

Monuments as “Sites of Memory”: Remembering the Forgotten Ottoman Past of the Modern Turkish Republic through Elif Shafak’s *The Architect’s Apprentice*

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how monuments must not be seen as independent or self-referential depositories of historical knowledge; instead, they must be considered highly significant historical, cultural and socio-political artefacts “with important political implications” (Bozdogan, 2001, p. 12). Elif Shafak’s The Architect’s Apprentice (2015) establishes Ottoman monuments as the ‘sites of memory’ that have the potential to narrate alternative or buried histories. The present paper investigates how Shafak’s oeuvre helps revive the forgotten aspects of Ottoman Turkish heritage. It further delineates that these Ottoman monuments, as represented in the text, are nothing but the manifestations of the suppressed Ottoman heritage of the Republic of Turkey. The researcher attempts to undertake a close textual reading of the text by drawing insights from the conceptual framework of Pierre Nora’s idea of ‘sites of memory’ and the discourse concerning cultural memory and forgetting. The findings of this research reveal that Shafak’s oeuvre can be considered as a medium to understand how the imposition of ‘perpetual forgetfulness’ in the Modern Turkish Republic has defamiliarised the populace of the Republic from these Ottoman monuments, which are the material embodiments of the Ottoman memory and history. In this light, it becomes crucial to discuss these monuments as ‘sites of memory,’ for they have the potential to abridge the rupture between the forgotten Ottoman past and the Turkish present.

Keywords: Monuments; cultural memory; forgetting; heritage; monumentalization

INTRODUCTION

The cultural heritage of Turkey has been a quintessential aspect of its cultural and political identity. The Ottoman heritage and Ottoman legacy, which was deliberately forgotten under Kemalism, has been invoked in recent decades (with the emergence of neo-Ottomanism) to construct a *nostalgic narrative* that facilitates and strengthens the political elites’ foreign policies and other political patterns (Çolak, 2006; Yavuz, 1998). This selective (re)construction of the specific aspects of Ottoman historical culture, memory, and heritage was done with the intention to “resolve internal socio-cultural tensions,” reappropriate national history and heritage, and “determine Turkish foreign policies” (Çolak, 2006, p. 587; Haugballe & Hastrup, 2008, p. 137). It highlights the selective remembering of the Ottoman past in the Modern Turkish Republic, which has resulted in a conscious negation of the Ottoman heritage sites. This research identifies the significance of remembering the forgotten Ottoman Turkish heritage as ‘sites of memory’ in a country where numerous steps have been taken to deliberately suppress it. Moreover, the resuscitation of these neglected Ottoman monuments through Shafak’s *The Architect’s Apprentice*, a historical fiction, suggests how literature has the potential to bring to the surface the inert and repressed aspects of the past. In this context, Shafak’s oeuvre draws an intriguing narration surrounding the sixteenth

century Ottoman Empire's monuments and, in the process, locates them as the [heritage]sites of constant contestation. The novel brings the secrets and intrigue concerning these monuments to the surface and further highlights the role these monuments have played in the socio-political and cultural life of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. Shafak, through her fictionalised narrative, focuses on the politics behind the construction and institutionalisation of the monuments on the landscape of the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire. The text illustrates how Istanbul's monuments as sites of memory "encapsulate a powerful story for understanding the political history of Turkish society" (Sargin, 2004, p. 662). Moreover, the representation of these monuments in the novel as sites of Ottoman memory and history demonstrates Shafak's attempt to "reconstruct [Ottoman] past as a resistance" against the official distorted history and memory of the Modern Turkish Republic (Butt, 2018, p. 111). It delineates how these 'sites of memory' act as the living incarnations of the multifaceted Ottoman heritage of the Modern Turkish Republic. The present study aims to explore how the fictionalised representation of these forgotten 'spatiotemporal remainders'(monuments) of the Ottoman era in Shafak's *The Architect's Apprentice* establishes the novel as a site of Ottoman memory and history. It further attempts to examine the ways in which Shafak's oeuvre can be used as a medium to understand the imposition of cultural repression in the Modern Turkish Republic, which led to the dilapidation of these Ottoman monuments.

For Shafak, despite numerous attempts to suppress the Ottoman memory and its external manifestations in the form of monuments and other Ottoman heritage sites, the "imperial 'ghost' has haunted the state and society since the empire" (Yavuz, 2016, p. 440). Even though these sites have been reduced to merely being the "ruins of an Islamic Ottoman Empire," their presence on the landscape of the Modern Turkish Republic impels us to look for the inert histories and memories surrounding these monuments (Neyzi, 2002, p. 140). In this context, Shafak endeavours to create an imaginative rendering of the Ottoman monuments and the process of their monumentalization by amalgamating the factual and fictional narratives surrounding their construction. Through her text, she focuses on the role these monuments have played in the social and cultural milieu of the Ottoman era. The text embodies the politics behind the patronisation, construction, and 'sanctification' of these monuments constructed by the Chief Royal Architect, Mimar Sinan, in the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire. By relying on Ottoman history for its plot and characters, *The Architect's Apprentice*, a historical fiction, plays a significant role in modifying the national consciousness of the Republic of Turkey that has (de)Ottomanised its cultural heritage (Yıkık, 2022). The novel criticises the dictums of cultural repression in Turkey, which has been quintessential in pushing its Ottoman heritage to the peripheries. In this light, this article illustrates Shafak's attempts to immortalise the forgotten and erased memories of the Ottoman era and its architecture.

This research, thereby, analyses the significance of the monuments represented in Shafak's novel as 'sites of memory,' a concept developed by Pierre Nora that reflects on the relation between space, memory, and history. The research disentangles how these sites embody the "entangled histories of the empire and the nation-state in Turkey" (Onar, 2009). The tangible presence (in some cases, merely as ruins) of these 'sites of memory' on Turkey's landscape makes us realise how difficult it is to liberate oneself from the (ab)uses of the past, no matter how much we try to condemn it or disassociate from it, as a society, we cannot dissociate ourselves from the nightmares of history and memory. Furthermore, Shafak's fiction cannot be simply understood as a utopic and nostalgic attempt to resuscitate the Ottoman memory and heritage as the text, on different levels, strives to problematise the politics behind the construction of these monuments as

mnemonic institutions. The fictionalised narrative about the sixteenth-century monuments makes us *see* through the walls, jewels, marble, and grandiosity of these monuments. The present paper, therefore, aims to examine how Elif Shafak's *The Architect's Apprentice* establishes these Ottoman monuments as 'sites of memory' that have not only witnessed the political transformation of the Modern Turkish Republic but have also served as the repository of its multi-layered historic fabric and collective memory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are innumerable ways of externalising and materialising a nation's collective memory: monuments, texts, memorials, statues, and museums collectively create a country's cultural heritage. A. Assmann (2008, p. 100) writes in the contemporary world; collective memory is often built around the "normative and formative texts, places, persons, artifacts, and myths" that exhibit the different ways in which cultural memory manifests itself. Cultural [Collective] memory of a society is often "exteriorised, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms," depicting a clear nexus between memory and materiality (J. Assmann, 2008, p. 110). Moreover, the conventional 'function' of these heritage sites was "to establish codes of heroism, triumph, nobility, glorification" and "to instruct pedagogically on what should be remembered and to what purpose" (Sturken, 2008, p. 3). In this way, these material artefacts become the spaces where a society, community or nation's cultural memories manifest themselves. However, it is crucial to point out that cultural memory is not merely a ready-made reflection of the past but a "selective reconstruction" as we often tend to select, manipulate, misrepresent, and alter the past to acclimate our remembrances as per the requirement of the present (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 210). It reflects that these heritage sites manifest a process in which the past is subject to 'present reflections' and reconstructions (Young, 2016). Moreover, monuments as 'sites of memory' form an intrinsic part of a nation's cultural heritage as they are inextricably associated with the formation and institutionalisation of its cultural memory. Middleton defines monuments as metaphors for the "in-builtness of the past in the present" (Brockmeier, 2002; Lefebvre, 1991; Nora, 1989, p. 12). In the words of Viejo-Rose, "Cultural heritage in both its tangible and intangible manifestations, physical objects and structures as well as traditional knowledge, beliefs and forms of expression has become central to contemporary perceptions of collective memory" (Viejo-Rose, 2007, p. 102). Their material form and seeming permanence establish them as sites of civic importance and cultural heritage. Similarly, the Modern Turkish Republic's monuments represent its collective memory and how it has been subject to numerous distortions and contestations over the years. It emphasises that the materiality of memory is often subject to nationalistic dictums, socialistic structures, and political ideologies, which shape the meaning and function of these architectural embellishments.

The formation of the Modern Turkish Republic in 1923 resulted in a historical rupture; the newly formed Turkish nation-state envisioned a historical and cultural break away from the Ottoman heritage (Akcem, 2004; Gocek, 2011). The Ottoman past and legacy of the nation were negated and side-lined to "evolve and mature as a more secular state" (Çolak, 2006; Yavuz, 2016, p. 445). The ideologues of Kemalism envisaged a new 'Turkish' identity based on the "refusal to acknowledge the cultural heritage of the Ottoman Empire" (Eissenstat, 2003; Neyzi, 2002, p. 138). In this light, it can be maintained that the monumental past of the Ottoman Empire was either side-lined owing to the need for establishing a rupture between the Ottoman past and the Turkish present or conveniently appropriated to reclaim it as per the requirements of the present. Elena Furlanetto

enunciates that Shafak's *The Architect's Apprentice*, in many ways, contests "Kemalist narratives that construct Turkish culture as more inclined to the secular West rather than the Islamic East" (Furlanetto, 2016, p. 198). It enumerates that Shafak, through her text, criticises the rise of Kemalist nationalism as an ideology in the early twentieth century, which resulted in the distortion of historical facts, imposition of cultural amnesia, eradication of ethnic minorities, and, most importantly, the dilapidation of Ottoman heritage sites. As it can be adduced from the review of the existing works, the corpus of literature in context to the intricate interaction between memory and forgetting vis-à-vis the representation of these monuments as 'sites of memory' in the fictional narrative is limited. The present study, therefore, has the potential significance of developing a new lens to analyse these monuments using Shafak's historical fiction. Under such circumstances, the study of the representation of the sixteenth-century monumental past of the Modern Turkish Republic in the novel will establish Shafak's oeuvre as an alternative site where the Ottoman memory was preserved, updated, and reconstructed to maintain a historical continuity in context to the Turkish past and history.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A recent rendition of the relationship between memory and space has been Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire*. He defines *lieux de mémoire* as places "where memory crystallises and secretes itself," and these are the sites "where a residual sense of continuity remains" (Nora, 1989, p. 7). The premise of Nora's concept is primarily based on the proposition that since we can no longer spontaneously experience memory, we seek to consecrate realms of memory: "There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory" (Nora, 1989, p. 7). It illustrates that these 'sites of memory' are consecrated because of the absence of the real environments of memory. These realms propose a specific relationship between past and present and sometimes offer a sense of sustained and sustaining communal identification. In other words, these sites can be understood as the institutionalised forms of the collective memories of the past, and their major purpose is periodically stimulating the past. When it comes to these sites of memory, the most preeminent thing is not *who* is remembering the past but *how* it is being remembered under what circumstances and material configurations. These sites orient people spatially and temporally; they have their own histories, accrete their own pasts, draw a nexus between the past and present and determine who *belongs* to the nation and on what terms. It demonstrates that "memory attaches itself to sites," and all these mnemonic sites—burial places, museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, monuments, cathedrals, palaces, and battlefields—embody concrete traces of the past (Nora, 1989, p. 20). The current study will draw on Pierre Nora's idea of 'sites of memory' in order to understand the significance of these forgotten Ottoman monuments vis-à-vis the Modern Turkish Republic.

Moreover, these 'sites of memory' or *lieux de mémoire* exhibit the relation between memory and history and how both history and memory intersect at these sites to infuse a narrative of history, memory, identity, and, most notably, continuity. These sites become the place where the collective identity of the citizens is often manifested and formulated. These are the "places where societies engage in public activity through which they express a shared knowledge of the past, on which a group's sense of unity and individuality is based" (Winter, 2008, p. 61). Nation-states often relate to their heritage sites by transforming certain sites into memory sites, which will be used to legitimise, preserve, and propagate a nation's institutionalised narratives. During times

of transition, the unified identity of a nation or an empire is created by focusing selectively on the specific events, places, and people of history. The status quo of the ruling elites is maintained by selectively legitimising the past through specific sites of importance. However, their presence in the landscape of a nation-state hints at the possibility of neglected and ignored events of the past, which might have failed to achieve the status of national importance. In this context, Turkey's sites of memory "must be considered as pure representations of Turkey's political tensions in order both to 'forget' and to 'remember' distinct ideological geneses and their spatial faculties" (Sargin, 2004, p. 660). Eugenia Allier Montaño, while analysing Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, suggests that these sites are the "significant units," for these are the sites where the historical memory of a nation gets *selectively* incarnated (Montaño, 2008, p. 8). Interestingly, while elaborating on his concept of *lieux de mémoire*, Nora has demonstrated that these 'sites of memory' are "open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting" (Nora, 1989, p. 8). Nora's statement highlights how it is quintessential to understand these 'sites of memory' vis-à-vis the notion of forgetting. The fact that Nora's idea of 'sites of memory' lies at the intersection of history, memory and forgetting this critical theory can help achieve the research objectives of this study by applying the discourse concerning the interplay of memory and forgetting in Shafak's novel. In this light, *The Architect's Apprentice* reimagines and reconstructs the Ottoman *milieux de mémoire* (the real environments of memory) as spaces where the "memory is the real part of everyday experience" (Nora & Kritzman, 1998, p. xii). The text embodies the need to reconstruct and revive these 'sites of memory' because the authentic historical experiences of the times have ostensibly disappeared. In this way, it can be suggested that a critical reading of Shafak's oeuvre using the conceptual framework of memory, history and forgetting will help restore the "memorial consciousness" of the Ottoman times that have failed to survive in the Modern Turkish Republic.

METHODOLOGY

This article uses Pierre Nora's idea of 'sites of memory' as its fundamental theory to undertake a close textual analysis of Shafak's *The Architect's Apprentice*. The dialectical relation between memory and forgetting and the way it is embedded in Nora's theory of 'sites of memory' allows the researcher to fill the gaps and lacunae in the Modern Turkish Republic's cultural heritage. Nora's perspectives on tangible aspects of the past provide a suitable way forward to achieve the objectives of the study. Additionally, by using the theoretical insights from the discourse on cultural memory studies, specifically the politics of memory in the contemporary Modern Turkish Republic, this study attempts to contextualise Shafak's oeuvre in the larger historic-cultural context of the Republic of Turkey. The researcher shall also incorporate the non-fictional works and interviews given by Elif Shafak to understand the author's views on politics, gender, ethnicity, and religion in Turkey. Moreover, this study considers the perspectives of various critics and theoreticians like Jan Assmann, Sibel Bozdoğan, Ann Rigney, Jay Winters, K. M. Murphy, and many others who have made significant contributions to cultural memory studies. Apart from this, the views of literary critics like Elena Furlanetto and Rita Sakr have been considered to enrich the knowledge concerning Shafak's fictional writings. Moreover, the analysis of Shafak's oeuvre using the various tropes and techniques of fiction has been quintessential in framing and building the arguments of the proposed study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

THE ARCHITECT'S APPRENTICE AS AN ALTERNATIVE SITE OF OTTOMAN MEMORY AND HERITAGE

Elif Shafak is a renowned novelist, essayist, and political activist of Turkish origin who “escaped into a new continent” when she was accused of insulting ‘Turkishness’ by the officials of the Modern Turkish Republic (Shafak, 2015, p. 362). Ever since she left the Republic of Turkey, she established herself as a nomad whose only homeland is storyland, a space that transcends the shackles of fixities and rigidities. Shafak’s *The Architect’s Apprentice* encompasses a time frame of more than a century (roughly covering the reigns of Sultan Suleiman, Sultan Selim, and Murad III) and transcends geographical and cultural boundaries by incorporating Rome, India, Istanbul, and other geographical locations. Through an imagined storyline, the novel incorporates the factual and fictional stories associated with the sixteenth-century royal court, palaces, monuments and other such places. Shafak writes, “In the interests of narrative pace, I decided to jettison a strict chronological order” in order to create my “own timeframe, with actual historical events absorbed into the new timeline” (Shafak, 2015, p. 454). Further, Shafak’s oeuvre is set in the backdrop of the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire and revolves around the character of Mimar Sinan, the Chief Royal Architect, his four apprentices, and the white elephant who have been quintessential in constructing the Ottoman monuments in the novel. It is narrated from the point of view of Jahan, one of the four apprentices working under the Mimar Sinan, a character based on the Chief Royal Architect of the same name, the man behind manufacturing the magnificent edifices built under the reign of Suleiman, the Magnificent (1494-1566) and his immediate successors.

In the novel, Jahan, Davud, Nikola, and Yusuf are the four apprentices who work under Mimar Sinan and help him construct Suleimaniye Mosque, Mihrimah Sultan Mosque, Shehzade Mosque, and other buildings around which Shafak builds her narrative. Jahan, in the text, says, “There were six of us: the master, the apprentices, and the white elephant. We built everything together. Mosques, bridges, madrasas, caravanserais, alms houses, and aqueducts” (Shafak, 2015, p. 2). We see the nuances surrounding the grandeur of these sixteenth-century monuments through the eyes of Jahan, a mahout in Sultan’s animal menagerie before becoming one of the most trusted and efficient apprentices under Master Sinan. Shafak attempts to memorialise the forgotten Ottoman history while simultaneously challenging the notions of nostalgia and grandeur often associated with these material artefacts by bringing forth the underlying narratives of betrayals, intrigues, plots, slavery, conspiracies, conquests, wars, and murders. Jay Prosser says the novel “intervenes in contemporary Ottoman nostalgia, both by treating architecture as memorialising transcultural exchange, but also by reconstructing memories of transcultural violence founding the architecture and the Ottoman Empire” (Prosser, 2019, p. 514). For instance, in the novel, Jahan is seen stealthily entering the royal palace courtyard at night as he hears some noises and screams from that direction. He saw some deaf-mutes carrying “what seemed to be sacks” (Shafak, 2015, p. 9). After uncovering the burlap sacks, he realises they were “not sacks, not sacks at all. They were the dead bodies. Of Children...all boys...the oldest was an adolescent, the youngest still a suckling infant” (Shafak, 2015, p. 9). As the narrative unfolds, we realise that these dead bodies were of Sultan Murad’s brothers, the newly proclaimed Ottoman Sultan. Jahan further describes how, on the same night, Murad III, the newly proclaimed padishah and the brother and killer of the five princes, gave Sinan and his apprentices the task of “constructing inside the gardens of Hagia Sophia a monument that was large and impressive enough to befit the five princes, but neither so large nor so impressive as to remind anyone of how they had been strangled, on his orders, on the night he ascended the throne” (Shafak, 2015, p. 21). The incident highlights “the

opulence and barbarism of the palace and its inhabitants” and “the intrigue and rivalry within the palace” (Agha-Jaffar, 2017). It further illustrates how the façade of grandiosity created around these magnificent architectural embellishments is shattered when we accept that the construction of these Ottoman monuments is often tarnished with notions of fratricide and political conspiracies. In this context, Shafak’s quest toward “facing the experienced past, rather than a constructed nostalgia” means facing the narratives of violence intertwined within Ottoman monuments (Neyzi, 2002, p. 142). It delineates how the novel reproduces the culturally diverse and untold accounts and stories surrounding sixteenth-century monuments and other architectural places.

These heritage sites have been instrumental in maintaining the Ottoman Sultans’ hegemony and creating an Ottoman identity away from the influence of the Byzantine Empire. The novel suggests how the main objective of these Sultans was to historicise the present and de-historicise the recent past in order to appropriate both the prospective and retrospective aspects of cultural memory. Jan Assmann, in his well-known work *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, illustrates:

Rulers usurp not only the past but also the future because they want to be remembered and to commemorate their own deeds by monuments, ensuring that their glory will be narrated, sung, immortalized or, at the very least, recorded in archives. Power legitimizes itself retrospectively and immortalizes itself prospectively.

(Assmann, 2011, p. 54)

In the same way, the Ottoman rulers wanted to immortalise their power, and to achieve so, these Sultans resorted to the erection of monuments. Shafak, in the text, propounds how Suleiman the Magnificent, an Ottoman Sultan and grandfather of Murad III, ordered the construction of an imperial mosque (Suleimaniye) that would surpass every edifice ever constructed on the Ottoman land. In context to the conceptualisation of the Suleimaniye mosque, Jahan, in the text, says, “the mosque that the Sultan commissioned for himself would glorify his name for eternity” (Shafak, 2015, p. 142). It implies that these material artefacts were sometimes constructed in order to cater to the indulgent, extravagant, and epicurean impulse of the powerful royals. These are the sites where the Ottoman rulers’ sovereignty, dominance, and supremacy were openly incarnated and manifested.

Shafak’s oeuvre demonstrates how the Ottoman rulers commissioned the construction and deconstruction of numerous monuments during their rules, intending to provide a “cultural sphere for constructing a new collective ethos” away from Byzantine rule (Sargin, 2004, p. 662). In the text, Jahan suggests how seventeen pillars of The Hippodrome of Constantinople, a silent witness of Byzantine history and memory, were abolished in order to facilitate the construction of the Suleimaniye Mosque, an Ottoman monument. Jahan recounts, “Seventeen pillars were removed from the Hippodrome, disturbing the angry ghosts of Empress Theodora” (Shafak, 2015, p. 143). It is ironic that the new civilisations often build their “sites of memory” by destroying and deconstructing the sites of the older civilisations. The Hippodrome, the social centre of the Byzantine city of Constantinople, was no more significant under the rule of the Ottoman Sovereigns who had taken over the city in 1453. The text depicts how the Hippodrome, which was once the centre of the Byzantine city’s socio-cultural life, was pushed to the margins to the extent that its raw material (collected after the destruction of its parts) was used to build the newly commissioned Ottoman Monuments and the one such monument as illustrated by Shafak was the Suleimaniye mosque. Furthermore, Shafak exposes the myriad stories and narratives about the delays, plots, and terrible accidents that haunted the construction of the Suleimaniye mosque. For

instance, the text describes numerous accidents plotted by Mihrimah, Sultan Suleiman's daughter, to sabotage the construction of the mosque that would immortalise her father. It is quite later in the text that we realise it was Mihrimah's way of seeking "a little revenge" by slowing down the construction of the Suleimaniye Mosque that "was going to immortalise Sultan Suleiman and show his grandeur to posterity" (Shafak, 2015, p. 433). The novel portrays how Mihrimah hated Sultan Suleiman for killing her brothers and even murdering the Grand Vizier whom Mihrimah loved so much. In this way, it can be argued that Shafak attempts to show the darkness hidden behind the magnificence of these sites of grandeur through her oeuvre.

The architects are the "builders of memories," as they create spaces that transcend the cycles of life and death and serve as the connecting nodes where the memories of the living and future generations intersect (Shafak, 2015, p. 447). Literature, like architecture, transcends temporal constraints by surviving the ravages of time and allows the next generations to experience the inert and unacknowledged aspects of their past. In this context, Shafak's novel blends the aspects of historical fiction and urban politics as a way to speak to the populace of the Republic of Turkey. It acts as the transmitter of Ottoman memory and heritage for contemporary Turks as it brings the Modern Turkish Republic's repressed and side-lined Ottoman and Islamic heritage into the forefront, which otherwise has been consciously side-lined and negated under the influence of Kemalism. The text is rooted in Ottoman personages, architecture, art, landscapes, and local traditions and can be deemed one of the crucial "tools in preserving and transmitting the heritage of the Ottoman Empire" (Yavuz, 2016, p. 448). It demonstrates how fiction has the potential to recover and revive "knowledge by reincorporating some of its formerly rejected unofficial or arcane traditions" (Lachmann, 2008, p. 307). Orhan Pamuk (2007, p. 13), a Nobel Prize-winning author of Turkish origin, suggested that fiction is a "way of coming to terms with all these problems of pain, the imposed past, the invented past." Similarly, *The Architect's Apprentice* reawakens forgotten Ottoman memories and histories that have long been dormant in the political sphere of the Republic of Turkey. Even though the rise of neo-Ottomanism as an ideology in recent decades has expedited the (re)discovery, (re)appropriation, and (re)construction of the Ottoman heritage, scholars have time and again criticised the elites' attempt to politicise history to fulfil their specific political agendas. In Yilmaz Colak's words, the invocation of the Ottoman legacy in recent decades has been a "deliberate attempt to reconstruct the present," and to achieve so, the "past is continuously modified and redescribed" (Çolak, 2006, p. 587). Under such circumstances, the representation of the Ottoman Empire's architectural embellishments, like Suleimaniye Mosque, Shehzade Mosque, Mihrimah Sultan Mosque, and many mausoleums in the text constitute an alternative space where the monuments' original function and purpose are kept alive. In other words, the novel acts as a symbolic weapon and a repository for the Ottoman Empire's inert histories and repressed memories. Thus, it can be inferred that in Shafak's text, the remembered and forgotten aspects of Turkey's Ottoman history are articulated with such a balance that the text itself can be deemed a literary monument.

(RE)IMAGINING HERITAGE: MONUMENTS AS EMBODIMENTS OF HISTORY AND MEMORY

The 'sites of memory,' as represented in *The Architect's Apprentice*, serve as connecting nodes not just for the people who lived and perished in the sixteenth-century empire but also for those living in the present Modern Turkish Republic. In other words, these sites become the contact zones where the memories of the Ottoman past and the Turkish present intersect. M. Christine Boyer (1994, p. 31) says, "It is in these physical artefacts and traces that our memories lie[s] buried, for the past is carried forward to the present through these sites." It can be inferred that these

monuments, as sites of memory, act as mnemonic institutions with symbolic meaning and fulfil a function in society, be it simply evoking a memory periodically. These sites often require memory work as all sites are not transformed into sites of national heritage. In some cases, only those sites that embody a nation's national memory are projected as sites of national importance, and the ones that no longer fit into the socio-cultural and political frameworks of the present times are left to fade out of the mainstream narratives (Nora, 1989). Shafak, in the text, while discussing the ruinous state of the old Palace of the Porphyrogenitus (also known as the Palace of the Sovereign) under the reign of Ottoman Sultans, says, "the imperial residence that once hosted the Byzantium nobility and those born to the purple was now home to the animals of the [Ottoman] Sultan" (Shafak, 2015, p. 38). The Sultan's animals, when not in demand, used to be kept in the imperial residence of the Byzantine rulers. It is further narrated that along with the Byzantine palace, "some of the creatures were kept in an ancient church near the Hagia Sophia" (Shafak, 2015, p. 38). The statement suggests how specific events, places, and people of history are remembered, memorialised, and materialised in a particular age, and the rest are thrown into the abyss of forgetfulness. In this way, the dissonant heritage sites of the Byzantine culture that no longer fit the narrative frameworks of Ottoman society were pushed toward the peripheries and the newly formed Ottoman 'sites of memory' that conveyed the dominant ideologies of the empire were encouraged to stay at the centre.

To develop this argument further, Hagia Sophia, the great church erected by Justinian, was renowned before the conquest of Constantinople as a religious symbol of Christianity, but after its fall and the establishment of Istanbul as the new capital, the Faith (Sultan Mehmet II) "surveyed the church and ordered that it be immediately converted to Islamic worship under the name of Aya Sofya Camii Kabir, the Great Mosque of Hagia Sophia" (Freely, 1998, p. 200). It demonstrates the fate of so many Byzantine churches that were converted to the services of Islam after the conversion of Byzantine Constantinople into Ottoman Istanbul. This historical event exhibits how, with a change in the regime, the narratives and the practices concerning a material artefact change, as in the case of Hagia Sophia. Umut Azak, while talking about the multi-layered significance of Hagia Sophia, discusses how the former imperial church was converted into a mosque, which later "lost its religious function and was opened as a museum in 1934 by government decision" (Michael, 2022, p. 4). It was in the year 2020 that it was transformed from a museum to a mosque owing to the protests and campaigns steered by the conservative nationalist movement. And since then, it has been instrumentalised as a symbol of "anti-western Islamic nationalism" (Michael, 2022, p. 4). According to Shafak, the imposition of Islamic heritage on the erstwhile Byzantine capital illustrates how different layers of historical time and narratives are superimposed on these sites of memory. It signifies how the physical structure and the narratives surrounding these sites evolve with time and adapt to different needs and purposes of the present. These monuments as 'sites of memory' are reappropriated and reimagined over time to evoke the required dictums and ideologies of the present. Under such circumstances, some sites that threaten the legitimacy and hegemony of the present are often pushed toward the abyss of forgetfulness.

FORGETTING AND MONUMENTALIZATION

Collectives "construct monuments, museums, libraries, archives and organise commemorative ceremonies to prevent memory from fading away" or, in Pierre Nora's words, to "block the work of forgetting" (Gustafsson, 2020, p. 1052; Nora, 1989, p. 19). In some totalitarian nation-states, a culture of amnesia or a sense of repressive erasure is usually imposed in order to bring a historical break, which is what happened in the case of Modern Turkey. Turkey's political elites tried to

negate any possible associations with the tangible aspects of the Ottoman past. In some cases, the monuments present on the landscape of the Modern Turkish Republic were “not materially destroyed”; they “fell out of the frames of attention, valuation, and use” (A. Assmann, 2008, p. 98). Ann Rigney emphasises that “the metaphor of ‘memory site’ can become misleading if interpreted to mean that collective remembrance becomes permanently tied down to particular figures, icons, or monuments” (Rigney, 2008, p. 345). It establishes that the ‘sites of memory’ are not stable entities as their meaning and cultural function in a particular era under a particular regime are always subject to the concurrent ideologies of the times. It is important to highlight here that all the sites do not receive equal care from the ruling elites as they maintain silence surrounding the sites, which do not cater to the larger narratives of the nation. The silence surrounding such sites suggests that all sites are not equally important or memorable. In this way, the imposition of forgetfulness in the form of silence disrupts the usual habits of identification and further defamiliarises the aesthetic experience derived from these public monuments.

Further, the act of remembrance needs constant memory work as the termination of the social acts of remembrance leads to nothing but passive forgetfulness. It foregrounds the importance of the act of commemoration in the memorialisation of the monuments. The regular commemoration of these sites helps resist the risk of forgetting, which is a ‘disturbing threat’ lurking behind these monuments’ walls. Shafak emphasises how Ottoman subjects were ordered to commemorate the Ottoman monuments from time to time to legitimise the Sultan’s power and glory. The commemorative ceremonies were organised to keep the discourse concerning these monuments’ embodied history and memory relevant. These sites of memory thereby allow us to talk about the grand discourses on history and are a way for society to remember and commemorate these spaces in a public space collectively. It simply exhibits how important it is to orchestrate the acts of remembrance around these monuments; otherwise, there exists a fear of being forgotten or pushed into the abyss of forgetfulness.

In context to the monuments of the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire, the important point of contestation is: where do these monuments as sites of memory belong? Is it the times in which they were conceptualised, erected, and commemorated, or have they transcended the gap of almost 400 years and become part of modern-day Turkey? The populace of modern Turkey has become incapable of registering these Ottoman buildings, mosques, palaces, and monuments as meaningful since they do not fit any available narrative frameworks. It illustrates how these sites of memory are sometimes reduced to merely being the figures of forgetting, which have no purpose as per the current requirements and needs. Further, it delineates that when a particular version of the past no longer fits with present understanding or fails to persist, it loses relevance with time and is forced to drift away into the world of oblivion. Jahan, a character in the text, says:

People must be walking now across the courtyards of the mosques, not *knowing* [my italics], not *seeing* [my italics]. They would rather assume that the buildings around them had been there since the times of Noah. They were not. We raised them: Muslims and Christians, craftsmen and galley slaves, humans and animals, day upon day. But Istanbul is a city of easy forgettings. Things are written in water over there, except the works of my master [Mimar Sinan], which are written in stone.

(Shafak, 2015, p. 2)

It invokes Istanbul as a city where the act of forgetting has always been easier than the social practice of remembering. The people of Istanbul have forgotten the original stories lurking behind these architectural embellishments built using marble, jewels, emeralds, and stone. In the text, while describing a scene of a building site, Jahan says, “There were two kinds of men on a building site: the ones who never looked you in the eye and the ones who, at times, did. The former

were the galley slaves. Shackles on their ankles, whipped into submission” (Shafak, 2015, p. 134). This description of the labourers working on the building sites shatters the façade of the imperial culture of the Ottoman Empire, where “these Christian *slaves* [my italics] erected Muslim shrines from dawn to dusk” by merely surviving on “dried biscuits” and “thin soup” (Shafak, 2015, p. 134). The scene highlights the oppressive ways in which those who built these palaces were treated. Shafak criticises how these slaves, who were mostly the victims of forceful conversions, were forced to work on these sites. The novel eternalises the forgotten architects, builders, and labourers who had constructed these sites of memory together. It implies how Shafak’s fiction is not just about the stories and histories of the Sultans and chief apprentices but also about the stories and invisible histories of the gypsies, slaves, eunuchs, labourers, soldiers, ‘half-tribes,’ and animals, which have been forcefully buried under the dust. Further, Davud, one of the four apprentices, while questioning the utility of these magnificent mosques, which are usually built to immortalise the Sultans, their sons, wives, daughters, and their viziers, posits:

But who will pray in these mosques? Will they be unwell or hungry? Didn’t matter. Every year, work, work. Where do the resources come from? Another war. Another slaughter...Every colossal mosque we built was raised thanks to the revenues from another conquest. On their way to the battleground, the army would raze villages to the ground...without bloodshed elsewhere, there would be no money, and without money, there would be no building in the capital.

(Shafak, 2015, p. 413)

Davud criticises the Ottoman rulers who built magnificent monuments with the money extracted from the villages that were devastated during the wars, sieges, and conquests. These monuments were built on the corpses of those who died in wars. In this way, it is established that against the shams of the imperial culture that these Ottoman domes embody lie the real conflicts of the times, be they religious, scientific, cultural, or political, which have been forcefully buried under the dust. Shafak’s novel brings forth the narratives of bloodshed, conquests, loot, and beheadings ingrained in these sites of memory. Such sites are forcefully side-lined from coming to the surface and, over time, are reduced into sites of oblivion by the pioneers of history and historiography (Eissenstat, 2003). It brings us back to Nora’s proposition, where he has demonstrated that sites of memory are “open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting,” which reflects how important it is to understand the sites of memory vis-à-vis the idea of forgetting (Nora, 1989, p. 8). If the sites that embody the memory of a nation are considered important, then those that ‘crystallise forgetfulness’ of a specific era in history should be given equal importance. In the Turkish context, the ordinary citizens of the nation fail to recognise that these monuments embody a space where the Ottoman past and Ottoman memory have been decimated: these are the sites where the official history has been reconstructed to fit the dominant discourses prevalent in Modern Turkey. For this reason, it becomes important to discuss these Ottoman sites of memory through fiction, poetry, art, and music, as bringing such sites to the mainstream discourse might force the modern Turks and the next generations to build a critical understanding of their past.

CONCLUSION

Monuments can be deemed the apparatuses of collective memorialisation, for they play a significant role in establishing a nexus between memory, forgetfulness, and identity and are instrumental in forming a nation's cultural heritage. Shafak's oeuvre illustrates that (re)imagining the historical and fictional stories concerning these architectural 'sites of memory' enables a critical reading of the politics behind their construction and reconstruction. It reflects how crucial it is to bring the memories of those who have been silenced by history into the present. Moreover, Shafak's *The Architect's Apprentice* as an Ottoman 'site of memory' helps uncover the mantle of silence imposed on the narratives of violence, bloodshed, murders, and betrayal underlying the construction of these memory sites. In a society that has consciously imposed a rupture between the past and the present, these sites of memory function as traces of the real environments of memory. These traces or remnants of the past, if commemorated and monumentalised properly, act as a means to perpetuate the lost traditions and maintain the collective identities of a society. The paper tries to establish how the 'sites of memory' have the capacity to act as social agents and are, in fact, capable of shaping or altering the public space and its concurrent ideologies. Ironically, even though the monuments are "often backwards-facing, serving as reminders of the past, they can also play a critical role in opening dialogue" and "addressing long-standing erasures and silences," which convey the future-facing nature of the monuments (Murphy, 2021, p. 1149). In this context, Shafak resurrects and reconstructs the fictionalised as well as historical stories associated with these Ottoman monuments. Shafak incorporates the material, cultural, and theoretical dimensions of these monuments to focus on the significance of monumentalization in the context of the Modern Turkish Republic. *The Architect's Apprentice* attempts to stimulate the latent historical knowledge concerning the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire by reimagining and recreating the monumental past of the Republic. Thereby, by attempting to reconcile the Ottoman and Islamic past with the Western and secular present, Shafak's oeuvre invites us to reflect on the "need to preserve a sense of history" in a country like Turkey, where rigorous attempts have been made to erase it (Bozdogan, 2001, p. 303). In addition, this research's attempt to understand the repressed monumental past of the Modern Turkish Republic using a fictional narrative can invigorate future researchers to develop new perspectives on the representation of these 'sites of memory' in literature, for it has the agency to influence the cultural practices and political functions surrounding these monuments. Moreover, there is scope to analyse the position of women in the Ottoman era using Shafak's oeuvre as the text embodies the cultural ethos of the Ottoman Empire.

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