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IDENTITY AND MEMORY IN ELIF SHAFAK'S THE BASTARD OF ISTANBUL

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"The Path to the Truth is a labour of the heart, not of the head. Make your heart your primary guide. " - Elif Shafak

Abstract:

The central topic of *The Bastard of Istanbul* is identity and how it relates to social memory in a heterogeneous society. *The Bastard of Istanbul* presents characters who have conflicting identities as Turks and Armenian Americans who keep denying on the one side and keep remembering on the other to show how Turkey forgot the social memory of the Armenian Genocide, which is thought of as the backdrop of Turkey's violent history.

Keywords: Shafak, novel, conflict, identity, memory genocide



Elif Shafak Since the translation of the book "The Bastard of Istanbul" (published in 2006/translated in 2012), this moniker has gained recognition among Armenians in general and readers in particular. She is among the most well-known and opinionated authors in Turkey. "Elif is the Turkish name for Aleph, the initial letter of the Hebrew and Persian alphabets (an allusion to Borges? whose writings are read by Armanoush Tehakhmakhchian)" (Ginés, 2012:26). and Shafak, which means dawn in Arabic, is her mother's first name. She was born in Strasburg in 1971, and her 16 novels have been published. Elif Shafak is among the free-thinking intellectuals in Turkey who have had to deal with the anguish of their conscience. Her writings have appeared in the European press and are written in both English and Turkish. According to Shafak, "When I travel across nations, I also go through languages. Depending on what I say, I select which language to write in.

She probably couldn't express herself in Turkish, so she picked English to speak to the entire human race. Despite facing obstacles, Shafak is today a well-known writer in Turkey and the recipient of various honours. The Bastard of Istanbul by Shafak is a contentious and debatable book. The Armenian Genocide is also mentioned in the story. Genocide is, in reality, a psychologically difficult concept for Turks. Elif Shafak has twice been accused of violating Turkish Criminal Code Article 301 by using this phrase and disparaging Turkish culture.

To "insult Turkishness" was considered a felony in the article's original form. Currently, it reads: Anybody who openly disparages the Turkish people, the Turkish Republic, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, or the state's judicial institutions shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of six months to two years³.

Shafak contended that she was being evaluated for her inventive, imaginary account, but the court cleared her due to a lack of proof. While the book was denounced, prohibited from publication, and the author was harshly ridiculed, all of this did nothing but increase the book's popularity. It has been released in several languages, making it accessible and appealing to a large audience. The author first wrote the book in English before translating it into Turkish.



It is noteworthy that the author chose the following lines as the novel's epigraph because she saw the cohabitation of two peoples for millennia at the time as important: M“Once upon a time the human beings were as many as wheat. Talking too much was a sin... An introduction to a Turkish and an Armenian fairy Tale”.

The first chapter of the book gives a summary of Zeliha's day-to-day activities. There's no denying that the opening makes you think of Orhan Pamuk and the snow that never stops falling in Kai's fate and keeps coming to Kars. It arrives in Elif Shafak's book in the same way, but as rain. According to a literary critic, "Pamuk's "Snow" and Elif Shafak's "Bastard of Istanbul" both portray the same tale of contemporary Turkey and Turks. Both books discuss love that is tinged with suffering. Orhan Pamuk, who is standing by the side of the road and talking about those who cross the street, is unflinching, considerate, rational, and nearly apathetic. Shafak is explosive and cannot go by car since she is the vehicle. Shafak "explodes" if Pamuk chooses to "blow up" the reader. While there isn't a single Armenian hero in Pamuk's tale, they are nonetheless more heroic than all other living, breathing heroes combined.

This study discovered Armenian identification to be the resistance identity, Asya and Zeliha's ambition to be autonomous subjects with new identities to be the project identity, and Turkish identity to be the legitimising identity. The description of the remembering and forgetting processes in resolving the competing identities completes each of the aforementioned aspects.

Pamuk describes the absence of Armenians in such a straightforward and vivid manner that absent Armenians actively participate in the lives of modern Turks. Shafak "fixes that error". Armenians have active roles in her book. A novel by Elif Shafak captures the mindset and behaviour of her generation, a generation that would not have been if Orhan Pamuk's "Snow" had not been published.

It is difficult for a Turkish author to be branded a traitor in her nation for just discussing the suffering of others in public. Shafak asserts that she wasn't addressing major political issues on a worldwide scale when writing the book. On the contrary, she was able to demonstrate how strikingly similar Armenian and Turkish women's everyday lives were by studying the small details. Shafak compares Istanbul to a large, multicoloured matryoshka. When you



open it, another doll is inside. Nothing is as calm as it appears, everything is a reflection. Clichés are not its favourite. She has a clever concept and combines all women's difficulties into "Istanbul Women's Prudence Guidelines". For an Istanbulite woman, the Golden Rule of Prudence.

When harassed on the street, never respond, since a woman who responds, let alone swears back at her harasser, shall only fire up the enthusiasm of the latter! The Silver Rule of Prudence for an Istanbulite Woman: When harassed on the street, do not lose nerve, since a woman who loses her nerve in the face of harassment, and thus reacts excessively, will only make matters worse for herself! The Copper Rule of Prudence for an Istanbulite Woman: When harassed on the street, you'd better forget about the incident as soon as you are on your way again, since to recall the incident all day long will only further wrack your nerves! 6

The so-called "prudence" guidelines are essentially a few strategies for Istanbulite women to deal with harassment. Those who follow the standards will be seen as authentic Istanbulite women, while those who do not will continue to be seen as being unfaithful to the rules of their community. Zeliha, a 19-year-old single woman, was the victim of this harassment and was forced to follow the norms to be like other Istanbul women of her class.

You can observe the genuine issues facing Turkish society and its citizens in Shafak's book. She emphasises that there are many similarities between the two people in this situation while speaking out about these problems.

Yet she broke the Golden and Silver rules, the first two regulations. She was thus not considered a real Turkish lady when she broke the standards of propriety while walking to a doctor's appointment since most people questioned her and thought she was different from other women who can adhere to the laws of suitability.

Turkish women are taught principles of propriety, yet these guidelines were developed by strong social organisations to govern the populace and society. The desired outcome may occasionally be achieved, but there is also a chance that it may not. People's identities would become stronger if it is effective in suppressing them, as envisaged by the powerful institutions that have already planned the approach. Conversely, when it fails to shape the



desired internalised identity, people would prefer to rebel against it or even forge their unique characteristics to provide context to their experiences.

Also, the majority of individuals do not always know the regulations and they are not always clearly expressed. It is occasionally possible to build social rules or norms more implicitly, allowing individuals to include or exclude themselves or even other individuals from a certain group.

"Istanbul?"

Zeliha shrugged as if to say, where else could it be? Where else on earth but here? She belonged to this city! Wasn't that visible on her face? (p. 13)

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In addition to the regulations previously mentioned, there is one more guideline established by Turkish social apparatuses that are generally acknowledged by members of Turkish society. The law reflects Turkish society's conviction that following social and religious norms is an integral component of daily life. As a result, those who disagree with the regulation often face discrimination. Furthermore, the legislation works against the weaker party in terms of societal acceptance.

“The bureaucratic regulations were less keen to rescue babies born out of wedlock than those born to married couples. A fatherless baby in Istanbul was just another bastard, and a bastard just another sagging tooth in the city's jaw, ready to fall out at any time.” (p. 12)

Except for Mustafa, who represents Turkey, all of the novel's other important characters are female. The author claims that women are more responsible for maintaining cultural heritage. In the book, you may meet Turkish women who defy the patriarchal values of their nation, steadfast family traditions, and love to get tattoos, wear short skirts, and participate in Café Kundera debates on the one hand, and women who are the keepers of these traditions on the other. The novel's two young protagonists, modern Turkish and Armenian women, are



inspiring because of their closeness and discovery. The food is quite similar. Modern Turks and Armenians have a lot of similarities in their traditional cuisine.

Shafak presupposes that the audience is willing to shake hands and accept the arguments. Yet, Asya, a Turkish heroine of 19, finds it difficult to see why she should accept responsibility for something she had nothing to do with. Yet there is also a solution for it. The Armenian heroes of Shafak criticise your nation for denying history.

And since you founded that nation, you must be complicit. Another intriguing tidbit concerning Turkish amnesia. Tell me, is it true that System of a Down dislikes us, Asya questioned about "System of Down"? Armanoush responds and explains why Armenians despise Turks. Asya's aunts were so horrified and perplexed by the crimes done against Armenians that they were unable to fathom any relationship at all between the perpetrators of these atrocities and themselves.

And it's not by chance. The crucial issue is just around the corner. Shafak brings up the distressing issue of amnesia. This is another distinction between Turks and Armenians. "You can easily say, let's start again-sais

Armanoush- but we can't. Cruelty has nothing to do with the past and depression can only depend on the past. That is why you say, 'Let's forget, but we say "let's remember"9.

"I want the Turks to be able to remember and the Armenians to forget"10. This thought is constantly echoed in the pages of the novel, on different occasions in the characters' conversations, and that conclusion is repeated again and again: "Both Armenians and Turks live in different time zones. Time for Armenians is a circle- a period of rebirth in the present time of the past, and the present birth in the future. And for Turks, time is divided into many places, it's like a broken line, the past is ending in a specific place, and now it's starting from zero. There is nothing but a division between the past and present of the Turks"11.

It is no accident that Asya, a Turkish adolescent 19, meets Armanush and is shocked by the volume of adult experiences she has stored in her brain. But it is not the past for Armenians, it is present. Long-lasting, unceasing, palpable physical and spiritual agony. Third-generation representative Armanush Chakmakchyan has a sharp recall as a result of her close ties to her forefathers.



“Slowly it dawned on Armanoush that perhaps she was waiting for an admission of guilt, if not an apology. And yet that apology had not come, not because they had not felt for her, for it looked as if they had, but because they had seen no connection between themselves and the perpetrator of the crimes. “Who did this atrocity?!” “My aunt is asking who did this?” Asya said.

“The Turks did it,” Armanoush replied, without paying attention to the implications. “What a shame, what a sin, are they not human?” Auntie Feride volleyed

This was done to the Armenians in 1915 by the same Turks. They should not have apologised if they were Turks because she is Armenian. Nevertheless, nobody appeared eager to accept accountability.

She represented the spirits of her people from years past as an Armenian, but the typical Turk had no such idea. Asya had never met anybody so young with such a long memory.

There is a humorous test in the novel entitled "Are you Armenian enough?" The test that measured the degree of one's "Armenianness." The questions are chosen with such unmistakable accuracy that you unwittingly think that the writer is Armenian or at least perfectly knows the characteristics of the Armenians.

- a. If you have been given an Armenian alphabet book on each birthday until the age of six or seven.
- b. If you have a picture of Mount Ararat hanging in your house, garage, or office.
- c. If gathering to eat fruit after each dinner is a deeply rooted habit at your house and if your dad still peels oranges for you, no matter what age you might have reached.
- d. If your relatives keep shovelling food into your mouth and do not accept “I am full” as an answer.
- e. If the sound of duduk sends shivers down your spine and you cannot help wondering how a flute made from an apricot tree can cry so sadly.
- f. If deep inside you feel like there is always more about your past than you will ever be allowed to learn.

According to the author, “nothing brought people together more swiftly and strongly—though transiently and shakily- than a shared enemy. On Anoush Tree—a forum this week



the subject was “The Janissaries.” " People who believe the Ottoman rule was righteous don't know anything about the Janissary's paradox. The Janissaries were Christian children captured and converted by the Ottoman state with a chance to climb the social ladder at the expense of despising their people and forgetting their past"14.

Making such a claim requires bravery, especially for a Turkish author. Elif Shafak asserted in one of her interviews that literature shouldn't be biased and that it is a field in which anybody may work without a visa or permission15. Politics and periods are transcended in true writing. A genuine man is at the heart of real writing. If it is honest, literature is valuable. Because of his ability to understand Armenians so well, Shafak's honesty affects and astounds him. Social media users from Armenia often come up with creative usernames. Once inside, Armanoush ignored the other Greek and Armenian singles forums and chose Anoush Tree instead, a place where only regulars and people with intellectual interests congregated. They all have monikers. Madame My-Exiled-Soul was Armanoush's pet moniker...

She had selected this name in honour of Zabel Yessaian, the sole female author included on the Young Turks' execution list in 1915. They would select a certain conversation subject each week. Even though the subjects varied significantly, they all had a tendency to centre on their shared history and culture—"common" here typically referring to their shared foe, the Turks. Turkish and Armenian conversations in the Anoush Tree have so far consisted of heated insults and trembling rants. But there was a noticeable shift in the expression and content this time. They were conversing with the Turks for the first time.

“For God's sake. Tell me, what do you expect from ordinary Turks today? What can I do to relieve your pain, your grief-ask a participant. “Your country could apologize”. “Do you think they are going to say: Oh yeah, we are sorry we massacred and deported you guys and then contentedly denied it all...16?”

The expectation is more than clear. Speaking on politics and fiction at one of the TED-Talks17 events, Shafak draws an intriguing analogy between the geometric body of the circle and the effects it has on individuals. Her grandmother was an elderly woman who could cure with magic but was also poorly educated, conservative, and full of biases. For instance, she



encircles warts with dark ink when treating them, warning of the circle's strength and how the wart would eventually eat itself away. Shafak claimed to have received a valuable lesson from her grandmother: if you want to destroy something, whether it is an injury, acne, or a person's spirit, you should surround it with high walls, and it will eventually dry out.

“Now we live in some kind of a social and cultural circle. We all do. We are born into a certain family, nation, or class. But if we have no connection whatsoever with the world beyond the one, we take for granted, then we too run the risk of drying up inside. We tend to form clusters based on similarity and then we produce stereotypes about other clusters of people. “In my opinion- says Shafak- one way of transcending these cultural ghettos is through the art of storytelling. Stories cannot demolish frontiers, but they can make holes in our mental walls. And through those holes, we can get a glimpse of the other, and sometimes even like what we see. You may find that the similarities are much more than the differences that divide one another”.

The writings of this Turkish author carry the unwavering love of William Saroyan, one of the most renowned writers of the 20th century.

“You can know God through everyone and everything in the whole universe because God is not limited to churches, mosques, and synagogues, but if you want to know where his place is, you have one option to look for in the hearts of those who know genuine love: Brains and love are made from different dough. The brain is always careful and advises: “Beware of Excessive Excitement,” when love says: “Oh, come on and don't be afraid. The thought is not easy to break, at the same time love can turn into pieces. But the treasures are hidden in the very ruins. One broken heart hides many treasures. “The Path to the Truth is a labour of the heart, not of the head. Make your heart your primary guide. Not your mind. Meet, challenge, and ultimately prevail over your nafs (false ego) with your heart. Knowing your ego (higher self/soul) will lead you to the knowledge of God”¹⁸.

Paper Boats of Poetry website published an article “The Insufferable Shame of Being a Turk”¹⁹ by Turkish poet Serkan Engin: “I am a socialist poet from Turkey. My mother is Turkish so my mother tongue is Turkish, but I prefer to consider myself as a “Laz” like my father's ancestors because I am ashamed of my Turkish ancestors from my mother's side of



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the family. I refuse to consider myself a “Turk” because my Turkish ancestors were perpetrators of genocides at the end of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the Turkish Republic. 1,500,000 Armenians were brutally murdered by Turkish and Kurdish people under the orders of Ottoman generals. I apologize to all the Armenian victims in the name of humanity and kneel in front of your pain even though I had no participation in this violence personally,” the poet said. “They can arrest me and put me in jail because of these explanations or a racist can shoot me on the street, but my conscience and intellectual ethics make me obligated to shout out the truth to the whole world. I will speak the truth till my last breath”- Engin said. Through Zeliha’s words, we can hear the voice of Shafak. “We are very sorry for the loss of your grandma”- Auntie Zeliha said after a brief silence. “You have our most heartfelt condolences...-Thank you-said Armanoush”²⁰. The expectation is more than clear.



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