

Questions of Womanhood and Sexuality in Contemporary Turkey

Elif Shafak's *The Flea Palace* (2004), *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007), and *Honour* (2012)

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Abstract

This study will introduce and discuss the development of feminism in Islam and the context of Turkey. Elif Shafak's novels make close reference to Turkey's patriarchal traditions and feminist concerns about women's lives in Turkey. Shafak writes novels and newspaper articles that investigate the role of women and sexuality in relation to broader concepts of nationhood and nationality. This study will analyse Shafak's critique of the phenomenon of women's sexuality as a primary determinant of identity. It will examine those of her characters whose sexualities pose problems for Turkish society, leading to alienation. In the first chapter, *The Flea Palace* (2004) will be discussed focusing on the fact that women's identities are constructed with regards to their relationship to men instead of individual identities. In the second chapter, *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007) will be analysed focusing on how women's sexuality is a basis for degradation and sexual abuse for women. In the third chapter, the theme of honour and virginity will be discussed with respect to its analysis in *Honour* (2012). Shafak depicts women protagonists as the victims of patriarchy and as sympathetic characters with a position of silence and defencelessness. Besides, male protagonists are often punished for their oppression of women in their lives. Therefore, it is argued that these novels re-enact and condemn gender inequality as well as revealing how patriarchy adversely affects the daily lives of all concerned.

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I especially thank my mother and father for their support throughout my education.

Although they could not reach their lovely only child very often and complained about it, they always supported me for who I am ☺

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Turkey is experiencing development in the area of women's rights; although there remains patriarchal domination. 2002 saw legal amendments to family law, and abolition of the article stating 'the husband is the head of the family'.¹ Nevertheless, the current government maintains the hierarchical relationship between genders. The Prime Minister recommends that women should marry early, not be too discriminating when choosing a husband, and have at least three children to insure the increase of Turkish nation as he believes other ethnic groups living in Turkey 'will root Turkish race away' with their reproduction rates.² Prioritising nationalism, he burdens women with the responsibility for reproduction to continue the race. Conversely, women are not given sufficient maternity leave, and proposed amendments to maternity leave were abandoned when employers demanded 'reliable manpower'.³ Therefore, to date, modernisation has not succeeded in abolishing patriarchy, which is deeply rooted in the traditions of the state.

Elif Shafak's novels make close reference to Turkey's patriarchal traditions and feminist concerns about women's lives in Turkey. She is an accomplished international author, who writes in both English and Turkish. Shafak In her Ted-Talk, Shafak claims that she recreates herself in another language helps her narrative style to flourish and gain the interest of western readership.⁴ Shafak has been living both abroad and in Turkey since her childhood. Hence, she was taught in multicultural schools, where each student was the representative of their countries. Complaining about the responsibility of representation, Shafak expresses her concern over being

¹ The Republic of Turkey, The Turkish Civil Code, Law No 4721 (1st January 2002), Article No 152

² 'Basbakan Israrli: En Az 3 Cocuk Dogurun', *NTVMSBC*, 6th April 2008, <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/441827.asp> [accessed 4th September 2014].

³ 'Patron Ise Almam Dedi Dogum Izni Tasarisi Rafa Kalkti', *Aksam*, 16th February 2014, <http://www.aksam.com.tr/yazarlar/patron-ise-kadin-almam-dedi-dogum-izni-tasarisi-rafa-kalkti/haber-285150> [accessed 4th September 2014].

⁴ Elif Shafak, 'The Politics of Fiction', *TED*, July 2010.

categorised as a multicultural author. She considers that categorisation divides people, while literature is a powerful medium for bringing different nationalities into dialogue. In this dissertation, Shafak's works will provide the context to discuss women's contemporary issues in Turkey. Nevertheless, this dissertation will not categorise Shafak as representing all Turkish women.

Against this backdrop, Elif Shafak writes novels and newspaper articles that investigate the role of women and sexuality in relation to broader concepts of nationhood and nationality. As noted by Elif Oztabek-Avci, Shafak is often criticised for preferring to use English when writing.⁵ Oztabek-Avci comments that liberal nationalists have seen Shafak from a positive perspective, as representing her nation and conveying her culture. Meanwhile, Kemalist nationalists have shunned her writing as being 'assimilated into American culture'.⁶ Oztabek-Avci believes that Shafak presents transnationalism instead of internationalism. Instead of binding national borders, Shafak aims to transcend the borders between nations. Thus, She supports Shafak since her novels promote unity among diverse readerships.

From an alternative stance, Bilal Kirimli finds Shafak is unbiased in her depiction of the nation.⁷ He claims she promotes multiculturalism in her work, embracing all entities. Likewise, Esra Sazyek celebrates Shafak's multiculturalism, proposing that Shafak succeeds in gathering differences in one body as a whole. Sazyek sees multiculturalism reflected in her narrative style, as Shafak tells multiple stories in her novels, ultimately unifying them into one story.

⁵ Elif Oztabek-Avci, 'Elif Safak's *the Saint of Incipient Insanities* as an International Novel', *ARIEL*, 38 (2007), 83-99.

⁶ Ibid. p. 89.

⁷ Bilal Kirimli, 'Elif Safak'in Romanlarında Milliyet ve Turkluk Algisi', *TUBAR*, 28 (2010), 261-81.

Fethi Demir praises Shafak's narrative for being polyphonic and democratic.⁸ Demir believes that Shafak benefits from humanist, mystic, orientalist, conservative, and feminist viewpoints, although she stands closer to feminism. Demir also applauds Shafak's opening up of the Oedipus complex from father-son conflict to mother-son conflict in *Honour* for her contribution to the literary world. Besides, this dissertation will discuss that mother's upbringing her son with gender discriminatory ideals results in conflict.

Differing from other critics, Ilknur Mese emphasises that Shafak deconstructs womanhood and manhood simultaneously.⁹ She claims that Shafak mutually determines the gender roles of the characters in her novels. While potency is attributed to men, women can also claim power through their affiliation to men. Mese believes that Shafak's work also reveals the responsibility of women for gender discrimination.

Nese Demirci and Oktay Yivli focus on Shafak's narrative style.¹⁰ Yivli highlights the relationship between Shafak's stories and their subtitles, while Demirci celebrates Shafak's concern over naming in her narratives.¹¹ Both propose that Shafak allegorises character's names and subtitles, to communicate deeper meanings.

The aim of this dissertation is to reflect on the portrayal of women's sexuality in Elif Shafak's novels. This study will analyse Shafak's critique of the phenomenon of women's sexuality as a primary determinant of identity. It will examine those of her characters whose sexualities pose problems for Turkish society, leading to

⁸ Fethi Demir, 'Elif Safak'in *Iskender* Romanında Bir Tore Cinayeti Bağlamında Anne-Oğul İlişkisi', *Turkish Studies*, 7, 1 (2012), 849-57.

⁹ Ilknur Mese, 'Katilini Yaratan Annelik: Elif Safak'in *Iskender* Adlı Romanından Yola Çıkararak Türkiye'de Kadınlik ve Erkeklik Rollerine dair Bir Sorgulama', *Turkish Studies*, 8, 3 (2013), 399-411.

¹⁰ Nese Demirci, 'Elif Safak'in *Pinhan, Araf ve Mahrem*'inde İsim İmgelemi', *Turkish Studies*, 5, 3 (2010), 996-1008.

¹¹ Oktay Yivli, '*Baba ve Pic* Romanına Fenomenolojik Bir Yaklaşım', *Turkish Studies*, 8, 9 (2013), 2641-46.

alienation. It will emphasise that Shafak grounds her stories in the daily experiences of Turkish women, despite stating that she does not claim responsibility for her representation of Turkish women.

This study will introduce and discuss the development of feminism in Islam and the context of Turkey. First, it will be shown that discussions about women revolve around the veil and the oppression of women. It will state that from a western perspective the veil is seen to represent the oppression of women, a belief used as a pretext for colonialism under the cover of feminism. Later in the chapter, it will demonstrate the role of women as the foundation of the new Turkish Republic, because women's emancipation provided the founding fathers with a nationalist discourse.

In the first chapter, *The Flea Palace* (2004) will be discussed focusing on the categorisation of women in public. While women are divided into categories of 'women-to-bed' and 'women-to-marry', their regard is determined on account of these categories. Women's identities are constructed with regard to their relationship to men instead of individual identities. In this way, Shafak explores how patriarchy labels women and positions them into categories.

In the second chapter, the narrative of *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007) will be analysed. The life of Zeliha and her acceptance in the society is narrated. Zeliha gives birth to an illegitimate baby, which leads to her degradation by the society. She is constantly accused of her sexual appearance and she becomes the victim of rape. However, Zeliha is charged for the situation and blamed for her shame.

In the third chapter, the theme of honour will be discussed with respect to its analysis in *Honour* (2012). The novel portrays two different honour crimes, murder and suicide. One of the sisters is forced to commit suicide on account that she has to

recover the family honour. Her sisters, Pembe and Jamila are also victims of honour in the text. Jamila is pictured with an ambiguous virginity and its results on her life. Pembe is later accused of shame due to her illegitimate relationship. Her son, Iskender takes action for the family honour and kills her aunt by mistake. The novel clearly depicts women's victimhood against the claim of honour.

In conclusion, Shafak's novels demonstrate a pattern in their depicting women and men in Turkey. She depicts women protagonists as the victims of patriarchy and as sympathetic characters with a position of silence and defencelessness. Besides, male protagonists are often punished for their oppression of women in their lives. In these ways, I will argue, the novels re-enact and condemn gender inequality as well as revealing how patriarchy adversely affects the daily lives of all concerned.

An Introduction to Feminism in Turkey (1830-2000s) and Women in Islam

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse Turkey's transforming image of women, and to locate this research in reference to existing literature. It will address issues affecting women, such as the wearing of the veil and women's rights in Turkish society. Initially it references Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam*, Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety*, and Corinne Fowler's *Chasing Tales*, to investigate the position of women in the Islamic context.¹² After this, it draws on Deniz Kandiyoti and Yesim Arat's articles on the transformation of women's roles during the process of Turkey's modernisation.

Women and Islam

In *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed examines the foundation and development of gender questions. Ahmed writes about the problems women

¹² The term 'Islamic' is used to refer to religious context and practices whereas the term 'Islamist' is used to refer political use of Islam.

encounter as a result of social norms, and the role of Islam in subordinating women in reference to the veil and seclusion. According to Ahmed, the pre-Islamic period of Arab society was essentially a matriarchal society. Ahmed argues that Khadija, Prophet Muhammad's first wife was outspoken, wealthy and powerful, entering a monogamous marriage and choosing her husband autonomously.¹³ Ahmed contrasts Aisha, a young adolescent, married by an arranged marriage with Khadija's autonomy.¹⁴ In this way, she identifies incompatibility between Islam and pre-Islamic norms, emphasising how its practices transformed determination over issues such as marriage from women to men.

In the Quran there is a verse about a pre-Islamic Arabs, which says 'when one of them is told the birth of a female child, his face is overcast with gloom and he is deeply agitated. He seeks to hide himself from the people because of the ominous news he has had'.¹⁵ Thus, Islam effects changes in the perceived value of women in society. Although Ahmed covers Quranic proof of the ignorance of pre-Islamic Arabs, she denies that Islam succeeded in developing women's status, although Aisha is known to be an Islamic scholar.¹⁶

As with marriage customs, Islam brought about changes in the social and economic practices of observers. Ahmed disputes use of the veil by all Muslim women, stating it was initially introduced to seclude the wives of the Prophet.¹⁷ Its spread to wider society, corresponds instead with 'the Muslim conquests of areas in which veiling was commonplace among the upper classes, the influx of wealth [...]

¹³ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam, Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), . p. 42.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 43.

¹⁵ The Quran 16:58.

¹⁶ Aisha bint Abu Bakr, *Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality*, http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/muslimwomen/bio/aisha_bint_abu_bakr/ [accessed 3rd September 2014].

¹⁷ Leila Ahmed, p. 55.

and Muhammad's wives being taken as models combined to bring about their general adoption'.¹⁸ Thus, initially a requirement for the wives of the Prophet, veiling became a majority practice.

In international contexts, the veil has become a focus for discussions about the nature of civilisation. Ahmed notes that the veil provides a means for both Western and native scholars to claim the inferiority of Islamic societies, thereby grounding colonial attitudes toward the process of 'oppressing women'.¹⁹ Ahmed focuses on Britain's establishment of an 'evolutionary process' as the starting point and 'Victorian womanhood and mores [...] as the ideal and measure of civilisation'.²⁰ Ahmed benefits from Lord Cromer's claim that 'segregation and veiling exercised "a baneful effect on Eastern society"' underlining that he was 'the founding member and sometime president of the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage'.²¹ This western feminism is employed as a tool of civilisation, targeting practices in inferior societies although feminist movements were despised in their own countries.²² Ahmed interprets this as a 'substitution of Islamic-style male dominance by Western style dominance'.²³ She proposes that the Islamist culture of patriarchy violates the rights of Muslim women with the rule of the veil, whereas western opposition to the abolition of the veil does not offer freedom for women, as it does not seek their consent.²⁴ Ahmed observes:

If intellectual development and the acquisition of knowledge were indeed important goals for women, then the rational recommendation would be to pursue these goals directly with increased schooling, not indirectly by ending segregation and veiling.²⁵

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 56.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 161.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 151.

²¹ Ibid. p. 153.

²² Ibid. p. 154.

²³ Ibid. p. 162.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 166.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 160.

Ahmed focuses on supporting more schooling for women, rather than on abolishing veiling as a means to effect equality. She concludes that the politics of the veil, whether Islamist or western, seek to subordinate women's sexuality and identity against their will.

Similarly, in the introduction to *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood links Islamic patriarchy with women's failed emancipation. In this regard, Mahmood cites the re-emphasis on Islam, which was initiated with the 1979 Iranian revolution and the Zia ul-Haq regime of Pakistan.²⁶ However, Mahmood also locates secular feminist discourse as limiting free choice at all levels of society. Contrary to Ahmed, Mahmood infers that Islam gives a democratic voice to more groups than secularism.²⁷ But, similar to Ahmed, Mahmood reflects that 'the veil has become the symbol and evidence of the violence Islam has inflicted upon women'.²⁸ Mahmood cautions that cultural practices should not be confused with Islamic practices, although domestic violence is reportedly high in Islamic regions.²⁹ Mahmood asserts that the veil and the burqua-wearing woman are wrongly characterised as evidence of Islamic domestic violence against women in the west, citing the use of the veil in a western feminist campaign against the oppression of Taliban. Action that failed to account for 'the destruction wrought by twenty years of war funded by the United States'.³⁰ Mahmood supports Ahmed's deduction that while women were tragically deprived of education, veiling misguidedly became the topic of interest when debating the nature of Islamic civilisation.³¹

²⁶ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety, the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), .p. x.

²⁷ *ibid.* p. xi.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 195.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 190.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 197.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 197.

Corinne Fowler reflects on women in Afghanistan in *Chasing Tales*; investigating the dilemma of the burqa and the subordination of women there, while also explaining the representation of the veil in media.³² Fowler shares the same concerns as Mahmood and Ahmed that women are negatively affected as victims and ‘agents of change’ by the on-going politics about themselves whether it is proposed by their own government or western politicians.³³ Furthermore, Fowler examines the orientalist politicisation of the veil by western journalists. Especially selected photographs of women in burqas are reflected as the prototype for all Muslim women, and used to charge Islam with misogyny, conservatism and violence. Meanwhile, Fowler explains, those claiming to have an interest in their liberation ignored the voice of Afghan women.³⁴ Burqua-wearing Afghan women were rendered ‘invisible’, reflected onto the screens as ‘voiceless women’.³⁵ Fowler’s work also critiques the close relationship between British journalists and Afghan women. Fowler criticises the representation of unveiled Afghan women as having access to ‘the political leverage to help veiled women “get a better [political] deal”’.³⁶ Fowler argues:

The prevalence of antifeminist definitions of Afghan women according to their object status, leads to Afghan women being commonly depicted in the possessive mode (‘their women’), which underwrites notions of Afghan women as passive victims rather than as active agents of their destiny.³⁷

Despite the representation of unveiled Afghan women as liberated, constant references to Afghan women as passive subjects degrades silences them in relation to

³² Corinne Fowler, *Chasing Tales, Travel Writing, Journalism and the History of British Ideas about Afghanistan* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), .

³³ Ibid. p. 192.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 192.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 200.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 194.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 194.

the journalist.³⁸ Consequently, it is also noteworthy that the study reflects the imbalance within society through intersections of gender and class.

Turkey, Modernisation and Women

In the context of Turkey, the doctrines of Islam and the Islamic regime have been challenged since the late Ottoman era (1839), continuing during the foundation of the Turkish Republic (1923). Therefore, this led women to become a symbol and indicator of modernisation. During the Tanzimat period (1839-76), which witnessed secular political and legal developments against the shariah (secular education versus madrasa and state control of the waqf), there were attempts to legitimise the rights of women.³⁹ The aim was to secure British support against dissolution of the country with proof of westernisation, although certain rights were denied to women in the reform as the clergy claimed they contradicted Islam.⁴⁰ Deniz Kandiyoti states that the educated Ottoman male elites, who had been to Europe, discussed woman rights.⁴¹ With their support, women wrote in newspapers and constructed unions to seek to establish their rights in family law and inheritance law, serving three principles, 'being a good mother, a good wife and a good Muslim'.⁴² Nevertheless, these three principles were restricted by their claims for rights, far exceeding compatibility with the patriarchal regime.

Islamic institutions were seen as obstacles by the elites, who were seeking to reach a higher level of civilisation, as the politics of women's rights gave rise to new discourses of Turkish nationalism, contrary to principles of Islamic unity. According to Kandiyoti, this process began with Ziya Gokalp's dismissal of Islam and embrace

³⁸ Ibid. p. 195.

³⁹ Deniz Kandiyoti, 'End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey', in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. by Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), 1pp. 22-47.p. 24.

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 24-7.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 25.

⁴² Ibid. p. 27.

of pre-Islamic Turkish roots.⁴³ Gokalp found new moral codes based on the early Turkish regime, supporting monogamous marriages and democracy, with contributions from women in the family and the state, and equal rights for both sexes.⁴⁴ This made women the battleground for the foundation of a new nationalism; their sexuality was used as evidence of their freedom, and tied to their pre-Islamic roots, as Kandiyoti explains. By rejecting the veil, male elites were distanced from Islamic doctrines, and by nationalising the subjectivity of women's bodies they emphasised their distance from western doctrines. Although they emulated the west, they internalised the issue of women, attributing the shift to pre-Islamic Turkish roots. Therefore, women were expected to attribute the liberation of their sexuality to nationalist discourses, rather than westernisation. Nonetheless, Kandiyoti explains that Turkish feminism's rise in importance relative to Islamism was not an autonomous search for rights, but a male elite's project to establish a 'new woman' in a new secular state. The veil, which also contradicted the secular appearance of the sexes in public, was underrated with the reform of clothing. As Kandiyoti explains, people were urged to abide by the reforms and adopt modern codes of dressing, facing severe charges if they failed to do so.⁴⁵

Yesim Arat observes that the establishment and modernisation of Turkey meant that women were 'emancipated but unliberated'.⁴⁶ Women were given civil and political rights, to attain equality with their male counterparts, although they were still required to ask men to intercede on their behalf.⁴⁷ Thus, 'women were emancipated,

⁴³ Ibid. p. 34. Gokalp is a Turkish sociologist, writer, poet and one of the most influential spokesmen of the Turkish nationalist movement. See <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/237213/Ziya-Gokalp> [accessed 5th September 2014].

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 35.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 23.

⁴⁶ Yesim Arat, 'From Emancipation to Liberation: The Changing Role of Women in Turkey's Public Realm', *Journal of International Affairs*, 54 (2000), 107-123.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 111.

but only to the degree that the founding fathers saw fit'.⁴⁸ Women were expected to acquiesce to the modernisation process in Turkey, with the adoption of new civil codes. They were given the right to education, and the expectation of the founding fathers was a revision of their traditional roles, to match western norms, i.e. as homemakers rather than intellectuals.⁴⁹ In this way, they cultivated a stereotype of the modern Turkish women, and the education system was designed to support this stereotyping.⁵⁰ Thus, the new state was a paternal one, in which all people believed they would serve the best interests of all groups.⁵¹ Arat demonstrated that women's struggles for autonomy were refuted, just as their proposals to found a political party of their own were denied; instead they were encouraged to found a federation.⁵² Later, this federation collaborated with international feminist groups against the Nazi regime, and was abolished for its outspokenness.⁵³ Hence, Arat clearly shows the failure of the modern Turkish state to offer equality to women.

The Blossoming of Feminism and Contemporary Turkish Women

As discussed by Arat previously, women as social actors comply with the state against possible return to the shariah, since they have been emancipated. The percentage of female literacy has improved since the introduction of educational rights.⁵⁴ Kemalism has also been widespread, this means maintaining the reformist principles of the founding fathers but externally observing Islamic practices such as veiling. Women have followed this Kemalist perspective and not challenged state

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 111.

⁴⁹ Yesim Arat, 'The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey', in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. by Sibel Bozdogan and Resat Kasaba (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997), pp. 95-112.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 100.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 99.

⁵² Ibid. p. 101.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 101.

⁵⁴ Women Statistics, *State Institute of Statistics*, <http://kasaum.ankara.edu.tr/files/2013/02/İstatistiklerle-kadın-2012.pdf> [accessed on 20th August 2014].

politics. Nermin Abadan-Unat is ‘Turkey’s first female political scientist [...] and a defender of women’s rights in Turkey and abroad’ described in Arat’s terms.⁵⁵ She reflects her gratitude that ‘I chose my country as well as my nation with my own will. If Mustafa Kemal did not exist, perhaps I would not exist’.⁵⁶ In her speech, she idealises the Kemalist regime and ignores the challenges proceeding from its continuing patriarchy.

Turkey was subject to a military coup in 1980, which aimed to depoliticise leftist and rightist movements in Turkey.⁵⁷ Arat explains that the coup made it possible for women to redefine their commitments to the state, also introducing a second-wave of feminism from the west.⁵⁸ At present, women distance themselves from the state, uttering their dissatisfaction with existing traditions. When they criticise Turkey’s civil legal acts, they are named radical feminists. They discuss issues new to the political agenda, such as women’s sexuality, domestic violence and sexual harassment; subjects once taboo.⁵⁹ Although, the founding fathers enhanced the status of women in Turkey, they insured traditional gender roles with legal codes. Legally, ‘the husband head [is] of the family, representative of marriage union, privileged to choose the occupation of his wife’, gender segregation was sustained.⁶⁰ Feminist organisations are revealing the patriarchal of Turkey’s institutions and seeking to amend the law. They have also liberated many women from different backgrounds who were once not recognised and voiceless.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Yesim Arat, 1997, p. 95.

⁵⁶ Ahmet Taner Kislali, ‘Nicin Kemalistim?’, in *Yillik: Nermin Abadan-Unat’a Armagan* (Ankara: Ankara Universitesi Basimevi, 1991), pp. ix-x.

⁵⁷ Yesim Arat, ‘Contestation and Collaboration: Women’s Struggles for Empowerment in Turkey’, in *The Cambridge History of Turkey Volume 4: Turkey in the Modern World*, ed. by Resat Kasaba (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 397.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 397.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 397.

⁶⁰ Yesim Arat, 1997, p. 105.

⁶¹ Yesim Arat, 2008, p. 410.

Nowadays, violations of women's rights are even reported in the media. For example, the media has claimed that single women's parents are informed of their pregnancy test results,⁶² openly violating the civil right of women to privacy. The Ministry of Health has disavowed this claim, but women are restricted in their choice of abortions and C-section births. Abortion is restricted to less than ten weeks for women at free will, and women are imprisoned if it is discovered they have had an abortion after ten weeks.⁶³ In the case of married couples, women requiring an abortion must present consent from their husband. However, female children who are victims of sexual abuse are not granted an abortion without a judicial decision. In criminal cases, the health ministry claims it is acting to protect the lives of illegitimate babies, but the female victims are ignored. The lives of adolescent mothers are being jeopardised because of common honour claims.

The feminist movement has worked to prepare accommodation facilities for victims of domestic violence, committing to prepare alternative solutions to allow them to hide from their violators. This movement has allowed victims to enhance their opportunities with vocational courses, to gain economic independence and resist violence. The law formerly only recognised sexual crimes such as rapes and sexual attacks as crimes against public morality, leaving them unresolved with obligatory punishments, but it was amended in 2005 with the help of the feminist movement.⁶⁴ Thus, each case of violence is handled individually to insure effective punishment. However, women's campaigns to obtain universal help from the state have mostly been inconclusive. Although through Turkey's candidacy for European Union

⁶² 'Sağlık Bakanligindan Kiziniz Hamile Mesaji', *SoL*, 25th June 2012, <http://haber.sol.org.tr/kadinin-gunlugu/saglik-bakanligindan-kiziniz-hamile-mesaji-haberi-56230> [accessed 4th September 2014].

⁶³ Kurtaj Yasasinin Ayrintilari Belli Oldu', *Internethaber*, 18th June 2012, <http://www.internethaber.com/kurtaj-yasasi-kurtj-tasarisi-recep-akdag-ensest-iliskiler-siniri-ertesi-gun-hapi-443748h.htm> [accessed 3rd September 2014].

⁶⁴ Yesim Arat, 2008, p. 406.

requires compliance with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by the 2000s, as clearly expressed by Arat.⁶⁵

Turkey's maintenance of patriarchal norms and gender discrimination in both the private and public spheres remains influential. Although the state sometimes takes precautions against women's victimisation through moral codes, it is inadequate and attitudes toward female sexuality are non-progressive, as seen in the emphasis on chastity. One government minister declared:

Where are those girls of ours that symbolize chastity, that symbolize modesty, who blush slightly when we look them in the face, who can bend their necks forward and evade our eyes? Chastity is very important. She should know private from public. She shouldn't laugh out loud in public. She shouldn't entice with all her motions; one needs to preserve one's chastity.⁶⁶

This statement shows disrespect for women in general, and explains how in many cases the politics of subordination are justified in relation to the topic of chastity.

Women are called to be chaste in public, and the right to the protection of their bodies against sexual violation are not recognised throughout the country. However, Turkey has been presented with a target for the enhancement of women's status by 2020, by the European Union.⁶⁷

This research aims specifically to analyse contemporary Turkish women's difficulties and recognise their reflection to the contemporary women's literature. Therefore, this study will provide examples of women's common problems as mentioned in 2020 European Perspective for women report, and their representation in Elif Shafak's narratives. Shafak's novels will give the study context of

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 403.

⁶⁶ 'Laughing Photos in Response to Deputy PM', *Bianet*, 30th July 2014, <http://bianet.org/english/politics/157496-laughing-photos-in-response-to-deputy-pm> [accessed 30th August 2014].

⁶⁷ Report on a 2020 Perspective for women in Turkey, *The European Union*, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A7-2012-0138+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>, [accessed on 1st August 2014].

contemporary Turkish women and their lives shaped according to their materialisation of sexualities.



CHAPTER TWO: *The Flea Palace* (2004); ‘Women-to-Bed’ and ‘Women-to-Marry’

This novel is consisted of a block of ten flats and their lives influenced by a deep garbage smell in the block. Shafak presents distinct but similar stories of the dwellers. The reader is given the historical background of the block and the neighbourhood before learning the contemporary dwellers. Sidar at number 2 and twin hairdressers at number 3 bear similarities that they all had migrant lives and had to leave their roots and families. The Blue Mistress at number 8 and HisWifeNadia at number 6 suffer from the troubling unreliable male characters and get distanced from their tormented lives. While the novel is narrated through third person narration in general, the protagonist emerging in the oncoming pages is the only character that uses first person narration. The protagonist is a university professor man, and he also helps the reader to understand the categorisation of women in the novel. Women are socially categorised in accordance with their materialisation of sexualities in the novel. While the other novels I discuss are centred on women’s problems, this novel represents social categorisation of womanhood as only one of a number of issues. While the professor speaks on his behalf, and reflects on his opinion, Shafak does not create sympathy for him, as the professor is reflected as a type of womaniser. However, The Blue Mistress, who is seen as evil and seducer by the society, is reflected as innocent victim of the merchant. The Blue Mistress is portrayed as a sympathetic character, and her innocence is demonstrated alongside her victimhood, thereby promoting sympathy for her.

Shafak reflects on men’s violence towards women and their families in *The Flea Palace*. Rather than externalising the problem into a group of uneducated people, Shafak explores the idea that people have flaws in perception with regard to

gender. Istanbul may be the most cosmopolitan city in Turkey, yet the novel depicts a family embroiled in violence. The husband Metin is educated and works in the media, but he is totally deficient in his understanding of gender equality. HisWifeNadia, formerly a Russian scholar, realises that her husband's tendency to violence is due to his emotional inadequacy. She excuses for her husband's violence and remains silent about it. Shafak's novel supports that such violence should be a public, not a private, concern and that Turkish society should be schooled on gender equality.

Nadia's identity is subsumed by that of her husband. She is termed HisWifeNadia, which highlights her subjugated role in their marriage. She only comes to realise this when she encounters her name, written onto a wedding invitation as HisWifeNadia.⁶⁸ Once a researcher in her own country, she falls in love with her husband and comes to Turkey, where her life is reshaped by new social conventions. The degree of her confinement to the house is revealed by her remark that she has seen so little of the city since she arrived four years earlier.⁶⁹ During an unexpected visit to her husband's workplace, Nadia observes his intimacy with a woman at his workplace and becomes furious at his ability to be affectionate. Although 'HisWifeNadia had forgiven [...] Metin Chetinceviz's wrongs and in her jaded way endured his never-ending jealousies, callousness, even slaps' considering that he did not know how to behave, Nadia encounters for the first time with the reality of her position.⁷⁰ Metin is not affectionate with his wife since she already belongs to him. Even though she is occasionally treated in a terrible way, Nadia does not abandon her husband until she reaches the limits of her ability to endure it. She recovers her Russian identity and regains the strength to oppose her husband. Shafak shows that women are dependent on men for attaining their social identity, and thus they

⁶⁸ Elif Shafak, *The Flea Palace* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 213.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 201.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p. 201.

conform to the social conventions. The novel promotes the idea that a woman's nationality does not make any difference to their status in Turkish society.

Turkish women are daily faced with domestic violence; physical, psychological and sexual.⁷¹ Turkish women are subordinated by widespread emphasis on their modesty, which then becomes the grounds for "protecting" them. Psychological violence is experienced by women who are controlled by patriarchal tradition. Shafak opposes the idea that violence happens only in rural regions, by focusing on Metin and Nadia's urban situation. Her novel thus highlights the consequences of a lack of non-sexist education at all levels of society. Everybody, rich and poor, needs to wake up to the reality of domestic violence. Only in this way can domestic violence be understood as solely women's problem.

A full record of domestic violence cases in Turkey has been kept for the last 6 years.⁷² In the first seven months of 2014, 162 women were reported to have been murdered by men, 362 of them were victims of physical violence. 61 women and girls reported sexual harassment.⁷³ The EU report proposes that at least 39% of Turkish women have been victims of physical violence. There is therefore some pressure for the state to take concerted action to prevent gender-based violence, taking a non-tolerance approach to violence against women and finding effective and consistent legal punishment for such violence. Women who report violence also have to face the well-documented patriarchy of officials.

⁷¹ 'Erkek Sıddet Cetelesi', *Bianet*, 2014, <http://bianet.org/kadin/bianet/133354-bianet-siddet-taciz-tecavuz-cetelesi-tutuyor> [accessed 6th September 2014].

⁷² 'Erkek Sıddet Cetelesi', *Bianet*, 2014, <http://bianet.org/kadin/bianet/133354-bianet-siddet-taciz-tecavuz-cetelesi-tutuyor> [accessed 6th September 2014].

⁷³ 'Erkek Sıddeti Temmuz 2014', *Bianet*, 2014, <http://bianet.org/bianet/kadin/157628-erkek-siddeti-temmuz-2014> [accessed 6th September 2014].

Shafak's novel explores the experiences of women who are expected to follow traditional patriarchal regimes. She also highlights the condition of marginalised women. The most marginalised woman in *The Flea Palace* is the Blue Mistress. Although her exact situation is not fully revealed in the exposition of the novel, Shafak hints that the Blue Mistress combines innocence and lust.

While Nadia is subordinated and her identity is developed related to her husband, The Blue Mistress's identity is defined with her relation to a male character. The Blue Mistress is categorised according to her illicit mistress life with a married olive oil merchant. She obtains her name this way. The Blue Mistress's identity and sexuality is thus subordinated to that of the merchant.

The merchant buys her presents of 'infinite sky blue' underwear. While the colour blue is intended to suggest innocence and naivety, the gift of underwear nonetheless connotes promiscuity. The Blue Mistress is marginalised due to her relationship, but the merchant tries to combat this by making her seem more innocent. To the Blue Mistress, the merchant gives her a half-lamb, half-wolf appearance.⁷⁴ The social conventions remind her of 'the unsurpassable border between women-to-marry and women-to-bed'.⁷⁵ While women-to-bed are outcastes, women-to-marry are highly regarded on condition that they follow the social rules. The Blue Mistress is objectified by the merchant. However, Shafak's novels produce an alternative form of justice, in which male perpetrators are punished and end up dead. The Blue Mistress is freed from the merchant. Although he dies of heart attack, Shafak exacts some form of revenge by killing off the man who governs the Blue Mistress's life.

While women-to-bed are dishonoured, the men who exploit them shift the blame onto those same women. Shafak writes that 'such men lusted after what they

⁷⁴ Shafak, 2004, p. 175.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 175.

vilified and vilified what they lusted after'.⁷⁶ Thus, the link between shame and lust is constructed in the following way: 'be ashamed of your desires, [...] be ashamed of the woman you desire, [...] desire the woman who brings you shame'.⁷⁷ Men desire women-to-bed because they are attracted by what society condemns in them. While they choose respectable women as wives, they exploit women-to-bed. The merchant tries to make his relationship with the Blue Mistress more innocent to dampen his shame. The merchant even calls her his 'betrothed', religion would permit him to marry up to four women.⁷⁸ The merchant tries to own her body with religious claims. Yet her identity as a mistress is indelible and she may only be the object of sexual desire.

The Blue Mistress is much gossiped about. As the mistress of a wealthy merchant, others exploit her for sex. The first time she enters the hairdresser's at their block, she is given a peculiar attention. The hairdresser shakes her hand in defiance of convention, as though she is available to seduce and be seduced.⁷⁹ The Blue Mistress similarly defies convention, wearing a long gauzy dress, which masks her sexual identity yet makes her legs exactly visible, conforming to the expectation that women-to-bed do not refrain from displaying their bodies.⁸⁰ The hairdresser's pubescent pimpled apprentice looks at the Blue Mistress's nipples, as he would not do for any other women.⁸¹

The Blue Mistress is also involved in a relationship with the first-person narrator of the novel, the professor who lives across from her flat. The professor thinks that the mistress has long been deeply attracted to him, but he is surprised by

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 175.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 175.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 180.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 97.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 82.

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 97.

her reluctance.⁸² When he kisses her, the Blue Mistress draws back and tries to continue speaking. The narrator is so determined to maintain his move that he interprets her withdrawal as ‘forged reticence’.⁸³ The professor informs the audience that ‘[he] steered her inside to the bedroom. [...] She was at ease. So was [he]. Couples wise enough not to harbour future expectations from one another keep little back when making love’.⁸⁴ The mistress is not supposed to retreat from making love with him yet her identity does not meet the expectations of the university professor. Since she does not belong to the category of women-to-marry, the Blue Mistress is expected to be more easy with the idea of intercourse than conventional women. However, Shafak silences the Blue Mistress and, in this way, the reader learns the professor’s side of the story. Shafak is able to explore the justification for victimising women by exposing the professor’s assumptions. Social prejudices victimise women without giving them right to speak on their own behalf, thus Shafak recreates this inequality by choosing to speak in the professor’s voice. Shafak leaves the defence of the Blue Mistress for the reader. The Blue Mistress is reflected as a loser in her life and this promotes readers’ sympathy for her plight.

The professor talks about his poor memory for names, and how he is good at nicknaming people and remembering those instead. The Blue Mistress requests a nickname. The professor replies that she already has a nickname and it is ‘the Blue Mistress’. His view of her response to the name is depicted in the following way:

‘[he] could see it in her eyes all the same. She liked the name [he] had given her’.⁸⁵

The professor infers that she liked her nickname, but the reader never hears her real

⁸² Ibid. p. 319.

⁸³ Ibid. p. 320.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 320.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 375.

opinion of it. She is silenced and categorised by him, and by wider views about her sexuality. Thus, her true name and identity are ignored.

Despite the professor's perspective, the novel does enlighten the reader on the Blue Mistress's opinion of her intimacy with the professor. The professor asks her to attend one of his classes, saying he will tell people she is his friend if anyone asks any questions. The Blue Mistress challenges his idea. She claims that they cannot be friends, married or lovers, because 'friendship is based on compatibility'.⁸⁶ The Blue Mistress, who dropped out of high school, considers herself lower than the university professor. While social convention dictates the idea that people must share similar cultural backgrounds to get along, the Blue Mistress claims that they could only be accomplices.⁸⁷ Society thinks that illicit intercourse is immoral, and the Blue Mistress sees their relationship as a crime. Theirs is a crime against social convention and they are the accomplices. So, the Blue Mistress, who does not reveal herself to the external world, displays her intimate thoughts to the professor. She does not feel compatible with the professor and is aware that two people from distinct educational backgrounds are not encouraged to be friends.⁸⁸ Despite this, the novel shows that people from different backgrounds can be similar; the Blue Mistress and the professor discover that they have similar pasts and are able to build a relationship on their mutual understanding of shared troubles. Considering that the professor, who cheats on his wife, is forsaken by his wife, and the mistress, who is used by the olive oil merchant to cheat on his wife, the professor decides that they are both losers at the same level and need 'to be assured that their constant disappointment with the marital institution does not stem from their failures, and that they could make it work with

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 376.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 377.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 376.

another person'.⁸⁹ Although the professor's situation is not as innocent as the Blue Mistress, he regards her as evil as himself. However, society does not evaluate women and men with the same conventions, so the Blue Mistress is disregarded as less modest than the professor. The novel makes a clear distinction between the society's perceptions of modesty, which are discriminatory on the basis of sex.

The professor's intimacy with two other women also demonstrates the social categorisation of women. While the professor's ex-wife, Ayshin is a more conventional woman-to-marry, their friend Ethel deconstructs the ideal modesty of womanhood. The professor compares them, concluding that they are thesis versus antithesis. While the professor describes Ayshin in comparison with Ethel as very attractive with a flawless body, Ethel is referred as 'the cunt' multiple times in the text.⁹⁰ Contrary to Ayshin, Ethel is the leader of a temple-house, where she gathers brainy men from the university. While Ayshin and the professor are getting ready to marriage, Ethel prepares a parade of numerous boyfriends, all of who passed through her temple-house. Ethel is mostly mentioned as lustful and seductive with the nickname 'the cunt'. Ethel seduces the professor, the husband of her only girl friend. Whereas the professor has a regular sexual intercourse with Ethel during his marriage, Ethel decreases their sexual relationships after the professor's divorce.⁹¹

Ayshin proposed a perfect portrait of a woman-to-marry with 'a forced toughness [...] when [she] become[s] conscious of the admiration [she] arouse in others'.⁹² She sounds like doing a favour to men when she tells her name.⁹³ Hence, she is compatible with the social conventions with her uneasiness with men, because

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 320.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 149.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 192.

⁹² Ibid. p. 165.

⁹³ Ibid. p. 165.

women have to behave modestly but lustfully. Thus, she is wise enough to conform to social conventions but she is also able to be flirtatious that she arouses desire for men.

Ethel does not conceal her body, although it is described as ugly by the professor. She is compared to 'a flasher', whose victims become addicts. Ethel's desire to display her body despite all her flaws distinguishes her from other conventional women. She behaves like a man, desiring what he sees, rather than a woman needing to be desired.⁹⁴ Ethel's difference is revealed more when she tries to seduce the professor in a taxi. The professor shows some resistance against Ethel's target-oriented attacks.⁹⁵ While the professor is anxious to discover whether the driver is aware of what is happening, Ethel does not pay attention to others. Since she is identified with her lustfulness, she digresses from conventional female sexuality. With her carefree nature, Ethel '[refutes] womanhood on all occasions with an in-your-face attitude'.⁹⁶ Ethel's deviance from supposedly normative sexuality makes the society to label her 'the cunt'.⁹⁷

The novel also reveals the distinction between women's sexuality in the other flats of the block. Hygiene Tijen is a meticulous housewife and germophobic. She sends her daughter Su to a private school for a better education. She never leaves the house for cleaning purposes. The society determines Tijen's identity as a wife, and expects her to follow convention. However, Tijen is criticised because she insisted on an expensive school and spent all their money on it.⁹⁸ She is seen as partly responsible for her husband's nervous breakdown and the wreckage of her marriage.⁹⁹ Society blames wives for the breakdown of their marriage. Even though she is a traditional

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 190.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 309.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 308.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 310.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 129.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 129.

housewife, compatible with the social conventions, the responsibility of keeping the husband interested falls on her shoulders.

Su reveals the family dispute at the beauty parlour unintentionally. Su says that her mother thinks the lice come from her father, who got them from his prostitutes.¹⁰⁰ The lice are associated with the prostitute because she is seen as filthy. Since Tijen is portrayed as meticulous and ultra clean, she is also remote from any sexual connotation. Yet conventions dictates that Tijen is responsible for her husband's cheating, and the prostitute are reprimanded for her occupation while the faulty husband escapes blame. The society condemns women either as lustful discriminates them in accordance with the use of their sexualities or as grumbler and uninteresting for the husband.

The Flea Palace is narrated using the multiple stories of people living in the block. The block complains about the unending garbage smell. The garbage smell surrounds the whole neighbourhood, and it is seen that government's neglect on the issue worsens the situation. Shafak uses the metaphor of garbage smell surrounding the whole public to express that people actually live under the heavy smell as long as they maintain maltreatment of women. It shows that gender discrimination surrounds the society, affects them all, and the government's inability to intervene in worsens the situation. Although the dwellers are uncomfortable with the problem, they do not take effective steps to eliminate it.

Shafak reflects that women are categorised and criticised with respect to their perceived sexualities. The Blue Mistress is reflected as both innocent and lustful, as the merchant feels ashamed of her and tries to behave her like his betrothed. The merchant's death frees her from her ambiguous situation. However, the idea about

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 130.

women is divided into two categories, women-to-bed and women-to-marry, which includes the Blue Mistress. She is socially marginalised and expected to conform to others' idea of her sexuality. As the professor expresses his intention to have sexual intercourse with her, she is expected not to oppose his lustful move. The Blue Mistress does not defend herself that makes her vulnerable to the society, thus sympathetic for the reader's consciousness. Shafak punishes the main determiner of her life, the merchant, with death. The professor's relationship with two other women, Ethel and Ayshin, also reveals the social categorisation. While Ethel is referred as 'the cunt', she is represented according to her lust, parade of boyfriends, seduction and explicit sexuality. Ayshin is categorised as woman-to-marry since she is more modest, conservative and difficult to win. Shafak uses another detail to represent women-to-bed, as Su describes her problem with the lice. Her mother claims that her father sleeps with prostitutes, who give him the lice. Thus, women-to-bed are disregarded as filthy.

CHAPTER THREE: *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007); The Shame of Clothing

In this novel, Shafak narrates the stories of families with two different ethnicities, Turkish and Armenian. By the end of the narrative it is learned that they were related all along. The novel is told from the perspective of a third-person narrator. The Turkish family, the Kazancis, are cursed with the death of their men in their early forties. Therefore, the Kazanci family is comprised of seven women from four generations. In the Kazanci home, one of the daughters, Zeliha gives birth to a baby girl, Asya out of wedlock from an unknown father. It is revealed later in the novel that Zeliha was raped and impregnated by her brother. Mustafa then flees to America to go to university and stays there for twenty years. The eldest sister in the family, Banu works as a psychic devoted to God. She learns the truth of rape and punishes Mustafa upon his return to Turkey after twenty years. The novel clearly demonstrates that women have to control their behaviours, by acting with modesty and chastity if they are to be respected. Otherwise, they are considered sexually exploitable.

Zeliha is demonstrated as a sympathetic character, whose innocence is overlooked under her explicit sexuality. The characters prefer to judge or accept her identity themselves. Shafak decides on her truth, as Zeliha's violator Mustafa is punished for his crime with death. As the moral consciousness of the family, and with divine abilities such as captivating the jinni, Banu decides to poison Mustafa while liberating Zeliha from the agony of the past. Thus, killing Mustafa Shafak suggests that the society should be punished for their classification of women.

Zeliha is reflected as a rebellious soul, acting against the doctrines of the society. The first impression the reader has of Zeliha is the opinion of vendors in the Grand Bazaar. They disapprove her as deviating from modesty, as she wears a shiny

nose ring, that they believe marks her out as her lecherousness.¹⁰¹ As well as the nose ring, she wears colourful miniskirts, tight-fitting blouses, satin nylon stockings, and high heels, which make her appear taller, although she is already taller than the average woman.¹⁰² Hence, Zeliha appears to publicise her sexual identity as a reaction to social preconceptions.

Society approaches Zeliha, not as an esteemed individual, but as a promiscuous woman. As a confirmation of public prejudices, a taxi driver verbally harasses Zeliha. Shafak reflects that Zeliha open herself up to public torment by the way she dresses. Shafak questions, through the voice of Zeliha, if a woman reluctant to conceal her sexuality should be afraid to walk alone in the streets. The taxi driver who harasses her also offers her a ride in his taxi, referring to his intention to have sex with Zeliha. Since she does not dress modestly, the driver expects her to be free with her sexual desires. Shafak also provides music in the background, Madonna's 'Like a Virgin', to connote Zeliha's promiscuity. While the lyric plays *been saving it all for you*, the driver makes a move to demand his satisfaction, as if he has the right. After the incident, Zeliha is not supposed to bring up the topic of the abuse. Were she to refer to it, she would be stigmatised, rather than supported.

Shafak does not neglect the sharp contrast between modest women, who are regarded as normal and respected by the majority, and women who are motivated by their free will, rather than the guidance of society. Life styles and preferences are regarded as a basis for the categorisation of women in Turkey. Thus, if a woman digresses from social conventions, she is automatically outcasted from the norm of womanhood. Zeliha falls into the second category. She knows 'a woman who smoked on the streets was not highly regarded in Istanbul', but she does not care about this,

¹⁰¹ Elif Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* (London: Viking, 2007, repr. 2008), p. 3.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* p. 4.

since she fights against social conventions.¹⁰³ Later, she plans to offer a cigarette to the husband of a woman she met at the gynaecologist. However, she is also conscious that she would be criticised for seducing the man since ‘an unmarried woman could not ask such questions of married men, and a married man would display hostility toward another woman when next to his wife’.¹⁰⁴ Society disregards unmarried women as outcastes and possible seducers of husbands.

She violates the prudent principles of being a respectable woman.¹⁰⁵ It is highlighted that she swears at her harasser, loses her nerves and throws a tantrum in the street. In this way, Shafak references the understanding of innocence in traditional terms. An innocent woman is supposed to be unresponsive to harassment, because she has to behave accordingly. As mentioned earlier, Shafak resists the patriarchal determination of innocence and shame, as regarded by a Turkish governor.¹⁰⁶ She underlines that the governor’s classification of women does not reflect the truth, as innocence or shame should not be decided by the society.

It is socially unacceptable for women to display their sexualities publicly, and this is worse for unmarried women, and those who remain single or divorcee. Multiple times in the novel, Zeliha encounters accusations of seduction, extramarital intercourse and shame. Her initial reason for visiting the gynaecologist is to have an abortion, which is already a problem in the Turkish context. Moreover, the revelation of her age and her single marital status worsens her situation. While she would legally require the consent of her husband for abortion if she were to be married, she has to take the burden of a bastard infanticide. Although Zeliha is represented as a rebellious

¹⁰³ Ibid. p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Elif Shafak, ‘Masum Kimdir?’, *Zaman*, 8th April 2007, http://www.zaman.com.tr/elif-safak/masum-kimdir_786670.html [accessed 7th September 2014].

character, to whom other people's opinions is not important, she is discriminated against anyway. Shafak shows that it is possible to ignore others' opinions even though it is not possible to transform them.

Shafak addresses the problematic understanding of honour and disrespect and the situation of innocence. A local administrator announced that honour murder was an issue for women, who have failed their families, and cheated on their husbands, claiming they are not innocent. Thus, he maintains that there is nothing for modest women staying at homes raising children to be concerned about. Shafak takes this announcement and scrutinises it, exemplifying how honour is reconstructed in patriarchal terms.¹⁰⁷ It is proposed that patriarchal tradition claims the right to decide on the honour of women. Shafak opposes any discrimination between women according to honour and dishonour.¹⁰⁸ She fuels public opinion, requiring that people take action against honour crimes rather than ignoring them. It is also underlined that honour is not a quality upon which mankind decides, and that officials should take precautions to protect women from their potential murderers.

Shafak demonstrates that an abortion for an unmarried woman is easier than for a married woman. Even the Turkish Civil Code employs discrimination according to female sexuality. Shafak opines on behalf of Zeliha that 'bureaucratic regulations were less keen to rescue babies born out of wedlock than those born to married couples. A fatherless baby in Istanbul was just another bastard, and a bastard just another sagging tooth in the city's jaw, ready to fall out at any time'.¹⁰⁹ Thus, women

¹⁰⁷ Elif Shafak, 'Masum Kimdir?', *Zaman*, 8th April 2007, http://www.zaman.com.tr/elif-safak/masum-kimdir_786670.html [accessed 7th September 2014].

¹⁰⁸ Elif Shafak, "'Honour Killings': Murder by Any Other Name", *The Guardian*, 30th April 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/apr/30/honour-killings-spreading-alarming-rate> [accessed 7th September 2014].

¹⁰⁹ Shafak, 2007, p. 12.

were not modest and children born out of wedlock were not under the protection of the state. While abortion for married women is dependent on certain regulations, single pregnant women are cast out for their lack of chastity.

With legal regulations discriminate against women according to their sexuality, public opinion about women's sexuality determines their public representation. When Zeliha explains her pregnancy and her inconclusive attempt at abortion, her mother, Gulsum belittles her and reminds her of the male honour of the family. Gulsum laments this:

Shame on you! You've always brought disgrace on this family. [...] Look at your nose piercing... all that makeup and the revoltingly short skirts, and oh those high heels! This is what happens when you dress up... like a whore! You should thank Allah night and day; you should be grateful that there are no men around in this family. They'd have killed you.¹¹⁰

As a non-normative character, Zeliha has already drawn the attention of others with her dress style. Therefore, Gulsum also has already categorised her daughter as promiscuous. The reality of a fatherless child causes no fundamental difference in Zeliha's life, because her reflection of sexuality already defines her as whore-like. Gulsum blames her appearance for her extramarital pregnancy, since Zeliha is believed to be responsible for her so-called crime due to her choice of clothing, which caused her to appear lustful to her attacker. Even when she is the victim of sexual abuse, a negative label is imposed upon her. Although she becomes more vulnerable to public torment and verbal abuse, Shafak comments that the public positions her as desirous of sex.

When introducing inequalities into the social sphere, patriarchy is very visible in relation to honour crimes. Shafak asserts that honour is not only a word, it is a name reserved for men only, and women can only be aligned with shame,

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p. 29.

which is the worst label for any woman.¹¹¹ Although similar to domestic violence, due to the kinship of the doers, honour crimes differ in that they are based on claims of disrespecting family honour, concluding with the death of the disrespecting woman. Honour crimes may be realised with murder or suicide. The girl is either killed by her closest male relative, or forced to commit suicide so that she will not continue to dishonour the family, imprisoning her family members. Steps further than domestic violence, honour crimes are one of the most critical problems facing women in Turkey regardless of urbanity. They are also a symbol of the Turkish patriarchy.¹¹² Honour criteria function differently for the different sexes.

Her mother, Gulsum does not explore whether Zeliha is responsible for her situation or not. She imposes the view of society regarding women's sexuality. What also attract attention are her remarks, which show she cares for the family honour rather than her daughter's tragedy. Gulsum insists that Zeliha's existence is a disgrace to the family due to her appearance and the illegitimate baby. In the opinion of society Zeliha deserves to be killed by her male family members. Despite her shame, it is emphasised that she should be grateful that she has no male relatives nearby to murder her. The novel deconstructs this fact with Zeliha's innocence and Mustafa's punishment. Mustafa's death does not only liberate Zeliha from his disgrace, but it also conveys to the reader that Shafak protects Zeliha's honour, not the family honour.

The incident that changes Zeliha's flow of life stems from conflict with Mustafa regarding her clothing. Although after their father's death, Zeliha feels more

¹¹¹ Elif Shafak, *Honour* (London: Viking, 2012, repr. 2013), p. 16.

¹¹² Elif Shafak, 'Turkey: Looking for Honour in All the Wrong Places', *The Guardian*, 21th March 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/mar/21/turkish-honour-seriously-misguided> [6th September 2014].

liberated, whereas Mustafa claims responsibility for the female members. Mustafa tries to recover the patriarchal system in the house. He intervenes in her dress, accusing her of being seduced by all the men in the neighbourhood.¹¹³ Zeliha tries to fight back, as a rebellious soul. Mustafa also questions her: '[y]ou have no shame. [...] You don't care when men whistle at you on the streets. You dress like a whore and then expect respect?' as his mother would react on revelation of the illegitimate baby.¹¹⁴ Mustafa questions her style of dress and judges Zeliha's sexuality as aligned with promiscuity. Society positions women openly as whores, and whores do not have a right to expect respect, as they digressed from a normative womanhood. Zeliha's materialisation of sexuality, and its misunderstanding by society determines her existence as a sexual object in public.

Mustafa is called a 'precious phallus' later by Zeliha, because he cannot learn to control his desires, he is enraged and attacks his sister.¹¹⁵ Mustafa's judgmental remark on her dress informs his masculinity. Although Zeliha tries to prevent him raping her, he traps her body under his weight. The very first thing she feels is humiliation. After the incident, she feels like 'life had been drained from her' because that would mark the change of fate.¹¹⁶ Even though she should not be the one who is ashamed, society claims she should feel shame. Women are supposed to protect the family honour with the protection of their bodies, permitting dishonourable men to go unnoticed, as Elif Shafak notes.

The rape is influential in changing the course of Zeliha's life, it gives her more encouragement to wage a war against the social conventions. Before the incident, Zeliha did not wear a nose ring. Hence, Zeliha confesses that she pierces her own

¹¹³ Shafak, 2007, p. 312.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p. 314.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 316.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 317.

nose in defiance against society, since it was unacceptable for a Turkish girl to wear a nose ring back then.¹¹⁷ A recurring theme in Shafak's novels is the silence of women in the face of accusations. Shafak reports on the significance of women's free will and their victimisation in society.¹¹⁸

Zeliha does not reveal the secret of the incest to anybody in the family. On the other hand, she begins a silent war against the conventions, mangling the physical integrity of her body with the nose ring, a body already ruined by Mustafa. Just as the confidentiality of The Blue Mistress in *The Flea Palace*, and Cemile's in *Honour*, yet to be discussed, Zeliha does not look to prove her innocence to anybody. Shafak provides a self-censor for Zeliha to protect her self-respect, which would be severely damaged were she to defend herself. In addition, she would not be given a voice by the society, even if she tried to claim her victimhood. In this way, Shafak pictures Zeliha a sympathetic character for the reader.

Sheila Jeffreys argues that 'a distrust of sexual response is likely to develop from an unwillingness to experience the feelings which are associated with shame'.¹¹⁹ Zeliha feels ashamed of the act of incest, and after the rape Shafak does not give any details about the number of Zeliha's boyfriends. However, it is mentioned that she has had an extended relationship with a university professor. Asya mentions her mother's commitment to her boyfriend, Aram. When asked about the possibility of their marriage, Asya indicates that Zeliha is severely influenced by a previous affair. Although unaware of the fact that she was a victim of rape, Asya believes that her mother has trust issues with men. Therefore, it is apparent that Zeliha's social life is influenced by her catastrophe. Zeliha is unable to construct a healthy relationship with

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p. 250.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p. 250.

¹¹⁹ Sheila Jeffreys, *Anticlimax, A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), p. 243.

a man as she is deeply affected by the rape. Thus, it is possible that women develop hatred for sexuality as the outcome of the violation of their sexuality.

Aside from Zeliha's conflict with Mustafa, Mustafa's approach to other women reveals a sharp discrimination in the characterisation of women's identity. Mustafa has to return home from the USA twenty years after the incident. Shafak makes it clear that Mustafa does not have any relationship in America other than that with his wife although he has attracted the attention of many women.¹²⁰ However, he is distracted by the appearance of a woman on the way home and questions his commitment to his wife. Shafak narrates, thus:

While passing the brunette's row, Mustafa noticed uneasily that the woman wore a brashly short skirt and had crossed her legs in such a way that you could easily be fooled into thinking that you might catch a glimpse of her underwear. He didn't like the disconcerting feeling the miniskirt brought on him; [...] the sight of his younger sister, Zeliha.¹²¹

The memory of Zeliha and his violation of her disturbs Mustafa. Paying attention to different women again, Mustafa is reminded of social categorisation. The brunette's preference for miniskirts causes her to be regarded as an unrespectable woman. However, Mustafa thinks that he could have liked any other woman than his wife. Mustafa considers that 'Rose was not a woman. Rose was Rose'.¹²² Multiple times in the context, Rose is mentioned as a plump woman, who spends all her time in the kitchen cooking and trying to lose weight to improve her looks. Therefore, Mustafa categorises his wife not as a woman. He does not consider Rose as having the qualities of femininity. On the other hand, Mustafa pays Rose respect by never cheating on her. It is inferred that women displaying their sexualities do not deserve respect from the society, whereas they are vulnerable to public torment. Women like

¹²⁰ Shafak, 2007, p. 291.

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 291.

¹²² Ibid. p. 292.

the brunette or Zeliha are forced to suffer from sexual exploitation, and not given respect.

As understood from the context of *The Bastard of Istanbul*, Turkish society categorises women according to the materialisation of their sexualities. The novel encourages the reader to judge the social categorisation. It is proven that with Zeliha and Mustafa's situation that appearance might be deceptive. The novel sympathise with Zeliha, who is disregarded and marginalised in the society. The novel conveys to the reader that the abusers must be punished, not the abused. When women display their sexualities, they are disregarded by society due to their desirousness and lecherousness. They are publicly tormented as it is suggested that they are 'asking for it' by how they dress. The perception of society is that women intend to be abused and expect not be respected if they wear clothes improper for society. If they experience abuse because of the lack of social respect, it is indicated that it is they who should feel shame, not their harassers. Thus, women are degraded in public. Their human rights are violated and they are deprived of the opportunity to construct a healthy relationship. However, they are victims of social categorisations, and are accused because of their obvious materialisations of sexuality. Mustafa's punishment and Zeliha's liberation proves that the novel proposes its own justice system. Women are represented as the victims of social categorisations; they are accused because of their explicit materialisations of sexuality.

CHAPTER FOUR: *Honour* (2012); The Honour of Virginity

Honour is a novel about different generations within families intersecting in each other's lives. The sustenance of honour is dictated as a tradition, passed from generation to generation, from mother to daughter in the novel. Pembe and Jamila, twins of eight daughters, were raised within a conservative society, where honour and the subordination of women's bodies were regarded as main principles. They witness their elder sister's suicide to recover honour while they are still young. Although resistant to and questioning tradition, Pembe follows social regulations in her later life. Years later, Pembe also raises her children with the same conservative gender discriminatory understanding when they emigrate to London. She advises her daughter Esma to protect her virginity and family honour, although her son Iskender, who is accepted as the sultan of the family, is allowed to experience his sexuality freely. Pembe becomes the victim of her own social conventions and her upbringing of Iskender. Iskender fills in his father's shoes and is upgraded to patriarchal sustainer of the family. After the abandonment of her husband, Pembe is seen with a man, fuelling rumours in their neighbourhood. Influenced by others' opinions about honour, Iskender is determined to protect his honour and scare his mother. However, he murders his mother's twin, his aunt, mistaking her for his mother. The novel narrates the images of women, who become the victims of their sexualities and the social imposition on women's bodies.

Men are believed to be the protector and maintainers of their lineage while women are 'respons[ible] for procreation'.¹²³ In Turkey, sons are more favoured than daughters in some families. Therefore, women sometimes start their lives unwanted by their families, as they lack sexual superiority and are seen as guests in their

¹²³ Fereshteh Hashemi, 'Women in an Islamic Versus Women in a Muslim View', *In the Shadow of Islam: The Women's Movement in Iran*, trans. by Azar Tabari and Nahid Yeganeh (London: Zed Books, 1982), p. 180.

fathers' houses. The novel criticises this percept demonstrating it as tragic. Pembe and Jamila come from a family, who crave sons and subordinate their daughters to accord with the demands of the traditional patriarchy. Naze, mother of eight daughters, risks her death while labouring believing that it is a boy.¹²⁴ She cuts herself to deliver the baby, which displays her despair in giving birth to son. The novel represents Naze as a female character that is accustomed to patriarchal superiority and tries to empower herself through her son because a woman could claim authority in the husband's house 'only by producing male offspring'.¹²⁵ While men are highly respected, women's statuses are also reshaped in relation to men.

In their youth Pembe and Jamila are warned by their mother Naze against violations of social regulations. Naze rigorously criticises Pembe and Jamila while they are dancing merrily in their adolescence. She lectures both of them: 'why would you [dance]? [...] Unless you two have decided to turn yourselves into harlots. [...] Modesty is a woman's only shield. Bear this in mind: if you lose that, you will be worth no more than a chipped kurus'.¹²⁶ Naze's concern over her daughters' modesty reveals her understanding that women are classified according to their social representation and others' conventions. She maintains that patriarchal tradition views an immodest woman as more worthless than a chipped coin. Therefore, a woman will be pushed to the fringes of the community if she fails to conform to social rules as a modest woman. Society categorises such women as unworthy, and worth is contingent on the concealment of one's sexuality.

Men and women are treated differently in terms of honour in society. Shafak writes that men are 'cut of thick dark fabric' while women are produced of 'the

¹²⁴ Elif Shafak, *Honour* (London: Penguin, 2012, repr. 2013), p. 19.

¹²⁵ Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with Patriarchy', *Gender and Society*, 2, 3 (1988), pp. 274-90. p. 279.

¹²⁶ Shafak, 2012, p. 15.

lightest cambric'.¹²⁷ Thus, men would not reveal any stains on them, although women can be stained by 'the tiniest speck of dirt', which pushes them to be more conscious of their manners.¹²⁸ Men would not be influenced by any claim of chastity, and such claims are ignored when a virgin has lost her honour in society. Thus, virginity is a determinant of a woman's identity in public.

Turkey is conservative in its attitude to sexual relationships, and domestic problems in this area typically remain private. Virginity is taken as proof of purity and worth in Turkey and its preservation reflects on a family's honour.¹²⁹ A girl who loses her virginity before marriage is regarded as dishonouring her family, and loss of virginity is the most commonly encountered reasons for an honour murder. Virginity is one focus of the subordination of women's bodies to patriarchal dominance, and challenging this is a decisive act for the feminist movement. Although the term honour is used for domestic killings, it is a dishonourable act to inflict violence on women. Valentine Moghadam discusses that 'in a patriarchal context, women are considered a form of property. Their honor [...] depends in great measure on their virginity and good conduct'.¹³⁰ Thus, it is taken too seriously that the contrary position the girl with the threat of death. Virginity becomes a method of subordination of women's bodies under patriarchal control as property and it constitutes a turning point for the feminist movement and autonomy need.

Until 2005, it was legal in Turkey for anyone to enforce a woman to have a virginity test. The law now protects women from pressurising a woman into a

¹²⁷ Ibid. p. 16.

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 16.

¹²⁹ Gul Ozyegin, 'Virginal Facades: Sexual Freedom and Guilt among Young Turkish Women', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 16 (2009), 103-23, p. 108.

¹³⁰ Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women, Gender & Social Change in the Middle East* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), p. 105.

genital check.¹³¹ The issue is one that remains. Tragically, in 2014 in Izmir, which is one of the most progressive cities in Turkey, a mother pressured her daughters to take a virginity test. Their refusal to do so led to them murdering her to retain the secret of their virginity. The test itself, when taken, imposes a label of shame on women. All the same, a 13-year-old girl named Havva committed suicide because of her father's insistence that she take the virginity test.¹³² The shame of being forced to have the test drove her to take her life, and yet after her death, her father publicised to the media the fact that she was a virgin.

Despite progression, patriarchal traditions endure, and in Turkey, the purity of a woman's body continues to determine male honour. Although the legal procedure of a virginity test does technically require the willingness of the woman/girl, it should be considered an act of sexual violence against women.

Jamila is represented with two different identities in the society in the novel. Initially, the novel defines Jamila with an ambiguous virginity and positions her unchaste in the society. The family-in-law of Jamila's elder sister kidnaps her and takes hostage for a few days for her father's disavow on their marriage. When they bring Jamila back, they claim that they did not lay a finger on her. Jamila does not accept or refute the claims on her virginity. A midwife gives her a virginity test on the demand of her father and announces that she is not a virgin.¹³³ Thus, she is marginalised even in her family. The society accepts her as stained and she is not seen worthy enough to be a young man's bride. The headman of their village reveals that 'the good news is that [the family-in-law] accept the girl as a bride for an old relative.

¹³¹ The Republic of Turkey, the Turkish Criminal Code, law no 5237 (1 April 2005), Article No 287.

¹³² Ayşe Gul Altınay, 'Bekaret ve Cinselligin Siyaseti I', *Bianet*, 27th July 2006, <http://bianet.org/bianet/bianet/82876-bekaret-ve-cinselligin-siyaseti-1> [accessed 6th September 2014].

¹³³ Shafak, 2012, p. 97.

A widower. Her honour is saved'.¹³⁴ Even though they degenerated the honour themselves, the girl is charged for their dishonour. Furthermore, their worsening the girl's situation with the marriage to an old man is accepted as a blessing for the girl, because 'her honour is saved'. The girl is considered dishonoured and her identity in the society is disregarded. Although Jamila is the most self-contained character in the novel, with her consistent position on others' claims on her virginity she is the sympathetic character in the novel. She is committed to her silence and allows the reader to either sympathise or criticise her.

Jamila's life is displayed as severely influenced by the non-virginity claims. Adem, who asks for her hand in the first step, he is affected by the ambiguity of her virginity. Adem calls Jamila to account for her shame. Jamila demands that Adem should love her as the way she is.¹³⁵ Although they love each other, Adem does not resist the social conventions or risk the possibility of her being non-virgin. He could not accept her doubtful situation, as the society would blame him. Adem thinks that 'what would his brother Tariq say when he learned that he had found himself a tainted wife?'¹³⁶ Jamila becomes the black sheep for the society and her relationship to any men would be condemned on the account that she is 'tainted'. Hence, she would be deprived of respect and love. Shafak does not break her rule on women's defence again. Shafak employs an indeterminate virginity for Jamila in *Honour*. She is claimed to dishonour the family honour, but the irony of her victimhood in all the tragedy is ignored. Upon all the discussions on her body, the girl keeps her silence neither accepting nor rejecting the situation. It is demonstrated as a self-reaction against labelling. Considering that her voice would not be heard even if she defended herself,

¹³⁴ Ibid. p. 97.

¹³⁵ Ibid. p. 99.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p. 99.

Shafak displays her as self-censored. The girl does not challenge the prejudicial ideas constructed on her sexuality. It shows Shafak's stance of the imposition of virginity that women need not be supposed to be discriminated with regard to others' ideas of their sexualities. Like the previous news item, Shafak protects the girl's self respect concealing the reality of her virginity. Thus, Shafak proposes to the society that women do not need to explain themselves to anybody. Sexuality is a personal matter, and the girl's silence maintains its privacy as long as she can keep it away. Jamila does not break her silence even when she is on the verge of losing her loved one. Shafak preserves Jamila's self-esteem even though the society condemns her into secondary position. She preserves her privacy from the society and does not challenge others' opinions of her.

Later in the novel, working as a midwife away from her village, where no one knows her history, she is accepted into the society. Jamila suspects that 'the peasants didn't love her, but they did respect her. Travelling on horse, donkey and mule, she was allowed to set foot in places no other woman could enter'.¹³⁷ Since she takes on the occupation of midwife, Jamila is accepted as semi-sacred and deprived of femininity with thick 'knitted shawls'.¹³⁸ The community see her as unsuitable for marriage because she has past her 'prime' time. Society views women like her as 'a dry womb is like a melon gone bad: fine on the outside, desiccated inside, and good for nothing'.¹³⁹ Thus, the community regards her as masculinised, because she does not suit conventions, and is not of interest for her sexuality. Shafak shows that a woman has to be deprived of her sexuality in order to be accepted into the social sphere. Society is expected to respect her and make allowances that they would not

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 36.

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 34.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 34.

for any other woman, because she is not accepted as a normal woman. She is masculinised to achieve recognition by the community.

The novel includes two honour crimes, based on women's sexuality. The first one is Pembe and Jamila's elder sister Hediye's suicide. Hediye is victimised in relation to claims of dishonour and made to commit suicide to recover the family honour. Hediye elopes with the inoculator of the village. After having been deceived by the inoculator, Hediye returns to her father's house to meet her irreversible end. The father, who was excluded from any social gatherings in the village because of his daughter, confesses that he is happy to have no sons at that moment because a son would have been asked to murder his sister and 'spend his life rotting amidst four walls'.¹⁴⁰ Hediye's elopement brings shame and dishonour to the family, and her honour needs to be recovered with blood. Hediye's suicide is presented to the reader as a ritual. She is served a cauldron with a rope in it.¹⁴¹ The whole family is ordered to abandon the house during the day, so that they could return to find Hediye, whose 'body limp like a rag doll, her neck broken, hanging from a brass hook in the ceiling' in the evening.¹⁴² Hediye's identity in public is severely influenced by her sexuality. Hence, she is ordered to murder herself rather than bringing trouble to her father.

The claims of shame on her sexuality bring about her murder whether it is called suicide. Clearly, Shafak aims to publicise concerns over honour and its control by men. In the event of the absence of her husband, another male character takes responsibility for family honour, leaving women vulnerable to his decisions. Even when male members do not want to interfere with legal responsibility, women are expected to restore honour for their families.

In her writing, Shafak highlights the context of the honour problem in

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 266.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p. 267.

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 268.

Turkey, attempting to awaken public concern over its relationship to the dismissal of gender discrimination, and subordination of women's bodies. Hence, Shafak insists what is important to remember with honour crimes is that 'there is no happiness without freedom and there is no "honour" in murder'.¹⁴³

As mentioned earlier, the perception of women's sexuality may also lead to murder. Shafak conveys to the reader that Pembe dies twice, first figuratively and then literally. Pembe's figurative death is in response to Iskender's rage against her, and the murder of her twin sister. Iskender had not known of Jamila's secret visit to London. He had forbidden her mother to leave the house, and when he saw his mother's identical twin of her mother, he was enraged enough to stab her. Pembe's other children, Esmâ and Yunus secretly fly their mother to Turkey. The incident leading to the figurative murder of Pembe was her secretive relationship with a man, Elias.

Pembe was a passionate girl who had wandered around the world since her childhood, unlike her twin, although they were raised conservatively. She knew social conventions and patriarchal tradition. However, she was stuck in a marriage without love with a man, who had never loved her, and had already abandoned her for a dancer. Pembe's relationship with Elias did not include anything physical. They are depicted as enjoying their time together secretly, going to silent cinemas developing a language of their own 'with lots of gestures and not many words'.¹⁴⁴ It was 'like a childhood game' for both.¹⁴⁵ Pembe's brother-in-law discovers their relationship coincidentally at the cinema, and rumours about Pembe spread through the

¹⁴³ Elif Shafak, "'Honour Killings': Murder by Any Other Name', *The Guardian*, 30th April 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/apr/30/honour-killings-spreading-alarming-rate> [accessed 7th September 2014].

¹⁴⁴ Shafak, 2012, p. 262.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 262.

neighbourhood. Feeling responsible for the whole family as the eldest brother-in-law, Tariq integrates Iskender into the story, and prompted him into murder.

The imposition of patriarchy on Pembe's sexuality altered her life. Iskender wanted to subordinate his mother so that he could take control of the family's honour. Pembe was the only caregiver and provider for the family. She used to work at a hairdresser's, but the gossip about her sexuality oppressed the family. Iskender demands that she not work anymore.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, Iskender restricts her from stepping outside the house.¹⁴⁷ Pembe's life is rearranged in accordance with restrictions set by Iskender, who was trying to end her secret affair with Elias. However, the real obstacle to Pembe's materialisation of her sexuality was Iskender's attempt to scare her with a pocketknife. Even if the victim was Jamila, not Pembe, she needed to be kept as a secret as the real target. Thus, she maintains an undercover life. Although it is mystery to everybody but Esmâ and Yunus if their mother is alive, Pembe's life was tremendously altered. She was marginalised due to the materialisation of her sexuality by the society. Pembe also becomes the victim of society's imposition on the idealisation of women's sexuality.

According to the report of Human Rights Association in Turkey, four thousand women have been murdered in seven years. As recently as 2007 and 2009 more than one thousand women were killed annually.¹⁴⁸ The primary reasons for these murders are honour, infidelity, divorce, abandoning the house and reluctance to engage in sexual intercourse. It is also worrying that 40% of women who have been threatened cannot demand state help because of the fear that it will disrespect honour. Thus, they are unnoticed by officials inevitably leading to their

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 282.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 309.

¹⁴⁸ 'Kadına Yönelik Sıddet Raporu 2005-2011', *Bianet*, http://www.bianet.org/files/doc_files/000/000/320/original/kadin_cinayetleri_raporu_pdf.pdf [accessed 6th September 2014].

deaths.

Since honour crimes are domestic issues in Turkey, they are mostly not intervened in until after a death has occurred. The conditions of women under threat are not in the newspapers until they become legal criminal cases. Neglect of the problem restricts the search for official ways to avoid these crimes. Therefore, it is clear that patriarchal tradition maintains gender inequality and contributes to the ignorance of these murders. It also appears that women are becoming the victims of honour claims at younger ages, and so feel forced to commit suicide during adolescence; the number of adolescent suicides is highest in women. The ‘dishonoured’ women are pressured into committing suicide by their families so that they are not punished for murder. The EU report has called for urgent examination of the sudden rise in the cases of women’s suicides to provide better security of life for women.

The media discusses this problem in reference to the legal consequences and mostly after the conviction of the party responsible. A 16-year-old girl, Ayse was murdered in 2008 in Turkey; her case was a mystery until it was discovered that she had a boyfriend. Officials then re-evaluated the possibility of an honour crime and solved the case sentencing her uncles and father to life imprisonment after their confession of murder.¹⁴⁹ But, in the media emphasis is always on newsworthiness, not the preservation of women’s lives. An adolescent named Guldunya became the symbol of honour crimes after her brothers were sentenced to life imprisonment.¹⁵⁰ Her brothers murdered her after she was raped and

¹⁴⁹ ‘16 Yasindaki Ayse Toreye Kurban Gitmis’, CNNTurk, 29th September 2012, <http://www.cnnturk.com/2012/guncel/09/29/16.yasindaki.ayse.toreye.kurban.gitmis/678570.0/index.html> [accessed 6th September 2014].

¹⁵⁰ Sedef Senkal Demir, ‘Guldunya'nin Babasina Agirlastirilmis Muebbet’, Haberturk, 20th July 2012, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/760402-guldunya'nin-babasina-agirlastirilmis-muebbet> [10th August 2014].

impregnated by her cousin. The Guldunya case was heard by the media after her brothers' confession. Her father then killed her rapist 7 years after the case is closed. The media in reporting the case undermined her victimhood in relation to the rape by emphasising her murder. She is claimed to have disrespected her family's honour, although in reality she was a victim.

As an inheritance from older generations, Pembe's situation was also transferred to her children. She raised her children, discriminating between them on the basis of gender. Pembe's maintenance of the patriarchy is imposed on the distinction between Iskender and Esma. Pembe, also, as the victim of gender discrimination, raised Iskender as the sultan, the apple of her eye naming him after Alexander the Great.¹⁵¹ However, Esma's condition was different, and Pembe raised Esma as her own mother did with warnings to protect her virginity. With the consciousness that women are positioned as second in life, Esma and her sexuality were developed under the imposition of patriarchy. Esma considers that having first period transformed her relationship with her mother. While they used to communicate, Esma says that 'the only thing she was interested in was [her] virginity. She was always preaching about the things [she] should never/ever/not even in [her] wildest dreams do'.¹⁵² While she is restricted from acting freely, Esma witnesses that Iskender 'could be himself, [...] didn't need to be careful'.¹⁵³ Therefore, her mother subordinated Esma's sexuality after adolescence, shifting her desires.

Rather than wishing to be involved with boys her own age, Esma desired and demanded to know how it would be to be a man. Esma questioned the gender boundaries 'snails were hermaphrodites, having both female and male reproductive

¹⁵¹ Shafak, 2012, p. 30; p. 25.

¹⁵² Ibid. p. 184.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 185.

organs. Why couldn't human beings be like that?'¹⁵⁴ Esma's stress of being under control made her investigate methods of self-control. She expresses her desire to be a writer. Esma dreams of being a strong man, although she is aware that constructing a strong personality with her femininity is impossible. She decides on a pen name, John Blake Ono, which is an amalgam of her favourite male personalities, John Keats, William Blake and Yoko Ono.¹⁵⁵ Esma claims that men's names are more authoritarian, able and powerful, whereas women's names are 'whimsical, dream-like, as if they are unreal'.¹⁵⁶ By transforming her name, Esma plans to obtain more power and authority.

Esma is not given privacy in the house while Iskender has his own bedroom. Pembe suspects that Esma would do terrible things if she locked her bedroom door.¹⁵⁷ Thus, she finds solitude in the bathroom, the door to which can be locked without doubt. Esma experiences being a man, changing her appearance in the bathroom. She first takes her sweater off, and then her bra leaving her breasts free, 'two burdens to carry'.¹⁵⁸ She plays with her appearance. She thickens her eyebrows and draws a moustache on her lips.¹⁵⁹ 'Pleased with [her] moustache, [she] set[s] out to draw a goatee on [her] chin'.¹⁶⁰ Apart from desires of superiority, Esma challenges her female appearance in search of her autonomy. Her desire for transformation comes out as resistance to the imposition of her sexuality. After her mother distances her, she is freed from patriarchal subordination of her sexual autonomy. It is noteworthy that she has chosen a heterosexual marriage with children by the end of the novel. It proves that Esma searches for her autonomy through masculinisation when her

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 185.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 183.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 183.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 180.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 180.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 180.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 183.

woman identity is challenged by her mother's patriarchal imposition. The abolition of the dominant force, her mother's existence, contributes to Esma's self-definition of gender identity.

The novel suggests that women are subordinated by imposition of patriarchy on their bodies. The honour claims of the families result with the murder of the dishonoured women. Pembe and Jamila are deeply affected by their sexualities. Pembe is marginalised for her illicit relationship. Jamila's identity is constructed on the reality of her virginity or non-virginity. While Iskender intended to kill Pembe for the family honour, Jamila is killed instead by mistake. Shafak criticises that patriarchy is maintained by the society to control women's behaviours in public. While Pembe and Jamila is brought up with warnings about virginity and honour, Pembe raises her daughter Esma with the same warnings. Nevertheless, it is made clear that men do not need to be same responsible for their acts in their sexuality as reflected by Iskender and Adem's illegitimate sexualities. However, Shafak clearly sides with gender equality as Adem commits suicide and Iskender suffers in prison.

CONCLUSION

My first chapter introduced the major themes and preoccupations of women's situation in Turkey. It discussed the historical background to Islamic and Turkish feminism. Even though Turkey began to eliminate gender discrimination in the public sphere, it has maintained patriarchal traditions in its wider social conventions. Elif Shafak's fiction and non-fiction explores the effects of such restrictions on Turkish women's autonomy. Her novels, which are widely read, draw public attention to the ways in which such women experience these patriarchal processes in their lives.

Women are mainly categorised in Turkish society according to their relationship with men.

Chapter two discussed *The Flea Palace*, which reflects on the ways women are categorised and criticised with respect to their sexualities, focusing on the lives of The Blue Mistress, Ethel, Ayshin, and Tijen. Such women are divided into two categories, women-to-bed and women-to-marry. Shafak encourages the reader to criticise social prejudices about women proving that innocence and shame could not be judged with regard to others' opinion. Shafak encourages the reader to criticise social prejudices about women proving that innocence and shame could not be judged with regard to others' opinion.

The third chapter focused on *The Bastard of Istanbul*, which also explores the categorisation of women according to their sexual experiences. The practice of shaming women is challenged in this novel, which emphasises Zeliha's respectability, despite the fact that she is disturbed by womanisers. Shafak makes Zeliha a sympathetic character, marginalised due to her explicit sexuality. Women are disregarded as lustful seducers when they choose to display their sexualities without paying attention to modesty, because they are seen as inviting abuse. Even when

women become the victims of sexual harassment, they are blamed, not their harassers. Their identity is thus reshaped by social disrespect. The novel shows that their situation violates human rights and the principles of gender equality. The novel clearly sides with Zeliha by proving that she should not be a social victim. The novel's alternative sense of justice, which portrays Mustafa as evil, enables Zeliha to be sympathised with. Once again, a male oppressor is killed off: Zeliha is liberated from the past when Mustafa is poisoned.

Honour, discussed in chapter four, explores the theme named in its title. It suggests that women's bodies are controlled by patriarchy. Family honour is preserved mostly by means of the murder or forced suicide of disrespected women. The novel deconstructs that honour belongs to men no matter what they commit. However, women are portrayed as heavily subordinated under protection of honour through their bodies. The novel constructs its own justice system, judging women's abusers and criticising social prejudices against them.

It is understood that dominant notions of sexuality determine women's identity in Shafak's novels. Shafak criticises that women's identities are constructed either according to their relation to men or others' perceptions of their sexualities. The novels show that women are reflected as lustful in public if they do not conform to social conventions such as modesty. Therefore, they are interpreted as sexually desirable, and also more vulnerable to exploitation. It is also criticised they are respected, and they avoid public criticism when they are categorised as conventional women.

Shafak's novels maintain an obvious pattern that represents women characters as the victims of patriarchy, deliberately silenced and defenceless. On the other hand, male characters are punished for their practices of patriarchy and subordination of

women. Shafak's novels condemn patriarchal practices for their adverse effects on women's identity and thus re-enact gender inequality in Turkish patriarchy.



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