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Chapter 1
Exploring Postmemory in Markar Esayan’s Novel *Karşlaşma*

The transmission of traumatic memories to second generations, who have not witnessed the ordeals that their parents went through, has been a central topic in memory studies. This phenomenon concerns the second generations and how they appropriate their parent’s stories that preceded their births. To further explore the particular relationship of the second generations to their parental past, various scholars such as Ellen Fine, Ernst van Alphen, Gabriele Schwab, Celia Lury, Alison Landsberg, Nadine Fresco, Henri Raczymow, Froma Zeitlin, James Young and Marianne Hirsch have examined this subject. Their works have been motivated by the question whether the traumatic recollections of the second generations should be viewed as memory. This relationship has variously been described as an “absent memory” (Ellen Fine), “haunting legacy” (Gabriele Schwab), “inherited memory”, “belated memory” or “prosthetic memory” (Celia Lury, Alison Landsberg), “mémoire des cendres” (Nadine Fresco), “mémoire trouée” (Henri Raczymow), “vicarious witnessing” (Froma Zeitlin), “received history” (James Young) and “postmemory” (Marianne Hirsch).23

The concept of postmemory, developed by Marianne Hirsch, is based on the readings of autobiographical works written by post-Holocaust second generation authors. Hirsch invites us to rethink our relation to literature to explore the effect of traumatic experiences on the second generations. The concept of postmemory provides a new lens to scrutinize the intergenerational memory after the Holocaust. Yet, the particular historical context of this examination is the Armenian genocide,

which has not been acknowledged by the Turkish government for a century. In this
chapter I will analyze the novel of Markar Esayan, *Karşılaşma* [Encounter]. The
novel written in Turkish in 2007 seems to reflect on the issues of memory, trauma
and transgenerational memory. In the light of the ongoing denialist policies of Tur-
key, one might ask the question: How is it possible that the novel is able to deliver a
story that goes against the grain of the official state narrative? Prior to attempting to
answer this question I will first briefly look at the narrative of *Karşılaşma* in order to
understand how the novel delineates the clash between the official public narrative
and individual memory.

Next I will introduce the foundational concepts that I will use in this study such
as trauma and memory. In doing so, I will discuss the differences between trauma
and memory in the light of the theory developed by Cathy Caruth in *Trauma Ex-
plorations in Memory* (1995). Additionally, I will provide an analysis of the concept
of “postmemory” by examining the arguments of Ernst van Alphen and Marianne
Hirsch. Hirsch defines postmemory as the relationship of the second generations
to traumatic experiences that preceded their births but somehow transmitted to
them so deeply that they constitute memories in their own right. Thirdly, I will
analyze the novel in order to understand in what terms it captures the way memory
is preserved and communicated from one generation to the next. My analysis will
focus on the dedication, the multiplicity of narrators and the representations of
intergenerational memory in the novel. Finally, I will conclude by explaining how
*Karşılaşma* delineates the question of memory and the effects of traumatic events on
the second generations.

At the beginning of the novel readers come across two dedications: one to Hrant
Dink and the other to everyone, in the name of Gomitas Vartabed, whose life, hope
and effort have been stolen from him in Anatolia. Dink was an Armenian journalist

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24 Markar Esayan is an author and journalist born in 1969 in Istanbul. His first novel titled *Şimdinin Dar
Odası* was published in 2004. It was followed by *Karşılaşma* (2007) and *Jerusalem* (2011). Esayan started
his journalism career at *Agos* newspaper. Since 2013 he has been a columnist for the Turkish daily
*Yeni Şafak*, a conservative paper known for its support of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his ruling AK
party. During the parliamentary elections in Turkey in June 2015, the AK party nominated Esayan as an
MP candidate for Istanbul. Along with other Armenian candidates Garo Paylan, from the pro-Kurdish
People's Democratic Party (HDP), and Selina Özuzun Doğan, from the Republican People's Party (CHP),
Esayan was also elected as an MP in the Turkish Parliament.

25 See Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*; Ernst van Alphen, Ernst,
of Postmemory”.

26 Born in 1869 in Kütahya, Soghomon Soghomonian was twenty-five years old when he was given the
name of the seventeenth-century poet and musician Catholicos Komitas. In February 1895 he was
who was assassinated in 2007 in Istanbul. Soghomon Soghomonian, commonly known as Gomitas Vartabed, was an Armenian priest, musicologist and composer. By juxtaposing the name of Gomitas to that of Dink, the dedication makes a link between the present and the past, and the first and the second generations.

The preface and a note to the preface follow the dedications to Gomitas and Dink. In these parts of the novel, the reader comes across multiple narrators. All the individuals involved in the process of delivering, safeguarding or publishing the text provide the reader with a publication history of *Karşılaşma*.

After these introductory parts, Zayrmayr tells the story of the shop owner Pehlivan Usta, who does not want to be known by his real name. Because everyone associates him with his profession he is known by the moniker *kalaycı*: the tin-plater. His store is located in Istanbul’s Dolapdere area on the European side of the city. A shy and quiet man, *kalaycı* rarely talks to other people. The novel charts his relationship with his conservative and narrow-minded neighbour Mr Rakım.

*Karşılaşma* [Encounter]

The novel begins in a hospital room with a vivid description of a liquid going through the narrator’s chest. All of a sudden he realizes that it is blood. However this does not scare him because he is aware that he is dying. In the following pages, while he introduces himself, he points at his nose and says “this is an Armenian nose” (22). In addition to this reference to his ethnic identity, the narrator provides as much information as possible about his hospital to the reader. He states:

Kaldığım yer Aylazk’ların Yedikule Ermeni Hastanesi adıyla bildiği Surp Pırgiç Azkayin Hivantanots’tur. (23)

[The place where I am staying is Surp Pırgiç Azkayin Hivantanots, known as Yedikule Armenian Hospital by the Aylazks.]

As can be seen from the English translation, the narrator also explains his hospital in Western Armenian using the Latin alphabet. In Western Armenian, *Surp Pırgiç Az*

appointed as a *vardapet* (celibate priest) and, thereafter became known as Gomitas Vartabed. There are two usages of his name due to the difference in pronunciation between Eastern and Western Armenian. In Western Armenian he is referred to as Gomitas Vartabed whereas in Eastern Armenian it is Komitas Vardapet. I have adopted the Western Armenian *Gomitas*.

27 Translations from Turkish are my own.
Chapter 1

Kayin Hivantanots (Սուրբ Փրկիչ հայոց հիվանդանոց) means The Holy Saviour Community Hospital. The Armenians generally refer to Turks as Aylazks. He is staying at The Holy Saviour Community Hospital that is known as Yedikule Armenian Hospital by the Turks. The footnote explains that these are Armenian sentences and it provides a Turkish translation. The narrator makes it clear to the reader that he is Armenian by pointing out his Armenian nose and giving the name of the hospital in two languages. He thinks that it is time for the readers to get to know him.


[Briefly, it is time we met. I am Zayrmayr Parsoğlu. In Armenian: Զայրմայր Բարսէղէան. The original version of my surname is Parseğyan. However, following the Surname Law, -yan was dropped and has become -oğlu.]

We learn from this introduction that the narrator is called Zayrmayr. Tatyos, Zayrmayr’s father, was always a very difficult man and drunk most of the time (30). Most importantly he has never shown any interest in doing anything with Zayrmayr. To compensate for the lack of a father figure in his life, Zayrmayr spent most of his time with their neighbor Şirag (31). Due to their age difference Zayrmayr always addressed him as Uncle Şirag. Zayrmayr had such a bond with him that, as a child, he always dreamt of Uncle Şirag replacing his father (30). Şirag owned a printing house called Arev. Most of the books he published were written in Armenian, Turkish and in foreign languages (32). It was Uncle Şirag who introduced many Armenian authors to Zayrmayr when he was a child.

In the next chapter Zayrmayr announces that he will describe a miracle to the reader. We learn that he will talk in detail about a man who had many names, including Kalayci [tin-plater], Pehlivan Usta [Master Pehlivan] or just Usta [Master] (67). In general, the way he referred to his real name was just S. Zayrmayr was one of the few people who knew his full name. Most of the time Pehlivan Usta avoided contact with other people. To find an answer to his recluse behavior Zayrmayr asks himself: why is he so proud, even though he is a poor Armenian man? (70). This questioning informs us that Pehlivan Usta is also of Armenian origin.

So far the reader has come across three characters of Armenian origin: Zayrmayr, Uncle Şirag and Pehlivan Usta. Zayrmayr is the youngest of the three. In the following section of the novel, we are introduced to Mr Rakım. He is a man who

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28 Şirag (Shirag) is an Armenian male name.
dislikes Armenians but also people who have contact with Armenians (80). He is a conservative man who cannot tolerate non-Muslims and always refers to them as *gavur* [infidel]. He owns the house and the property that used to belong to his Armenian neighbor Haçik (80). The setting of the novel is the Dolapdere district of Istanbul where Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, Jews, Roma people, Sunnite and Alawite Moslems, Albanians, the Laz, Circassians and Kurds lived together (105). The multinational character of the neighbourhood has not always allowed these communities to peacefully coexist. Occasional conflicts did happen; yet, they still lived right next to each other.

One day Pehlivan Usta walks to his store when he comes across a huge crowd gathered in a circle, watching a young boy suffering from a seizure and foaming at the mouth. Pehlivan Usta goes to the child and holds him. All of a sudden the boy recovers and walks away. Referring to Pehlivan Usta’s healing powers, Zayrmayr informs the reader about “the fame of Pehlivan Usta started to spread around all the districts within a short time” (141).

The boy healed by Pehlivan Usta is Yusuf, Mr Rakım’s son. Shortly after recovering from his sickness, he is subject to seizures again. Pehlivan tells his other neighbours that Yusuf’s family should pay him a visit if they want Yusuf to recover completely. The mere idea of visiting an “infidel” incenses Mr Rakım and he turns the offer down. However, Mr. Rakım’s wife Mrs Emine cannot bear seeing her son suffer and plans a secret visit to Pehlivan Usta’s store. During their conversation Usta tells Mrs Emine that a curse is the cause of Yusuf’s illness and that he will not get better unless the curse is lifted.

Mrs Emine is distressed at not finding a satisfactory answer to all the questions she asks herself and is overcome by the desire to find out the truth about Haçik, a member of the Armenian Demircigiller family, who left his house to Mr Rakım in 1915 (137). Mrs Emine uses the verb “to leave”, suggesting that he left of his own accord.

During a conversation with her husband Mrs Emine asks him what really happened to them. According to Rakım, “they had committed a crime against our land and our Sultan. What a crime! They were traitors and mutineers to their country and they also cursed Islam” (137).

Pehlivan Usta tells Zayrmayr that Rakım’s family has a secret, which is the reason for their son’s illness (345). At the climax of the narrative, Mr Rakım, Pehlivan Usta and various religious figures congregate in the Dolapdere district to resolve the situation. Mr Rakım tries to win the support of the imam to malign Pehlivan Usta. When the imam does not give him his support, Mr Rakım panics. He feels the urge to testify in front of everyone in the street and confesses that he has deceived his neighbour Haçik, a member of the Demircigiller family, and confiscated his proper-
ties. After this admission Yusuf mysteriously recovers and starts to walk. Coming to terms with the past brings a catharsis to the neighbourhood. The Dolapdere residents enjoy the newly-established fraternity in the district.

Karşılaşma raises questions about the relationship between different generations and the transmission of accountability to second generations. Similarly, the concept of “postmemory” explores the transfer of traumatic experiences to second generations. In the following section I will highlight how the concept of “postmemory” explains the puzzling relationship between different generations. In doing so, I will also examine what the notion of “postmemory” can offer to broaden my analysis.

**The Concept of Postmemory**

In a discussion on the role of concepts in the humanities, Mieke Bal states that concepts “raise the underlying issues of instrumentalism, realism and nominalism and the possibility of interaction between the analyst and the object” (Bal 2002, 29). Concepts are key interlocutors between the object and the analyst and to a large extent they shape analytic practice. They have a significant influence on the way cultural objects are “read” and “analyzed”. The “meanings” of cultural objects do not lie dormant within the objects themselves, but they are generated through the processes of analysis in a dialogue between analyst, concept and object.

The key concepts in this chapter are trauma and memory, with a special focus on intergenerational memory. Recently the concept of trauma has become the fashionable term to refer to a wide variety of phenomena. This recent usage of trauma has prompted Bal to say that:

‘Trauma’ for example, is used casually to refer to all sad experiences, whereas the concept in fact theorizes a distinctive psychic effect caused by happenings so life shattering that the subject assaulted by them is, precisely, unable to process them *qua* experience. (33)

In *Trauma Explorations in Memory* Cathy Caruth argues that a traumatic event is not simply a sad or painful experience, but rather an event that is intense and shocking. It is so unexpected that the subject undergoing it lacks the cognitive framework to fully process it when it happens. One can say that the victim did not fully “experience” the event when it occurred. The “missed” event is somehow registered as a psychic wound or trauma that marks the subject, and returns to haunt him in the form of nightmares or flashbacks. “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event” (Caruth 1995, 4). This image or event, precisely insofar as it
is traumatic, resists integration into a “memory” that the subject “owns” to narrate it as a story.

Caruth gives the example of a car crash to explain this phenomenon. Often the victim does not really “experience” the crash, nor does s/he remember it consciously. The event itself may return, unexpectedly, in nightmares and sudden flashbacks or in repetitions, when it returns in all its shocking intensity. “Working through” this traumatic memory means translating it into “narrative” memories. Yet, as Caruth points out, the paradox is that as soon the traumatic encounter is integrated into a series of narrative memories, its “traumatic”, shocking and violent nature is effaced. Traumatized people face a double bind: on the one hand narrating their trauma is impossible since if they choose to tell people what they experienced, it will be distorted. On the other hand, if they do not testify, they will continue to be hit by the terror of this event. The concept of trauma will play a key role in this chapter. However, it will not be my main focus. The central issue in Encounter is not concerned with a trauma like a car accident, but with the transmission of the memory of an event, i.e. transmitting the memory of genocide to the next generations.

In the chapter “Mourning and Postmemory” of her book Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Memory, Hirsch raises the issue of the transmission of the memory to the second generations. Hirsch opens her chapter with a personal anecdote. She tells her readers about the first apartment that her family had rented from the Jakubowicz when they had immigrated to the United States (Hirsch 1997, 17-18). She mentions their Orthodox Jewish neighbours that kept kosher and had a daughter called Chana. Hirsch remembers visiting their apartment and staring at the family pictures of Mr and Mrs Jakubowicz. Although something made her uncomfortable when looking at the pictures, she wanted both to keep staring and look away. Another visual image that struck her at that time was the photo of Frieda Wolfinger her husband Leo’s aunt, a survivor of the Riga ghetto and a concentration camp. The images did not directly indicate anything about the Holocaust, rather they conveyed the message of “having survived” or “being alive” (19). In Hirsch’s view, the connection of postmemory to its object is not maintained “through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation” (22). She argues that the grandchildren of the survivors carry the mark of a traumatic memory that they have themselves neither experienced nor witnessed.

In a response to Hirsch’s study, Ernst van Alphen questions whether we should use the word “memory” to characterize those phenomena. He analyzes the problems of survivors’ children in two literary works, Nightfather by Carl Friedman and After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust by Eva Hoffman. Van Alphen argues that the traumas of the children in Nightfather do not derive directly from the Shoah, but rather that “their trauma is caused by being raised by
a traumatized Holocaust survivor” (Van Alphen 2006, 482). The radically different nature of this trauma is obscured by Hirsch’s term “postmemory”, which suggests continuity between these two experiences. Van Alphen concedes that the “postmemory” concept implies an intergenerational transmission, and does not “help to understand the specificity of the problems of children of survivors and of the special dynamics between survivor parents and children” (487-88).

Van Alphen does not refute the idea that children have knowledge about the past of their families but “that knowledge is, however, the result of a process of conveying, of combining historical knowledge and the memories of others” (486). Since Hirsch focuses on the prefix post, Van Alphen declares that to her the term memory is more or less self-evident. The prefix post in Hirsch’s postmemory concept does not imply that later generations are “beyond memory”. For Van Alphen, however, “post” indicates a very particular kind of memory, one that connects to its object not through recollection but through an imaginative investment. On the other hand, Hirsch claims that there is an indexical connectedness between the survivors and the later generations.

Since disconnection is replaced by a term that indicates a fundamental continuity, he names this intergenerational transmission process “wishful thinking”. By disconnection he does not mean discontinuity in terms of the emotional level but in terms of the intelligibility of a traumatic experience.

In her article The Generation of Postmemory Hirsch responds to Van Alphen’s statements by partly taking up some of his suggestions. She states that:

> The “post” in “postmemory” signals more than a temporal delay and more than a location in an aftermath. [I]t reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture. (106)

She conceives of postmemory as a consequence of traumatic recall not at a generational remove, which implies both continuity and rupture. Hirsch admits that the events that influence survivors’ children “happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present” (Hirsch 2008, 107). With reference to memory’s indexical nature invoked by Van Alphen, Hirsch states that “postmemory is not identical to memory: it is ‘post’ but at the same time, it approximates memory in its affective force” (109).

Yet, despite this acknowledgement her precise wording implies continuity. Hirsch argues that the children of the victims “directly affected by collective trauma inherit a horrific, unknown and unknowable past” (113). She adopts the verb inherit, suggesting that the memory of the first generations automatically passes to the survivors’ grandchildren. This assumption takes the intergenerational transmission of trauma for granted.
A question therefore remains about how memory scholars should approach the transmission of trauma to the second generations when most survivors fail to admit their horrific experience as knowledge. Dori Laub’s notion of “empty circle” attempts to provide an answer to this puzzling question. It addresses the gap that results from the survivor’s inability to possess the experience as knowledge. The concept of “empty circle” derives from a dream of one of his patients. He writes:

The empty circle, a dream element of my patient, Mrs. A, whose case I will discuss in detail, is a term that symbolizes the absence of representation, the rupture of the self, the erasure of memory, and the accompanying sense of void that are the core legacy of massive psychic trauma. The empty circle is unleashed by the breakdown of the empathic dyad that occurs during the traumatic experience (Auerhahn and Laub 1989) and is perpetuated through the inherent resistance of the experience to integration into the survivor’s cognitive and affective framework – that is, through the survivor’s inability to possess the experience as knowledge. (Laub and Auerhahn 1993, 508)

The failure of the survivor to integrate the traumatic experience to his/her cognitive and affective framework results in an empty circle. It points to the trauma as something that cannot be fully remembered. Yet, as Laub clearly states, the empty circle not only haunts survivors but also “comes to exert a dominating and mysterious force on the identities and lives not only of survivors but of their children as well” (Laub 1998, 508). Laub’s concept addresses what the concept of postmemory ignores. The empty circle is something that is shared by first and second generations, precisely because they are both haunted by something that they have not properly experienced. Ultimately, as Laub writes, “at the centre remains a ‘hole’, an emptiness caused by an event that defies representation and is experienced as a profound absence” (Laub and Auerhahn 1993, 289).

One can conclude that the identification of second generations with the trauma of their family members, which is not based on any intelligible knowledge, results in blankness. To make his argument more concrete Laub shares examples from his patients who were the children of Holocaust survivors. Laub’s patients, with an inarticulated, inexperienced and absent knowledge about their family’s traumas, were caught “in a paralyzing identification process that precluded historicization of an intergenerational trauma” (Laub 1998, 512). Laub speaks of the “tyrannical intrusion of a history” as the intrusion of the “real”, of “an objective, historical event unconsciously known and transmitted across generations” (512).

The difference between the “memories” of first generations and the “postmemories” of second generations becomes even more crucial when we speak about the way traumatic histories are conveyed to the public at large. In his book Fantasies of Wit-
nessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust (2004) Gary Weissman explores the lacuna that comes to the surface when second generations treat the experiences of their families as an inherited lived memory. Weissman argues that non-witnesses endeavour to experience the Holocaust vicariously. They do so through sites or texts designated to make it “real” for them. Weissman states “this desire can be satisfied only in fantasy, in fantasies of witnessing the Holocaust for oneself” (Weissman 2004, 4). In this way, he believes that non-witnesses can “bear witness” only in the most nebulous way. He considers that the prevailing rhetoric of “secondary” memory and trauma are responses to an encroaching sense of unreality that results in absence, estrangement, distortion and disassociation. Weissman argues that the distinctions between the children of survivors and non-survivors are blurred when learnt history is treated as an inherited lived memory. Let me analyze *Encounter* in the light of this theoretical discussion and sketch how memory formation is constructed throughout the novel. How does *Encounter* position itself with regard to these debates about trauma, memory and postmemory? In order to do this, I first have to briefly look at a crucial paratextual feature: the dedication of the novel.

**Dedication, Remembrance and the Multiplicity of Narrators**

In order to understand the reflection of the novel on the transmission of memory, first we have to understand the way it positions itself within contemporary Turkish memory wars. The dedications raise this issue of Turkey’s memory conundrum. At the beginning of *Encounter*, the reader finds one dedication to Hrant Dink and another one to everyone in the name of Gomitas Vartabed.

Korkunun kadim lisanı sükûneti alt etmek, maziyle karşılaşımak, ve bize, içinde hepimizin onur ve kardeşlikle var olacağı bir dil vermek üzere yaşamını feda eden sevgili dostum **Hrant Dink** e adanmıştır.

Gomidas Vartabed’in şahsında Anadolu topraklarında ümitleri, emekleri ve hayatları çalınmış tüm insanların anısına.

[This is dedicated to my dear friend Hrant Dink who sacrificed his life to conquer silence, which is the ancient language of fear, to confront the past and to provide us a space in which we all can exist in honour and fraternity.]

[To everyone, in the name of Gomidas Vartabed, whose hopes, efforts and lives have been stolen in the territories of Anatolia.]
By mentioning Dink’s name, the novel imbeds itself into a tense history. Dink was the editor-in-chief of the weekly Armenian paper Agos. On 19 January 2007 he was assassinated outside the Agos office. In articles prior to his assassination, Dink described the increasing death threats against him. “I do not know how real these threats are”, he wrote, “but what’s really unbearable is the psychological torture that I’m living in, like a pigeon, turning my head up and down, left and right, my head quickly rotating”. Dink’s assassination had a deep impact on the Armenian community in Turkey but also on those Turks who were fighting for justice and human rights. Thus, by dedicating Encounter to Dink, the author tries to convey very specific messages to the reader.

Dink’s name can be read as an indication of two different purposes for the reader. On the one hand it stands for hope. Although Dink’s death brought pain to many people, to his family and to the Armenian community, his assassination generated a degree of mutual understanding in Turkey. For the first time in Turkey’s history and regardless of their ethnicity and religion, thousands of people united for justice. During his funeral, protesters carried placards saying “We are all Hrant; We are all Armenians”. This identification with Dink and the sympathy with his family’s loss convey the hope for co-habitation and mutual respect among Turkey’s different ethnic groups. The dedication of the novel to Dink means that the author expresses his condolences but also shares his optimism and hope for the Armenian-Turkish reconciliation. Yet Dink’s name not only stands for solidarity, it also indicates a conflict. The placards saying “We are all Hrant; We are all Armenians” triggered debates within Turkish society. For instance, shortly after Dink’s funeral, football fans in Trabzon, a city in Turkey’s Black Sea region, were seen holding up banners saying “We are all Turks”.

The name “Dink” is understandably a complex signifier. It stands for the hope for reconciliation and for a history of repression. Many Armenians perceive Dink’s assassination as the continuation of the Turkish government’s anti-Armenian policies and as a direct link to the genocide. For this reason, the Armenians commonly acknowledge Dink as one of the last victims of the genocide.

31 For some Armenians, the arbitrary “death” of Sevag Şahin Balıkçı, a Turkish citizen of Armenian descent, on 24 April 2011 while he was fulfilling his military service in Batman, is the latest example showing the ongoing institutionalized hatred towards the Armenians in Turkey. The military reports tried to sweep the case under the carpet by classifying him as a “martyr” but subsequently it was discovered that
In addition the novel is dedicated, in the name of Gomitas, to those whose lives have been uprooted in Anatolia. Gomitas was an Armenian priest, composer, musicologist and singer. By juxtaposing the names of Dink and Gomitas an explicit link is made between the present and the past. In his article “Komitas Vardapet and His Contribution to Ethnomusicology” (1972), Sirvart Poladian provides invaluable information about the personal biography of Gomitas. Soghomon Soghomonian (Gomitas’ real name) was born on 26 September 1869 in Kütahya, Turkey, to Armenian parents. Unfortunately, at the age of eleven he lost both his parents. Poladian believes that this personal misfortune proved crucial in shaping his identity because he was sent to Etchmiadzin, the seat of the Armenian Apostolic Church, to study at the seminary of the Holy See as a music student. He eventually entered the celibate order of the priesthood in the Armenian Church, adopting the name Gomitas after the famous seventh-century poet and musician Catholicos. He is generally known as Gomitas Vartabed since “Vartabed” is the title given to a scholastic celibate group of Armenian priests.

After studying in Etchmiadzin and Berlin he moved to Constantinople in 1910. Then the genocide started and Gomitas was part of the first group of Armenian intellectuals rounded up in Istanbul and sent to a prison camp in Çankırı. Although he was quickly released, he developed severe post-traumatic stress disorder. He was later transferred to a psychiatric hospital in Paris where he died in 1935. The central square in Etchmiadzin, the Yerevan State Musical Conservatory and an avenue in Yerevan are some of the landmarks named after him. Statues of Gomitas, which commemorate the victims of the genocide, can be seen in Québec, Detroit and Paris.

In his dedication, the author does not use the term “victims of the Armenian genocide” when he refers to the ones who lost their lives in Anatolia. Using the name of Gomitas implies that the ones who lost their lives shared his destiny: they were also victims of the genocide. The relationship between dedication and remembrance can be examined on many levels. Two reasons will suffice to illustrate the role of dedicating the novel to Dink, Gomitas and those whose lives and hopes have been taken away in Anatolia.

In the first place, Gomitas ranks among the first Armenian victims of the genocide and many Armenians think that Dink is one of the last victims. Referring to

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these two men alludes to the Armenians’ ongoing mourning since the genocide. Both men of letters had important roles in the Armenian community and worked hard throughout their lives. Gomitas collected and transcribed folk songs written in Armenian, Turkish and Kurdish. Dink defended the importance of dialogue and reconciliation between the Turks and the Armenians. Including the names of Dink and Gomitas in the dedication highlights the importance of creating mutual understanding amongst Turks and Armenians in order to live together after having to come to terms with the haunting constraints of the past.

Secondly, the dedication of the novel to the memories of “those individuals whose hopes, efforts and lives have been taken away in Anatolia” points out the obliteration of the past in Turkey. The author conveys the message that his novel will generate remembrance as a new genre of memorial practice in a country where coming to terms with the past is blocked. The dedication of the novel to “those individuals” emphasizes the role of the novel in awakening the memory of those who perished during the genocide. The novel places itself in a long tradition of literary texts that testify about the genocide, implicitly suggesting that in this difficult history, literature has a specific role. By dedicating the novel to Gomitas and to Dink, the novel states its ambitions and aspirations. It wants to testify and is, perhaps, even a call for justice.

Karşılaşma stresses the importance of conveying the obscured and overlooked histories to the second generations. Interestingly, the form of the novel itself also raises this thematic reflection on storytelling. At the beginning of the book, a narrator states that he has compiled all the information presented in this book, about his next-door neighbour Zayrmayr Parseğyan, in his hospital room. After Zayrmayr’s death, the narrator is the first one to enter the room of the deceased where he finds Zayrmayr’s personal belongings on his bedside table. He says:

Daha sonra odayı şöyle bir gözden geçirdim. Basılırken kitaba eklenmesi için gazeteci dostum Mösyö Hagop’a verdiği fotoğraf, çizim ve resimleri, sanki hususi olarak oraya bırakılmış gibi, komodinin üzerinde bulundum. (12-3)

[Later on I inspected the room. I found the photographs, sketches and pictures that I had given to my journalist friend Monsieur Hagop to be added to the book for the publication on the bedside table, as if they were left there on purpose.]

This narrator, named Mardiros Bakırcıyan, informs the reader that he is staying in the same hospital as Zayrmayr. One night he overhears Zayrmayr talking to himself. He feels the urge to write down his story and hands in the draft of the book to a notable character in the Istanbul Armenian community named Hagop Sepasdati. Mardiros assures the readers that throughout the narrative they will come across
the first person narrative of Zayrmayr; therefore, they will listen to the story as if Zayrmayr himself were telling it. The story of Zayrmayr itself is overheard, written down and transmitted.

Mardiros says that chapter seven has been written down in italics since he made this part up. He legitimizes his role as a narrator by explaining that there was a discontinuity in Zayrmayr’s narration because the narrator had to go to the bathroom. The novel suggests that listening to the testimony of Zayrmayr is not merely a passive act. It requires the listener to fill in the gaps. With regard to the act of assigning the narrator role to himself, Mardiros states:

During the time when my friend was narrating his story, because I have prostate cancer, I had to go to the bathroom. Certainly there arose a gap in the narration during this short period of time. Instead of leaving this part blank, I completed it in compliance with the general flow of the story. I found it appropriate to emphasize this addition at the beginning of the seventh chapter in italics, just in case you forget.

Yet, this situation is even more complex: following the agreement between Mardiros and the reader, a note to the preface is included. B. Sepasdati, Hagop Sepasdati’s son, informs the reader that Mardiros passed away in 1947 and that his father Hagop has done his best to get this book published. He adds in so many words that the political climate in Turkey had not been suitable for the publication of this work until 1995 when the political reforms initiated by the PPP party extended the freedom of speech and thought. B. Sepasdati only succeeded in having this work published as a result of the substantial improvement of human rights in Turkey thanks to the PPP party. He states:

Luckily, shortly after my father’s death, Turkey entered a democratization era. Although this happened to pave the way for accession to the European Union,
the reforms made during the PPP government have somewhat smoothed the path for the freedom of thought and speech, which have been coerced for many years.]

The novel’s narrative has embedded narrators. The reader first comes across Mardiros Bakırcıyan, who shares his destiny with Zayrmayr as an old man on his deathbed. He assigns to himself the role of narrator and writes down Zayrmayr’s story. Moreover, his legacy as an author allows him to invent chapter seven since he believes that his reception of the story was distorted as a result of his visit to the bathroom.

B. Sepasdatsi is another narrator who adds a note to Mardiros’ preface. He states that his role is of vital importance to the publication of the book, which Mardiros entrusted to his father. By the same token, Mardiros informs the reader that throughout the narrative, Zayrmayr’s first-person narrative will prevail; he will be the phantom of the novel. This complex narrative situation highlights three phenomena.

Firstly, by emphasizing the complexities of telling about the past, and listening to it, the book underlines that history writing and cultural memory are always framed by the historical situation in which they take place. Memories do not only disclose something about the past, they tell us about the present in which the remembering takes place. B. Sepasdatsi’s quote highlights the fact that “the reforms made during the PPP government” enabled publication of the novel. The insertion of such historical information aims to show the reader that the political regimes determine to what extent nations can talk about their past in the present.

Secondly, the multiplicity of narrators, representing different generations, illustrates that “coming to terms” with the past is an intergenerational phenomenon. The act of finding a cure and liberating oneself from the spell of the past involves an intergenerational process. The names Mardiros, Zayrmayr, Hagop Sepasdatsi and B. Sepasdatsi exemplify the importance of intergenerational collaboration to come to terms with the past.

Thirdly, there are multiple narrators in the novel. There are gaps between the stories collected and shared by different narrators. Therefore, the stories shared by different narrators do not convey a unified narrative. This complex narrative situation can be compared to second generations who have not experienced their parents’ memory. The experiences of children who have not witnessed certain events are different from their parents. If second generations treat their learnt memories as the experience par excellence, the emergence of “empty circles” is inevitable. A similar trajectory is also observed among the characters of the novel representing different generations. Every single character asserts that he will tell the real story as it is, trying to convince the reader of the authenticity of their storytelling. Ironically
Mardiros even invents chapter seven to establish *consistency* in the storytelling act. None of the characters fully experienced the narrated event. What they share with the reader is the result of a transmission from one generation to another. The novel was completed by different generations by listening to Zayrmyar, transmitting the story from one generation to another one and by filling in the gaps in the narrative.

**Testifying and Unearthing the Silence**

The issue of memory is raised both in the story and in the mode of narration. After a preface and a note to the preface, the novel starts with the character-bound narrator Zayrmayr Parseğyan. He is on his deathbed, telling about the pain he is enduring in his hospital room. The narrative commences on 23 April 1946, the day before 24 April, which is commemorated by Armenians as “Genocide Memorial Day”. On 24 April 1915, the Armenian elites of Constantinople were rounded up. These operations started with arrests at home or at workplaces by the State Security Office. These elites were held for 24 hours or more in the central prison of Constantinople and then taken to Haydarpaşa railway station under police escort. From there, they were transferred to two internment locations: Ayaş and Çankırı. Since Constantinople was the centre of the empire’s Armenian community, arresting prominent figures from political and intellectual life was the first step to neutralize the Ottoman Armenians. Razmik Panossian states that “this decapitated the nation and it was the opening act of the genocide” (2006, 237). The starting date of the narrative has a symbolical meaning. It establishes a link between the personal pain felt by Zayrmayr while vomiting blood and that of the Armenian nation, as well as that between his body and the collective body of the Armenians.

The opening chapter acts like a frame. It can be inferred from the passage that the whole narrative structure of the novel will be narrated through Zayrmyar testifying on his deathbed. This dramatic opening situation raises the question of transgenerational transmission. The efforts of Zayrmayr, Mardiros, Hagop and B., as characters representing different generations trying to get the manuscript published, also imply the transgenerational transmission of a story to the next generation. The date at which the novel is set furthermore invites another reading.

Zayrmyar explains that he feels the need and the urge to share his experiences with the second generation. His wish to share his story with the reader is not just an arbitrary assessment. It is a keen commitment by an old man who wants to bear witness and transmit all his knowledge before he passes away. His ruminations indicate that the telling of the story is an urgent need for him, as he feels pressed by time. He further explains:
Exploring Postmemory in Markar Esayan’s Novel Karşılaşma


[I am not sure if the remaining time is long enough to complete my story. I want to tell this amazing story with all its details to you. This is my only concern. But I do not promise. How can I know when I will breathe my last breath? I am determined and I will continue telling until I run out of energy.]

Furthermore Zayrmayr promises that the story he narrates is true. His act of storytelling should be understood as a testimony. Zayrmayr directly addresses the reader by saying:

Ah, şunu biliniz ki, anlatacağım ne hayali bir öykü, ne de bir masaldır hiç yaşanmamış. Bu hikayedeki her şey doğru...o derece doğru ki, bunun kanıtlarını hikâyениn kendienden çok, kendi yüreginde, kendi mazisinde kolaylıkla bulabilir herkes. (22)

[You should know that what I will tell right now is neither a fictive story nor a fairy tale, which is not true. Everything in this story is true...It is so true that everyone can find easily the evidence of it in their heart and their own past rather than in the story itself.]

Zayrmayr claims that the story he will tell is a real one. He urges his readers to listen to it in a specific way, i.e. by looking at the same time as they are listening, inside their own hearts. The past is not just made up of a series of historical events, it is also something that is shared between people. Zayrmayr believes that:

Düşündüm ki, mutluluk, sevgi, keder ve yalnızlık gibi, mazi de paylaşılmalıdır dostlarla: Her ne kadar orada yüzleşmek istemediğimiz pek çok şey olsa da. (25-26)

[L]ike happiness, love, despair and solitude, the past should also be shared with friends even if there are many things there that we do not want to be confronted with.]

In other words, the past is something that should be transmitted, told, shared and narrated. The past should be “encountered”. Yet this “encounter” is complex. It is not an encounter with something the reader already knows. This is indicated by a pun in the title. The title of the book also refers to the confrontation with the genocide because the title has a double meaning in Turkish. The verb “karşılaşmak” means “to
encounter”. However, as the ‘ş’ in the title has been written in an unconventional way, the author implies “karşıl(aşma)”, meaning both to encounter and to exceed, transcend or confront. It suggests that the encounter will be with something that may lie beyond the reader’s established knowledge and frames of reference.

The pun in the title may be read as programmatic, as a promise to the reader. We may understand it as a contract, as if the author signed an agreement with the reader that s/he will transcend his/her horizons to be confronted with an unknown part of Turkish history. In other words, the author intimates that this book will reflect what has not been uttered hitherto. A specific role is attached to the narrative, which urges the reader to question his/her dogmatic perceptions. Later on Zayrmayr states that:

Anlattım ya, hep kaçarak yaşadım ben...en çok da kendimden kaçtım. Yine de gelin, haksızlık etmeyin bana.. Kaçınmadım çünkü karşılaşmaktan, kendimle... sizlerle...son nefesimde olsa bile...Sükûnete teslim olmadım. Bildiklerimle gömülüp gitmeye razı olmadım işte.. Korkmadım korktuğumu söylemekten... (63)

[As I have told you, I have always lived by avoiding the things… mostly I avoided myself. Still, do not be unfair to me. I did not refrain from being confronted with myself and with you, even though I am breathing my last breath. I did not give in to silence. I could not accept dying with the things I know. I was not afraid to say that I was scared.]

Zayrmayr defines the limits of his narrator’s role and highlights the importance of testifying. He includes the reader as the narratee who is addressed in his narrative. The “confrontation” or the “encounter” is not just an encounter with the past, but also between the narrator and the reader. Zayrmayr, who is dying, shares his story with the reader, who inherits his story. The relationship between the narrator and the reader suggests that Zayrmayr does not wish to die with the things he knows before sharing his story with others. The desire to narrate is driven by the desire to convey.

Early on in the novel, the reader understands that Zayrmayr is in need of sharing a story with us to find inner peace. From the above quotes it becomes clear that he has experienced a disturbing event, which still haunts him even on his deathbed. The daunting nature of the event makes Zayrmayr uneasy and urges him to give testimony. It is not only for his own sake that an “encounter” with his story is necessary. He also hopes that what he will share with the reader will also transform the “you” whom he addresses. Zayrmayr thinks that the role of the book is highly important in terms of “transforming” his readers. That is why he says:
Zayrmayr contends that once the reader hears his testimony s/he will be confronted with an unknown story. He believes that exposure to the story, which the novel reveals, has the capacity of transforming the reader. The belief of Zayrmayr about the potential power of his story to transform the reader is reiterated many times in the novel. Zayrmayr claims that first we have to “heal the wound, and then forgive each other and finally start all over again” (36). To remind the readers of the importance of their role while reading the novel, he claims that forgiving or settling the dispute will not be possible without the contribution of “you” (210). Through the dedication, the multiplicity of narrators and the framing of the opening chapter, the reader is given an idea about the novel’s central theme, namely the narrative’s power and ability to transmit “excessive” or “unspeakable” stories to the second generations. These stories are the ones, which are explicitly linked to the Armenian genocide.

**Confessing, Healing and Reconciliation**

Despite the clues that the novel is about the Armenian genocide, the link to this history is not immediately clear to a non-suspecting reader. In the first chapter Zayrmayr provides information about his life. The readers learn that he used to live with his mother, since his father was an alcoholic who passed away when he was a small child. He falls in love with a poor but very beautiful Armenian girl named Mari. Zayrmayr does his best to marry her and he even begs a fortune-teller for help. They eventually get married and Mari gives birth to a baby boy, Kalust. Although he did marry the girl of his choice, he cannot say that it was a happy marriage.

At a later stage, Zayrmayr meets Pehlivan Usta, who heals Yusuf, Rakım’s son. This intervention is the central point of the narrative that gives the readers a clue about the divine character attributed to Pehlivan Usta throughout the novel. So far
the story reads, perhaps quite unexpectedly after the introduction, as something that resembles a folk tale or a fairy-tale. It tells of curses, magic and healing powers. However, it does give the attentive reader clues to a possible alternative reading.

On the one hand, this story reads as a fairly traditional episode about a haunted house confiscated by Mr Rakım. On the other hand, the haunted-house motif has specific connotations in light of the history of the Armenian genocide. During the genocide, Armenian properties were seized and confiscated. In Islamic law “halal” refers to the permissible things that can be practised, consumed or possessed by Muslims. One of the things that is not considered halal is to possess something that does not belong to the holder. This general belief in Islam suggests that an individual who has something haram [the opposite of halal] will sooner or later be punished by God.

As soon as the genocide is activated as an “intertext” that is present in the reader’s mind, other textual details become significant. For example, Mrs Emine, Mr Rakım’s wife, does her best to remember their Armenian neighbours:

Ağrik’ten o eve gelin geldiydim biliyorsun. Lakin hep merak ettim, nasıl gittiler, nereye gittiler, diye. Bir daha memlekete ne döndüler, ne de bir haber aldık onlardan. (136)

[It was the house in which I settled from Ağrik after our marriage. However, I have always been curious about how they left and where they headed. They neither returned to their hometown nor informed us.]

If we read Mrs Emine’s remark about the house allegorically, it signifies genocide as a haunting phenomenon, curse or illness from which the perpetrators and the victims need to be cured and released. The effect of the genocide on individuals becomes clearer later on, when Pehlivan shares his intention to discuss Yusuf’s medical situation with Mr Rakım in two days’ time.

Zayrmayr: “İki gün sonra mı?”
Pehlivan Usta: “Papağan gibi tekrarlamasan her dediğimi. Kulağın bende değil-midir nedir!”

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Zayrmayr: “In two days?”
Pehlivan Usta: “Do not repeat everything I am saying like a parrot. Are you not following me?”
Zayrmayr: “Do not be angry. Of course I am listening to you. In fact I am listening to you very carefully. In two days it will be the 24th of April, that is why I was taken aback.”
Pehlivan Usta: “I know. Calm down! We will turn the mourning day into a festival. We will find the cure all together on the day we became ill.”

The expressions “the mourning day” and “the day we became ill”, as well as the date, again, seem to refer to the annihilation of the Armenians. Furthermore, it suggests that the cure is not something individual, but that it is something collective. Moreover, this cure is found precisely when the day that they became ‘ill’ is remembered. “Curing” is presented as something that lifts a spell and is linked to collective commemoration.

Apart from a spell, an illness and a curse, something can also be read allegorically. Pehlivan Usta claims that Rakım’s family has a secret, which is the reason of their son’s ongoing sickness (345). As the narrative climaxes, Mr Rakım feels the urge to testify in front of everyone in the street. He suddenly opens up:


[ Gentlemen, I am a murderer. I deceived my neighbour Haçık Usta. Thirst for property and money made me blind towards my neighbour. I was affected by jealousy. There was no law and chaos was prevailing. Before their forced deportation, Haçık Usta came to our house and told my father that he would entrust all his properties to us. He also added, “If we do not return, all of it will naturally belong to you.” We were deceived by the devil. My father and I were intrigued to possess his properties. Therefore we made a plan not to see his return. Oh friends! The perplexed face of Haçık Usta is still fresh in my memory. Since then I have been feeling restless and having nightmares. God forgive me! I am sinful!]
The confession of Rakım can be read as an almost religious allegory, indicating the liberating role of forgiveness and confession. What sets the story apart is that it is not so much the perpetrator who suffers from the curse of the past, nor the victim who is still under the spell of the past, but rather the perpetrator’s child, the second generation. Yusuf suffers from a cursed history that he himself does not know, but which has been transferred to him by his family. As long as this story is not brought out in an open way and truly confessed, a cure is impossible.

Spectres of Memory

In the novel Yusuf represents a second-generation child whose parental past has led to his pathologization. The secret past of his family is transmitted to him. He also becomes a victim. In this section, I will analyze how different kinds of haunting memories form the character of Pehlivan Usta [first generation] and Zayrmayr [second generation].

In the novel Zayrmayr is depicted as a “reader” and a “listener”. Throughout his youth, he enjoyed spending his time in the printing house of Mr Şirag, whom he calls Uncle Şirag [Dayday Şirag in Armenian]. During each visit at the printing house, the books delight Zayrmayr. Uncle Şirag lends him books by certain Armenian authors such as Zohrab, Zabel Asadur, Zabel Esayan, Yeghise Charents, Hagop Baronian, Bedros Turyan and Krikor Zohrab. Zayrmayr recalls, “He used to tell me that he was a good friend of Krikor Zohrab and that they used to see each other until Zohrab’s untimely death” (32). Uncle Şirag did not choose these Armenian authors or poets randomly. The Armenian intellectuals that Uncle Şirag introduces to Zayrmayr were targeted by the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the genocide. On 24 April 1915 these authors were arrested along with Gomitas in Constantinople. From there they were sent to internment camps in central Anatolia. The arrest of these intellectuals marks the beginning of the genocide.

Different explanations offer different explanations to Uncle Şirag’s motivation to introduce these books to Zayrmayr. By lending him certain books Uncle Şirag sought in first instance to enlighten the boy about a suppressed history. When Zayrmayr asks Şirag about the importance of these books Uncle Şirag replies: “You can never know what kind of secrets and stories are hidden in those books diğa” (34).35 Uncle Şirag makes an effort to relativize the importance of the authors to the Armenian people but Zayrmayr, a young boy, fails to understand what he is talking about: “As I told you, I never understood anything from his sentences” (34). Zayrmayr “receives”

35 “Diğa” means young boy in Western Armenian.
the stories of the genocide, not as something that he can “understand”, but rather as a “secret” that remains inaccessible to him. As a child Zayrmayr was unable to grasp the importance of the stories hidden in these books. Uncle Şirag frequently gives clues about what happened in 1915 and explains: “I lived a lot, more than enough to experience things which should never be seen and experienced diğa” (34).

Uncle Şirag is passionate about his printing house to publish and therefore about transmitting more knowledge about a forgotten episode in Turkish history. Interestingly in this part of the novel someone again “receives” the story, but not completely. In the other (embedded) story, there is something that needs to be “filled in” by the person who transcribes. Similarly, in the relationship between Zayrmayr and Uncle Şirag, we understand that there is a “secret”, which Zayrmayr cannot understand. As a second-generation child who has not witnessed the genocide, Zayrmayr’s memory is empty. From his conversation with Pehlivan Usta about the importance of the 24th of April, we are made aware that he knows what happened in 1915. However, in the novel he is depicted as a character devoid of memory.

On the other hand, S., commonly known as Pehlivan Usta, is portrayed as someone whose memory and character have been fundamentally shaped by the genocide. At the beginning of the novel he is introduced as S. to the reader. Later on, when Pehlivan Usta goes to the police station, Zayrmayr informs us that there he introduces himself as “S. Soğomonyan” (159). Pehlivan Usta has a cousin who is also referred to as S. (177). As indicated at the outset of this chapter, Gomitas’ real name is Soghomon Soghomonian. At this point the reader infers from the passage that both Pehlivan Usta and Gomitas carry the same official name: Soghomon Soghomonian. Thus, the novel establishes a historical link between the narrative and the historical figure of Gomitas, both through the textual element of the dedication of the novel.

The title of the novel’s next chapter is Medz Yeghern, which means Great Catastrophe in Western Armenian. It is used to refer to the annihilation of the Ottoman Armenians. This chapter clearly outlines what the genocide means for Pehlivan Usta. The dialogues between Zayrmayr and Pehlivan explicitly inform the reader about how the genocide started the eradication of the Anatolian Armenians. Pehlivan Usta remembers that his cousin Gomitas was arrested in Constantinople on the 24 April 1915. Devastated by this news, Pehlivan Usta rushed to the Armenian Patriarchate to find a solution. There he met hundreds of other Armenians whose family members had also been arrested (187).

Along with many other Armenian intellectuals, Gomitas was sent to an internment camp in Çankırı. Meanwhile, the illustrious Turkish author and intellectual Halide Edip Adivar, following a plea by Pehlivan Usta, asked the American ambassador Henry Morgenthau for the American government’s support. Eventually Gomitas returned from exile, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (187).
By weaving a historical fact about Gomitas’s victimization into the narrative through Pehlivan Usta, the novel highlights intergenerational memory. For instance, Pehlivan Usta himself has not witnessed the genocide. Yet as a member of the first generation he has produced a postmemory, which makes him believe that the genocide pathologized every single Armenian. That is why, during his conversation with Zayrmayr, he expressed the wish to visit Mr Rakım on 24 April to induce both a personal and collective recovery from the ongoing effects of the genocide. He says, “I am aware of the fact that I am ill. I came back to my city to encounter and be confronted with the reason of my illness” (151). The psychological effects of the genocide on his character cause his ailment, which gets worse day by day due to the absence of acknowledgement. In a conversation with Zayrmayr, Pehlivan Usta said that he would transform “the mourning day” and “the day they became ill” into a celebration (326). This also confirms the fact that Pehlivan Usta sees all second generations after the genocide as the carriers of this intergenerational memory. They suffer not only because of the genocide itself but also because of the Turkish government’s denialist policies, thus obstructing the way to bereavement. I believe that, for Pehlivan Usta, the Turkish government’s refusal to acknowledge the mass extermination of the Armenians as genocide is the reason of the intergenerational “illness”. This is illustrated by Yusuf’s instantaneous recovery following the confession of Mr Rakım. The narrative thus brings the link between acknowledgement and recovery out.

So far the narrative has equated Armenian characters with victimhood and Turkish characters with accountability for the genocide. However, this dichotomy is broken with the introduction of the Armenian character Armine. One day Pehlivan Usta meets a girl named Armine in an Armenian church (189). She witnessed the death of her parents during the genocide. A Kurdish man called Bekiroğlu Reşit felt sorry for her and took her in. She was saved by the altruism of a Kurdish man. Armine asks Pehlivan Usta, “How can I come to terms with this? I have the same nightmare ever since in which I see the tragic end of my family” (190). The answer of Pehlivan marks a shift in the narrative about the way the second generations approach the Turks. Pehlivan replies:

Unutma. Bu memleketi senin ananı babanı katledenler olduğu kadar, işte Reşit gibi hayatı pahasına Ermeni komşularına sahip çıkanlar da var. Şimdi sen kime nefret besleyecek, kime lanet edeceksin? Türk’ü, Kürt’ü, Çerkes’i Müslüman’ı hepsi bir kişi mi? Hepsı kötü mü? Hepsı suçlu mı?: (190)

[Do not forget. In this country, apart from those who murdered your mother and father, there are also people like Reşit who saved their Armenian neighbors...]
at the risk of their own lives. Now, who will you hold a grudge against? Who will you curse? Are Turks, Kurds, Circassians and Muslims just one person? Are they all bad? Are they all guilty?]

The advice of Pehlivan Usta also contains a message to the reader. No matter what happened during the genocide the second generations should firmly resist holding grudges against each other. Armine has been haunted by the tragic death of her family. Her memory is so heavily loaded with nightmares that she seeks a solution to her problem. However, she lives in Istanbul, a city where a large majority of the residents are Turks. At this point, of Pehlivan Usta also impresses on her the need for Armenians and Turks to learn to live together. They should not let the genocide antagonize them.

One can argue that through Pehlivan Usta, the novel offers another voice from the Armenian community. He clings to his past so strongly that he generalizes and makes all Armenians the bearers of a common pathos. At the same time, he presents the recognition of the genocide as a vital step towards Armenian-Turkish reconciliation. Zayrmayr agrees with Pehlivan Usta about the importance of acknowledgement for recovery, using the word şifa [cure] in Turkish. Zayrmayr comments on the importance of acknowledgement:

Ben siyaset bilmem, kimseyi de incitmem. Lakin hakikat, bir yaranın mecburen dağılanması gibi ilk acı verir. Ancak şifa bulmak için de bu şarttır. (184)

[I do not know anything about politics and I would not like to hurt anyone. However, like the bleeding of a wound, at first reality hurts. But it is essential in order to find a cure.]

Zayrmayr also creates an analogy between coming to terms with reality and finding a cure for an illness. Acknowledgment of the genocide is considered as the tool to pave the way for a collective recovery.

The concept of postmemory, as defined by Hirsch, is the transmission of memories belonging to the survivors to the second generations. She presents it as an comprehensive term that can illuminate transgenerational trauma. However, what the second generations bear witness to is only a vague attachment to a subject they have not experienced themselves. The concept of postmemory stages all second-generation children as individuals affected by a learnt memory. The way that second generations treat their learnt memory as a lived memory becomes clear when we look how Pehlivan Usta is psychologically burdened by the genocide. The exile of his cousin Gomitas has definitely played an important role in the way Pehlivan Usta
centralizes the genocide in his identity. Yet over-identifying with the experiences of the victims and survivors is nothing but a psychological investment.

Zayrmayr’s traumatic memory has not been shaped by the genocide but by the socio-political measures taken by the Turkish governments against the Armenians. Let me further develop my argument by giving concrete examples from the novel. After explaining Pehlivan Usta’s many nicknames, Zayrmayr informs the reader about the importance of names to Armenians. To show the relationship between Armenian identity and names, he uses the examples of three Armenian names: Bedros (Peter), Boghos (Paul) and Krikor (Gregory). The fact that there are many festivals and name days associated with these names make them widely familiar. To further illustrate what names mean for the Armenian identity Zayrmayr asserts:


[Paying that much attention to our names is the crystallized reason of our effort to remain in existence and to survive as “Armenian and Christian”. Our names have sealed off our souls and they have become alike. Even if all we have is endangered, no one can take away the name of a proud person. The last thing to be ransacked is a person’s name. If such a thing happens, that person is nothing but a cursed soul, which has lost its existence.]

For Zayrmayr, names are one of the elements that keep the Armenians together and help them to retain their identity. His explanation makes it very clear that names attribute certain identities to people and that without names people do not exist anymore. Zayrmayr believes that although a person may lose everything s/he has, no one should be forced to change his name. On the following page, he demonstrates in detail why names are so important for Armenians. He takes the view that although Armenians have enormously suffered, they have always done their best to retain their names (66).

At the beginning of the novel Zayrmayr introduces himself to the reader and explains that his surname has been changed as a result of the Surname Law (29). At first sight this regulation might seem like a minor legal measure, but it has led to the neutralization and the Turkification of religious minorities, as demonstrated by the case of Zayrmayr. In chapter two, Zayrmayr further elaborates on the effect of the Surname Law on his memory. He states that:
Ben Soyadı Nizamnamesi yürürlüğe konduktan birkaç sene daha eski soyadımı muhafaza ettim. Lakin bindokuzyüzotuzaltı yılında polis -ben onlara isim avcı-ları- diyordum evlere kadar dayanmaya başladığında, çaresiz nüfus müdürlüğüne müracat ederek soyadımı değiştirmek mecburiyetinde kaldım. (66)

[After the adoption of the Surname Law, I continued to use my real surname for a couple of years. However, when in 1936 the police – I call them name hunters – started to knock on our doors, I was forced to change my surname.]

The recurrent mention of this law throughout the narrative emphasizes the effect of this policy on the psychological condition and memory of Zayrmayr. Adopting Turkish surnames not only sustains a public invisibility of non-Muslims but also contributes to the assimilation of minorities.

Zayrmayr does not take in the realities pertinent to the genocide through his own imagination since he lacks the direct experience. He is aware of the fact that the Young Turks carried out such a racially motivated annihilation and that the outcome was horrible. Yet this is all he can say. Since Zayrmayr cannot easily “access” his past, he is alienated from his Armenian heritage. The histories found in books are therefore like secrets to him. In the case of Pehlivan Usta, Yusuf and Zayrmayr, the characters suffer from a past that is “unknown” to them, which resembles the “empty circle” mentioned by Laub.

**Conclusion**

The novel *Karşılaşma* [Encounter] focuses on the repercussions of the remembrance of the genocide on the second generations. The dedication of the novel to the first and the last Armenian martyr in Turkey indicates that the novel will focus on an intergenerational transmission of the genocidal memory. Uncle Şirag and Pehlivan Usta represent first generation Armenians who are dedicated to find the “cure” for their illness. Uncle Şirag devotes himself to printing books written by the first victims of the genocide: the Armenian men of letters from Constantinople. On the other hand, as a recluse and shy man, Pehlivan Usta leads an anonymous life. Rather than identifying himself as Soghomon, he adopts a nickname to disguise his real identity. During a conversation with Zayrmayr, he claims that the Armenians will recover on the day they became ill. The statement of Pehlivan Usta not only pathologizes all Armenians as the bearers of a common pathos but also entrusts them with a new mission to find the “cure”.

As opposed to the two characters with a vivid postmemory about the genocide, Zayrmayr does not grasp the meaning of books written by massacred authors. In the novel he is presented as a failure, with an unhappy marriage and an unsuccessful business. Portraying Zayrmayr as a man who lacks a distinctive character can be read as the result of his failure to be a memory character.

The novel suggests that healing takes place through listening, but also by using the imagination to fill in the gaps. Usually a reader can distinguish between official history and private memories. The standard idea is that “history” is objective and in the third person, while memories are subjective and in the first person. The novel suggests a third category, memories that are “inherited” and that need to be completed, shared, filled in, taken possession of by using the imagination. Therefore, Karşılaşma assigns a specific role to the imaginative reader to fill in the gaps, to complete the missing parts of the puzzle and to reach their own conclusion. There are gaps between the stories collected and shared by different narrators. That is why these stories do not convey a unified narrative. The complex narrative situation of the novel can be compared to second generations who have not experienced the ordeals their parents have gone through. The experiences of children are different from their parents’. This accounts for the gap between the generations. Similarly, the same phenomenon can be seen among the characters of the novel representing different generations. Every single character asserts that he will provide the real story as it is. The characters try to convince the reader of the authenticity of their storytelling. At this point I believe that the novel assigns a role to the imaginative reader who will invest in the story narrated by Zayrmayr. It is only then that the gaps between the stories by different narrators will become meaningful. This will allow the reader to understand the conflict between the official public narrative and private memory. Ultimately this will result in filling the gaps and creating a structured and unified narrative.