



RESEARCH PAPER

Echoes of the Unspoken: A Study of Bowlby's Attachment Theory and Intergenerational Trauma in Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul*

¹ Iqra Saleem, ² Warda Abbas*

1. MPhil Scholar, Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

2. Lecturer, Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Corresponding Author

warda.abbas@umt.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to investigate fictional representation of intergenerational trauma in Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) using John Bowlby's "Theory of Attachment". Shafak's novel presents an intricately woven plot based on a multigenerational account of complex characters exposed to a heterogeneous blend of traumatic experiences which leave detrimental impact on their following generations. Utilizing Bowlby's insights, this paper enunciates how remnants of an individual's trauma are carried forward into his next generation through insecure attachment pattern within a parent-child relationship. After analyzing four consecutive generations of Kazanci family in Shafak's novel, the study concludes that parent-child attachment relationships between Shafak's characters are highly insecure and therefore remain instrumental in passing Shushan Kazanci's complex childhood trauma across her following generations - ultimately leading to her great-granddaughter's incestuous birth. This vicious chain of intergenerational trauma can only be broken with the victims' resistance and resilience which Shafak's characters lack

Keywords: Intergenerational Trauma, Attachment Theory, Insecure Attachment, Childhood Trauma, Parent-Child Dyad

Introduction

The term "intergenerational trauma" refers to the transmission of trauma from one generation to another. Dr. Vivian Rakoff introduced the concept of intergenerational trauma in 1966 during his research on the descendants of Holocaust survivors. He proposed that the damaging impact of a psychologically traumatic event may not necessarily remain limited to the victim and can be passed on to subsequent generations (DeAngelis, 2019, p. 36). According to Dr. Yael Danieli (1998), intergenerational trauma can be passed on to the next generation "biologically, chemically, psychologically, behaviorally, interpersonally, culturally, and even nationally" (p. 7). This paper specifically analyzes the psychological impact of trauma across generations in Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) - using an attachment-based approach. John Bowlby (1907-1990) put forth "The Attachment Theory" which chiefly studies the primary relationship between a child and his parent or primary caregiver. According to him, attachment is a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings", (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194). Pamela C. Alexander maintains that "the attachment theory is notably relevant to the concept of complex trauma and is uniquely suited to the study of cycles of violence and trauma." According to her, an understanding of interpersonal "attachment relationships is integral to apprehend the intergenerational transmission of violence and trauma" (Alexander, 2014, p. 25, 63).

The attachment theory divides interpersonal attachment relationships into two major categories – Secure Attachment and Insecure Attachment. To understand the secure and insecure attachment patterns, it is important to comprehend Bowlby's concept of the "internal working model" - a cognitive framework that functions as the "base" or "life-long template" for a child to unconsciously develop a strategy to maintain an attachment relationship with his parent (Bowlby, 1969, p. 170). To elaborate, if the parent-child relationship is based on responsiveness, reliability, consistency, warmth and trust on the part of the parent, the child believes himself to be worthy of love and care and creates a positive sense of self and others. Contrarily, if the parent-child relationship is based on unresponsiveness, inconsistency, rejection or maltreatment, the child believes him to be unworthy of love and care and therefore, unconsciously creates a negative sense of self and others.

Consequently, a child with a positive internal working model is bound to have secure attachment relationships as an adult, whereas a child with a negative internal working model is highly vulnerable to insecure attachment relationships in adulthood. The secure attachment, therefore, is characterized by balanced social and emotional development as a securely attached individual tends to have an emotionally regulated behaviour, self-efficacy, social competence and effective conflict resolution, which is why, the secure attachment pattern is usually not associated with any form of trauma whereas the insecure attachment pattern is most pertinent to trauma. Bowlby (1969) explains that an individual who experiences abuse in his childhood is most likely to become an abuser himself and is highly susceptible to abusing his children which negatively affects his attachment relationship with them. In other words, if a child experiences "repetitive or prolonged" trauma based on abuse, neglect or abandonment by his parents he is most likely to replicate his parent's abusive behaviour towards his own children and may unconsciously create a chain of intergenerational trauma (p. 172).

In her novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006), Elif Shafak explores the inherently complex subject of intergenerational trauma through multifaceted nuances of trauma experienced by her characters and their subsequent generations. Using the 1915 Armenian genocide as the backdrop of the novel, Shafak constructs a connection between complex family dynamics and intergenerational trauma as she narrates an interwoven tale of two essentially different families, the Kazancis and the Tchakhmakchians, connected by the blood of their common matriarch - Shushan Stamboulion who survives the Armenian Genocide. This paper studies the intergenerational afflictions of Shushan's intense psychological trauma, which begins from the Armenian genocide, and eventually ends up in the questionable existence of her great grand-daughter Asya – the Bastard of Istanbul who is a product of rape and incest between siblings.

Literature Review

Elif Shafak, in her fictional works, often explores various forms of psychological trauma and its familial and intergenerational impact. Shafak's sound understanding of the nuances of emotional suffering particularly in the context of parent-child relationships can also be observed from her opinions shared on her digital platform present at YouTube and Facebook titled *Say Your Word*. In her video titled, *How To Cope With Inherited #Trauma*, She says, "I want to ask a complicated question...that is it also possible to inherit something as abstract as difficult to define as sorrow...is it also possible to inherit trauma from the past generations? ... Inherited perhaps our physical appearance -the color of our hair, the shape of our cheeks or chin from our parents or grandparents? (Say Your Word / Elif Shafak, 2021, 0:04 - 2:28) In the same video, she answers her question by reading an excerpt from her book – *The Island of Missing Trees*, where she uses the metaphor of trees to elucidate the concept of intergenerational trauma. She remarks, "If families resemble trees...family traumas are like thick, translucent resin dripping from a cut in the bark...They trickle down generations" (Say Your Word / Elif Shafak, 2021, 2:42 - 3:01).

Moreover, In an interview with Rachel Cooke, Shafak expressing her thoughts on intergenerational trauma as she says, "I've always believed in inherited pain...It's not scientific, perhaps, but things we cannot talk about easily within families do pass from one generation to the next, unspoken"(Cooke, 2021).

Chaudhary and Munawar (2023) in their article explore the connection between silence and intergenerational trauma in the context of migration, displacement, violence and loss caused by the Cypriot war in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*. The study revolves around survivors of war and the transmission of their trauma to their successive generations. The researchers emphasize that silence, as a coping mechanism, in response to either individual or collective trauma can have serious repercussions on the following generations of survivors of trauma. They remark that if the trauma is suppressed, it shows up in coming generations with "many subtle and obvious ramifications". The research maintains that Defne and Kostas - the protagonists of the novel - choose to maintain silence regarding their individual and collective traumas of loss, separation, violence and forced migration as a "survival strategy". However, despite their silence, their trauma "seeps into the next generation."

N.Guler Ugur (2020) in her thesis explores Elif Shafak's selected works as trauma fiction with a particular emphasis on sexual trauma. At the structural level, this research studies the narrative devices used by the author for an effective portrayal of trauma while at the thematic level, the research analyses the sociocultural conditions contributing to sexual trauma and its recovery. The central argument of the study is "the destructive effects of sociocultural norms brought about through patriarchy" (Guler, 2020). The research calls out the noxious societal constructs based on toxic masculinity, patriarchy and misogyny that lead to sexual violence against women and children who constitute the weaker portion of society. The research emphasizes that there is a complex relationship between gender inequality, patriarchy and unequal power relations between genders and the key factors contributing to "all forms of sexual abuse" including incest, rape, honor killings and sexual exploitation of children (Guler, 2020, p.9).

Iulia Waniek (2014) in her article focuses on the identity crises of Armanoush and Asya - the youngest members of two interconnected but estranged families belonging to two different religious and ethnic groups separated by different geographical settings. The researcher maintains that the symbolic structure of the novel comprises dualities, opposition, and antithesis. Armanoush's identity conflict arises out of her globalized and multicultural existence as a bilingual American who is exposed to multiple cultural and religious environments as her life is divided between her paternal Christian Armenian-American family and her Christian-American mother married to her Muslim -Turk stepfather. Asya's identity crises, on the other hand, are caused by her identity as a bastard with no knowledge about her father's identity. Both the characters belong to the same family connected through a paternal matriarch Grandma Shushan who experiences severe psychological trauma in her childhood during the 1915 Armenian Genocide. According to Waniek the Turkish Kazanci family and the Armenian-American Tchamakchian families are like two parallel threads that finally merge at the end and bring closure to identity issues stretched over the lifetimes of characters, particularly Asya and Armanoush. The researcher maintains that the novel is primarily based on the concepts of identity and memory and one cannot be established without the other. Therefore, Asya and Armanoush do not develop a stable sense of identity until the dark realities of their past are revealed. Waniek concludes that despite the harshness and disturbing nature of the memories and realities, diving deep into the memory is essential to developing a sound identity (Waniek, 2014).

In addition to a comprehensive exploration of the concept of intergenerational trauma in academic and general literature, acknowledgement of this concept can be seen quite widely spread in popular culture - particularly in social media domains. It can be

observed that with the rise of social media usage, the idea of inherited pain is also being widely advocated by authors, mental health specialists, inspirational speakers and even the general population on their social media handles such as Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter. A few instances of such phrases and quotations include “Hurt People, hurt People” (Eads, 1959) and “If you never heal from what hurt you, you’ll bleed on people who didn’t cut you” (Kulish, 2021).

Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature and employs the textual analysis methodology. The original text of *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) by Elif Shafak is the primary source of this research. The theoretical framework of the present research is based on the “Attachment Theory” which, according to Pamela C. Alexander, provides the “most comprehensive basis for understanding when and why trauma and violence experienced in one generation affects subsequent generations” (Alexander, 2014, p. 8). As a secondary source of research, this paper essentially uses Pamela C. Alexander’s *Intergenerational Cycles of Trauma and Violence: An Attachment and Family Systems Perspective* which integrates John Bowlby’s original theory of attachment with the latest empirical data on intergenerational trauma and, thereby proves to be an effective methodological tool for this research. This method will help readers explore the fundamental causes and effects of intergenerational trauma present in Elif Shafak’s *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006).

To understand the foundational basis of this theoretical framework, it is important to be familiar with three major types of insecure attachment patterns, put forth by the attachment theory. The insecure attachment in adults is broadly categorized into three categories i.e. Dismissing-Avoidant Attachment, Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment and Disorganized attachment. (i) *Dismissing-Avoidant Attachment* pattern is characterized by an emotionally avoidant approach in interpersonal attachment relationships. People with avoidant attachment patterns struggle with emotional closeness and experience high levels of discomfort with intimacy in their interpersonal attachment relationships. Due to their avoidant and dismissive behaviours, these people generally engage in internalizing maladaptive behaviours such as emotional suppression. (ii) *Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment* pattern is characterized by high levels of anxiety which creates insecurity in people regarding their interpersonal relationships and manifests through their fear of losing loved ones or their fear of rejection. People with anxious preoccupied attachment patterns tend to experience separation distress or indulge in proximity maintenance. This insecure attachment pattern is mostly associated with low maternal availability or overall poor parental involvement. (iii) *Disorganized Attachment* pattern is associated with a collapse of attachment strategy and is most pertinent to trauma. Individuals with a disorganized attachment pattern may exhibit a paradoxical amalgam of avoidant and anxious behaviours in their interpersonal relationships. Consequently, these individuals are most likely to sabotage their own relationships or to engage in toxic attachment relationships based on poor communication, proximity maintenance, separation distress, avoidant tendencies or abuse. To study the primary attachment relationships of Shafak’s characters, this paper employs the dyadic method where a dyad is a person-to-person relationship between two closely related individuals who share an intimate emotional bond such as the attachment bond between a parent-child dyad, a husband-wife dyad or a brother-sister dyad.

Results and Discussion

In the final chapter of her novel, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, Elif Shafak writes that “Family stories intermingle in such ways that what happened generations ago can have an impact on seemingly irrelevant developments of the present day” (Shafak, 2006, p.355). To understand this notion effectively, this section analyzes the chain of intergenerational

trauma transmitted across four consecutive generations of the Kazanci family in the form of four sub-sections named after each generation. The first generation studies Shushan Stambouljian as the primary source of trauma, the second generation is focused on her son Levent Kazanci and his wife Gulsum as dysfunctional parents, the third generation analyses their traumatized children Mustafa and Zeliha Kazanci, and the fourth generation evaluates the character of Asya Kazanci as a product of incest and the negative repercussions on her life.

The First Generation

Shushan Stambouljian, the matriarch of the Kazanci family, experiences adverse psychological trauma during her primary developmental years of life due to her first-hand experience of the 1915 Armenian genocide. Being a victim of an institutionalized ethnic cleansing of the Armenian community, her trauma is both complex and chronic as it stretches across her childhood and adolescence, beginning from the age of three. During these years, Shushan experiences various forms of trauma including physical, emotional and verbal abuse as well as emotional and physical neglect. Three years old Shushan, alongside her family and hundreds of other Armenians, is made to walk a "long distance on foot" along the "road of exile" where many people "starved to death" and "some...were executed" right in front of her eyes. Shushan's pregnant mother also dies of starvation and exhaustion and she loses her elder brothers due to overwhelming "confusion and chaos" in the crowd (Shafak, 2006, p.162-163). According to Bowlby (1988), a child has an instinctive need for a secure bond that "ensures the child's proximity to the caregiver" and this need for that secure bond is most intense "under conditions of stress" (p. 124). In Shushan's case, the loss of both her parents and brothers, under extremely stressful circumstances shatters her sense of security and intensifies her trauma. A study by Finger et al. (2009) can explain the long-term effect of Shushan's trauma as it maintains that a child's experience of a lack of parental protection, particularly in times of extreme stress leads to disorganized attachment with all its implications for cycles of violence or trauma.

In light of Shushan's psychological trauma, alongside her loss of family and parental protection in her developmental years, it can be inferred that she developed an insecure - disorganized attachment pattern. To elaborate, due to the lack of a reliable parenting figure, Shushan's instinctive need for a primary attachment figure remains unmet as a consequence of which she fosters "incompatible internal working models of the self and the other" which ultimately lead to a "collapse of attachment strategy" in her which is characteristic of disorganized attachment pattern. Shushan's collapse of attachment strategy is "carried forward into new relationships" and affects her role as mother and wife, as when reunited with her lost brother Yervant, she chooses to abandon her little son Levent and husband Reza Kazanci. Menger Leeman (2018) explores the intergenerational impacts of child abuse and neglect in her research and maintains that disorganized attachment in a parent as a result of their unresolved childhood trauma paves path for development of insecure attachment pattern in their children. The same can be observed in the case of the Shushan-Levent dyad as her desire to maintain proximity with her lost family, though instinctive in nature, proves to be highly maladaptive in the context of her role as a mother and in response to her own traumas, she ends up causing a lifelong abandonment trauma to Levent and unconsciously begins a chain of intergenerational trauma.

The Second Generation

Levent Kazanci, having been abandoned by his mother at "developmentally vulnerable times", spends his childhood with "suppressed bitterness" and grows into "a dour man" with an overall grumpy personality (Shafak, 2006, p. 356). During his childhood, he becomes so "bitter inside" that he "resists" and "ridicules" his kind stepmother Petit-Ma and rejects her altogether (Shafak, 2006, p. 139,356). However, Petit-

Ma understands that Levent was hostile because he was “abandoned by his own mother” (Shafak, 2006, p. 309). Levent rigidity as a child can be understood by Alexander’s observation that when a child fails to understand the parent’s unresolved trauma, he develops a confused sense of self and holds himself responsible for his parent’s rejecting behaviour. Unaware of Shushan’s traumatic past, Levent fails to comprehend the actual cause behind his mother’s blunt rejection of him and therefore perceives this abandonment as his fault and believes himself to be “flawed, damaged, or even unworthy” of Shushan’s warmth, love and care (Alexander, 2014, p. 28-29). As already established, fundamental rationale of the attachment theory is based on the idea that secure attachment figure is the child’s inherent need; particularly in the primary developmental years of life and the absence of a caregiver significantly contributes to an insecure attachment relationship which has been observed in the case of both Shushan and Levent. In response to his abandonment trauma, Levent internalizes his emotional suffering and develops the dismissing-avoidant attachment pattern which is characterized by emotional and social withdrawal. Levent’s avoidant-dismissive attachment pattern manifests through his multiple maladaptive behaviours including *emotional avoidance*, *acrimony*, *anger*, *aggression*, and overall *emotional rigidity*.

Levent’s “bitterness” and “acrimony” matures with age and he ends up becoming “a bitter and abusive man” as an adult, which certainly affects his role as a father and a husband. Shafak describes him as a boy “abandoned by his mother” who grows up to be “sullen and bitter” and proves to be “a terrible father” to his children (Shafak, 2006, p.139, 326, 356). As per the attachment theory, separation and loss of one or both parents in childhood is most likely to contribute to men’s violent behaviour as apparent in Levent’s case. Since he grows up without the physical and emotional presence of his mother, he attempts to replicate the same towards his children and despite being physically present for them; he remains emotionally avoidant, absent, distant, dismissive and abusive towards them. Levent not only verbally abuses his children by his aggressive outbursts, yelling and “repeated scoldings” but also physically abuses them by giving them “spankings” usually using a “russet leather belt with a brass buckle” (Shafak, 2006, p.335). Research on child abuse by Locke & Newcomb (2001) explain Levent’s behaviour as the study explains that “a father’s history of emotional neglect” is particularly linked with his “lack of parental warmth” and his “rejecting style of parenting” (p. 1239). Levent maintains rigid expectations from children by adopting extremely authoritative, violent and punitive parenting towards them, and therefore, Levent’s role as “DAD” meant “Deliberate Ache Deferment” for his children (Shafak, 2006, p.335). The attachment theory attributes the fathers’ maltreatment towards their children as a very likely cause of the intergenerational transmission of violence which has been observed in Levent’s role as a father.

The Third Generation

Levent’s son Mustafa is a critical character in the study of intergenerational trauma in Shafak’s *The Bastard of Istanbul*. A paradoxical combination of hostile and helpless parenting is practised by Levent and Gulsum towards Mustafa as he is “pampered, molycoddled [and] spoiled” by Gulsum but on the other hand, Levent “[beats] him, no matter his age”. Such stark contrast between the parenting of mother and father leaves on Mustafa’s personality as he grows up to be a confused man with an insecure attachment relationship with both of his parents. Where the excessive dotting of his mother boosts his ego, his father’s punitive behaviours leave irreparable damage to his self-esteem, as a consequence of which, he develops a paradoxical “narcissistic and insecure” personality. Levent not only “spit on him and spank him” frequently but also strictly prohibits Mustafa from crying and forces him to display masculine behaviour (Shafak, 2006, p. 31-46). As a consequence, Mustafa develops hatred towards crying and prides himself for “never crying”, not “even a tear” when Levent beats him with his leather belt and becomes disgusted at himself for letting out an involuntary “gasp” “in between spankings” (Shafak,

2006, p. 314-315) In light of such an intense history of emotional and physical abuse, this study infers that he develops a disorganized attachment pattern and cultivates several maladaptive coping strategies including *social isolation, emotional suppression, unstable sense of self, avoidance (escapism) cultivated amnesia and hyper-sexuality*.

The most deleterious among Mustafa's maladaptive defence strategy, which drastically affects his life, is *hyper-sexuality*. Alexander (2014) elaborates that if a child, during his developmentally sensitive period, experiences long-term psychological and physical maltreatment due to his exposure to a high-risk family environment, or hostile parent-child relationship, he is more likely to have compromised sexual development. This explains Mustafa's odd preoccupation with sexuality at a precariously early age. He struggles with his sexuality as soon as he hits puberty he experiences and hates his exaggerated "carnal cravings" that overwhelm him like "some contagious disease" (Shafak, 2006, p. 166,313). It needs to be understood that his sexual perversion is somehow a product of the psychological and physical abuse he suffered in his childhood at the hands of his father. From his early childhood, due to Levent's strict prohibition of the display of emotions and vulnerability, Mustafa represses the most innocent of his emotions which resurface in the form of his sexual perversion and impulsive sexual behaviour. A research study by Maniglio (2012) explain that early attachment disruptions and interpersonal difficulties can contribute to the development of deviant sexual fantasies which leads to the adolescent's dependence on a partner of opposite gender to meet his or her attachment-related needs for intimacy, sexuality and emotional closeness. Likewise, Mustafa fails to have a normal social life, instead, he remains lonely and struggles "unspeakable thoughts about women". His carnal desires become so obsessive that he begins frequenting prostitutes and intentionally chooses "dingy" places for "disgraceful sex...[and finds] the cruder and the uglier the better" (Shafak, 2006, p. 313). Ultimately, his hypersexuality leads to his dysfunctional social behaviour and his sexual offence against his younger sister Zeliha.

Zeliha Kazanci, just like her brother Mustafa, shares a highly insecure attachment relationship with both her parents due to her childhood abuse at their hands. Levent's "regular spankings" and verbal abuse affect Zeliha so intensely that after his death, she wants to visit his grave to confront him for being excessively "harsh and unloving toward his...flesh and blood" and to tell him that "his ghost still haunts them" (Shafak, 2006, p. 308, 313). Unable to process her anger and frustration over her childhood abuse, Zeliha internalizes her trauma and fails to develop a "positive internal working model of herself and others" and consequently deactivates her attachment needs. This study infers that, like her father, she also develops a "Dismissing-Avoidant Attachment" pattern and adopts an emotionally avoidant and dismissive attitude in her relationships including her own emotions and feelings. As per the attachment theory, a person with avoidant-dismissing attachment minimizes the importance of attachment relationships and maintains an emotionally distant attitude towards them – which is evident in Zeliha's case. She overtly adopts an aggressive and rebellious demeanour based on multiple maladaptive behaviours including *anger, rebellion, defiance, verbal aggression, emotional suppression, compulsive self-reliance and self-harm*. Zeliha blatantly defies the moral codes of her family and believes that a person cannot be even "said to be alive" who cannot "rise and rebel" (Shafak, 2006, p. 221). Zeliha's rebellion, defiance and verbal aggression is the product of Levent's childhood abuse against her, as explained by a research on parental attachment and aggression according to which a father has a key role in the development of either pro-social or aggressive behaviour of his children (Zhang & Wang, 2020).

The Mustafa-Zeliha dyad is based on a very complicated relationship dynamic as in addition to being siblings who are victims of an extremely abusive father, they share a relationship of a victim and a perpetrator and are also parents of their daughter Asya. Having grown up in a hostile family environment, both Mustafa and Zeliha lack effective

affective (emotional) communication skills and therefore share a highly insecure and toxic relationship devoid of mutual respect and reverence. Sahithya B.R. (2017) associates chronic aggressive interactions among siblings with their intention “to cause harm and to dominate” the other, which can be observed in the Mustafa-Zeliha dyad (p 2-7). One day, at the age of twenty and eighteen respectively, Mustafa attempts to establish his supremacy over Zeliha as the authoritative head of the family while Zeliha strives to defy his dominance through verbal aggression. The conflict between Mustafa and Zeliha begins over something as insignificant as a “razor blade” but ends in the sexual abuse of Zeliha perpetrated by Mustafa, and ultimately leaves significant scars of trauma on the lives of both the victim and the perpetrator alike.

Shafak has explored the taboo subject of sexual trauma caused by a sibling that is far distinct from non-sibling sexual trauma but the subject is not usually widely explored due to its controversial nature. Mustafa’s role as a rapist of his sister can be understood from to a research study based on the link between insecure attachment and sexual perpetration according to which child sexual abusers and rapists have been observed to have “greater overall intimacy deficits” usually because of growing up in families with “dysfunctional relationships” and having poor parenting based on “harsh physical discipline” and “absence of warmth and accepting support”. All of these factors collectively set a stage for risky behaviour, especially with regard to sexuality”, which can be observed in Mustafa’s case (Miner et al., 2010, p. 59-62). Due to their conflictual family dynamics and insecure relationships with their parents, both Mustafa and Zeliha have compromised emotional development. While Mustafa struggles with maladaptive *low esteem*, *insecure sense of self* and *hypersexuality*, Zeliha’s behaviour is dominated by *rebellion*, *defiance* and *verbal aggression*. The combination of the two results in the disastrous consequence in the form of Zeliha rape’s by Mustafa. The repercussions of this incestuous rape haunt the victim and the perpetrator alike as both Zeliha and Mustafa pay its price for the rest of their lives. Mustafa ultimately commits suicide while Zeliha experiences far more severe and complex ramifications of her rape as she gives birth to her brother’s daughter Asya, whose existence proves to be a constant reminder of her sexual trauma. Therefore, the intergenerational implication of Levent’s childhood trauma has been observed in his children’s behaviours and actions - as Zeliha victimizes Mustafa emotionally and verbally while Mustafa perpetrates physical and sexual trauma against her and hence, the cursed cycle of intergenerational trauma continues.

The Fourth Generation

Zeliha Kazanci, after her rape, unapologetically embraces herself as a “sinner” and the nasty “culprit of the righteous Kazanci family” and therefore, defiantly gives birth to her daughter Asya “out of wedlock” (Shafak, 2006, p. 258-259). The relationship between Asya and Zeliha is highly insecure due to its inherently abnormal and controversial nature. Asya’s existence as a product of incest and rape, alone, proves to be the prime cause of their insecure attachment relationship. Liotti (1992) observes that, in certain cases, a “child’s very presence may elicit reminders of the parent’s own history of abuse” (p. 196). This observation remarkably elucidates the dilemma of Asya and Zeliha’s relationship as Shafak explains that Asya often feels guilty and struggles to understand her faults that might have “upset her mother” but fails to realize that it is “her very existence” which distresses Zeliha (Shafak, 2006, p. 306). Sokolowski et al. (2007) found that “a mother’s negative relationship with the father of her child” affects the mother-child relationship and it has been particularly observed in the case of rape survivors, who give birth to their perpetrator’s child, that they have “distorted and negative mental representations” of themselves and their children (p. 7). The same is apparent in Asya-Zeliha Dyad as Zeliha’s dismissive behaviour towards Asya is driven by Asya’s existence as the constant reminder of “rape” as “she sees” Mustafa in Asya’s “face” (Shafak, 2006, p. 306). It can therefore be deduced that Zeliha, as a parent with an avoidant-dismissing attachment pattern and

complex trauma history, adopts emotionally withdrawn behaviour towards Asya which proves to be emotionally traumatizing for her. As a result, Asya struggles with self-blame, doubts, and guilt as she fails to understand the actual cause behind Zeliha's maternal insensitivity.

Furthermore, born and bred a "bastard", Asya remains unacquainted with the concept of having a father as since her birth, "there [is] no father around", and no one even knows about the identity of her father "other than Zeliha of course", so her family acts as if there's "no such thing as a father" (Shafak, 2006, p. 146, 335). Therefore, in addition to Zeliha's avoidant-dismissing attachment relationship, there is an outright lack of existence of a father figure in Asya's life. This complex hybrid of maternal insensitivity and paternal deprivation results in the development of a negative internal working model in her which leads to her negative sense of self and others. In the light of these observations, it can be deduced that Asya develops a disorganized attachment pattern as Alexander explains that "a mother's affective (emotional) communication errors" and "emotional withdrawal" from the child" play a key role in "the development of disorganized attachment". She also maintains that that "paternal deprivation is an insidious form of maltreatment" as the child's experience of "lack of protection associated with lack of paternal involvement leads to disorganized attachment, with all its implications for cycles of violence or trauma" (Alexander, 2014, p. 49, 69).

The repercussions of Asya's disorganized attachment pattern manifest through multiple maladaptive behaviours including *anger, aggression, self-harm, drug addiction and hypersexuality*. Shafak equates Asya with a classic "Dostoyevsky character" as her personality is full of "rage, satire, and wit". Asya struggles with "rage" and "temper" due to which she becomes highly "sensitive" and "reactive" towards her surroundings, so much so, that she remains "ready to explode at any time" (Shafak, 2006, p. 182, 200). Moreover, she contains "bottomless potential for demolition", particularly against herself as she is "attracted to self-destruction [just] like a moth is attracted to the light". Asya herself acknowledges her self-destructive tendencies as she remarks that "maybe" it is so because "I was born a bastard" (Shafak, 2006, p. 146, 150). Alexander (2014) associates "higher levels of anger, aggression, low self-esteem, and depression" with maltreatment and the negative impact of the father's absence. She also observes that the "severity of a mother's unresolved trauma" is highly linked with the "child's deregulated anger, aggression and general distress", both of these factors can be observed in Asya's case. (p. 222). Since she never receives her parents' warmth, love and care, she believes herself to be undeserving of receiving the same from others and therefore develops intense self-loathing and self-hatred. As a consequence, Asya contains an intense emotional void inside which she attempts to fill through various self-destructive practices such as maladaptive *reliance on drugs*, and *alcohol* as well as her indulgence in *risky sexual behaviour* as Asya develops an addiction to "marijuana, rake (alcohol), and sex. Unable to cope with her internal void, she makes failed attempts to "commit suicide" as she believes herself to be excessively "young...foolish...furious [and] intense" for the life she is born into (Shafak, 2006, p. 62, 151, 199).

Conclusion

To conclude, four consecutive generations of Shafak's fictional Kazanci family have been observed to pass on their inherited trauma. The chain of trauma beginning from Shushan's childhood exposure to genocide leads to her dysfunctional role as a mother, the consequent role of Levent as an abusive father, Mustafa and Zeliha's compromised emotional development in response to their childhood abuse and ultimately results in Asya's controversial existence as a product of rape and incest. Highlighting the impact of trauma across generations, Shafak herself poses a question at the end of the novel "If Levent Kazanci had not grown up to be such a bitter and abusive man, would his only son, Mustafa, have ended up being a different person? If generations ago in 1915 Shushan

hadn't been left an orphan, would Asya today still be a bastard?" (Shafak, 2006, p. 355). In the light of the reasoning provided by Bowlby's Attachment theory, the answer to Shafak's question is "No" as per the findings of this study. Through an in-depth analysis of the Kazanci family, the study has observed that a complex hybrid of three interdependent channels i.e. insecure attachment relationships, childhood trauma and maladaptive coping behaviours collectively transfer trauma from one generation to another and if these channels are not interrupted by any generation, the chain of intergenerational trauma remains unbroken.

Recommendations

The present study can prove to be useful for future researchers as a model or cue for the study of emotional consequences of trauma that reverberate across generations. Since intergenerational trauma is an emerging field of study, a wide array of trauma literature can be analyzed using various psychological research approaches to understand multigenerational accounts of individual and collective suffering caused by factors like slavery, colonization, violence, discrimination, warfare, genocide, loss or separation from loved ones. For this purpose this research article recommends few contemporary works on intergenerational trauma such as *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, *The Seed Keeper* (2021) by Diane Wilson, *Pachinko* (2017) by Min Jin Lee, *Homegoing* (2016) by Yaa Gyasi and *Salt Houses* (2017) by Hala Alyan.

References

- Alexander, P. C. (2014). *Intergenerational cycles of trauma and violence: An attachment and family systems perspective*. W. W. Norton and Company.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. Basic Books
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative and history*. Johns Hopkins University Press
- Chaudhary, D. F., & Munawar, A. (2023). Un-burying the buried: Exploring silence and generational trauma in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*.
- Cook, A., Spinazzola, J., Ford, J., Lanktree, C., Blaustein, M., Cloitre, M., DeRosa, R., & van der Kolk, B. (2005). Complex trauma in children and adolescents. *Psychiatric Annals*, 35(5), 390–398
- Cooke, R. (2021, 8). Novelist Elif Shafak: "I've always believed in inherited pain." *The Guardian*
- Crittenden, P. M., & Landini, A. (2011). *The adult attachment interview: Assessing psychological and interpersonal strategies*. Norton.
- Danieli, Y. (Ed.). (1998). *International handbook of multigenerational legacies of trauma*. Plenum.
- DeAngelis, T. (2019, February). *The legacy of trauma*. Monitor on Psychology.
- Erozkan, A. (2016). The link between types of attachment and childhood trauma. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 4(5), 1152–1160.
- Fonagy, P. (2008). Attachment, trauma, and psychoanalysis: Where psychoanalysis meets neuroscience.
- Freud, S. (2012). *A general introduction to psychoanalysis*. Wordsworth Editions.
- Garland, C. (2018). *Understanding trauma: A psychoanalytical approach*. Routledge.
- Güler Uğur, N. (2020). *Representations of sexual trauma and the potential for recovery: The case of Elif Şafak's trauma fiction*. Leiden University Scholarly Publications.
- Kulish, T. (2021). *If you never heal from what hurt you, you'll bleed on people who didn't cut you*. Tamara Kulish – Empowered Results Life Coach.
- Liotti, G. (1992). Disorganized/disoriented attachment in the etiology of the dissociative disorders. *Dissociation*, 5(4), 196–204.
- Maniglio, R. (2012). The role of parent-child bonding, attachment, and interpersonal problems in the development of deviant sexual fantasies in sexual offenders. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 13(2), 83–96

- Menger Leeman, J. M. (2018). Living our parents' trauma: Effects of child abuse and neglect on the next generation [Doctoral thesis, Australian Catholic University]. ACU Research Bank.
- Miner, M. H., Robinson, B. E., Knight, R. A., Berg, D., Romine, R. S., & Netland, J. (2010). Understanding sexual perpetration against children: Effects of attachment style, interpersonal involvement, and hypersexuality. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 22(1), 58–77
- Newcomb, M. D., & Locke, T. F. (2001). Type-specific intergenerational transmission of neglectful and physically abusive parenting behaviors among young parents. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 25(10), 1239–1261
- Quote Investigator. (2019). *Hurt people hurt people* - Charles Eads. <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2019/09/15/hurt/>
- Sahithya, B. R., Manohari, S. M., & Vijaya, R. (2019). Parenting styles and their impact on children: A cross-cultural review with a focus on India. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 22(4), 357–383
- Sahithya, B. R. (2017). Sibling bullying: When it's more than rivalry. *Psychological Reflections*.
- Shafak, E. (2008). *The bastard of Istanbul* (2nd ed.). Penguin.
- Shafak, E. (2021, December 18). Can we inherit #family traumas? *Say Your Word / Elif Shafak* [Video]. YouTube
- Sokolowski, M. S., Hans, S. L., Bernstein, V. J., & Cox, S. M. (2007). Mothers' representations of their infants and parenting behavior: Associations with personal and social-contextual variables in a high-risk sample. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 28(3), 344–365.
- Van der Kolk, B. A., Perry, J. C., & Herman, J. L. (1991). Childhood origins of self-destructive behavior. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 148(12), 1665–1671.
- Waniek, I. (2014). Identity issues in Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul*. *Analele Universității Creștine Dimitrie Cantemir, Seria Științele Limbii, Literaturii și Didactica Predării*.
- Zhang, H., & Wang, Z. (2020). Parental attachment and proactive-reactive aggression in adolescents: The mediating roles of self-control and perspective taking. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 108, 104673.