Representations of sexual trauma and the potential for recovery: The case of Elif Şafak's trauma fiction

Güler Uğur, N.

2. THE RAPIST, THE RAPED, AND THE BASTARD

Regardless of any given country's level of development or rates of literacy for women and men, and regardless of whether the people are religious or not, sexual assault is common all around the world. Turkey is a case in point. While the majority of the population would claim to be believing Muslims and the economy is developing, Turkey has some of the worst statistics for rape in the world. As a major source of trauma for its victims and society as a whole, it should not come as a surprise that the issue of rape has been taken up in a variety of fields, including law, psychology, and sociology—and, of course, literary fiction. *The Bastard of Istanbul* by Elif Şafak is one such work. In this chapter, I will examine the novel by scrutinizing how Şafak presents readers with the tragic story of a rape victim along with the cultural, religious, and psychological challenges that the rapist, the raped, the child of the rape victim, and other family members face. My aim here is to analyze Şafak's literary representation of sexual trauma and how recovering from trauma is related to familial relationships and culturally-based normative standards. In the novel, Şafak critiques the cultural norms of Turkish society, which in some regards can be rather brutal, and holds them up them as the underlying reason for the traumatic experiences of the characters. All of the protagonists have been through traumatic experiences and come up with different ways of coping with them. As a means of exploring those issues in detail, this chapter will be divided into three sections, each of which will examine the psychological and social conflicts experienced by, respectively, Zeliha as the Raped, Mustafa as the Rapist, and Asya as the Bastard. The impacts of family and society on the identity formation of these characters and their processes of recovery from trauma represent the core of this chapter.

The Bastard of Istanbul is the story of a Turkish and an Armenian family, the Kazancıs and the Tchakhmakhchians, respectively, who are related to each other through Shushan, the grandmother. Both have family secrets and traumatic memories, but they differ in how they try to deal with them. The Kazancı family has four daughters and a son, whose emotionally unavailable father dies at the age of forty and whose sexist mother contributes to gender inequality in the household through her patriarchal form of motherhood. I contend that *The Bastard of Istanbul* represents the cultural aspects of interfamilial rape and recovery, the impacts of parenting on gender roles and the relationships of siblings, the social pressure on women to remain silent, and the secondary roles women play in social life even if they constitute the backbone of the family.

Tragically, the title of this chapter, "The Rapist, the Raped, and the Bastard," refers to the members of one nuclear family, the Kazancıs. The perpetrator, Mustafa Kazancı, and the victim, Zeliha Kazancı, are brother and sister. The child who was born as a result of the rape, Asya Kazancı, is thus both Mustafa's daughter and niece. By the end of the novel, Asya learns that her uncle Mustafa is actually her father. This is the antithesis of what a female member of the Kazancı family says about Turkish families: "…they [Westerners] don't have strong families. We are not like that. If somebody is your father, he is your father forever; if someone is a brother, he will be your brother till the end."[165] While the uncle turns out to be the father, the brother is the perpetrator, and Asya is both the niece and daughter of the same man; Şafak subverts these so-called strong, stable family roles and shows that they can easily change as a result of a single tragic moment. In the novel, Şafak deconstructs all the moral codes and value systems of the patriarchal Turkish family.

The Bastard of Istanbul lays bare the strong interconnections between the possibility of healing from trauma and the cultural, social, and familial reactions that victims must face. This interrelatedness is most vividly depicted when the raped girl, Zeliha, is called an *orospu* (whore) by her mother, and the child born of the rape, Asya, is called a *piç* (bastard) by her grandmother in the *baba ocağı* [family home] where Zeliha was raped by her brother. I deliberately emphasize *baba ocağı* because traditionally that is where one would grow up under the protection of one's family, and as such it should be the most peaceful and safest place in the world. Ironically, the home in this novel is the most dangerous setting, not the outside world. All of Zeliha's physical and emotional wounds are inflicted within the family; firstly by the brother, and then by the mother in the *baba ocağı*. There is no father present to protect Zeliha, and her brother Mustafa, who has been tasked with being a father-substitute by his mother, is Zeliha's rapist. Unfortunately for Zeliha, their mother is a traditional woman who favors her son and expects that he can provide her with the love and affection she could not get from her husband. In a paradoxical twist, as a writer who is strongly opposed to "adding another brick in the imaginary walls erected between cultures, religions, and ethnicities,"[166] Şafak reveals the thick walls that are raised between family members in response to both physical and psychological penetrations of the most secret and private spheres of the members of the family.

[165] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 320.
[166] "Interview: Elif Şafak." http/freespeech.com/en/discuss/elif-shafak-on-our –common-humanity

While typical, patriarchal Turkish families favor boys and devalue girls, men are conspicuous by their absence in the novel. All the male members of the Kazancı family die before the age of forty, and they are all remembered for the indelible marks they leave on others. Şafak creates a contradiction between the title and the content of the novel by using a male-centered title, *Baba ve Piç* (*The Father and the Bastard*), yet writing a female-centered story. Indeed, the title and cover of the book are symbolic. On the cover of some editions of the book there is a large pomegranate that has been cleft into two, revealing the seeds inside. In one sense, the pomegranate, with its particular shape and color, stands as a metaphor for a vagina and represents the rape of Zeliha by Mustafa, which results in the birth of Asya. As such, it is where the father and the bastard meet in the mother's body. In her book *Erkeğin Yittiği Yerde*, Zeynep Ergun analyzes representations of masculinity in *The Bastard of Istanbul* and comes to the following conclusion:

> The title of the novel is masculine in two ways that contradict the content. "The father" stands for ultimate power in patriarchy. It is placed at the center. Since the family constitutes the core of social organization, the father plays a vital role in constituting and maintaining that order. He is the prime and independent ruler of all religious, social, political, social, and financial institutions. […] The second word in the title is again related to a child. *Piç*, or bastard in English, connotes a male child in both languages. The male-centered title is deceptive, as women constitute the center of the novel.[167]

In fact, Şafak turns a critical eye to patriarchal Turkish family life by creating a contradiction between the title and the content of the novel. Men live a social life whereas women are under the protection of men in the home, as social life outside is not deemed proper for them. Just as men are on the cover and open to the public where everyone can see them, the title of the book consists of masculine words. In contrast, women are confined to the domestic sphere, so they only exist inside the book even though they are the main characters.

Another striking instance of social criticism in the novel is the narrator's desire to silence others. The narrator repeats these lines:

[167] "Romanın başlığı metnin içeriğini yalanlar biçimde, iki yönden erkeksidir; *Baba,* ataerkinin birincil gücünü simgeler: Merkezidir. Aile toplum düzeninin çekirdeğini oluşturduğundan, "baba" bu kurumum yapılandırılmasında ve sürdürülmesinde yaşamsal ve yitirilmemesi gereken bir işlev üstlenir. Dinsel, siyasal, toplumsal ve parasal bütün kurumların "baş" ve egemen yöneticisidir…Romanın başlığında yer alan ikinci kavram yine çocuk ile ilgilidir: Piç. İngilizcede olduğu gibi (bastard), Türkçe kullanımında bu sözcük erkek çocuğunu çağrıştırır. Baslığın erkek merkezli görüntüsü yanıltıcıdır: Romanın merkezi ve etkin gücü kadınlardan oluşur." Zeynep Ergun, *Erkekliğin Yittiği Yerde* (Istanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2009), 321.

> Once there was. Once there wasn't. God's creatures were as plentiful as grains; talking too much was a sin.
> It was a sin for you could tell what you shouldn't remember and you could remember what you shouldn't tell if you talk too much. Every family has sins that must be kept secret.[168]

These lines are like advice from a traditionally-minded person who wants to silence Zeliha and make her keep the rape a secret. The rape is a family secret and no one should be told about it. Şafak wants to draw attention to the cultural pressure that is put on rape victims by having the narrator repeat those words. A girl who has been raped is not a virgin anymore, so she is not a good candidate for marriage in Islamic society. Secondly, a raped girl can be accused of having instigated the rape because of her clothes or behavior. Thirdly, a girl who has been raped may be seen as dirty; people may want to keep themselves (and their daughters, sons, husbands, and wives) away from such a person because she may inadvertently lead them to experience the same thing.[169] That is how many people view rape victims, so they must keep silent as noted by the narrator.

The novel emphasizes the crucial fact that Zeliha, who has been sexually assaulted, is alone in the family because there is no one to listen to her story or let her be the master of her tragic memories. Her mother is a traditional Turkish woman who places her only son on a pedestal and calls her daughter Zeliha a "whore" because she wears miniskirts and high-heeled shoes, so she cannot be an empathetic listener. As for her sisters, they do nothing to help heal Zeliha's wounds. If the needs of a wounded psyche do not correspond with what culture/society has to offer, it is very difficult to recover. In her article "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," Susan Brison writes about her own experience of being raped and she highlights the vital necessity of sympathetic listeners if one wants to acquire control over traumatic memories; that is a case in point of what Zeliha experiences. As Susan Brison describes it,

> Memories of traumatic events can be themselves traumatic: uncontrollable, intrusive, and frequently somatic. They are experienced by the survivors as inflicted, not chosen-as flashbacks to the events themselves. In contrast, narrating memories to

[168] "Bir varmış bir yokmuş. Tanrı'nın mahlukları tahıl kadar çokmuş; fazla konuşmak günahmış. Günahmış çünkü haddinden fazla konuşursan hatırlamaman gerekenleri hatırlayabilir, anlatmaman gerekenleri anlatmaya başlayabilirsin. Her ailede sırlar vardır saklı kalması gereken." Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 372.
[169] What I claim is, unfortunately, supported by the data: "…one study in Turkey found that 33% of police officers agreed with the assertion that 'some women deserve rape and 66% agreed that the physical appearance of women tempt men to rape.'" Accessed September 18, 2013, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rape statistics

> others (who are strong enough and emphatic enough to be able listen) empowers survivors to gain more control over the traces left by the trauma.[170]

Şafak criticizes this major conflict between what people need and what they receive. She represents it in the novel through Zeliha's experience and her struggle for recovery. Actually, the way a person shapes her/his experiences depends very much on how they are viewed by others. Zeliha being called a whore and her daughter being called a bastard adds to the pain they have already been suffering as a result of the rape. Ernst van Alphen's assertion in his article "Symptoms of Discursivity, Experience, Memory and Trauma" concerning experience and discourse will be useful for clarifying how rape is coded in Zeliha's mind:

> Experience depends on discourse to come about; forms of experience do not just depend on the event or history that is being experienced, but also the discourse in which the event is expressed/thought/conceptualized.[171]

Thus, it is not only the moments during which we experience a traumatic event that affect us but also how society and the victim verbalize or conceptualize it according to cultural, social, and religious norms, which have the potential to strengthen and reinforce the trauma. In a society where rape victims are considered to be bad women, how rape is remembered is inevitably traumatic. That can lead to a repression of the event and silence; Zeliha is advised to do precisely that, which closes the door to recovery. Dori Laub, who has written extensively on the Holocaust and survivor testimony and co-authored the book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, and History* with Shoshana Felman, notes, "The 'not telling' of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny."[172] However, Zeliha gives birth to a daughter who grows up to be an empathetic listener to whom Zeliha can narrate her memories.

Everyone in the Kazancı family experiences significant loss in their lives. The psychic reaction of the mind to loss can be traced through the minds of all the members of the family. The great-grandfather Rıza and grandfather Levent are deeply wounded when Shushan, Rıza's wife and Levent's mother, leaves them unexpectedly and never returns. As a result, Rıza loses his trust in

---

[170] Susan J. Brison, "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," in Mieke Bal, ed., *Acts of Memory* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 40.
[171] Ernst van Alphen, "Symptoms of Discursivity, Experience, Memory and Trauma," in Mieke Bal, ed., *Acts of Memory* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 24.
[172] Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," in Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 64.

people and for years he doesn't remarry. When he eventually gets married to Petite-Ma, he refuses to talk about his first wife, calls her a "slut," and never recovers from the fear that he may be left again; when his second wife asks if his first wife left him for another man, he flies into a rage and says, "Are you interested in repeating the act or what?"[173] His son also struggles to deal with the situation:

> That, however, was hardly the case with the then six-year-old boy at home; Levent Kazancı never accepted Petite-Ma as a mother; he would have never attempted to love her. He resisted and ridiculed her at every opportunity for years to come, ending his childhood with suppressed bitterness, if childhood could ever come to an end when one remained so bitter inside.[174]

As a result of not having a psychologically healthy childhood, Levent Kazancı turns out to be an unaffectionate father. His family home and children remind him of his own childhood and being left by his mother:

> …anyone who ran into him inside the *konak* would have taken him for an icon of reliability, considerateness, togetherness, and righteousness, the kind of man each one of his daughters' closest friends dreamed of marrying one day. Inside the house, however, his kindness was reserved for strangers alone. Just like he took his shoes off as soon as he entered the house and put on his slippers, just as naturally he transformed from a gentle bureaucrat to an authoritarian father.[175]

Every evening the children would assemble in front of the dinner table, where they would be inspected by their father.

As for the female members of the family, Levent's wife never receives any love from her husband and is also left by her only son, Mustafa, whom she treats as a husband-substitute and as the head of the family. After assaulting his sister, Mustafa leaves Turkey and sees his mother only once more, in Germany. In that way, Gülsüm loses both her husband and her son:

> Grandma Gülsüm was a woman who had never been reciprocally loved; one of those who aged not gradually but in a hurry, leaping from virginity to wrinkles… Grandma Gülsüm felt herself left alone. It made her feel ashamed; she could do nothing to

[173] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 142.
[174] Ibid., 139. In the Turkish version, Levent Kazancı is three years old at the time. Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 148.
[175] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 309.

> change it. Grandma Gülsüm buried a deep pain for being rejected. Over time she became more and more hard-hearted.[176]

Because they were born to such traumatized parents, Banu, Feride, Cevriye, Zeliha, and Mustafa all suffer their own losses. After Banu loses her twin sons, she enslaves two djinns and lives with them in her father's home. Feride loses her mind, Cevriye loses her husband, Mustafa loses his family and homeland, and the biggest loss of all occurs when Zeliha is raped by Mustafa. Not only does she lose a family member forever, she loses her trust in people, especially men. She learns that what should be the safest place—home—is not safe at all. Her first sexual experience is a rape, which transforms her into a traumatic character. She becomes a woman who is alienated to herself, her family, and her daughter. She builds walls around herself to keep people away, which is a defense mechanism. For all these reasons, the Kazancı family could aptly be referred to as a family steeped in loss.

In the novel, Şafak directs readers' attention to the oppressive power of patriarchy in Turkish culture. She subverts it by killing off all the male members of the Kazancı family before they reach the age of forty and making the victim Zeliha the strongest character. In fact, in contrast to the strength of Zeliha, who recreates her undone self after the rape, Mustafa's weakness becomes immediately apparent, revealing him to be the weakest member of the family as he chooses to escape rather than face reality. By doing so, Şafak deconstructs the supposedly strong social roles of men and weak domestic of women in traditional Turkish culture. Building on that notion, in the next section I will examine the characters and the way society views them from the perspective of the dynamics of Turkish culture.

ZELİHA KAZANCI: THE RAPE AND THE RAIN

Zeliha is a rebellious woman who never submits to the rules set by society and her family that restrict women. Among the Kazancıs, she is the only one who rebels, especially against her mother. One day she rebels again and refuses to visit her father's grave with the other female members of

[176] "Gülsüm nine asla sevgisine karşılık bulamamış bir kadın; yavaş yavaş değil de hızla yaşlanan, bakirelikten ihtiyarlığa atlayan… Gülsüm nine terkedilmiş hissediyordu kendini; kederini yanı sıra utanç veriyordu terk edilmek. Utanılacak bir şey yapmış gibi hissediyordu kendini, terk edilen ve bunu düzeltmek için elinden bir şey gelmeyen. Oda içindeki sancıyı kapatabilmek için dış cephesini karattıkça karartmıştı. Gittikçe taşlaşmıştı." Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 224.

the family. However, she pays the price for her rebellion when her brother rapes her at home after the others have left. In this respect, Zeliha's story is similar to the story of Connie in *Where Have You Been, Where Are You Going?* by Joyce Carol Oates.[177] Like Zeliha, Connie refuses to go out with her family and stays at home alone, and subsequently she is punished by Arnold. In both stories, the protagonists are rebellious characters; they want to live independently rather than submit to restrictions on their sexuality and choice of clothing. They both have a problematic relationship with their mothers. Their families, especially mothers, symbolize patriarchy. Therefore, their conflicts with their families and their refusal to go out together with them represent their fight against patriarchy but in response to their rebellion, men punish both protagonists.

The Bastard of Istanbul begins with a chaotic scene. Rain is pouring down and the cars passing by splash water on the people walking along the street. One of those people is Zeliha, who is struggling in the rain with her high-heeled shoes. A taxi driver verbally harasses her because she is wearing a mini skirt. Zeliha is swearing as coarsely as a man because she missed her doctor's appointment. Later, we learn that she got pregnant out of wedlock and wants to have an abortion. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator reveals that it was Mustafa who raped Zeliha; she was eighteen years old at the time. As mentioned above, the rape occurred when the female members of the family got together to go to Levent Kazancı's grave and Zeliha stayed at home.

Although the rape of Zeliha comes to light at the end of the novel, the opening chaotic scene with the splashing of water and Zeliha's hopeless struggle with the rain foreshadows the rape and her subsequent struggles and failure to escape. On the very first page of the novel, the narrator tells the reader that whatever you get from the sky, you should appreciate without complaining. Whether it is rain, freezing snow or anything else, you should accept it because the sky sends it down to you, and the sky symbolizes God watching us from above. What Zeliha receives from the sky is rain, but it is mid-summer, the first of July. This is an unusual time for such heavy rains in Istanbul. There are men walking down the street holding umbrellas, but Zeliha does not have one. Umbrellas have a phallic meaning here. They are what Zeliha lacks, and she is alone without any protection, just like the day she was raped. There are also some fishermen with fishing rods, which are also a phallic symbol. In the novel it is men who rape, so it is their sperm that rains down and drenches Zeliha, but the men with their umbrellas and fishing rods—penises—are not affected by it. In her

[177] Joyce Carol Oates, *Where are You Going, Where Have You Been?* Elaine Showalter, ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

dream, Zeliha tries not to touch the "motionless fishermen with worms wiggling at the end of their spinning rods."[178] Similarly, she tries not to touch Mustafa's body when he rapes her. For the narrator, the rain does "not necessarily" imply getting wet:

> Rain, for us, isn't necessarily about getting wet. It's not about getting dirty even. If anything, it's about getting angry. It's mud and chaos and rage, as if we didn't have enough of each already. And struggle. It's always about struggle.[179]

Just like the day when Zeliha struggles with Mustafa, she now struggles with the rain. However, she can neither get away from the rain nor from the rape, and once you get wet because of the rain or once you get raped, it is irreversible:

> It was too late. She was already sopping wet. That is what makes rain similar to sorrow: You do your best to remain untouched, safe, and dry, but if and when you fail, there comes a point at which you start seeing the problem less in terms of drops than an incessant gush. Rain is like sorrow. Once you have it, it does not matter how you got it. You are either untouched or wet.[180]

The rain, as a disturbing and unwanted element touching and wetting her body, is suggestive of her brother's sperm, which Zeliha encounters most unexpectedly when she is alone at home, unprotected. The unusual rains in July represent the unexpectedness of the rape at their family home. Moreover, on the day she is raped, there is no rain: "As a matter of fact, there was not even a single cloud in the bright blue sky [*Zeliha Teyze'ye tecavüz edildiği gün alabildiğine bulutsuzdu gökyüzü. Yağmur yoktu*]."[181] For on that day, it wasn't symbolic rain but Mustafa's sperm that rained over Zeliha. And rain, "with an extra splash of romanticism, is good for lovers."[182] Rain can represent pleasant sexual intercourse if there is love involved, but in Zeliha's case there is no romanticism and it's as if she is drenched with mud that cannot be washed away. Additionally, the narrator associates the rain with the rape and sin:

---

[178] Shafak, *The Bastard of İstanbul*, 19.
[179] Ibid., 2.
[180] "Zaten artık çok geç. Sırılsıklam oldu bile. Bu açıdan bakınca, yağmur da hüzün gibi bir şey galiba: İlk başta bana ilişmesin diye didinir sakınırsın, emniyetli ve kuru kalmak için elinden geleni yapverarsın,ama… Yağmur da hüzün gibi bir şey, yakalandın mı bir kez, azı çoğu yok artık. Olsa olsa 'kuru kalabilenler' ve 'sağanaktan nasibini alanlar' var." Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 11.
[181] Ibid., 318.
[182] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul,* 2.

> The crisp smell of the after-rain gave the whole city a sacred air. Here and there children stomped in mud puddles, taking delight in committing simple sins. If there ever was a right time for committing a crime, it must have been at this fleeting instant.[183]

If the rainy day represents the day Zeliha is raped and the rain represents sperm, then Zeliha's curses directed at the rain are actually addressed to Mustafa, God, and the people who turn a blind eye to incest. The narrator relates one of Petite-Ma's rules:

> You might not be fond of the rain, you certainly do not have to be, but under no circumstances should you curse at anything that came from the skies, because nothing poured above on its own and behind it all there was Allah the Almighty.[184]

That is a reference to a verse in the Quran which says that both good and bad are sent by God and you should not rebel against anything bad that happens to you because it would entail rebelling against God.[185] That piece of advice admonishing Zeliha not to swear at the sky because of the rain is a symbolic warning not to rebel against God because of the rape she endured. Since God is omnipotent, if he lets a rape happen, there must be a reason for it; people must not question God.

The following lines depicting what happens after the rains on the first of July metaphorically illustrate the scene after Mustafa rapes Zeliha:

> …when you are not quite sure that it has finally ceased raining, and neither is the rain itself, in that very interstice, everything becomes serene. The sky looks at us. The sky seems to apologize for the mess she has left us in. And we, with driblets still in our hair, slush in our cuffs, and dreariness in our gaze, stare back at the sky…We look up and can't help smiling. We forgive her; we always do… At the moment, however, it is pouring and Zeliha had little, if any, forgiveness in her heart.[186]

This scene after the rain resembles the moment just after Zeliha is raped. There is silence, her clothes are torn and wet, and she is exhausted. After Mustafa has raped her, she looks at the sky and sees a helium balloon with a Kodak advert on it. She imagines it might be recording everything that happens in the world. The balloon is like the eyes of God that can see everything and record

[183] Ibid., 21.
[184] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 4.
[185] Accessed October 18, 2019, https://kurul.diyanet.gov.tr/Cevap-Ara/25/amentude-yer-alan--hayir-ve-ser-allah-tandir--ifadesinin-acilimi-nedir-
[186] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 2.

what happens. And the narrator asks, "Did the celestial camera take pictures on that day? Do the pain and the sin still exist in God's memory? [*Çekmiş miydi acaba resimlerini o gün semavi kamera? Duruyor muydu Tanrı'nın belleğinde yaşanan acı, işlenen günah?*]."[187] Zeliha wonders if there is a God because if he existed, how he could have allowed the rape to happen. How could he forget Zeliha and forgive Mustafa? In the quote above, the sky represents God who sends the rain and symbolically lets the rape happen. Zeliha, who used to believe in God, questions why God would allow such a wicked thing to happen and she becomes an atheist. However, she cannot stop herself from talking to God and asking him why he did not save her from Mustafa. Zeliha gets angry with herself when she talks to God because she thinks she is an atheist. In fact, however, while she believes in the existence of God, she cannot forgive him for letting the rape take place. In that way, the novel represents the inner conflicts and anger that a rape victim feels toward God. This inner conflict that torments Zeliha continues to the end of the novel. As the story unfolds, Şafak criticizes the moral codes of a society in which incest occurs and family members cover it up. She critiques the attacker and God by underscoring the fact that Zeliha can forgive never either of them.

The narrative continues with her appointment with the doctor. As the doctor anesthetizes Zeliha for the abortion, she sees a black point on the wall. At first, it is still, but then it starts crawling and looks like a black spider. Like the narrator in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Zeliha sees hallucinations on the walls.[188] Actually, both women have a point in common. In Gilman's story, the protagonist's husband confines his wife to the domestic sphere, which drives her mad. Similarly, the social pressure on Zeliha to have an abortion disturbs her because she wants to have the baby. Though being raped made her feel dirty, the way bastard children and women who are pregnant out of wedlock are viewed by society pushes her to get rid of the baby. Only by having an abortion can she clean the dirt from her body and get the approval of a patriarchal society. When the anesthesia wears off and she thinks that the abortion has been performed, she imagines buying a fishing rod and going fishing. A fishing rod as a phallic symbol can only be possessed by obeying the rules of patriarchy. In this case, it means killing a baby whom people would call a bastard.

[187] Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 318.
[188] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Wisehouse Classics, 2016).

Before she fully wakes up, she keeps dreaming and she sees, just like the rain, cobblestones falling from the sky into a "void." The void here represents a vagina and it is filling up with cobblestones sent down from the sky. As the narrator explains, everything that comes from the sky is sent by God, so the cobblestones in her dream are sent by God too.[189] Once again, this is a symbolic rape, but this time Zeliha contributes to the rape because as she takes a step, a cobblestone falls into the void. The reason why Zeliha thinks she is contributing to the rape is that she is having an operation to get rid of the baby; in other words, she is doing what patriarchal social codes want her to do. She suddenly screams "Stop!" and prevents the baby from being killed. Actually, her scream is symbolic; it is reminiscent of the moment when she screamed "Stop!" at Mustafa during the rape. The target of her words here is Mustafa when he rapes Zeliha, the doctor when he is about to abort Asya, and God when he sends cobblestones into the void. The dream recurs in the novel as Zeliha continues her psychic struggle with trauma.

Dissociation and Alienation

For Zeliha, being raped is a major trauma, the effects of which will become manifest through her body, self, psychology, and relations with other people. In their book *Ethics and Trauma in Contemporary British Fiction*, Susana Onega and Michel Ganteau note about the literary representation of trauma, "It should not need to be pointed out that, no matter how common an occurrence and no matter how the individual reacts, rape is undeniably a trauma inflicted upon an individual."[190] The same holds true in Zeliha's case. However, she never stops struggling from the first moment of the rape until she re-constructs herself by narrating it and taking control of her life.

In order to integrate a traumatic event into one's life story, one has to admit its reality and witness its occurrence. The opposite would entail watching the event from a distance as if someone else was experiencing it. This is referred to as "physical dissociation" and it is "seen as a necessary psychic defense mechanism but one, which is, paradoxically, potentially damaging in the longer term."[191] Dissociation is a psychic reaction to an uncontrollable event that happens unexpectedly

[189] The metaphor of a rape by God parallels Zeus's rape of Danae when he transformed himself into a shower of gold. This was reinterpreted by Rembrandt with an image of gold coins falling from the sky into the womb of Danae. Accessed September 6, https://www.theartstory.org/artist/rembrandt-van-rijn/
[190] Susana Onega & Michel Ganteau, *Ethics and Trauma in British Fiction* (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2011), 62.
[191] Ibid., 64.

and is beyond the capacity of the mind to grasp. So as a means of defending the self, the victim dissociates herself from the scene and, inevitably, annihilates her presence:

> …this loss of the capacity to be a witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one's history is abolished, one's identity ceases to exist as well.[192]

When Mustafa first attempts to touch her skirt and legs, what Zeliha feels is embarrassment and humiliation, but suddenly "a surge of panic washed the humiliation."[193]

She slaps, punches, and bites Mustafa, doing everything she can to physically stop him. This continues until Zeliha feels his brother's penis in her vagina, meaning that she struggles until the penetrative rape physically takes place. At that moment, when it is no longer possible to prevent it, she cries out:

> She heard someone shriek "Stop!" at the top of her voice, shrill and inhuman, like an animal in a slaughterhouse. She did not recognize her own voice just as she didn't recognize her body, as though it was alien territory, as he entered it.[194]

This is the moment when Zeliha dissociates herself and listens to her own voice as if someone else is talking, like watching the traumatic event from a distance. Zeliha cannot grasp the reality of the situation because "…everything was so unreal, so out of control, she thought it could not be reality [*her şey o kadar gerçek dışı, öylesine kontrolsüzdü ki, hakikatin bu olmadığına hükmetti*]."[195] She is experiencing an event in her life story that is completely out of her control, and she annihilates herself in the scene as a defense mechanism. As Onega and Ganteau point out about another story in which a character named Marienne is raped, "In keeping her eyes open, she also refuses to dissociate from the attack—Jemel may have raped her body but he has not raped her mind."[196] That act may very well help Marienne recover from the trauma. Susana Onega and Michael Ganteau go on to note, "Non-dissociation leads to a greater sense of control during and after the assault and so to a better psychological interpretation of, and recovery from, the traumatic occurrence."[197]

---

[192] Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," 67.
[193] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 316.
[194] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 316.
[195] Şafak, *Baba ve Piç,* 330.
[196] Onega & Ganteau, *Ethics and Trauma in British Fiction*, 72.
[197] Ibid., 64.

In Zeliha's case, her reaction is the opposite of Marienne's. She closes her eyes in the hope that if she does not see what is happening, nobody else will see it either. This is a psychic reaction to trauma that is based on the assumption that not seeing what happened will obliterate its reality. Zeliha keeps her eyes closed even after the rape: "Just as there is a point where words fail, there comes a moment when eyes do the same. There was nothing to see [*tıpkı söz gibi, gözün de tükendiği bir asama vardı demek. Görecek bir şey yoktu*]."[198] Metaphorically speaking, Zeliha loses both her voice and eyes.

Post-Rape

Not only a traumatic occurrence but also how it is perceived by society affects the way the event is disseminated into a victim's memory. This is because while an event may physically come to an end at a certain point, its psychological effects do not. In the case of Zeliha, being a rape victim in the Kazancı family will influence the way Zeliha deals with the trauma. In this respect, how women are viewed by society and what Zeliha feels about that is significant. The most obvious symbol used in the novel to represent women is tea glasses. Zeliha is obsessed with tea glasses; whenever she goes shopping, she cannot stop herself from buying a new set of tea glasses "with gilded belts around their bellies with thin, delicate spoons and brittle saucers… [They are] so damn fragile."[199] In Turkey, tea glasses are famous for their "thin waists," so Zeliha's tea glasses with their ornamentation, thin waists with "belts" and fragile appearance stand for women who are expected to have thin waists and be fragile in comparison to men. Moreover, it is usually women who wear forms of ornamentation to make themselves more attractive. Thus, all the qualities Zeliha attributes to tea glasses are actually references to women. More importantly, in Turkish culture girls wear red belts around their "thin waists" on their wedding day to represent their virginity.[200] Zeliha's fragile tea glasses with gilded belts around their "waists" stand for virgin girls adorned with red belts on their wedding day serving their patriarchal husbands. Clearly, Zeliha associates tea glasses with women and herself; their home is full of the tea glasses Zeliha buys, just like it is full of women. Actually, every time she buys a new set of tea glasses, she is trying to heal her soul. Her

[198] Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 330.
[199] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 8-9.
[200] Red belts, which are wrapped around girls' waists by their brother or father, symbolize virginity. The tradition of wearing red belts is still popular in Turkey. Sibel Turhan Tuna, "Türk Dünyasındaki Düğünlerde Koltuklama ve Kırmızı Kuşak Bağlama Geleneği." Accessed March 23, 2014, 154-156, http://www.yesevi.edu.tr/files/article/38.pdf

sisters criticize her, saying, "You go off and buy new sets but they break so easily. The slightest impact makes them shatter [*sen alıyorsun, onlar kırılıyorlar. Yazık ki ilk darbede gidiveriyorlar*]."[201] It is a part of dealing with trauma; if tea glasses break easily, she will simply buy a new set. Similarly, if she is traumatized by Mustafa's rape, she will work through it and recover. When Zeliha suddenly changes her mind about having an abortion and screams at the doctor to stop, for the first time she attempts to heal herself by giving birth to her baby, who will become her "listener" and help her recover from her trauma. When she leaves the hospital with a new set of tea glasses in one hand and a broken shoe heel in the other, the newly bought tea glasses stand for the newly created Zeliha. She buys a new set of glasses to replace the broken ones; unconsciously, she replaces "Zeliha who was raped" with "Zeliha who has decided to give birth to the baby." In addition, the broken shoe heel is Mustafa's penis; it is what Zeliha holds in her hand. Control, which was in Mustafa's hands during the rape, now fully belongs to Zeliha. She subverts the rape and takes control of her life, just as giving birth to the baby is completely under her control. On this point, Zeynep Ergun argues,

> Zeliha will not only make Mustafa a "father" (though he does not know the fact), but also she will let the "bastard," Asya, be born…when she decides not to have an abortion and screams "Stop!"[202]

Zeliha takes control of her life by giving birth to Asya. Brison's comments about her own experience of rape shed light on Zeliha's situation:

> I argue that working through, or remastering, traumatic memory (in the case of human-inflicted trauma) involves a shift from being the object or medium of someone else's (the perpetrator's) speech (or other expressive behavior) to being the subject of one's own.[203]

The rape was a traumatic event over which Zeliha had no control; but now Zeliha changes roles and becomes the controller and the subject. She gives birth to Mustafa's baby without asking

---

[201] Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 31.
[202] "Zeliha hem Mustafayı (irade dısında, bilmese de) 'baba' yapacak, hem de 'piç'in, Asya'nın dıogmasına neden olacaktır… Kürtaj olmaktan vazgectigi anda, 'durun' sozcugunu soylediginde..." Zeynep Ergun, *Erkekliğin Yittiği Yerde*, 321.
[203] Susan J. Brison, "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," in Mieke Bal, ed., *Acts of Memory* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 39.

him. She is strong enough to give birth to a baby out of wedlock, which is a major source of shame in Turkish society and in Zeliha's family.

Unconsciously, Zeliha conceptualizes women as fragile tea glasses. She believes men's sole aim is to harass women. In a patriarchal society, there are no safe places, and women have no chance to escape from the repression of men. The novel emphasizes the fact that the unwritten rules of society always have the goal of trying to repress women and keep them silent. For example, the narrator describes certain rules that every woman in Istanbul knows:

> When harassed on the street, never respond, since a woman who responds, let alone swears back at her harasser, shall only fire up the enthusiasm of the latter… A woman who loses her nerve in the face of harassment, and thus reacts excessively, will only make matters worse for herself![204]

Such rules are based on the notion that aggressive behavior makes women responsible for the abusive behavior of men. Unfortunately, those unwritten rules are so ingrained that it is not only men but also women who defend their truth and validity. When Zeliha is harassed by a stranger on the street, she prefers to keep it secret:

> Zeliha was smart enough to know that even if she had now brought up the harassment, other women, far from being supportive, would have the tendency to pass judgment on a harassed sister in cases like these. So she kept the answer short and the rain remained the only thing to blame.[205]

As a result, a raped, sexually assaulted, or abused woman is actually destroyed twice; first by the perpetrator and then by society.

Zeliha's mother is representative of a patriarchally-minded women. She criticizes Zeliha for wearing miniskirts, makeup, and high heeled shoes and for "always bringing disgrace to the family."[206] When Zeliha announces that she is pregnant, Gülsüm becomes furious and calls her a whore for getting pregnant out of wedlock. Gülsüm says, "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."[207]

---

[204] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 5-6.
[205] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 11.
[206] Ibid., 29.
[207] Ibid.

It is tragic that, as mentioned above, Zeliha's clothes make her responsible for the rape in Gülsüm's eyes. Ironically, Gülsüm claims that if Mustafa—the rapist—was in Istanbul, he would kill Zeliha for being pregnant with a "bastard" child. Zeliha is destroyed twice; by her brother and also by her mother. On this point Şafak criticizes the patriarchal rules of Turkish society, according to which men are considered to be the guardians of women's honor and women the objects of men's honor.

In many ways the novel is like a battlefield on which Zeliha and her mother Gülsüm continuously fight. Zeliha is a "source of shame" that must be kept indoors according to Gülsüm because she is pregnant but not married. She says to Zeliha, "You are a single mother, a divorcee."[208] But Zeliha was never married. This is Gülsüm's way of saving her family honor by pretending that Zeliha is a "divorcee," which Zeliha bravely corrects by saying that she has a baby that was born out of wedlock. This is another example of the silencing of Zeliha. Gülsüm does not want to face this fact because as Zeliha's mother, she will be criticized by society. This demonstrates the power of society and its unwritten rules. Some families sacrifice their own members in order to avoid dishonoring the family name. Clearly, rape victims need support from people, especially their closest relatives, if they are to recover. In Zeliha's case, her needs are not taken seriously by her mother, as she is not interested in healing her daughter. For her, Zeliha violates the social rules and moral codes with her miniskirts, nose ring, and tattoos, so she can be nothing but guilty. That is why Gülsüm always calls her a "whore" and her daughter a "bastard." The destructive effects of this attitude on Zeliha's wounded psyche are inevitable. Van Alphen's claims about the strong interrelatedness of experience and the external world resonate with Zeliha's wounded psyche:

> There is yet another meaning of experience that is unrelated to the idea of experience as internal subjective testimony. In the twentieth century, experience can also stand for influences external to individuals. Those influences are the real things outside to which individuals react. This notion of experience excludes the feelings, thoughts, or consciousness of individuals. Whereas the first meanings of experience imply that experience is something that takes place inside the individual, the latter meaning locates experience outside the individual.[209]

[208] Ibid., 258.
[209] Ernst van Alphen, "Symptoms of Discursivity, Experience, Memory and Trauma," in Mieke Bal, ed., *Acts of Memory* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 25.

How Zeliha feels about the rape is not exactly how she experienced it because how it is viewed by the people around her also contributes to the experience, whether positively or negatively. In Zeliha's case, having a baby out of wedlock is considered to be the worst thing a mother could experience. So her mother, as a representative of the society in which Zeliha lives, influences her experience negatively. The burden of the rape and having the baby out of wedlock must surely be heavy, but people's reactions to Zeliha make it even heavier.

The impact of people's reactions has been succinctly described by Susan Brison:

> …how (and even whether) traumatic events are remembered depends not only on how they are initially experienced but also how (whether) they are perceived by others, directly or indirectly, and the extent to which others are able to listen emphatically to the survivor's testimony. The traumatic event is experienced as culturally embedded (or framed), is remembered as such (in both traumatic and narrative memory), and is shaped and reshaped in memory over time according, at least in part, to how others in the survivor's culture respond.[210]

Zeliha knows she cannot talk to her mother about the rape because Gülsüm would either not believe Mustafa raped her or she would again blame Zeliha for the rape because of her behavior and the clothes she wears. In addition, Gülsüm's harsh attitude and the accusations she levels against Zeliha certainly influence how she thinks about being a mother without being married. Moreover, the accusing gaze that the people in the doctor's office fix on Zeliha, criticizing her for being pregnant at the age of nineteen and not being married, exemplify how people respond to Zeliha without knowing what she has experienced. I contend that Şafak criticizes the severe social norms and unwritten rules of society that force victims to keep silent to save their family's honor. That is why the narrator often repeats the following statement:

> Once there was. Once there wasn't. God's creatures were as plentiful as grains and talking too much was a sin, for you could tell what you shouldn't remember and you could remember what you shouldn't tell.[211]

What Zeliha needs is an emphatic listener to whom she can narrate her experience and recover, but what she gets from her family is criticism and admonitions to keep silent. Although Aram, Zeliha's

[210] Brison, "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," 43.
[211] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 354.

boyfriend, knows the truth about the rape, this does not help Zeliha get rid of the pain that it inflicted on her. She needs to share it with a family member:

> "Aram, when is it going to end? This compulsory amnesia. This perpetual forgetfulness. Say nothing, remember nothing, reveal nothing, not to them, not to yourself… Is it ever going to come to an end?"[212]

What Zeliha needs to recover is to show that her miniskirts, nose piercing, and everything she is criticized for has nothing to do with her honor and the rape. The truth of the matter is that the most precious gem in the family, Mustafa, is the one who brings disgrace to them. However, she is discouraged by her family's attitude towards her, so she cannot share the truth with them. The only person she could possibly speak with is Asya.

No matter how strong Zeliha appears or how she defies social values, the effects of the trauma and people's criticism of her leave their traces. On the other hand, the way she deals with her memories can be interpreted in terms of "working through" the trauma rather than "acting it out." To see how Zeliha works through the trauma, it will be helpful to recall how Dominick La Capra explains the difference between acting out and working through in his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma*:

> I would argue, or at least suggest, that undecidebility and unregulated difference, threatening to disarticulate relations, confuse self and other, and collapse all distinctions including that between present and past, are related to transference and prevail in trauma and in post-traumatic acting out in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes… Working thorough is an articulatory practice: to the extent one works through trauma (as well as transferential relations in general), one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one or one's people back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future.[213]

Zeliha does not act out but works through her trauma in certain ways. In the same year as she is raped, she pierces her own nose:

> I went to the bathroom; I used a baby carrot, a sterilized needle, ice cubes to anesthetize, and also, lots of rage. I had so much rage against everything but mostly

[212] Ibid., 281.
[213] Dominick La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press: 2001), 22.

> against my own family… My hand shook in my nervousness, so I pierced it wrong the first time and hit the septum. It bled a lot.[214]

When she was raped, she was a virgin so her vagina bled. But now, Zeliha takes control of her body and makes her nose bleed by piercing it with a needle. This is like a re-experience of the rape, but now she is the master. Moreover, the carrot she takes into the bathroom is a phallic symbol because it is not necessary for piercing her nose. It is in the bathroom under Zeliha's control, but it is not useful for penetrating her nose, so in this way Zeliha renders Mustafa's penis functionless. Consequently, piercing her nose can be interpreted as a means of working through the trauma.

Zeliha tries to erase the traces of rape on her body by marking it herself; this is a form of working through. When Zeliha is raped, her brother physically becomes the master of her body and leaves a mark on her. He needs to prove his masculinity on the body of Zeliha, who "always mocked him, and made him feel himself inadequate and deficient [*Zeliha onunla hep dalga geçer, kendisini eksik ve arızalı hissetmesine sebep olurdu*]."[215] Mustafa is a man who has problems with his masculinity; therefore, he uses Zeliha's body as an object through which he can show that he is masculine. For Mustafa, Zeliha's body is a means to express himself. As Brison postulates,

> A further obstacle confronting trauma survivors attempting to reconstruct coherent narratives is the difficulty of regaining one's voice, one's subjectivity, after one has been reduced to silence, to the status of an object, or worse made into someone else's speech, the medium of another's agency.[216]

So for Zeliha, the only way to get rid of these effects is to take control of her body and leave her own mark on it. Apart from piercing her nose, Zeliha also has tattoos. In a society where she is forced to keep silent, Zeliha finds new ways to express what she is forbidden to say. First of all, she chooses to be a tattoo artist not only for the sake of freedom and creativity but also because "she would have to choose a profession where she could inflict a bit of pain [*kendine göre bir meslek seçmişti…içinde az biraz acı barındıran*]."[217] It is a means of taking revenge on humanity. Moreover, she does not use classical figures, but creates her own. Tattoos become a language through which she expresses herself, and it is a forceful language because it is inscribed directly

[214] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 249.
[215] Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 56.
[216] Brison, "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," 47.
[217] Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 83.

on people's bodies. She inscribes faces that are half masculine and half feminine, and bodies that are half human and half animal onto people's skin. These figures are important because they symbolically stand for people in real life, people like Mustafa who is the half uncle and half father of Asya, or Zeliha, who is the half mother and half aunt of Asya, and the other siblings who are half *teyze* and half *hala*.[218] Later, she creates a new collection of tattoo designs consisting of animal figures that she creates by looking at photos of the ex-lovers of her customers. The narrator explains this as follows:

> The whole practice adhered to the ancient practice of simultaneously internalizing or externalizing one's totems. The aim was to strengthen you against your totem animal by creating a special relationship between you and your totem. Not to antagonize your ex-lover, but to weaken her/him by interiorizing into your body was the wish… The ex-lover was interiorized-injected into the body, and yet at the same time exteriorized—left outside the skin. The power structure between the dumped and the dumper changed. Now the tattooed lover felt superior, as if the key to the ex-lover's soul was in his or her hands.[219]

Having the symbolic figure of an ex-lover on one's body as a tattoo represents an attempt to recover from the pain of breaking up. For that reason, I claim that having a tattoo is like a metaphorical testimony of a traumatic event. Laub explains the relationship between testimony, trauma, and recovery in the following terms:

> The testimony is inherently a process of facing loss—of going through the pain of the act of witnessing, the end of the ending of the act of witnessing—which entails yet another repetition of the experience of separation and loss. It reenacts the passage through difference in such a way, however, that it allows perhaps a certain repossession of it.[220]

When Zeliha draws the symbolic figure of an ex-lover on a client's body, it is a painful process. The client's separation from her/his ex-lover is also a painful process, just like when the tattoo is being inscribed on her/his body. It is like a testimony of the traumatic event which enables the act of witnessing, facing the loss, and repossessing it. It makes it possible to transform traumatic

[218] In Turkish, *teyze* means one's mother's sister and *hala* means one's father's sister.
[219] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 73.
[220] Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," in Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 73.

memory into narrative memory because the tattoo has a meaning and it can be seen by other people. Through this process, the victim takes control of the painful moment. As Brison points out,

> …piecing together a self requires a working through, a remastering of, the traumatic memory that involves going from being the medium or object of someone else's (the torturer's) speech to being the subject of one's own.[221]

As the narrator says, someone who has an image of her/his ex-lover on her/his body feels superior, as if they have taken possession of the key to the ex-lover's soul. For a brief moment, the making of a tattoo is for Zeliha a ritual that allows her to work through and master the trauma.

Tattoos are only symbolic devices for transforming silence into language. Zeliha's mastery over Mustafa is fully accomplished when she narrates the rape to her daughter, Asya. First of all, in Zeliha's relationship with Asya, a crucial point that should be highlighted is the fact that Asya calls Zeliha "Aunt Zeliha," not "Mother." As discussed earlier, in the Kazancı family people's roles are in flux, continuously changing. Although Zeliha gives birth to Asya and this is known by everybody, she is called "aunt" by Asya, just like the other aunts in the family. This highlights the fact that Zeliha is Asya's aunt as much as she is her mother because Zeliha is Asya's father's sister. So being called "aunt" by Asya is another way for Zeliha to remember the rape and face its reality. It also shows the alienation Zeliha feels towards herself after the rape. At one point, she "…is sitting straight up in her bed, eyeing her room as if it belongs to someone else, as if she were memorizing the details to feel closer to the stranger who belongs there."[222] Hence, being an aunt but not the mother is both a reminder of the rape and an escape from the rape. Being a mother as a result of the rape is difficult for Zeliha to accept.

We know that Zeliha decides to give birth to Asya when she is in the middle of having an abortion, and she makes that decision when she is half-unconscious as a result of the anesthesia. The role Asya plays in Zeliha's life is significant because, in effect, Zeliha creates a listener for herself who makes it possible for her to narrate her trauma. In her reading of the short novel *A Jewish Mother from Berlin*, Irene Kacandes points out the necessity of having a listener for the sake of recovery:

---

[221] Susan J. Brison, "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," 48.
[222] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 221.

> …in the absence of a sympathetic listener with whom to construct the story, the trauma continues to surface as symptom-waiting-to-be-narrated. In other words, psychoanalytic accounts suggest that to effect healing, a circuit of communication must come into being, the components of which are enunciator (the trauma victim-patient), a story (the narrative of the traumatic event), and an enabler for that story (the listener-analyst).[223]

Without a listener, Zeliha's attempts to narrate her story through tattoos would be incomplete. By sharing with Asya the truth—the fact that Mustafa is her real father—she not only provides information but also shares her trauma. In that sense, Asya becomes the emphatic listener Zeliha needs in order to share her story and also share the heavy burden she has been carrying on her shoulders until now. Brison explains the necessity of having a suitable listener:

> Trauma undoes the self by breaking the ongoing narrative, severing the connections among a remembered past, lived present, and anticipated future. In telling a first-person trauma narrative to a suitable listener, the survivor is, at the same and once again, a second person, dependent on the listener in order to return to personhood.[224]

Considering all this, it can be concluded that as much as Zeliha becomes Asya's creator by deciding to give birth to a bastard, Asya becomes Zeliha's creator by being a suitable listener like the one Brison mentions, a listener on whom Zeliha depends to recreate herself and return to personhood.

The end of the novel represents Zeliha's reconstruction of herself. This could only happen after Mustafa has died and Zeliha feels strong enough to share the truth with Asya. The way the novel ends highlights once more the symbolic meaning of rain and Zeliha's confused feelings regarding God. Just before Zeliha's rape is fully revealed, the narrator speaks about Noah's flood, which is as unpredictable as the rape and just as catastrophic. The flood begins with a few droplets and then becomes a catastrophe:

> Allah commanded: "O Sky! Now is the time! Let your water pour down. Do not hold yourself back anymore. Send them your water and wrath."[225]

[223] Irene Kacandes, "Narrative Witnessing as Memory Work: Reading Gertrude Kolmar's *A Jewish Mother*," in Mieke Bal, ed., *Acts of Memory* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 56.
[224] Susan J. Brison, "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," 39.
[225] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 305.

Yet again it is rain that causes a catastrophe and yet again God is the commanding force. Throughout the book, Zeliha has conflicting thoughts about God and questions God for letting the rape happen. But when she remembers that she is an atheist, she avoids talking to God. Towards the end, her approach to God seems to warm up because rather than harshly criticizing God, the celestial eye is presented as caring and crying for the people. The narrator claims that "each hole in each cloud was a celestial eye that shed a tear for each sin committed on earth."[226] When Zeliha confesses the truth to Asya and feels relieved, she makes peace with God and with the rain. The narrator then concludes that whatever falls from the sky should not be cursed, and that includes the rain. It should not come as a surprise that in the last scene Zeliha is with Aram and serves him tea with the tea glasses she had bought twenty years earlier just before going to have an abortion. The tea glasses are still undamaged, symbolizing how Zeliha has now recovered.

MUSTAFA KAZANCI: THE RAPIST

As discussed earlier, the male members of the Kazancı family are conspicuous by their absence in the novel. Despite the fact that the Kazancıs passionately hope for sons rather than daughters, ironically the number of Kazancı men decreases rapidly. At the end of the book, after Mustafa dies four generations of Kazancı women are now living together in the family house but no males are left to carry on the family name into the future. It is as if a spell had been cast upon the Kazancı men, as the life span of each male gets shorter and shorter with each generation. The great-grand father, Rıza Kazancı, dies unexpectedly at the age of sixty, unable to breathe. Similarly, the father, Levent Kazancı, dies of a heart attack at the age of fifty. There are two nephews who die at around twenty years of age, one while swimming under the full moon and the other hit by a bullet fired by a hooligan. There are two more cousins, one of whom dies by falling into a ditch and the other one shoots himself. Banu's twin sons die at a very early age because of a childhood illness. In addition, Cevriye's husband, who is also a second cousin, dies by stepping on a high-voltage electricity cable. This shows that any man who has a blood relation with the Kazancı family is doomed to die unexpectedly and early. Mustafa Kazancı is the last male member of the family. Despite all the precautions the family takes, he dies before reaching his fortieth birthday.

[226] Ibid., 307.

Just like all the other male members of the family, Mustafa's death is unexpected and suggests that the cost of the sins of the men in the Kazancı family is their lives. Not only Mustafa, but also the other male members in the family have problems with women and sexuality. Mustafa's father, Levent Kazancı, had a very problematic relationship with his wife. He could never satisfy Gülsüm emotionally, which is why she expects her son to provide her with the love and affection she could not get from her husband. As for the great-grandfather Rıza Kazancı, for years he kept his distance from women after he was left by his first wife. Eventually he marries the sixteen-year-old Petite-Ma, who is twenty years younger than him. Zeynep Ergun suggests that when Rıza marries a sixteen-old girl who loses her virginity before even having her first period, this implies that Rıza himself is a kind of pedophile or rapist. Just like Zeliha, Petite-Ma is indeed raped. It would seem that the male members of the Kazancı family have sexually perverted natures,[227] indicating that in addition to an incestuous rapist, there is also a pedophile among the Kazancı men. This could lead to the conclusion that the Kazancı men pay for their sexually perverted ways by dying at an early age as a punishment meted out by God. I would also contend that Şafak wants to draw attention to the strong belief in Islamic culture that Allah punishes people for every bad deed they commit. Belief in Allah and his incessant gaze fixed on people's lives are significant issues in the novel. Throughout the book, we hear Zeliha's conflicting thoughts about the existence of God. At the end of the novel when Mustafa dies, she makes peace with God. The early deaths of the Kazancı men are also a part of God's divine justice. They have to die because of their sins. In the end, Şafak shows there is divine justice and no sin goes unpunished.

She also takes a critical stance on the passionate wish of most Turkish families to have sons rather than daughters. She demonstrates her criticism by getting rid of all the Kazancı men. After getting married, Levent Kazancı's greatest desire is to have a son that will carry on his family name. It is common in Turkish families to overvalue sons, and they believe that having a son is a symbol of masculine power. A famous Turkish saying exemplifies this idea: "*Erkek adamın erkek evladı olur*," which means "A real man has sons." Unfortunately for Levent and Gülsüm Kazancı, they have three "unwelcome guests"—that is to say, daughters— until finally the precious gem of the family, Mustafa, comes into the world. Their obsession with having a boy is depicted as follows:

[227] "Şuşan'ın adet görmeden kadın olduğunu öğrenmemiz ilişkiye tümüyle farklı, kötücül bir boyut yükler. Zeliha gibi Şuşan'a da tecavüz edilmiştir; üstelik geçmişteki bu tecavüz sübyancılıkla (pedophilia) birleştiğinden daha vahim bir sapkınlık içermektedir. İsimleri olumlu özlemler taşısa da Kazancı erkeklerinin cinsellikle genetik sayılabilecek bir sorunları vardır." Zeynep Ergun, *Erkekliğin Yittiği Yerde*, 414.

> The result of Levent Kazancı's fixation on having a boy to bear his surname had been that the four Kazancı sisters had each grown up as unwelcome guests. The first three children were all girls. Banu, Cevriye and Feride had each felt like an introduction before the real thing, an accidental prelude in their parents' sex life, so determinedly were they oriented toward a male child. As for the fifth child, Zeliha, she knew she had been conceived with the hope that fortune could be generous twice in a row. After having a boy, her parents had wanted to see if they were lucky enough to make another one.[228]

By having the family consist of four girls and only one boy, by making all the married Kazancı women go back to their family homes and live there without their husbands, by rendering all the sons-in-law of the Kazancı family functionless, by showing that the life of the Kazancı women goes on more peacefully without the men, and by killing off all the male members of the family one by one till there are no men left, Şafak creates a "Herland." The Kazancı *konağı* (mansion) is a "Herland" where no man is allowed to enter, or if they do enter they lose their lives. From another perspective, the *konak* is like a sacred place from which men are kicked out forever. That is where Rıza marries the sixteen-year-old Petite-Ma, and it is also where Mustafa rapes Zeliha, meaning it is a place where sins are committed. Mustafa touches his sister even though it is strictly forbidden. Immediately afterwards, he leaves and goes to America because he thinks that if he gets away from the *konak*, he may also escape the fate of all the Kazancı men: an early and unexpected death. The *konak* is forbidden for Mustafa after he has sexual intercourse with someone with whom he is forbidden to have sex, just like Eden is forbidden to Adam after he eats the fruit he was forbidden to eat. The story of Mustafa and Zeliha is similar to the story of Adam and Eve in this respect. In that story, Eve is blamed for seducing Adam and causing them to be cast out from Eden. Similarly, the narrator repeats over and over society's, especially Gülsüm's and Mustafa's, harsh criticisms of Zeliha for her clothes, which they think seduce men. On the day Mustafa rapes Zeliha, he says,

> Don't you have shame? ...You don't care when men whistle at you on the streets. Look at you! You dress like a whore and then expect respect?[229]

This reflects a common view about girls who wear clothes like miniskirts. If Gülsüm ever found out about the rape, she would surely blame Zeliha for seducing Mustafa. By portraying Zeliha as a

[228] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 31.
[229] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 314.

woman who is free of bad intentions and sin and by only banning Mustafa from the *konak*, a symbolic paradise, and keeping Zeliha there, Şafak saves Eve's and women's honor.

Mustafa the Oedipus

Mustafa is an oedipal character for a number of reasons: He expects his father to treat him with privilege, his mother loves him unconditionally and obsessively, he has a child from an incestuous relationship, and he is unable to escape his fate.

Although Mustafa is the only son in the family, he cannot slip free of the brutal way his father treats the children. Levent Kazancı is an authoritarian figure who never shows affection to his children and demands full obedience. He sometimes beats his wife and children with his belt to discipline them. When Mustafa does something wrong, he remembers his father's belt, especially the one with the "brass buckle" because it hurts so much more than the others. I argue that the belt is a phallic symbol that stands for the father's penis. If we take into account Mustafa's childhood memories and adult dreams, it becomes clear that there is an oedipal rivalry between Mustafa and his father.

For Mustafa, his father is like a celestial eye that always watches him and sees everything he does. During his circumcision at the age of seven, he remembers his father looking at him angrily. He then warns Mustafa not to cry, saying,

> "Did you ever see me cry, my son?" Mustafa shook his head. No, nobody had ever seen Father cry. "Did you ever see your mom cry, my son?" Mustafa nodded heartily. Mom cried all the time. "Good." Levent Kazancı smiled gently at his son. "Now that you are a man, behave like a man."[230]

From a Freudian point of view, this symbolizes the castration complex of a boy whose penis is being cut under the censuring gaze of the father. Mustafa never forgets the way his father looks at him at that moment. He remembers it especially when he masturbates in front of his father in his dreams. Unfortunately, Mustafa can never behave like the strong man his father expects him to be; rather, he is a weak character like his mother, who cries all the time. In the years after his father

[230] Ibid., 313.

dies, Mustafa cannot pull his pants down when he masturbates because he is afraid of being caught by his father's ghost; his fear is that if his father catches him, he will castrate him in the act, so he keeps his penis safe in his pants. In Mustafa's unconscious, his father is a threatening figure in both life and death. When he masturbates, he hears his father repeating over and over, "You are a man, behave like a man," which reveals Mustafa's obsession and insecurity about "being a man." Mustafa obsessively thinks that his father watches him whenever he masturbates, so his sexual satisfaction is always accompanied by a strong feeling of fear of his father and his father's angry stare. These anxieties all point to Mustafa's unresolved castration complex. Additionally, his repetitive dreams of being caught by his parents as he masturbates are significant. In one dream, he masturbates and his parents break down the door and catch him in the act:

> Amid screams and wails, Mom would kiss and pat him on the back, while Father would spit on him and spank him hard. Where Father would leave bruises, Mom would rub in a speck of ashure, as if the dessert was some sort of ointment.[231]

While his father punishes Mustafa for his sexual desires, his mother heals his wounds. According to Freud,

> At a very early age, the little boy develops an object-cathexis for his mother which is originally related to the mother's breast and is the prototype of an object-choice on the anaclitic model; the boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him. For a time these two relationships proceed side by side, until the boy's sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus complex originates.[232]

In Freudian terms, this dream summarizes Mustafa's oedipal rivalry with his father and object-cathexis with his mother. After Mustafa leaves the *konak*, Mustafa and Gülsüm meet alone in Germany like secret lovers. The abnormal relationship between Mustafa and his mother emerges as a result of both Mustafa's Oedipus complex and Gülsüm's approach to motherhood. Gülsüm is a weak character who dedicates herself completely to her only son, "trying to find solace in him [for] everything that life had taken from her."[233] What Gülsüm mostly longs for and expects from

[231] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 314.
[232] Sigmund Freud, "The Ego, the Id and Other Works," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Volume XIX (1920 -1925), (London: The Hogarth Press, 2001), 31-2.
[233] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 218.

Mustafa is the love and affection of which her husband deprives her, so Gülsüm unconsciously expects Mustafa to serve as a substitute for her husband.

The ashure that Gülsüm uses in the dream to soothe the wound inflicted by the father is symbolic, too.[234] It is the dessert that Mustafa likes most and her mother cooks it for him often. Although the daughters always cook at home, Gülsüm and Gülsüm alone cooks ashure, so it is associated with her. Child Mustafa's undying love for ashure and its association with his mother conjures thoughts of ashure as a form of mother's milk. As a result, Mustafa's attachment to his mother is symbolized by his passionate love for ashure even as an adult and the excitement Gülsüm feels when she is cooking it with rapt attention for her son.

Until now, I have discussed Mustafa's fear of his father and love for his mother. In the Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus's effort to escape his fate and his subsequent failure to do so is critical in this regard, as it holds true for Mustafa. All the members of the Kazancı family know the unfortunate fate awaiting the male members of the family. To help Mustafa escape his fate—dying at an early age—they take every precaution. They place evil-eye beads and amulets around when he is a baby. Until he is eight years old, they keep his hair long so that Azrael, the Angel of death, will not see that he is a boy. They also refer to him as a "girl," not a boy, for the same reason. When he is twenty years old, they send him to America so that he can get away from home and hopefully escape an early death. Like all the precautions taken in *Oedipus Rex* to prevent the incest and murder of the father, however, the precautions taken by the Kazancı family are in vain. When Mustafa comes to the family home just before the age of forty, he dies. This makes Mustafa an Oedipal character who cannot defeat his fate. From another perspective, this state of affairs also references the Islamic belief that changing one's fate is impossible. In fact, Şafak uses religious elements throughout the narration. Banu tells the story of a man who comes across Azrael in China and rushes to Cairo in an attempt to flee death. Sadly for him, he is welcomed by Azrael in Cairo, who says, "I was so surprised to run into you in China, for your destiny said it was here in Cairo that we would meet."[235] This story is told by the only religious member in the family, Banu. Not surprisingly, it is Banu who gives the poisoned dessert to Mustafa to kill him as punishment for the rape.

---

[234] Ashure, which is common in both Turkish and Armenian cuisine, is cooked by combining many different ingredients, each of which is the name of a chapter in the novel. The multicultural nature of the Ottoman Empire is also thus symbolized through ashure, as each ingredient represents a culture.
[235] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 131.

In *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus has sex with his mother and has two daughters, Antigone and Ismene, and two sons, Eteocles and Polynices. What is more important than their names is the fact that they are both his children and siblings. In *the Bastard of Istanbul*, incestuous intercourse takes place between Mustafa and Zeliha, as a result of which Asya is born, and as such she is both the daughter and niece of Mustafa. Despite all the similarities between Oedipus and Mustafa, there is a major difference: Mustafa has sex with his sister, not his mother. There are a few reasons for this difference.

Since his early childhood, the female members of the family, especially his sisters, have been objects of love for Mustafa. He cannot stop fantasizing about them:

> Mustafa was raised with a mother, grandmother, and four sisters about whom he was forbidden to fantasize... In his bed at night, he would tense up as he thought, "I am the only man in this house." It was as if the women in his family knew every wish in his mind. That was what sexuality meant: repressed feelings and a silence ready to burst. At first, he considered women to be sacred. He would fall in love with women who would obviously refuse him, and he would dream about meeting them but could never touch them, not even in his dreams...[236]

Except for the sons in a household, the only man that can live in a Turkish family home is the father. The thought that he is the only man in the house prods Mustafa's unconscious feeling that there is no father in the home. This fact excites him because the father's absence—after his death—means there is no rival he has to fight for the mother. However, his recurring dreams prove that his fear of the father—or the ghost of the father—is still strong and unresolved. In other words, the way he masturbates without pulling down his pants for fear his father's ghost will catch him and even as a teenager his dreams in which his father beats him when he is masturbating and his mother heals his wounds illustrate Mustafa's repressed oedipal fear of his father, which was established in infancy. Freud notes,

[236] "Annesi, büyükannesi ve haklarında fantezi kurması tabu olan dört kız kardeş arasında (büyümüştü)…Geceleri yatağa yattığında, 'bu çatı altındaki tek erkek benim' düşüncesiyle kasılırdı bazen. Çıkardığı her sesi, aklından geçirdiği her özlemi biliyor görünüyordu sanki ailesindeki kadınlar. Zihni ağza alınmayacak düşüncelere kayar, üzerinden atamadığı bir suçluluk duygusuyla kendi, kendine dokunmaya baslardı. Cinsellik buydu, bastırılmış kelimeler arasından boy gösteren iğreti bir duraklama, patlamaya hazır bir sessizlik. İlk baslarda kutsal gözüyle bakardı kadınlara. Onu reddedeceği bastan belli kızlara asık olur, uzaktan uzağa tanışma hayalleri kurar ama asla el süremezdi kızlara, değil kendilerine hayallerine bile…" Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 56.

> Along with the demolition of the Oedipus complex, the boy's object-cathexis of his mother must be given up. Its place may be filled by one of two things: either identification with his mother or intensification of identification with his father.[237]

I claim that Mustafa's weak character makes it impossible for him to identify with his father. Moreover, his fear of his father represses his oedipal wish to have sexual intercourse with his mother. That's why he replaces his mother as an object of love with his sisters. In *"*On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love," Freud discusses how the objects of primary choice change as a result of the barriers and obstacles an infant faces. He looks for other objects that might be more suitable because the father represents a major threat. The infant finds an extraneous object to replace the mother; in the novel, Mustafa chooses Zeliha, the young latecomer, as his new object.[238] This is because how girls are treated by the mother actually make them extraneous objects. This will be unpacked in more detail in the following paragraphs. Freud postulates that

> When other children appear on the scene, the Oedipus complex is enlarged into a family complex…especially as jealousy is constantly receiving fresh nourishment in the later years of childhood and the whole shock is repeated with the birth of each new brother or sister. Nor does it make much difference if the child happens to remain the mother's preferred favorite.[239]

With the birth of younger sisters or brothers, the Oedipus complex can turn into a family complex or sister-brother complex. Zeliha is never favored by her mother; on the contrary, Mustafa has always remained the favorite child even after Zeliha's birth. Despite this fact, Zeliha is the object of a family complex for Mustafa. Hatred arising as a result of feelings of rivalry and a desire to have sex coalesce through the person of Zeliha. As Mitchell says, "the desire to love is sourced by the desire to kill."[240]

Moreover, the oedipal child thinks he has to compete with the father for the love of the mother. As for sisters, they are not the objects of love for the father, so there is no need to fight with the father for them. In the novel, this is relevant on a psychic level, and on a social level it is

---

[237] Freud, "The Ego, the Id and Other Works," 32.
[238] Sigmund Freud, "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XI: 1912c, 177-190.
[239] Sigmund Freud, "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume: 15-16: 1916-7, 334.
[240] Juliet Mitchell, *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 38.

also true. In other words, the fact that the girls are not valued in the Kazancı family and are seen as the "unwelcome guests" of a family that wants to have a son put the girls in a situation in which they are open to attack. Just like the fragile tea glasses that Zeliha associates with women, the daughters of the Kazancı family are vulnerable, devalued, and without protection. They do not have a father and their mother does not care about them. In *Siblings: Sex and Violence,* Juliet Mitchell highlights how differently mother-incest and sibling-incest are tabooed in people's minds:

> Sibling incest is less strongly tabooed than intergenerational incest. In most cultures, sexual intercourse with one's mother, or even one's fantasy is more or less unthinkable because the desire's core representation is more than repressed, it is demolished. This elimination of the fantasy is not the case with sibling incest.[241]

Indeed, Mitchell's claims are demonstrated by the daughters in the Kazancı family. Moreover, Mitchell underscores the fact that sibling incest happens in the absence of parental care. What affects the child more bitterly is this neglect rather than a sexual assault. She continues with a case in which a girl named Sarah is raped by her older brother, and she concludes, "Sarah's main problem was this deficiency of primary maternal recognition of who she was."[242] The stories of Sarah and Zeliha are similar; both are raped by an older brother and both are expected to be sons by families who value boys over girls. As far as parental care is concerned, I do not assume that this is related only to the care a baby needs. On the contrary, I would argue that the devaluing attitude Zeliha's mother has towards her daughters is also exemplary of the parental neglect that lead daughters to be perceived as objects that can be used by the "valuable" sons of the family as they wish. This appears to be another significant social criticism to which Şafak wants to draw attention. This attitude regarding daughters results in their victimization by brothers in a society that neglects girls and values boys.

Mitchell also notes that the biggest difference between love for the mother and love for the sister is that the aim of love for the mother is to have a baby with her. It is a vertical relationship that includes both sexual drive and reproduction as opposed to love for the sister which does not include a desire to have a baby, so it is lateral.[243] Oedipus kills his father and has sexual intercourse with his mother but in sibling incest, the person to kill and to make love with is one and the same

---

[241] Mitchell, *Siblings: Sex and Violence*, 40.
[242] Ibid., 66.
[243] Ibid., 38.

because the desire to love emerges from a desire to kill.[244] However, killing one's siblings is prohibited:

> Repression—making unconscious of this wish to kill and the prohibition against it—fails and violence against siblings or their substitutes is acted out… The failure of repression or sublimation of murderousness, an analogy with the failure of the repression or sublimation of infantile sexuality, can be enacted in what I will call a violence—perversion, which is psychically structured like a sexual perversion.[245]

When we analyze the relationship between Zeliha and Mustafa from this point of view, it is obvious that there is hatred between the two siblings. Actually, Zeliha's existence is a kind of threat to Mustafa and his masculinity. In Mustafa's mind, Zeliha is different from his other sisters because she is the only one in the family "who made Mustafa feel inadequate and deficient [*kendini eksik ve arızalı hissetmesine sebep olurdu*]."[246] Mustafa is a weak character who cannot behave as his father expects him to behave. Zeliha has a strong persona that is more akin to what the father expects. She bluntly says to Mustafa, "Father is dead and I am not going to let you replace him [*Babamız öldü. Boş yere ondan rol çalmaya çalışma*]."[247] Mustafa comes to see that the biggest hindrance for him in realizing his unconscious desire to replace his father is Zeliha. After the father's death, he acts like the master of the household but Zeliha does not recognize him as such, so he needs to transition into masculine adulthood. He is first humiliated by his father and then by his sister. Thus, he lives in two different worlds; for his mother, he is the sultan of the house, but he is a loser in the eyes of Zeliha. As the narrator says, "Zeliha always mocked him… In contrast, her mother always admired and flattered him [*Zeliha onunla hep dalga geçerdi… Oysa annesi tam tersine onu hep takdir eder, pohpohlardı*]."[248] Even in his youth, he cannot bring himself to approach girls for fear that they will turn him away. This reveals the psychic impotence inherent to Mustafa's sexuality that emerges as a result of "an incestuous fixation on a mother or sister."[249] He is unable to have healthy sexual relationships with women because of the fact that, as Freud relates,

---

[244] Ibid., 36.
[245] Mitchell, *Siblings: Sex and Violence*, 36.
[246] Shafak, *The Bastard of İstanbul*, 56.
[247] Ibid., 328.
[248] Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 56.
[249] Freud, "The Ego, the Id and Other Works."

> It must nevertheless be said that anyone who is to be really free and happy in love must have overcome his apprehension for women and have to come to terms with the idea of incest with his mother or sister.[250]

Moreover, as I pointed out earlier, Mustafa initially considers women to be sacred. As a result, he cannot approach them. Freud calls this "over-valuation of the sexual object" and considers it as another consequence of not being able to come to terms with incestuous desire.[251] By raping Zeliha, he wants to prove his manhood:

> Though twenty by now, Mustafa felt like he was still stuck on that threshold between boyhood and manhood. He could neither return to the former nor leap into the latter.[252]

He wants to behave like the man his father ordered him to be.

The Id versus the Superego

Mustafa tries hard to repress his sexual desires because he knows that they are targeting his sister, who is forbidden to him. Mustafa calls his desire to masturbate "it," which clearly stands for the Freudian "id." The Freudian "id" is one of the agencies of human personality, and it is driven by the pleasure principle. "It" is narrated as a kind of capricious patriarch and demands full obedience; it is active everywhere, all the time, at once in her sister's room, in her bed, on her chair, and on her desk. Mustafa's sexual desires for his sister are represented as the Freudian "id," which operates according to the pleasure principle, and as such it is amoral, driven by the passions, and demands immediate and full gratification. Mustafa strives to repress his amoral sexual desires, and between the ages of thirteen and nineteen, he never masturbates. Freud notes that in order to take control of the "id," the erotic object-choice is transformed into an alteration of the ego, which assumes the features of the object to make himself liked by the id. As a result of this, an abandonment of sexual desires is sought and desexualization emerges. For five years, Mustafa desexualizes himself by not masturbating, but it comes back with a vengeance. Şafak again uses a religious element here.

[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.
[252] "Artık yirmi yaşına gelmiş olmasına rağmen çocuklukla erkeklik arasındaki meçhul eşiğe saplanıp kalmış gibi hissediyordu kendini. Ne evvelki safhaya dönebiliyor, ne sonrakine sıçrayabiliyordu." Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 324.

Mustafa never uses his right hand when masturbating because it is reserved for good deeds like holding the Quran and taking elders' hands to kiss them—which again is reminiscent of the image of the father. The victor in the fight between Mustafa's "id" and ego is thus clearly the "id."

Mustafa pays for raping his sister with his life. It is a mysterious death which can be seen as both a murder and a suicide. When Banu learns from her *djinn*, Ağulu Bey, that Asya's father is Mustafa, she cannot carry the heavy burden of that knowledge. When Mustafa comes to the *konak,* she serves him ashure one night. When he thanks her, he thinks his sister Banu looks like a ghost and he sees two more eyes, which may belong to Banu's djinn. He then wakes up suddenly and finds a bowl of ashure on the nightstand. The fact that Banu serves him ashure at night has mystical elements and Mustafa feels that if he eats the ashure, he will die. This is because he asks Banu who Asya's father is and Banu replies, "I wish I did not know the things I know,"[253] so Mustafa realizes that Banu knows he raped Zeliha. Banu is the only sister Mustafa has always feared and she is the only religious character in the novel. For that reason, Banu, as a religious and punishing figure, represents the Freudian superego.

Although Mustafa is Zeliha's rapist and victimizer, he is also a victim. His childhood memories are dominated by the authority of a dictator-like father and a mother who worshipped her son like a god who created *the* Mustafa, who is both "insecure and narcissistic" as Zeliha quips. His mother's treatment makes him feel like a king who demands obedience and recognition from everybody. On the other hand, his relationship with his father makes him feel unmanly, as he is demasculated by his father's authority. Unable to "behave like a man" as he father requires, he cannot feel that he is truly a man. The fact that his father spits on him as he masturbates in his dream can be interpreted as a projection of his father's sperm, and in that way Mustafa is symbolically castrated by his father. When his mother soothes his wounds with ashure, with symbolic milk, she offers him her breast. Because Gülsüm expects from Mustafa the love and emotional satisfaction she could not get from her husband, she offers herself to Mustafa so she can get the satisfaction she needs and also make it possible for Mustafa to regain his masculinity after being castrated by the father. The fact that Mustafa was raised like a girl, once had long hair, and was called a "girl" in his childhood explains why Mustafa feels so insecure about his masculinity. His right eye twitches and his head leans to the right when he talks to girls, which is indicative of his feelings of insecurity with them. The person who makes him feel that way and also tells him

[253] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 336.

about that fact is Zeliha, so it is no coincidence that he rapes her. If he dominates Zeliha sexually and wields his masculinity over her, he thinks he will be able to get over his insecurities.

ASYA THE BASTARD

Asya is the novel's central character. The fact that she is the only character who is mentioned both in the Turkish and English titles of the book is a sign of her importance. She is important because her existence has varying and vital meanings for almost all the characters in the book. The fact that the narrator refers to her as "a bridge that connects east and west" is not a coincidence either.[254] Asya is also a bridge between the past and the present. Her existence in the present reminds the family members of how she was conceived. She is the child of an interfamilial rape, so she represents the rape. For Zeliha, she is both a daughter whom she loves deeply and the daughter of the man she hates the most in her life. Her hatred is so strong that Asya picks up on it: "Sometimes when my mother looks at me I think she sees him in my face but never says a word."[255] In that way, Asya's existence stirs up two conflicting feelings for Zeliha: love and hatred. This demonstrates that Asya will always be the most vivid reminder of the most calamitous moment in Zeliha's life. This is unfortunate, as it means that Asya bridges the feelings of love and hatred in her own body. Similarly, she is the one who bridges Mustafa with his past, which he longs to forget and has fled from for years. After living far from his family for a long time, after breathing the same air as Asya for one day, he dies. Among all the characters, Gülsüm, her grandmother, is the only one who most despises Asya. Gülsüm sees Asya as the embodiment of Zeliha's biggest and most unforgivable sin. For her, Asya's existence makes Zeliha's sin public and brings disgrace to the family name. More importantly, Asya symbolizes Gülsüm's expectation of love and affection from Mustafa, which she never gets. Mustafa raped Zeliha and Asya is the most concrete proof of this fact. As a result, Asya is a bridge between Gülsüm and her own bitter memories.

As the embodiment of Zeliha's grave "sin," Asya is like the character Pearl in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. In both novels, there is a daughter who is born out of a socially unacceptable relationship. Both daughters, Asya and Pearl, are symbols of sin. Just as Hester names

[254] Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 144.
[255] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 146.

her daughter Pearl, which symbolizes purity, Zeliha describes her daughter as "*pur-i pak*," which has the same meaning as pearl.[256] Of course, the names Pearl and *pur-i pak* are used ironically. According to social norms, these names stand in opposition to the way the girls are conceived. However, they underline the fact that these girls are not responsible for their births. Neither of them deserves the humiliation they experience in their societies. Moreover, the names contradict how the girls will later be called by society: bastard/*piç*. I would contend that the names contain a critique of society's humiliation of women and children born out of wedlock, as bastards are as pure as other babies. Furthermore, in both novels men are respected by society while women are exposed to social degradation. Hence, they way they call their daughters "pure" also reflects Zeliha's and Hester's strong personalities and courageous fight against societal norms.

Asya and Armanush

Asya and Armanush are oppositional figures in many ways, just as many Armenians and Turks stand in opposition when it comes to the issue of memories.[257] Firstly, as her name implies Asya represents the east and what was once cosmopolitan Ottoman Anatolia. She is also a bridge that connects the Turkish Kazancı family to the Tchakhmakhchian family as she is the only fluent English speaker in the family who can enable communication with Armanush. In America, Armanush's name morphs into Amy, so she represents the in-between position of Armenians. Armanush's life is dominated by her father's sisters while Asya is surrounded by her mother's sisters. While Asya does not know who her father is, Armanush lives with Asya's father in America. This could be the unconscious motivation driving Asya: "For some reason unknown to her, Asya wanted to confront the guest [Armanush]."[258] When Asya first hears about Armanush's visit, she feels uncomfortable and unhappy because Armanush and her mother are the people who "stole" her father Mustafa. Symbolically, this can be interpreted in the sense that Asya takes her father back from them when he dies in Istanbul and is buried there, meaning that he will never return to his American family.

[256] Meaning "pure/clean" in Turkish.
[257] The closest name in Armenian to Armanush is Armenush, which means a sweet, good Armenian woman. Armenian Female Names. Accessed September 12, http://www.armeniapedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Female_Names
[258] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 156.

When Armanush visits the Kazancı's *konak* in Istanbul, she winds up bringing together the Armenian Tchakhmakhchian and Turkish Kazancı families, which are related by blood. Their relationship is based on the marriage between Rıza Selim Kazancı and Shushan Tchakhmakhchian many years earlier. Shushan is the daughter of an Armenian writer, Ohannes İstanbuliyan, who lives in Istanbul and writes children's books. As a result of the Armenian and Turkish conflict in 1915, Ohannes İstanbuliyan is arrested by Turkish soldiers and it is thought he has been killed. Rıza Selim Kazancı works with Shushan's uncle and marries her because she has nobody left in her family. She has been placed in an orphanage, and he saves her by way of marriage. Levent Kazancı is the son of Rıza Selim and Shushan, whose brother takes her to America after finding out where she is. Shushan marries again in America and Armanush is her granddaughter and also Mustafa's stepdaughter. This link between these two families is represented by a golden miniature pomegranate that Ohannes İstanbuliyan buys as a present for his wife. Shushan receives it from her mother and leaves it at the *konak* when she leaves for America. As the oldest daughter, Banu Kazancı inherits it and later gives it to Armanush when she visits them in Istanbul. By creating such a complex web of relations, Şafak shows the strong possibility of blood relations between Turks and Armenians and their shared past.

The Bastard of Istanbul revolves around two main points; the first is the rape of Zeliha by Mustafa and the second is the deportation of the Armenians by the Turks in 1915. The way Şafak fictionalizes and narrates these two events makes them symbolically similar to each other. One day when the Armenian writer Ohannes İstanbuliyan is working on a book in his room, he suddenly hears his wife and children scream. When he goes downstairs, he finds his wife, children, and their maid standing stock still like children who are being punished; across from them is a group of Turkish soldiers in the kitchen. The soldiers search all the drawers, shelves, and cupboards, a scene that is reminiscent of Zeliha's rape in the family home. Ohannes İstanbuliyan is accused of inciting the Armenians to rise up against the Ottoman sultanate through his books. He is arrested, taken away from his home, and left to die.

Just as Zeliha is unexpectedly raped in her family home, the İstanbuliyans (which means "from Istanbul") are attacked in their family home in Istanbul. And just as Zeliha is raped by a family member, Şafak represents the deportation of the Armenians as being carried out by family members. Firstly, Şafak demonstrates the possibility of blood relations occurring between Turks and Armenians. Moreover, Armenians and Turks who live in the same neighborhood are kind to

and friendly with each other. Even during the Armenian and Turkish conflict, Turkish people helped the child Shushan and looked after her like their own daughter. Later, Turkish soldiers take Shushan away and send her to an orphanage. In that way, Şafak emphasizes that Turks and Armenians used to be like members of the same family. Just as Mustafa stands for the masculine power in the family, the Ottoman soldiers stand for the masculine power in the government. In both cases, the victim is considered to be an object or the means by which masculine authority and power is exhibited and justified. Barbara Mehrhof and Pamela Kearon's description of rape is helpful in understanding the parallels Şafak draws between the deportation of the İstanbuliyans and the rape of Zeliha. They note,

> Rape, then, is an effective political device. It is not an arbitrary act of violence by one individual on another; it is a political act of oppression (never rebellion) exercised by members of the powerful class on members of the powerless class. Rape is supported by a consensus in the male class… It is communicated to the male population as an act of freedom and strength and a male right never to be denied.[259]

It is clear that men symbolize the strong gender in the Kazancı family. Levent Kazancı exemplifies this by violently beating his wife and children and also by asserting himself as the master of the family. As he is the only male in the family, Gülsüm expects Mustafa to maintain that hegemony. However, he is not a strong character like his father and grandfather, so he selects Zeliha's body as a battlefield where he can display his masculine power. Şafak shows that rape is not merely a matter of sexual satisfaction but a matter of flaunting one's masculine authority over members of a powerless gender. The way she depicts the deportation of the İstanbuliyan family is similar. The Armenians were a minority group in the Ottoman Empire; positions of authority and power in the Ottoman Empire were held by Turkish men, while the Armenians were a powerless class, and hence symbolically female. When the soldiers break into the İstanbuliyans' home, men once more prove their authority over the powerless class.

Şafak also creates a parallelism between the Kazancı family's lack of knowledge about Zeliha's rape and the Turkish characters' ignorance concerning the Turkish-Armenian conflict. Most of the Armenian characters are represented as being strongly tied to their past and they try to keep it a part of the present. Ohannes İstanbuliyan writes children's books as a way to pass on

[259] Barbara Mehrhof & Pamela Kearon, "Rape: An Act of Terror," in Dawn Keetly & John Pettegrew, eds., *Public Women, Public Words* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 155.

Armenian folk tales to the new generation. The Tchakhmakhchians send Armanush to Armenian camps to keep the Armenian spirit alive, echoing the Armenian belief that "our ancestors breathe in our children [*Atalarımız çocuklarımızın içinde nefes alıp verirler*]."[260] When Armanush visits the Kazancı family, she tells them about her family history in great detail and is surprised by how the Kazancı family reacts—none of them are very interested in the Armenian deportation, and they do not know anything about what she is saying. At the end of the conversation, Armanush is disappointed by their lack of knowledge, while Asya is astonished "to meet a young person with such an old memory."[261] The Kazancı family is represented as a secular, Kemalist family, so when Banu wears a headscarf, everyone in the family members react negatively. Gülsüm says,

> Turkish women took off their veils ninety years ago. No daughter of mine is going to betray the rights the great-commander-in chief Atatürk bestowed on the women of this country.[262]

The fact that they name their only son Mustafa (after Mustafa Kemal Ataturk) is another sign of the Kemalist leanings of the family. What Şafak wants to draw attention to here is that the Kemalists ignore the times before the establishment of the Turkish Republic, which occurred in 1923. In other words, they do not consider the Turkish Republic to be a continuation of the Ottoman Empire, but rather a completely new nation. That is why they are so uninformed about the Turkish-Armenian conflict and feel no responsibility for the horrific experiences the fictional Tchakhmakhchian family underwent in the past. As a result, just as the Kazancı family shows no empathy for Zeliha because she was raped by Mustafa, Armanush does not get the apology she expects from the family as representatives of the Turks. The narrative highlights how the Kazancı family ignores the rape by figuratively hiding behind Mustafa Kemal. This also underscores the way they ignore Mustafa's act of rape by "saving" Mustafa and victimizing their daughter no matter what the cost.[263]

---

[260] Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 65.
[261] Ibid., 173.
[262] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 68.
[263] As readers, we should bear in mind that *Baba ve Piç* is a fictional work; in 2006, Şafak was put on trial for "humiliating Turks" because a character in the book referred to them as "butchers." She was also criticized for considering the issue only from the Armenian side and ignoring the Turkish perspective on the events that transpired. She defended herself on the grounds that all the characters and events in the book are fictitious, and she was found not guilty.

Asya's Trauma

There are two inevitable qualities that are bestowed on Asya by birth. The first is that she will never be able to cast off the label society imposes on her, namely that of "the bastard." She learns about it at a very early age and is reminded of it whenever someone wants to hurt her. In *the Bastard of Istanbul*, the person who humiliates Zeliha the most for her "socially unacceptable behavior" is Gülsüm. In the same way, it is again Gülsüm who inflicts such traumas on Asya starting in her early childhood. In an ironic scene, Asya hears the word "bastard" applied to her for the first time when Gülsüm speaks it. In that scene, Gülsüm is being affectionate with her plants, speaking to them as her granddaughter is Asya drawing in a coloring book. When Asya asks her why she talks to the plants, Gülsüm answers:

> "Plants bloom if you talk to them."
> "Really?" Asya beamed.
> "Really. If you tell them their soil is their mother and water is their father, they buoy up and blossom."[264]

Gülsüm continues talking to the plants affectionately and Asya, who becomes jealous of the attention lavished on the plants but not her, imitates Gülsüm, who gets angry and stops what she's doing. She turns to Asya and says, "Bastard."[265] This scene reveals that, in Gülsüm's eyes, Asya is not worthy of the love and affection that her plants deserve. In fact, Asya is only eight years old and she needs care and attention. Crucially, Gülsüm says that plants need to know about their mothers and fathers so they can grow. This is ironic because Asya does not know who her father is and she may never know until the end of her life. Immediately afterwards, she tells Asya that she is a bastard. This cannot be a mere coincidence; Şafak reveals Gülsüm's unconscious feelings about Asya by having her say that she will never blossom like a plant because she is a bastard. Neither she nor anyone else (except for Zeliha and Banu) knows who her father is, so, for Gülsüm, she does not deserve to exist. Şafak shows Gülsüm's insincerity by depicting her as being loving and affectionate. What Gülsüm actually symbolizes is the hypocrisy of society. Although Asya does not know the meaning of the word "bastard" at the time, she never forgets that day. Unluckily for her, the next year, when she is nine years old, a boy at her school reminds her that she is a bastard.

[264] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 61.
[265] Ibid.

Asya fully comprehends that she is a bastard and this is not temporary but a lifetime realization. Şafak deftly demonstrates that Gülsüm's intolerance for and hatred of her granddaughter is so strong that she is even more impatient to humiliate Asya than Asya's childhood friends at her primary school.

The incident at the school remains lodged in Asya's memory as a bitter shock and trauma. That is why Asya says, "Being a bastard is less about having no father than having no past."[266] In this way, Şafak associates having no father with having no origins, so having no father makes Asya bereft of a past and lost. This image of a girl with no origins is akin to the image of the *tuba ağacı,* which is believed to exist in heaven and is mentioned numerous times in the novel. Unlike other trees, the roots of a *tuba ağacı* are suspended in mid-air, like a tree hanging in the air upside down. If we recall what Gülsüm says about the plants—"If you tell them their soil is their mother and water is their father, they buoy up and blossom"[267]—the soil means the father and the source. Lacking a father, Asya is like the *tuba agacı*, without roots or a past, hanging in the air upside down and lost. As such, this repeated image symbolizes Asya. The tree exists in heaven and Asya is *pur-i pak*, like a tree in heaven.

The second quality that is bestowed on Asya by birth is related to memory; she embodies memories and the pasts of the family members who want to forget them. This is ironic because she does not know about her past but her existence is the embodiment of the family's history. The narrator does not say that if she had not been born, life would have been easier for the others in terms of forgetting bitter memories, but that could have been the case. Asya carries two burdens on her shoulders, the first of which is the heavy burden of being the embodiment of an interfamilial rape, and the second is the gap her unknown past left to her. Asya wants to get rid of both of them. That is the only way she will be able to exert control over her life. As Horwitz notes, "to consciously know one's personal and political history is to have more command over one's life."[268] This is helpful in seeing more clearly that Asya does not have that control. She is forced to live in a particular place, the boundaries of which are determined by her family. She would like to transgress them but that will only be possible if she discovers her past. On the other hand, she is a representative of the past for others. It is the past—the rape—that created her, and she knows

[266] Ibid., 262.
[267] Ibid., 61.
[268] Deborah Horwitz, *Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 55.

nothing about it. Yet, when people see her they recall the rape or the "socially unacceptable" relationship her mother supposedly had. So when she finds out about her personal history, she will be freed of both burdens. Psychoanalyst Dori Laub points out the importance of one's past and the necessity of knowing one's past:

> There is, in each survivor, [there is] an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life.[269]

Asya, however, is not able to lead her own life. She cannot discover the past and get away from the unknown. For that reason, she wants to destroy the past, the unknown. If the past and the unknown are represented by Asya, what Asya wants to destroy is none other than herself. That may also explain why Asya attempts to kill herself by taking a large number of pills and indicate the fact that she does not like herself. As she is the embodiment of what people do not want to remember, Asya reaches the point of self-resentment. Horwitz's claims about self-hatred can be helpful in understanding the reasons behind Asya's hatred for herself:

> […] self-loathing (almost invariably a symptom of depression) is neither a "fixed" nor an essentially entity of one's self. Self-hatred is usually comprised of culturally biased views, forcefully imposed from the outside. Unconsciously as if by osmosis, one identifies with these psychologically damaging projections, especially if they are repeatedly enforced.[270]

The negative qualities attributed to Asya, like being a bastard, are not physiologically bestowed upon birth. Nobody is born with self-hatred or negative feelings about themselves. However, if someone does not fit in with the roles culture assigns them, they may very well become an outsider. Asya is such an outsider, a child born out of wedlock—a bastard shunned by society, which step by step imposes this notion on Asya. The first step is taken by the grandmother, who calls her granddaughter a bastard when she is eight years old. Later, her friends at school call her a bastard. She has a group of friends who are much older than she is. As Asya regularly meets up with them, they seem to be close. The narrator never tells us their names but rather refers to them by

[269] Laub, "Truth and Testimony," 63.
[270] Horwitz, *Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction*, 10.

nicknames. During an argument, one of her friends, who is nicknamed "the Non-nationals Scenarists of Ultranationalist Movies," attacks her by calling her a bastard:

> "Who do you think you are to tell me about hypocrisy, Miss Bastard? Why don't you go and rummage around for your papa instead of plaguing me here."[271]

Once again Asya is reminded of the fact that she is a bastard. Those people are the only friends Asya has. While it may initially seem strange that the narrator does not refer to them by real names, I contend that the reason for this is that their friendship is far from being genuine. During the course of an insignificant argument, they are able to wound Asya deeply. Just as their names are unknown, Asya doesn't know anything about the reality behind their personas. People have generalized opinions about bastards and they are all negative. This imposition, which Asya cannot avoid in her childhood, at school, and in the company of friends, causes her to feel self-hatred.

Moreover, Asya's physical appearance and the psychological pressure her family exerts on her lead to self-loathing. She has no father and her mother is a mother-aunt. She has four mad aunts, a hateful grandmother, and a Petite-Ma with Alzheimer's, and they all have control over her life. Asya's life is nothing more than the product of their wishes. Physically, she is a combination of the physical qualities of the people in her family. Asya's physical appearance is as conflicting as that which her existence symbolizes. She is the "un-beautiful" daughter of a beautiful mother. The narrator informs us that she inherited her big ears from Aunt Banu, her bony thin-veined fingers from Aunt Cevriye, her annoyingly pointed eyes from Aunt Feride, and her mother's nose, none of which are necessarily ugly on their own. However, her face, which consists of a combination of all these features, is far from beautiful. Asya thinks she looks like the Quranic creature the *Dabbat-ul Arz*, which has limbs from various animals.[272] Just like Asya, there is no harmony in the physical construct of this creature. Moreover, the narrator never mentions if Asya inherited any traits from her father. The conclusion could be drawn that her features are disharmonious because of how she was conceived—as the result of an incestuous rape.

[271] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 212.
[272] "Dabbat-ul Arz." Accessed November 20, *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*. https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/dabbetul-arz

Asya's Revenge

Asya is a girl of many contradictions; even the moment when Zeliha decides to call off the abortion is full of contradictory points. Although Zeliha claims to be an atheist, she is jolted alert by the voice of the *muezzin*[273] coming from the mosque as he sings out the call to prayer. When she gets home, she says she stopped the abortion because God sent her a message through the call to prayer. Asya is thus destined for a life of contradictions from pre-birth to adulthood.

All of her bad memories and experiences lead Asya to try to commit suicide at the age of eighteen. By doing so and not fighting against her trauma, Asya is like her father, who chose death over a life of pain. In this respect, she stands in contrast to Zeliha, who never gives up and fights back against all the traumatic life experiences she goes through. It is important to note here that the female members of the family save Asya. In that manner, while the male family members stand for death in various ways, the women stand for life and driving people to get through life. Firstly, it is Zeliha who makes it possible for Asya to live by calling off the abortion. Then another female family member saves Asya's life. Ultimately, this makes Asya feel that it is impossible to live or die in her family.

After the attempt to kill herself fails, Asya has different ways to take revenge. This is how she feels about women:

> She does not like women… Whenever she met a new woman, she did one of two things; either waited to see when she would hate her or hated her right away.[274]

As a girl who lives with her mother, her mother's three sisters, her grandmother, and her great-grandmother, Asya thinks that the only possible feeling one could have for women is hatred. And as for men, her relationships with them consist only of sex, and she shuns romanticism:

> She had had numerous relations in the past, way too many, as if to take revenge on men, but revenge for what, she still couldn't tell.[275]

For Asya, all the people in the world are hateful and represent potential danger, regardless of whether they are women or men. Her life experiences have left behind many bitter memories

[273] The person who makes the call to prayer from the minaret of a mosque.
[274] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 85.
[275] Ibid., 199.

brought about by the people closest to her. That is why Asya develops a defense mechanism against everyone. First, she comes to despise all women sooner or later. I argue that the source of this hatred is the loathing Asya sees in her mother's eyes when Asya reminds her mother of her father. Second, she does not approach men romantically and uses them purely for sexual gratification, which is one aspect of what her father did to her mother by raping her. From this perspective, it could be claimed that Asya rapes these men, who for her are like father-substitutes, to exact revenge on them. Both of these acts are defense mechanisms that Asya uses to hurt people before they have the opportunity to hurt her.

Overall, it is Asya who gets hurt the most by Mustafa's rape of her mother. While Zeliha is a victim and Mustafa is both a perpetrator and a victim, Asya suffers more than anyone else. Zeliha and Mustafa both know what happened and attempt to deal with that reality in their own ways. Mustafa commits suicide and Zeliha heals herself by the end of the book. On the other hand, although Asya has been deeply affected by the rape from her early childhood into adulthood, she cannot deal with her trauma like Zeliha and Mustafa did because she does not know what to do. In other words, she is the victim of an event no one tells her about. That is why she is unable to develop ways to recover and reclaim herself and can only develop defense mechanisms to protect herself. In that sense, she is the real survivor in the narrative.

When Mustafa dies, Armanush and Asya accompany his body in the funeral car. It is like a family picture; the sisters are with their father and they are sending him off on his final journey. It is as if peace has been achieved between the members of the family. Later, Zeliha confesses and tells Asya that Mustafa was her father. However, this creates yet another shock and trauma for Asya. She does not want to believe it. At that moment, Asya looks at the dead man and calls him "father" for the first and last time. What she feels is not joy at finding her father, and a gap even larger than the one created by her unknown past opens up within her:

> In the beginning there was the word, says Islam, preceding any and every existence. On the contrary, her relation-absence of relations tells the opposite. The absence of the word preceded its existence. The word "father" was never uttered. It was absent.[276]

[276] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 354.

That word means nothing to Asya. When she finds out at Mustafa's funeral who her father really is, Asya is still unable to recover because she cannot not face the truth. After the rape, Mustafa and Zeliha see each other at the family home. This makes it possible for them to face each other and the reality. In contrast, Asya has no such chance. She is sent reeling by another bad surprise and it is unclear if she will be able to survive it. If we recall that the people in Asya's family have all bad experiences that turn them into traumatic characters, it would not be amiss to refer to Asya in terms of the phrase "second generation" that Van Alphen uses in his article "Second Generation Testimony, Transmission of Memory and Post Memory." In that article, Van Alphen discusses the transmission of trauma from Holocaust survivors to their children. It is in that sense that I posit that Asya can be seen as a representative of the second generation. Asya's relationship with her mother-aunt Zeliha and her spiteful grandmother are examples of the transmission of trauma to the next generation through parent-child relationships. Taking all of this into consideration, I once again come to the conclusion that Asya's trauma causes her more suffering than anyone else and is ultimately irreparable. Van Alphen argues,

> It is assumed, doubtlessly rightly, that expressing their experiences to a caring, believing audience contributes to the healing process.[277]

I have made the claim that Asya needs to learn about her personal history, but that is not enough to initiate the process of healing, as Van Alphen indicates. It needs to be shared, but what Asya learns cannot be narrated. Being a bastard in a conservative society inflicts pain derived from humiliation, even in Asya's own family. If Asya attempts to tell her rather patriarchal family members that her "precious" uncle is indeed her father, they wouldn't believe it. What if she shared it with people outside her family, for example with her friends who call her a "bastard" just because of a small argument? The fact that her uncle is actually her father is one of those facts that cannot be told. Indeed, "Every family has sins that must be kept secret [*Her ailede sırlar vardır saklı kalması gereken*]."[278] Asya must keep silent to survive.

[277] Ernst van Alphen, "Second-Generation Testimony, the Transmission of Trauma, and Post memory," *Poetics Today* 27 (2006): 473-88. Print.
[278] Şafak, *Baba ve Piç*, 372.

Conclusion

The Bastard of Istanbul is the story of two families, the Tchakhmakchians and the Kazancıs. The novel should not be seen as merely illustrating the painful life experiences of individuals like Zeliha, Mustafa, and Asya. Rather, it represents the problematics of womanhood and manhood in a patriarchal society, elaborating on the destructive effects of patriarchy and the social and cultural norms that contribute to its perpetuation.

If we ignore all the bad experiences the Kazancı family goes through over the course of several generations and only concentrate on the rape, the narrative suggests that the root cause of that grave sin are Levent and Gülsüm Kazancı. Undoubtedly, Gülsüm and Levent did not drive Mustafa to rape his sister. However, their approach to parenting creates a rapist out of a child. The pressure Mustafa feels very early on in his childhood is so intense that he seeks ways to free himself, and in the end rape is his pathetic attempt to become masculine. As noted by Mehrhof and Kearon,

> Rape supports the male class by projecting its power and aggressiveness on the world. For the individual male, the possibility of male rape remains a prerogative of his in-group; its perpetration rekindles his faith in maleness and his own personal worth.[279]

At the core of his desire to rape his sister lies a desire to prove that he is a man. As a boy who endured a painful childhood, as a teenager who raped his sister, and as a man who is the father of his niece, Mustafa is a victim, a victimizer and a victim again. This clearly demonstrates that although the patriarchal system values boys and devalues girls, it also harms boys as much as girls. Elif Şafak has argued,

> In strongly patriarchal settings, it is not easy to be a woman; it is not easy to be a man, either, particularly a young man. There is a lot of pressure on male individuals so that they can conform to the given definition of ideal masculinity. Any young man who deviates from this path can be mocked, ridiculed, distanced.[280]

[279] Mehrhof and Kearon, *Rape: An Act of Terror*, 154.
[280] "Elif Shafak" Accessed 20.08.2013, www.foyles.com

The novel demonstrates how patriarchy is exercised by men and also supported by a Kemalist woman like Gülsüm. An important fact that should not be neglected is that the patriarchal family system in Turkey leads Gülsüm and Levent to such a gendered form of parenting. The novel offers up crucial social messages through the characters and the plot. By revealing at the end of the book that the rapist Mustafa is also a victim, Şafak shows that it is patriarchal society, not only Mustafa, that victimizes others. Gender inequality is a major problem in Turkey, and Mustafa is as much a victim of the system as Zeliha and Asya.

All the actions of individuals should be analyzed in relation to the social group of which they are a part. This is true for Gülsüm's and Levent's parenting, and it is also true for the trauma victims:

> It is not the trauma itself that does the damage. It is how the individual's mind and body reacts in its own unique way to the traumatic experience in combination with the unique response of the individual's social group.[281]

What hurts Zeliha is not only the negative experience of the rape but also the reactions she faces after her family learns that she has had sexual intercourse without being married and because she gives birth to the baby. The society in which she lives holds rape victims responsible for what happened because they claim that women tempt men through the way they dress and behave. This is exemplified well when Gülsüm tells Zeliha that if Mustafa were in Istanbul, he would have killed her because of her baby and because of the way she dressed. It is again society that victimizes Zeliha. On the other hand, her baby turns out to be her biggest source of support to whom she can narrate her story and find relief. Zeliha's struggle with her family should be considered not only as a challenge to the authority exercised by male members of the family but also the unwritten rules of society.

However, Asya is not as lucky as Zeliha in terms of remaking herself and recovering from her trauma. One point that has been highlighted repeatedly in this chapter is the necessity of narrating one's story to an understanding listener. Sandra L. Bloom argues,

[281] Sandra L. Bloom, "Trauma Theory Abbreviated*," The Final Action Plan: A Coordinated Community Response to Family Violence*, October, 1999.

> Without words, the traumatic past is experienced as being in the ever present "Now". Words allow us to put the past more safely in the past where it belongs.[282]

What hurts Asya so deeply is not only being unaware of who her father is, but also how society reacts to her because she is fatherless. The humiliation heaped on her by Gülsüm and her friends for being a "bastard" creates the most suffering for Asya because the word "bastard" is both an insult and a symbol for lacking origins and a past.[283] Moreover, she has nobody to speak with nor is it possible for her to leave it all in the past; she is condemned to experiencing and re-experiencing it in the present. In contrast, Zeliha narrates her experience and starts a new life. Unable to open up about his own trauma, Mustafa commits suicide. Similarly, Asya cannot talk about her trauma with anybody either, and although she attempts to kill herself, she is saved. Hence, Asya is stuck in a state of limbo—she can neither live nor die. She tries to survive, caught in between life and an afterlife.

In this respect, Asya is like Armanush, who is wedged between the now and the past, which is ever present. When she meets Zeliha's boyfriend Aram, who is also Armenian, she cannot understand why he still lives in Turkey and doesn't move to America. Although Aram tells her that Istanbul is where he belongs and that he is happy living there, she is not convinced. She is unable to get the empathy or the apology she expects for the suffering her forebears endured, which leaves her feeling disappointed. The pomegranate depicted on the cover of the book serves as a metaphor for Asya's and Armanush's disappointment in life: "Once a pomegranate breaks and all its seeds scatter in different directions, you cannot put it back together."[284]

[282] Bloom, "Trauma Theory Abbreviated," 1999.
[283] Onur Bilge Kula, "Elif Şafak'ın Romanı: Pinhan ve Baba ve Piç Örneğinde Bir Çözümleme Denemesi," *502 Frankofoni*, 2007, 19: 483-514.
[284] Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 233.