anxiety has no specific object, namely I will accept anxiety as an objectless fear. Interpreting Heidegger's analysis of fear, Svendsen concludes that the root cause of fear is uncertainty. Returning to Biberyan, it means living "between two disasters, waiting for the next one". According to Svendsen:

In Heidegger's analysis of fear, what is feared is something that has not yet happened, something that exists as a potential impending threat. The object of fear "disseminates noxiousness". The main point is that this damage/harm has not yet happened and there is a possibility that it will not happen. Fear, then, is closely associated with uncertainty. This uncertainty can be described as a fundamental feature of human existence. In fear, the basic determination of my being, that is, my openness to the outside, is revealed. (...) An emotion like fear is a way of being ready/present in the world. On the other hand, a world we fear is a place where we cannot feel completely at home.²⁴¹

Rollo May also examines the relation that fear (or anxiety) establishes with issue of "home". May emphasizes "the loneliness of the subject, their inability to love and to be loved, the pressure on them to adapt, and their feeling of a special

²⁴⁰ Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Fear*, translated by John Irons (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), p. 11.

²⁴¹ *ibid*, p. 60-61.

'homelessness"', along with anxiety in general, whether implicit or overt (overt anxiety became particularly evident after 1945).²⁴²

At this point, it would be stating the obvious to say that anxiety and fear have taken hold over Baret of *The Sunset of the Ants*. He is a character who does not feel belonged wherever he goes, who cannot establish a genuine sense of belonging anywhere, and who never finds his home. Various traumas from his past (the most major ones are, of course, the *Nafia* military service and the sudden impoverishment after the Wealth Tax) have imprisoned him in a state of pathological anxiety. Wherever he goes, he is a stranger, far from home, always in a search: "Where will he go, what will he do? (...) Aside from not knowing, he even didn't want to know. He wanted his home, a home. A home of his own."²⁴³ Penniless Lover Sur also always wanted to have a room: "But it would be nice if we had a room," he thought. "Four walls are okay even if it doesn't contain any belongings... Without the fear and worry of being seen there, without thinking about anything but love."²⁴⁴

Of course, Sur's situation is very different from Baret's; unlike Baret, Sur does not feel depressed with anxiety and fear, does not become paralyzed. However, the conditions to cause anxiety are present throughout the novel. Obviously, they are under the gaze of voyeurs, and they are constantly faced with the threat of an attack, and moreover, a threat with its source not clear. Refusing to see this threat, Sur, in Biberyan's words, endures all the agony of an incorrigible defeat with his heart pounds terribly, feeling desperation. But, as we said, the factors that will cause anxiety are present: stones are thrown to them, they are assaulted, some eyes are constantly watching them somewhere, being named Sur (an Armenian name) is a cause for concern and he is afraid to tell his name to police, it is not possible to speak Armenian, etc. But of course, the end of the novel is the part where the above-mentioned anxiety, fear and the matter of "not feeling at home" are unveiled in their sheer starkness. At the end, the two penniless lovers return to the island again,

²⁴² Renata Salecl, *On Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 2.

²⁴³ Biberyan, *Karıncaaların Günbatımı*, p. 175.

²⁴⁴ Biberyan, *Meteliksiz Aşıklar*, p. 61.

sitting alone. They see a man in a pink shirt crouched inside the bushes, watching them whom they had seen from time to time before. "Norma looks at Sur with horror. Sur does nothing," "He does not have any anxiety, and does not fear of anything."²⁴⁵ Finally they come face to face with the man, and the man asks, "What's your name?". He then follows up with a request, "Let me see your ID." From what he told to them, he is a Laz man looking for a Jew who had humiliated him in the presence of a girl, and that he thought Sur was that man. When he realizes that Sur is not him, he says, "Enjoy yourself, brother, don't be afraid. It is our Burgaz". Needless to say, this man is a representative of the panopticon, the ever-watching eye focused on them. He has the right to ask for ID, and to beat them too if he finds it necessary because ultimately, as he had himself said, the island is his (*It is our Burgaz*). But this is not the striking part, because in every novel, we constantly come across man like the one with the pink shirt. The most interesting part is the thoughts of Sur after the man leaves and the short dialogue between him and Norma. Here, we witness that Sur is actually in a state of constant fear and anxiety: "It was wonderful to be able to lie down so carefree, without waiting for a catastrophe to happen. To be not nervous. To be comfortable, with inner peace... Not to feel guilty, not to be uneasy because of an act that is not a crime."²⁴⁶ Although he seems to be talking about a place where he and Norma can have sex comfortably, we understand that these sentences reveal a much more general psychosis, from the repetition of the word *catastrophe* just like the repetition of the same word at the end of *The Sunset of the Ants*, which awakens Baret: "anxious, waiting for a constant catastrophe". Although Norma insists that the man thought they are Turkish and that he would act differently if he had realized that they were Armenian, Sur ignores her, he wants to believe that they had become friends. For this very reason Sur's last sentence is quite meaningful and tragic: "It is wonderful to know that you have a friend around and to be not afraid".

²⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 209.

²⁴⁶ *ibid*, p.215.

Let's take a final look at Jean Améry and his famous text, "On the Necessity and Impossibility of Being a Jew." My intention here, of course, is not to compare the two Catastrophes, to try to find similarity between the two people who were persecuted and massacred, but to show, as the members of these communities who have been turned into objects of hatred by the society of the country they live in, the discourses, thoughts and opinions of both Biberyan and his characters in his novels are very similar to what Améry had written in this article. I find it stimulating to compare these two texts in terms of being similar, moving along the same line, and giving birth to an ethics of resentment. Améry survives a camp designed and organized to kill him. Having no ties to Judaism either culturally or religiously, while sitting in a Vienna coffee house in 1935, reading his newspaper, he suddenly learns that under the Nuremberg laws, he had become "a Jew in every sense and in all clarity of the word by a society that is defined by the national socialist German state which is recognized by the whole world as the legitimate representative of the German people" or rather obtain, "a knowledge he had for a long time, but which hitherto had no significant influence on him, that is it is only a new dimension to his Judaism".²⁴⁷ The phrase that gives its name to the article, "the necessity and impossibility of being a Jew," starts at this moment. Let us remember Sur, who wants to say "what if I am an Armenian" and of course, Baret's famous interior monologue. During the conversation between Saraygil Azniv Hanım and his mother Arus, which Baret does not listen carefully at first, he suddenly startled by the word catastrophe. For Baret, this conversation had the same effect of the newspaper that contained the articles of the Nuremberg laws, which made Améry suddenly realize that he could not get rid of the Jewishness stuck on him no matter what he did. We have quoted a long excerpt of this section in the previous chapters, so I think these two sentences will suffice to build the bridge now: "He was becoming Armenian again, unintentionally" and "He had realized that it was better not to be an Armenian. But it was impossible not to be an Armenian."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Jean Améry, "Yahudi Olmanın Zorunluluğu ve İmkansızlığı", in *Suç ve Kefaretin Ötesinde*, translated by Cemal Ener (İstanbul: Metis, 2014), p. 114.

²⁴⁸ Biberyan, *Karınların Günbatımı*, p. 479.

So what does this obligation mean? Let's go back to Améry again and examine how this obligation explained by him finally manifests itself and is represented in Krikor.

Améry says:

But to be a Jew, beyond the task of holding within me the Catastrophe that happened yesterday and which we cannot say with certainty that will not happen tomorrow, is also a *fear*. (...) As a Jew, I go through life like a sick man with one of those ailments that do not cause great suffering but will surely result in death.²⁴⁹

The state of being in fear, especially when this fear and anxiety becomes pathological and permanent, irreversibly disrupts all ties between the person and the society in which he lives. Because, as Svendsen underlines, fear will mean to putting a distance between the feared things and the subject, which will undermine trust, which is seen as "the most basic characteristic of human relations". This is the reason why Améry says: "As a distrustful Jew, I stand alone and estranged from my surroundings, and all I can do is get used to living being a stranger. I have to accept my foreignness as an essential element of my personality; I must patiently claim it like an inalienable property".²⁵⁰ The lonely man of *The Lonely Ones*, Krikor, and his loneliness, his fear and, of course, his tired resentment, which he carries like an "inalienable property", is embodied in his woolen cardigan, which he never dared to take off even on a summer day. While his Turkish neighbors could walk around naked if they ever wanted, as this nakedness represents their capacity and fearlessness as a populous and powerful people, Krikor's subalternity and "subjugation" will not allow him to take off his woolen cardigan from his hunched back for a moment.

Thus, we have finished examining the last part of the atlas that we started at the beginning of the chapter. We have seen how all of Biberyan's characters' loneliness that they are immersed in, fuels their rage and envy. But we've also seen that the reason behind these envy and anger was not merely predicaments or dilemmas of

²⁴⁹ Jean Améry, "Yahudi Olmanın Zorunluluğu ve İmkansızlığı Üzerine", in *Suç ve Kefaretin Ötesinde*, translated by Cemal Ener (İstanbul: Metis, June 2019), p. 126.

²⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 127.

the modern man who struggle desperately in existential crisis, but the main reason behind that is the obligation to be an Armenian, and as Améry says, we've also seen that all these emotions constitute the fundamental components of their personalities and existences. This is how the circle we started to draw closes at this point: In Biberyan, all these emotions are constantly evolving and adding to each other, gradually getting bigger and finally rooting in the characters in the form of disgust. This disgust that one feels for one self's own existence, which is impossible to get rid of it, rules the whole universe of emotions. But is there not a glimmer of hope in all this darkness? Will Biberyan show us a way out? Before I finish my study, I would like to examine possible answers to this question.

CONCLUSION

I have started the introductory chapter of my thesis with the sores in life which slowly erode the mind, wounds that don't heal over time. Throughout my work, I have tried to take a closer look to this wound. But taking a closer look at the wound actually meant looking for ways to heal it. In this concluding part, I would finally like to discuss whether there is any glimmer of hope in Biberyan's literature. In other words, will Baret be able to find a home? Will Krikor be able to take off his cardigan? Or will Sur be able to live freely as he dreamed of, without fear of anyone, without hiding?

Considering the novels, it can be said that there is no hope. At the end of the *Lonely Ones*, Gülgün dies, Aret is beaten to death, *Penniless Lovers* ends with Norma's worried gaze, and at the end of the *Sunset of the Ants*, the whole city is on fire... But throughout my study, for this very reason, I have tried to show that the life and the literary output of Biberyan are inseparable. It should never be forgotten that he was a socialist writer. He never gave up on his demand for equal citizenship and his dream of a just world. He never stopped fighting for his cause. But on the other hand, he never accepted the status of "minority" that the state and the society tried to assign to him. Therefore, it is possible to read his novels and their hopeless endings as an objection to surrendering to this denialist habitus. In his autobiography, speaking of his post-Nafia days, he writes:

Everything seemed to me to be changed. Or everything inside me had changed. Things that used to be so good to me in times of crisis, such as escaping to nature and dreaming, did not interest me at all anymore. The poem was over for me. Even the novel was over. I couldn't dream, I couldn't get excited. I felt like I had lost my sensitivity. I needed to struggle, that was all I was interested in. All I had in my mind was aggression and rebellion. I was also worried about uncovering the truths that I saw only a part of, interpreting the other face of the reality that I had come close to, interpreting the experiences I had. I couldn't wait to get into the arena.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Biberyan, *Mahkumların Şafağı*, p. 320.

As can be seen from this excerpt, Biberyan rejected the passive, obedient position that his characters accept. His political consciousness has prevented this acceptance. It is as if he is saying to the Armenian community: do not give up the struggle, do not give up your demand for reckoning, because if you give up on these, you will eventually become wretched like Baret. Or perhaps a more pessimistic interpretation might be formulated as the following: Biberyan is actually holding up a mirror to the Armenian community, which has already gave up these demands and accepted to live in this denialist habitus.

Throughout my study, I refrained from shifting my focus from Biberyan to anyone else. In the first chapter, I traced the collective memory of the Armenians, which also constitutes the key to the novels. Knowing that individual memory cannot be separated from the collective memory, I tried to read Biberyan's life together with this collectivism. I devoted the first chapter substantially to the life of Biberyan and focused mainly on his autobiography. It was only at the end of the first chapter that I compared Zaven and Baret and mentioned that they were both in the search for a home. Thus, I would be able to move on to my second chapter, the chapter I wrote about the places in Biberyan's novels. In this chapter, I examined the characters in the novels in their cities and houses. Both Istanbul and the houses had one thing in common: they were uncanny. Big changes were going on in Istanbul, the characters felt like stranger in the city. On the other hand, they were constantly told in different ways that they did not belong there and that they were not wanted there. So, the characters are worried and anxious, they feel fear. This anxiety and fear transform into a repulsion in them. From this viewpoint, I moved on to my last chapter, the atlas of emotions. In this part, I examined the four basic emotions in Biberyan's literature: disgust, hatred, anxiety and fear. In doing so, I compared some of the novels in which disgust and anxiety are dominant emotions, especially those of Dostoyevsky, Kafka and Atay, with those of Biberyan. Thanks to these comparisons, I think I have shown how Biberyan stands in a different position within this modernist literature.

It is worth emphasizing one more point. In fact, Biberyan's political position is quite different from that of Jean Améry, whom I often refer throughout my study. In his book, Améry talks about a society that could never be reconciled and trusted. The ethic of resentment emerges at this very point. Biberyan's political anger seeks ways to live together. Améry thinks that no apology or confrontation can be genuine. On the other hand, Biberyan raises his voice with a demand for a confrontation and apology, in this sense, his very existence becomes a rebellion.

I have asked a few times where the home could be for Biberyan. At the end of my study, perhaps I can now give two symbolic answers to this question: his mother language and the sea. These are the only areas where he can calm his anger and find a cure for his own wound. Whenever he is somewhere far from the sea, he wanted to return immediately. As for his mother language, the concept of home has its own ambivalence here too: Biberyan wants to stay there (that is, he wants to write in that language), and to move away from home (that is, he regrets writing in Armenian). Apart from these two symbolic homes, a real home is often a dream and disappointment in Biberyan. Like Baret, his life also passed in the search for a home, moreover, with the dream of creating it. Both his journalistic career, political engagement and his literary output can be seen as the results of this dream. Therefore, at this point, we see very clearly that the wound which Sadeq Hedayet mentioned is not the same as Biberyan's, it is the wound of being exiled in his own homeland. I think I was able to examine this wound in detail, especially in the third chapter of this thesis. I have tried to show that under the disgust and anger combined with the poison of masculinity, there is actually and endless fear and anxiety of being an Armenian in post-genocidal Turkey.

So far, I have told what I have done in my thesis, what I have accomplished. Before concluding my study, I would like to touch on the last couple of points, and this time, I would like to speak of what I could not accomplish in my thesis. First of all, I had a problem because of a language barrier. Since I do not know Armenian, I could not access the newspaper articles of Biberyan and his contemporaries. The only source I had was Biberyan's autobiography which covers the first 25 years of

his life. So unfortunately, the last periods of the author's life remained incomplete. Secondly, instead of focusing solely on Biberyan's novels, I would like to have examined his short stories, poems and newspaper articles too, but I gave up on doing so as this would make my study too long and complicated. Therefore, I preferred to focus only on the novels and to examine them in depth. However, for a more comprehensive study, I believe that it would be appropriate to examine his works in these other genres. Last but not least, I think that in order to better understand Biberyan and to recognize where he is positioned in the history of literature, it is necessary to compare him with other canonical writers in Turkish literature. A close reading and comparison of the author's works with the works of his contemporaries will be very useful in terms of revealing the difference of Biberyan's literature.

In conclusion, it can be said that Biberyan's literary legacy is a call to us, to the readers. He calls us to take a political and ethical position. He shows that wounds cannot be healed without a real confrontation, without the perpetrator coming to terms with the victim. Briefly, he tells that some wounds will not heal over time. But he also writes in his auto-biography that writing is not enough for him, he needs action. And he never gave up the struggle, he never despaired, because, as he says, *"car vivre, c'était se battre et faire l'amour"...*

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