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ECHOES OF SILENCE: TRAUMA, GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, AND PATRIARCHY IN *PURPLE HIBISCUS* AND *THE BASTARD OF ISTANBUL*

The Bastard of Istanbul is a novel set in modern-day Turkey, which amid its economic and political development continues to suppress the problematic points in its past and is still an extremely patriarchal society, as the characters of the novel struggle with personal issues and traumas. The novel focuses on historical trauma, violence against women, and how culture and its established and rigid social and religious norms silence and oppress women. On the other hand, the novel *Purple Hibiscus* is set in post-colonial, also patriarchal, Nigeria and follows the internal dynamics of a Christian family that goes through the torture of an authoritative and violent father on everyday basis. Unlike, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, where we find Turkey in the post-colonial period of the Ottoman Empire, as the heir of a former colonial power that does not know how or does not want to come to terms with its crimes, in *Purple Hibiscus*, Nigeria is seen as a de-colonized country that still does not manage to find its way to a healthy and non-oppressive political arrangement. This paper will explore how both novels depict the intersection of patriarchy with gender, trauma, and history.

Key words: *trauma, gender violence, patriarchy, history, Purple Hibiscus, The Bastard of Istanbul, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Elif Shafak*

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Judith Lewis Herman opens her book *Trauma and Recovery* by stating: "THE ORDINARY RESPONSE TO ATROCITIES is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word unspeakable." (Lewis Herman,

2015:11) She however continues to explain that the unspeakable finds its way out as the only form to the process of healing:

> Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work. Folk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told. Murder will out. Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims. (Ibid.)

Building on this foundation, violence and trauma are inextricably bound by silence and the first step towards healing is in breaking of the silence, it is in telling. Violence against women is still undeniably a pervasive global problem that affects approximately one in three women in the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) states in its reports that around 30% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner or non-partner during their lifetime.[1] (WHO, 2025) Furthermore, these statistics highlight the fact that gender-based violence goes beyond cultural, economic, and geographic boundaries. Violence against women is most frequently committed by an intimate partner with data stating that almost one-third (27%) of women aged 15 to 49 who were in a relationship reported some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner. (WHO, 2025) This type of violence leaves the victims with profound and lasting consequences, from physical injuries, and psychological problems to sexually transmitted diseases. According to the reports made by Associated Press in 2023, an average of 140 women and girls were killed by their intimate partners or family members per day, which was a total of approximately 51,100 victims worldwide.[2] Years of efforts in the fight against violence against women have led to some legal changes; however, various problems still exist in combating this problem. One of the developments is the fact that as of 2018, almost three-quarters of the world's countries have banned domestic violence. (UN WOMEN INTERACTIVE, 2025) The focus of this paper is two novels, *The Bastard of Istanbul* and *Purple Hibiscus*, with events set in Turkey spanning the time from the 1920s to the 2000s and Nigeria in the years after the end of colonial rule. Elif Shafak and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, undoubtedly acknowledge the problem of gender violence and the inferior position of women globally, and they set out to convincingly render a portrayal and dissection of oppression, mistreatment, and abuse of women in their respective countries.

[1] https://data.unwomen.org/global-database-on-violence-against-women, last accessed 1/14/2025

[2] https://apnews.com/article/un-killing-women-girls-partners-family-global-c2f-26290b8158e1d97b1b16ef76e85a8, last accessed 1/14/2025

Violence against women is still a significant problem in Turkey. According to statistics, approximately 40% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence during their lifetime. Studies conducted in Turkey have reported that from 13% to 78% of women are subjected to domestic violence at some point in their lives. (Basar, Nurdan, 2018) In 2024, at least 193 women were killed in the first half of the year. Despite legal reforms aimed at solving the problem of gender-based violence, such as the adoption of Law No. 6284 on protecting the family and preventing violence against women, there are still challenges in its effective implementation and enforcement in Turkey.[3] Unfortunately, in 2021, Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe treaty set to help fight violence against women. According to the Amnesty International report:

> In Turkey, violence against women by family members spans the spectrum from depriving women of economic necessities through verbal and psychological violence, to beatings, sexual violence, and killings. Many acts of violence involve traditional practices, including "crimes of honor", forced marriage, including early marriage, berdel (the barter of women to avoid paying dowries and other marriage expenses) and beşik kertmesi (a form of arranged marriage in which families barter newborn daughters, forcing them to marry as soon as they are considered old enough).[4] (Amnesty International, 2004)

Similarly, violence against women in Nigeria is also a grave and pervasive problem that manifests itself through physical, sexual, psychological, and other forms of abuse. According to UNFPA-Nigeria reports, approximately one in three Nigerian women has experienced some form of physical violence by the age of 15.[5] According to data from the UN Women Data Hub, in 2018, 13.2% of women aged 15 to 49 stated that they had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months. In addition, harmful traditional practices such as early and forced marriages, family violence, and female genital mutilation are still widespread, which further worsens the security position of women in Nigerian society. (UNFPA-Nigeria, 2025) In light of these realities, and considering the activist inclinations of both Elif Shafak and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, it is of no surprise they predominantly choose to write about women and feminist perspectives in their novels in which they convincingly render authentic accounts

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[4] https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/eur440132004en.pdf, last accessed 1/14/2025)

[5] https://nigeria.unfpa.org/en/topics/gender-based-violence-19, last accessed 1/22/2025

on the issues of gender-based violence, violence in general and trauma induced by said events.

Trauma theory is a multidisciplinary field in literature that explores how narrative forms include, represent, and process traumatic experiences. It approaches literary texts with a focus on the analysis of the traumatic events of the characters in the novel, the different ways in which trauma is experienced and processed, and how it affects the lives of individuals and groups. In literary works especially novels, the interest in trauma can be seen as early as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the overall interest in the psychological aspect of human existence started growing, and when the term itself first appeared and was discussed in psychology, most notably in the works of scientists such as Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud. The term began to be used in the 1980s in literary theory as well, primarily in the studies of Cathy Caruth, Shoshan Felman and Geoffrey Hartman. According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is a difficult event to process and therefore inherently difficult to represent. This leads to the paradox that a traumatic event has a great impact on a person who has survived the trauma but is also inaccessible to their conscious understanding of it. Caruth also examines the concept of trauma beyond the individual and considers its collective dimensions to analyze how communities and cultures deal with the legacies of traumatic histories, such as wars, genocides, and colonialism. (Caruth, 1995) Trauma theory investigates the manifestation of traumatic events in literary and historical works and how fictional characters deal with their traumas, as well as how literary texts function to record the traumas that occur in society. In her book *Trauma and Fiction*, Anne Whitehead starts with the theory of Pierre Janet, who made a distinction between "narrative memory" and "traumatic memory", arguing that narrative memory is a social act that takes into account the audience, and that traumatic memory does not need that social component and that it is not addressed to anyone and does not answer to anyone. "Traumatic memory", claims Jenet, "must be transformed into a narrative memory, so that the traumatic event can become part of the individual experience". (Whitehead, 2004: 140–141). Trauma theory, as a multidisciplinary field that relies on psychology, history, and cultural theory, comprehensively deals with the textual articulation of human traumas, illuminating both personal and collective suffering. Transgenerational trauma, which is another significant category explored by trauma theory, could certainly be included under the term collective suffering. Through their approach to literary works, theorists analyze how literature records the lasting impact of historical crimes on communities and future generations. This theoretical framework finds literary resonance in novels such as *Things Fall Apart* by Chinu Achebe, where the

author examines the trauma of colonization, or in the *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko, where the author delves into the cultural and spiritual wounds of the displacement of the American natives. Marianne Hirsch, a trauma studies theorist, introduces the concept of "post-memory" into trauma studies and she emphasizes how the descendants of those who survived the trauma inherit the burden of remembering and processing the experiences of their ancestors. (Hirsch, 2012) Such literary research points to the temporal persistence of trauma, that is, they reveal how trauma transcends time, embedding itself in cultural memory and identity.

Literature is one of the key media for researching trauma because it offers exactly that wide textual space in which wounded and broken identities, repressed memories, and collective social wounds can be explored. Through storytelling, the authors investigate traumatic events such as wars, genocides, slavery, but also rape and abuse of any kind. In this way, authors and their fictional worlds serve as a catalyst for human suffering, they give readers the possibility to empathize with human vulnerability, but also an insight into the complexity of human resilience.

A special category of trauma that is central to this research is gender trauma, which can be characterized as a complex intersection of personal and collective experiences in relation to gender. These experiences result from the way in which societies have historically constructed and implemented gender norms, which are specifically addressed in literature by gender theory, the study of what is understood as male and/or female and/or queer behavior regardless of context, society, or field of study. The concept of gender refers to the biologically visible categories of the human body, between the female and male body, while the concept of gender refers to the categories of social expectations, roles, and behavior, female and male. Older editions of the dictionaries do not distinguish today's nuances between the concept of gender, however, in recent times, there have been changes in definitions in dictionaries and they include gender and gender distinguishing characteristics. English dictionaries, such as Oxford and Cambridge added transgender labels and gender-neutral terms to the definitions of man and woman. (Džiho-Šator, 2024:170) Gender trauma therefore represents a type of combination of trauma theory and gender theory. Because gender norms are rooted in patriarchal structures, these norms have relegated individuals, especially women and gender-diverse people, to marginalized roles. This trauma manifests not only in the form of overt violence but also in more subtle systemic inequalities such as wage differentials, limited access to education, and limited autonomy, leaving lasting psychological and social scars on the affected population. This aligns with Shafak's and Adichie's narrative depictions, where history and patriarchy play a key role.

Namely, the historical dimension of gender trauma is intertwined with periods of political upheavals and social restructuring, as well as the continuously nurtured atmosphere of patriarchal culture. During the Industrial Revolution, gender roles were already strictly codified, men were assigned the role of family breadwinners, and women's lives were limited within the domestic sphere. Such constructs created a dichotomy that became deeply ingrained in cultural narratives and continuously supported by patriarchal societal codes that persist to this day, especially in highly religious and conservative societies. For this reason gender identities are at the center of issue of violence as well:

> Gender identities are therefore a vital factor in explaining women's and men's experiences and roles as victims and perpetrators of violence worldwide. In both conflict-affected and peaceful environments, violent masculinities and femininities are shaped by socially constructed and perpetuated norms related to the use of violence (EL Jack, 2003, Segalo, 2015)

Men and women are taught to behave in certain ways within standard and non-violent context. This type of learned and imposed behavior extends to violent and post-violent contexts as well and affects how women deal with violent trauma.

The Bastard of Istanbul and *Purple Hibiscus* are both novels that render literary representations of gender trauma that is deeply rooted in the sociocultural context and has far-reaching societal consequences. While Shafak writes of and explores suppressed personal and collective histories, women's memory and transgenerational trauma within the family and patriarchal Turkish society, Adichie explores the psychological and physical effects of domestic violence, religious extremism and colonial legacy in post-colonial Nigeria. Through their protagonists, both novels tell the stories of trauma—how it is inherited, resisted and finally voiced and they are aligned with trauma theory's emphasis on narrative recovery and collective memory.

2. GENDER AND VIOLENCE IN *THE BASTARD OF ISTANBUL* AND *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

In both novels, *The Bastard of Istanbul* and *Purple Hibiscus*, the authors depict gender roles and power dynamics in relation to patriarchal society, how women are oppressed within such social and cultural structures, and how they process the traumatic events inflicted upon them. In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, Elif Shafak aims to highlight the many ways in which a patriarchal society shapes the family, family roles, and relationships, but also social expectations.

Women in the novel, and within such a set context, occupy a central place with their lives torn between personal desires and aspirations and rigid and deeply rooted social, religious, and cultural traditions. The character of Zeliha represents a woman who is the product of generational and systemic silencing of women in a highly traditional and conservative society who is unable to properly deal with her traumatic experience of rape. Drawing on Jenet's theory of narrative memory Anne Whitehead writes:

> Traumatic memory is inflexible and replays the past in a mode of exact repetition, while narrative memory is capable of improvising on the past so that the account of an event varies from telling to telling. For Janet, the conversion of traumatic memory into narrative memory represents the process of recovery from trauma. (Whitehead, 2004:87)

Zeliha is not given space to go through the said conversion of trauma from traumatic memory into narrative memory and is thus unable to start her recovery. The recovery in her case would mostly involve the relationship with her daughter and the psychological centering and grounding of the daughter herself. Asya is affected by Zeliha's trauma as well because it shapes and affects their relationship.

For a household filled with temperamental and talkative women, the Kazandzi home is awfully silent when it comes to Zeliha's rape. The rape occurs in the Kazandzi home while the mother, grandmother, and sisters are, quite symbolically, visiting their father's grave, and Zeliha and her brother Mustafa stay behind home alone. The family enters the home right after the act of rape, while Mustafa is throwing up in the bathroom and Zeliha is all disheveled and bruised in the face, but no one suspects anything. The explanation Zeliha gives after deciding at that moment not to tell anything about rape is that she stood up for a woman in the park and got beaten by her husband as well. The irony of the whole context should not escape the readers—the family is out to visit the grave of a very strict patriarch of the family, Mustafa uses rape to punish Zeliha, to shame her into submission and crush her spirit, and Zeliha hides it all away behind a fictitious assault by an unknown man. Even if not in that particular moment, the event should have stirred suspicion after she became pregnant soon after and does not give the name of the father. Shafak implies that the family most definitely chooses not to know. Not wanting to know and forgetting becomes almost a leitmotif in the novel. Zeliha doesn't want to remember, Banu who most definitely suspects and later learns of the truth wants not to know and guilt-ridden Mustafa wants to forget as well. Even the narrative voice that can be seen as a collective voice of the said traditional society is advising silence:

> Once there was. Once there wasn't. God's creatures were as plentiful as grains; talking too much was a sin. It was a sin for you could tell what you shouldn't remember and you could remember what you shouldn't tell if you talk too much. Every family has sins that must be kept secret. (Shafak, 2007:233)

Shafak here wants to place focus on the ubiquitous cultural pressure that is put on rape victims. She implies that a young girl who has been raped is first and foremost in the eyes of the community no longer a virgin which consequently doesn't make her a good match for marriage in a conservative society. She might also be accused of instigating the rape with her choice of clothes or behavior which is still often the case in many societies. And probably the strongest reason for the silence is the shame the rape brings on all the members of the family, especially on women and unmarried girls. Shafak reminds the readers of the painful fact that Zeliha has no one to talk to—her mother is a traditional Turkish woman who puts her son before her daughters and is blind or oblivious to the sexual assault, especially since she sees Zeliha's way of dressing as provocative. She calls her daughter Zeliha a "whore" because she wears miniskirts and high-heeled shoes. Zeliha's sisters are in no way open to helping Zeliha close her wounds, and she cannot in fact recover from her trauma. In her article, "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," Susan Brison recounts her personal experience of sexual assault and emphasizes the crucial role of empathetic listeners in enabling individuals to regain agency over their traumatic memories. Brison describes her own experiences:

> Memories of traumatic events can be themselves traumatic: uncontrollable, intrusive, and frequently somatic. They are experienced by the survivors as inflicted, not chosen as flashbacks to the events themselves. In contrast, narrating memories to others (who are strong enough and emphatic enough to be able to listen) empowers survivors to gain more control over the traces left by the trauma. (Brison; 1999:40)

This insight is particularly relevant to understanding Zeliha's experience, she does not have an empathetic listener at that point in her life. Perhaps her later partner would be, and perhaps Asya as well would be, but by that time Zeliha had already closed herself off in the defense mechanism cocoon she created on that day by disassociating herself from her own raped self.

> But then, in an instant, a surge of panic washed the humiliation away. She tried to block him with one hand while with the other she attempted to pull her skirt back down, but in next to no time he had lifted it again. She fought, he fought, she slapped him, he slapped her harder, she bit

> him, he punched her in the face, one single blow. She heard someone shriek "Stop!" at the top of her voice, shrill and inhuman, like an animal in a slaughterhouse. She did not recognize her own voice, just as she didn't recognize her body, as though it were alien territory when he entered it. (Shafak, 2007:315)

She immediately wants to forget everything, as if that is something one could do, but is unable: "Everything had happened so swiftly, perhaps she could convince herself that it hadn't happened at all. But the face she saw in the mirror revealed a different story." (Ibid.) In that moment her face stops her from suppressing the event and later, after she gives birth to Asya, it is her face that does not allow her to forget the rape. Her bruised face in the mirror and later her daughter's face and existence are the symbols of the impossibility of forgetting. One cannot forget what is part of one's experience, especially the traumatic one.

Zeliha is a victim of a culture that uses family, and then society to put obstacles and limiting expectations, tasks, and obligations of household and family life before women through generations and imposes on them the ultimate form of female self-sabotage—silence. Through silence and cultivating a culture of silence about her own experience, a woman closes herself in a vicious, closed circle of pain, trauma, and loss. This is not a phenomenon that is present only in Turkish culture, but it is historically present in all societies and has served as perhaps the most subversive form of control of women. Namely, not conveying the story, trauma, and women's experience, and not facing these problematic aspects of one's own life, results in a further deepening of both the trauma and the shackles of gender roles in society. Zeliha's experience of domestic violence, i.e. rape, her silence about it as well as the neglect of her own feelings and needs creates a woman who has no autonomy over her own life. Furthermore, the silence creates a rift between Zeliha and her daughter, one that permeates their relationship and is impossible to resolve without breaking the silence and revealing the truth. In turn, such a legacy of silence and oppression is passed down to Asya, who, in her quest to challenge patriarchal authority, finds herself trapped in a complex web of tradition, family silence, and devotion, and a struggle for self-expression and self-determination.

Though *The Bastard of Istanbul* undeniably foregrounds the theme of patriarchy and men's violence against women, men seem to be excluded, that is, removed from the story. By doing this Shafak seems to want to emphasize the agency of women, but also to point to the omnipresence of male oppression in the novel. The overarching grip of patriarchy doesn't appear to vain after men leave. When the novel begins, the mother, that is, the female patriarch,

rules the Kazanci family, because the father dies earlier, and the brother, the rapist Mustafa, is not physically present in the women's lives after the act of rape, but their actions hang over the women's lives like shadows and negatively determine them in different ways.

Quite the opposite, in the novel *Purple Hibiscus*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie presents a picture of a completely open form of patriarchal control and male dominance over women through the character of Eugene. While Shafak uses the family structure of the Kazanci family and the character of Zeliha's mother to draw attention to the role of women and their implicit and explicit participation in deepening the poor position of women within the family and society, Adichie emphasizes the exclusive presence of men and the direct dominance of men over the lives of women. In this novel, the father independently and directly rules the family, he deepens the rigid gender roles and violently extinguishes any forms of disagreement within family dynamics. This applies both to his wife and children but to an extent to his sister and father. Unlike the loud Kazandi home, the Achike home is disturbingly silent due to the fear of the father. The beatings he gives them are terrible but so is the silence in between these events:

> We went upstairs to change, Jaja and Mama and I. Our steps on the stairs were as measured and as silent as our Sundays: the silence of waiting until Papa was done with his siesta so we could have lunch; the silence of reflection time, when Papa gave us a scripture passage or a book by one of the early church fathers to read and meditate on; the silence of evening rosary; the silence of driving to the church for benediction afterward. Even our family time on Sundays was quiet, without chess games or newspaper discussions, more in tune with the Day of Rest. (Adichie, 2003:31)

The mother is silent about the abuse and the whole family is quite literally silent as to not to disturb the father. Adichie makes it clear to the readers that the family learns to live to avoid violence and not to provoke it, they learn to walk, talk and breathe to avoid the margins of horror. The silence permeates the lives of the Achike family even after the poisoning of the father. The last chapter is titled “A Different Silence”. The mother does not talk about it, she does not even answer terrified Kambili why she put the poison in his tea because she sometimes would take sips of his tea. Beatrice is equally traumatized by her own violent act as she is by Eugene’s repeated acts of violence and silence is both her only refuge and a prison. As a victim of abuse, but also as a person shaped by patriarchal norms she also lets Jaja as a man to take the lead after the murder, she lets him take the blame. She would presumably get

the worse treatment in prison for the same act, and it would be difficult for the children to get her out of prison, so the logistics is sound, but it does not take away from the fact that the motherly instinct in her is eclipsed by the trauma she suffered and by the sheer and sad certitude that she is conditioned to let the men lead.

In terms of religion and suppression of women in *The Bastard of Istanbul* Islam is present as a cultural and historical lingering force and a fact of life but not in a practical form. None of the major characters, except for Banu and Feride, are deeply religious or are practicing religion, pray five times a day, or go to the mosque, and religion is not directly used as an excuse for violence. However, Mustafa rapes Zeliha in a state of mind that was made possible by the religious and patriarchal society, believing she should be punished for her immodest way of dressing and outspokenness, just because she is a woman. In *Purple Hibiscus* Christianity is used as the basic method and excuse of suppressing women. Eugene is a pathological bully who uses his strict religious moralism as a means to physically and emotionally abuse his wife Beatrice and their children.[6] Eugene's belief in his own moral superiority and the justification of violence towards his wife and children are a reflection of his brutality and extreme character, but they are also a reflection of the social fact that women's voices, desires, and independence are secondary to the power and control of men. The man is *the first* and the woman is *the second*, and both authors make sure to portray that as the fact of life for female characters in their respective novels. In this context, silence is used by both authors as a form of female self-sabotage. Beatrice is submissive and she keeps quiet about her husband's abuses, she hides them from herself and her children, but also from her family and acquaintances. She also turns her head and remains silent about her husband's abuse of their children, all because of religious and cultural convictions about family life and the role of women in it. It is important to note that in both novels perpetrators of violence are punished by death and not so by the justice system but by characters themselves. Banu gives Mustafa ashura, the traditional Turkish pudding his mother made in honor of his visit which she had previously poisoned. She leaves it by his bed before revealing to him the knowledge of the rape. So, it is not Zeliha that poisons him, but Banu, the older sister who can no longer live with the burden of knowledge as she says. Other characters in the novel never learn of this and no one is punished. Mustafa also willingly takes the poisoned ashura no longer being able to live with himself, especially after he is back home, confronted with

[6] See more in: Džiho-Šator A. & Džiho-Hidović A. (2023). *Gender and Violence in Toni Morrison's A Mercy, Elena Ferrante's Tetralogy My Brilliant Friend and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus*, Društvene i humanističke studije, DHS 2 (23)

the past and the knowledge he is the father of Asya. After learning he fathered Asya, Mustafa chooses to eat poison and die and after his death, Zeliha tells Asya he was her father. So, the circle of violence is closed, and the healing of trauma can begin. Beatrice, as well, resorts to poisoning her husband, which lasts over a longer period, and is reckless because her daughter sometimes sips her father's tea. The reader does not learn if the mother was cautious in these instances, or if she was just traumatized and beside herself in wanting to end their suffering which in turn also made her irresponsible. Shafak and Adiche choose this type of murdering of the male aggressors because poisoning is tied to women's domestic sphere—it happens within the kitchen, it does not ask for physical strength and it is quiet. In the *Purple Hibiscus* there are consequences to crime, Jaja goes to prison, but after three years, a good team of lawyers, and a lot of money spent on bribery he is to be freed from prison by making on to a list of prisoners of conscience. However, while the female characters in *The Bastard of Istanbul* are somewhat freed from trauma by the death of the aggressor and by breaking the silence of rape, and can start their healing journey from the trauma, the Achike family seems to be further enveloped by darkness and trauma. Beatrice is near to losing her sound mind and Jaja spends time in prison for the crime he does not commit. Beatrice solves the problem of violence in her family under the veil of silence and secrecy with the ultimate act of violence that could have killed her daughter as well, but they never seem to break the silence between themselves and heal.

In both novels, gender roles are strictly defined and socially imposed, and women's voices are silenced primarily through the family. They are not only strict but also cruelly imposed, with women's voices being systematically silenced by the male figures who dominate them. While Asya's resistance to patriarchal expectations in *The Bastard of Istanbul* represents a woman's rebellion against patriarchal social settings, Beatrice's endurance and persistence in following the rules in *Purple Hibiscus* emphasizes patriarchal oppression and the devastating effects it has on women. Both novels emphasize the psychological damage such societies and norms inflict on women, and the traumas and transgenerational traumas they have to deal with.

The family, both in apparent reality and in literature, occupies an important place, and hundreds of variants of functional and dysfunctional families have been written about in the works of world literature. They can be a place of privacy, belonging, and ultimate comfort for an individual, but also a source of conflict. In contemporary literature, the family very often represents a microcosm of larger social phenomena and becomes a place of dissection of power, oppression, historical trauma, and violence. In their novels, Shafak and Adichie try to show how the family, as an intersection of historical trauma,

gender violence, and patriarchal power, influences the shaping of women's lives. *The Bastard of Istanbul* and *Purple Hibiscus* do not portray family in the traditional way, as a place of comfort and safe haven, but as a place of violence, surveillance, but also resistance. Within the family context, the woman is under control and her suffering is hidden under a veil of silence from the eyes of the outside world. In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, the man is not directly in control, but the patriarchally structured family is, and in *Purple Hibiscus*, patriarchal control is exercised both literally by the father and by the traditional patriarchal structure of the family, because the mother consents to violence through her silence and conviction that such a situation simply has to be. The family therefore at the same time reflects wider social and cultural controversies, but also individual ways of controlling, silencing, and oppressing women.

In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, Shafak portrays the broader political and historical context of the Republic of Turkey through the Kazanci and Tchakhmakhchian family, personal trauma experienced within the family, but also collective trauma experienced within the social collective. The novel focuses on two coming-of-age girls, Asya and Armenoush, and their families, one Turkish and one Armenian, who in different ways live in the shadow of the Turkish genocide against the Armenians. Apart from Asya and Armenoush, the novel follows four generations of women and families living in Turkey and the USA. The families are connected through the grandmother Shushan who it turns out is Armenoush's grandmother and Asya's great-grandmother. The novel is among the first novels that directly talk about the massacres and deportations that decimated the Armenian population during the last years of the Ottoman rule. The Armenian Genocide is still a controversial issue in Turkish society and culture, and *The Bastard of Istanbul* caused controversy due to the attitudes and opinions of the characters presented in the novel. Like Orhan Pamuk and several other public figures before her, Elif Shafak was accused under Article 301 of the Turkish Criminal Code and tried for defaming the Turkish nation, but she was acquitted both at the first trial and after an appeal. The novel was first published in English, then in Turkish, and Shafak herself suggested that the choice of language in English was perhaps to put a distance between herself and her sense of Turkish identity which in turn as she states in an interview only brings her closer to Turkey.

> I love language. I love alphabets. The fact that you can build infinite meanings with a limited number of letters is, to me, still like magic. As I commute between Turkish and English I pay attention to words that cannot be translated directly. I think about not only words and meanings, but also absences and gaps. Strangely, over the years I have come to understand that sometimes distance brings you closer, stepping out

> of something helps you to see that thing better. Writing in English does not pull me away from Turkey; just the opposite, it brings me closer.[7]

So, in an effort to approach the issue of fictionalizing a controversial point in Turkish history as objectively as possible, the author avoids the Turkish language, and in an effort to give weight to the Armenian genocide and its denial and bring it closer to the readers, she portrays it through family life, that is. Shafak makes a point on how this collective trauma of a nation was transmitted generationally through the family, and how it specifically affected women. Through the Kazanci family, Shafak inverts two paradigms of Turkish society and culture: one is the issue of the Armenian genocide, which their official historical discourse denies, and the other is the understanding of the family, especially in relation to the Western concept of the family. Namely, the Kazanci family, as we learn in the novel, are the descendants of Shushan, an Armenian girl whose father was killed by the Turkish authorities and who by fortune survived the genocide, and Riza Selim, a Turk who worked for Shushan's uncle and married her after realizing who she was. So, the Kazandzi are in part Armenians as well. Another paradigm is the family, which culturally within the Turkish consciousness of itself as a society, is considered a sacred and safe place, is in this case a place of violence. At one point in the novel, Feride expresses this concept of Turks about other cultures: "they [Westerners] don't have strong families. We are not like that. If somebody is your father, he is your father forever; if someone is a brother, he will be your brother till the end." (...) The perpetrator of rape in the family is Mustafa, who rapes his sister Zeliha, and Asya, who is their descendant, is in relation to the man, the protector of the family, both his niece and daughter. Thus, Shafak approaches the Turkish family and the so-called strong and stable roles within the family, primarily the roles of women, in a subversive way. In such a family dynamic, the woman is portrayed as a victim of sexual violence precisely in order to deconstruct several cultural beliefs. In most cultures, rape is still shrouded in shame and stigma, and the blame is placed on women. Her mother calls Zeliha a whore, and her grandmother calls Asya a bastard. All of the mistreatment of Zeliha and Asya happens in their family house where the rape happened as well. In this case, the stigma and even the silence is double because the rape happens within the family. By crafting the story in this way, Shafak deconstructs the moral values of the patriarchal system of the Turkish family.

[7] https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/elif-shafak-writing-english-brings-me-closer-turkey, last accessed 3/14/2025.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the family also represents a microcosm of society as a whole, it depicts violent social turmoil, surveillance, and silence, it has a completely patriarchal structure, with the fact that in this novel the father is constantly present as the center of power. While in *The Bastard of Istanbul* the focus is on the Ottoman Empire and the consequences of its fall and the policies implemented during the period of its disintegration, in the Purple Hibiscus Adichie explores the consequences of the long-term British colonization of Nigeria, and the corruption and violence of the government that occurred after their withdrawal. Adichie tries to present readers with an account of the violence that permeates the entire Nigerian society. It aims to illustrate the recurring cycle of violence in Nigerian society, encompassing both governmental and political conflicts, as well as conflicts within the realm of family life. Adichie implies that the initial source of this violence is, in fact, British colonialism itself, which with its withdrawal left corruption and hostilities within the Nigerian administration that followed. A sense of danger is always present throughout the novel, both in government spheres and within family life. Through the novel *Purple Hibiscus*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie tries to present the world of violence, control, power, and gender inequality within the family environment. The narrator and the main character of the novel, the girl Kambili Achike, lives in a family dominated by her father Eugene, whose intense authoritarianism and religious fanaticism are reflected in the physical and emotional abuse of the entire family. The father's violence is a key source of family dysfunction, and his authoritarian control over his wife and children is a direct manifestation of patriarchal power. Eugene imposes strict and oppressive rules on his family. These rules and punishments are not self-invented, they are rooted in religion or have to do with religion in some way, but Eugene’s maniacal nature pushes them to extremes. (Eugene not only carries out physical violence, but also psychological violence, and the family is constantly isolated from the outside world. The children, Kambili and Jaja, are not allowed to socialize with other children, and freely express their opinions and feelings, and Beatrice endures all this torture in absolute silence. In this way, home and family, which are traditionally understood as a source of warmth and security, become a prison where any violation of strict rules is punished. The home becomes a prison, where any deviation from Eugene's strict rules is punished, and the women's suffering remains hidden from the outside world. This stark contrast between the outward appearance of the family - respectable, pious, and wealthy - and the inner reality of fear and oppression speaks to themes of appearance versus reality and how social expectations often mask the underlying violence that many women experience. The family environment in *Purple Hibiscus* is also a place where, just

like on a social level, resistance, and small rebellions take place, especially through the characters of Jaja and Kambili. The novel opens with a description of the violent scene that occurs after Jaja refuses to go to communion. After that, Kambili also becomes more aware of domestic violence. She concludes that this is when the disintegration of their family begins, which it does, but the violence most certainly existed before that event only the children were not aware of it because it did not involve them. The time Kambili spends with her aunt Ifeoma and relatives, who live in a much freer and less oppressive environment, serves as a turning point in her development. It is in these moments of relative freedom that Kambili begins to recognize the possibility of resistance, both against the tyranny of her father and against the larger social forces that support patriarchal control.

In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, Zeliha's and Asya's healing as separate individuals, but also as a mother-daughter unit, can only truly begin after Asya learns about her past and origins, and that happens only after Mustafa is dead. Asya is rebellious and restless in character like her mother, but readers can see that there is a deeper pain in her that causes her depression and nihilism. She even tries to take her own life and the fact that the narrator doesn't dwell too long on that fact nor the characters themselves speaks of the poor ways this family deals with trauma. Banu's decision to give Mustafa poisoned ashura, his decision to take it, and Zeliha's decision to tell Asya the truth about her father is a clear chain of events that form a path of trauma healing and a resistance against the patriarchal order. Similarly, in the *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili's quiet defiance, especially her emotional and intellectual growth, represents a rejection of her father's control and the restrictive domestic space he created. Both novels illustrate that the family can be both a place of violence and a space of resistance, where women can reclaim their voice and challenge the forces that want to silence them. The contrasting depictions of family in both novels also highlight how domestic spaces can become traps for women. In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, the family home is shaped by historical trauma and patriarchal power, while in the *Purple Hibiscus*, it is defined by emotional and physical violence. In both cases, however, the home is also a place where women find ways to resist and carve out a place for themselves, even within the constraints of their circumstances. The family, therefore, is not only a place of subjugation, but also a place where change, albeit slow and difficult, can take place.

3. CONCLUSION

The Bastard of Istanbul and *Purple Hibiscus* both render a vivid and true to life portrayal of family as a microcosm of much broader social and historical forces, with gender oppression deeply rooted within domestic spheres. In both novels, patriarchal violence shapes the lives of female characters, forcing them into silence and either complete form of subjugation or into certain forms of self-denial and trauma suppression that most definitely affect all family members. Shafak and Adichie both display the cruelty of these firmly entrenched gender norms; but they also highlight the ways in which women ultimately resist them. Whether through rebellion, silence, or even acts of ultimate defiance and aggression, such as in both novels by poisoning the male aggressors, female characters find ways of reclaiming agency over their lives. Yet, the consequences of this resistance differ—while Asya and Zeliha seem to embark on a path of healing after Mustafa's death, Beatrice's act of defiance brings the family only partial and delayed sense of safety because Jaja goes to prison and is yet to come out and the mother and her children don't appear to be near of resolving the issue of trauma.

The narratives of patriarchal violence and resistance that are dominant in the novels extend beyond the sphere of the private and domestic context and connect personal traumas with the historical and cultural reality of Turkey and Nigeria. In The Bastard of Istanbul, the dysfunctionality of the family reflects Turkey's unresolved historical wounds, especially the denial of the Armenian Genocide, and in Purple Hibiscus, Eugene's violent behavior towards family members reflects the violence and corruption deeply embedded in Nigerian post-colonial society. Using the family as a lens through which larger social and historical forces are examined, both novels question the traditional perception of the home as a safe zone and place of comfort and present it as a battlefield where oppression and resistance coexist.

Ultimately, both novels highlight the long-term effects that a patriarchal environment and violence have on women as well as their struggle to break free from it. However, while individual acts of defiance by women may bring temporary relief or justice, broader systemic oppression remains deeply rooted in societies. By portraying this complexity, Shafak and Adichie not only illuminate the personal victims of patriarchal and religiously justified violence, but also raise questions about the possibility of true liberation and healing within such deeply entrenched structures.

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ODJECI TIŠINE: TRAUMA, RODNO UTEMELJENO NASILJE I PATRIJARHAT U *PURPURNOM HIBISKUSU* I *ISTANBULSKOM KOPILETU*

Radnja romana *Istanbulsko kopile* smještena je u savremenoj Turskoj, koja usred svog ekonomskog i političkog razvoja nastavlja potiskivati problematične tačke iz svoje prošlosti i još uvijek je izrazito patrijarhalno društvo, a likovi romana se bore s ličnim problemima i traumama. Roman se fokusira na istorijsku traumu, nasilje nad ženama, te kako kultura i njezine etablirane i krute društvene i vjerske norme ušutkavaju i tlače žene. S druge strane, roman *Purpurni hibiskus* smješten je u postkolonijalnu, također patrijarhalnu, Nigeriju i prati unutarnju dinamiku kršćanske obitelji koja svakodnevno prolazi kroz torturu autoritativnog i nasilnog oca. Za razliku od *Istanbulskog kopileta*, gdje Tursku nalazimo u postkolonijalnom razdoblju Osmanskog Carstva, kao nasljednicu bivše kolonijalne sile koja se ne zna ili ne želi pomiriti sa svojim zločinima, u *Purpurnom hibiskusu* Nigerija je viđena kao dekolonizovana zemlja koja još uvijek ne uspijeva pronaći put do zdravog i neopresivnog političkog uređenja. Ovaj će rad istražiti kako oba romana prikazuju raskrižje patrijarhata s rodom, traumom i istorijom.

Ključne riječi: *trauma, rodno nasilje, patrijarhat, istorija, Purpurni hibiskus, Istanbulsko kopile, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Elif Shafak*