

Nostalgia in Autobiographies: Close Reading of Banine's Life-Writing

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Abstract This paper explores the notion of nostalgia and its revealing nature in the formation of the autobiographical self, in cultural and gendered self-identity. Truth and lie are popular topics for discussion regarding autobiographies. Different from factual diversions there can sometimes take place prevarications when the authors try to conceal their emotions but their discourse makes these denied feelings obvious. Azerbaijani emigrant writer Banine's autobiography is analysed in this paper with the purpose to find evidences of nostalgia for her native land while living in Paris. Qualitative studies, discourse analysis, close reading are employed to unfold the author's cultural identity and her perception of this identity. The method of hermeneutic phenomenology is applied to find goes further than the author's own understanding or confession, to offer point of departure in the situation suggesting meanings which then allow the possibility of analysis, description, and interpretation. Through interpretation of microcontexts are offered insights into macrocontexts (the whole picture). The feeling of nostalgia which takes part in life-writings, has diverse expressions in different works what is influenced by culture, personality, social status of the authors. In Banine's autobiography it is multilayered and has been expressed both through silence and eloquent denial of its existence.

Key words Power; autobiography; Banine; nostalgia; life-writing.

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Introduction

This paper explores the notion of nostalgia and its revealing nature in the formation

of the autobiographical self, in cultural and gendered self-identity. Different from factual diversions there can sometimes take place prevarications when the authors try to conceal their emotions but their discourse makes these denied feelings obvious. Azerbaijani emigrant writer Banine's autobiography is analysed to find evidences of nostalgia for her native land while living in Paris. Discourse analysis is employed to unfold the author's cultural identity and her perception of this identity. The method of hermeneutic phenomenology is applied to find "that is deeper or goes further than the author's own understanding or confession. The feeling of nostalgia which takes part in life-writings, has diverse expressions in different works influenced by culture, personality, social status of the authors. In Banine's autobiography it is multilayered and has been expressed both through silence and eloquent denial of its existence. "People become aware of their culture when they stand at its boundaries: when they encounter other cultures, or when they become aware of other ways of doing things, or merely of contradictions to their own culture"¹.

The paper will investigate Azerbaijani's emigrant writer Banine's self-identity which can be observed in its dynamics through the process of her autobiography writing. Describing stages of her adaptation to the new place after moving from Baku to Paris, she demonstrates her going through hyphenation in-between position, a characteristic status for migrants which puts them in the status of everlasting search of identity. She seems neither assimilated, nor isolated (alienated and/or discriminated). Banine's position is interesting because as she was expecting, the immigration provided her with individual power coming from independence, but unexpectedly for her, it deprived her of community related power. It was the community she used to deny, to reject previously. The autobiography shows the author's prevarication in the topics concerning her homeland, purposely avoiding the theme of nostalgia.

Nostalgia in Banine's autobiography attracted my attention because she actively denied its presence in all her interviews. Besides, her literary heir Rolf Sturmer, who kindly answered my question on social media, was very affirmative about her attitude to Azerbaijan claiming that Banine did not miss it at all. Banine's autobiography depicts her attitude to her homeland exactly repeating that she did not experience any nostalgia. However, a close reading finds certain traces of her longing for her childhood memorable moments. The autobiography depicts the

1 Anthony P Cohen. *The symbolic construction of community* (First published in 1985 by Ellis Horwood Ltd and Tavistock Publications Ltd). This edition is published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library (2001) 69.

author's unconscious fear to be dropped from one chronotope (time-space reality) and not to be accepted in another. The discourse analysis also reveals the author's intention to conceal this.

Banine, France and Azerbaijan

Days in the Caucasus and *Days in Paris* are two parts of the autobiography written by Azerbaijani emigrant writer Banine, who was a granddaughter of Baku's wealthiest oil magnates, Shamsi Asadullayev, her paternal grandfather and Mirza Agha Musa Naghiyev her maternal grandfather. She was the youngest of four sisters in her family. Her father Mirza Asadullayev besides of running business also served as the minister of trade and industry under Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (1918-20).

Apart from these two works Banine also wrote, "Rencontres avec Ernst Jünger" (Meetings with Ernst Junger, 1951, with the German writer Ernst Jünger she kept friendly relationships, as well as with the Russian writer, the owner of Nobel prize Ivan Bunin), "J'aichoisi l'opium" (I chose opium, 1960), *Après* (After, 1962), "Portrait d'Ernst Jünger : lettres, textes, rencontres" (The Portrait of Ernst Junger. Letters, texts, Reminiscence, 1971) and other novels still not translated into her native Azerbaijani language. Banine wrote most of her works in French, except for some short stories in Russian, which, encouraged by Ivan Bunin. The Russian writer was well aware of Banine's fluency in Russian and insisted on her writing in his native language. In one of his books which he presented to Banine, Bunin wrote: "Dear madam Banine. A black rose of Allah's divine garden. Get accustomed to writing in Russian. Ivan Bunin, June 21, 1947"¹.

Banine's autobiographical duology "Days in the Caucasus" and "Days in Paris" was written and published in French in 1946 and 1947, respectively. It interweaves cultural, historical and feminist analyses of self in order to reach the core of self-identity. The titles of the two books are informative and show the dynamics of the author's quest for identity.

Days in the Caucasus

The first book of the autobiography illustrates the author's life from birth to her 17, the time span she spent in Baku. As the book is written in France, Banine contrasts and interweaves her mature perspective in Paris with a retrospective about her childhood in Baku. This part offers a picture of growing up in a culturally

¹ Aynur Mustafayeva, Banine Asadullayeva. *The Last Love of Ivan Bunin*. http://samlib.ru/a/ajnur_m/banindoc.shtml.

heterogeneous environment. Born to traditional and very wealthy Azerbaijani parents and having lost her mother at her birth, Banine grew up among relatives: her grandmother, aunts, uncles and cousins. The German nanny's presence played an important role in the pivotal twists of Banine's self-identity. Her paternal grandmother is described as a fanatical religious and veiled Muslim woman, who did not speak with any male, if he was not a family member. She devotedly observed Islamic practices and Azerbaijani customs; she also insisted that family members only marry fellow Muslims, became disgusted if her home appliances were touched by non-Muslims and would hand such items over to the poor. Banine's grandmother was very far from European culture and considered Europeans and Russians to be destroyers of national traditions. Her husband had left her for a Russian woman, her children did not take religion seriously, her daughters refused to wear veil. Unable to prevent her children from getting integrated into "new cultural life" she kept querulously complaining about the changes time was bringing. As Banine's grandmother repudiated everything different to her own lifestyle, she despised Fraulein Anna, the German nanny of her grandchildren.

Deprived of her mother on birth, Banine saw her grandmother as a mother figure, a symbol of family, an incarnation of her native culture. Her subconscious strove to reconcile two contradictory parts of her life. She writes that her grandmother, who was very strict to her other grandchildren, treated her with kid's gloves, as she had been an early orphan and in Azerbaijani culture nobody would dare to offend an orphan. Banine found this custom to be very beneficial, but with time's passing she felt pulled away from the family towards her nanny, subconsciously choosing Europe as her innermost identity. It is the German woman who provided cultural context for her. The author describes Fraulein Anna contrasting her appearance to the countenances of her female family members. This portrait eloquently reveals her childhood self-identity. Her nanny with her silky blond hair and smooth white skin was for her the incarnation of intelligence, beauty, kindness, and honesty. The contrast Banine made between the Fraulein and herself with her sisters is more than the description of appearances. It is a way of life, a mentality, a way of thinking and living.

Banine's description of the other family members openly reveals her attitude toward them. She does not accept the ways they think, the clothes they wear, their behavior and their values. She feels drawn to her nanny—a German lady, known to her as Fraulein Anna. Banine writes: "That German woman from the beaches of the Baltic Sea was my nanny, mom, and guardian in my life. She spent her health, life, and nerves on us. She endured all kind of pains and suffers for us without expecting

any reward or reparation for it. To be brief, she was a noble person who was able to self-sacrifice gratuitously.”¹

“Fraulein Anna strived to annihilate our inherited features and transfer to our hearts her pure sentimental German girl’s soul. But our ancestors’ heritage was in our sinew. As we were growing, our thighs became huge, noses enormous, breasts big. We, four sisters, were dark skinned, black haired, our legs and arms were hairy, and we were Eastern kids. When we gathered around her to have our photo taken, it made a really amazing picture.”²

From her childhood Banine seems to view herself as a recluse within her own family. Surrounded by all comforts of affluence, she does not feel comfortable, yet her sisters, cousins, and aunts do. She is indifferent to the wealth of her family, and she cannot accept the ways her family members think and act because of it. The author subconsciously denies her native culture, but simultaneously she seems uncertain about her suitability to the other culture and the other culture’s pertinence to her. Her young mind is conflicted between the two cultures, feeling at home within neither. This early maturity liberated her from the cultural frames of her homeland, enabling to look at them from distance as an observer, not a participant.

“Poor Fraulein was desperately observing the process of our growing up. She could still bear the changes in our bodies. When these alterations started to concern our hearts and souls, she got really terrified. When my sister Leyla who had just turned 13 said that she was in love with our cousin, Fraulein Anna became very much astonished and lost her peace from this very moment. Sacrificing herself both physically and emotionally she did manage to guard us for a while. But we became more and more cruel to our nanny with each of her restrictions.”³

In *Days in the Caucasus* the author demonstrates a deep understanding of what was happening in her home country. The time and space distance makes it imbued with nostalgic and at the same time ironic mood. The author does not hide her frustration about being part of this environment. Such an attitude is highly unusual for collectivist cultures including Azerbaijani culture, as individual interests in such communities are held below the values and behavioral preferences of collectives.

Egan and Helms write: “Nation...describes in general the communities into, out of, and between which narrators adjust their identities”⁴. As Banine wrote *Days*

1 Ummulbanoo (Banine). *Days in the Caucasus*. Baku, Yazichi (1992) 6.

2 Ummulbanoo (Banine), p.9.

3 Ummulbanoo (Banine), p.10.

4 Susanna Egan, Gabriele Helms. “Autobiography and Changing Identities: Introduction.” *Biography*. Volume 24, Number 1, Winter (2001) ix-xx.

in the Caucasus in France, after having spent over twenty years in this European country, she views her childhood from the contemporary French present, in the absence of national stereotypes obscuring the mind of objective evaluation. She tries to solve the riddle of her identity. This puzzle tortures her and is a constant theme throughout the duology. Her solutions seem to come with the aid of retrospection, and from the perspective of a new time and new place. The sense of alienation that Banine had experienced in her childhood was explained by her as an attempt to identify herself as an individual. Describing the process of growing up, she tries to find her personal and cultural identity. However, the expected state did not come even at the end of the second book of the duology. Like endless turns of a gyre, each visible approach to the destination of a definitive identity opens a new and wider circle of enquires.

The author's identity quest is incessant and dynamic. In spite of not being marginalized as a woman, she once confesses that she had wished to be male, what is understandable as the modern reader embraces the opinion that males had a stronger, if not absolute voice in Azerbaijan in the beginning of the 20th century. In Banine's autobiography we do not observe any segregation and the males' ultimate right of decision. Her momentary desire to be a man seems to be determined by the stereotypes of the society trusting men rather than women, and her inner need for urgency of independence, freedom of choice.

As Banine's father was an adherent of Western views, she does not describe the differences among generations as being a problem. Despite the grandmother's remonstrance, Banine's father hired Western tutors for his daughters, married an educated woman, allowed her to organize parties at home and invite whomever she wanted. The aunt's objections also could not stop her own sons and her daughter Gulnar from acting in a manner she felt was not suitable for Muslims. Quite the contrary to contemporary reader's expectation, it was not the old generation who dictated the rules, but the young generation who entirely relegated to the parents' role. The generational and cultural boundaries in Azerbaijan at the beginning of the 20th century appeared to be an anathema to that of earlier centuries. That was one of the reasons why the duology by Banine encountered confusion and disapproval from modern readers, whose confidence in previous beliefs about social conditions in the early 20th century were shattered by the unexpectedly confessional notes of a person from that time. What used to seem obvious, now appeared to be completely incorrect. The story of identity, of a personal investigation, initially intended to help the author in forming her own identity, overturned modern readers' confidence about the knowledge of their own cultural values and beliefs.

A retrospective look aims to fill the gap of knowledge which is a hurdle in understanding of self-identity. Childhood is an ideal object for nostalgic remembering. The juxtaposition of Caucasian and European selves appears as an attempt to understand herself through multilayered relationships with language and culture. Seemingly authoritative voice of the autobiography writer is an illusion, as autobiographical narratives are conventionally multivocal¹. Nostalgic autobiographies contain affirmations of the golden age and rarely take a conflict view of history².

The retrospection is centered on childhood efforts to define her own genuine self-identity. She remembers herself as a child contrasting her grandmother as embodiment of Muslims, Easterners, and as a repository of old Azerbaijani traditions, while attributing enlightened values to the nanny whom she saw as a paradigm of beauty, benevolence, erudition, the qualities she integrated under the term European. She found the majority of traditions in her culture too meaningless to stick to. Her grandmother's hatred towards non-believers, her approach to education, her aunts' manner of loud speaking and ceaseless gossiping increasingly intensified her negative attitude towards her native environment.

The author creates a suitable medium enabling her to convey childhood experiences that were spent between two cultures with their competing claims and compelling authorities upon her. In the process of growing up the narrator faces the differences between Eastern and Western cultures. While to the former she belongs by birth, to the latter by preference. The childish maximalism makes her strive to find an appropriate way of living and of thinking. The process of self-identity construction coincides with an unstable historical period as it was the time of the Soviet invasion of Azerbaijan and with it the complete change of governmental and societal structure. Banine's father, Mirza Asadullayev, beyond owning oil companies, also held the position of the minister of trade and industry. Yet on April 27, 1920, this era suddenly ended.

"I woke up to the sound of the 'Internationale' playing in the street," Banine writes in *Days in the Caucasus*: "When I got up, I saw soldiers not looking Azerbaijani by either their personages, or their uniforms. These were Russian soldiers. The Azerbaijani army "disappeared without firing a single shot," she continued. "The republic was destroyed . . . I witnessed the end of a world, saw this

1 Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Second Edition (University of Minnesota, 2010) 174.

2 Kate Douglas. *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Trauma, and Memory* (Rutgers University Press, 2010) 99.

process with my own eyes.”¹

The Soviet regime tightened the borders of Azerbaijan with Turkey and removed them between Azerbaijan and Russia. Communist occupation drove wealthy Azerbaijanis to European countries, because they were judiciously scared of being deprived of their fortunes and arrested by Bolsheviks, who actually jailed Banine’s father. At 15, she felt obliged to marry a man for the sole purpose of him providing a passport for her father to leave the country. Banine’s father was released from the prison and went to Paris, leaving Banine with her 35-year-old husband, who adored her and was patient to all her caprices.

At 17, Banine left her husband to join her family in Paris, where her father, stepmother, stepbrother and sister had been living for a couple of years. When she first appeared in Paris, among the many emotions she experienced there was a notable lack of culture shock. Her arrival in Paris brought her unmitigated joy. Nothing, even her brother-in-law’s mocking her clothes while first meeting her in the Parisian train station could hurt her or spoil her happiness. She describes her first passing through Parisian streets as a cheering ceremony not to be overshadowed even by the incongruous view of her dream city’s real, dirty streets.

Banine proved to be loyal to the European values cultivated in her childhood. All evidences say that she never felt nostalgic for the bygone careless and wealthy days in her homeland. In Paris Banine worked as a secretary, translator, and fashion model, while her family lived on savings from their previous wealthy life. She became acquainted with, and befriended some celebrities, among whom were Ernst Jünger and Ivan Bunin.

The other, utterly different reality, facilitated her looking at her childish and early youth identity, at a distance and from an absolutely different perspective. Even though this perspective was somewhat familiar to her, being from Azerbaijan she felt herself to belong to another reality, but the Parisian environment molded her shapeless thoughts with an order and certainty of an outsider. Narrating her life from birth to the life changing event of her resettlement to Paris, *Days in the Caucasus* was published in 1946 and brought success to Banine. Such celebrities as Ivan Bunin, Anri Montherlant, Mikos Kazantzakis, Andre Malraux, and Ernst Jünger highly appreciated her autobiography. In the following year Banine published the second book of her autobiography “Days in Paris,” which illustrated the author’s life after she had moved to France. Until the collapse of Soviet Union in 1990, few in Azerbaijan knew of this autobiographical duology. When it was found in France, translated from French to Azerbaijani and introduced to Azerbaijani readers, they

1 Ummulbanoo (Banine). *Days in the Caucasus* (Baku, Yazichi, 1992) 103.

were rather perplexed, as they did not know how to react to such an individualist approach taken by a female representative of a well-known family.

A Book about a Southern Caucasian Country Published in France. Two Cultures in One Autobiography

The geographical position of Azerbaijan makes both Eastern and Western cultures' influences on its culture and literature inevitable. Its history is long and its literary traditions are quite heterogeneous. Medieval Azerbaijani literary works include a huge number of Persian and Arabic words and their associated cultural concepts. Nineteenth-century Azerbaijani literature is written on a foundation of Turkish literary traditions. Twentieth-century Azerbaijani literature has much in common with contemporary Russian literature. Within this diversity of literary traditions scarcity of autobiographies is obvious, which can be explained by a reluctance of those from Eastern societies to reveal family secrets, Asian part of Azerbaijani collective unconscious which prevent the author from frankly confessing her own inner world, secrets of family members and friends. The western influence on Azerbaijani consciousness prevented the authors from writing about life events, and adapting individual attitudes and feelings to be more in line with societal norms. Semi-conscious rivalry settled between European and Asian influenced authors peddling a form of autobiographical confession full of understatements and prevarications under the disguise of eloquence.

Autobiographies cannot be culture free, quite the opposite, as these texts are inevitably cultural. "Generic and geographical border crossing form the basis of the autobiographical enterprise and represent definitory features of major autobiographical texts. The unfolding of a national identity in autobiographies is hence connected to generic and geographical transgressions and begins outside of one's country of birth."¹

Days in the Caucasus and *Days in Paris* are not multicultural in the same manner as most other autobiographies, as this life-writing does not deal with a family involving participants from diverse cultures. Banine's parents were monocultural to their cores. However, multiculturalism is a major factor in both works because the author makes a conscious effort to belong to another culture. She navigates, through the process of social interaction, between opposing value systems. Her understanding of empowerment encompasses changes in consciousness, or a sense of agency, including their sense of self-worth and social

1 Alfred Hornung, "Out of Place: Extraterritorial Existence and Autobiography," ZAA 52.4 (2004): 368.

identity, their capacity to exercise strategic control over their own lives, and to renegotiate their relationships with others¹.

The memoirs are blurred with the passage of time and become clarified from a new temporal and spatial perspective. The culture Banine belonged to and which she had left was collectivist, the culture into which she moved, and from which she was looking at the past - individualist. In Azerbaijan as in many Eastern cultures family and societal goals are considered above individual needs or desires. People in this country simply take the culture's stance for granted, bothering about the attitude of others to their choices and behaviours even when those are entirely personal and concern only their own selves. She chooses the individualistic approach characteristic for Western European cultures. Even though she spent her childhood in Azerbaijan, the description of childhood events and thoughts is also individualistic. The subconscious choice of culture remained unchanged throughout her life.

The language the author preferred to use for the writing of her duology is French. The language choice is reasonable, as had it been written in Azerbaijani, nobody would be able to read it in Europe, and as it would not be able to cross the borders into Azerbaijan, it would certainly fall into oblivion. When it comes to individualism, from the narrative we can guess that the author's recalcitrance would not allow her to join any community. Her evaluation was selective and mature enough to assess positive and negative aspects in one person, in one culture, rather than to marginalize people and cultures as utterly bad or good. Gulnar, the author's cousin, was a girl with a rather corrupted morality from the points of both cultural value systems; she jilted many lovers, and once eloped with a Russian soldier, who was Banine's beloved. She hesitated to tell her father about her affair with a Bolshevik-official, "Andrei," who later ran off with her cousin. Andrei arranged time to meet with Banine and elope, but by then Banine changed her mind, as she did not dare disappoint her father. She sent Gulnar to Andrei to inform him of her decision. Gulnar did not come from that meeting, as she remained with Andrei. Banine found it reprehensible the way her cousin behaved, but she still adored her as a friend, as someone she could share her secrets and with whom she could enjoy life with.

If Banine had remained in Azerbaijan, she would certainly not have been able to create such well-rounded characters; or to be more exact, collectivist perspective, which tends to classify people as good and bad, would not have allowed her to see multilayered nature of her relatives and express her heterogeneous attitude

1 Naila Kabeer. *Mainstreaming Gender in Social Protection for the Informal Economy* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2008) 27.

towards life. This individualist approach, her lack of tendency to generalize, her unwillingness to classify concepts firmly into entirely negative or positive, might have been formed from living in France, but the author's attitude does not seem to have been changed as she moved into exile. On the contrary, all childhood reminiscences, faults, secret thoughts, immoral desires seem to be confessions of an aged person, who upon reaching maturity is no longer concerned about her reputation anymore. Banine seems to have had all these attitudes, and had reached these conclusions, firmly established in her youth. Settlement in Paris created a context for her to compile her ideas and arrange them in a discourse that would allow her to summarize her lifelong search for her individual identity.

Nostalgia and Its Denial.

“While life writers like Anna Porter and Modris Eksteins, who remember their personal experiences in Europe more or less directly, return to reconnect with their family roots and their implications in the historical developments, the return visits of life writers who have only an indirect knowledge of their family's origin and were too young to remember concretely are carefully planned excursions into a past only known to them by their parents' and grandparents' life stories¹.

Banine remembers her personal experience in a Caucasian country very clearly, however she does not wish to return either physically or psychologically to reconnect with her family roots and their implications in her personal identity. On the contrary, she appears to be trying to avoid the confrontation with her past, though she is aware of inevitability to meet the past in order to understand herself and create a new, more harmonic self. She has her own childhood story which is eventful and able to shed a bright light on many aspects of identity. But due to painfulness of this confrontation, Banine does not allow her mind to dwell on the happenings of these days. The reminiscences are painful because they are obviously and eloquently deconstructing her childhood pictures about idealized European life. Deconstruction of childhood ideals creates discomfort, sense of doubt in her own assessment ability. This fear of possible disempowerment through “previous fallacious values” makes her disguise the affinity to go back to the childhood years which she was longing for, though thoroughly trying to hide this feeling.

Banine seems, or tries to seem, comfortable in Paris. She insists on her irrevocable break up with her native culture. In spite of her efforts to keep silent about her attitude to her homeland and intense denial of her homesickness, there are

1 Alfred Hornung, “Return Visits: The European Background of Transcultural Life Writing,” *The European Journal of Life Writing* VOLUME II (2013) 18.

episodes in *Days in Paris* which provoke the readers' thoughts about the author's real attitude to her childhood linked to her homeland.

"I could not sleep. I was pondering and dreaming. Now my dreams were connected to the past. I remembered the beach of the Caspian Sea, those beloved places where we grew up. Our garden with poplars, blossoming acacias, honeysuckles with intoxicating scent. It had a scent of Paradise. And our marvelous pools with fresh water! Warm waves of the Caspian... Is my heart yearning indeed? No... Maybe a little little bit. I yearned for the blue sky, sea, trees, flowers... so precious to my heart beauty... But no... I renounced my past. Where did these reminiscences come from? Why?"¹

The place where she was growing up remained in her memory as a Paradise. Carl Jung regards Paradise as an unconscious archetype associating with a longing for redemption. Nostalgia for the lost paradise shows that Banine was longing for her life in her homeland. She did not renounce her past though she is insisting on this. This familiar, recognizable world had obtained a shape and form when the author was looking at them in time and space distance. The process of reminiscence is pleasing and thus different from the real time she experienced those events. The negotiations between her personal accounts and public discourse obtain a different colour. The beauty which remained unnoticeable during childhood and youth because of social and political events, becomes discernible when the author is free from these distractors and is situated in a different public discourse. Poplars, blossoming acacias, honeysuckles with intoxicating scent create an idyllic picture of a careless childhood and indicate the author's longing for the past. Particular places and objects, smell, touch, music, weather, sea together make a picture of a harmonic and happy childhood, which it seems to the author from spatial and temporal distance and in retrospect.

In the first part of the autobiography, Banine talks about religious rituals to which her grandmother used to take her, with a touch of disdain. In the second part she remembers them while listening to jazz in Paris. Even unpleasant events from her childhood create a good memory for her and she allows her mind to dwell on those episodes.

"The sounds of jazz returned me back to Baku. When I was 8, grandma used to take me to religious traditional annual commemoration of tragic Kerbela events to develop in me the sense of true religion. I was sitting in the women's part suffering from stuffiness. In the men's part men were beating themselves with chains, wounded themselves with swords. I was shivering with fear looking at this

1 Ummulbanoo (Banine). *Days in Paris*. Baku, Yazichi (in Azerbaijani) (1998), 126.

nightmare and wanted to run away. Now, when we are away from the turbulent Caucasus I go back to that time without trembling, without a sense of fear.”¹

The author recalls these episodes and the feelings they were bringing up. Her complicated and not understood by herself emotions are cleared through the acquired perception of cultural identities. She remembers those events nostalgically and without a sense of fear. Nostalgia implies comparison of a present situation with a past one. The sounds of jazz which was alien to the author and probably imposed a sense of unfamiliarity brought about the reminiscences about religious commemorations. A little girl in Baku and a mature woman in Paris seemed to be feeling the same reclusiveness. The author's frustration was coming from the feeling that the ideal place, which she considered Paris to be, appeared to be not friendly but as harsh as the previous environment she was eager to leave.

In another episode the author is writing about Bunin, who had been her friend for many years. “Bunin who gained acknowledgement in exile, also was feeling burdened by a foreign land, but he did not want to go back. Though he was invited. He was answering that “They will force me to tell what I do not want to, what I do not believe in.” The Nobel prize had been spent. But the old and sick man rejected both fame and money. It requires an exceptional willpower”².

The word “also” leaks from her feelings and reveals her own attitude to her immigration. She knew that she would also refuse if they invited her. Banine's reasons for refusal would be the same with Bunin's. But why is she writing that refusal to go back to one's homeland requires a distinguished willpower? It raises a question about her candidness while talking that she considered France to be her homeland and had forgotten Azerbaijan at all. Socio-spatial trajectories lead to individual and cultural self-perception and self-identity.

The following episode disapproves again the author's claim about her consideration of France as a native land and repudiation of Azerbaijan. Patriotic feeling she tried to conceal, come to surface and demonstrates the author's feeling about her native land. She expresses her proud for her homeland and for the religion of its population, because this country remained unique and not assimilated and melted into other cultures.

“In spite of occupation (Soviet), we did not become Slavonic. We kept our national peculiarities, language and religion. Assimilation of the locals is a dream of every colonizer. But to change and assimilate a very different nation, especially if

1 Ummulbanoo (Banine), (1998) 84.

2 Ummulbanoo (Banine), (1998) 77.

they are devoted Muslims is very difficult.”¹ [Banine. *Parisian Days*]

While criticizing local social and religious norms in the first book, she talks in exclusive terms (they). However, in the second book she uses inclusive terms (we) and seems to want to be a part of a community, her native “chronotop.”²

Banine’s cousin decided that in Banine’s life there should be a man, because her cousin did not imagine a woman’s life without a man. When she invited her husband’s French friend home in order to introduce him to Banine, he asked: Do you like Paris? She writes about it: “he asked me the question which the French always ask foreigners. The question was senseless, because it assumed deliberately positive answer. Even if somebody did not like France, ethics required this answer. For this reason, French people think that all people like their country”³.

This passage and the episodes scattered around “*Days in Paris*”, in which Banine, after every unpleasant event in her life, repeats that “I am still happy, because I am in Paris” build a conclusive evidence that she just tried to believe that she was happy in France. What she was silencing instead was fear of in-between position, which she tried to escape but seemed to experience all her life. The discourse analysis reveals the long lasting conflict between persona and personality, eloquence and silence.

“Before lunch, wine was served. After drinking, everything seemed to me as a stupid dream. What are we doing in France if even after many years of our living here could not uproot in ourselves the spirit of Islam? I remembered my grandma, veiled in chadra (chador). What would she think if she saw us sitting and drinking with men? The memories of the past were depressing me. Was not it more reasonable to get rid of them? Why do I so strongly want to weep?”⁴ [Banine. *Parisian Days*]

The rhetoric questions she asks herself break a silence which lasted over 20 years. For the first time in her life she allowed her feelings which she was so determinedly suppressing to come to the surface. The conflict of her personality and persona, silence and eloquence created so huge a tension that she wished to weep and release it out.

At the wedding party of her cousin, Banine feels lonely, feels envious to her cousin because she is always loved and admired by men, though Banine herself is unwilling to build relationships. She goes to the bathroom, closes it from inside and

1 Ummulbanoo (Banine), (1998) 66.

2 Time-space, the term offered by M. Bakhtin.

3 Ummulbanoo (Banine), (1998) 75.

4 Ummulbanoo (Banine), (1998) 129.

weeps again. Having noticed her absence, everybody, including the bride rushes to break the door and let her out. She goes out, her cousin's anxiety and care softens her heart, she puts her head on the cousin's shoulder and asks: "Do you remember our balcony with the view to the sea? And our sandcastles? Do you remember? And the "devil house" we built in the summer house? Do you remember? Maybe we could have been happier if remained there, would be wearing veils like our grandmothers? Would not look for a job, men, freedom. Would have had many kids, would have been gossiping with women... Ah, I am so unhappy"¹.

This eloquence is another extreme different from that which was nourished by the euphoria of having come to France. This stream of consciousness makes it obvious that she is missing what is native to her heart. Even what she used to dislike seems to her attractive. This episode creates a specific kind of integrity with the beginning of the "Days in Paris". These two streams of consciousness describe the dynamics of the author's cognitive changes, the process of formation her self-identity. In the beginning of the second book she writes:

"At last I understood what crucial moments of human life were. And right now, in one of those fateful moments I was approaching to the divine gates of a new, unknown but longed for life. I was so excited that did not feel my body, I was hardly breathing, and heart seemed to be beating in every cell of my organism. I entirely was one knocking heart filled with feelings. Looking through the window I did not notice dirty, rubbished streets. I saw what I wanted to see. – my dreams, my imagined happiness. Now I will firmly keep it and never release. It is my victory. I will not let it go. I have come to the threshold of my Hope."²

In the end, after the previously mentioned event at her cousin's wedding there followed this last and most revealing episode.

"...I found myself in a half dark street. I do not know how I have come to this park where Sun rays hardly were reaching. Stepped along a narrow path and approached to a bench. Sat down. Felt hopeless. I was fed up with everything. Could death be the only solution?...No. I am still not ready. And what to do? I looked at the Sky where lives God. A bird flew over my head. Suddenly I felt fine. In my heart glowed a light. A weak one, but it was a light of Hope. I understood the truth. While a fly of a bird, rustling leaves, sea waves make you happy it worth living. I am young and can do much. Why not to try myself in writing? The sadness disappeared. It seems that death is not the only solution. Life was waiting for me. I

1 Ummulbanoo (Banine), (1998) 130.

2 Ummulbanoo (Banine), (1998) 132.

had to hurry.”¹

Conclusion

The feeling of hope unites these episodes, but in the beginning the hope was connected to the power she expected the new place would provide, whereas, in the end, the Hope was evoked by an internal power, understanding of the own identity, significance, potential and power. Nostalgia in Banine’s autobiography is prompted by feelings of meaninglessness, loneliness and disconnectedness. After having got empowered through retrospective self-analysis and defined self-identity, she becomes empowered enough to decide to start writing her life, which would allow her to be in a role of the ruler in this. Accepted nostalgia allowed Banine to maintain consistent self-identity, to have a coherent and harmonic picture of self which is continual because it consists of past-self and present-self, different from the previous self which denied the past self. Unfolding of selfhood through time removed the burden of imagined ideal life, brought the hidden conflicts to surface, and this cathartic nostalgia seemed to serve as reconciliation of different stages of life, different selves and prompted beginning of a new stage in life.

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