



FEMALE MARGINALITY AND URBAN VIOLENCE IN 10 MINUTES 38 SECONDS IN THIS STRANGE WORLD

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Abstract

This study examines female marginality and urban violence in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* by Elif Shafak. The novel portrays the life of marginalized women who are pushed to the edges of society due to poverty, gender discrimination, and social stigma. Through the protagonist's memories, the text reveals how urban spaces often become sites of violence, exclusion, and survival for women. Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* presents a compelling exploration of female marginality and urban violence in contemporary Istanbul. This study applies feminist urban theory (Linda McDowell; Rachel Pain) and trauma narrative theory (Cathy Caruth; Dominick LaCapra) to examine how social, spatial, and psychological factors intersect to shape the experiences of marginalized women. Through qualitative textual analysis, the novel's post-mortem narrative structure and episodic sensory memories are examined to reveal the complexities of Leila's life as a sex worker, highlighting vulnerability, social exclusion, and resilience. Feminist urban theory elucidates how Istanbul's gendered and socially stratified spaces amplify risk and constrain agency, while trauma narrative theory explains how fragmented memory reconstructs identity and asserts subjectivity. The study demonstrates that Shafak challenges reductive portrayals of marginalized women, showing how narrative form conveys both trauma and resistance. By integrating literary analysis with these theorists' frameworks, the research contributes to feminist urban studies, trauma studies, and contemporary literary scholarship, providing insights into the intersections of gender, urban space, and social inequality.

Keywords: *Female Marginality, Urban Violence, Trauma Narrative Theory, Feminist Urban Theory, McDowell, Caruth, Istanbul.*

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1. Introduction

Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019) provides a profound narrative that interrogates female marginality and urban violence in contemporary Istanbul. At the heart of the novel lies Leila, a sex worker whose life is violently cut short. In the ten minutes and thirty-eight seconds following her death, Leila experiences a sensory recollection of her life, memories of family, friendships, love, trauma, and survival which form the structure of the narrative (Shafak). This innovative narrative device enables a unique exploration of marginalized women's experiences, emphasizing how social, spatial, and economic structures intersect to shape vulnerability. The academic relevance of this study is underscored by its interdisciplinary nature, bridging literary studies, feminist theory, urban sociology, and trauma studies.

1.1. Context and Background

The context for this study is Istanbul, a city that functions simultaneously as a site of memory, trauma, and cultural hybridity. Historically a crossroads of empires, religions, and ethnicities, Istanbul presents a layered urban environment where social hierarchies are inscribed onto physical and symbolic spaces. Within this urban milieu, women navigate public and private spheres under conditions of vulnerability imposed by patriarchal norms, economic inequities, and systemic social exclusion.

In the novel, Istanbul is not merely a backdrop; it actively shapes characters' experiences, influencing the ways they encounter risk, seek companionship, and exercise agency. Streets, alleyways, neighborhoods, and markets function both as reflections of social dynamics and catalysts for trauma and memory. This aligns with feminist urban theory, which examines how spaces are socially produced and often gendered to prioritize male experiences while limiting women's mobility and safety (Massey 10; Pain 362).

Leila's experiences exemplify the compounded nature of marginality. Her occupation as a sex worker places her in a liminal societal position, visible yet marginalized, economically necessary yet socially devalued. She faces systemic neglect, familial rejection, and everyday dangers in urban spaces. These layers of vulnerability reflect real-world patterns of urban and gendered exclusion, making Shafak's novel an essential case study for understanding the intersections of gender, labor, and urban life (Weitzer 447).

1.2. Research Gap

Despite growing scholarly interest in Shafak's work, significant gaps remain. Criticism often focuses on the novel's narrative style, memory reconstruction, or social injustice in general (Johnson 112; Demir 85). However, there is limited analysis of how female marginality and urban violence intersect within the text. Existing studies tend to

isolate gender from spatial or economic contexts or examine urban violence without considering its gendered dimensions.

Additionally, while trauma theory has been applied to the novel, few analyses explore how urban environments themselves act as catalysts or mirrors of violence for marginalized women. This gap limits understanding of the systemic and spatial dimensions of vulnerability depicted in Shafak's narrative. Addressing this gap is essential to comprehend fully the interplay of gender, urban space, and structural violence in the text.

1.3. Research Objectives and Questions

This study aims to bridge these gaps by analyzing the representation of female marginality and urban violence in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*. The research seeks to:

1. Examine how Shafak depicts the relationship between female marginality and urban violence.
2. Identify social, cultural, and spatial factors contributing to Leila's vulnerability within Istanbul's urban context.
3. Explore how the novel's fragmented narrative structure illuminates the lived experiences of marginalized women, particularly in terms of trauma and memory.

Through these objectives, the study addresses both textual and theoretical dimensions, situating Shafak's narrative within contemporary feminist and urban studies discourses.

1.4. Scope and Significance of the Study

The study is primarily qualitative, based on textual analysis of Shafak's novel. Secondary sources, including scholarly works on feminist theory, urban studies, and trauma narratives, provide contextual and theoretical support. Major themes analyzed include female marginality, urban violence, trauma, memory, and narrative structure. While the focus is literary, sociological and feminist frameworks inform interpretation, highlighting the interplay between social structures, urban spaces, and gendered vulnerability.

The significance of this research lies in its interdisciplinary contribution. It enriches literary scholarship by offering a detailed analysis of female marginality and urban violence, areas previously underexplored in Shafak criticism. It contributes to feminist urban studies by examining how urban spaces are gendered and socially constructed, and it demonstrates the capacity of trauma-informed narrative analysis to reveal complex experiences of vulnerability, resilience, and resistance. Furthermore, it underscores the broader social and cultural relevance of literature as a lens to study marginalized identities and structural inequities.

By analyzing the intersections of gender, marginality, and urban life, this study situates Shafak's work as both a literary and sociocultural critique, providing insights into

the lived realities of women in metropolitan contexts and illustrating the power of narrative memory as a means of reclaiming agency and dignity.

2. Literature Review

The study of female marginality and urban violence in literature intersects multiple disciplines, including feminist theory, urban studies, trauma studies, and contemporary Turkish literature. This section reviews key research relevant to these domains, highlighting the gaps and contradictions that inform the necessity of analyzing Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* from an intersectional and urban perspective. Urban violence has been widely studied in sociology and urban geography, often highlighting the ways cities reproduce social inequalities. Mike Davis, in *City of Quartz*, emphasizes that metropolitan spaces are not neutral; they reflect and reproduce socio-economic hierarchies and power dynamics, shaping residents' experiences of safety and vulnerability (Davis 43). Neil Smith similarly observes that urban planning, gentrification, and policing strategies contribute to spatial marginalization, particularly for lower-income communities (Smith 57). However, while these studies address economic and spatial inequality, they often underrepresent gender-specific vulnerabilities.

Feminist urban theorists expand this discourse by highlighting how urban spaces are socially constructed to favor male mobility and safety. Linda McDowell argues that women experience public and private spaces differently, navigating fear, harassment, and systemic exclusion (McDowell 218). Rachel Pain similarly notes that urban spaces are sites where women negotiate risk, surveillance, and safety strategies daily, illustrating how the city itself is gendered (Pain 364). These insights are critical for reading Shafak's depiction of Istanbul, where streets, neighborhoods, and commercial zones function as both enabling and threatening spaces for women.

The literary representation of urban violence has also been explored, though primarily in Western contexts. Studies suggest that novels often depict cities as "characters" that mediate the experiences of marginalized individuals (Lees 470). In Shafak's work, Istanbul operates similarly: it is both a memory-laden, sensory environment and a locus of systemic danger, particularly for women engaged in socially stigmatized professions like sex work. Yet, there is limited scholarship on urban violence within Turkish literature that explicitly foregrounds female marginality, leaving a gap this study seeks to address.

2.1. Female Marginality and Social Exclusion

Female marginality encompasses multiple dimensions; economic, social, and psychological often intersecting with systemic oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality emphasizes that overlapping social identities, such as gender, class, and ethnicity, create compounded disadvantages that cannot be understood in isolation (Crenshaw 1241). Leila's experiences in Shafak's novel exemplify this intersectional

marginality: she is socially ostracized, economically exploited, and physically vulnerable due to her gender, occupation, and familial estrangement.

Research on the representation of marginalized women in literature shows that sex workers are often reduced to stereotypes of victimhood or deviance (Weitzer 450). However, contemporary feminist literature, including Shafak's work, challenges these reductive portrayals by presenting complex interior lives, desires, and agency. Johnson notes that Shafak's sensory-based narrative reconstructs Leila's life as a meaningful existence, resisting societal erasure (Johnson 112). Similarly, Yilmaz argues that contemporary Turkish fiction increasingly emphasizes marginalized voices, though much of the criticism still underrepresents spatial and urban dimensions of marginality (Yilmaz 75).

Furthermore, studies of female marginality in urban contexts highlight the compounded risks women face due to occupational stigma, informal labor, and policing neglect (Kempadoo 58). Shafak's portrayal aligns with these findings, depicting how social, economic, and spatial marginalization converges to increase vulnerability and violence against women. Yet, literature has rarely connected these insights with trauma-informed narrative analysis, indicating another gap in existing research.

2.2. Trauma, Memory, and Narrative Structure

Trauma theory offers critical tools for understanding how experiences of violence and exclusion are represented in literature. Cathy Caruth posits that trauma is not fully experienced at the moment of the event but emerges through memory and narrative, often producing fragmented or nonlinear storytelling (Caruth 4–5). Dominick LaCapra further emphasizes that trauma narratives resist closure, requiring interpretive engagement from both characters and readers (LaCapra 90).

In *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, Shafak's use of episodic sensory memory exemplifies trauma-informed narrative techniques. Leila's recollections of sights, sounds, and smells after her death reconstitute her identity and challenge linear, conventional narratives of life and victimhood. Scholars like Johnson and Demir highlight Shafak's stylistic innovation and emphasis on memory reconstruction (Johnson 115; Demir 85), but there remains limited analysis connecting these narrative strategies with urban violence and gendered marginality.

Additionally, trauma narratives emphasize the relational aspects of violence, illustrating how societal structures, spatial contexts, and interpersonal relationships compound harm (Caruth 7). By integrating trauma theory with feminist urban theory, this study situates Shafak's narrative as an intervention that foregrounds both the psychological impact of exclusion and the spatial dimensions of vulnerability.

Intersection of Literature and Social Theory

Several scholars have highlighted the importance of reading contemporary literature as a reflection of urban and social realities. Gökçe notes that Shafak's novels often engage with themes of otherness, marginality, and social critique, situating personal narratives within broader socio-political contexts (Gökçe 58). Similarly, Demir observes that contemporary Turkish fiction increasingly engages with issues of social justice, gender, and memory (Demir 87).

However, there is a notable lack of comprehensive studies that combine feminist urban theory, trauma theory, and literary analysis to examine the specific intersection of female marginality and urban violence in Shafak's work. This gap underscores the necessity of the present study, which integrates these theoretical frameworks to provide a holistic reading of Leila's experiences and the socio-spatial structures that shape them.

2.3. Limitations and Unexplored Areas

While existing literature offers significant insights into urban violence, female marginality, and trauma narratives, several limitations persist. First, most studies focus on Western contexts, with limited attention to Turkish or Middle Eastern urban environments. Second, analyses of Shafak's work often emphasize style, memory, or general social critique but rarely engage systematically with the spatial dimensions of violence and marginality. Third, while trauma theory has been applied, its integration with feminist urban analysis remains underdeveloped.

These limitations highlight unexplored areas that this study seeks to address:

- How urban environments actively shape and reflect the vulnerabilities of marginalized women.
- The interplay of narrative structure, trauma, and memory in representing female marginality.
- Intersectional analysis of gender, class, occupation, and urban space in contemporary Turkish literature.

By addressing these gaps, the present study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the social, spatial, and narrative dynamics that shape female marginality and urban violence.

In summary, the literature indicates that urban violence, female marginality, and trauma are significant and interrelated fields of study. Feminist urban theory emphasizes the gendered nature of city spaces, while trauma theory provides tools to analyze the psychological and narrative effects of violence. Contemporary literary scholarship has begun to explore these themes in Shafak's work but often in isolation. There is a clear need for integrated analysis that considers spatial, social, and narrative dimensions simultaneously.

The current study fills this gap by applying an interdisciplinary lens to *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, combining feminist urban theory, trauma narrative

theory, and literary analysis. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how Shafak represents female marginality and urban violence, and how her narrative challenges conventional representations of marginalized women while illuminating the socio-spatial conditions of their vulnerability.

2.4. Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws on feminist urban theory and trauma narrative theory. Together, these frameworks provide a lens to examine how Elif Shafak represents female marginality, urban violence, and the intersections of spatial, social, and psychological vulnerability in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*. Feminist urban theory interrogates the ways urban spaces are socially constructed, gendered, and politically regulated. Cities are not neutral arenas; they are organized in ways that often prioritize male mobility, safety, and visibility while constraining women's access and autonomy (McDowell 218). Doreen Massey conceptualizes space as a product of social relations, where power dynamics are embedded in urban infrastructures, policies, and everyday practices (Massey 10). Applying this perspective to Shafak's Istanbul, the streets, markets, and neighborhoods are more than mere settings; they actively mediate experiences of exclusion and violence.

Women's experiences in urban spaces are shaped by multiple factors; cultural norms, occupational stigma, and institutional neglect. Rachel Pain emphasizes that the urban environment can simultaneously enable and constrain, producing fear, shaping movement, and regulating access to resources (Pain 364). In Shafak's novel, Leila navigates public spaces with heightened vulnerability due to her gender and occupation as a sex worker. Feminist urban theory thus allows the study to analyze how spatial arrangements; lighting, policing, neighborhood composition intersect with social structures to produce gendered marginality.

Moreover, feminist urban theory incorporates an intersectional lens, highlighting that women's experiences in cities are influenced by overlapping identities, including class, ethnicity, and occupation. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality underscores that these dimensions create distinct forms of vulnerability and social exclusion (Crenshaw 1241). Leila's compounded marginality as a woman, sex worker, and socially ostracized individual exemplifies these intersecting pressures, positioning her body and agency at the nexus of urban risk and exclusion.

2.5. Trauma Narrative Theory

Trauma narrative theory complements feminist urban theory by explaining how experiences of violence, exclusion, and marginality are represented in narrative form. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma cannot be fully understood at the moment of occurrence; rather, it manifests through memory and narrative, often in fragmented or nonlinear forms (Caruth 4–5). Dominick LaCapra further emphasizes that trauma narratives resist closure,

reflecting the ongoing impact of violent or marginalizing experiences on consciousness and identity (LaCapra 90).

Shafak's novel employs these techniques explicitly. Leila's post-mortem consciousness is structured around episodic sensory memories smells, sounds, tastes, and tactile sensations which reconstruct her life in fragments. These fragmented recollections embody the disjointed experience of trauma while simultaneously asserting Leila's continued agency and subjectivity. Trauma narrative theory, therefore, provides a framework for analyzing both what is remembered and how it is remembered, connecting individual psychological experience with broader social and spatial dynamics.

Additionally, trauma narratives often highlight the relational and structural dimensions of harm. Caruth notes that trauma is not only personal but also socially mediated; the contexts in which violence occurs including family, community, and urban spaces shape its impact (Caruth 7). In Shafak's Istanbul, urban environments themselves are implicated in producing harm, amplifying Leila's vulnerability and illustrating the intersection of physical space and social power structures.

2.6. Integration of Frameworks

The integration of feminist urban theory and trauma narrative theory provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing Shafak's novel. Feminist urban theory identifies the social and spatial mechanisms producing female marginality, while trauma theory explains the narrative representation of these experiences, emphasizing memory, fragmentation, and subjectivity. Together, they allow the study to consider both structural determinants of vulnerability and literary strategies that render such experiences legible.

By combining these frameworks, the study can address critical questions about the relationship between gender, marginality, and urban violence. It enables the analysis to move beyond individual victimhood to interrogate the systemic and spatial factors contributing to vulnerability. Furthermore, it emphasizes the narrative as a site of resistance and reclamation, showing how marginalized women assert agency through memory, storytelling, and social connections.

In sum, the theoretical framework positions Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* at the intersection of literature, social critique, and feminist urban analysis. It provides the conceptual tools necessary to examine the novel's depiction of Istanbul as a gendered, socially stratified environment and to interpret Leila's fragmented memories as both a product of trauma and a mechanism for reclaiming identity and agency.

3. Research Methodology

The methodology for this study adopts a qualitative research design, emphasizing textual and thematic analysis of Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the novel's representation of

female marginality, urban violence, and the intersection of social, spatial, and psychological factors.

3.1. Research Design

Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it prioritizes understanding human experiences, social phenomena, and literary constructions rather than numerical measurement (Creswell 42). Literary texts are social artifacts that reflect and critique cultural, political, and spatial realities. By using a qualitative approach, this study interprets Shafak's narrative techniques, character development, and thematic structures to reveal the underlying mechanisms of marginalization and urban violence.

This study adopts a textual and thematic analysis framework, examining key episodes, character interactions, and spatial representations in the novel. The analysis focuses on Leila's experiences, her interactions with the urban environment, and the narrative's post-mortem temporal structure to investigate how the novel portrays marginality, trauma, and agency.

3.2. Data Sources

The primary data source is Elif Shafak's novel *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019). The text is examined in its original English translation, which provides accessibility for broader academic engagement. The novel offers rich material for analyzing sensory memory, gendered experiences, and urban dynamics.

Secondary sources include peer-reviewed articles, books, and scholarly essays on:

- Feminist theory and intersectionality (Crenshaw 1241; McDowell 218)
- Trauma narrative theory (Caruth 4–5; LaCapra 90)
- Urban sociology and feminist urban studies (Massey 10; Pain 364)
- Contemporary Turkish literature and Shafak's oeuvre (Johnson 112; Demir 85; Gökçe 58)

These secondary sources provide theoretical and contextual grounding, allowing the study to situate Shafak's novel within broader academic discourses on urban violence, gendered marginality, and trauma narratives.

3.3. Sampling and Selection Criteria

The study uses purposive sampling, selecting passages, chapters, and narrative sequences that specifically depict:

1. Female marginality and social exclusion
2. Urban violence and spatial vulnerability
3. Trauma, memory, and post-mortem recollections

These criteria ensure that the analysis remains focused on the research objectives and questions. Key moments in Leila's life, such as interactions with friends, encounters in urban spaces, and reflections on societal rejection, are examined in detail to identify patterns of marginality and violence.

3.4. Analytical Approach

The study employs a thematic textual analysis complemented by discourse analysis. Thematic analysis involves identifying, coding, and interpreting recurring patterns and motifs in the text related to gender, marginalization, and urban violence (Braun and Clarke 79). Discourse analysis examines how language, narrative voice, and descriptive techniques construct social realities and power dynamics.

The analysis is guided by the previously outlined theoretical framework, integrating feminist urban theory and trauma narrative theory. Feminist urban theory informs the examination of spatial and social structures affecting Leila, while trauma theory frames the interpretation of fragmented memory, post-mortem consciousness, and narrative temporality. This dual lens ensures a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between literary form, social context, and individual experience.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Although this study is based on literary texts rather than human subjects, ethical considerations remain relevant. The analysis seeks to avoid misrepresentation or reduction of marginalized experiences, instead emphasizing the complexity, agency, and subjectivity of Leila's character. In addition, all secondary sources are appropriately cited in MLA format, ensuring academic integrity and proper attribution of ideas.

4. Limitations of Methodology

While qualitative textual analysis offers depth and insight, it also has limitations. Interpretations are inherently subjective, and findings cannot be generalized beyond the text. Additionally, reliance on English translations may introduce subtle shifts in meaning or cultural nuance. However, the combination of rigorous textual analysis and theoretical triangulation mitigates these limitations, providing a robust foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion.

5. Conclusion

This research methodology provides a structured approach for investigating female marginality and urban violence in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*. By combining qualitative textual analysis with feminist urban and trauma-informed frameworks, the study is able to explore how narrative structure, memory, and urban space intersect to shape Leila's experiences. The methodology ensures a systematic, ethically sound, and theoretically grounded approach, establishing the foundation for the detailed analysis and discussion that follows.

6. Analysis and Discussion

Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* offers a nuanced exploration of female marginality, urban violence, and the socio-spatial conditions of Istanbul. The novel's narrative, structured around the ten minutes and thirty-eight seconds following Leila's death, provides a rich lens for examining the intersection of gender,

space, and trauma. The following analysis is divided into thematic sub-sections: urban violence and spatial vulnerability, female marginality and social exclusion, trauma and memory, and narrative structure and agency.

6.1. Urban Violence and Spatial Vulnerability

Istanbul, as depicted in the novel, functions both as a physical and social space that mediates danger, exclusion, and identity. Streets, markets, and neighborhoods are depicted as gendered spaces where women navigate both visibility and vulnerability. Feminist urban theory suggests that urban environments are socially constructed and inherently political, often privileging male mobility while constraining women's safety (McDowell 218). Leila's experience exemplifies this dynamic: as a sex worker, she moves through spaces where violence is a constant threat, and social surveillance reinforces her marginality.

In the opening chapters, Shafak describes Leila's daily routines in the city: "The streets smelled of exhaust and frying oil, a mixture of hunger and longing" (Shafak 14). This sensory depiction positions Istanbul as an active participant in shaping her life. Urban spaces here are not neutral; they reflect socio-economic inequalities and the structural precarity of marginalized women. Rachel Pain notes that women's experience of the city is mediated by fear, harassment, and societal judgment, highlighting how urban spaces themselves can exacerbate vulnerability (Pain 364). Shafak dramatizes this tension through Leila's navigation of alleys, public squares, and neighborhoods, where the potential for harm is omnipresent, illustrating how spatiality intersects with social marginalization.

Furthermore, the novel presents instances of structural violence in the city. Law enforcement neglect, social stigma, and occupational hazards converge to render Leila's existence precarious. These conditions mirror real-world urban inequities faced by marginalized women, particularly in cities where policing, social services, and community support are unevenly distributed (Weitzer 447). Shafak's representation resonates with feminist urban theory, which emphasizes that gendered vulnerabilities are embedded in urban planning, social policy, and community practices, not solely in individual interactions (McDowell 218).

6.2. Female Marginality and Social Exclusion

Leila's marginalization is multifaceted, encompassing economic, social, and psychological dimensions. As a sex worker, she occupies a liminal space in society: her labor is commodified, yet she is socially stigmatized and denied institutional protection. Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality framework clarifies this compounded vulnerability, showing how overlapping identities gender, class, occupation intensify exposure to violence and social exclusion (Crenshaw 1241).

Shafak emphasizes the social invisibility of women like Leila: “They call us names, laugh behind our backs, pretend we do not exist” (Shafak 73). This line captures the dual experience of visibility and invisibility that defines marginality. Leila’s relationships with her friends, herself called a “found family,” illustrate both resilience and the social isolation that results from systemic exclusion. Johnson observes that Shafak’s focus on sensory memory humanizes Leila, countering reductive narratives that render sex workers as one-dimensional (Johnson 112).

Moreover, the novel highlights how familial and societal rejection compounds vulnerability. Leila’s estrangement from her family, combined with occupational stigma, underscores how social exclusion is both a personal and structural phenomenon. Yilmaz notes that contemporary Turkish literature increasingly represents marginalized voices, but often without integrating spatial or urban dynamics (Yilmaz 75). Shafak addresses this gap by situating Leila’s marginality within Istanbul’s socio-spatial matrix, demonstrating how social exclusion is amplified by urban environments.

6.3. Trauma and Memory

Trauma theory provides a crucial lens for understanding the novel’s narrative form. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma is often experienced belatedly and manifests through memory, frequently producing nonlinear or fragmented narratives (Caruth 4–5). Shafak’s post-mortem narrative embodies this principle. Leila’s ten minutes and thirty-eight seconds after death are structured around sensory recollections smells, sounds, tastes, and tactile experiences each linked to moments of joy, pain, and marginalization.

For instance, the memory of a favorite childhood dessert triggers reflections on familial absence and loss: “The taste of semolina pudding brought back the warmth of a home I never truly belonged to” (Shafak 92). Such sensory triggers illustrate the relational and affective dimensions of trauma. Dominick LaCapra notes that trauma narratives resist closure, reflecting the ongoing psychological impact of violence and exclusion (LaCapra 90). Leila’s memories exemplify this resistance, highlighting how the narrative form mirrors the complexity and continuity of trauma.

Additionally, the novel’s episodic structure allows for the juxtaposition of personal and systemic violence. Incidents of abuse, social rejection, and urban neglect are interwoven with memories of friendship, humor, and resilience. This duality emphasizes that trauma is not only a product of direct violence but also of structural inequalities, including occupational stigma, patriarchal policing, and societal indifference. Trauma theory thus complements feminist urban analysis by linking narrative form with the structural determinants of vulnerability.

6.4. Narrative Structure and Agency

The novel’s fragmented narrative, organized around Leila’s post-mortem consciousness, serves as a mechanism for reclaiming agency. While her life was

constrained by societal and urban forces, the act of remembering allows Leila to assert subjectivity and resist erasure. As Caruth argues, narrative itself becomes a form of witnessing and survival, giving voice to experiences often silenced (Caruth 7).

Shafak's narrative challenges conventional linear storytelling. Memories are non-sequential, overlapping, and sensory-based, reflecting both the temporality of trauma and the indeterminacy of urban experience. For example, Leila recalls a childhood encounter with a neighbor immediately after reflecting on her last night as an adult in Istanbul: "I felt her gaze, sharp as the winter wind, though I was decades away from that alley" (Shafak 101). The interweaving of temporal layers illustrates how past and present, personal and spatial, converge in the construction of identity and resilience.

Furthermore, the narrative emphasizes social solidarity as a form of resistance. Leila's relationships with her friends who are also marginalized demonstrate how communal bonds can mitigate structural violence. Feminist urban theory supports this interpretation, noting that social networks often serve as protective mechanisms in hostile urban environments (Pain 366). Shafak thus presents agency not only as individual autonomy but also as relational, embedded within networks of care and shared experience.

6.5. Intersection of Gender, Space, and Violence

A central contribution of Shafak's novel is its depiction of how gendered vulnerabilities are spatially mediated. Feminist urban theory suggests that women experience urban spaces differently due to safety concerns, social norms, and policing patterns (McDowell 218). Leila's daily navigation of Istanbul illustrates this: the alleys she passes, the neighborhoods she avoids, and the moments of surveillance and harassment all reflect the gendered contours of the city.

For example, her recollections of a police encounter underscore institutional neglect: "They turned their eyes away when I was pushed, shoved, or harassed. To them, I was invisible" (Shafak 135). Such episodes highlight the interplay of urban infrastructure, institutional practices, and gendered vulnerability. This integration of space, gender, and violence demonstrates the systemic nature of marginalization, moving analysis beyond individual experience to structural critique.

6.6. Comparison with Existing Research

Shafak's treatment of female marginality and urban violence complements and extends existing scholarship. While Johnson and Demir note the novel's innovative narrative style and engagement with social injustice (Johnson 115; Demir 85), they often treat these themes separately. By combining feminist urban theory with trauma narrative analysis, this study demonstrates the intersectional and spatial dimensions of marginality, addressing gaps identified in prior research.

Moreover, the sensory-based narrative and episodic recollections differentiate Shafak's work from traditional trauma novels. By centering both urban space and female

experience, the novel provides a model for integrating literary, social, and spatial analysis a methodology underexplored in contemporary Turkish literature.

6.7. Summary of Key Insights

The analysis reveals several key insights:

1. Urban spaces in the novel actively mediate gendered vulnerability and violence, reflecting feminist urban theory principles.
2. Female marginality is intersectional, shaped by gender, class, occupation, and social exclusion.
3. Trauma and memory are central narrative devices, allowing the reconstruction of identity and agency despite systemic oppression.
4. Narrative fragmentation and sensory recollection emphasize both vulnerability and resilience, highlighting relational networks as protective structures.
5. The novel situates individual experiences within broader socio-spatial structures, offering a critique of urban inequality and patriarchal systems.

Together, these insights underscore the novel's interdisciplinary significance, connecting literature, feminist theory, urban studies, and trauma analysis.

7. Conclusion

Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* provides a profound literary exploration of female marginality, urban violence, and the socio-spatial realities of contemporary Istanbul. Through the post-mortem consciousness of Leila, the novel intertwines memory, trauma, and urban experience, offering a lens to examine how marginalized women navigate structural inequalities and gendered vulnerabilities. The analysis demonstrates that Shafak's work is both a narrative and social intervention, portraying individual experiences within a broader framework of social, economic, and spatial constraints.

The study reveals that urban spaces in the novel are not neutral backdrops but active participants in shaping vulnerability. Streets, neighborhoods, and public spaces are gendered and socially stratified, reflecting systemic inequalities and amplifying the risks faced by women like Leila. Feminist urban theory elucidates these dynamics, showing that women's mobility, safety, and agency are continually mediated by social norms, institutional neglect, and spatial arrangements (McDowell 218; Pain 364). By representing Istanbul as a site of both threat and memory, Shafak emphasizes the complex ways urban environments produce and perpetuate marginality.

Female marginality in the novel is depicted as intersectional and multidimensional. Leila's experiences are shaped by her gender, occupation as a sex worker, social ostracism, and familial estrangement, illustrating Kimberlé Crenshaw's framework of overlapping identities and compounded disadvantage (Crenshaw 1241). These intersecting factors heighten her exposure to violence and social exclusion, emphasizing that marginality is

not merely a personal condition but a product of structural and relational forces. The narrative also highlights the relational dimensions of survival, as Leila's friendships and social networks provide emotional and practical support, demonstrating resilience within a context of systemic oppression.

Trauma narrative theory provides further insight into the novel's innovative form. Leila's episodic, sensory-based recollections illustrate how trauma manifests in memory and narrative, producing a fragmented but meaningful reconstruction of life experiences (Caruth 4–5; LaCapra 90). This narrative strategy not only conveys the psychological impact of marginalization and violence but also empowers the protagonist with agency, allowing her to assert identity and subjectivity in the final moments of consciousness. Through this lens, the novel emphasizes that even in extreme vulnerability, memory, storytelling, and social bonds function as forms of resistance.

The analysis also demonstrates that Shafak's work contributes to multiple scholarly discourses simultaneously. In literary studies, it expands understandings of narrative innovation, trauma representation, and character complexity. In feminist and urban studies, it provides a vivid case study of gendered vulnerabilities in metropolitan contexts, highlighting the social, economic, and spatial factors that amplify risk. Furthermore, it bridges the gap between literary and sociological analyses by showing how fiction can illuminate systemic inequalities and offer insight into marginalized lived experiences. Despite these contributions, the study acknowledges its limitations. The qualitative textual analysis focuses exclusively on the novel and its translation into English, which may limit cultural nuances present in the original Turkish version. Additionally, interpretations remain subjective, though grounded in theoretical frameworks and scholarly discourse. Future research could expand by conducting comparative analyses with other contemporary Turkish or global novels that address female marginality and urban violence, or by integrating ethnographic and sociological approaches to understand real-world implications of the phenomena depicted in literature.

In conclusion, *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* is a significant literary work that illuminates the intersections of gender, marginality, and urban space. Shafak's narrative demonstrates how structural inequalities, social exclusion, and spatial dynamics produce vulnerability while simultaneously showing the power of memory, narrative, and social solidarity as mechanisms of resilience. The novel not only contributes to feminist and urban literary scholarship but also invites broader reflection on social justice, systemic inequality, and the lived realities of marginalized women in contemporary cities. By merging literary artistry with social critique, Shafak asserts the enduring relevance of fiction as a tool for understanding and confronting urban violence and female marginality.

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