Can the other Speak? A representation of Otherness in Elif Shafak's Bastard of Istanbul

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هل يستطيع الآخر الكلام؟ تمثل الآخر في إليف شفق في نذل اسطنبول

*أمانيOSH

المستخلص

كونها امرأة من العالم الثالث، جسدت غاياتري سبيفاك فكرتها عن المهمشين أو الآخرين أو المتطرفين بطريقة جذبت انتباه كل من الموهوبين والمعارضين. تسعى إلى تحقيق الذات مثل تمكين المرأة في مجتمعها وإنشاء هوية للغرباء والأقليات العرقية، بالإضافة إلى التحرر من القيود الأبوية في معظم المجتمعات. أصبحت الهوية أكثر تعقيدًا وتعقيدًا بسبب الحداثة في هذه الحقبة المتاخرة. تحدث هذه الظاهرة لأن التعقيد وانعدام الأمن في الهوية يُنظر إليها عمومًا على أنها تختلف التغيرات الهائلة في الحالة الاجتماعية لحياة الإنسان. ونتيجة لذلك، قد يُنظر إلى التنوع السريع للهوية على أنه يهدد استقرار الهوية نفسها، لا سيما في عصر التكنولوجيا المعاصرة والهجرة والتحجر والعولمة التي يعيش فيها الناس اليوم. الهوية وعلاقتها بالاستدعاء الاجتماعي في الثقافة غير المجتمعة هي الموضوع الرئيسي لكتاب "لقيط اسطنبول" الذي يصور كيف نسيت تركيا الذاكرة المجتمعية للإبادة الجماعية للأرمن، والتي يُنظر إليها على أنها خلفية لماضي تركيا العنيف، من خلال إظهار الأشخاص ذوي الهويات المتناقضة كأتراك وأرمن آمركيين يواصلون الإنكار من جهة، ومن جهة أخرى يبحثون عن انتقامهم. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو توضيح كيفية التعامل مع النازحين قسراً باعتبارهم غرباء حسب بلدهم وكلاً من حسب البلدان التي يعيشون فيها، وتصوير ضياعهم بين جذورهم وأصولهم والعولمة الثانية التي يحملونها.

كلمات مفتاحية: الآخر، غاياتري سبيفاك، هل يستطيع التابع أن يتكلم؟ أليف شفق، نذل اسطنبول، آسيا، أمانوش

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Can the other Speak? A representation of Otherness in Elif Shafak's *Bastard of Istanbul*

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Abstract

Being a third world woman, Gayatri Spivak has embodied her idea about the marginalized, the others, or the outliers, in a way that caught the attention of both supporters and opponents. She seeks self-realization such as empowering women in their society and establishing identity for outsiders and ethnic minorities, in addition to liberation from patriarchal restrictions in most societies. Identity has gotten more complex and convoluted because of modernism in this late epoch. This phenomenon occurs because the complexity and insecurity of identity are commonly considered to be permeated by the huge changes in human life's social condition. As a result, the quick flux of identity might be seen as endangering the stability of identity itself, especially in the age of contemporary technology, migration, urbanization, and globalization in which people today live. Identity and its relationship to social recall in heterogeneous culture is the central topic of *The Bastard of Istanbul* which depicts how Turkey has forgotten the societal memory of the Armenian Genocide, which is seen as a backdrop to Turkey's violent past, by showing people with contradictory identities as Turks and Armenian Americans who continue to deny on one hand, and on the other, they are looking for their affiliation. The goal of this study is to illustrate how to treat the forcibly displaced as they are outsiders according to their country and as they are others according to the countries they inhabit, depicting their lost between their roots and origins and the second identity they hold.

**Keywords:** Otherness, Gayatri Spivak, Can the Subaltern Speak? , Elif Shafak, *Bastard of Istanbul*, Asya, Amanooush.
1. Introduction

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a literary critic from India who describes herself as a "practical Marxist-feminist-deconstructionist." She is considered one of the most significant postcolonial thinkers and is widely recognized for her article Can the Subaltern Speak. She was born in India, where she first witnessed persecution of people, particularly women. In her writing, she mixes strong denunciations of the harm done to women, especially the non-Europeans, and the impoverished by the privileged West with a continuous questioning of the grounds on which radical criticism takes its stand. Her original essay, Can the Subaltern Speak has revolutionized colonialism analysis with an eloquent and uncompromising argument that affirmed Marxism's contemporary relevance while employing deconstructionist methods to investigate international labor division and capitalism's wording of the world. Spivak's article focuses on the historical and ideological causes that prevent individuals who live on the margins from being heard. The person or a group of people whom have been excluded from their community is called subaltern. They have no voice, and they are lost in the world due to colonialism.

It's a thorough examination of what it means to be a political subject, to have access to the state, and to bear the weight of difference in a capitalist system that promises equality but consistently denies it. (Landy 203)

Spivak as an American critical theorist and speaking for humanities against ideological colonialism, was seeking for a theoretical framework in her own culture, family, and nation. She found the subaltern technique to be useful; she expanded the field of subaltern studies to include women, focusing much of her work on Sati widow sacrifice and the critique of the colonial attitude of white men coming to save brown women. Her work is significant in that one can no longer use the term "subaltern" without thinking of women. She emphasizes the role of women in people's struggles, such as Algerian women's engagement in the independence fight, as well as the difficulties of articulation without a platform, which is why she concludes that the subaltern cannot speak. She is attempting to build a system that does not normalize the subaltern. (patricia 122)

Spivak emphasizes her resistance to colonialism in Deconstructing Historiography, seeing it as a transition from semi-feudalism to capitalist servitude. The British viewed Indians as second-class citizens when they conquered India. Cultures and faiths were irrelevant, and the most useful shift, according to her, is from religious to militant. While some lives were spared as a result of Britain's efforts, Hindu rituals were prohibited, according to her article. While this intervention may have saved some lives and provided the women some autonomy, it also helped
to consolidate British control in India and to emphasize the claimed distinction between British civilization and Indian barbarianism. Women and the subaltern may have had more freedom under British control, but is it really freedom when assimilation is required to have a voice? The most important result of this revision or shift in viewpoint is that the insurgent or subaltern is now the agent of change. (Ania 14)

Postcolonial feminism arose as a reaction to feminism that was primarily concerned with the experiences of women in Western countries and former colonies. In the postcolonial world, postcolonial feminism tries to account for how racism and the long-term political, economic, and cultural repercussions of colonialism impact non-white, non-Western women. Postcolonial feminism arose as a reaction to feminism that was primarily concerned with the experiences of women in Western countries and former colonies. In the postcolonial world, postcolonial feminism tries to account for how racism and the long-term political, economic, and cultural repercussions of colonialism impact non-white, non-Western women. (Spivak 66)

According to postcolonial feminism, by adopting the term "woman" as a universal category, women are only defined by their gender and not by their socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Postcolonial feminists also strive to mainstream Western feminism the concepts of indigenous and other Third World feminist organizations. Spivak's classic 1988 postcolonial studies essay argue that one of the main problems for society's poorest and most marginalized members (the subalterns) is that they lack a platform to express their concerns and a voice to influence policy debates or demand a fairer share of the goods. Her work is replete with references to agency: the individual's capacity to make their own judgments While Spivak's main goal is to explore how subalterns (her name for indigenous) are dispossessed in colonial cultures, hence this study focuses on showing how western researchers unwittingly replicate hegemonic systems in their work. (Spivak 476)

The technique of portraying and characterizing colonial peoples as inferior to their European counterparts is known as othering. Gayatri Spivak created the phrase to describe the colonizers' discursive and other methods for creating and maintaining negative and inferior attitudes and assumptions about the colonized natives. In her article Can the Subaltern Speak, she demonstrates how early political history altered the voice of subaltern groups such as women, tribal people, the Third World, and the Orient. The idea of Subaltern is central to her theory. (Subaltern is a military word that implies "lower rank). In this article, she recognizes herself as a Third-World lady, a little uncomfortable special guest, and an American professor, as a Bengali middle-class exile and, on occasion, as a success story in the American academic star system. In the framing of the subject as a Third World subject, she has been taken for
granted. She sheds light on the irony of subalterns being aware of their own rights by making active statements against unjust dominance and injustice in her article. (Nelson, Grossberg 1)

Spivak condemns the injustices perpetrated on women from the Third World and non-Europeans. She wishes to offer subalterns, who are unable to speak and are oppressed, a voice. She tries to re-establish the presence of nonwestern female women who have been marginalized by their male counterparts. Moreover, she critiques the Eurocentric viewpoints of the West believing that information is never free, and that it is constantly manipulated by commercial interests and power in the West. Knowledge, according to her, is just like any other commodity or product sent from the West to the Third World. Western academics have traditionally positioned themselves and their understanding of Eastern civilizations as objective. The knowledge of the third world is always produced in the interests of the west's political and economic interests. Spivak teams up with Edward Said to attack how western writers have portrayed the third world (subaltern) in academic discourse, for example, (Caliban) in Shakespeare’s The Tempest, Arabs in (Albert Camus’) The Outsider and so on. (Maggio 419)

*Can the Subaltern Speak?* is a seminal work, as Spivak claims, that has inadvertently become dominant in recent years. She denies the idea of a precolonial past that can be recovered, according to the concept of Worlding, which is connected to her. Because there is no such thing as a "clean" precolonial past to restore, nostalgia for lost origins, roots, and original culture is a faulty endeavor. All can be done now is to comprehend the "worlding" of the Third World. ‘Worlding’ is the process of persuading the local populace to embrace the European interpretation of reality as a means of comprehending their social situation. (Spivak 59)

It is of high importance to note that Spivak's success stems from her ability to gender the subaltern, bringing together gender, class, and race. It cannot divide them in the way that Western feminism does. It cannot subordinate one to the other and she is worried that the term (subaltern) has become popular and has degraded into a buzz word, where it is possible to casually say, "We are subalterns" without a thorough grasp of the environment in which it arose. She argues, however, that while this is true, it is nevertheless a vehicle through which one may study the dispossessed, with a special focus on women. (Ibid 60)

It is undeniable that Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak” has become widely known in literature and gained a big echo in several literary works, including Elif Shafak *The Bastard of Istanbul*, in which tackles her country's terrible past in a bright and colorful tale set in both Turkey and the United States. *The Bastard of Istanbul* is a daring, compelling novel full of strong, memorable female characters that will affirm Shafak as a rising star of world literature. Elif and Spivak also shared the idea of Otherness. Elif Shafak was called the voice that defends the voice of the other, and I knew most of her works, specifically the novel The Bastard of Istanbul,
with this idea of dispersal of identity and nostalgia for the past and origin as a result of the marginalization of the minority as others, and she succeeded in making her heroes women to reinforce the idea of marginalized women. Therefore, Shafak writes about the marginalized, enslaved and confined group in a narrow framework, in an attempt to prove that they exist and have a voice, regardless of their religion, ethnic or cultural affiliation, and the nationality attributed to them. She succeeded in shedding light on this non-individual problem through her function of expressing their voice through her literary works. (Ivanova 67)

2. Discussion

The common principle between Elif Shafak's novel and Gayatri Spivak's theory is to address the marginalized group in society, people who are unable to prove themselves and do not have a voice to be heard, especially women. Both focused on feminism after colonialism and shed light on women, who are overpowered and governed by social traditions, and the result of political conflicts and the view taken on them, and the pressures they are subjected to and not allowing them to exercise their rights or even discover and express their identities.

Elif Shafak is one of the most notable and outspoken Turkey novelists, author, essayist and a translator. In 1971 in France, Shafak was born to a father who was a philosopher and diplomat mother. Later on, her parents separated then, she moved to Ankara, Turkey, where she was raised without her father or any male guardian. Growing up in a male-dominated atmosphere influenced her decision to become a feminist. She has immersed herself in diverse cultures since she was a child, having lived in Asia, Turkey, and Western Europe. This is why, in her books, she openly discusses themes like as women's rights, free speech, cultural and religious diversity, and regional politics. (Winter 37)

Elif affirmed in her novel that:

"We are stuck. We are stuck between the East and the West. Between the past and the future. On the one hand there are the secular modernists, so proud of the regime they constructed, you cannot breathe a critical word. They've got the army and half of the state on their side. On the other hand there are the conventional traditionalist, so infatuated with the Ottoman past, you cannot breathe a critical word. They've got the general public and the remaining half of the state on their side.” (Shafak 81)

Referring to the problem of tearing the Turkish society, between the East and West, and the dispersion of civilization between the two parts, echoes Spivak’s theory about how marginalized are lost and torn between two cultures due to colonialism.
Shafak is the only child of her mother. She was raised by her, then she became a diplomat around the time that Elif was about ten or eleven years old. Armenian militants were assassinating Turkish officials in Madrid, Spain, while they were there. Her initial impression of Armenian identity is a bad one. Terrorism cannot be justified or condoned in any manner. However, as a writer and intellectual, her efforts led her to a point where she had to confront the sad events of 1915 and reassess the entire history as she continued to read, ponder, and gather tales from actual people. She never saw her father as a child, and he has been missing her entire life. There are parallels in that regard. At first, she intended to call the book *Baba and the Bastard*, with baba meaning father in Turkish language. In addition, as a kid, she was surrounded by many women like grandmothers, aunts, and neighbors. They were ordinary and occasionally uneducated, but they were undoubtedly strong willed and lovely souls. All of these things are represented in her book. She had the opportunity to speak with many Armenian women while writing this work. They welcomed her into their homes and allowed her to share with them their experiences and stories, and Elif was grateful for the cooperation they offered her. (Furtanetto 98)

The Armenian problem is the central theme of her *Bastard of Istanbul*, which is typically forbidden in Turkish writing. It has been considered forbidden in other places. Senator Bob Dole, hardly a conventional leftist, was rejected in the United States over a planned National Day of Remembrance for the Armenian Genocide. Shafak herself was prosecuted for insulting Turkishness in this novel. The issue is raised from both sides. In other words the Armenian point of view is heard, the one generally accepted in the West, and the Turkish views, which range from the view that there were bad deeds on both sides. (Akcan 227)

The political and historical hostility between the Turks and the Armenians goes back to the Ottoman era after the First World War, when the Turks carried out brutal practices of killing and exterminating the Armenians and forcibly deporting them outside the Turkish borders, around 1915-1917. The genocide that was carried out against them was later denied by the Turkish government, which increased the resentment of the Armenians in Armenia and around the world. (Ibid 228)

*The Bastard of Istanbul* is about the relationship between Turks and Armenians, as well as the intricate dance of victimizer and victim. Two young ladies, one Turkish and the other Armenian, one residing in Turkey and the other in the United States, are intimately linked by history and family, two distinct engines of remembering that have more in
common than meets the eye describes the process of two families and two pasts coming closer together, with the sins of the family standing in for the collective crimes of a country. Shafak, even in the pages of a fictitious tale, is unable of bringing peace to such unsettled circumstances. All she can and does is throw a light on the past and keep it blazing so that everyone Turkish, Armenian, and elsewhere is forced to look. In her novel, Elif focused on the issue of identity proof, ethnic discrimination and cultural genocide of the persecuted minorities by the Turkish government and society according to societal customs and traditions or political conflicts. (Bloxham 115)

The novel's plot revolves around two major characters along with a slew of other characters, each of whom plays an essential part. The novel's first main character is Asya Kazanci, a jerk who despises learning about her history since she believes that the past just leaves grudges on one's heart. She lives with a slew of female relatives, including four aunts, a grandmother, and a great grandmother, and she has never seen a male in the house. The males in the Kazanci family could not survive past their forties, and it was thought that there was some sort of curse in the Kazanci family that prevented them from living past their forties. However, Mustafa, the youngest and last living male in the Kazanci family, was transported to America in order to get free of the curse. In addition, only Asya's mother and her clairvoyant elder auntie, Banu, know who Asya's father is. (Tunca 29)

Asya thinks that:

"The past is nothing but a shackle we need to get rid of. Such an excruciating burden. If only I could have no past you know, if only I could be a nobody, start from point zero and just remain there forever. As light as a feather" (Shafak 148)

Here she addresses her mother, Zeliha, for her repeated refusal to reveal her father's identity, trying to convince herself that searching for the past is futile, and that she wishes that she had no past; she would have stayed in the beginning because the past had exhausted her. In addition, Asya refers to her mother as auntie for no apparent reason. Furthermore, she eventually grows tired of her female family and refers to it as a nuthouse, and she typically goes to a coffee shop where she has some acquaintances. Mustafa is the lone male member of the Kazanci family, which is cursed to slay its male representatives before their time. Mustafa, being the sole male in the family, is adored and treasured by his female relatives, who lavish him with their entire attention. Nonetheless, he feels alienated from the "dark and intricate world" that his family's women share, and this condition causes him to develop into a "narcissistic and insecure" adult. When Mustafa reaches puberty, he expresses his unexpressed, uncomprehend sexual
desire by raping his sister Zeliha and fathering Asya. He resolves to flee his family and his terrible history by relocating to the United States a few years later. (Fisher 36)

Asya is dependent, suffering from loss of identity and marginalization. Although she is of Turkish origin and lives in her mother country, the nature of the situation imposed on her as an illegitimate girl in a conservative Muslim country made her marginalized without an identity. She did not have a voice heard even by members of her family, especially her grandmother, who was constantly rejecting her presence, and this is what made her searches for the identity of her father, thinking that finding him helps her to break the society’s and her family's view of her. Her father's absence and hidden identity have confused her whole life, and she is, according to Spivak, one of the marginalized people whom society speaks of in the name of the agency in speeches without trying to hear from them. She is of the marginalized people who seek freedom and respect in all respects. This is what made her object and protest against the conservative society because it does not respect her.

Armanoush is the prominent character of the second story. She was not more fortunate than Asya, she also suffers the blurred identity in a country that was not her mother country and is scattered between three cultures, the American, who goes back to her mother, Rose and the country that she lived in, and the Armenian, who goes back to her real father. While the third goes to her stepfather Mustafa a Turkish person who married her mother and raised her like his daughter. She visits her father from time to time and sits with her grandmother Shushan, who is always evokes her spirit toward the history. Armanoush always felt nostalgic for the cultural heritage that she was supposed to belong to during her visits to her grandmother. She used to find herself in the details that her grandmother kept from hand-sewing pieces, her traditional clothes, choosing her colors, the simple collectibles that she was able to keep from Turkey. All these things made the grandmother's house an incentive to search about more and an attempt from her to know about the origin, especially since her grandmother was constantly telling her about the past. Inside her, she felt a sense of belonging to her Armenian roots; however, there was a bitter and memorable past between the Turkish and Armenians. She is curious about what happened during the 1915 war, which ended in the genocide of Armenians. (Koroglu 72).

She sates her misleading feelings and loneliness being torn between three cultures and two countries:

"Being the only daughter of an Armenian father, he himself a child of survivors and of a mother from Elizabethtown, Kentucky, I do know..."
how it feel to be torn between opposite sides, unable to fully belong anywhere, constantly fluctuating between two states of existence”.

(Shafak 116)

However, it is worth noting that each chapter title refers to a different food: dried apricots, dried figs, white rice, rose water, and so on. A thorough reading of this novel demonstrates that this is a character-based novel rather than a story-based one since we will discover many more characters that are eventually related to one another; furthermore, everybody has a unique tale to share. The plot is extremely captivating, and the end is completely unexpected; the language is also suitable and adequate. Elif Shafak has worked hard to make an everlasting impact on history as well. (Kanditoti 210)

Shafak's writings are characterized by cultural pluralism and integration between societies and citizenship, in addition to presenting the difference between nationalities, races and religions. Its focus is primarily on the dominant post-colonial identity. In this novel, Shafak excels in portraying small worlds within large worlds, isolated from the outside world, in order to preserve what remains of identity and origin. The two cafes mentioned in the novel represent these small worlds. The novelist portrayed these places as a space of like-minded people, with a single identity and culture, trying to preserve the essence and striving for survival. (Castro, Mainer 120)

"Kundera Café" is a small place located in the heart of Istanbul on a narrow winding street on the European side. Its walls are almost invisible because of the hanging frames between traditional pictures, landscapes and unknown drawings. This place is frequented by Turkish citizens with a cultural temperament or who are trying to search for historical heritage and Kemalism within the borders of their empire, which they believe will immortalize the idea of the Ottoman Empire in light of the change and development taking place outside the borders of their cafe. The pioneers of this place are trying to separate from the outside world and their new cultural reality by being isolated and isolated within the memories of this cafe. (Buchenau 162)

"The Modernists tell us to move forward, but we have no faith in their idea of progress. The Traditionalists tell us to move backward, but we do not want to go return to their ideal order either. Sandwiched between the two sides, we march two steps forward and one step backward, just like the Ottoman army band did! We don't even play an instrument! Where can we possibly escape to? We are not even minority. I wish we were an ethnic minority or an indigenous people under the protection of the UN Charter. Then we could have at least, some basic rights. But
nihilists, the pessimists, and the anarchists are not regarded as minority, although we are an extinct species. Our number is lessening every day. How long can we survive?” (Shafak 82)

One of the café’s customers is trying to explain to Asia with these lines about the dispersion, distinction and separation they are exposed to, because Istanbul is located in a sensitive area between two sides, each of them trying to show and prove his culture, as they are treated as a marginalized minority on this side, even if they are Turks. This place receives different clients, some of whom yearn to separate from their identity and culture, and some who try to hold on to what remains of their heritage. The distinction was not limited to minorities, ethnicities and nationalities only, but rather the distinction between the Asian and European side, between the Christian and the Muslim, between the traditionalists and the contemporary, it is between the Turks themselves.

For "Constantinopolis Café", it is a virtual electronic café that gathers its customers in a chat room created by a group of minorities such as Armenian Americans, Sephardic Americans and Greek Americans, who have one common joint, as they are descendants of families that used to live in Istanbul. Everything in this café indicates nostalgia, the past and adherence to roots, prompting its customers to try to revive a virtual city to include their remains. Although the café is virtual and its customers do not actually meet on the ground, it is characterized by stability, as all of its customers are resentful of the former Turkish colonialists responsible for their dispersal between the states of America, but their ties are strong and their common goals are to prove their existence in light of the marginalization they have been subjected to. (Ibid 164)

Asia was invited by Armanush to "Constantinopolis Café", in an attempt to recognize the right of the Armenians and apologize to them as a contemporary Turk, unrelated to the events of the past, all aimed at reaching a point of reconciliation and peace. This Asia question was not asked by a Turk to any Armenian before. It carries a depth and feeling, in which there is recognition of excellence in persecution, expulsion and denial. Asia’s question was not to heal the wounds of the Armenians. Even if she was sincere in her feelings, she does not represent a whole country. It is just an individual apology that will not change the reality.

“Tell me what can I do as an ordinary Turk in this day and age to ease your pain?” (Shafak 261)

Through the representation of "Café Kundera" and "Café Constantinopolis", Elif Shafak investigates the ongoing search for Turkish identity, portrayed and synthesized by the author as a clash of opposites that needs to be overcome: East and West, Turkish majority and former imperial minorities, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, cultural homogenization and cultural
pluralism. The walls of these cafés isolate groups of individuals who share rigid conceptions of identity, sheltering them from interaction with the quickly evolving outside world.

Both main characters are regular customers in these cafes, according to Spivak's theory sticking to their identity and origins through a virtual electronic platform that lacks a physical dimension, and there is always an argument about the principles of this formation and an attempt to know what the other party sees about it. Spivak wanted to tell us through her theory that the subordinate and marginalized are not heard, no one can sense what and how they feel. She suggests if the subaltern can speak and if they have been given a voice, they might accomplish what they were striving for. For her, colonialism has devastating disadvantages as it blurs the identity, disperses the community, encourages divisions, obliterates civilization, and threatens the existence of minorities.

3. Conclusion

The marginalization of the individual occurs due to several factors, the first of which is colonialism, as the largest segment of marginalization is women, ethnic minorities, and bullying of people of brown skin. Colonialism can be external, as Spivak explained in her theory of subordination, but there is a more dangerous type of internal marginalization among the members of society themselves. Elif Shafak, in her novel The Bastard of Istanbul, sheds light on the marginalization of the Armenians by the Turks, their deportation and forcible extermination, as she wrote a historical reality that puts her at risk because she belongs to the mother country Turkey. However, she wanted to be fair to describe the misery of the Armenians and write frankly about the Turkish government, and this is due to the schism that she is divided between the European countries and her mother country, Turkey. Gayatri Spivak succeeded in exploring the struggles of the marginalized people who have neither a voice nor a right, and that not everyone who spoke about them in the speeches knows anything about their reality. Eliff also managed through this novel to depict the harmful consequences of being inferior and other. She, through the story of Asya and Armanush, portrayed how the identity of individuals can be blurred and deconstructed by being other and marginalized.

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