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

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#### 4. HONOUR: A FAMILY TRAUMA

Some key issues that Elif Şafak deals with in her novels are interfamilial relationships, gender construction, and inequality, as well as the pressure of cultural and social norms. Her book *Honour*,<sup>427</sup> which was published in Turkish with the title *İskender*,<sup>428</sup> deftly interweaves all of those topics. *Honour* focuses on the relationship between parents and their children, particularly how children are raised and how gender construction correlates with interfamilial relationships. The novel demonstrates that when social and cultural pressure exacerbate gender inequality in the family, the results can be disastrous. In an interview about *Honour*, Şafak said, “Families intrigue me. In this novel, I wanted to explore how we hurt the people we love most. I focused on mother-son relationships, on how mothers raise their sons as the sultans in the house, and how this ruins people's happiness in the long run.”<sup>429</sup>

*Honour* is about the Toprak family, whose story starts in a small, rural village in the east of Turkey and continues in London. Two of the main characters, Pembe and Cemile, are twin sisters and the youngest of five other sisters. Their parents are disappointed when the twins are born, as they yearn for a son. In particular, it is the mother who is distraught over the fact that she doesn't have a son, and she risks her life trying to have another child. When the mother dies in childbirth, the oldest sister takes on the maternal responsibility of looking after her siblings, but ultimately she runs off with a young man without first getting her family's blessing or permission, for which she is punished by death.

The marriage of Pembe and Adem marks the beginning of a string of unfortunate events that will plague the family. During a visit to his brother in a small rural village, Adem falls in love with Cemile and wants to marry her. It turns out, however, that nobody knows if Cemile is a virgin or not because she was abducted by her sister's fiancé after her sister broke off the engagement. Adem, who cannot be sure if she is a virgin or not, decides to marry Pembe instead of Cemile. Although Pembe and Cemile look alike for the most part, personality-wise they are very different. Pembe is rather childish whereas Cemile is more somber and mature, and Adem never loves Pembe the way he loved Cemile.

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<sup>427</sup> Elif Şafak, *Honour* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

<sup>428</sup> Elif Şafak, *İskender* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2011).

<sup>429</sup> Elif Şafak, “In Turkey, Women Read and Men Write, I Want to See this Change,” interview by William Skidelesky. Accessed May 20, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/apr/08/elif-shafak-honour-meet-the-author>

As the result of economic problems, Adem and Pembe migrate to London, where the gap between Adem and Pembe widens even further. He gambles, loses all his money, leaves his wife for another woman, and, in the end, commits suicide. Pembe works as a hairdresser and tries hard to look after her children. However, as she feels quite lonely in those foreign lands, she starts dating a man of mixed origins, though she doesn't have sexual relations with him.

In London, Pembe's children İskender, Esma, and Yunus all face racism and feelings of alienation, and they try to cope with their problems in their own ways. Yunus, the youngest of the children, becomes friends with a group of young activists and communists. Esma is a feminist, unhappy with the unequal gender relations at home, and her dream is to be a writer. İskender, the oldest of the three, is their mother's favorite and the "sultan" of the household in her eyes; neither a hero nor an antihero, he becomes a killer for the sake of family honor but at the same time he is also a victim.

The Turkish version of the novel is named after İskender, who is the main protagonist. A rebellious, handsome, young man fifteen years of age, İskender has mixed feelings about his mother. While he loves her deeply, that love bears traces of oedipal tendencies. When a rumor starts going around that his mother is having an affair with a man who is a "stranger," İskender is driven to stab her. In that sense, defending the *namus* of the family defeats his love for his mother. *Namus* is a complex concept. It is usually translated into English as "honor," but for the purposes of the arguments I make in this chapter, I have opted to use the Turkish word *namus* as it contains so many nuances. *Namus* and honor are not exactly the same; it is commonly used to refer to a women's virginity before marriage and sexual fidelity to the husband after she gets married. Towards the end of the novel, Şafak throws a twist into the plot by revealing that İskender had actually stabbed his aunt Cemile to death, not his mother. The only people who know this are İskender's sister Esma, his brother Yunus, and his mother. İskender himself does not discover this fact until the final days of the fifteen-year sentence he serves in prison.

The cover of the Turkish version of the novel proved to be quite controversial because it consists of a photograph of Elif Şafak dressed as a man representing İskender, and a similar image appears again on the last page of the novel. Şafak has been criticized for presenting herself as a character in the novel, and the move was deemed by some to be a publicity stunt geared towards garnering attention for the book. However, the cover photo is significant if it is interpreted to mean that the "female" represents Pembe and the "male" represents İskender. He is driven to commit the

honor killing by the patriarchally-coded paradigms ingrained in his mind, which are bolstered by the notion that he is the sultan of the household and the protector of the *namus* of the family. Since it was İskender's mother who raised him to think that way, she was actually the one who created him as a killer. In an interview, Şafak said,

The cover photo is brave and innovative. It invites people to question and it reflects the story in the book. It is impossible to solve the problem of domestic violence without putting ourselves in men's shoes and empathizing with them. There lives a woman inside each man and that is the woman who raises them. Both masculinity and femininity are worn like templates; we can cast off those templates if we want to, if we really think and try.<sup>430</sup>

In the novel, Şafak seeks to draw attention to a particular social problem: interfamilial violence. The emphasis on the relationship between İskender and his mother Pembe shows that mothers are somehow involved in the creation of their own honor killers. The codes of honor that victimize men are not only enforced by men. The experiences of İskender's mother demonstrate that men and men alone do not bear all the responsibility in honor killings, as women also unknowingly contribute to them through their parenting. Şafak suggests that we need to look at honor killings from the point of view of the murderer if we want to truly understand what motivates them.

The plot begins with Esma's narration of the family story, whereupon an external narrator takes over, and İskender also intervenes in the narrative. These three narrators are used interchangeably throughout the book. I will analyze that point in the first section, but it should be noted here that Şafak wants the reader to empathize with İskender, dig deep into his mind, and see what a boy might feel when he murders his mother. That is why Şafak presents herself as İskender on the cover and lets him explain himself by directly addressing the reader. It is easy to empathize with a woman who has been murdered or the daughter of a woman whose life has been taken. But what about empathizing with a boy who kills his own mother?

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<sup>430</sup> "Benimki Sürekli Öğrencilik Hali." Accessed May 20, 2017, [http://www.hurriyetaile.com/sizin-icin/tv-magazin/benimki-surekli-ogrencilik-hali\\_6759.html](http://www.hurriyetaile.com/sizin-icin/tv-magazin/benimki-surekli-ogrencilik-hali_6759.html) "Kitabın kapağı cesur, yenilikçi. Sorgulayan bir kapak. Beraber sorgulamaya davet eden ve kitapta anlatılan hikayeyi yansıtan bir kapak. Kendimizi erkeğin yerine koymadan, empati kurmadan bizim aile içi şiddet meselesini çözmemiz mümkün değil. Her erkeğin içinde, yetiştirilişinde bir kadın var: Annesi. Erkeklik de kadınlık da birer kalıp gibi giydiriliyor üzerimize, o kalıpları çıkarabiliriz istersek, düşünersek, denersek."

In light of that question, in this chapter I plan to analyze Şafak's approach to narrating a murderer's trauma, which can be quite complicated. The trauma that torments İskender is both cultural and personal in nature. Through the course of the novel, Şafak depicts the social burdens placed on men/boys, burdens which often result in either social or legal punishment. That is to say, if a male figure does not act "manly," he may have to contend with social discrimination and isolation. But if he does act manly—such as by restoring the *namus* of a family by killing a female relative who is *namussuz* [without honor]—he may very well end up facing legal punishment. In order to explore the forms of representation of trauma related to maleness in *Honour*, I first analyze notions of masculinity and femininity in the half-Turkish/half-Kurdish family depicted in the book. Thus, this chapter will begin with a discussion regarding definitions for terms that are central to the novel such as masculinity, femininity, shame, and *namus*. I will also focus on how one becomes a "man"—is it natural, bequeathed at birth, or is it constructed? What are the requirements of being a man? What does it mean to act like a man and what happens if one doesn't behave that way? Who truly possesses *namus*? Should it be protected and if so, by who? These are important questions because in the novel Şafak places more emphasis on masculinity and its loss than on femininity. This does not mean, however, that she places more value on one than the other. Because gender inequality is usually discussed from a woman's point of view, she has attempted to create a new way of looking at the issue that may offer fresh perspectives.

In *Honour*, Şafak turns a critical eye to the mother-son as well as the father-son relationship. Three major characters in the novel—İskender, Adem, and Elias—all have problematic relationships with their mothers and fathers. Oedipal love for the mother is accompanied by hatred for the father. For that reason, the impacts of the relationship between sons and parents on masculinity will also be scrutinized.

In the second section, I will focus on İskender's psychological trauma and the issues plaguing the other family members. During his imprisonment, İskender shows posttraumatic symptoms and he attempts to commit suicide. Upon thinking back on his actions, he regrets killing his mother and he says that, if given a second chance, he wouldn't do it. This is important because honor killings are committed for the sake of purifying a family's *namus*, and such murderers should never express regret, no matter what the cost. Şafak bridges the gap between men and women as a means of transcending gender to bring to light the underlying motivations and inner drives that prompt actions which are socially and legally forbidden. Şafak says, "It was important

to put myself in his [İskender's] shoes, to see the world the way he sees it, without judging him from above. That was an emotional challenge.”<sup>431</sup>

Since the book is about an honor killing, criticism of the book has mostly focused on the victimization of the female characters. However, we must also take into account the social norms that govern *namus*, as they put a lot of pressure on men; that is why I want to focus on the victimization of men, as Şafak herself stresses the importance of empathizing with İskender. I also aim to explore the “weaknesses” of the male characters because in *Honour* the men are for the most part depicted as being more passive than the female characters and they all become “losers” one way or another.

## **Narrators**

*Honour* depicts a family tragedy that involves honor killings, suicides, matricide, and violence against family members. There are two significant points that Şafak wants to highlight through this tragic narrative. Since honor killings are performed by men against the “shameful” female members of a family, in general only women are considered to be victimized in such cases. However, Şafak’s characters are constructed in such a way that it becomes possible to empathize and even sympathize with the male murderer and to blame the female characters for the honor killing. This does not mean that Şafak blames the women for being “shameful” or supports honor killings. Rather, she emphasizes another point: the male members in society are under social and familial pressure to act “manly,” so in that sense they are also victimized like women. In that way, they are transformed into both victims and murderers.

One of the narrative devices that Şafak uses is multiple *focalizers*.<sup>432</sup> There is an external focalizer who narrates events from the past to the present, and İskender’s sister Esma is a character-bound focalizer, as is İskender, for the reason that the act of focalization lies with these two characters. As Bal points out,

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<sup>431</sup> Elif Şafak, “En Zor İskender Olmaktı,” interview by Irmak Zileli. Accessed May 20, 2017, <http://www.elifsafak.us/roportajlar.asp?islem=roportaj&id=366>

<sup>432</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 152.

If the focalizer coincides with the character, that character will have an advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the characters' eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character.<sup>433</sup>

There are more parts in which İskender acts as a character-bound focalizer than not, so the reader is most often presented with his point of view. Esma's focalization and external focalization add to the objectivity and neutrality of the work. Although this functions as a narrative strategy by making it look objective, this is not because the focalizer's bias remains implicit.<sup>434</sup> Şafak uses this strategy to help the reader empathize with İskender.

Each of these focalizers have different tones of voice and sometimes conflicting ideas about the events that take place. The external focalizer provides the reader with an objective and detailed narration about the family history from the birth of Pembe and Naze to their death. Then the reader hears Esma's voice, and she is the first character they meet. She has an accusatory tone, and it's as if she is trying to convince the reader to take her side against İskender. At the end of this first section, she states that İskender is a murderer. Then the external focalizer begins to relate the story. Şafak divides the book into five main sections, each of which is divided into subsections, and these subsections are named after characters in the book. The first character that the external focalizer introduces is Pembe; then the other characters are introduced and the family story is further narrated by the external focalizer. The climax of the story—the murder of Pembe (in fact Cemile)—is strongly interrelated with the family's history. That is why the external focalizer informs the reader about the family and İskender's childhood, in addition to Esma, Yunus, Pembe, Cemile, and Adem. If there is a murder to be narrated, the reader might expect an objective and detailed narration, and Şafak's external focalizer serves that aim well. Bal notes that a narrative appears objective if it is told entirely by an external focalizer, not through the point of view of the characters.<sup>435</sup> Although *Honour* is not entirely told by an external focalizer, the external focalizer's narrative occupies much of the book and creates an objective tone. Indeed, the book is constructed in such a way that it is like a murder report that is prepared in such a way that it would appear to the public to be objective. That is why the book provides the reader with the family trees of the two families involved. Moreover, at the beginning of each subsection dates and places are indicated. This makes the external focalizer's depiction seem more realistic. The narration

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>434</sup> Bal, *Narratology*, 153.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

provides the unseen aspects of the murder, while the seen aspects are in a newspaper article about the murder:

**BOY KILLED HIS MOTHER FOR  
“HONOR”, 2 DECEMBER 1978**

A 16-year-old boy of Turkish/Kurdish origin stabbed his mother to death in Hackney in an act of honor killing. Iskender Toprak stabbed Pembe Toprak in front of the family home on Lavender Grove.

It is claimed that the 33-year-old mother of three had an extramarital affair. Neighbors said that though they remained married, Adem and Pembe Toprak no longer lived together. “But when the father is absent like that the mother’s honor is guarded by the eldest son, which in this case was Iskender.”<sup>436</sup>

Şafak wants to show that stories in newspapers are partial and subjective; that is why she wants to provide the whole story objectively. As she puts it,

For us, many things in newspapers are only “news.” They include only names. There are a lot of stories in this news, indeed. There are a lot of miseries in these stories and there are turning points in them. I want to investigate them more closely. It is an extraordinary story for me, but it is at the same time a very familiar story. It is a local story, and it is universal at the same time.<sup>437</sup>

The reader can see that there is an unknown aspect of İskender’s story which shows how he is manipulated and forced to carry out the honor killing. As Şafak includes all the characters’ stories with exact dates and places, she makes the narration as realistic as a newspaper article.

Esma’s narration represents a feminist yet subjective point of view that has been shaped by her hatred for her brother since early childhood. She rages against the hegemonic masculinity in the family, to which her mother Pembe contributes much by overvaluing her first son İskender over the other children. For Esma, while İskender enjoys being the favorite child in the family, she leads a neglected childhood. After their father leaves them, İskender becomes the head of the family and acts as the decision-maker while Esma goes on being an object, not a subject, in her own life story.

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<sup>436</sup> Şafak, *Honour*, 72.

<sup>437</sup> “En Zoru İskender Olmaktı,” May 20, 2017. <http://www.elifsafak.us/roportajlar.asp?islem=roportaj&id=366>  
“Bizim için pek çok şey gazetelerde birer haberden ibaret. Sadece isimlerden ibaret. O haberlerin içinde bir sürü hikâye var. O hikâyelerin içinde bir sürü hüznün var, bir sürü kırılma noktası var. Ben bütün bunlara daha yakından bakabilmek istedim. Benim için bu çok sıradışı bir hikâye ama aynı zamanda çok tanıdık bir hikâye. Çok buralı bir hikâye, ama aynı zamanda çok evrensel bir hikâye.”

Her biggest dream is to be a writer—not just any writer, but a male writer. She even creates a nickname for herself:

I wanted to be a writer, but not a female one. I have even decided on my pen name. John Blake Ono—an amalgam that consists of the names of my three favorite personalities; a poet, a writer and a performance artist: John Keats, William Blake and Yoko Ono.

I often wondered why female names are so different from male names, more whimsical and dreamlike, as if women are unreal, a figment of one's imagination. Male names embody power, ability, and authority, like Muzaffer "the Victorious One;" Faruq, "One Who Distinguishes Truth from Falsehood;" or Husam al Dib, "the Sword of Faith." Female names, however, reflect a delicate daintiness, like a porcelain vase. With names such as Nilüfer, "Lotus Flower," or Gülseren, "Spreading Roses," or Binnaz, "A Thousand Blandishments," women are decorations for this world, pretty trimmings on the side, but not too essential.

J.B. Ono. A name for booksellers to mention in reverent tones. A bit mysterious and surely androgynous. A name in no need of a bra.<sup>438</sup>

Being a writer and being male, as combined in John Blake Ono, will offer Esmá the privileges she lacks as a woman. When she grows up and loses hope that she will become a writer, she says, "I've reached an age at which I'm more at peace with my limitations and faults."<sup>439</sup> These limitations and faults are mostly the result of being a woman because she believes that courage, authority, and power are combined in men. For Esmá, being a woman means being incomplete, being fragile, and being trivial. Esmá, however, wants to possess power. Though she promises herself she will write her mother's tragic life story, she has always lacked the courage or motivation to do so. As a witness to interfamilial murder, it must be difficult to narrate it, as Herman notes:

Witnesses as well as victims are subject to the dialectic of trauma. It is difficult for an observer to remain clearheaded and calm, to see more than a few fragments of the picture at one time, to retain all the pieces, and to fit them together. It is even more difficult to find a language that conveys fully and persuasively what one has seen.<sup>440</sup>

Until he is imprisoned, it is İskender who wields power. But when he is in prison, he cannot function as the head of the family. And by not being able to function as the head of the family, he loses his masculinity, too. When Esmá recreates herself as a male writer and writes their life story,

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<sup>438</sup> Shafak, *Honour*, 183.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>440</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 2.

Esma replaces İskender. She now possesses the symbolic “phallus” she had lacked and desired; now she is the master of their life story as the writer John Blake Ono. Writing gives Esma the chance to get revenge on İskender. The book starts with Esma’s narration: “I promised myself I would not let her story be forgotten...”<sup>441</sup> She continues: “I’ll keep him confined within those four walls, between the hate and the love, none of which I can help but feel, forever trapped in a box in my heart. He is my brother. He is a murderer.”<sup>442</sup> Esma’s narration only appears at the beginning and end of the novel. She starts and ends the book, but she does not play a role in the unfolding of events in the narration. This is likely because Şafak does not want her to manipulate the reader through her narration and position the reader against İskender. As Esma starts and ends the book, the reader makes a circular journey and arrives at the end where the book started. As such, the temporal structure of the book is not chronological. When Esma and İskender describe the 1990s, the past intervenes in constant slippage between years, settings, and characters. The nonlinear flow of time and the interventions of the past render the book a work of trauma fiction on the textual level as well.

While Esma’s voice is accusatory, vengeful, and ambitious for power, İskender’s voice is regretful and desirous of forgiveness. His narration is sincere, and it includes a depiction of his weaknesses. At the beginning of each section narrated by İskender, there is an image of handwritten text, and İskender’s narration is set off because it appears in a font that differs from the other narrations. This suggests that these parts are in İskender’s own handwriting, as if he is keeping a diary while in prison. Keeping a diary and narrating his trauma makes it possible for İskender to provide testimony for that trauma and share it with the reader. Şafak places the reader in the role of the sympathetic listener that trauma victims need in order to share their trauma. By using multiple narrators and choosing İskender as one of them, Şafak gives him a chance to reveal to readers the unseen aspects of the story. In an interview, Şafak said:

This was the reason for me to disguise myself as İskender on the cover photo. I put myself in İskender’s shoes every day. I put myself in all the characters’ shoes, not only İskender’s. It is important to keep a certain distance. But the biggest difficulty for a woman writer might indeed be understanding İskender, being İskender. Being Pembe is easy. Being Cemile is easy. Being Esma is the easiest for me. She is a girl who wants to be a writer. Being Yunus is easy, too. Those who have not read the book do not know these characters, but the most difficult part was being İskender. I

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<sup>441</sup> Şafak, *Honour*, 1.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

focused mostly on him. I think this is also an important question for the reader: Can you understand İskender? Can you feel İskender?<sup>443</sup>

This makes İskender's role even more significant because he is now both the main character and one of the narrators. The reader hears İskender's voice directly without a mediator. This helps the reader get closer to İskender and try to see events from his point of view, creating a kind of identification between the reader and İskender. As Şafak herself dressed up as İskender for the cover of the book and identifies with him, she tries to urge the reader to put themselves in İskender's position and empathize with him.

Şafak aims to bridge the gap between honor killers and society. She has said that honor killers are victimized as much as the women they murder and that it is impossible to stop honor killings without taking their stories into account.<sup>444</sup> On a related point, Herman explains the importance of community support for trauma victims:

Sharing traumatic experiences with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world. In this process, the survivor seeks assistance not only from those closest to her but also from the wider community. The response of the community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of the trauma. Restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and the community depends, first, upon public acknowledgement of the traumatic event and, second, upon some form of community action. Once it is publicly recognized that a person has been harmed, the community must take action to assign responsibility for the harm and to repair the injury. These two responses— recognition and restitution— are necessary to rebuild the survivors' sense of order and justice.<sup>445</sup>

Şafak aims to create a community that will support İskender and help him recover. Esmâ's narration of the murder of Pembe does not reflect the difficulties İskender faces. İskender's character-bound focalization shows how pitiful he is and how much pressure is put on him when he is just a fifteen-

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<sup>443</sup> "En Zoru İskender Olmaktı." Accessed May 20, 2017, <http://www.elifsafak.us/roportajlar.asp?islem=roportaj&id=366>

"Zaten kapaktaki İskender olma halinin sebebi de o. Ben her gün kendimi İskender'in yerine koydum. Bütün karakterlerin yerine koydum, sadece İskender'in değil. Belli bir mesafede durabilmek önemliydi. Ama belki bir kadın yazar için en zoru, İskender'i anlayabilmek, İskender olabilmek aslında. Pembe olmak daha kolay, Cemile olmak daha kolay. Esmâ olmak belki en kolayıydı benim için. Sonuçta orada yazar olmak isteyen bir genç kız var. Yunus olmak da kolay. Okumayanlar bu karakterleri tanımazlar ama, en zoru İskender olmaktı. En çok onun üzerinde durmam gerekiyordu. Bence okur için de en önemli soru o, İskender'i anlayabiliyor musun? İskender'i hissedebiliyor musun?"

<sup>444</sup> "En Zoru İskender Olmaktı." May 20, 2017. <http://www.elifsafak.us/roportajlar.asp?islem=roportaj&id=366>

<sup>445</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 70.

year-old boy. These shifts from external focalization to two characters acting as focalizers make it possible for the reader to see events from different points of view.

## Honor and Shame

“Girls with high expectations fall hard [*Yüksekleri hedefleyen kızlar fena batar .*]”<sup>446</sup>

“If you’re not circumcised, you can’t be a man [*Sünnet olmazsan erkek olamazsın.*]”<sup>447</sup>

“If you can’t take care of your *namus*, you can’t be a man! [*Namusunu korumazsan erkek olamazsın.*]”<sup>448</sup>

“Man up and don’t cry! [*Sakın ağlama, erkek ol.*]”<sup>449</sup>

“You turned out to be a coward! [*Bir sen ödleğ çıktın.*]”<sup>450</sup>

“So, don’t you want to be a man? [*Erkek olmak istemiyorsun heralde.*]”<sup>451</sup>

“If you’re not circumcised, you can’t get married. [*Sünnet olmazsan, evlenemezsin.*]”<sup>452</sup>

“*Namus* is a woman’s only armor. If you lose it, you’ll be worth less than a chipped *kuruş*”<sup>453</sup>  
[*Namus kadının zırhıdır. Zırhınızı kaybederseniz, bakır akçe kadar kıymetiniz kalmaz, unutmayın.*]”<sup>454</sup>

Compared to the other characters in *Honour*, Yunus is the least exposed to gendered discourses. The moment that Pembe, Cemile, Adem, İskender, and Esmâ are born, they are subjected to discourses that emphasize the requirements expected of each gender. These are so strong that such unwritten rules are quite normative in people’s lives. Şafak highlights some of these rules, as quoted above. In effect, these normative discourses basically give each gender a to-do and not-to-do list. If women disobey them, they lose their *namus*. And if a woman loses her *namus*, her entire family loses its *namus*. The novel emphasizes the social norms by means of which male relatives must protect women’s *namus*, which is closely bound to her family members: “If a girl or woman is the subject of gossip, the people responsible for her *namus* are firstly the husband, then other male members of the family like fathers, brothers, or sons.”<sup>455</sup> Community norms governing *namus*

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<sup>446</sup> Şafak, *İskender*, 90. Translations mine.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>451</sup> Şafak, *İskender*, 25.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> A coin which is the smallest unit of Turkish currency.

<sup>454</sup> Şafak, *İskender*, 66.

<sup>455</sup> Clementine Van Eck, “Purified by Blood: Honour Killing Amongst Turks in the Netherlands” (PhD diss., Amsterdam University, 2003), 19.

make boys/men the guardians of the *namus* of their female family members and they are obliged to adhere to these rules. This means that a man's *namus*, as defined by social rules, can be lost through the loss of the *namus* of one of the female members in the family.

Moreover, men also run the risk of losing their masculinity if they do not act in a manly manner, which is again set by community norms. Femininity is represented as something people want to get rid of, because while women may be at risk of losing their *namus*, men are at risk of losing both their *namus* and masculinity. The to-do and not to do list, as governed by the community, is a prescription for people to save their *namus* and for men to retain their masculinity as well. However, a closer look at the narration reveals that *Honour* is a book of *loss* in which men lose both their masculinity and *namus* and women lose their *namus* no matter how strictly they follow this prescription.

But what exactly is *namus*? Is it something only women have, as is commonly believed? What about masculinity? Is it acquired by birth or is it something that can be lost? On the website of the Turkish Language Association [*Türk Dil Kurumu*], *namus* is defined as “adherence to ethical rules and social values in a community.”<sup>456</sup> Both men and women are expected to obey ethical rules; however, while *iffet* is a word that refers only to women, it is also used as a proper name for women. In *Honour* an explanation is offered:

So it was in the land where Pink Destiny and Enough Beauty were born, “honour” was more than a word. It was also a name. You could call your child “Honour” as long as it was a boy. Men had honour. Old men, middle-aged men, even schoolboys so young that they still smelled of their mother’s milk. Women didn’t have honour. Instead, they had shame. And, as everyone knew, shame would be a rather poor name to bear.<sup>457</sup>

*İffet*, *namus*, and shame are related to women, and honor is related to men. In explaining the etymological origin of the word *namus*, Recep Doğan notes,

An etymological analysis of the word “*namus*” shows that it also refers to the land owned by a man in addition to the other meanings it has. It is thought that it was adopted from Persian and Arabic into Turkish and that it originates from the Old Greek word “*nomo*.” “*Nomo*” means authority, law, and rule, and it is based on the word “*nema*,” which means the land and the animals living on the land owned by a

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<sup>456</sup> “Türk Dil Kurumu.” Accessed June 12, 2015, tdk.gov.tr. “Bir toplum içinde ahlak kurallarına ve toplumsal değerlere bağlılık, iffet.”

<sup>457</sup> Shafak, *Honour*, 16.

man. The root of the word *namus* means “to own” and “lands/fields that are owned.”<sup>458</sup>

Indeed, *namus* is indirectly related to men as well. In *Honour*, fathers “own” their daughters until marriage and then they are “owned” by their husbands after marriage. So, although *namus* seems to only be attached to women, men are responsible for the *namus* of that which they own. In Turkey, it is common for husbands to call their wives “my honor” [*namusum*].

For women, *namus* means sexual fidelity to the husband and, crucially, being a virgin before marriage. A woman lacking these qualities is deemed to be shameful. As for men, their *namus* is dependent on having a chaste wife and modest daughters. When Pembe’s older sister runs off with a boy, their father, Berzo, loses his *namus*. He can’t go to the coffeehouse in the village because of his daughter’s shame until she commits suicide and his *namus* is purified. Pembe’s twin sister Cemile is abducted by a man in the village and held for one month. When Cemile is returned to her father’s home a month later, everybody gossips about whether or not she is still a virgin. Even though Adem is deeply in love with Cemile, he marries Pembe when he finds out that Cemile was abducted by a man. Cemile has few options available to her; she can marry an old or disabled man, or become a second, third or fourth wife, all for the sole reason that her virginity has been called into question.<sup>459</sup> However, Cemile does not have to be subjected to an honor killing because she was defiled [*namusu kirlenmiş*], which is different from lacking honor/being shameful [*namussuz*]. Van Eck explains the difference between *namusu kirlenmiş* and *namussuz* in the following terms: “When a female family member becomes the subject of scandal and is killed, this is referred to as purifying the family’s *namus*. If the woman or girl is not to blame for the loss of *namus*, she is ‘defiled’; if she is partly responsible, she is both ‘defiled’ and ‘dishonorable’ [*namussuz*].”<sup>460</sup> Thus, *namus* means physically and emotionally being faithful to one’s husband, and before marriage it entails being a virgin. In contrast to common belief, however, *namus* is not expected only of women; men are expected to be *namuslu* as well, but the conditions are different. If a man has a sexual affair with a woman before, during, or after marriage, this does not make him *namussuz*.

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<sup>458</sup> Recep Doğan, “*Namus, Töre*” ve *Eril Şiddet* (Ütopya Yayınevi: Ankara, 2016), 29. “*Namus* kelimesi etimolojik olarak incelendiğinde, bu kelimeinin kökeninin diğer anlamlarının yanında erkek tarafından sahiplenilen toprağa da denk gelmesi şaşırtıcı değildir. *Namus* kelimesinin Farsça ve Arapça’dan Türkiye’ye geçtiğini düşünülmete olup kökeni Eski Yunanlıların kullandığı ‘*nomos*’ kelimesinden gelmektedir. ‘*Nomos*,’ iktidar, kanun, kural anlamında olup kökü ‘*nema*’ kelimesinden gelir. Bu da bir erkeğin sahip olduğu otlak alan ve otlak alanın üstünde otlayan hayvanlar anlamındadır... *Namus* kelimesinin kökeninde ‘sahiplenmek’ ve sahiplenilen otlak/tarla fikri yatmaktadır.”

<sup>459</sup> Shafak, *Honour*, 34.

<sup>460</sup> Van Eck, “Purified by Blood,” 47.

Şafak's novel illustrates that *namussuz* women are killed for the purposes of purifying *namus*; in contrast, Adem, who has sexual intercourse with Roxana during his marriage with Pembe, is merely censured for leaving for his family and not supporting them financially. Nobody accuses him of being *namussuz* and social rules do not stipulate that he needs to be killed for the sake of *namus*. On the other hand, when Pembe meets up with Elias, gossip spreads like wildfire through the Muslim neighborhood and İskender is forced to purify the family *namus*. However, this does not mean that men are free of social pressure. The very first requirement is that they should have a *namuslu* wife and keep her in check to maintain her *namus*. And, in the case of a loss of *namus*, men have to cleanse the family *namus* by killing the "shameful" woman. The male members of the family—even if they are still children—are required to kill female relatives deemed to be *namussuz*. Otherwise, as a result of social pressure they will not be able to remain in the neighborhood and they will be considered "shameful" themselves. In that process, they will also suffer the loss of their masculinity.

When Simone de Beauvoir asserted that gender is a social construct, it was assumed to hold true for both sexes. That is to say, masculinity is socially constructed as much as femininity. This implies that masculinity is not acquired by birth; rather, it is acquired during the course of one's life and it should be carefully guarded because it is a fragile construct that can shatter. There are some requirements that must be fulfilled to acquire masculinity as it is understood in *Honour*, the most important of which are circumcision, heterosexual intercourse, marriage, having a job, and producing children (especially sons). For example, Adem, the father in the Toprak family, is representative of a man who loses his "masculinity." Firstly, he is not able to earn a living for his family, which is why his wife has to work and earn money. Secondly, he is not able to function as the head of the family and he cannot save his wife's *namus*. After finding that Pembe, his wife, has a boyfriend, he ignores this fact despite society's expectations. When he slaps İskender across the face, İskender yells at him and threatens to beat him. His son's rebellious behavior is another sign that Adem is not acting like a masculine male figure. Lastly, İskender purifies the name of the family, though it was Adem's responsibility to do so. Thus, Adem is not presented as being manly enough to purify his *namus*. That is why Adem loses his masculinity in the eyes of society and İskender replaces his father, taking over his roles.

Şafak demonstrates that people internalize these social norms and that is how gender roles are learned. Those roles are taught to boys at a very young age, and one of the most efficient ways

of doing that is through proverbs and idioms.<sup>461</sup> The expressions quoted at the beginning of this section represent a mere fraction of the gendered discourses employed by the characters in *Honour*. Notably, it is mostly women who use such gendered discourses, especially when talking to their children. Şafak shows that the role of mothers in the construction of masculinity is of great importance. Starting in early childhood, primary caregivers instill in their sons the idea of the “superiority” of their sex and also the strict requirements for manly behavior. Şafak represents this through her depiction of how Pembe raises İskender.

On the day İskender is circumcised, Pembe “...wept all morning, telling him how proud she was that her little boy was becoming a real man.”<sup>462</sup> As Delaney asserts, “Circumcision is the first exam to take to be a man. It is prideful. Pride and masculinity are united in the penis.”<sup>463</sup> Pembe wants her son to pass the “exam” of circumcision successfully and be a man. At the same time, however, Şafak reveals something that parents may not notice, namely that it can be a traumatic event for children. When İskender flees from the circumcision and is found in the tree in which he has been hiding by his parents and the circumciser, he is paralyzed.

Then the strangest thing happened. Something that he never knew until then, but that will happen again and again: İskender froze. He could neither move nor breathe, just like a red deer standing in front of a car on the road. He didn’t feel his limbs. His tongue went numb, and in place of his stomach was a rock. Although he could hear people begging him to come down, he could not respond. He became a part of the tree. An acorn boy.<sup>464</sup>

There are two traumatic events in İskender’s life, one of which is the circumcision and the other is killing his mother because of her “shame.” In the quotation above, the narrator foreshadows that İskender’s body and tongue will be paralyzed again during the second trauma. Herman calls this “constriction” and notes that it is one of the main symptoms of trauma:

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<sup>461</sup> Hale Borak Boratav, Güler Okman Fişek & Hande Eslen Ziya, *Erkekliğin Türkiye Halleri* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Yayınlar, 2017), 65.

<sup>462</sup> Şafak, *Honour*, 26.

<sup>463</sup> Carol Delaney, *The Seed and The Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Village Society* (California: University of California Press, 1991), 110.

<sup>464</sup> Şafak, *İskender*, 24. “İşte o zaman tuhaf bir şey oldu. Daha sonraki yıllarda tekrar tekrar zuhur edecek ama oğüne kadar hiç bilmediği bir şey: Dondu kaldı İskender. Yolda, arabada, farları karşısında kalakalmış bir alageyik gibi ne hareket edebiliyor ne de soluk alabiliyordu. Uzuvarları tutmuyordu; dili uyuşmuş, midesinin yerine koca bir taş gelip oturmuştu. İnsanların ona aşağı inmeleri için yalvardığını duysa da yanıt veremiyordu. Ağacın bir parçası haline gelmişti. Meşe palamudundan bir oğlan.”

When a person is completely powerless, and any form of resistance is futile, she may go into a state of surrender. The system for self-defense shuts down entirely. The helpless person escapes from her situation not by action in the real world but rather by altering her state of consciousness. Analogous states are observed in animals, sometimes they “freeze” when they are attacked.<sup>465</sup>

Whether circumcision is a traumatic event may be open to debate, but it should be conceded that the impacts of such events can differ from person to person. Taking into account the fact that circumcision is a matter of *namus* for parents, the pressure to which children are subjected can be intense. In her depiction of a visit to a Turkish village, Delaney explains,

A high percentage of the drawings boys made at my house included some references to *sünnet*<sup>466</sup> or the *sünnetçi* [the man who performs the circumcision]. In the discussion that followed, it was clear that *sünnet* had left an indelible impression. Research on this subject (Cansever 1965; Öztürk 1963, 1973) suggests that a boy experiences *sünnet* as an act of aggression.<sup>467</sup>

As a child, İskender internalizes circumcision as something that victimizes him rather than as an event that turns him into a real man.

By focusing on circumcision, Şafak critiques the value attached to it by parents, especially mothers. In an interview with İskender during his time in prison, the interviewer summarizes the Toprak family’s case thusly: “It was my Mum’s fault; as the elder son, I had been spoiled by her. ‘This is a typical case of Middle Eastern patriarchal tradition,’ blah, blah, blah.”<sup>468</sup> Şafak demonstrates how, step by step, Pembe inculcates patriarchal codes in İskender’s mind starting in his early childhood. I posit that Pembe does so unwittingly, as she is merely trying to make her son as manly as the community norms require him to be.

In Şafak’s *The Bastard of Istanbul*, the Kazancı family represents a modern, educated Turkish family, born and raised in Istanbul; however, the inequality between the daughters and sons, especially as encouraged by the mothers, is more than apparent. In contrast to the Kazancıs, Pembe and Cemile’s family live in a “rugged, remote, Kurdish village with no roads, no electricity, no doctor, no school. Barely any news from the outside world permeated its sheath of seclusion. The aftermath of the Second World War, the atomic bomb... The villagers had not heard about any

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<sup>465</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 42.

<sup>466</sup> Circumcision.

<sup>467</sup> Delaney, *The Seed and The Soil*, 85.

<sup>468</sup> Şafak, *Honour*, 136.

of this.”<sup>469</sup> However, their attitudes about gender, especially the attitudes of the mothers regarding sons and daughters, are strikingly similar in the two families.

In both novels, it is the mothers who are keenly desirous of sons and disappointed by the birth of daughters, not the fathers. I argue that mothers desire sons because their son’s masculinity bears symbolic meaning for them. When girls are born to parents who do not welcome them, they are rejected precisely because they are girls. Therefore, mothers’ attitudes towards daughters makes them feel inferior in their childhood simply because they are not boys. The privileging of boys and the undervaluing of girls continues throughout their lives. In that sense, women lack what men have, and they desire it. This can be understood through the Lacanian concept of the phallus. When such girls get married, the feeling of lacking a penis bursts forth in the form a desire to have a child who has a penis. This is why it is not fathers but mothers who are so eager to have sons. Mothers tend to think their children belong to them, and they identify with their children. Therefore, a baby boy with a penis can provide the mother with the phallus and the privileges men enjoy. Girls, however, cannot provide them with that, which is why some mothers are even willing to risk their lives to have at least one son. In this process, sons are transformed into objects of desire for their mothers. Indeed, the much-criticized cover photo of the novel presents an illusion in which the mother and son reside in one body, and the son gives the mother the opportunity to possess the heretofore absent phallus.

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<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.



Image 1: The last page of the novel *İskender*.

At this point it should be made clear that the Lacanian phallus is only a signifier, and it enters the world through the advent of a signifying system. Lacan makes a distinction between “privation” and “castration,” which indicates that the phallus is not a thing but a symbol. The privation of the phallus does not refer to the physical lack of a penis:

Lacan introduces several significant contributions that are uniquely his. To begin with, Lacan distinguishes between "privation" and "castration." In the real, nobody is missing an organ. For example, speaking at the level of the real, women simply have vaginas. In other words, they aren't deprived of an organ, since their bodies are as they are. Lacan calls this privation. Only with the advent of the symbolic—when language dissects the real, designates an organ as an isolated entity, transforms this thus-designated entity into a signifier, and therefore becomes capable of marking an "absence" of a penis (i.e., a "phallus," insofar as the penis is elevated to the level of a signifier) on a woman's body—can individuals be said to be "castrated."<sup>470</sup>

In *Honour*, being male is exalted through the role of language and it makes women desire the phallus so they can attain that exalted position. In other words, language, through the entrance of a symbolic order, transforms the penis into a phallus. Therefore, women lack nothing biologically in the real, but they lack the phallus in the symbolic order.

Within the real, the girl is, strictly speaking, missing nothing. Instead of not having a penis, she possesses a vagina. Prior to their subjugation to signs, anatomies cannot be

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<sup>470</sup> Adrian Johnston, “Non-Existence and Sexual Identity: Some Brief Remarks on Meinong and Lacan,” September 1, 2017. <http://www.lacan.com/nonexist.htm>

compared along the lines of presence or absence. As soon as the symbolic order enters the real, a lack immediately appears marked on the body of the female child. The vaginal organ is erased under the now-designated absence of a signifier, a signifier for a dangling little piece of flesh. This miniscule fragment of the real (i.e., the penis), once divorced from the specificity of the male body to serve as a "transcendental signifier" distinguishing between both sexes, becomes the condition of possibility for castration.<sup>471</sup>

The only dream that Pembe's mother has in life is to have a son. She lives solely for that and also dies for the same reason. When she doesn't give birth to a son, Pembe's mother becomes angry with God and she does not speak for forty days after the birth of Pembe and Cemile. After forty days of silence, she names the baby girls Pembe Kader [Fate] and Cemile Yeter [Enough]. She gets pregnant again in the hopes of having a son because she believes God owes it her—that is, he owes her a phallus.<sup>472</sup> In her eyes, since it is God who created her as a female, he is responsible for this state of affairs and he is the one who can make up for it. As Naze is giving birth, the midwife has to choose between saving the baby or saving Naze because of complications that arise. Naze orders the midwife, "Cut me open, you bitch! Take him out! It's a boy, don't you see? My son is coming! You spiteful, jealous whore. Get a pair of scissors! Now! Cut open my belly and take my son out."<sup>473</sup> Both the baby—who turned out to be a girl—and Naze die.

When Pembe gets pregnant for the first time, she has a son. She is both extremely proud and extremely anxious. She sees her dead mother's face everywhere she looks and she is afraid that her mothers' ghost will come take away her baby boy, her symbolic phallus. For five years she refuses to name him and lets his hair grow long like a girl's to hide her baby's sex from her dead mother.

Pembe's mother and Pembe are not the only female characters who are desirous of obtaining a phallus. Esma, Pembe's daughter, also longs for one. Displeased that she was born a girl, she imagines being a boy. As mentioned earlier, she dreams of being a writer, a male writer: "John Blake Ono." Sometimes she locks herself in the bathroom and secretly dresses up as a boy:

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<sup>471</sup> Adrian Johnston, "Non-Existence and Sexual Identity," (para. 11)

<sup>472</sup> Shafak, *Honour*, 17.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

She hated being a girl. Why had she been born as Esmâ, not İskender... She fused her eyebrows to make a thick mono brow. Then she drew moustache over her upper lip.<sup>474</sup> She wanted to leave her body. If only, if only she hadn't been born as a girl.<sup>475</sup>

Esmâ is jealous of both her brothers and longs to be in the position İskender holds in their mother's eyes. She believes that could only happen if she was a boy because mothers want to have sons, not daughters: "If the mother's desire is for the phallus, the child wants to be the phallus in order to satisfy her."<sup>476</sup> Unable to have the phallus—that non-existent object—Esmâ leads an unhappy life in which she envies both of her brothers, İskender and Yunus.

Attaching so much value to sons inevitably creates unhealthy relationships between parents and children. Pembe places more value on İskender than on her daughter Esmâ and her second son Yunus. Although Yunus is a boy, he is not as important as İskender for Pembe. This is because İskender is the one provides Pembe with the missing phallus. She loves him more than her other children, even after he stabs Cemile by mistake. Pembe's unhealthy love for İskender foreshadows the unfortunate events that will happen in İskender's life: "İskender was happy to feel the earth beneath his feet, happier still to have been missed this much by his mother—and yet there was something suffocating about her embrace, sickly sweet. Her lips against the side of his neck, her breath, her clutch enclosed him like a coffin."<sup>477</sup> While Pembe loves him unconditionally, she also tries to raise him as a "real man," which will ultimately drive İskender to the point of stabbing a woman he thinks is her when she has a love affair. Seen in this way, Pembe's extreme love for İskender results in him being imprisoned at the age of fifteen, which can be taken to mean a kind of death.

İskender's fear of and escape from the circumcision makes Pembe so furious that, for the first time, she shouts at him and slaps him in the face: "Come down, you rascal! You've shamed your father. All the boys have been circumcised. You are the only one who acted like a baby... You spoiled brat! Come down this minute or I'll break your bones! Don't you want to be a man?"<sup>478</sup> Since circumcision is a matter of honor, it is expected that İskender will not bring shame on his

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<sup>474</sup> Şafak, *İskender*, 253. "Nefret ediyordu kız doğmuş olmaktan. Ne olurdu Esmâ değil de İskender olarak gelseydi şu dünyaya... Kahverengi göz kalemiyle kaşlarını kalınlaştırıp, ortada birleştirdi. Sonra dudaklarının üstüne bir bıyık çizdi."

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 142. "[Esmâ] bedenini terketmek istedi. Keşke, ah keşke kız doğmamış olsaydı!"

<sup>476</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2006), 694.

<sup>477</sup> Şafak, *Honour*, 30.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

parents. However, İskender shames his father, as Pembe says. This is an important point because the general belief is that honor is attached to men and shame is attached to women. However, Şafak demonstrates that acting in a manner that is not manly can make men sources of shame as well. Pembe convinces İskender to come down from the tree by promising him that he won't be circumcised. Taking her at her word, İskender runs to his mother and hugs her. That's when she slaps İskender and warns him, "Do not ever shame me again!"<sup>479</sup> whereupon she hands him over to the circumciser. İskender is in a state of shock and never forgives his mother. This is significant because Pembe both punishes and seduces İskender for something that is shamed in society. In this way, İskender learns that behaving in a shameful way—that is, according to the social rules—leads to punishment. This foreshadows how İskender is going to punish his "mother" when she starts getting involved in a relationship. That will be a revenge of sorts because "never had it occurred to him that you could deceive a person you held dear. Until that day, he hadn't known that you could love someone with all your heart and yet be ready to hurt them. It was the first lesson in the complexity of love."<sup>480</sup> In an interview, Şafak mentioned that scene in which Pembe slaps İskender:

I think it is a very significant scene. A turning point. Until then, İskender does not know how complex love is. We hurt people although we love them very much. We deceive them despite our love. Getting slapped by his mother, and his mother's expectation that he will act manly, would be important turning points in any boy's life.<sup>481</sup>

In that scene, Pembe orders him to act like a man and not shame the family. In the future, when he finds out about Pembe's affair, he will in fact behave in a manly way and save the family's honor. Thus, from his very early childhood onwards, first Pembe and then others impose codes of honor on İskender, thereby creating İskender the murderer. This is because İskender's parents present him with a prepared set of rules to obey rather than letting him make his own decisions about what is right and wrong. Judith Herman describes the relationship between parenting, trauma, and autonomy in terms of a sense of self:

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<sup>479</sup> Şafak, *Honour*, 30.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>481</sup> "En Zoru İskender Olmaktı," May 20, 2017. [elifsafak.us/roportajlar](http://elifsafak.us/roportajlar) "Benim çok önemli bulduğum bir sahne. Tambir kırılma anı. O ana kadar aşkın ve sevginin ne kadar karmaşık olduğunu bilmiyor İskender. Çok sevdiğimiz halde incitebiliyoruz insanları. Sevdiğimiz halde kandırabiliyoruz. Kendi annesinden o tokadı yemesi. Annesinin ondan erkek gibi davranmasını beklemesi, bence bir oğlan çocuğu için hayatında önemli bir kırılma noktası."

A secure sense of connection with caring people is the foundation of personality development. When this connection is shattered, the traumatized person loses her basic sense of self. Developmental conflicts of childhood and adolescence, long since resolved, are suddenly reopened. Trauma forces the survivor to relive all her earlier struggles over autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy.

The developing child's positive sense of self depends upon the caretaker's benign use of power. When a parent, who is so much powerful than a child, nevertheless shows some regard for that child's individuality and dignity, the child feels valued and respected; she develops self-esteem. She also develops autonomy, that is, a sense of her own separateness within a relationship. She learns to control and regulate her own bodily functions and to form and express her own point of view.<sup>482</sup>

I contend that if patriarchal paradigms had not placed so much pressure on İskender and if Pembe had let İskender cultivate a sense of autonomy, he could have developed an independent personality and been able to make his own decisions. However, because of social norms and the way he was raised, he was incapable of acting independently, as he was repressed by those norms. The regret he feels in prison suggests that he never wanted to hurt his mother. If he could have taken action as an individual, he may not have gone through with the honor killing.

### **The Father as an Absent Figure and the Mother as an Object of Desire**

In this section, I will investigate how Şafak's representation of the relationship between İskender and his parents can be understood in terms of the Oedipus complex. The profound love between Pembe and İskender is often emphasized and it is supported by the language Pembe and İskender use when talking to each other. As for the father, he is an absent figure. Although he exists, his existence is defeated by his symbolic nonexistence. To put it another way, he cannot satisfy the community norms that govern masculinity; consequently, he loses his masculinity in the public sphere. This makes it possible for İskender to replace his father and "own" his mother until another rival emerges. Lacan asserts that there is nothing without language,<sup>483</sup> and indeed it is language that causes the symbolic death of the father and the murder of the mother in the end.

As discussed earlier, in this novel mothers yearn for sons. When Pembe gives birth to a son, he becomes her one and only love. İskender is aware of his mother's deep love for him and

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<sup>482</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 52.

<sup>483</sup> Adrian Johnston, "Non-Existence and Sexual Identity."

he has complicated feelings for her. When he looks at his mother's face and realizes how beautiful she is, he says:

She turned to look me in the face. The green light from the window caught the flecks in her eyes. Amber and gold. I saw how pretty she was. You do not normally notice your mother's beauty. But that day I saw it plain and clear. It made me uneasy. A strange fear gripped me at that moment, and I didn't like it.<sup>484</sup>

İskender's love for his mother shows oedipal signs and this disturbs İskender. This implies two possibilities; firstly, the relationship between a son and a mother is beyond physical beauty and sons do not care about their mothers' physical allure. Thinking that she is physically attractive makes İskender feel uneasy because this suggests that İskender's physical attraction to his mother is an example of an Oedipus complex. Secondly, her physical beauty would mean that her father and other men are also aware of her mother's beauty and that makes him feel jealous and irritated. He makes it clear that he does not want to share his mother. He wants to travel to the past "to the years back to his babyhood. Before Yunus. Before Esmâ. When it was only him and his mother wrapped in untainted love."<sup>485</sup> İskender wants his mother to desire only him. Moreover, he says he wants to marry a woman that looks like his mother.<sup>486</sup>

When a rumor starts going around that his mother has been dating a man, İskender's uncle urges him to take action. Although İskender does not want to believe what he hears, when he comes home, he understands that there is a man there. He says, "My heart started to pound and I felt the air go out of me."<sup>487</sup> He cries,

"[My mother] used to love me more than anything—her first child, first son... Everything was different now. Ruined. A tear rolled down my cheek. I slapped myself to stop it. But it did not help. I slapped myself again, harder."<sup>488</sup>

The father figure is missing in the family, so İskender considers himself his mother's only "owner" and his mother's one love. So when he discovers that she is having an affair, he feels cheated.

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<sup>484</sup> Shafak, *Honour*, 102.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, 51. The light of my eye.

Since Adem, İskender's father, leaves his family for another woman, the father is absent from the household. Lacan explains that an Oedipus complex can come into being without the real presence of a father because "the function of the father in the Oedipus complex is to be a signifier substituted for the first signifier introduced into symbolization, the maternal signifier."<sup>489</sup> The father is representative of the primordial law, which is the prohibition of incest. This means that he is the one who prohibits the mother from engaging in sexual intercourse with her child. As Lacan argues,

What is this fear of castration? How, from what end will we approach it? First of all in the first experience of the Oedipus complex under the form of what? Of a retortion. I mean that it is in the context of an aggressive relationship in so far as this aggression begins from the child, from the boy, in so far as his privileged object, the mother, is prohibited to him, it is in so far as the aggression is directed towards the father that the child then, on the imaginary plane in the dual relationship in the measure that he imaginarily projects into the father the aggressive intentions that are equivalent or reinforced compared to his own but whose origin is in his own personal aggressive tendencies. In short, the fear experienced before the father is clearly centrifugal, I mean that it has its center in the subject. This is in conformity both with experience and the history of analysis. It is from this angle that, very soon, experience taught us that the fear of the father experienced in the Oedipus complex should be measured. Castration, therefore, in so far as it is on the one hand profoundly linked to the symbolic articulation of the prohibition of incest.<sup>490</sup>

At an unconscious level, İskender wants to get rid of the father and replace him. As he says, "I was the head of the family since my father had gone off."<sup>491</sup> İskender is taught that as the oldest son he is the one who should take on the role of the father in the family. However, the father is only a signifier, and his absence puts an end to neither the incest taboo nor the Oedipus complex. İskender dreams of replacing his father; as Lacan says "...in desire, the desire for 'her,' for that being, is essential. This means that what the subject desires is not simply the craving for her care, for her contact, even for presence, it is the craving for her desire."<sup>492</sup> No matter how much he wants to be "the desire of the desire of the mother," when he arrives at home, he becomes certain that his mother's desire is not centered on him and that there is a rival. As the community's norms

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<sup>489</sup> Lacan, *Book V*, 1957-1958. Accessed October 20, 2016, 123, [www.lacacniniirealend.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book](http://www.lacacniniirealend.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book)

<sup>490</sup> Lacan, *Book V*, 121.

<sup>491</sup> Shafak, *Honour*, 50.

<sup>492</sup> Lacan, *Book V*, 131.

governing *namus* teach him that he should do something to purify the family *namus*, he decides to punish either Elias, the new rival, or his mother to put an end to the relationship. He decides to stab Pembe, his mother, instead of Elias, because, at the unconscious level, just like Hamlet, İskender identifies with his mother's lover.

## **A Family Trauma**

In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, *The Gaze*, and *Honour*, Şafak undertakes a psychological and social investigation of trauma in both the individual and familial contexts. In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, the traumatic event is incest, so the reaction of the family plays a major role in the recovery process. In *The Gaze*, not much information is given about the parents of the protagonist, but her grandmother's attitude regarding the protagonist increases the burden of the trauma. However, *Honour* is quite different from these two novels in terms of the role of family relations in traumas. The family unit is constructed on secrets in the Toprak family, and each generation guards these secrets from succeeding generations. The Topraks are a family of tragedies; almost every member of the family has a wound in her/his soul. Nevertheless, each individual's wound is correlated to those of the others. Individual traumatic events that happen within a familial context like violence, loss, separation, incest, and deaths inflict harm on familial bonds and traumatize the family members. The reason why they keep these tragedies secret lies in the nature of traumas, as Judith Herman asserts:

The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma. People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner, which undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy. When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery. But far too often secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom.<sup>493</sup>

The repetition of traumatic events in the Toprak family starts with the birth of İskender's parents and continues to haunt the family until the honor killing takes place. Cathy Caruth describes

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<sup>493</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.

this “as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control.”<sup>494</sup> Tragic events follow the Toprak family wherever they go and eliminate any chance of recovery, both in Turkey and in England.

İskender’s parents had troubled and traumatic childhoods. This blocks the development of a healthy child-parent relationship and creates ruptured relations in the family. *Honour* highlights the disruption of the familial bonds through its very structure. It is a family story, and it has an episodic narration. Each episode is titled after the name of a family member. The titles of the episodes indicate who the main character in the episode is. Therefore, although it is a family story, it is narrated as a collection of individual stories. The fragmented and unified nature of traumatic events parallels the narration of each individual episode. It creates an allusion, as if the titles of the episode do not refer to particular members of the family but to strangers. At the structural and narrative level, this representation shows how past traumas raise walls between the people in the family. Moreover, Şafak uses this fragmented narrative style to position İskender at the center of the story. There are more episodes titled “İskender” than episodes titled after all the other characters’ names. From a feminist perspective, the victim of the honor killing should be at the center of the story. However, Şafak decenters Pembe and positions İskender, the murderer, at the heart of the narrative. Making him the central character and internal focalizer makes it possible for the reader to plunge deep into the harshly criticized and judged mind of İskender the murderer and see his trauma. This is a narrative strategy that highlights the fact that İskender is also a victim and this should not be overlooked. In this manner, the novel encourages readings of the novel from a different perspective.

An important point that the traumatized characters have in common concerns crises of identity. The novel draws attention to the fact that trauma fragments these characters’ identities and as a consequence they all endeavor to reconstruct themselves and reach a state of wholeness. This is represented through the problematizing of names.

The fact that Pembe does not name İskender until he is five years old foreshadows the problems İskender is going to experience with his name and identity in the future. This symbolically prevents İskender from constructing an identity independent of his mother. After he

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<sup>494</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 2.

turns five years of age, Pembe asks an old woman to name her son and the old woman offers two names. She says,

There are two names that might suit him well, depending on what you expect. One is Saalim. Once upon a time, there was such a sultan. He was a poet and a fine musician to boot. May your son, too, learn to appreciate beauty should he be given this name... The second one [Askander] is the name of the great commander who always marched in front of his soldiers, fought like a tiger, won every battle, destroyed all his enemies, conquered land after land, united the East and the West, the sunrise and the sunset, and was still hungry for more...<sup>495</sup>

Pembe wants her son to be a fearless leader rather than a mild-mannered, merciful person. In Pembe's mind, making people feel afraid, being a leader, and fighting like a tiger is more becoming of men, while mild-manners and mercy suit women. Therefore, Pembe names her son Askandar and symbolically determines İskender's personality and fate. In their Kurdish village, her son is called Askander; at school, he is known as İskender; and in London, he is called Alex. In London, a Turkish friend criticizes him for having an English girlfriend and going by Alex instead of İskender. In fact, İskender wants to construct a new identity for himself with the name Alex and his British girlfriend. That is his independent world where his mother's and Turkish community's codes are not involved. However, I would argue that İskender becomes lost in all these different names and is unable to construct an independent identity for himself. Because of the social burden each name places on him and his mother's patriarchal approach to raising him, he is transformed into a puppet playing the role his mother and society assign to him. The honor killing is a central part of that role.

İskender is not the only character suffering from an identity crisis and living with different names. When Pembe and Cemile are born, their mother refuses to name them because they are girls, not boys. After forty days, they are named Pembe Fate and Cemile Enough. They are alternatively called by their names in Turkish as Pembe Fate and Cemile Enough or their Kurdish equivalents Bext and Bese. As such, İskender and his mother Pembe share the same fate about their names. Moreover, this shows that regardless of whether one is a boy or a girl and regardless of whether one's parents are happy or unhappy about your sex, the result is the same—a refusal to name the child, which entails rejecting and disrespecting her/his individuality.

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<sup>495</sup> Shafak, *Honour*, 25.

Also in terms of identity crises, the twin sisters Cemile and Pembe are like one person, substituting for each other. Indeed, Pembe and Cemile are like a “mirror image” of one another. For example, when Adem learns that Cemile might not be virgin, he does not want to marry her. Cemile’s father proposes that Adem marry Pembe, as if they are the same person, and Adem agrees to do so. Pembe is thus the *namuslu* substitute for the possibly *namusu kirlenmiş* Cemile. In addition, this system of substitution occurs once more in England when İskender decides to stab his mother because she has been dating a man and lost her *namus*. On that day, Cemile is in England to visit her sister, though İskender is unaware of her arrival. Cemile puts on one of Pembe’s dresses and goes out to do some shopping. İskender stabs Cemile thinking that it is his mother and Cemile dies. In this way, Cemile is a substitute for Pembe. In both of these cases, what they are blamed for is of course related to their *namus*. After Cemile dies and everybody thinks that it is Pembe who has died, Pembe leaves London and goes to the village in Urfa where Cemile used to live. Once more, Pembe substitutes herself for Cemile and continues her life in the village as if she is Cemile.

Two other female characters who have problems with their names and identities are Esmâ and Roxana. Esmâ always dreams of being a boy and having the name William Blake Ono because she believes she is treated unfairly because of her sex. As for Roxana, she is a victim of incest. When she leaves her family’s home to create a new life for herself, she starts out by changing her name from Elena to Roxana. Both Esmâ and Roxana deny who they are and try to reestablish their shattered identities. All of these identity crises and their connection to the changing of names will be discussed in greater detail in the section about the traumas of these characters.

The traumas that the characters experience in *Honour* are difficult to classify in terms of being individual or familial. Just like the branches of a family tree, the traumas begin with the parents and work their way down to the children. For me, the family tree that is presented at the very beginning of the book, depicted as a real picture of a large tree with numerous branches, illustrates the source of trauma as the roots of the tree and shows how it is transmitted to the younger generations through the branches. And I believe that Şafak considers the roots of the tree, that is to say, the source of the trauma, as the intersection of normative social rules, family, and gender discrimination. This representation of trauma brings together a variety of issues such as family, individuality, feminism, mental issues, cultural norms, moral assessment, guilt, and shame.

The family tragedy in the book is marked by death, incest, abandonment, and domestic violence. Pembe and Cemile’s mother dies when she is giving birth and they are subsequently

raised by a unkind stepmother. Their older sister commits suicide upon the orders of their parents to purify her *namus*. At a very early age, Pembe sees her older sister's body hanging from the ceiling of the house. Cemile cannot marry the man she loves because he doubts she is a virgin, and Pembe marries him instead. The man, Adem, who is the father of İskender, Esmâ, and Cemile, had been subjected to domestic violence at the hands of his father, and he was also left by his mother as a child. İskender stabs a woman whom he thinks is his mother as a means of purifying the family *namus*, but he kills his aunt instead. And, lastly, Adem's mistress, Roxana, cannot bear her father's incestuous acts and leaves home. These are the main traumatic events represented in the novel.

In the depiction of İskender's tragic life story, Şafak underscores binary oppositions like nature and nurture, love and hate, individuality and community, and reality and hallucinations. By his nature, Adem, İskender's father, has a weak personality. Therefore, the qualities of a real man, which have been encoded in İskender's mind by his mother, do not correlate with his father's temperament. He does not want to be like his father; he longs to be a real man, a leader, just as his mother wanted him to be when she named him İskender. Şafak highlights the impacts of nurturing and the community on people's individuality. As a child, İskender was exposed to domestic violence through the actions of his father. His mother's flattering way of treating him like a sultan and his father's beatings and punishments stand in opposition to each other. Yunus remembers "the days when Daddy would scold and punish İskender for every little wrong-doing, but those were long past. Now, İskender seemed to think he was in charge, always hot under the collar and impossible to reach."<sup>496</sup> Indeed, Adem, who suffered from domestic violence in his childhood and could not stand his father, now makes İskender suffer the same. Adem's memories of his father involve a man "who punched the steering wheel/the walls/the tables/the doors/the china cupboard, and when that didn't help, beat them with his belt, and once kicked his wife in the groin, sending her flying down the stairs."<sup>497</sup> Adem's mother is so fed up with this violence that she takes away her youngest child Adem and attempts suicide by trying to jump into a river. Moreover, one day she decides to leave her family for another man and she wants to take Adem with her, but the man does not want Adem. Two years later, she leaves her family for the same man. Adem expects that his mother will come back and for years he waits for her. All these childhood tragedies leave marks

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<sup>496</sup> Şafak, *Honour*, 241.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

of trauma on Adem's psyche. As he can never forget those painful memories, he reenacts them in his current life. The past haunts his present:

Adem was an unhappy man. This might have been the reason why Pembe was angry with him; spending a little time with him is enough to see his grief. He often talks about his childhood, he tells the same memories over and over again. The past is like an addiction that is known to be harmful but could not be given up. He talks about the past out of his control and sometimes without being aware of it.<sup>498</sup>

Adem cannot incorporate those traumatic events into his consciousness. The way that those traumas are repeated through flashbacks in Adem's life "reflects the unavoidable and overwhelming imposition of historical events on the psyche."<sup>499</sup> Despite the fact that he cannot forget the past, he says, "I cannot remember our childhood. I am going crazy."<sup>500</sup> In fact, what he has difficulty remembering is his mother's face. When his mother leaves home for another man, all his photographs are thrown out and he is forbidden from talking about her. As a result, Adem forgets what his mother looks like, but he can never get rid of his childhood pain. Moreover, Adem's love for his mother bears traces of the Oedipal and it cannot be defeated by the passage of the years. When he tries to remember his mother's face, he realizes that the image he sees is in fact his wife's face. His mother called him "my little lover" and Adem corrected her, saying "my big lover." As an adult, Adem often remembers those moments and he feels that "his childhood fears have shown up. There are noises that make one feel startled; he feels as if he is with her mother by the river into which they are about to fall."<sup>501</sup> This is a traumatic reenactment that Adem frequently experiences and it reveals the unassimilated nature of his trauma. Considered through the Freudian concepts of "mourning and melancholia," Adem's reaction to his lost object—his mother—is similar to the symptoms of melancholia. Towards the end of the book, Adem commits suicide. He is in Abu Dhabi hoping to find his mistress Roxana. He is in a dire situation, penniless and alone. He loses all hope and the desire to live, and he gives up. In fact, the only object of love Adem does not lose is his mother. Adem had fallen deeply in love with Cemile and he thought he could not

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<sup>498</sup> Şafak, *İskender*, 51. "Adem mutsuz bir adamdı. Belki de Pembe'nin ona kızmasının nedeni bıydu; onunla az biraz zaman geçiren herkes kederini apaçık görebilirdi. Sık sık çocukluğundan söz eder; aynı anıları tekrar tekrar anlatırdı. Ani zararlı olduğunu bile bile atıştırmaktan vazgeçilemeyen çerezler gibiydi onun için geçmiş. Elinde olmadan, belki farkında bile olmadan başlayıverirdi gene eskilerden bahsetmeye."

<sup>499</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 58.

<sup>500</sup> Şafak, *İskender*, 77. "Çocukluğumuzu hatırlayamıyorum. Delireceğim."

<sup>501</sup> Şafak, *İskender*, 190. "Adem çocukluktan kalma korkularının ortaya çıktığını hissetmiş. Tüylerini ürperten bazı sesler varmış hayatta: sanki yine annesiyle o barajın kıyısındaymış, düşmek üzere."

live without her. However, he had been indoctrinated with the idea that a girl who is not virgin cannot be a suitable wife. The codes of honor in his mind prevent him from marrying Cemile and his tragic life starts after he marries Pembe, and henceforth Adem is transformed into a melancholic subject:

Mourning is regularly a reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on... In some people, the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition... In one set of cases it is evident that melancholia, too, may be the reaction to the loss of a loved object. Where the exciting causes are different one can recognize that there is a loss of a more ideal kind. The object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love.<sup>502</sup>

Adem is thus a melancholic subject who cannot work through but only act out his loss and trauma. As Dominick La Capra describes it,

Mourning brought the possibility of engaging trauma, a reinvestment in or “re-cathexis” of life that allowed one to begin again. In line with Freud's concepts, one might suggest that mourning be seen as a homeopathic socialization or ritualization of the repetition—compulsion that attempts to turn it against the “death drive” and counteract compulsiveness by repartitioning it in ways that allow for critical distance, change in the resumption of social life and renewal. In any case, the broader concepts that include without being restricted to melancholia and mourning are acting-out and working-through: melancholia as a mode of acting-out and mourning as a crucial mode of working-through... In acting-out one has a mimetic reaction to the past which is regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription. In psychoanalytic terms, the acted-out past is incorporated rather than intersected, and it returns as the repressed.<sup>503</sup>

His father's violence and his mother's departure are traumatic moments that leave indelible scars in Adem's mind. Notably, when he becomes a father himself, he leaves his family for Roxana just as his mother left him as a child. Moreover, he makes İskender a victim of domestic violence. İskender, however, does not submit to him and threatens to hit Adem if he tries to beat him again. This is a moment of self-realization for Adem. He is jealous of İskender's courage and the way he

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<sup>502</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916)* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 236-260.

<sup>503</sup> Dominick La Capra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 45.

challenges him, and for that reason he thinks of himself as weak and cowardly. İskender never holds Adem up as an example and dislikes his weakness. İskender thinks he will make a “lamentable” father:

And a lamentable father is like a fishbone lodged in your throat. You’re not exactly sure how you got stuck with it, but when you do get rid of it, something remains, a permanent scar no one can see from the outside but you always sense it there. Nobody needs that kind of rubbish.<sup>504</sup>

In fact, that is how İskender feels about his father. When his aggressive nature is guided by the patriarchal codes of the community he lives in, İskender the murderer is inevitably born. His father’s absence makes İskender think that he must now be the head of the family. The burden of committing an honor killing is thrust upon him mostly by his uncle Tarık and the Muslim community. Only after the murder does İskender realize how he was used as a puppet by those people and then abandoned during his imprisonment.

When İskender stabs his mother, he feels dissociated from the act as if he was not the one who stabbed her: “I looked at my left hand. My stronger hand. But it had gone slack, as if it had been attached to my body only temporarily and now belonged to someone else. I tossed the knife under a parked car. If I could, I would have thrown away my hand.”<sup>505</sup> This is traumatic dissociation. The hand, which symbolically belongs to someone else, points to the role of the community in the murder. The hand is a metaphor for the pressure society places on İskender. It does not belong to him because the killing of his mother did not arise from his nature but rather it was the result of how he was nurtured. His desire to throw his left hand away symbolizes his longing to cast off the normative rules imposed on him by the community. I posit that the role cultural pressure plays in encouraging him to purify the family *namus* is much more influential than his natural instinct (if at all) to stab his mother. He stammers for the first time in his life when he buys the knife he plans to use to stab his mother. If stammering is taken up as a psychological disorder, it shows that the idea of hurting his mother affects his psychology negatively and causes the disorder. He truly does not want to hurt his mother. However, if he does not restore the family *namus*, he will not be the real man he has been taught to be since his childhood. It is his uncle Tarık who informs İskender of the “bad news” about his mother and says that it is up to him to handle

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<sup>504</sup> Shafak, *Honour*, 103.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

the issue in long speeches about matters concerning family honor.<sup>506</sup> However, Tarık's outer façade and his internal persona could not be more different:

His long beard and his prayer-beads made him look like a pious Muslim, but he was not. He had a long beard because he thought it suited him well and because it covered the pockmarks on his face. He fingered his *tespih* out of habit rather than religious conviction.<sup>507</sup>

When Tarık is single, he refuses to go to a whorehouse with his friends and they make fun of him by calling him gay. He immediately gets married and asks his wife to come to his workplace to show his friends that he is not gay. For Adem, social norms are more important than one's own truth. Since they live in the same neighborhood as İskender and his family, rumors about Pembe affect Tarık, too. That is why he pushes İskender to purify the family *namus*. However, when İskender calls him after stabbing a woman whom he thinks is his mother, Tarık denies everything he has told İskender. İskender is stunned and stammers again.

Two times in his life İskender feels numb, frozen, and suddenly unable to speak. The first time is when he is circumcised. The second time is when he is told that his mother has died after he stabbed her. Those are the most significant traumatic events in his life. During his imprisonment, he suffers from epilepsy, migraines, panic attacks, and psychosis, and he attempts suicide.<sup>508</sup>

Over time, İskender goes through a process of self-growth in prison. It starts when he begins to see his mother's ghost visit him in the prison.

I prop myself on my elbows, and prick up my ears. At first I suspect my mother's ghost has visited me, but I quickly realize she's not around tonight. No weird glow in one corner of the cell either, like freshly fallen snow. No soft rustling, as if from silk curtains. No scent of jasmine and rose. No smells of sesame halva. I'll never forget when that happened for the first time. It freaked me out like hell.

She used to visit me more often in the past. Then less and less frequently. Lately she doesn't appear at all anymore. I dread that she will never show up again. It's a stupid thought, but as long as she comes to see me there's a hope that she might forgive me.<sup>509</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> Şafak, *İskender*, 363.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., 218. "Uzun sakalını ve elindeki tespihi görenler öyle sansalar da dindar bir adam değildi. Hem yüzüne yakıştırdığı hem de çiçekbozuğu cildini sakladığı için sakal bırakıyordu. Tespih ise dindarlıktan ziyade alışkanlıktan elindeydi."

<sup>508</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>509</sup> Şafak, *Honour*, 159.

This supernatural event works along the lines of Freud's wish-fulfillment theory of dreams. İskender does not dream but rather he hallucinates and those hallucinations serve his desires. He wants to have a chance to apologize to his mother and be forgiven by her. That is why he believes that when his mother visits him, she has forgiven him. This is a means of recovery for İskender. It is not known for sure if he has recovered or not, but it is clear that seeing his mother's ghost changes him.

Then one night, my mother came home. Her ghost. An apparition. Whatever you call it. I could smell her hair. It was that real. She stayed with me the entire night. Her face. Her eyes. I sobbed like never before. After that, I began to change and I'm a different man today. Maybe not better, but different.<sup>510</sup>

Another way for İskender to recover from his trauma is through meditation sessions and long talks with his cellmate, Zişan. Zişan is an innocent prisoner and he is released from prison after the truth comes to light. However, during his imprisonment, he keeps telling İskender that everything happens for a reason and the reason he himself was wrongly imprisoned was to help İskender. He claims that God sent Zişan to prison to help him recover from his trauma. This coincides with Pembe's prayers to God "to send an affectionate and wise friend to İskender in the prison. May God help İskender have such a friend."<sup>511</sup> God accepts her prayers and sends Zişan to the prison. He teaches İskender that affectionate, wise people should purge their hearts of grudges and hatred and be patient. He tells İskender to peer into his inner self, to avoid feelings of anger and grief because they are too burdensome for the soul. Every day they have meditation sessions early in the morning. One day the woman whose bag Zişan was accused of stealing recovers and says that he is not the person who attacked her. This means that Zişan's mission of helping İskender is completed and he is released from prison. The novel presents the relationship between İskender and Pembe as being one that is supernatural and mystical. Pembe contributes much to İskender getting imprisoned, but at the same time she serves as a mediator for his recovery. In addition, the love İskender feels for Pembe borders on hatred. His loathing for his mother drives him to stab the woman he thinks is Pembe, but his love for her also offers him relief.

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>511</sup> Şafak, *İskender*, 442. "Allah'a dua ediyorum, muhabbet dilini konuşan kalp ehli birini ona yoldaş yapması için. Böyle birini İskender'in yanına verir inşallah."

Another important means of recovering from trauma is narrating and sharing it with a sympathetic listener. The reader has direct contact with İskender through the parts he narrates. It would seem that Şafak wants to emphasize that those sections were handwritten by İskender because at the beginning of those parts there is an image of handwritten text. Moreover, all of the other parts are printed in the same font—only those by İskender are different. İskender wants to write his story and reveal how he was transformed into a murderer. That is a means for him to be forgiven by the community, which will be embodied by those who read his text.

Pembe forgives İskender. He is still her favorite child even after the honor killing. He prays that God will help all the people she loves but she reserves her longest prayers for İskender. This is not to say that Pembe realizes the mistakes she made while raising her children; she still discriminates in her love for them, and all the tragic events she has suffered teach her nothing about the burdens that patriarchy places on people.

During the course of her life, Pembe sees the dead bodies of her two sisters. The first one is her older sister Hediye, who hangs herself in order to purify the family *namus*. When Pembe is watching a movie with Elias one day, she sees a scene in which a man is being hung. She cannot bear watching it and leaves the cinema because she wants to escape any and all reminders of the trauma. That also represents a traumatic reenactment. The second incident is the murder of her sister Cemile at the hands of İskender. At that moment, “Pembe could hear someone scream. A piercing howl in the wind. It would be another minute before she realized the sound was coming from her. She couldn’t budge, for she had no body. She had no substance. She was only a voice.”<sup>512</sup> This is another traumatic moment during which Pembe leaves her body and distances herself from the crime scene. She cannot recognize her voice because she is going through traumatic dissociation. Moreover, Cemile’s death makes her feel as if she has also died. Again they are “mirror images” of each other because “it is believed that twins are one soul in two bodies. But they were much closer. Cemile and Pembe are one body in one soul.”<sup>513</sup> Just as İskender sees her ghost, Pembe sees her sister Cemile’s ghost.

Esma is the only Turkish female character with an intellectual background and an acute awareness of the gender discrimination in society. Unfortunately for Esma, this makes her as unhappy as the other members of the family. She constantly struggles with her mother to change

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<sup>512</sup> Şafak, *Honour*, 313.

<sup>513</sup> Şafak, *İskender*, 65. “İkizlerin iki bedende ikamet eden tek bir ruh olduğu söylenirmiş. Ama onların yakınlığı bundan da öteymiş. Onlar tek beden, tek ruh imişler.”

this situation but Pembe's internalization of patriarchy is so pervasive that nobody can change her. Her indignation at injustice, her aunt's death, and her brother's imprisonment all make her life tragic. Esmâ says that "it is a pale scar on the surface, but a painful wound deep within."<sup>514</sup> Like Pembe and İskender, Esmâ also sees ghosts. The only way she can find relief is through writing, which is why she wants to be a male writer. So even though she cannot be a man, she decides to write her mother's story.

The only person in the family who is not as unhappy as the others is Yunus, the youngest. I think Şafak uses the character Yunus as a foil to show the differences between how the siblings are raised. Yunus is the only child in the family who is born and raised in London. He has perfect English and can speak a little Turkish but no Kurdish. Since his childhood, he has been spending most of his time with a group of anarchists and communists who live in an abandoned building close to their home. Because he doesn't spend a lot of time with his family, Yunus grows up in an environment that is more open-minded and independent, far from the social mores imposed on İskender and Esmâ. He also creates a new identity for himself in that abandoned building, indicated by the fact nobody there calls him Yunus. In fact, he spots his mother with the man she is seeing but he keeps it a secret. He is far less affected by all the tragedies that plague the family. Eventually he becomes a well-known singer, which stands in sharp contrast to the tragic ends that his brother and sister face.

One character who does not have blood relations with the Topraks but has a similarly traumatic past is Roxana. She is Adem's mistress, but she leaves him when she falls in with a wealthy man. Her name, in fact, is Elena, and she is originally from Bulgaria. When her mother becomes paralyzed, Elena works hard to take care of her mother and father. However, her father asks her to serve as a replacement for her mother. Herman argues, "The issue of the mother's sexual availability to the father is, in the final analysis, a trivial one. But the question of her role in the genesis of incest is not... For the theme of maternal absence, in one form or another, is always found in the background of the incest romance."<sup>515</sup> The mother's absence increases the daughter's vulnerability, making her more dependent on the father, which has the potential to result in the formation of unhealthy father-daughter attachments.<sup>516</sup> Her father's incestuous approach to her drives Elena to leave home. From then onwards, she constructs a new life, transforming herself

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 10. "Yüzeyle görünürde belli belirsiz bir iz ama dipte, derinde zonklayan bir yara."

<sup>515</sup> Judith Herman, *Father-daughter Incest* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 44

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., 44.

into Roxana from Russia. This is representative of an identity crisis and a means of creating a new way of living. However, she cannot erase the traces of the trauma. In her sleep, she returns to the scene of the trauma and is filled with terror, screaming “No! No!” at her father in her dreams.<sup>517</sup> The novel is thus haunted by recurring remembrances.

## Conclusion

In honor crimes, the murderer and victim are always family members. That is why the concept of “family” is central to them and the same holds true for *Honour* as well. In the English version of the novel, it is written that: A key issue here is that which remains unspoken and goes unheeded:

When I was seven years old, we lived in a green house. One of our neighbors, a talented tailor, would often beat his wife. In the evenings, we listened to the shouts, the cries, the swearing. In the mornings, we went on with our lives as usual. The entire neighborhood pretended not to have heard, not to have seen. The novel is dedicated to those who hear, those who see.<sup>518</sup>

Şafak criticizes those who know about domestic violence but pretend not to see or hear it. She seeks to raise people’s awareness, to lay bare the hidden facts behind domestic violence, and to stop it. The central core of domestic violence is the family. Şafak shows how parents contribute to domestic violence through their own actions. She demonstrates that women are quite influential in the way children are raised, and that is why women can be more effective than men in putting a halt to domestic violence. The very first destructive experience girls undergo is brought about by the disappointment their parents feel when they see that they now have a daughter, not a son. In Şafak’s narration, it is the mothers more than the fathers who discriminate between their children based on gender and favor boys. In *İskender*, Pembe, Cemile, and their six sisters love their father more than their mothers. Their father wants them to go to school and learn about the Turkish constitution. In contrast, their mother’s sole desire is for her daughters to get married. Their mother forbids them from dancing because, in her mind, girls who dance will turn out to be whores. However, their father enjoys it when his daughters dance and have fun. In Şafak’s depictions,

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<sup>517</sup> Şafak, *İskender*, 203.

<sup>518</sup> Şafak, *Honour* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 1.

women are often crueler to each other than men and mothers' gendered parenting brings more harm to their daughters than their fathers could ever do.

Domestic violence has the potential to create trauma among family members and that can cause families to disintegrate. In such situations, families cannot provide children with a safe and peaceful environment, even though that is the primary duty of the family. Of course, families that fail in that regard cannot help family members recover from the traumas they may have suffered. In *Honour*, İskender and Esma become the victims of their family. Yunus, however, who generally steers clear of the family and spends time with people outside the family unit, becomes a successful individual. He finds love, tolerance, and understanding in the homeless anarchist group, and that helps Yunus avoid getting hurt by his family's tragedies.

Şafak integrates trauma into the structure of the novel and creates a family tragedy at both the textual and structural level, which contributes to the effect that the narration has on the reader. The most effective strategy in that regard is the use of multiple narrators. We often hear the voice of the external focalizer, but for the most part it is İskender who tells the story from his own perspective. This creates a sense of intimacy with İskender, making it possible to see him not just as a murderer but also as a victim. Moreover, the use of repetition in the novel symbolizes the reenactment of traumas, and the nonlinear time flow and flashbacks emphasize the notion that traumas exist both in the past and in the present.