

Affiliations, Aversions and Assertions: Memory, Identity and Amnesia in Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul*

Farhan Ahmad

Department of English, College of Sciences and Humanities, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Abstract—The present study aims to investigate the nexus between memory, identity, and amnesia in Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul*. The proposed study will examine how collective amnesia inflicted by the state, aids in the erosion of historical memory of violence and inhumanity among its denizens. Memory of the past shapes a person's life in a plethora of ways. It is a source of personal as well as collective identity. Memory travels across generations and links one's past and future. It is created, destroyed, and recreated. The loss of memory or amnesia performs a crucial role in what one remembers, how one thinks of their self, and how one acts. The study contextualizes memory as an important source of one's personal as well the collective identity. The loss of memory or amnesia performs a crucial role in what one remembers, how one thinks of their self, and how one acts. The study concludes that not everything can be remembered and not everything can be forgotten. After all, a little remembering and a little forgetting never hurt.

Index Terms—affiliation, memory, identity, amnesia

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to various cultural changes in the contemporary era, the concept of identity has become a subject of much debate. Identity refers to the association of the self with an abstract entity that provides a sense of meaning and belonging and helps the world to survive. An abstract entity can be class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, nation and so on. Such abstract entities are not material but play an indispensable role in human life. According to Deng (1995), identity is used to describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture. Giddens (1991) defines identity as a project on that individuals and society work on and that is constantly changing. Identity entails our ability to sustain a narrative about the self. Barker (2012) describes identity as "An emotionally charged discursive description of ourselves that is subject to change" (p. 221). The idiom of identity can include 'all kinds of relatedness, all experiences of shared ethics, connectedness, and harmony as well as all senses of self that are mediated through various ways and practices.

In today's globalized world, one encounters an infinite number of people who may or may not share one's identity. As physical distance becomes negligible in this age of globalization, one becomes conscious of who they are. Identities intersect, sometimes old ones are lost and new ones are born. However, such interplay of identities often leads to conflict. It occurs when one meets a person or persons with a different identity that one believes to be inferior or strange. Moreover, the tension arises when there is an ongoing attempt to homogenize identities by putting forth the narratives such as 'Your identity is in danger due to the other person's identity'. Often, such narratives are propagated by the ruling dispensation that calls for the erasure of different and conflicting identities in order to maintain its power.

In cultural studies understanding identity is not a thing but a description in language. Identity is never static or singular. So, it would be appropriate to use the plural form of this word as it exudes multiplicity. Moreover, identities are dynamic, constantly changing, forming, and reforming. No identity is superior or complete. The importance of any identity depends on the place one is in, the kind of people one is surrounded by, and the purpose of the person in that place. Therefore, one's external environment decides what kind of identity or identities one is going to display. During 2005 in his *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction* opines,

Individuals do not have a single identity, they have identities, and do so just because identities are based on partial traits (skin color, socio-economic status, gender, nationality, region, profession, generation, and so on). I am a man and a New Zealander and an ectomorph and bourgeois and an academic and Aquarian, etc. But not all identities carry equal weight in particular circumstances or have the same social consequences. For instance, in many nations the country in which one was born used to matter a great deal in terms of identity. Now (generally speaking) it matters much less. (p. 146)

The emphasis of during here is on the multiplicities and temporalities of identities. Contributing to this significant discussion on identity Hall (1991) says, "Identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself. Identity is always a temporary and unstable effect of relations which define identities by marking difference" (p. 21).

Hall's critique of identity is against an understanding of identity as something that is originary, unified and integral. Grossberg (1996) conceptualized identity as not simply a matter of places, but also of the spatial relations of places and spaces and the distribution of people within them.

Identity is closely related to memory, which is considered a key component in the creation and maintenance of the individual and collective identity. The word memory comes from the Latin roots *Memoriam* or *memor* which means to remember. Memory can be defined as the ability to recall past events and recall learned facts and ideas. Such ability to recollect past events leads a person to identify himself/herself with something or the other. This process of identification results in the construction of an identity-based on past recollections. Thus, what one remembers of the past, and what one forgets, defines what one becomes in the present. This process of remembering and forgetting is sometimes influenced by external factors. The outside environment may be such that certain things are presented as important for retention, while other events or experiences are shown as worthless which should be discarded and are no longer required to be remembered. The importance of memory in the construction of identity can be captured by imagining a self that has no memory. When there is nothing to remember the sense of connection with an entity also disappears. Hence, lack of memory results in lack of identity which in turn makes it difficult for a person to survive in this world of infinite identities. According to Reid (1785):

Our own personal identity and continued existence, as far back as we remember anything distinctly... we know immediately, and not by reasoning. It seems, indeed, to be a part of the testimony of memory. Everything we remember has such a relation to ourselves as to imply necessarily our existence at the time remembered. (p. 586)

Memory, like identity, is dynamic. It depends on the constant process of remembering and forgetting that goes on in one's mind. Things that are retained and emphasized, become a strong element of personal identity and things that are forgotten or lost gradually lose their significance in one's identity. Memory is ubiquitous and often used quite loosely. Prager (1998) claims that memory is 'intersubjective' and represents past motivations that emphasize situated schemas, which are of course cultural. Yelvington (2002), contends that "Memory is a process of the self-situating itself. It is part of the process of self-constitution" (p. 239).

Not only individuals, but communities, groups, and nations have a sense of memory too in the form of a shared past. A nation's consciousness represents the collective past of the people. Personal identity is closely related to national memory, especially when the nation has a history of turmoil, or war. The subject living in the nation feels a sense of belonging and responsibility to the land, which becomes especially important when there is interaction between two groups or individuals with distinct national identities. Also, national memory is constantly shifting and changing.

Nations rewrite histories, erasing earlier histories mostly to reinforce a particular identity. The dynamic nature of memory can be understood by looking at the concept of amnesia. Amnesia comes from the Greek *a* (without), *mnesis* (memory). In simple words, it refers to the loss of memory. Among the many different types of amnesia, the condition in which a person forgets some important information about their life (e.g., a traumatic, violent event) but does not experience any disruption to their sense of identity, this is called dissociative amnesia. This type of memory loss is used to forget the pain or trauma associated with the event. Memory loss can be a natural process such as an injury or accident. However, it can also be intentional as influenced by external factors such as power structures, culture, etc.

Certain events or memories are erased from a person's personal or collective consciousness in such a way that the person feels that they were never part of their identity. Such gradual erosion of memory can have many motives, including the desire to abandon the previous identity and create a new identity that may somehow be detrimental to the new identity. When the erosion of memory occurs at a communal level, it is called collective amnesia. In this way, communities collectively forget memories and cannot recall them whenever they are referred to by another group. Such is the effect of collective amnesia. At the individual level, one may try to forget a painful past. This is generally done through ignorance or avoidance. Therefore, studying the complex relationship between memory, identity and amnesia is highly relevant as the contemporary world is identity-conscious where identity construction and destruction is an ongoing process that happens through the process of remembering and forgetting. "Memories are not ready-made reflections of the past, but eclectic, selective reconstructions. People remember or forget the past according to the needs of the present, and social memory is an active and ongoing process" (Van Dyke & Alcock, 2003, p. 3).

The proposed study is an attempt to understand how past memory shapes a person's life and is a source of personal and collective identity. Memory travels across generations and connects one's past and future. It is created, destroyed, and recreated. Memory loss or Amnesia plays an important role in what one remembers, how one thinks of their self, and how one acts. Such loss can be inflicted by various social, cultural, or national factors. The research will engage the following questions:

II. RESEARCH PROBLEMS

- What are the effects of collective amnesia on a nation and an individual?
- How do past experiences and memories shape the social relations and identity structures of the present?
- Does amnesia act as a liberating experience or as a source of rootlessness?
- Why is the past manipulated and memory is erased from communal consciousness?
- How does memory become baggage of the past but also act as a source of healing?

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is to analyze the effects of collective amnesia on a nation as well as an individual. The study shows how the past shapes the social relations and identity structures of the present and how amnesia acts as a liberating experience as well as a sense of rootlessness. The study ponders over how and why the past is manipulated and memory is erased from communal consciousness. It illustrates how memory acts as a baggage of the past as well as a source of healing.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study will use a broad theoretical framework of memory, identity, and amnesia. Related texts, documentaries, interviews, and other supplementary materials will also be consulted. This study will be conducted by looking at various elements and events in Shafak's *Bastard of the Istanbul* that reveal the nexus between memory, identity, and amnesia. Quotations from the original text will also be used, wherever relevant.

V. LITERATURE SURVEY

Un-Silencing the Past: A Juxtaposition of Personal and Political in Elif Shafak's novel, *The Bastard of Istanbul* by Tajamul Islam (2022) provides the socio-political background of the Armenian genocide and discusses the concept of the bastard represented through the character of Asya Kazanci. Asya and Armanoush share a history of rootlessness and identity crisis. Through their characters, a personal account of the 1915 genocide is presented. Additionally, the author examines how alternative spaces such as Cafe Kundera and Cafe Constantia are used in the novel to subvert the state-imposed silence surrounding the genocide. Apart from this, the issue of personal versus political is also examined. The Armenian community cannot forget the past even after becoming a member of another community which is American. However, for Turks, the past is an unknown place. They are amnesiac towards their history. Thus, according to the author, Shafak tries to address a historical wrong that holds immense importance when Turks are trying to reconstruct their past.

Nabanita Chakraborty in *Contesting Spaces and Conflicting Memories: A Reading of Armenian Diaspora in Elif Shafak's The Bastard of Istanbul* (2019), examines the political dynamics of the contemporary Armenian and Turkish State. State-sponsored silence and denial over the 1915 genocide is questionable. The author proposes that the Turkish state should acknowledge the atrocities and that Armenians should leave their past behind. In this way both communities can resolve their differences.

A Post-Modernist Critique of Elif Shafak's Novel, *The Bastard of Istanbul* by Nabila Akbar et al. (2020), presents a postmodernist view of the novel by probing various elements such as depthlessness, pastiche, etc. The authors have used the concepts given by Ehab Hasan such as silence, play, opportunity, solitude, emptiness, alienation etc. which reflect the postmodern tendencies of the novel. In addition, Jameson's definition of 'disconnection with the past' as an element of postmodernism is used to illustrate the fragmented identities of various characters in the novel, for example the characters of Asya and Armanoush. The repetition of many postmodernist elements makes *The Bastard of Istanbul* a true postmodernist novel.

Elena Furlanetto (2014) in *Safe Spaces of the Like-Minded: The Search for a Hybrid Post-Ottoman Identity in Elif Shafak's The Bastard of Istanbul* acknowledges Shafak's attempt at writing a novel to oppose the Kemalist goal of forgetting the Ottoman past and deliberately induce amnesia to construct a modern Turkish identity. Shafak provides a critique of the Kemalist regime and aims to revive Turkey's past of pluralism, peaceful coexistence, and diversity.

Identity construction of Istanbulites in Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* by Mohd Zaimil Alvin (2017) studies the process of identity construction in the novel by drawing upon the theories of Castells. The author discusses the relationship between social memory and identity construction. The novel mainly discusses three types of identities namely, Legitimising, Resistance, and Project identity. The author concludes the study by calling Turkish a legitimizing identity and Armenian as the Resistance identity. Finally, the characters of Zeliha and Asia represent the project identity according to the author.

In summary, several aspects are investigated such as the socio-political context of the Armenian Genocide, the state-sponsored silence surrounding the event, personal and political, the convergence of postmodernist elements, the nature of Istanbul society, and multiculturalism. It may be noted that the studies that have been conducted on identity construction have only discussed the issue from a sociological perspective. Moreover, diasporic identity issues are studied only in references. Therefore, it becomes crucial to analyze in depth the relationship between memory, identity, and amnesia without limiting the examination to only one perspective.

VI. DISCUSSION

A sense of the past is what plays a pivotal role in shaping the plot and the lives of the characters in *The Bastard of Istanbul*. "Memory of the past as well as the links between the past and the present constitute the central subject of the novel" (Yazicioğlu, 2009, p. 65). The novel is not just the story of two communities living in two different geographical boundaries, but it is a story of well-nigh every human being on this planet who remembers the things they do not want

to remember and forgets the memories they cherish and want to retain. Their lives become a constant struggle between the search for a lost memory and the desire to break away from the identity they live in at the present. Such are the characters of Zeliha, Mustafa, and Asya. At the very beginning of the novel, Zeliha walks the streets of Istanbul, swearing by the rain, the traffic, and the garbage left after the rain. She is a rebellious modern woman who wears mini-ski, high heels, flaunts her body and ignores the male gaze. She is almost everything one would not expect from an Istanbulite woman. Here, Shafak's first identification is with Istanbulite, specifically as a woman from Istanbul. "Hadh't she already waged a war against the entire society?" (Shafak, 2007, p. 8).

Zeliha's battle is not only against society but also against the identity of being a woman in Istanbul which restricts her from expressing herself as she wishes. Behaving contrary to what is expected of her, she distorts her social identity and creates her own distinct identity where she becomes the center of her universe. Interestingly, when Zeliha, who is nineteen years old, unmarried, and pregnant, goes to have her abortion, the receptionist asks her about her place of birth. The receptionist is shocked to hear from Zeliha about her birthplace. She finds it unpalatable to associate Zeliha's actions with her identity of being an Istanbulite. However, Zeliha considers herself a true Istanbulite, her sense of national identity and the Receptionist's perception of a true Istanbulite are different. This incident provides an alibi that identities are plural and subjective. Zeliha is rebelling not only against society but also against her inner self. She is filled with bitter memories of her past. "Aram, when is it going to end? This compulsory amnesia. This perpetual forgetfulness" (Shafak, 2007, p. 281). Like other characters in the text, her character is a victim of her past. It is a journey of self-afflicted amnesia that takes a toll on their lives.

Mustafa struggles between two worlds. At home, he is treated like a king by the Kazanci women as he is the only surviving male child of the family. However, he is antisocial in the outside world. In Arizona, Mustafa is constantly haunted by memories of home that question his existence. He wants to detach himself from these memories but fails to use this willful amnesia. "How he wished he could remove his memory, restart the program until all the files were deleted and gone" (Shafak, 2007, p. 45).

Like all Turks, Mustafa has no knowledge of the genocide. He is living an identity that is entangled with a past that he wants to erase. In Istanbul, neither his national, nor his personal past makes any sense to him. When Armanoush asks him about history and how the Turks treated the Armenians, he simply answers in the negative. Mustafa is constantly trying to bring about amnesia on purpose. When he finally visits Istanbul, he has no choice but to embrace and face his past. The memories leave him weak and depressed. "This amnesia of his was deliberate, though not calculated. On the one hand, there was somewhere inside his brain a gate that would not close no matter what; some memories always escaped. On the other hand, was the urge to dredge up what the mind had neatly expunged" (Shafak, 2007, p. 334).

Rose's character is worried about her post-marriage identity. Her recent past at her ex-husband's house forces her to prove to the world that she is indeed a good mother. "After being repeatedly accused of being a slipshod housewife and a terrible mother, Rose was eager to prove the contrary in any way she could" (Shafak, 2007, p. 36). Her desire to become a new woman makes her unhappy with her current status as a good mother envisioned by her husband's family. "Now that hell-of-a-divorce season was over, she was going to become a new woman" (Shafak, 2007, p. 37). A clash of identities occurs when the Tchakhmakhchian family learns that Rose is planning to marry a Turk. This is an attack on their Armenian identity. In order to preserve their lineage, Armanoush must be raised in a purely Armenian way sans any influence of the outsider let alone a Turk. Uncle Stambouljian is particularly upset about Rose's decision to marry a Turk.

What will the innocent lamb tell her friends when she grows up? My father is Barsam Tchakhmakhchian... Something Somethingian, and I am the grandchild of genocide survivors who lost their relatives at the hands of Turkish butchers in 1915, but I have been brainwashed to deny the genocide because I was raised by some Turk named Mustafa (Shafak, 2007, p. 53).

Armenian families consider the memory of the genocide an important marker of their personal and communal identity. A person who forgets Armenian history cannot be called a true Armenian in this sense. This illustrates the resentment of the Armenians against the Turks. The memory of the past is so important to the family that Aunt Surpun confronts Barsam who does not want to interfere in Rose's affairs.

In an ideal world, you could say, well, that's her life, none of her business. If you have no appreciation of history and ancestry, no memory and responsibility, and if you live solely in the present, you certainly can claim that. But the past lives within the present, and our ancestors breathe through our children and you know that (Shafak, 2007, p. 55).

Barsam, who does not seem too attached to his Armenian past, has easily adapted to American ways. He does not want to interfere in his ex-wife's affairs and understands Rose's inability to fit into the Armenian Catholic family because she had no multicultural background. However, members of the Tchakhmakhchian family always harbored grudges against Rose because she was from the outside community. Community identity and the memory of a painful past become so rigid that members fail to accept their daughter-in-law's background.

Asya Kazanci is often made to feel her unwanted presence at home. The first time she heard the word bastard from Grandma Gulsum, she did not understand what it meant. She realized what it meant when a schoolboy called her a bastard a year later. After that, the word became so embedded in her identity that she became convinced that she no longer belonged to Istanbul. Her suicide attempt at the age of seventeen symbolizes her desire not to fit into any normal

identity and her struggle to break free from the socially imposed undesirable identity. Unable to find out her father's identity, Asya feels subjugated. "We all pretend there is no such thing as a father" (Shafak, 2007, p. 146).

Not only Asya, but the place she frequents, Caf Kundera has no distinct identity of its own. The name of the place itself is mysterious as there are many stories about the name of the place. Members and visitors come here shedding their worldly individuality. "The Caf  was a fictive place with fictive people as regulars" (Shafak, 2007, p. 77). The space consisted of numerous frames of different countries that give people a kind of traveling experience jumping between different identities.

Armanoush Tchakhmakhchian's identity is largely shaped by her past. Born to an American mother and an Armenian father, she is constantly burdened to prove her identity. She spends five months of each year with her father's Armenian family and the remaining seven months with her mother in Arizona. She is a bookworm that does not go over well with the Tchakhmakhchian family. Armanoush knows that the family is afraid of her bibliophile nature because of the traumatic past they share.

Thus, the memory of the past shapes the current fears and insecurities of the family. The Tchakhmakhchian family could not even think of children excelling too much, or displaying extraordinary talents, for fear of shining differently from ordinary people, which could endanger their lives. Such fear makes Armanoush downplay her talents and constraints her from expressing herself openly. Not only her talents and capabilities, but Armanoush's past also meddles in her personal encounters. On a date with a boy named Matt Hassinger, she could think of nothing but talk about her past. "They talked a little, he about the career he wanted to build, she about the childhood she would like to destroy; he about his plans, she about the traces of the past; he about his expectations in life, she about family recollections" (Shafak, 2007, p. 108). Like Mustafa, she also wants to forget the memory of her past which becomes a hindrance in her present engagements. Albeit, she loves living in San Francisco, but still feels part of her identity missing. Presumably, it is this search for a lost identity that makes her land in Istanbul.

Like Caf Kundera, Armanoush regularly visits a cyberspace called Caf Constantinopolis; a group of descendants of families that once lived in Istanbul. The cafe offered a place where members could enter by giving up their identity. Armanoush visits the Tree of Anoush which consists of people who argue against a common enemy. The space paradoxically presented an opportunity where members without identity could project their past memory into their present. Armenian identity and the presentation of Turks as a threat to them is reinforced through debates, tests such as one's degree of Armenianness, etc. Armanoush's desire to find her identity unfolds during her visit to the tree. "Because of her fragmented childhood, she still had not been able to find a sense of continuity and identity. She had to make a journey to her past to be able to start living her own life" (Shafak, 2007, p. 116).

The memory of Ottoman violence travels from generation to generation and hatred against the perpetrators grows stronger. Such anxiety is represented by the reactions of the group members when Armanoush explains her decision to move to Istanbul. People in cyberspace believe that Turkey is not a normal place and any Armenian community visiting it will be arrested. Anti-Khuvurma, a member, claims that Armanoush will be a war reporter there. Armanoush's visit to Istanbul is a symbolic visit to her family as well as her past. The Tchakhmakhchian family, feels a sense of rootlessness in being constantly aware of its history. Their memory is a baggage that must be carried forward, but ironically, such a baggage will also save them from an identity crisis.

The history of Petite-Ma greatly coincides with the development of the modern Turkish Republic. Governments' efforts to build a modern nation based on Western values were accompanied by many changes at the societal level that indicated the fact that the Ottoman past and its deeds were to be erased from public memory. It was not welcome on the part of the national elite to discuss government affairs barring their veneration. Women's identities were also changing as this division took place among elite women. On the one hand, there were professionals who symbolized the new Turkish woman, on the other hand, wives remained. The former shed their sexuality and femininity and became asexual as they climbed the social ladder. "They had short haircuts, no makeup, no accessories. They moved in defeminized, desexualized bodies" (Shafak, 2007, p. 140). The latter group was more inclined towards their femininity. Importantly, the drastic change in society, especially among women, also points to the emergence of new identities that were institutionalized by the state breaking down past identities. Elite women considered their identity superior and modern compared to the wives who stuck to their original Turkish identity. However, the Turkish state itself suffers from a conundrum in its identity. It can neither be fully Western nor willing to bend to the East. Dipsomaniac Cartoonist blurts out, "Yeah, we should all line up along the Bosphorus Bridge and puff as hard as we can shove this city in the direction of the West. If that doesn't work, we'll try the other way, see if we can veer to the East" (Shafak, 2007, p. 145).

The same is visible when Armanoush arrives and is astounded that in the same household, Zeliha wears modern clothes whereas Aunt Banu is clad in a headscarf and a long dress. Armanoush's shock reflects the image of the Turkish state among Americans, particularly Armenian-Americans. It is the distance and lack of dialogue between the two communities that strengthens their prejudices against each other. It will be only through the presence of dialogue that differences will be resolved, and negative images about each other can be shed. When Armanoush reveals her Armenian-American identity to the family, she realizes that the family has no sense of a national past. They could not understand why her grandmother had to leave. Armanoush narrates the whole story and the miserable condition in which her grandma Shushan and her siblings were exiled. Aunt Cevriye, being a teacher of national history was not aware of this atrocity.

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, that she had heard the whole story as grim news from a distant country. The new state in Turkey had been established in 1923 and that was as far as the genesis of this regime could extend. Whatever might or might not have happened preceding this commencement date was the issue of another era--and another people (Shafak, 2007, p. 164).

Turks shared with Armenians a very distinct sense of memory and past. The history of the Ottoman past was clearly erased from Turkish memory, indicating state-induced amnesia. The family listened to Armanoush's story in silence, neither accepting nor contesting her claim. It seemed as if they did not consider themselves the perpetrators of the crime. The past where they were tyrants was a completely distant territory for the Turks. "For the Armenians, time was a cycle in which the past incarnated in the present and the present birthed the future. For the Turks, time was a multihyphenated line, where the past ended at some definite point and the present started anew from scratch, and there was nothing but a rupture in between" (Shafak, 2007, p. 165).

The state-induced collective institutional amnesia affected Turkish identity in several ways. Citizens lost their sense of the past and became apathetic. They constantly oscillated between East and West in search of belonging and identity. In addition, they became merciless in their treatment of other communities, especially the Armenians whose blood had been shed at their hands. There was nothing left in the past that they could claim as their own, not even the accusation of having committed violence.

There is often visible a big tension between the past and the present. More particularly, it is a tension between past meanings and processes, which we would like to reconstruct from historical remains and meaning which we would like to obtain from the material culture of today. Critical role of the past in the assertion and legitimation of group identities often leads to a problematic slippage between contemporary concepts of group identity and the mapping of past groups in the past (Jones, 1996, p. 63).

The meeting of Asya and Armanoush represents a clash of two strange identities. It comes as a shock to Armanoush that Asya has no interest in traditional Turkish music, which she considers an important part of her connection to her roots. However, Asya claims that the past becomes part of one's identity only when one has some knowledge of the past. Lack of knowledge about the past makes one wander in the world of identities.

Moreover, the two communities fear each other. The group members of Anoush Tree fear that Armanoush may be Turkified during her visit as she speaks positively of the city. Armanoush gradually comes to realize that her attempt of asking for recognition or apology from the Turks is futile as they do not even accept that the atrocity occurred. The Nonnationalist Scenarists of the Ultrationalist movement, for instance, believe that the incident never happened as anyone really among them had ever heard about it and people have been brainwashed.

Though the motive of hatred against the perpetrators of genocide is shared by the Armenians, there is no concerted political action proposed by any member to resolve the differences. The Armenian diaspora seems to be at stasis since it is caught up in the memory of the past and cannot look towards a new future (Chakraborty, 2019).

Since there are no official documents available on Ottoman history, no books have been written, and no research has been done on Ottoman history, it becomes clear that even the intellectual circles of the Turkish land has apparently no knowledge of this genocide. In this way, the government is quite successful in erasing the violent past. It is only through the memories of the victims of the genocide that the wounds have not yet healed. When aunt Banu hears of the horrific events of the genocide and the destruction it has brought to the Stamboulia family, she wonders about the usefulness of the past. "Was it better for human beings to discover more of their past?... Or was it simply better to know as little of the past as possible and even to forget what small amount was remembered" (Shafak, 2007, p. 243)? Hence, it becomes pertinent to ask whether the past and its remembrance are better or whether being amnesiac towards the reminiscences is healing and to what extent?

Aram who is the significant other of Aunt Zeliha is a complex character. He is an Armenian but lives in Istanbul. He does not share any hatred toward the community. Armanoush wonders why he did not go abroad and become a member of the Armenian diaspora, but believes that Istanbul is the place for him. "He suspecting she was too Americanized, she construing he was too Turkified. The mordant gap between the children of those who had managed to stay and the children of those who had to leave" (Shafak, 2007, p. 254).

Nevertheless, it is debatable whether a community with a bloodied past, and facing displacement will be able to survive without any collective identity. Shunning the Armenian identity in a foreign land, in this case, America would only mean that they would be left only with the American identity. If this identity were to be recognized, it would once again mean a complete obliteration of their original past and history. Such willful amnesia would be burdensome. In trying to get rid of the native identity in a foreign land, one may feel inferior and constantly aspire to be like someone else. The sense of identity is confused here, the diaspora can neither fully embrace the new identity nor reject the past identity. Barsam Tchakhmakhchian, for instance, felt the same pangs of pain. "Even years later, his mother would approach him now and then, explaining how as a little boy he had asked the Dutch American tenants upstairs what particular soap they used to wash themselves because he wanted to be just as white as them" (Shafak, 2007, p. 279).

It becomes clear that despite efforts to deliberately forget, the past certainly affects present relationships and identities. A gradual acceptance and recognition of the past on a personal level is better than repressing memories that

are painful. Retrieving the past identity is important in making-up the national identity. Communal identity and harmony can be achieved when communal groups recognize past tensions and try to forget mutual hatred.

If history cannot be changed, the attitudes that drove the Armenian Genocide can be abandoned in favour of a new approach that will respect Armenians and promote the well-being of all people in Turkey, including Armenians. This will carry over to Armenians around the world, fostering better relations with the Armenian Republic as well as the sizable Armenian diaspora. Turkey will improve politically and this will support the well-being of Armenians as well as Turks (Therault, 2009, p. 89).

VII. CONCLUSION

The Bastard of Istanbul is a novel where the characters are either constantly in denial or searching for their identity. Their memories shape their present states of existence. Past is either a hellish place for them or a territory yet to be explored. Zeliha, Mustafa, and Asya are under the illusion that they do not need the past and see their memories as a burden. However, when they delve into their past and come to terms with their memories, which until now were overshadowed by their willful amnesia, those same memories become the source of healing. The past can be repressed but not erased. Similarly, the Turkish state is also in denial about its past. It seeks a new identity to Westernize itself through the institutional erosion of historical memories of violence and genocide. Its purpose is to induce collective amnesia to completely erase memory from the minds of its citizens as well as from the national consciousness. Such an effort is made to create a strong sense of national identity as well as to steer itself clear of all the accusations of being the persecutor of the communities such as the Armenians. However, like the characters, collective amnesia leads the state nowhere. It succeeds in westernizing itself but fails to escape the need for a strong historical past. This leads to the feeling of rootlessness and pastlessness. In this way, the inhabitants of Istanbul become a diaspora in their homeland. Hence, collective amnesia proves destructive to the unity as well as to the identity of the nation.

Furthermore, the Armenian community clings strongly to its past as a marker of its identity. According to them, the past cannot be forgotten and must be strengthened from generation to generation to unify the communal identity. This is probably because the Turks did not accept their responsibility for committing the genocide. Thus, hatred of the Armenian community spreads and is further exacerbated by the geographical distance between the Armenians and the Turks. The other side of the coin is seen here. Clinging to one's past can also be a source of hatred and an inability to accept though hatred can be eradicated. Hate should not be such as to breathe in hatred. Being amnesiac to some memories can also be a way of avoiding bitterness and distress in the present. In this way, memory can be a burden as well as a source of healing. As in the case of Armanoush, for instance, her inability to have a past hollowed out her identity. She searches for her lost past, and in the process loses her bitterness towards the Turks. Here, memory becomes a healer.

Both memory and amnesia are important elements of identity, whether personal or national. The past is important to feeling a sense of belonging and understanding who one is. By looking deep into the past, one can avoid indifference from the roots, but the same past can also prove to be a treasure of bitter truths. Remembering is important to sustain the present identity but forgetting the past or deliberative amnesia is also crucial so that the past does not poison the present. The question of identity and memory will never be obsolete because identity and memory are in a constant process of creation and re-creation.

Moreover, all identities such as personal, social, cultural, or national are interconnected and interrelated and thus, shall be a source of harmony and peaceful co-existence. The question of Armenian and Turkish identity and the chasm between the two could be filled only through the acceptance on the part of the perpetrators and the forgetting on the part of the victims. The aim should always be to construct the identity in such a way that no other identity is undermined and harmony is at stake. Finally, this study provides a sense of understanding of the nexus between memory, identity, and amnesia. The important point is that not everything can be remembered and not everything can be forgotten. After all, a little memory and a little forgetting never hurt.

VIII. SIGNIFICANCE

The study is important in several ways. Its treatment of universal themes such as memory, identity and amnesia emphasizes the need to engage with art as a source of knowledge, compassion, and community. Memory and amnesia are an important element of identity. Memory can be a burden as well as a source of healing. A gradual acceptance and recognition of the past is good for communal identity and cohesion. Forgetting certain memories can also be a way to avoid bitterness and distress in present. The important point is that not everything can be remembered and not everything can be forgotten. After all, a little remembering and a little forgetting never hurt.

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Farhan Ahmad, is currently working as an Assistant Professor of English at the Department of English, College of Science and Humanities in Alkharj, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He is an active researcher and published articles in Scopus and Web of Science. His research interests include performance studies, modern European drama, cultural studies, gender studies and ESL/EFL pedagogy.