

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
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University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis
Faculty of Foreign Languages
Department of English Language



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History Between Memory and Amnesia in Elif
Shafak's The Bastard of Istanbul (2006)

Submitted by:

TOUATI Malika

Board of Examiners

Chair Person: Mrs. ABDELHADI Nadia

University of Mostaganem

Supervisor: Dr. DJAFRI Yasmina

University of Mostaganem

Examinor: Mrs Benmati Fatima Zohra

University of Mostaganem

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mum here, and my mum there, and my father's soul above and everywhere.

To my brother and my sister, and my lovely aunts

To Nessma, the golden heart; Batoul, the fashion star; and Youcef, the poet

To Amoun, my sugar plum fairy

To Mary, Hafida, and Houda

To Mr. Teguia Cherif whose broad smile, and supportive nature never ceased to impress me and prod me to be as lively and kind.

To Jane Austen with love

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Abstract

Memory is among the manifold topicalities that characterize fiction texts and mark them as a vital medium of human expression. Numerous texts adopt the theme of memory as an object of explicit reflection as they often touch upon the manner in which individuals and groups remember, and at times, forget their pasts. One of these texts is the *Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) by the British Turkish writer Elif Shafak, which grounded itself in a fictive representation of the processes and the outcomes of social remembering and forgetting in two particular societies: the Turkish and the Armenian. The present research aims at exploring and expounding the representation of the Turkish and the Armenian social memory as well as Shafak's critiques and comments concerning the diametrically opposite situations of memory in the two societies. In this respect, three major questions were raised: First, how did Shafak portray the Turkish/ Armenian social memory in the novel? Second, what makes social memory of injustice important to the Armenian characters of the novel? And last, what future did the writer predict for the Turkish society in light of its social amnesia? To answer the research questions, the researcher undertook a detailed sociological inquiry on the topic of social memory, as well as an elaborate investigation of the etiology behind the current memory situation in the concerned societies. This material was, then, used to scrutinize the novel and make sense of the content relevant to the research. The analysis of the novel brought to light three main findings: First, the Armenian characters of the novel value and treasure their social memory, whereas the Turks are amnesiac and negligent of theirs. Second, the social memory of injustice is important to the Armenian characters, especially those living in the diaspora, as it provides them with an emotional bond that promotes their social cohesion and deepens their sense of belonging to their home nation. Finally, the state of social amnesia that pervades among the Turks could have tragic ramifications on the country.

Keywords: Elif Shafak, the *Bastard of Istanbul*, social memory, the Turkish social amnesia, the Armenian genocide, the politics of memory.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

It is a truism that human beings live in a continuity of time wherein their present feed on their past, and in turn, nurtures their future. Human beings perpetuate themselves in time and space relying majorly on the knowledge of their past experiences, and the experiences of those who preceded them in time and place. This knowledge of the past helps them make sense of their present realities and possibly predict their future by invoking, analyzing and learning from past scenarios. The process of invoking the past into the present is commonly known as a remembrance, and it is achieved through a complex system called memory.

Memory is not an asset exclusive to individuals, for societies have memories as well, and like individuals, societies are capable of invoking the memories of the past into the present and make use of them to exist and last. Moreover, the memories of a society are called social memories, or in some accounts, collective memories, and they are commonly defined as a group's shared memories of its own past.

The discourse about social memory was inaugurated by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) in his work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912); although Durkheim did not overtly use the term "Social memory" he frequently emphasized the importance of historical continuity and the fact that societies display and require a sense of continuance and connection with the past to guarantee social solidarity and cohesion in the present and in the future (Mitzel 2003). Subsequently, Durkheim's student, Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), adopted the term "collective memory" in his book, *La Mémoire Collective* (1950), this and his other book *Les cadres Sociaux de La Mémoire* (1925) mark the foundational framework for the study of societal and national remembrance.

In his scholarship on social memory, Halbwachs proclaims that the shared memories of a social group are, essentially, influenced by the needs of the present, and hence they are often subject to alterations and revisions (Halbwachs 1950). Such distortion of social memories' intactness is generally committed by the political leaders and/or the elite stake holders of the social group whose incentives to achieve their political agendas prompt them to reconstruct the past and select which events are to be safeguarded into the group's memory and which to be drawn into oblivion. Such manipulative approach to social memory renders it both a product and a tool of power through which authorities control and manipulate a social group. In this respect, the political leaders of a social group are the only true holders of the group's memories, and thus their treatment of those memories, be it preservation, and maintenance, or obliteration and erasure, determines the behavior of the group, generation after generation, toward their memories and their past as a whole.

The Turkish and the Armenian societies are two excellent samples of the memory preservation/memory loss continuum afore discussed. At one end of the continuum, there is the Turkish society, whose history and social memory were conquered by its political leaders following the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The Turkish leadership then, commended by the Republic's founding father Kemal Ataturk, undertook a systematic obliteration of the people's memory through history sterilization and censorship. with the aim of annihilating the Ottoman past of the country which, for them, posed an obstacle in the face of the country's progressive aspirations. This conquest of memory has, in the long run, resulted in a tragic state of historical ignorance and social amnesia among the Turks. Moreover, at the other end of the continuum, there is the Armenian society whose history is soaked in the blood of over a million of Armenians who were massacred at the hands of Ottoman Turks during World War I in what is known as the Armenian genocide of 1915. Despite the trauma and pain that the Armenian past carries, its remembrance is appreciated

and preserved by Armenians, not merely that but the memory of the collective painful past is carefully and faithfully transmitted from generation to generation in a way to guarantee the preservation of the past through time.

There can be no denying that the Turkish society has been a society of collective amnesia and historical ignorance since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. However at the turn of the twentieth century an upsurge of interest in social memory began to bloom among the Turkish intelligentsia who began to take notice of the putrefactive fruits of amnesia and ignorance hanging on the tree of progress and civilization that the early republican leadership had planted plenty of years ago. The issue of the Turkish social amnesia and the country's disavowal and disowning of any event that predated the establishment of the Republic, especially the Ottomans' transgressions against the Armenians in 1915 have been brought to light by many intellectual figures and in various forms such as articles, journals, art works, etc. The literary realm, being an important platform of social criticism, had its share of social memory discussions as the modern upsurge of memory was reflected in the literary outcome of several Turkish writers who utilized imagination to recollect the fragmented reality restore the many lost pieces of the past. One of the most prominent Turkish voices in the literary sphere, one that has dedicated her literary journey to represent her country's problems and intricacies, is the British Turkish novelist Elif Shafak. In her novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) Shafak invites the cultivated reader to reflect on the subject of social memory, as she persistently addresses the issue of remembering and forgetting, and the effect of these processes on individuals and societies alike. She does that by casting a bright, rather blinding, light upon the issue of social amnesia in her country and the subject of the Armenian genocide of 1915 and its remembrance.

Intrigued and fascinated by Shafak's commitment to serve her society through her art, and the sense of humanity and boldness she demonstrates in facing the social ills that prevails in

her country, namely the state of social amnesia and historical ignorance that was inflicted upon her people by political agents. I the researcher, decided to help popularize the human cause that lies behind the fictitious curtains of the novel and to cast an additional light on the dire consequences of social amnesia and historical ignorance. For this I forged the present research, wherein a detailed interpretation of the symbols and imageries that Shafak utilized in her novel to convey her opinion vis-à-vis the Armenian and Turkish social memory.

In my research, I undertake a thorough exploration of the theme of social memory in Elif Shafak's novel *the Bastard of Istanbul* (2006). To achieve this I have raised three questions that will help cadre the present research and contour its features. The questions are the following: First, how does Elif Shafak portray the Turkish and the Armenian social memory in her novel *the Bastard of Istanbul* (2006)? Second, what future does she predict for the Turkish society in light of its social amnesia? And finally, according to the novel, why is social memory important for the Armenians, especially those living in the diaspora? To answer the research questions, three hypotheses were proposed, and they are stated respectively as follows: First, In her novel *the Bastard of Istanbul* (2006), Shafak portrays the Turkish and Armenian social memory as a polarity with two extremes one is Turkish and is depicted as forgotten and neglected and the other is Armenian, and is shown as carefully preserved and over protected. Second, through one of the novel's central characters who lives his life struggling to forget and deny his past and who eventually commits suicide as he could no longer bear the toxicity of the accumulated hidden files of his past, Shafak hints at potential ramifications of social of breaking with the past that awaits Turkey in the future. Finally, the Armenian social memory of suffering and pain provides a sacred cohesive bond that connects and unites the members of the Armenian society. Concurrently, it serves as a basis for identity construction; as it is argued that a society's memories of the past shape the identity of its members both in the collective and the personal level (Becker 2005). As for the

Armenians who live far from home, social memory helps them find haven in the collective reminiscence of the past.

The present research is composed of three chapters. The first chapter is a sociological inquiry on memory, as it provides a rigorous investigation on memory as a social phenomenon, and explores the manner in which groups collectively remember and/or forget their pasts. Moreover, the second chapter puts the phenomenon of memory into context by introducing two societies in which social memory is a significant subject of discussion. It provides the etiology of the Turkish social amnesia memory and the Armenian conservation of memory by offering a historical background on the two major events in the history of the two societies, namely the Armenian genocide of 1915, and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, two historical events which determined the fate of memory for years. Concurrently, the chapter depicts the novel interest in memory that prevails among Turkish intellectuals, and literary figures, giving exclusive attention to the prominent Turkish writer Elif Shafak in *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) whose remarkable efforts to unearth the historical truths which concern the Armenian genocide of 1915 and which have been long hidden in her country, aim to bring attention to the problem of memory loss in her society. Finally, the third chapter of the research explores the theme of social memory and the processes of remembering and forgetting in Elif Shafak's fiction *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006).

Chapter One:
A Sociological Inquiry on Memory

Introduction

For so long the study of memory was exclusively the task of experimental psychology as memory was considered the product and property of individual minds. However, in recent years, accurately during the first half of the twentieth century, a burgeoning interest began to develop regarding the social nature of memory. This interest was interpreted into amassment of research pioneered by the French Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) who embarked upon a thorough exploration of the social nature of memory in his two major works *Les cadres Sociaux de La Mémoire* (1925) and *La Mémoire Collective* (1950). Halbwash's scholarship was elaborated and carried on by a number of social scientists who proved that memory is a social product.

Exemplarily, the first chapter of my research provides a rigorous investigation on memory as a social phenomenon, and explores the manner in which groups collectively remember or forget their past. The present chapter opens up with a presentation of the analogy between sociology and literature. Then it proceeds to offer a brief background on memory as a social product. Then it provides a thorough and rather detailed inquiry on the phenomenon of social memory, this includes a definition of social memory, its types and characteristics, its role in societies and its influence of individuals, how societies remember, and how they forget.

1.1. A Sociological Approach to Literature

In his theory of *mimesis*, Plato holds that art, in all its forms is an imitation of life and a mirror reflecting reality, and that the artist is an imitator of the various aspects of the observable universe (Abrams 8). Building on Plato's theory, literature has proven itself to be a creative reproduction of the socio-economic and political context within which it occurs, i.e., the thoughts and feelings expressed by the author in his/her works are essentially influenced

and shaped by his/her social environment. In this regard, literature further transcends its aesthetic nature to serve a more complex social role.

In an effort to scrutinize the social content of literary works, the sociology of literature has emerged as an interdisciplinary literary approach, in which sociology – the study of human societies and their development is employed to interpret and understand the social production of literature and to decipher its implications.

Among the myriad social phenomena that have become topicalities in literature, the topic of social memory and the processes of group remembering enjoy an important share; as numerous literary texts take interest in portraying the manner in which social groups jointly remember their pasts and the way these recollected memories interfere in their present realities and their future. According to Neumann (2008) such texts emphasize the highly selective nature of human memory –especially social memory, as it is likely to undergo intentional fashioning; and that “the rendering of memories tells us more about the rememberer’s present, his or her desire and denial than about the actual past events” (333). Literature of memory, therefore aims at examining the presence of the past in the present, and the means through which the former influences individuals and their social lives. As previously noted, sociology is brought into service to analyze and interpret the social content of literature and to emphasize the social significance of literary works.

1.2. Memory as a Social Product

Etymologically, the term memory is derived from the Latin word ‘*memoria*’ and ‘*memor*’ meaning, mindful, or remembering. According to Sternberg (1999), memory is “the means by which we draw on our past experiences in order to use this information in the

present” (222). It is commonly agreed upon among psychologists that the process of memory involves three stages: encoding, storage and retrieval (McLeod 2013). Encoding is generally defined as the primary learning of information, storage refers to the conservation of information over time, and retrieval refers to the ability to evoke information when required; the last stage is commonly known as remembering.

For so long the study of memory was exclusively the task of experimental psychology, which views memory as “the product and property of individual minds” (Middleton & Edwards 260), disregarding, by that, the influence of external forces like society and its accompanying dynamics which affect the internal mental processes of memory. Profoundly challenging this traditional view of memory, social scientists took upon themselves the mission of investigating the social dimensions of human memory.

Admittedly, the scholarship of memory is not entirely novel to the field of social sciences, for it has been a preoccupation of social scientists since the Greeks (Olick & Robbins 106), yet it was not until late nineteenth and early twentieth century that a social perspective on memory took shape and became prominent, as many researchers embarked upon a sociological inquiry on memory, the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs gave memory a social context when he argued that individual memory is socially conditioned and shaped; he argues that, “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories, it is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories” (Halbwachs 38). For him the idea of individual memory bereft of its social context was “an abstraction almost devoid of meaning” (Connerton 37) and that the ability of an individual to acquire, localize and recall memories owes greatly to “their membership of a social group –particularly kinship, religious, and class affiliation” (36). From this line of thought the concept of social memory, or the memory of the group was brought to light drawing eventually a great attention to the discipline of sociology.

1.3. Social Memory

1.3.1. Definition

Social memory (*mémoire social*), or in Halbwachs' words, collective memory (*mémoire collective*), is commonly defined as a group's memory of its own past, which allows it to define its identity in relation to other social groups (17). Put another way, it is the collectivity of representations and beliefs that a group members share of their past; It is acquired through social interactions, and is a key element in guaranteeing a group's unity and cohesion as well as in outlining its identity. According to Halas (2008), the term 'social memory' is a "metaphor" (4) as there is no actual memory of a society, rather the term refers to the processes of communications and symbolic representations of a people's experiences (4). Theorists of social memory, on the other hand, affirm that, "the collective memory of a group is quite different from the sum total of personal recollections of its various individual members, as it includes only those that are commonly shared by all of them" (Zerubavel 96). In other words, social memory involves the integration of various distinct individual pasts into a single common one that all members of a community come to recollect jointly.

1.3.2. Types of Social Memory

Social memory can be divided into at least two types: popular and official. According to Bar-Tal (2013), popular memory refers to the narratives of the past that are popular among members of a social group. These narratives are imparted either by formal state institutions such as schools and mass media, expressed orally through stories and accounts recounted by older family members, friends and other social agents, or transmitted through folklore, ceremonies and rituals (138). Official memory on the other hand constitutes narratives brought by the formal representatives of a society, i.e., the ruling parties of a group, or

government. It is generally expressed in “the publications of governmental institutions, formal organizations of a society, and in school textbooks when they are under the control of formal authorities (138). The two types of memory can either exist in accordance or in conflict within a social group, i.e., in some societies the popular memory of the people duplicates the official memory propagated by the formal governmental institutions, whereas in other cases there exists a clash between the two, this is often due to the politicization of memory, i.e., the organization and manipulation of the public’s memory by political agents, which appoints it as a tool of power and might in the hands of political elites.

1.3.3. Characteristics of Social Memory

One characteristic feature of social memory is that it is very likely to be a source of emotional experiences, as its presence in a society evokes a variety of emotions among the group members which they experience either at the individual level or collectively. These emotions emerge as a reaction to memories of past events and experiences; and as those memories vary, the emotions corresponding to them vary as well. For instance, a memory of a heroic revolution against an enemy naturally induces a feeling of pride, whereas memories of injustice and oppression call up feelings of rage, etc. The emotions instigated by social memories provide a particular meaning to them thus facilitate their memorization (Bar-Tal 142).

Moreover, the memories of a society provide original material for various cultural productions such as, “Literature, films, monuments and ceremonies” (142), by keeping alive the cultural heritage of a group, i.e., tales from the past, folklore, and myths. An example of this is the reflection of the past, present in national museums, local literary production, cultural sites and practices, etc.

Lastly, social memory emphasizes the uniqueness, individuality and distinctiveness of a social group by presenting its past as an original trait that differentiates the group from other social groups, it thus contributes a major part in the formation, preservation, and strengthening of the group's social identity.

1.3.4. The Communities of Social Memory

Since Halbwachs' scholarship on collective memory, the question of how societies remember has provoked a great deal of attention in the discipline of memory studies. In her book, *The Theories of Social Remembering* (2003), the sociologist Barbara Misztal argues that the construction and transmission of a society's memory owes to three major communities; which she refers to as, "mnemonic communities" (Misztal 15). These communities create and maintain a group's social memory by socializing to its members which episodes of the past to remember and which to forget (15). Misztal identifies three major mnemonic communities that, she claims, either produce or repress a group's social memory, these communities are: the nation-state, ethnic groups, and family. The nation, being the chief mnemonic community, plays an essential role in the production and transmission of social memory, as the latter guarantees its existence and continuity. According to Misztal, a nation's existence and continuity is bound to a "vision of a suitable past and a believable future" (17), and in order to achieve such vision, the nation requires the creation, and promotion of a usable past, one that serves a community's present and future.

Typically, the creation of such a past is the task of nationalist movements which according to Gellner (1993), "propagate an ideology affirming identification with the nation state by invoking shared memories" (qtd. in Misztal 17), the success of these movements, therefore,

owes to memory which particularly maintains a sense of connectedness and continuity between generations.

Ethnic groups are another mnemonic community that contributes as a major part in the formation of social memory. Given the ever increasing cultural and ethnic pluralization that characterizes modern societies, a growing importance is given to ethnic identities whose formation is largely based on traditional memory narratives; Heller (2001) states that among all the groups in need of memory, ethnic groups have had the easiest task, for they have never entirely lost their cultural memory (qtd. In Misztal 18). The reason behind the fascination with memory that is common among ethnic groups is that it is their only means to legitimize their political claims, and to obtain more rights in a world where minorities only possess minor rights (18), for this reason, Heller affirms that ethnic groups utilize myths and stories of repression and suffering, combined with “cultural memorabilia” (18) like music, crafts and religious lore (qtd. In Misztal 18), to fulfill their objectives and to preserve their ethnic identity. The last community of memory, according to Misztal, is family. Similar to the other two communities, family is a key producer and transmitter of social memory; for Misztal, a family that jointly produces and sustains its memories, ensures its own cohesion and continuity (19). The process of memory construction at family level, usually involves shared narratives that symbolize the family unity through generations, and reproduce its “traditions, secrets and particular sentiments” (19). These narratives are often presented in the form of “old letters, photographs and family lore” (19), and are sustained, according to Billing (1990), through family conversations, as past events are jointly recalled or co-memorized (qtd. In Misztal 19). The role of family in memory construction is clearly demonstrated in a research conducted by Middleton and Edwards (1988) which shows that children learn to remember in the family environment, guided by parental intervention and shared recollection. According to the research, one does not remember his younger self clearly, thus he relies on stories about

himself recounted by older members of the family, such as parents, who witnessed his childhood (19).

1.3.5. The Socio-Psychological Role of Social Memory

The present and the future of humanity feed on its past, as such, the memories that a nation, or a social group hold of their past naturally affect their present and ultimately their future. These memories guide and instruct the group so that it either revives and recreates the past, if its revival supports the development of the group, or avoids the mistakes of the past which may stand as an obstacle in the face of the group's social progress. Another key role of social memory is that it transfers a group's cultural capital from a generation to the other, thus, acting as a mechanism that supports the building and maintenance of a group's social identity; according to Gaskell (2001) "the main function of collective memory is to conserve the coherence of the social group and to reassure its identity in the present and in the future" (qtd. In Deaux & Philogene 16). In a similar vein Becker (2005) argues that a society's memories of the past shape the identity of its members both in the collective and the personal level, "Halbwachs shows that individual memories always crystalize in a social framework and that public events leave a deep imprint on those who experience them, especially young people who are in the process of constructing adult identities" (Becker 105).

Moreover, social memories outline a group's common origin and describe its past events, with that they illuminate a group's present experiences and give insight into its future. They also provide a basis for a feeling of commonality, belonging and inclusiveness, traits that are essential for a group's existence and continuity.

1.4. Memory between Loss and preservation

1.4.1. The Politics of Memory: Presentism, Future-Orientation, and the Sacrifice of Memory

In a society the “representations of the past are manifested in the present and carried forward into the future” (Linde 8); as such, one of the various functions of social memory is to serve the needs and interests of both the present and the future of a nation or a social group; and as every nation, or group is dominated by a political power or a “ruling class” (Connell 1), these ruling classes, which, have a natural access to a multitude of tools and mechanisms, use the past to ensure the maintenance of their ascendancy for as long as the present stretches and the future promises, Lebow (2006) puts it thus, “ political elites, their supporters, and their opponents ... construct meanings of the past and propagate them widely or impose them on other members of society” (13) this indeed, is achieved through disseminating selected narratives of the past, by using official means like, educational curricula, public museums, national holidays, political rhetoric, and so forth. The notion that political powers shape and re-shape the consumed representations of the past for political expediency is known as the «presentist approach» to collective memory (Bentley 55–56). According to the theory of presentism, social constructions of the past –social memories, are influenced by the needs of the present, i.e., leaders of a group re-construct a past using rationalization, so that it serves their interests in the present; the past is, therefore, malleable, and is dictated by powerful political actors. In the same line of thought, Edward Said (2000), when exploring Hobsbawm and Ranger’s work: *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), argued that, “the invention of tradition is a method for using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an entirely functional way” (179).

He also argues that the past is evoked entirely for present purposes, “the processes of memory are frequently, if not always, manipulated and intervened in for sometimes urgent purposes of the present” (179).

Social memory is, therefore, both a tool and object of power, through which authorities control a nation, or a group’s present by manipulating their past. The idea that memory can be turned off on command –Presumably at the whim of politicians with the help of historian drives from a simplistically conceived notion of social memory, which assumes that if memory is constructed and malleable it can be easily annulled thus causing social forgetting, or social amnesia.

1.4.2. Social Amnesia

As it is commonly known that memory involves both remembering and forgetting, the latter enjoys considerable attention in the studies of social memory; the historian Peter Burke (1989), for instance, argues that in order to fully grasp the workings of social memory, it is essential to explore “the organization of forgetting, the rules of exclusion, suppression, and repression, and the question of who wants whom to forget what, and why.” (qtd. In Beiner 108). Bruke referred to this direction as the study of ‘social amnesia’ which he considered to be the complementary opposite of ‘social memory’. Social forgetting, or social amnesia, is defined by Russell Jacoby (1975) as, “a society’s repression of remembrance society’s own past” (Jacoby 5). According to Misztal (2010), social amnesia is the outcome of society’s need to eliminate segments of its social memory which are interfering with the society’s present function (qtd. In Beiner 24). In the same line of thought, Nancy Wood (1999) states that social memory often “testifies to a will or desire on the part of some social group or disposition of power to select and organize representations of the past” (2) this process of

selection and organization which aims at strengthening and legitimizing established authorities, through a systematic obliteration of memory usually results in a state of collective amnesia. The notion of social amnesia, or society's loss of a clear sense of its past, is well demonstrated in the works of George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949), and Milan Kundera's *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979). In Orwell's 1984, there is a specific line that appears repeatedly throughout the novel, it says, "who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (44), with this statement Orwell explicitly indicates the mutability of the past by pointing that history is by no means natural, and neutral, i.e., the past has no objective existence but rather it only survives in written records and in mnemonic practices, which, themselves, are controlled and dictated by political elites who use their authority in the present to edit, select and organize the past so that it suits their interests and future aspirations. In the same vein, Kundera addresses the issue in his book's introduction by quoting the Czech historian Milan Hubl, who writes, "The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history ... Before long the nation will forget what it is and what it was" (qtd. In Kundera vii). A similar point is made by Koonz (1994) when she quotes a letter written by the Czech president Vaclav Havel in (1975) in which he describes the psychological aftermaths of forgetting on individuals, "one has the impression that for some time there has been no history slowly but surely we are losing the sense of time; we begin to forget what happened when, what came earlier and what later, and the feeling that it really doesn't matter overwhelms us" (qtd. In Gillis 258). Koonz refers to the process of forced forgetting as "organized oblivion" (258), as memories are confined to oblivion by not being invoked, spoken about and remembered in public. Concurrently, Koonz accentuates the consequential damages that social amnesia leaves on average citizens who are left "cynical and alienated" (258) and suffering a state of historical weightlessness which renders their lives and their perception of the world around them

lacking in meaning and significance (259). This amnesia of the past affects people's perception of the present as well as their growth and progress toward the future. An example of this is the case of Turkey which government, led by *Kemal Ataturk*, conquered the people's social memory by sterilizing the nation's history to meet their aspirations of forging a modern, secular nation-state. For them, this could only be achieved by discarding their Ottoman past, or as Berkes puts it, removing "the debris" (465) –the debris of superstition as well as communal memories of a multi-ethnic Ottoman history (465). In the long term, this conquest of memory has resulted in a collective ignorance among the Turkish masses about the nation's history, as the nation's historiography does not discuss or even mention the events prior to the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Today's Turkish society is forgetful of its memories and oblivious about its past.

1.4.3. The Social Memory of Injustice and the Value of Remembering

In contrast to the state of memory loss that characterizes some modern societies like Turkey; other societies rely entirely on their shared memories to survive and continue to exist in unity and cohesion. Among the collective memories that are likely to survive intact despite time, space and political interference are those of injustice and trauma, "social memory of trauma persists [untouched] beyond the lives of the direct survivors of the events and is remembered by group members that may be far removed from the traumatic events in time and space" (Hirschberger 1). Such memories make the past lives for eternity in the minds, hearts and present realities of generations after generations of posterity, and its remembrance as vivid, painful, and offensive as the injustice itself, the memories are like "blows to the group's identity and self-esteem and [they are] glorified in the retelling across generations" (Alexandre Marc et al. 82).

Painful and traumatic as they may be, the shared memories of pain and suffering play a vital role in bonding members of a society together as they often support affiliation with the social group “through a feeling of shared fate and destiny” (Hirschberger 3). Besides, the shared memories of past injustice provide a basis for identity construction, “massacres and military defeat . . . provide a fertile ground for the production of cultural narratives and shared belief systems that infuse meaning and support social identity” (3).

An example of such attachment to the social memory of pain and loss is that of the Armenian society, who has a history with violence and oppression which dates back to World War I when over a million of Armenians who, then, inhabited the Ottoman Empire were massacred by the Ottoman Turks; the events that are recognized as the Armenian genocide of 1915. Today, the painful past of the genocide constitutes a major part of the Armenians’ present realities as they still carry the weight and burden of the calamity that their ancestors experienced over a century earlier. Their shared memories of the past, as afore discussed provides them with a basis for identity construction as they answer the questions: who are we? Where do we come from? Who are our ancestors, and what do we owe them? Besides, the shared memories of the Armenian genocide offers the Armenians who live in Armenia or those dispersed around the world a sense of bonding and belonging which connects them together and help them exist in the present and march toward the future as one Armenian person who carries the legacies of his forebears on his back.

Conclusion

It is a truism in the field of sociology that memory is not an exclusive asset of individuals, considering that societies possess memories as well. Much like individuals, societies are capable to invoke their collective past into their present and make use of it in order to get a

clear sense of who they are, and to better understand their present realities. The social memory of the group, public as it may be, is tacitly the private ownership of the group's political leaders who enjoy an amount of power which allows them to interfere in the group's past and to alter the collective memories of it. Thus, it is the task of the group's political leaders to either foster a sense of appreciation for the past and its memories among the members of the group or to obliterate their memory and force them into a state of social amnesia and historical ignorance. In the chapter a society's attitude vis-à-vis its memory is illustrated by the example two societies, one of memory and one of amnesia, namely the Armenian and the Turkish societies, respectively. The following chapter will discuss the etiology of the Armenian preservation of social memory and the Turkish social amnesia, and the manner in which the two societies' treatment of memory affects their wellbeing and social continuity.

Chapter Two:

Social Memory Between Loss and Conservation: The Case of Turks and Armenians

Introduction

The history and memories of a collectivity are almost similar to those of an individual. As the life story of an individual opens up with his birth and from there begins the accumulation of his/ her memories, each society has a starting point in history which defines its birth and with it the creation of its own album of memories. However, as societies are not divine creations, but rather the working of humans, determining which day society was born and what took place in its lifetime is the task of its leaders and politicians who either choose to preserve its history and memories or abandon or alter them for their own benefit. The Turkish and the Armenian societies are two examples of the memory preservation and the memory loss continuum discussed above. The Turkish society is among other societies in the world whose geneses was controlled and altered by its politicians, and whose memories of an unwanted Ottoman past were buried deeply under its new republican modern soil. The Armenians, on the other end of the continuum, though scattered and dispersed, cherish their past and conserve their memories as if the latter were a national treasure.

That said, the present chapter provides the etiology of the Turkish loss of social memory and the Armenian conservation of memory by providing historical background on the two major events in the history of the societies, namely the Armenian genocide of 1915, and the establishment of the Turkish Republic which discarded six hundred years of Ottoman history. Concurrently, the chapter depicts the novel interest in memory that pervades among Turkish intellectuals, and literary figures, giving exclusive attention to the prominent Turkish writer Elif Shafak in *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) whose remarkable efforts to unearth the historical truths which concern the Armenian genocide of 1915 and which have been long hidden in her country, aim to bring attention to the problem of memory loss in her society.

2.1. A Historical Background on the Armenian Genocide (1915 - 1917)

2.1.1. The Multiethnic Ottoman Empire

The history of the Ottoman Empire dates back to the year 1299 when the Ottomans took over a substantial part of Europe, Asia, and North Africa. In addition to what is known today as Turkey and Armenia. In its most glorious days, the Empire's border reached as far as "Vienna in the North, Yemen in the South, Algeria in the West and in the east it stretched at certain periods deeply into today's Iran" (Major 257). Owing to the vast geographical space that the Empire encompassed, the empire was known for its ethnic homogeneity, considering that inside it there lived a variety of ethnically, religiously, and linguistically different groups. The most important of which were the Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Copts, Vlachs, and Hungarians, most of them were either Muslim, Christian, or Jews (257). These groups lived enduringly in relative harmony and peace within the Empire.

2.1.2. Armenians in the Ottoman Empire

For the most part of their history, Armenians had, invariably, been under the rule of different kingdoms and rulers. Thus, their compliant nature made it easy for the Ottomans to subjugate them in the 16th century and annex the area to the once-great Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans ruled over the area that had been Armenia from the 16th century until the end of WWI. There, the Armenians lived and worked enduringly in a state of "security and comfort" (Oskanyan & Ghazarian 278). Though the bulk of them were farmers, many others occupied some important positions like banking, finance managing, and business. Others, particularly those who lived in the capital, Istanbul were elevated to positions of honor and privilege and were "rewarded for their talents in government administration and finance" (278). Despite the relatively stable life they enjoyed in the Empire, the Armenians were often troubled by the

religion-based discrimination that they faced from the Ottoman authorities; being Christians, their religion stood between and the Muslim Ottoman's trust, as non-Muslims were perceived as being 'Kavors' meaning infidels or unbelievers (Moscovici xii). This sensitivity which is grounded in religion, and which was held especially for the Christians in the Empire has its origins in the crusade wars when the Catholic Church sent off numerous military crusades into the region of South Turkey for the purpose of reclaiming the holy city of Jerusalem. The series of battles left an eternal grudge between Christians and Muslims (Freedman 9). Moreover, in order to live in the Empire, the Armenians had to pay taxes, Al Jizya to the Muslim government. They were not allowed to testify in courts, or bear arms (Freedman 9). On the whole, their creed reduced them in status and deprived them of many rights and liberties that Muslims enjoyed in the Empire, they "were considered second class citizens" (Moscovici xii). Being the inferior Other to Muslims, Armenians were subjected to periodic aggression and acts of violence from the part of the Muslim Turks and Kurds who often invaded their lands and pillaged their possessions. These aggressions would later in time upgrade into a gruesome genocide.

2.1.3. The Empire at War: The Beginning of the End

The outbreak of the First World War was the beginning of the end for the Ottoman Armenians, as the war gave the Ottomans a solid ground in which it would exterminate the Armenian ethnic minority. Especially that Shaykh al-Islam declared any war against Christians as a holy war, or jihad (History.com editors 2009). The extermination of the Armenians was conducted in a gradual manner starting by forcibly enlisting Armenian men to fight against the Russians in the Russo- Turkish war of 1877. The conscripted Armenians were either positioned on the front lines with minimal military equipment or used as logistical support units within the army. Upon their defeat, the Turkish leadership publicly blamed their

defeat on the Armenians as they “were convinced that their defeat had been caused by treacherous Armenian elements” (Ungor 57). With hearts full of rage and bitterness held for the so-called Christian traitors who, “had been engaging in agitation and disturbance against the notion of Ottomanism all along” (57), retreating Ottoman soldiers took reprisal on Armenians by invading their villages, massacring many of them and pillaging their goods.

Thenceforth, the Armenians’ were perceived as a threat to national security and on that basis, Ottoman authorities decided to “deport the Armenians to somewhere they would not cause trouble” (59). The mass deportations had resulted in a bloody massacre that claimed the lives of over a million civil Armenians.

2.1.4. The Armenian Genocide (1915-1917)

The Armenian genocide was officially launched on April 24, 1915, the day that is known as the “Red Sunday” (Brome 5). When the Ottoman government imprisoned and deported a few hundred Armenian intelligentsias from Constantinople. It then progressed to mass imprisonment and assassination of robust-bodied males whose strength was feared by the Ottomans. A month after, the government implemented the Temporary Law of Deportation ‘Tahcir Law’ which legitimized and legalized the deportation of whoever posed a “threat on the national security” (Motta 12). In this respect, thousands of Armenians including women, elderly, and children were forced to march hundreds of miles across the Syrian Desert without sufficient nurture, medical supplies, and sanitary facilities (Moscovici xii). With these death marches, the Ottomans exterminated entire villages and communities of Armenians, women and young girls were sexually assaulted then slaughtered, sometimes Armenians “were loaded onto cattle cars and taken by rail to their death” (Freedman 25). Historical statistics Estimate

the number of Armenian victims that were annihilated in the 1915 events to be ranging from hundreds of thousands to 1.5 million casualties.

2.2. The New Turkey

2.2.1. Ataturk and the Rise of a New Turkey

After six hundred years of straddling three continents, the First World War had brought the Great Ottoman Empire to its knees. By the end of the war, the Empire was partitioned by the Allies, and soon thereafter the Turkish Republic was founded. The founding of the new Republic owes almost completely to Mustafa Kemal Ataturk who succeeded in birthing a new nation from the ashes of a perished Empire. The Turkish Republic was established in 1923 by a group of former Ottoman soldiers led by Kemal Ataturk (Jenkins 10). The new regime established itself as a modern, secular, and “Europe-oriented” (Cagaptay 115) nation-state that renounced the late Ottoman Empire’s multi-ethnic heritage and its Islamic principles. After being elected as the president of the Republic in 1923, Kemal Ataturk introduced Kemalism – an ideology that supported his “modernist, future-oriented vision” (Ozyurek 2). Kemalism or Kemalist modernism was principally grounded in liberating the new nation from its burdening Ottoman legacy by cutting all ties with the nation’s immediate Ottoman past. In one of his speeches, Ataturk declares, “The new Turkey has no relation with the old. The Ottoman Empire has passed into history. A new Turkey is born” (qtd. In Yadirgi 14).

For Ataturk, the ottoman past was impregnated with ideals and traditions that went against the path of progress and development that he drew for his nation. He describes the Ottoman traditions and lifestyle thus: “Social life full of irrational, useless and harmful beliefs is doomed to paralysis . . . Progress is too difficult or even impossible for nations who insist on preserving their traditions and beliefs lacking in rational bases” (qtd. In Berkes 465). Such ideals, for him, would hold the nation back from achieving its progressive aspirations, and

thus with the help of his government, Ataturk introduced a number of reforms that would in the long run radically change the social structure of the Turkish society.

2.2.2. The Reforms of Amnesia: A Kemalist Systematic Obliteration of Memory

In the period between 1923 and 1930, the Turkish government engrossed itself in the manufacturing of a brand new Turkish society, one that is new, civilized, and European. Ataturk and his associates introduced a number of reforms and policies that aimed at clothing the Republic in a new dress of westernized fashions, habits, and mentalities. In the name of progress and development and in order to elevate Turkey to the level of civilization that Europe and the West enjoyed, Ataturk's reforms promoted forgetting and disconnection with the past. Starting from the change in physical appearance to the change in the alphabet the new reforms dug a deep temporal trench between the Republic and its immediate Ottoman Past.

The first attempt of the Turkish government to annihilate the people's memory of the past was through the passing of the Hat Law of 1925 which banned men from wearing fezes – Ottoman style hats and substituted them with western-style hats with brims (Ozyurek 4). The hat law obligated the European hat and prohibited the fez and all other ethnic, traditional, or religious forms of headgear. The Islamic or Ottoman fez for Ataturk was a symbol of backwardness and ignorance, he says in one of his speeches, “it was necessary to abolish the fez, which sat on our heads as a sign of ignorance, of fanaticism, of hatred to progress and civilization” (qtd. In Louis 203).

One year after passing the Hat Law, Ataturk made another change that aimed at severing ties with the nation's past. In 1926, the Turkish Republic officially changed its timing from lunar to solar, i.e., it adopted the Western clock and Georgian calendar as a substitute for the Islamic ones. This change in time made events that predate 1926 appear as if they belonged to another temporal zone.

A third measure that was taken and perhaps the most powerful of all is the administration of the script reform of 1928. The reform abolished the use of the Arabic alphabet and substituted it for the Latin one. The abolition of the Arabic script and the adoption of the Western Latin alphabet supported the new nation's hankering to join the western civilized world, however, in its essence it carried the intention of the new government to disconnect with the Ottoman past, one that poses "a threat to the new generations who would create the civilized Turkish Nation" (Celik 73). By the adoption of the Latin Script and the abandonment of the former one, the connection with the past, namely the Ottoman past with its Oriental and Islamic connotations would be overcome. In his book *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (1996), Bernard Lewis explains that the Latin script for Ataturk and his associates was, "A barrier for the Ottoman Empire, Seemingly, through the learning of the new script and forgetting the old one, the past would be buried and forgotten, and a new generation that would be open only to the ideas expressed by the new Turkish written with the new Roman script would be raised. (Lewis 428)"

In addition to changing the script, the Republican government went as far in their progressive and modernist endeavors to rewrite the nation's history and to re-establish its origins. The new government prepared new history textbooks in which the Turks were portrayed "as very old people and a powerful race that had the tradition of building states" (Yildiz 117). They inhabited wide geography and advanced various civilizations. The

Ottoman Empire with 600 years of history was almost overseen. Besides, “the idea that Turks were of the yellow race was trying to be refuted. Instead, the Turks were depicted as some of the most beautiful members of the white race” (Yildiz 186). This strategy was essentially used to manipulate the intellectual field and the public sphere, as the future generations would grow ignorant about their real history.

Essentially, Atatürk’s reforms had played a key role in the formation of the modern Turkish society, one that is tragically ignorant about its history and distant from its past. The reforms had facilitated the birth and prevalence of a severe state of collective amnesia among the new generations of Turks who regard the Ottoman multi-ethnic past as another time and another legacy.

2.3. Modern-Day Turks and the Lost Past

In one of her recent publications, the Turkish novelist and political activist Elif Shafak describes modern-day Turkey as being a society of collective amnesia,

[It is a country with] a rich, diverse, and mesmerizing history, and yet, a poor memory. You can walk the streets for hours without coming across a single plaque or statue about the complexities of its urban heritage. You can pass by an Ottoman cemetery without having the slightest clue, if you are unable to read the tombstones, as to the people who have been buried there. [Turkey’s] entire relationship with the past is full of ruptures, convenient forgettings, silences. (Shafak 2020)

The state of collective forgetting that, Shafake refers to as being prevalent in the modern Turkish society is essentially the inevitable consequence of the unrelenting efforts of early republican government to sever ties with its immediate Ottoman past in the name of progress

and development. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979) Milan Kundera writes: “the first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history ... Before long the nation will forget what it is and what it was” (qtd. In Kundera vii).

What Atatürk did to his people is quite similar to what Kundera spoke about in his book, considering that the Turkish leader extirpated every evidence of the Ottoman past, and burned every bridge that may have connected the new nation to its past. As a result, the Turks who were born and educated in the new Republic are remarkably ahistorical and tragically amnesiac about their past. Naturally, The Turks’ forgetfulness about their country’s Ottoman past made them both physically and emotionally disconnected from any event that predates the establishment of the Turkish Republic, their legitimate homeland, and the only Turkey they know. Thus they cannot relate themselves to the Ottomans neither their achievements nor their transgressions.

To the present day, both the Turkish officials and the public sphere refuse to discuss the Ottoman history and deny the occurrence of some major events that took place in that period, like the Armenian genocide of 1915. Taking into account their detachment from the past, the Turks refuse to take responsibility for something that they did not commit or live through. They simply reject the idea that their present realities are shaped by a past that is neither of their making nor of their choosing

2.4. Modern-Day Armenians: The Past Inhabits the Present

In James Baldwin’s words, modern-day Armenians are, “a people [who] are trapped in history and history is trapped in them” (qtd. In Streich 57). Their memories of the gruesome genocide that their ancestors faced at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in 1915, keep them

imprisoned behind the bars of their collective past. For Armenians, the past is not a bygone time but rather a vital and vivid part of their present, and a means through which they interpret their present and predict their future. Unlike the early Republican government led by Atatürk who chose to dispose of the past and leave it behind because it did not serve its progressive plans, the Armenian survivors of the 1915 genocide chose to maintain their past alive within them and its remembrance as vivid as their present realities. After the genocide, most Armenians who lived in the Ottoman Empire dispersed to various countries (Gibney & Hansen 13). However, their strong attachment to their painful collective past and their memories of injustice and victimhood had kept them united through time despite the spatial distances.

For decades Armenians have managed to preserve the memories of pain and suffering by faithfully transmitting them from generation to generation in what Shwab (2010) referred to as ‘trans-generational transmission of trauma’ meaning the passing of traumatic memories through generations. Like a precious family treasure, the memories of the genocide are bequeathed to young Armenians by their parents and grandparents in the form of reports, stories, and songs that beam with feelings of loss, sadness, and heavy psychological pain. Despite the burdening responsibility the young Armenian feel having to bear the weight of such emotional memories, they are taught from early childhood that the preservation of memory is a duty and an obligation to the passed victims who have deprived the right of life and dignity that them, the current generations enjoy, as James Booth argues, “remembering past injustice is important because we should give dignity to those who were not granted it in their time” (Biggar 71). In stark opposition to modern-day Turks whose past is burdening chuckle that holds them back from achieving their aspired lives (Shafak 171), Armenian use the past and its reminiscence as a source of inspiration and learning as it teaches them to appreciate the present and to look at the future with an eye of wisdom and experience

2.5. A Growing Intellectual Interest in Memory Among the Turkish

Intelligentsia

At the turn of the 21st century and as “nostalgia and its industry [were] on the rise all over the world” (qtd. In Ozyurek 2), the Turkish intellectual sphere witnessed a burgeoning interest in social memory and studies of the past. This interest was interpreted, shortly after, into amassment of scholarships and artworks that desperately strived to recover the many lost pieces of the country’s past. This upsurge of memory in Turkey had emerged as a reaction to the “administered forgetting” (Gonglugur & Sezer 5), of Turkey’s Ottoman past, inflicted by Ataturk and his associates following the creation of the Republic in 1923. Essentially, the surge of interest in memory and the increasing discourse about it is prompted by the scarcity, if not the complete loss of memory in Turkey, as Pierre Nora (1989) states, “We speak so much of memory because there is so little left of it” (qtd. In Middleton & Brown 3). Further, the proliferation in memory discourse has taken a variety of forms: “criticism of official versions of history and recovering areas of history previously repressed; demands of signs of a past that had been confiscated and suppressed; growing interest in “ roots” and genealogical research . . . an explosion of interest in memoirs, historical novels and films” (Olick et al. 437)

Moreover, the contemporary memory boom in Turkey among intellectuals is characterized by “a novel sensitivity to collective atrocities” (Gonglugur & Sezer 5); those committed by the Ottomans against ethnic minorities. This sensitivity drew attention to one of the most taboo topics in Turkey today, namely the Armenian genocide of 1915; the Turkish authorities’ denial of the genocide and the growing demands of Armenians for genocide recognition had led to a “proliferation of academic and journalistic works on the Armenian Genocide [and] the

massacres and deportation of religious and ethnic minorities” (Gonglugur & Sezer 6). Followed by a series of, “taboo-breaking, academic conferences, apology campaigns and reconciliation statements” (6). Such gesture of the part of the Turkish intelligentsia is widely interpreted as an indirect and unofficial apology on behalf of the Turkish nation, which insists, to the present day, on disavowing the historical assaults of the Ottomans against the Armenians in 1915, and which refuses to recognize them as a gruesome genocide and a scar of shame in the history of the country which requires in the least an amende honorable. Turkey’s intellectuals are well aware that denying the genocide is an act of injustice equal to that of committing the genocide itself. In his publication to *The Conversation* (2013), the Australian professor Colin Tatz proclaims that “victims of genocide die twice: first in the killing fields and then in the texts of denialists who insist that “nothing happened” or that what happened was something “different” (Tatz 2013).

Further, in the literary realm the modern intellectual upsurge of memory was reflected in the literary outcome of several Turkish novelists like the noble prize laureate Orhan Pamuk and the renowned authoress Elif Shafak who based two of their most celebrated novels, *The Black Book* (1990)¹, and *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) respectively, on the themes of social amnesia in Turkey and the Armenian genocide of 1915.

2.6. Elif Shafak: A Prominent Voice against the Turkish Social Amnesia

Elif Shafak, born on October 25 1972 in Strasbourg, France (Wikipedia), is a British-Turkish novelist, essayist, academic, political, and human rights activist. She is one of the most prominent contemporary novelists in the Turkish literary sphere, as she has been

¹ *The Black Book* (1990) is a novel by the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk, where the central theme is the lost history of Turkey, and the strategic obliteration of public memory in the wake of establishment of the Turkish Republic.

recognized by several critics as “one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary Turkish and world literature” (qtd. In Nihad 2900). Up to the present day Shafak has published, an amount of 14 books, nine of which are novels. She writes fiction in both Turkish and English, and the content of her works revolves mostly around the sensitive political issues and social ills that prevail in her mother country Turkey. Among many of her generation in the intellectual and literary field, the Turkish writer chastises the historical ignorance that characterizes her country’s people, as well as their complete detachment from their past; in one of her interviews, Shafak states that Turkey is “a country of collective amnesia . . . whose historical consciousness is scant and therefore [they] cannot learn lessons from history” (Shafak 2005). Further in the interview, she holds the political elites of the country accountable for the state of historical ignorance and collective amnesia that pervades the Turkish society. She adds: “The elites like to prove to the westerners how westernized we Turks are. Yet when it comes to critically reading the past, the same elite is indifferent, if not ignorant” (Shafak 2005).

Shafak’s political views and personal opinions regarding the issue of social memory in Turkey are plainly reflected in her novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006). As she utilizes the fictive nature of the text to openly and, rather boldly, challenge the politically controlled historical discourse in her country as well as to chastise the state of social memory that prevails among her fellow Turks. Just as important, in her novel Shafak brings to light one of the most taboo topics in Turkey, the Armenian genocide of 1915, which has been buried under the soil of the new Republic since its establishment in 1923.

2.7. The Bastard of Istanbul (2006): A tale of Remembering and Forgetting

The *Bastard of Istanbul* is largely regarded as one of Elif Shafak's most intriguing and thought-provoking works. It was originally crafted in English, and then it was translated into Turkish and a number of other languages. The novel carries within its folds a rich variety of themes namely: history, family, identity, and for the most part, memory. In the novel, Shafak invites the cultivated reader to reflect on the subject of social memory, as she persistently addresses the issue of remembering and forgetting, and the effect of these processes on individuals and nations alike. The story tracks down the lives of two antithetical, and yet identical families who share a common past but hold dissimilar memories of it. The two families are the Kazancis, a Turkish, Istanbulite family, and the Chakmakchians, an Armenian family in the American diaspora. Moreover, In their manner of treating their memories and their distinct behaviors towards their past, the two families present a clear personification of their own cultures, i.e., modern Turkish and Armenian American, who seem diametrically opposite in their views and understandings of time and their perception of the past.

Through the medium of its central characters, the novel sheds light on the state of historical ignorance and social amnesia that dominates the Turkish society; and contrasts it to the Armenians' over-consciousness of their collective past, and their attachment to their social memory. It also makes manifest the incredibly interwoven relationship between the past, the present, and the future by portraying the characters' struggle for self-identification in the present, and their anxiety about the future in the light of their dim pasts. In the novel, Shafak affirms that the memories of the past that a group holds or abandons actively shape its present and essentially determines the features of its future.

Conclusion

The duality that exists between the Armenians and the Turks regarding social memory and their treatment of the past owes largely to two crucial events that marked the history of the two societies, namely: the massacres committed by the Ottomans against the Armenians in 1915, commonly known as the Armenian genocide, and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The Armenian genocide has left an everlasting traumatic effect on the Armenian posterity which holds them, prisoners, to the memories of a gruesome and painful past. On the other hand, the establishment of the Turkish Republic was accompanied by the systematic destruction of the Ottoman heritage in purpose of joining the civilized West and embracing progress and modernity; this had, in the long run, resulted in a state of complete social amnesia and historical ignorance among the Turks.

In light of this, the following chapter will address, at length, the reverberations of the afore-discussed events on the two societies as reflected in the Elif Shafak's fiction *the Bastard of Istanbul* (2006).

Chapter Three:

The Bastard of Istanbul (2006): A Tale of Remembering and Forgetting

Introduction

Similar to many of her peers in the literary realm, the Turkish novelist Elif Shafak has taken upon herself the mission of incorporating the problems and complexities of her society in her works. For this, she has brilliantly utilized the art of story-telling and the gift of imagination to shed light on the social and political issues taking place in her country, as well as widely at the global level. Her novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) is a bold, yet eloquent execution of her mission. Among the versatile set of themes which the novel encompassed, the theme of social memory is a dominant one. In the novel Shafak emphasizes the state of social amnesia and historical-ignorance that dominates her country and contrasts it to the Armenians' burning attachment to their ancestral memory. In addition, she highlights the essential role that social memory plays in the existence and continuity of social groups, as well as the negative ramifications that may result from a society's loss of its own history and memory.

3.1. Fiction as a Place of Memory

Memory is one of the manifold topicalities that characterize fiction texts and mark them as a vital medium of human expression; it has particularly been an important, indeed dominant topic that has sparked the interest, and fueled the imagination of fiction writers through time. Numerous texts adopt the theme of memory as an object of explicit reflections as they often touch upon the manner in which individuals and groups remember their past, as well as how these recollected memories intervene in, and shape their present realities, such texts are particularly concerned with "the mnemonic presence of the past in the present" (Neumann 333), and the unwavering relationship between what is gone and what is extant. The literary representation of individual and group memory is not new or recent to the world of fiction,

considering that memory and the processes of remembering have been the interest of the field for a long time; however no genre designation existed for such texts until not long ago, when literary critics proposed the term: ‘Fictions of memory’ to refer to memory specific texts (334). As aforementioned, the term ‘fictions of memory’ refers to the group of fiction texts specialized in depicting the complex mechanisms, and workings of human memory as well as the active part it contributes to the existence and continuity of humanity; in addition, such texts establish the nexus between memory and identity, according to Neumann (2008), fictions of memory are “the stories that individuals or groups tell about their past to answer the question ‘who am I?’ or collectively ‘who are we?’” (334) with that, they emphasize the connectedness of the past and the present. Moreover, one key purpose of fictions of memory is to articulate the importance and value of specific version of the past, ones that have been underrepresented, tabooed, adjusted, or deleted, with that fictions of memory give voice to the previously silenced memories by creating and an imaginative counter-memory that challenges the hegemonic social memory and questions the socially established boundary between remembering and forgetting. (338)

3.3. The Representation of the Turkish and the Armenian Social Memory in the Bastard of Istanbul (2006)

In her brilliantly-crafted fiction of memory, the Turkish writer Elif Shafak offers her readers a penetrating insight into her country’s state of social amnesia, and contrasts it to the Armenians’ obsession and ongoing fascination with their social memory; with that Shafak addresses the stark duality that exists between the two nations with regard to their social memory and their perception of the past. It is, then, safe to claim that the novel itself is an elaborate fictionalization of the writer’s political opinion on the issue of memory obliteration

in her country. In the novel, Shafak appears to be clearly denouncing the early Turkish Republic's investment in the monopolization of the people's memory by means of history sterilization and censorship, this conquest of memory had, in the long run, created a huge rupture between the country and its past. According to the novel, a linear, chronological and progressive understanding of time has worked itself into the consciousness of generations after generations in modern Turkey, "for the Turks, time was a multi-hyphenate line, where the past ended at some definite point and the present started anew from scratch, and there was nothing but rupture in between" (Shafak 189). Traditionally, the Turks' understanding of time is the fruit of Kemalist modernism – an ideology introduced by the founder of the Turkish Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who decided that in order to forge a strong, secular, modern nation-state, and give it a "a new identity" (Ozyurek 3), Turkey had to annihilate its multiethnic Ottoman legacy. One, which he believed, was impregnated with violence, irrationality and superstition (Berkes 465), and was far from meeting the European standards of freedom, democracy and secularism which he embraced, and which he was yearning to ground his new born nation in. Fortunately for Atatürk, and indeed sadly for the coming Turkish generations, the Republic's progressive plans were successfully achieved, and within a few years no trace of an Ottoman past was left (Ozyurek 4). This breakup with the past, had in the long run, resulted in a complete disconnection with history, and eventually, in a severe state of social amnesia, a condition that Shafak clothed her story in. One of the clearest representations of the Turkish social amnesia in *The Bastard of Istanbul* is the writer's choice of the novel's setting, Istanbul. A city which Shafak described in one of her articles as "a city of collective amnesia" (Shafak), in which "there is such lamentably poor memory, it is easier for the state's selective memory to survive unquestioned" (Shafak).

Furthermore, in utter contrast to the Turks' perception of time, the Armenians, in the novel, view time as repetitive and circular where the past always provides a lens through

which they see over their present and their future, it was a “cycle in which the past incarnated in the present and the present birthed the future” (Shafak 189). The Armenian philosophy with regard to time stems from their profound connection with their history and their attachment to their social memory. Unlike the Turks, the Armenians in the novel are too oriented towards their past that they believe it to live with their present “the past lives within the present” (71). For them the memories of suffering and trauma are essential to their continuity and cohesion, “despite all the grief it embodies history is what keeps [them] alive and united” (204).

3.3.1. The Tchakmakchians and the Memories of Pain and Injustice

At one end of the Turkish-Armenian dichotomy (continuum) that Shafak created in her novel, the reader gets to encounter the Armenian Chakhmakchians, “a huge family with a very traumatic past” (75). The family lives in the American diaspora, but has its roots running in Istanbul, Turkey: a country in which over a million of Armenians were massacred and plenty others, who survived, were either deported from their lands and homes, or remained there and lived in the guise (Foresythe 98). Similar to every Armenian around the world who lived in the aftermath of the 1915 genocide, the Chakhmakchians are obsessively oriented towards their community’s collective past. Their feverish attachment to their ancestral memory takes shape in their everyday discourses, which are impregnated with references to the past, and stories of pain and suffering from a century earlier. This attachment carries in its essence a fierce sense of animosity towards an old persecutor, “‘a common enemy’ the Turks” (Shafak 135). In the novel Shafak intentionally sketches the Tchakhmakchian family as fiercely anti-Turk to convey the Armenians’ inflammatory attachment to their social memory, a memory carried from generation to generation in the form of tragic stories that unite, as well as imprison them. Unlike the Turks who see no value or merit in their history, the Armenians

believe that “the past is anything but bygone” (211), to them “the past lives within the present, and [their] ancestors breathe through [their] children” (71). This complete orientation towards the bygone days that characterizes the Armenians of the novel is clearly demonstrated in the Tchakhmakchians’ reaction to the news of Rose, the family’s American ex-daughter-in-law, and the mother of Armanoush the youngest of the family, deciding to marry a Turk. Their reaction was a mixture of disbelief, offence, and terror, for how could their “poor little Armanoush” (69) live under the same roof with a Turk? How could they give their “flesh-and-blood daughter to those who are responsible for [their] being so few and in so much pain today?” (72). The very prospect offended as well as terrified them, thus, they felt the need “to rescue the child” (68) from an imminent danger. Besides, “what will that innocent lamb [Armanoush] tell her friends when she grows up?” (70), exclaimed one of the family,

I am Armanoush Tchakhmakchian, I am the grandchild of genocide survivors who lost all their relatives at the hands of the Turkish butchers in 1915, but I myself have been brainwashed to deny the genocide because I was raised by some Turk named Mustafa! What kind of a joke is that? (70)

The strong sense of bitterness and antipathy that the Tchakhmakchians, a modern Armenian-American family, hold for the modern Turks stems, essentially, from the legacy of oppression and victimhood that they received second hand from their parents who, in turn, received them from their parents and such like, in the form of painful memories; the process which Schwab (2010), referred to as ‘Trans-generational transmission of trauma’ a term that indicates the transmission of memories of trauma and loss through generations via stories and narratives (Schwab 122). Moreover the Tchkhmakchians’ affiliation to a formerly oppressed community, legitimizes their anti-Turk sentiments, and reinforces their attachment to their ancestral memory, it is their way of expressing that they have not forgotten the oppression, nor forgiven the oppressor, and will never do, as “the oppressed has nothing but the past”

(Shafak 290). This commitment to the memory of suffering, according to Assmann (2010), is “a remedy for survived generations and a spiritual obligation for the victims” (Assmann 17).

The sense of obligation that the family hold for their ancestors, is not exclusive to those of old age, or maturity of mind, for even the youngest member, the nineteen years old Armanoush is as obsessed with the past and as attached to the memories of her forbears’ suffering as her older relatives. She as an Armenian “embodied the spirits of her people generations after generations earlier” (Shafak 189). Armanoush regarded the past as a medium through which she finds her true self and construct her identity, her complete reliance on the past as a therapeutic institution is clearly reflected in her decision to secretly travel to Turkey to learn more about her ancestors’ home , and to unearth the buried truth about the 1915 events, the urge to visit her community’s past was provoked by her inability to find peace in her life , the burden she carried weighed heavily on her shoulders, that only a journey to her past could release her from it, “she had to make a journey to her past to be able to start living her own life” (137). In Turkey, to Armanoush’s utter astonishment, no trace of the past was to be found. The people there offered no answers to her curious questions, not because they refused to, but because they themselves did not have the answers, their history and their memory had long been erased. The people in Turkey did not remember their past, and did not care to remember it.

3.3.2. Café Constantinopolis: Where Reminiscence is Home for the Homeless

Another place, in the novel, where memory and the past is the main subject of discussion is Cafè Constantinoplis. As its name indicates, Cafè Constantinopolis, is grounded in the shared sentiments of longing and nostalgia that its regulars feel about their collective past, during a

time when Istanbul was Constantinopolis, and when it was a safe and a sound haven for their fathers. The café is a digital chat room in which a group of anonymous Armenian-American intellectuals who go by the name of Anoush Tree frequently meet to discuss topics of various themes, “Though the themes varied greatly, they all tended to revolve around their common history and culture –common oftentimes meaning ‘common enemy’ The Turks” (135). For the regulars of Café Constantinopolis, such discussions provide an outlet for their feelings of frustration, rage, alienation, and trauma. Their shared memories and their hostility toward a common enemy serves as a bond which brings them together in a strong camaraderie relationship, as “nothing brought people together more swiftly and strongly – though transitionally and shakily – than a shared enemy” (113). Moreover, in addition to the sense of solidarity and unification that Café Constantinopolis offers its regulars, it also serves as a basis for identity construction, especially for young people like Armanoush, who are still in an ongoing quest for their identity, “For me to be able to become an Armenian American ... I need to find Armenianness first” (140). Armanouh was able to find her Armenian identity and through the conversations about history and memory that take place in the café.

3.3.3. The Kazancis: A family Inclined to Never Remember Their Past

In the novel, one characteristic feature that defines the Tchackmakchian family as Armenians is their feverish ancestral memory and their obsessive attachment to their past. In stark contrast to that, the Turks, embodied by the Kazanci family, appear to be utterly detached from “the natural flow of time, due to their condition of social amnesia” (Gurel 61).

The Kazancis are another huge family on which Shafak based her story; a Turkish family from Istanbul who seem to have done away with their memories of the past and skillfully buried them several feet underground. This state of memory impairment touches, nearly,

every member of the Kazanci family, starting from the great-grandmother, Petite Ma, who suffers an acute condition of Alzheimer, reaching to the youngest member of the family, the bastard of the title, Asya Kazanci, to whom the past is as blurry and undisclosed as her father's identity and whereabouts. Essentially, the state of collective amnesia that governs the family is the outcome of several episodes of pain engraved in the history of the family, the most painful of which, perhaps, is Mustafa Kazanci's rape of his own sister Zeliha, the misfortune that produced Asya the bastard of Istanbul.

In all likelihood, the Kazancis' cataclysmic break with their past is emblematic of the state of social amnesia that dominates the Turkish society. This state has developed in the wake of the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, when the founders of the new Turkish state strategically worked on erasing the social memory of the country so as to achieve their hankering for a modern secular nation-state; one that resembled the West and perhaps, in the long run, pertained to it (Bal 327). For that, the country had to take a forward march towards the future, leaving behind the sins and memories of the past.

This systematic obliteration of the people's memory was largely advocated by the Turkish educational system in which "the state has introduced a nationalist version of history" (Voss 42), a history "based on censorship" (Shafak 289) and sterilization, a rather "cleansed version of the past" (170), one that fits into the needs of the present and meets the aspirations of the future. In the same vein, the Turkish scholar Taner Akçem (2005) emphasizes the role of the Turkish system of education in fostering the social amnesia of the country, he declares:

Turkish education for the past ninety years has created ignorance about the country's history. This ignorance has fostered social amnesia; as national historiography generally does not discuss or even mention the events before the founding of the Turkish Republic especially those of 1915. (Akçem 2005)

In the novel Shafak gives the Turkish Educational system a body and a voice through the character of Auntie Cevriye Kazanci, one of the Kazanci sisters, “Twenty years in her career as a Turkish National History teacher, she was so accustomed to drawing an impermeable boundary between the past and the present, distinguishing the Ottoman Empire from the Modern Turkish Republic” (Shafak 188). As a primary source of historical input in the family, Cevriye Kazanci perfectly epitomizes the manipulated and manipulative educational system in Turkey, one that “systematically erases minorities, multiplicities and truths” (Shafak 2020). The result of this system, Shafak wrote, in one of her recent publications, is “a vacuum in historical knowledge and understanding” (Shafak 2020). This historical vacancy is evident in many instances of the novel, one of which surfaces when Armanoush Tchakhmakchian, the Armenian- American visitor to the Kazanci domicile, tells the family about her forebears’ suffering at the hands of the Ottomans in 1915; the Kazancis’ reaction to Armanoush’s almost direct accusations were not at all what she anticipated, as it included neither contrite, nor defiant, however, their reaction was a combination of blunt puzzlement, and denial; it was as if they received some “grim news from another country” (Shafak 188). “Who did this atrocity?” (187) exclaimed Auntie Cevriye, the Turkish history teacher; “What a shame, what a sin, are they not human?” (188) cried her sister Auntie Feride. Upon hearing Armanoush’s story, some of Asya’s friends even went too far as to deny the occurrence of the story, “that didn’t happen” one of them remarked, “we never heard of anything like that” (235) added another. A third one summarized the Turk’s philosophy regarding time and history, “we need to understand that 1915 is not 2005. Times were different back then. It was not even a Turkish state back then it was the Ottoman Empire ... The pre-modern era with its pre-modern tragedies” (235). The Turkish characters’ statement vis à vis the Armenian genocide tells about the huge historical gap that exist in Turkey and their total disconnectedness with their social memory.

3.3.4. Mustafa Kazanci: A Tragic Story of a Forgetful Sinner

Indeed, Shafak's *the Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) is brimful of implications, symbolism, and representations of major taboo subjects in Turkey; perhaps, the most interesting of which is the representation of the Armenian events of 1915 and the Turks' obliviousness of it and of most of their own history. In the novel, Shafak sharply denounces the atrocities committed by the Ottomans against the Armenians in what is known as the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Concurrently, she criticizes the post-Ottoman rulers' conduct of concealing the crimes of their predecessors, and conquering the social memory of the country by means of history sterilization and censorship. Through the medium of the novel's central character Mustafa Kazanci, Shafak contrived a reification of both the Armenian genocide and the systematic endeavors of the Post-Ottoman Turkish Republic to amend the country's dark history by inflicting a state of collective amnesia upon the Turks.

Mustafa Kazanci, "a precious gem bequeathed by Allah amid four daughters" (46), his mother's most valued treasure, "she has always admired him" (88), and the brother who raped his own sister. Upon reading Shafak's description of Mustafa in the first half of the novel, the reader gets a glimpse of the high status and royalty life that Mustafa enjoyed among his family, he was "so indisputably cherished as the king at home" (47); a modern life Ottoman emperor. This grandeur, however, vanishes as the novel approaches its end; the expensively embroidered image loses its reverence, when Shafak unleashes Zeliha of her long kept secret, that of her rape at the hands of her brother, the very Mustafa Kazanci, revealing through that the antagonistic facet of the Kazanci Emperor, who proved that he resembled his Ottoman ancestors, not only in their prestige, and position but also in their wickedness.

Mustafa's rape of his younger sister Zeliha is, presumably, intended to symbolize the Ottomans' atrocities committed against the Armenians in 1915. Besides, the sibling relationship that ties the assailant and the victim in the novel, may very likely refer to the intimate relationship that existed between the Ottoman Turks and the Armenians prior to the 1915 genocide, as they coexisted enduringly in mutual respect and ever lasting peace. "Armenians and Turks had lived in relative harmony in the Ottoman Empire for centuries" (Mylonas 1).

Mustafa's rape of his sister is indeed an act of the devil. However, for Shafak what is more worthy of the blame is his not taking responsibility over his conduct. By that she brought to light George Orwell's famous dictum "if the party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event, it never happened – that surely was more terrifying than mere torture and death" (Orwell 35). Rather than confess his deed After impregnating Zeliha with his sin, Mustafa escaped to the other side of the Atlantic, the far America, leaving his stained past behind; there, in a country that did not resemble his home in anyway, he led a neat life and married Rose, an American woman who did not, particularly, resemble his sisters or his country's women. In America, Mustafa studied, and worked extremely hard "not because he wanted to attain a better future but because he had to dispose of his past" (139). A past that burdened his conscience, and endangered his reputation, "all these years, a harrowing remorse had been gnawing him inside, little by little, without disturbing his outer façade" (368). Mustafa's buried crime had prompted inside him a wish to forget his memories and "to break away from his past" (125), "How he wished he could remove his memory, restart the program, until all of the files were deleted and gone" (61). This wish, according to Shafak, was induced by his feeling of shame, guilt, and fear of exposure, "there were so many voices in his head that questioned, and blamed him for who he was" (313). Broadly, Mustafa's wish to abandon the past and its reminder of his atrocious deed is quite identical to that of the early

modern Turkish Republic, which chose to sacrifice the memory of its Ottoman past for the prospect of a better future, drawing from one of Ataturk's speeches: "progress is too difficult or even impossible for nations that insist on preserving their traditions and memories" (Berkes 465).

Further, the novel abounds with examples of Mustafa's self-imposed amnesia; one instance is the cool-headed indifference that he demonstrated when his Armenian step-daughter Armanoush, brings up the topic of the Turkish-Armenian debacle, "A few times she had tried to converse with him about 1915 and what the Turks had done to the Armenians 'I don't know much about those things' Mustafa replied shutting her out with a genteel but equally stiff manner" (125). In another instance of the novel, he escaped Armanoush's persisting inquiries by declaring himself, the average Turk, unqualified to discuss his country's history, "It's all history you should talk to historians" (125). His avoidance to discuss history, be it personal, or that of his nation affirms his desire to be rid of anything that might remind of him of his past, "for me to exist the past has to be erased" (368).

Eventually, Mustafa's fierce rejection of his past and its remembrance had driven him to his demise; as his return to the Kazanci domicile, his old home, had positioned him face to face with his past, the monster that had been chasing him for twenty years. His past scared, quite immensely, that when his sister Banu confronted him with his deed, he preferred to kill himself and not allow the past to enslave him, "for [the past] to exist, he had to be erased" (368). By killing himself Mustafa was relieving himself of his past and also of his future, very likely because he, finally came to realize that it does not matter how much you wish to be rid of your past, or how much you work to achieve that because it will continue to live within your present, and it will follow you to your future, quoting William Faulkner (1951), "the past is never dead. It isn't even past" (Faulkner 73).

Through Mustafa's story, Shafak suggests that if a nation fails to confront and acknowledge its transgressions, if it merely wishes to dismiss or forget them rather than compensate and learn from them, the ramifications could be dire. The character's eventual self-destruction hints at the potential harm that the Turkish systematic social amnesia might cause itself; and ascertains the importance of social memory in the continuity and the psychological wellbeing of societies.

3.3.5. Asya Kazanci: The Child of the Forgetful and the Forgotten

While Mustafa's self-imposed amnesia symbolizes the state of memory obliteration that the Turkish government had inflicted upon its citizens following the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, his daughter, Asya Kazanci is a perfect representation of the average Turkish citizen upon whom the state of amnesia was inflicted. Similar to every Turk, born after 1923, Asya was nurtured historical disavowal, and ignorance about the past since early childhood. Considering the circumstances into which she was born, Asya was taught to turn her back to her past, and ask no questions about it, learning by their example, she was raised amid a family who relied on forgetting and disavowal to deal with disturbance and inconveniences that cross their days, "that's the Kazanci's technique of coping with problems, if something's nagging you close your eyes, count to ten, wish it never happened" (170). On that account, Asya grew up swallowing everyday "another capsule of mendacity" (170).

As my be expected, the outcome of this imposed oblivion would be a historically ignorant adult to whom history is of no significance or importance, and the past is but a place in time that does not concern them by virtue of lacking knowledge about it, "someone like me can never be past oriented ... you know why? ... Not because I find my past poignant or that I

don't care about it. It's because I don't know anything about it" (204), in these words, Asya defended her, rather shocking, disinterest in history to Armanoush, her Armenian guest.

Essentially, the character of Asya, is an excellent fictive personification of the Post-Ottoman Turkish society, which Shafak describes, in one of her articles, as "a society of collective amnesia. Its entire relationship with the past is full of ruptures, convenient forgettings, and silences" (Shafak). It is safe to claim that the Turkish society, like Asya, was a victim of its own founding father, Kemal Ataturk – the father of Turks, who monopolized the official history of the country, and annihilated its social memory, digging by that the temporal trench that exists, now, between Turkey and its Ottoman past. Asya as well was a victim of her father's transgression, her mother's secrecy, and her family's fancy of treating the past as nonexistent. Like all the Turks, Asya grew up in an environment that advocated forgetting, and distrusted the past as a reliable institution.

Applying the famous dictum 'things are revealed by their opposites' Shafak accentuates her society's loss of memory, in the novel, by featuring another society – the Armenians who memorize their history by heart and sanctify their ancestral memory; through the character of Armanoush who epitomizes the Armenians' burning ancestral memory, the reader gets a clearer sight of Asya's cold detachment from her past. Asya and Armanoush are diametrically opposed in their perception of the past and their treatment of their memories. Being the fictive representatives of their own societies, the two girls, though age peers, seem to have a huge historical age gap, for Asya "history starts today" (205) she believes that "there is no continuity in time" (205), this belief stems mainly from her lack of knowledge about the past, as one cannot appreciate, nor sympathize with what they do not know, or do not remember. Armanoush on the other hand, has been nurtured memory every day for her entire life, the stories and narratives of that past which vividly live within her present prolonged her age with many years, as she knew, understood, and sympathized with people who existed in a different

time frame than hers, many years before her birth, “She as an Armenian embodied the spirits of her people generations after generations earlier” (189). Armanoush’s fascination with her community’s collective past seemed strange to Asya, who saw no use in history, in fact Asya wished to be rid of her history, in many instances of the novel she wished that she had her great grandmother’s condition of “sweet Alzheimer” (171), she thought that having “Alzheimer is not as terrible as it sounds” (171), for it makes your “memory withers away” (171). Essentially, Asya’s ignorance about her personal past, i.e, her father’s identity makes it difficult for her to relate to Armanoush’s fierce attachment to her ancestral past, “ you can’t feel attached to ancestors if you can’t even trace your own father” (205), and thus she wants to remove every remaining bit of it, “ all my life I wanted to be pastless” (291) says Asya. Like her country, Asya’s ignorance about her past makes her though similar in many aspects, starkly different than Armanoush who naturally inherited her people’s commitment to their collective memories of pain and genocide. At the end of their debate about the importance of one’s past Asya drew a clear line between herself and her Armenian friend, she remarked “that is our paths diverge. Yours is a crusade for remembrance, whereas if it were me, I’d rather be just like Petite-Ma [her great grandmother], with no capacity for reminiscence whatsoever” (204). With these words Asya, not only, described the paths of two teenage girls but also the fate of two nations, the forgetful Turks, and the remembering Armenians.

3.3.6 Cafe Kundèra: A Cafè of Laughter and Forgetting

In a quite brilliant literary gesture, Shafak presents her novel as a body of pressing oppositions, as the work seems to be impregnated with contrastive characters and symbols that indicate, in a rather agreeable manner, the duality that exists between her people – the Turks, and the Armenians with regard to their treatment of their memories, and their

perception of the past. One of the many polarities that crowd the novel is that of the Armenian Café Constantinopolis and the Turkish Cafè Kundera, two places that present, respectively, homes for the young protagonists, Asya and Armanoush. As its name reveals, Cafè Constantinopolis, is grounded in the collective sentiments of longing and nostalgia that its regulars feel for the past, during a time when Istanbul was Constantinopolis, and when it was a safe and sound haven for their ancestors. In stark contrast to that, Cafè Kundera appears at the forgetting end of the remembering-forgetting continuum that Shafak created in her novel. Giving its name, and its members' mindsets, Cafè Kundera succeeds to exhibit the pervading state of social forgetting in Turkey. As to "how and why it was named after the famous author [Milan Kundera], nobody knew for sure" (94); a number of theories were advanced by the residents of the café to solve the mystery of the mystery of the its name, one of which is that "when the place was newly opened, the author had happened to be in Istanbul and on his way to elsewhere he had fortuitously stopped by for a cappuccino" (95). And so, on that day the place was baptized under his name. This and many other stories were suggested everyday by the members, but none of them was proven true.

In a personal effort to unearth the secret behind the café's name, and its relation to the context of the story, as well as to the message that Shafak intends to convey. I, the researcher came up with an interpretation that may or may not be correct. Hypothetically speaking, Shafak used the name of the renowned German writer – Milan Kundera to draw attention to the major theme of his most successful work, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979). In his narrative, Kundera chronicles the forced expulsion of culture and history from central Europe by its Russian overlords, which resulted in a state of social amnesia in Europe. Through the characters of his story who struggle with memory loss, Kundera considers the nature of forgetting in history, politics, and life in general. He writes in the Introduction to the book, "the first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its

culture, its history . . . Before long the nation will forget what it is and what it was” (Kundera 1). The content of Kundera’s book is quite similar to the content of Shafak’s book as they both discuss the issue social amnesia.

Moreover, apart from its name, Café Kundera is portrayed as a space in which people, from various intersecting social fields, meet to forget about their personal and their country’s problems. There, unlike in café Constantinopolis, Asya’s intellectual friends are open and eager to discuss anything but the past. Despite the intellectual atmosphere that characterizes the place, an air of historical ignorance pervades among its members. One specimen that emphasizes the state of historical ignorance and social amnesia that dominates the place occurred when Armanoush confronted Asya’s friends with the 1915 events almost all the members of the Café denied the occurrence of the events, they “ never heard of anything like that” (235) commented one of them. Another accused her of being hysterical (that’s a sort of hysteria right there” (240), a third accused the Arminian collectivities of manipulating the individual’s “beliefs and thought” (237) by feeding them false stories of heroism and victimhood, “you keep hearing a story over and over and the next thing you know you have internalized the narratives” (237). The disavowal that the members of café Kundera demonstrated in reaction to Armanoush’s story is symptomatic of how tight is the hold of social amnesia on Turkey, considering that even intellectuals, who are supposed to compensate for the mass’s historical ignorance, are equally ignorant.

3.3.7. Elif Shafak on Forgetting and Remembrance

In the words of one of her characters, Shafak asks the question, “was it really better for human beings to discover more of their past? Or was it simply better to know as little of the past as possible” (271). Years later, she had the chance to answer her question in one of her

interviews, when she proclaimed that, “the past is important, [one] should not be trapped in it; but [one] shouldn’t be ignorant of it either” (Shafak). Her statement was directed at the Turks and the Armenians who are either trapped in their history or completely ignorant and disinterested in it. Being a political and social activist, the Turkish writer intended to convey a message through her novel that living in the past will not bring back, also completely abandoning it will not stop it from having existed.

Conclusion

Among the manifold topicalities that rest within the many folds of Elif Shafak’s fiction, the *Bastard of Istanbul* (2006), the topic of social memory seems to enjoy a major share. In her novel, Shafak explores the theme of social memory and social amnesia by casting two societies, wherein social memory is either overflowing, or non-existent. The Armenian, and the Turkish societies are, very much, the protagonists of the novel, as their collective behaviors toward their memories and their perceptions of their pasts are personalized in two fictive families, the amnesiac Turkish Kazancis, and the historically over-conscious Armenian Tchahmakchians. Opposed as they are, the two families seem to present a clear reification of the opposed memory situations that characterize the Turkish and the Armenian societies. Moreover, through the Armenian characters, Shafak accentuates the crucial role of social memory in building social identity and in maintaining social unity and cohesion, and warns against the ramifications of social amnesia and historical ignorance.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

The present research was conducted for the purpose of dissecting the theme of social memory and the processes of collective remembering and forgetting in the *Bastard of Istanbul* (2006), a novel crafted by the British Turkish writer Elif Shafak. Being a fiction of memory the *Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) is concerned with the presence and the absence of social memory in modern societies, as well as how a people's behavior toward their shared memories shape their present realities, and determine the features of their futures. It does this while straddling two societies, the Armenian society with its high sense of collective memory and its strong, rather obsessive, attachment to the past of trauma and genocide, and the Turkish society with its social amnesia and complete break with its Ottoman past.

Employing both sociology and history, a careful scrutiny was applied on the novel in order to better understand the theme of social memory in relation to the Turkish and Armenian societies as well as to investigate the historical etiology behind the modern memory situation in the two societies. After a detailed scrutiny of the theme of social memory in the novel, the research arrived at three major findings: First, the Turkish/ Armenian social memory was presented, in the novel, as a continuum with two extremes, at one extreme there is the Armenian ancestral memory of injustice and pain, which is preserved and treasured in the minds of every Armenian regardless of their age or residence. At the other extreme of the continuum there is the Turkish social amnesia which is fostered by the Turkish sterilized and censored historiography and its consequential historical ignorance and detachment from the past that pervades in the Turkish society.

Moreover, in the novel, Shafak foresees a catastrophic future for Turkey in the light of its break with the past and its loss of social memory. Such prediction was implicated through the story of Mustafa Kazanci, one of the novel's Turkish characters, who in order to bury a crime that he committed in the past, he turned his back to his past and annihilated its memory, thinking that if he forgot about the past, it would cease to exist. However, upon realizing that the past was only temporarily gone and that it came back to chase him, Mustafa decided to end his own life so that he would not have to face the consequential outcomes of the past's revival. Through Mustafa's story, Shafak suggests that if a nation fails to confront and acknowledge the inconveniences of the past, if it merely wishes to dismiss or forget them rather than compensate and learn from them, the ramifications could be dire, and their end could be similar to that of Mustafa.

Finally, the social memory of injustice and pain that the Armenians share seems to provide a sacred cohesive bond that connects and unites the members of the Armenian society. Also, it serves as a basis for identity construction; as it is argued that a society's memories of the past shape the identity of its members both in the collective and the personal level (Becker 2005). As for the Armenians who live in the diaspora, social memory helps them find haven in the collective reminiscence of the past.

The central focus of this research was to explore the theme of social memory and the processes of remembering and forgetting in the modern Turkish and Armenian societies in Elif Shafak's novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006). Reckoning with the scarcity of discussions

about the subject of social memory in fiction texts, the present research has attempted to fill the existing gap in knowledge regarding the representation of societal and collective memories in fiction. Wholesome and informative as it is aspired to be, a single research could never cover an entire area of knowledge, thus, on this basis future researchers are invited to expand, enrich or offer other dimensions to this research. Also, being an initiative, this research could be used as a solid ground for further investigations on the subject of social memory in Turkish and Armenian fiction.

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