In Honour, Elif Shafak conveys the story of the Turkish-Kurdish Toprak family going back three generations and ends with the honour killing of the aunt, Jamila, by her nephew, Iskender.

In my paper I want to highlight how Honour contextualises the issues of victimhood and culpability in honour killings.

As we can hear both a witness and the perpetrator of the honour crime as the narrative voices of the story, the novel deals with multiple points of views on the matters of victimhood and culpability in honour killings. I will concentrate on the agents and victims of honour killings as they are characterized in Honour and the techniques in which this representation brightens the spectacle of culpability. I claim that victimhood and culpability are allied in complex ways and that complexity lights the intricate nature of honour crimes. Through a contrapuntal analysis of the issues in Honour, this paper underwrites to our understanding of victimhood and culpability when honour killing is used as a way of ascertaining masculinity.

In Honour, which institutes the subject of this chapter, is one of Shafak's most intensively deliberated novels. Even before the book was published, its pre-released cover caused disagreement among critics due to Shafak's appearance on the front cover, cross-dressed as Iskender, who is the main character of the novel. Newspaper critics claimed the author was promoting herself and hindered with the imagination of the readers by providing an image of the fictional character.

Shafak's explanations can also be reasoned to her wider literary project as she often emphasises, extra-textually, the importance of feeling how it is to be someone else and the mother's role in the construction of masculinity… Thus, the cover says 'when you see an image of man, see the woman within as well'. Because what makes Iskender Iskender is actually Pembe.

Honour speaks the story of an honour killing in a diasporic community inside the structure of the mother-son relationship. The novel focuses on the standpoint of the killer and scrutinises how he is shaped whilst it also interrogates the role of women in the construction of the killer's character. Shafak, via her novel, reminds us that the killer is not a monster and she outspreads our understanding of honour killings beyond aspects covered in the mainstream media to display that there is a story behind the murders. She says that 'There are so much grief in these stories, breaking points. I wanted to examine all these closely'. The novel is extraordinary for its attention on the killer's perception and for this reason the wrongdoer will be the focus of this paper. Honour is narrated by the daughter of the Toprak family, Esma, who is both a fictional character and the fictional narrator of the book. The novel opens and closes with the first person singular pronoun (I) referring to Esma, hence we can construe that Esma is a fictional narrator, though a large part of the novel is narrated by a third person.
omniscient narrator. In the Turkish version of the novel, Esma's voice is heard only in the first and last part of the novel as the first person narrator. In the English version, Esma narrates chapters related to herself in the first person and the others in the third person. Iskender appears as a narratorial voice through prison dairies in both the English and the Turkish versions. Iskender recounts his feelings, experiences, and memories. Shafak uses both the voice of a man who committed an honour killing and the voice of a woman who experienced honour killing in her family. This contrapuntal arrangement makes the novel unique.

The novel times from 1945 to 1992 in the English version and 1946 to 1991 in the Turkish version. The motive of this slight difference is not known but might be associated to some historical mistakes found by editors as she was carpeted about those mistakes after publication. The settings of the novel is an unnamed Kurdish village on the banks of the Euphrates River, Istanbul, London, and Abu Dhabi. The novel is distinctive of Shafak's fiction in that it has numerous characters, assorted themes and features of black humour. As well as centering on the mother-son relationship within the background of honour killings, the novel explicitly talks of themes like the status of women in Turkish and Kurdish societies and mothers' situation in the construction of those communities; minority and immigrant problems; alienation; identity; dichotomy; love and Sufism. Shafak assembles the novel through analepses and prolepses, giving dates and names of places in the beginning of each chapter. The reader's concentration is kept thriving and the story moves gracefully between narrative voices, places and times. The novel uses postmodern techniques like magic realism and cultural critique. The novel uses 342 pages (the equivalent of 443 pages in the Turkish version) by adroitly fictionalizing them, nevertheless she was criticised for not tackling the topic and characters profoundly enough.

The story of the Toprak family starts when Adem, who would marry Pembe and be Iskender’s father, visits an unnamed Kurdish village during his brother’s military service and falls in love with a girl named Cemile there. When he notices that Cemile was kidnapped before, Adem marries her twin sister, Pembe, due to the risk that Cemile may not be a virgin. Adem and Pembe have three children: Iskender, Esma and Yunus. The family moves to Istanbul then to London because of economic complications that result from Adem’s gambling addiction. Iskender and Esma both are born in Istanbul and Yunus is born in London. The relationship between Adem and Pembe downrightness breaks down in London. Adem starts a relationship with a female escort named Roxana. When Adem’s money runs out, Roxana breaks up with him and goes to Abu Dhabi. Thus, Adem leaves home forever and goes to Abu Dhabi in the hope of reuniting with Roxana. While searching for Roxana, he works as a construction worker there. He eventually commits suicide by jumping off a building roof. In the meantime, Pembe, with the grief of being distant from her twin, is ill-fated in London. After her husband leaves her, she meets Elias and they have a love affair without physical intimacy. Pembe’s younger son, Yunus, sees the couple together when they covertly meet in the cinema, but Yunus does not tell anyone. As soon as the elder brother of Adem, Tarik, notices the relationship, he whips Iskender, his older nephew, that this is a question of honour. Iskender, by his mother even though he is a boy. Adem is an inattentive father who received no reprimand for rupturing honour values and demurring to them. Yunus is balanced as he is not treated particularly, unlike Iskender, by his mother even though he is a boy. Adem is an alcoholic and his mother leaves her family because of alcoholism and domestic violence. Suffering from his father’s alcoholism, Adem avoids becoming an alcoholic, but he damages his family due to his gambling addiction and desertion. Pembe, is portrayed to be bent by her patriarchal family and she also stimulates patriarchal values. Esma acknowledges that she is pontificated with words borrowed from Grandma Naze. Esma censures Pembe’s unfair attitudes and manners to control only female sexuality:

_We had been very close, me and my mother, but all that changed the moment my breasts started to bud and I had my first period. The only thing she was interested in now was my virginity [...]. Not once had she told me about what was possible and permissible; her powers of communication were reserved solely for rules and prohibitions. [...] Yet she didn’t impose the same rules on my brothers._

This description aids the reader to appreciate different perspectives on honour in the same culture and family and the techniques in which personal familiarity can change individual attitudes. This is how Shafak accentuates the prominence of personal experience and family values in personality structure. The novel advocates that concepts of honour that have been intensely rooted in definite cultural constructions of the family and that women have an imperative role in conserving these ideas.

In the novel, Shafak appeals thoughtfulness to ‘mother son relationships in a patriarchal society’ as she ponders that women habitually “take a very active part in constructing masculinity in a certain way. They raise their sons in a certain way and those sons end up being […] more masculine but the women also play a role in the same system.” Shafak acknowledges that she is pontificated with words borrowed from Grandma Naze. Shafak stated that:

_Esma criticizes her mother, does not want to be like her mother._

In the novel, Iskender, who is the first son and whose mother rears him as if he is a sultan, is an unruly teenager at the time of the crime. His sister, Esma, is a girl who feels excluded from the family because of gender discrimination against female children. She repels sexism and aims to become an author. Their seven year old brother, Yunus, is a dreamy boy. Due to his friendly love for an older woman, called Tobiko, Yunus spends utmost of his time with Tobiko’s friends who organise a revolutionary and anti-capitalist group and live in a squatters’ house. Iskender aches from repentance for murdering his mother. His preliminary plan was to frighten Pembe and her lover, Elias by wounding her mother in a non-fatal place; however, the piercing results in death. Iskender is sentenced to fourteen years in prison. His brother and sister, especially Esma, do not forgive him for the murder. A couple of years before his release, Iskender picks up from his brother that he actually killed his aunt, but Pembe, Esma and Yunus had hidden the truth about the crime. The readers are exposed the truth at the same time as Iskender discovers it. Pembe, disguised as her twin, goes back to the village. Iskender starts to write an apology letter to his mother which he plans to deliver by hand after his release, but when he gets out of prison, he, and readers of the novel, ascertain that Pembe passed away a year beforehand.

The mother Pembe is the one who preserves patriarchal values. Iskender is raised in Istanbul and the UK with harsh patriarchal values. Esma is a girl anguishing from these values and demurring to them. Yunus is balanced as he is not treated particularly, unlike Iskender, by his mother even though he is a boy. Adem is an inattentive father who received no reprimand for rupturing honour values despite leaving his family for another woman. This perhaps displays the sexist duality of the honour concept. Tarik, as an elder brother of Adem, is a traditional oppressive figure who manipulates social values to suit his interests. Cemile is a woman whose life is in ruins because of patriarchal values as she cannot marry the man with whom she is in love and, in the end, she is killed. Shafak adjusts curios values. Pembe’s family, as a Kurdish family, embodies an exemplary family with patriarchal and traditional codes. Throughout the novel we see that habits and values are mainly fashioned in the family. Adem’s father is an alcoholic and his mother leaves her family because of alcoholism and domestic violence. Suffering from his father’s alcoholism, Adem avoids becoming an alcoholic, but he damages his family due to his gambling addiction and desertion. Pembe, is portrayed to be bent by her patriarchal family and she also stimulates patriarchal values. Esma acknowledges that she is pontificated with words borrowed from Grandma Naze.
Honour was both commended and disapproved in Turkey and internationally. It was nominated for the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2007; longlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2009; and longlisted for the International Impac Dublin Literary Award in 2014. Honour has been evaluated more positively at the international level than it has been in Turkey. Maureen Freely’s review for The Guardian suggests that Shafak’s ‘portrayal of Muslim cultures, both traditional and globalising, is as hopeful as it is politically sophisticated,’ for which Shafak merits a world audience. Alev Adılı, in a review for The Independent, praises Honour as ‘an extraordinarily skilfully crafted and ambitious narrative, with Shakespearean twists and turns, omens and enigmas, prophecies and destinies fulfilled.’ Adılı, however, labels the characterisation of minor characters as ‘broad-brush’ and she remarks some minor historical flaws related to 1970s London subculture. She also acmes irregularities in characterization like the fact that Pembe allows seven-year-old Yunus to disappear for hours, and does not notice his tattoo for months. According to Ammar Khan, although Honour is not a good case of magic realism ‘as the crying spiritualism of which is too much to digest,’ it ‘offers everything that you would expect from a good novel’ with ‘vivid storytelling.’ Khan criticizes the recurrent use of fluke and ‘shoeorning in [of] solutions to jarring questions’ in the final pages. Although I found international grave reception of the novel fairer in terms of critiques of its style, I also observed that international critics are more timid to criticize subjects in the novel associated to the illustration of culture and its plotting. In this regard, my reading has supplemented a discerning understanding of the novel, precisely focused on its demonstration of Turkish culture. Literary criticism in Turkey has also been affected by the arguments and opinions surrounding, but not directly related to, Honour.

In Shafak’s Honour, Iskender’s uncle, Tariq, is the leader of the honour killing illustrated in the text, where he pushes Iskender to be the man of the family, to control his mother, Pembe, and to avert her from having a lover. Nevertheless, Tariq reassures Iskender to commit an honour killing, he fantasises as if he has never done so after the killing. Iskender calls his uncle, Tariq, after piercing his aunt under the mistaken postulation that he is stabbing his mother. Uncle Tariq condemns Iskender for his act. “What have you done, son?” His voice sounded choked. ‘This is terrible.’ Iskender narrates his bewilderment at his uncle’s words and how he could not take any legal responsibility as he says over the phone: ‘Iskender, son, you have to turn yourself in. I’ll tell the police this is exactly what I told you when you rang me. You cannot run from the law!’ With his words, Tariq’s hypocrisy is distinguished by Iskender and highlighted for the reader.

The unclem in this Turkish novel doles from the act of killing by reinstating their supposed honour without compelling the murders themselves. All the responsibilities of killing are deliberated on the nephew or the son, while the commanding uncles uphold a Godlike status as they decide who should kill. All the responsibilities of killing are transferred to the commanding uncles. The uncles are the leaders in the narrative, with Shakespearean twists and turns, omens and enigmas, prophecies and destinies fulfilled.” Adılı, however, labels the characterisation of minor characters as ‘broad-brush’ and she remarks some minor historical flaws related to 1970s London subculture. She also acmes irregularities in characterization like the fact that Pembe allows seven-year-old Yunus to disappear for hours, and does not notice his tattoo for months. According to Ammar Khan, although Honour is not a good case of magic realism ‘as the crying spiritualism of which is too much to digest,’ it ‘offers everything that you would expect from a good novel’ with ‘vivid storytelling.’ Khan criticizes the recurrent use of fluke and ‘shoeorning in [of] solutions to jarring questions’ in the final pages. Although I found international grave reception of the novel fairer in terms of critiques of its style, I also observed that international critics are more timid to criticize subjects in the novel associated to the illustration of culture and its plotting. In this regard, my reading has supplemented a discerning understanding of the novel, precisely focused on its demonstration of Turkish culture. Literary criticism in Turkey has also been affected by the arguments and opinions surrounding, but not directly related to, Honour.

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The uncle in this Turkish novel doles from the act of killing by reinstating their supposed honour without compelling the murders themselves. All the responsibilities of killing are deliberated on the nephew or the son, while the commanding uncles uphold a Godlike status as they decide who should kill whom. Meryem’s uncle tells his son Cemal that: ‘[...] it’s up to you to put things right. [...] Take the bitch to Istanbul and finish her off there’. Uncle Tariq puts the idea into Iskender’s head that he has to do something about his mother’s affair. While the two uncle figures are dynamic in making a decision about honour killing, the fathers do not have the power to forestall killing, and they are not involved in the decision-making process behind the honour killing. Meryem’s father, uncle and Cemal are in the same room when the uncle clarifies his detailed plan about the honour killing but Meryem’s father, Tahirin Agha, is silent: ‘he had not uttered a word during the sheik’s speech. He did not say anything to support his older brother but just sat there in troubled silence.’ From now, it can be claimed that uncles are represented as atrocious: any
Humane feelings or inner conflict over the killing that they may have are unrevealed. Represented as a decision-making device without any positive humane feelings, the figure of the uncle is dehumanised. We ought to think about why it is the paternal uncles who offer the judgements on honour killing in this novel. The contribution of the extended family in the crime permits the killing to be structured in cold blood, as they may not have as close ties with the victim as do the members of the immediate family and so it does not seem unrealistic when sentiments of the extended family members towards the killing are not exposed. More prominently, I would argue, the authoritative uncle figure points to the patriarchal system of the community, where, in classic patriarchy, the oldest man of the household rules the family. This patriarchal system exemplifies the supremacy of decision-makers and sustains itself by putting down confrontation. As fathers with inner emotional conflicts have the prospect to fight killing decisions, they incline to be excluded from the decision making process. Men in patriarchal systems are considered and appreciated as long as they fit within them; if they do not, they can be overlooked or disgraced or, in some cases, honour-related violence can also target them.

The statement that honour killings are committed ferociously and there are many intricate dynamics demarcated in this literary work. As honour killings are not easily comprehensible, this fiction can assist us to take a further step along the path to understanding the landscape of honour killings in specific communities. This literary work clearly maps the personal and collective calamities leading to honour killings and they parallel real cases of honour killings.

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