

Depiction of culture through food in *The Bastard of Istanbul* by

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Abstract

Shafak studies Turkish cultural values through the interactions between characters and food in *The Bastard of Istanbul*. Compared to other cultural sources, her explanation of how they use food in daily life as a communication tool transmits meanings that are more fruitful and durable. Shafak uses food and cooking as a symbolic language to discuss identity and cultural behaviours related to Turkish culture. Through culinary connections based on 1915 events, she has shown the turmoil inside the family. Once they eventually reunite at Kazanci Konak in Istanbul, the Armenians and Kazancis who were scattered by the genocide in Turkey in 1915 find that their cultural cuisine significantly mitigates their differences. This article aims to bring out the portrayal of Turkish culture through food narrative.

Key Words: Culture, food, familial bonding, women, preservation, differences.

The tensions in *The Bastard of Istanbul* centre on the Kazanci family in Istanbul and the Armenian families dispersed around Tucson, Arizona, and San Francisco. Through their meal choices, the chronicle depicts the embrace and denial of cultural norms by both families. The ladies that fill the story are both youthful and contemporary and old and traditional; they spend much of their time engaged in food-related activities. These women's efforts to preserve their identities as women and as distinctly Turkish provide as a window into the four eras of Armenians and Kazancis. It is difficult to deny the enduring allure of classic tastes and scents, even though the familial drama centres on the grave moral transgression of "Zeliha's rape." The careful observation and transmission of famous cultural culinary deliveries from older to younger generations is documented through these food references, which serve as continual aids to memory. With the help of Grandmas Shushan and Gulsum, Shafak communicates this culinary transition.

The fusion of various Turkish cultural and religious groups is represented by the mingling of tastes and flavours in traditional Turkish cuisines. Shafak illustrates this point with the way the Armenians and Kazancis prepare ashure. Although the meanings of ashure differ for Muslims and Christians, it is a classic dessert that holds great significance for both families.

They respect Ashure as a sign of their connection to and affinity with their culture. In order to emphasize the significance of her characters' traditional food and culinary culture, Shafak purposefully used the elements of ashure as the titles for her chapters. Armenians and Kazancis cook and share ashure with loved ones without regard to social status or religious convictions. Ashure is devoid of any meat and is made up of a blend of cereals, fruits, nuts, and dried fruits. This speaks to their custom of averting bloodshed and acts of violence in the community and extending love and peace to everyone, particularly during the holy month of Muharrem.

The special ashure sharing represents shared cultural values and is crucial in strengthening the bonds between these families. At both happy and sorrowful situations, Kazancis and Armenians faithfully adhere to this traditional culinary custom of sharing ashure. The preparation of ashure for funerals is one of the many often observed customs. For around three or four days, the deceased's family is prohibited from preparing any food at home. Ashure, in the Balka Sufi tradition, is an act of charity that upholds the notion that food has the ability to heal the sick and troubled. Special prayers are spoken before ashure preparation for protection, well-being, healing, prosperity, and spiritual nourishing. It also stands for the value of family bonds and reunion customs. Notwithstanding their disagreements, Shafak portrays ashure as a beloved meal that is joyfully enjoyed by every member of both households. Turkish generations have had this belief in ashure for ages. In the guise of a story, the family elders obediently teach their younger members this cultural lesson.

The love of cuisine shared by Armenians and Kazancis is a sign of Turkish joy and satisfaction. A common practice in both families is to have an abundance of food spread out on tables for consumption from dawn till dusk. Every Kazanci and Armenian woman is a skilled chef. They are always busy preparing traditional and healthful foods like karniyarik, pilaki, kofte, ashure, and manti. Their custom is to begin each day with a hearty and nourishing kahvalti (breakfast).

For kahvalti, a circular bread topped with sesame seeds called simit is specifically made and served with cheese, olives, a variety of vegetables, kaymak, and sucuk. Furthermore, "bastirma, borek, pogaca, and mememen" are guaranteed to be included in a kahvalti. Banu's ritual of calling and displaying kahvalti precisely at six in the morning is how it is described in Kazanci konak. A fascinating custom from Turkish culture is to show your affection for your youngest family member by leaving two sliced apples and two peeled oranges for them at night. Asya and Armanoush serve to illustrate this cultural feature. Armanoush is frequently served peeled oranges in America prior to bedtime. Shafak is an example of the Turks' love and respect for their traditional food values through these culinary customs.

Shafak depicts the Turkish custom of desire for a partner who must be well-equipped in making traditional meals through the culinary prowess of the women in both households. The women in both households are constantly busy cooking a variety of meals at home. With Zeliha's exception, the sisters are adept in preparing traditional meals among the Kazancis. Their cooking habits and dietary choices can reveal aspects of their personalities. The fourth chapter, "Roasted Hazelnuts," demonstrates how the elder Turkish age is becoming more tolerant of traditional foods and cooking techniques. In keeping with the culinary custom of the festivities, a cake has been carefully cooked for Asyan. "We Kazancis adore red meat, Auntie Seliha says, while Auntie Feride lovingly cooks the traditional meat meal "manti." The more greasy and redder, the better! (TBOI 74). This family feels like they belong because of

their connection to their own cuisines. It also implies that they take eating seriously and that preparing meals at home is essential. While Zeliha and Rose are harshly criticised for their lacklustre cooking, women who are unable to prepare traditional foods are subjected to severe criticism.

Rose's culinary connection with her past and current in-laws suggests her struggles with Kazancis and Armenians. She despises her in-laws just as much as they do, and their shared loathing is evident in the foods they like to eat. In an effort to keep Armenian food, she even goes so far as to ridicule their food in front of her friends and neighbors. She frequently complains about Armenian food, namely their favorite "cooked calf's feet and stuffed intestines," to Mrs. Grinnell, the neighbor next door. She says with a sickening sneer, "They stuff it with rice, spice it up with garlic and herbs, and wolf it down." (100 TBOI) Rose's animosity towards her in-laws is portrayed via her hatred for their preference of meals.

In addition to highlighting social bondage, the customary eating habits and food items listed in *The Bastard of Istanbul* serve as an example of Turkish society's standard of living. Shafak uses food analogies as codes to show a character's taste and identify their position in their social circle, both within and outside of their house. Food allusions are used in *The Bastard of Istanbul* to highlight the outdoor adventures of various characters, including Zeliha's quest for peace, Asya's flight from her aunties, Rose's disputes with her in-laws, Auntie Feride's sentimental bond with her former husband, Auntie Banu's divination, Grand-ma Shushan's sentimentality, Grand-ma Gulsum's forgetfulness, Mustafa's flight from reality, and, lastly, Armanoush's battle to resolve the Janissary paradox.

Turkish cultural legacy is shown by the hand-carved "walnut desk" and the "pomegranate brooch" that Hovhannes Stambouljian purchases from the Jewish antiquarian in Istanbul's Grand Bazar. The cores of pomegranates and walnuts are shielded by their hard coverings. The natural allegories of the walnut and the pomegranate allude to Istanbul's and Istanbulites' diligent preservation of their cultural history, which are still practiced by Armenian and Kazanci families and signify their loyalty to shared cultural origins. The fact that this cultural legacy endures despite the devastation caused by the civil war and slaughter suggests that these families have been successful in maintaining their cultural beliefs. The "Pomegranate Brooch" is held by Auntie Banu the "Walnut Sufi," who embodies the authentic Turkish spirit by designating an acceptable successor.

Shafak's use of culinary allusions in *The Bastard of Istanbul* helps readers comprehend the affection and respect that Kazanci and Armenian people have for their native foods. These two families are used to illustrate the ways in which various Turkish religious groupings are bound together by a common cultural cuisine. Their same culinary tradition facilitates their ability to comprehend and honour one another's sentiments and emotions. Thus the author has proved that culture can be expressed through food, as food is where the culture starts.

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