



Work and Family in the Postfeminist World

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Abstract

A few decades ago, getting married and starting a family were the main objectives for young women. After being married, women's responsibility was to look after their families. The men's responsibilities included working and meeting their families' financial requirements. Nowadays, women are required to do more things than before. Young women have to be financially independent, have a career and create their own social life. In other words, women become responsible for double effort and work, as they work for pay in the public sphere and unpaid work in their houses. This means a new role and burden are added to the women's shoulders, obliging them to act as if they are superwomen. Postfeminists blame feminists for creating a specific image of a successful woman. These social standards for successful modern women force them to fight to meet those standards. This results in an exhausting woman who suffers from self-doubt and a sense of failure if she does not conform to the modern feminist woman image.

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Introduction

Dickerson mentions this idea in her article "Young Women Struggling for an Identity." She says: I wondered about the legacy of feminism and its effects on young women, I noticed how they experience tremendous pressure to accomplish many things, including how to find a partner, determine their careers, ... When young women face these multiple expectations, instead of asking themselves, What works for me? They find themselves caving in to the pressure and feeling like failures for not measuring up. (338)

On the other hand, the majority of middle-class women in the post-industrial world become employees in a workforce, which causes the most recent change in economic state and empowerment in the postfeminist family. The male breadwinner role does not become the responsibility of the husband alone; both couples share this role. This leads to reducing a man's role in the family, which has a bad effect on both men and women. The woman finds that she does not need the man anymore, and the man feels that he is a useless cripple in his family. Faludi, in her book, illustrates this idea by mentioning George Gilder's words from his book *Wealth and Poverty*. Faludi explains that the man feels more helpless now. Men's responsibility as a provider—the archetypal male occupation from the earliest days of the hunt through the Industrial Revolution and into modern life—has largely been taken from him. According to Gilder, the feminist movement has undermined the role of the male provider twice: "first, directly, by encouraging women to work, and then, indirectly, by championing social welfare programs that allow wives to survive without their husbands" (302). Kay Ebeling, in "Has Feminism Failed," also explains that feminism's message is "woman, you don't need a man" (11). It is a way of thinking that makes divorce and cohabitation commonplace. It forces mothers into poverty and forces them to raise their kids by themselves. "Feminism made women disposable. The reality (today) is a lot of frenzied and overworked women often abandoned by men" (11).

Postfeminism encourages women to choose their own lives, as choice achieves equality, freedom, and empowerment for women. Postfeminism admits that feminism gives women the freedom to work, but it neglects their freedom from working and enjoying their lives. The woman can choose freely to sit at home and leave her career to take care of her husband and family. Laura Denison says: "The idea behind feminism is equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome" (56). Success is demonstrated by the fact that women can decide whether or not to pursue such a career. Haya El Nasser writes in the USA Today newspaper an article entitled "For More Parents, Three Kids Are a Charm":

In this post-feminist era, women who are educated and in good jobs are not afraid to lose their professional standing if they have children. They take it as a given that they can have both. Rather than delay childbirth or opt for smaller families, they're prepared to juggle the two, delay the launch of careers or take a break from successful jobs. Some who quit work view motherhood as a second career and envision starting a third when they're ready to return to work. (qtd in Denison. 100)

Postfeminism accuses feminism of pushing women to abandon their husbands and their homes for the loneliness of work and career. This over-expectation and

rejection of the traditional structure of family make women deserve to live an unhappy and lonely life. Budgeon says: "It is argued that postfeminism promotes an image of feminism as being responsible for the unhappiness women experience as a result of trying to have it all rather than as a movement that provides solutions to the problems women face" (13). Also, Susan Faludi mentions that a choice "implies only one correct answer: take the rocky road to selfish and lonely independence or the well-paved path to home and a flickering hearth. No middle route was visible on the trend story's map of the moral feminine universe" (96).

Postfeminism struggles for new family relationships; it is called the new traditionalism. The new traditionalism defines postfeminism as a return to prefeminist roles, arrangements and social spaces. The nostalgia to return to the traditional structure and peaceful family relationships lets women have good relationships with their husbands, children, home and even recognize themselves. As Denison illustrates:

Post feminism and particularly postfeminist television relies on nostalgia, or the pining for the days of old when women's lives were easier despite the fact that they had limited choices. The era of postfeminist television is in essence a return to the values of the 1950s where the trend is to show women at the center of family life. The work identity that most female television characters now have is never achieved at the expense of the family role and women are more frequently seen in full time domestic and mothering roles. (66)

The postfeminist adoption of the new traditionalism is considered a backlash to the disintegration of the feminist family. Faludi explains the meaning of the new traditionalist as: "an independent thinker who made her own choices and started a revolution. She's not following a trend. She is the trend" (106). She also adds: "The women now flee the office and hammer at the homestead door. Their new quest is to return to traditional marriage, not challenge its construction; they want to escape the workplace, not remake it" (139).

Charlotte Brunson identifies the nostalgia for traditional families and traditional female roles in the postfeminist world. She examines the highly successful television shows "Martha, Martha, and Nigella." She writes that there are now food and gardening programmes on television almost every night. She is interested in the connection between this rebirth of domestic television and feminism because many of these programmes have female hosts. She hints that postfeminism pushes women to know about the things that they are supposed to know well. Brunson explains, in her essay, these programmes that call women back to the kitchen do not represent the first or second wave of feminism. Joanne Hollows also shows the relationship between postfeminism and cooking in her article, "Feeling Like a Domestic Goddess." She asserts that postfeminist women enjoy practising their femininity and cooking to please their families. She also says that there is a relationship between cooking, caring for others and their feminine identity.

In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, Shafak addresses the importance of family and its customary construction. She lists many families' stories in this novel. She shows the value of having a family through many of her characters. The writer mentions that Kazanci's family welcomes Mustafa after twenty years of absence as if he had never

been away from them. Asya tells her aunt Feride: "It's been twenty years. Isn't it strange? The man never visits us, and now here I am scooping out his *ashure* because we still welcome him" (Bol 320). Feride insists on the importance of a strong family relationship and traditional construction. She answers her niece: "Of course we will welcome your uncle. Family is family, whether you like it or not. We are not like the Germans; they kick their children out of the house at the age of fourteen. We have strong family values" (Bol 320).

Shafak also describes Rose's suffering after divorce and her need for a family. Through the monologue, Rose explains that she tried to live a happy life with her husband and her daughter. She accused her husband's family of ruining her married life and her family. She says: "Who could possibly call her an irresponsible mom? How could they accuse her of paying no heed to her baby girl's needs? Had she not given up her college education when the baby was born? Had she not been working hard to sustain this marriage?" (Bol 39). Shafak also adds: "If that Tchakmakhchian gang had not poked their aquiline noses into her marriage, Rose thought, her husband would still be by her side" (Bol 40). Shafak also states that Rose misses the warm feeling of having a family after her divorce from Barsam. The writer describes Rose's feeling when she sees any couple: "A Mexican American couple crossed the sidewalk, she pushing a baby in a stroller, he holding the hand of a toddler. They walked unhurriedly while Rose watched them with envy. Now that her marriage was over, every couple she saw seemed blissfully content" (Bol 46).

Shafak claims that the traditional structure of a family is very important to society. She demonstrates that Turkey only cares about the children of married couples, not the bastard child. When Zeliha intends to have an abortion, she does not need her husband's consent. Actually, she does not need written approval from anyone. Shafak explains: "The bureaucratic regulations were less keen to rescue babies born out of wedlock than those born to married couples. A fatherless baby in Istanbul was just another bastard, and a bastard just another sagging tooth in the city's jaw, ready to fall out at any time" (Bol 12).

Even Asya misses the feeling of having a father and the traditional family structure. Having a family of four mothers does not compensate for the importance of a father in the family. Asya expresses her need for a father in her life by saying: "If my father were deceased, this vagueness would be over once and for all. That's what infuriates me most. I can't help thinking he could be anyone. When you have absolutely no idea what kind of a man your father is, your imagination fills in the void" (Bol 174). She also explains that her ignorance of her father's identity makes her feel lost and unsafe. She feels that she does not have a past or a future either. Asya's speech clarifies: "You can't feel attached to ancestors if you can't even trace your own father" (Bol 180).

Elif Shafak demonstrates that a woman has complete freedom in deciding whether or not to work. Shafak does not obligate any woman, in this novel, to work to prove to her society that she is equal with a man and that she can do whatever a man does. She also lets the female characters choose the type of work they want. Zeliha is totally free to choose her work. She realizes that she wants a job that is creative and lets her be independent. When Zeliha founded her tattoo shop ten years ago,

she began to compile a collection of unique designs. Shafak asserts Zeliha's choice by saying: "She had realized at an early age that she would have to choose a profession where she could be both independent and inventive-and also, if possible, inflict a bit of pain" (BoI 72). Rose also decides to drop out of college after the birth of her child, Armanoush. She finds a job at the university cafeteria to help her take care of her daughter.

Shafak does not mention that either Asya or Armanoush work at any job. The writer does not give a great deal of focus on the necessity for women to work in the postfeminist world. She explains the different types of women through the three generations: the traditional woman generation; the modern or feminist woman generation; and the postmodern or postfeminist woman generation. Shafak describes two types of women through a party scene in Riza Kazanci and Petite-Ma's house. The first type is the traditional woman or wife who is taking care of her femininity. Shafak describes that they are giggling in a feminine way and they wear colourful satin gowns, which give the impression of innocence and sensitivity.

The second type is the feminist woman or the professionals who represent "*the new Turkish female*" (BoI 140). Shafak describes how they get rid of their femininity in order to climb the career ladder. She says: "Unlike their mothers they were not confined to the house and had the chance to climb the social, economic, and cultural ladder, provided that they shed their sexuality and femininity on the way there" (BoI 140). Shafak is referring to the fact that each of those two types believes the other is not a good enough woman. The professionals consider the wives "concubines," and the wives consider the professionals "comrades." It indicates another type of woman who does not belong to the previous two types. That woman mixes between the traditional woman and the feminist woman. This woman is a postfeminist woman. Shafak illustrates that Petite-Ma "identified herself with neither group" (BoI 141).

In *Three Daughters of Eve*, Shafak develops the female character to an extent that allows her to freely reveal that she is a housewife without feeling any shame. Peri has been described as a "fine wife, a fine mother, a fine housewife, a fine citizen, a fine modern Muslim" (TDoE 4). Shafak does not underestimate the value of the housewife. She encourages the reader to respect the woman's decision, whether she decides to share in the work sphere or sit at home to take care of her family. In Oxford, Peri decides to find a part-time job to provide for her tuition fees, so she works in a bookshop. Once she returns to Istanbul and gets married, she decides to devote her life to her family. Peri mixes between being a well-educated woman and a good mother and housewife.

In this novel, Shafak displays two families. The first one is Mensur's family. The second is Adnan's family. Through narrating and comparing the two families, Shafak establishes the importance of having a close-knit family. In the first family, Shafak highlights the unhappy marriage life and the lack of understanding between Peri's parents. Shafak describes the relationship between Mensur and Selma by saying: "They were as incompatible as tavern and mosque. The frowns that descended on their brows, the stiffness that infused their voices, identified them not as a couple in love, but as opponents in a game of chess" (TDoE 16). Shafak also displays the disintegration of Mensur's family. She stresses the troubled relationship between

Mensur and his son Hakan, and the gap between Selma and her daughter Peri. When Shafak describes the relationship between Mensur and Hakan, she says: "They quarrelled constantly, viciously, father and son, a jumble of male voices, hurtful accusations rising above the breakfast table, like shoals of dead fish floating to the surface after a dynamite explosion" (TDoE 67). Peri thinks that her travelling to Oxford and studying God could help to save her 'broken family.'

The second family is Adnan and Peri's. Shafak shows Peri's desire to make her family different from her parents' family by showing Peri's care for her family. Through describing the fighting scene between Peri and the tramp, Shafak reveals Peri's feelings, thoughts and care toward her family. The writer says that the tramp hits Peri so hard that she cannot breathe. "[Peri] thought of her daughter, waiting in her car. She thought of her two young sons, watching their favourite TV show at home. An image of her husband swam into her head. ... The realization that she might never again see her loved ones brought tears to her eyes." (TDoE 40)

Shafak also introduces a new kind of man, a postmodern man who prefers a strong woman to a vulnerable woman who is easily harmed. At the end of this novel, Azur tells Peri that he does not fall in love with her because she reminds him of his old love, Nour. He is afraid to hurt Peri like he did with Nour. Azur prefers Shirin because she is such a strong woman that no one would be tempted to defeat her. Azur tells Peri via phone:

I became anxious that I could hurt you just like I had hurt [Nour]. The truth is, I know I've ended up harming every woman who's reached out to me. Except Shirin. She was invincible. She seemed so. She was younger, but she was strong, stubborn. A natural-born warrior. Next to her there was nothing to worry about. Nothing bad would ever happen to her. (TDoE 363)

Abbreviations

Bol	<i>The Bastard of Istanbul</i>
TDoE	<i>Three Daughters of Eve</i>

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