



BODIES IN REVOLT: CONSTRUCTION OF CONFINEMENT AND THE UNHOMELY SELF IN ELIF SHAFAK'S *HONOR* AND *10 MINUTES 38 SECONDS IN THIS STRANGE WORLD*

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Abstract

*This article examines how Elif Shafak constructs the female body as a site of confinement, resistance, and self-reclamation in *Honor* (2011) and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019). Drawing on postcolonial feminist theory and Homi Bhabha's concept of the "unhomely," the study explores how Shafak's women navigate intersecting structures of patriarchy, displacement, and identity. Through close textual analysis, the paper demonstrates that Shafak redefines womanhood not as passive victimhood but as embodied agency, transforming the female body from a symbol of silence into a medium of revolt. *Honor* exposes the internalized forms of othering and moral confinement imposed upon women within familial and diasporic spaces, while *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* reimagines the post-mortem female body as a locus of narrative and spiritual liberation. Together, the novels articulate a transnational feminist consciousness that challenges binary notions of purity and sin, home and exile, life and death. Shafak's fiction ultimately envisions the "unhomed self" as a dynamic, resistant identity that subverts patriarchal control through memory, storytelling, and embodied resilience.*

Keywords: *Elif Shafak, postcolonial feminism, embodiment, othering, unhomed self, resistance.*

1. Introduction

Elif Shafak's fiction offers a compelling exploration of women's existence within patriarchal, transnational, and often fragmented cultural spaces. As a Turkish-British novelist who writes both in English and Turkish, Shafak stands at the intersection of East and West, continuously interrogating gender, identity, and belonging in her narratives. Her female characters are not only victims of systemic oppression but also agents of transformation, negotiating between confinement and revolt. Through novels such as *Honor* (2011) and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019), Shafak constructs female bodies as both sites of social inscription and mediums of resistance, articulating what Butler (1993) terms "the performativity of gendered suffering" (p. 95).

In *Honor*, Shafak exposes the deeply ingrained patriarchal codes surrounding female purity, family honor, and shame within diasporic Turkish communities in London. The protagonist, Pembe, becomes the embodiment of the gendered burden of "honor," which defines women's morality through men's control over their bodies. Shafak (2011) writes, "Honor, once stained, could never be cleaned, not with water, not with tears, and not with blood" (p. 47). This symbolic equation of womanhood with purity situates the female body as a contested terrain, echoing Spivak's (1988) assertion that "the subaltern cannot speak" when her identity is mediated through patriarchal and colonial discourses. Similarly, Pembe's silence and eventual death



represent not merely personal tragedy but the collective violence inflicted upon women's voices across generations.

Conversely, *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* reconfigures the notion of confinement by transforming the posthumous female body into a narrative site of rebellion. The novel opens with Leila's consciousness persisting for ten minutes and thirty-eight seconds after her death, during which she recalls fragments of her life as a sex worker in Istanbul. Through this temporal defiance of biological death, Shafak challenges the traditional objectification of the female corpse. Leila's memories turn the body into what Braidotti (2011) describes as "a material-semiotic threshold of becoming" (p. 56). Shafak (2019) writes, "Even in death, Leila was thinking, her mind a whirlpool of images refusing to fade into nothingness" (p. 9). The persistence of her consciousness symbolizes a revolt against the erasure of women deemed socially disposable. This duality, between *Honor's* silenced domestic confinement and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds'* posthumous liberation, captures what Homi Bhabha (1994) defines as the "unhomely condition", a psychic displacement experienced by those inhabiting the borderlands of identity and geography. Shafak's protagonists live "in-between" spaces: between East and West, religion and secularism, life and death. The "unhomely self" thus becomes a metaphor for postcolonial femininity, alienated yet resistant, confined yet creative. As Öztürk (2020) argues, Shafak's fiction "translates the migrant woman's experience into a language of empathy that refuses both victimhood and assimilation" (p. 112).

Moreover, Shafak's narrative style itself embodies hybridity. Her use of multiple narrators, nonlinear timelines, and magical realism blurs distinctions between realism and myth, echoing Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity as a space of subversive potential. In *Honor*, for instance, the story moves between rural Turkey and immigrant London, exposing the transgenerational trauma of gendered expectations. The spatial dislocation mirrors the characters' psychological unhomeliness. Similarly, in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds*, Leila's fragmented memories unfold through sensual triggers, taste, sound, and smell, transforming her body into a repository of personal and collective history. Thematically, both novels dismantle the ideological binaries that confine women: purity versus sin, home versus exile, body versus soul. Shafak (2019) herself notes in an interview that she writes "against the dualities that reduce human beings to one-dimensional identities" (as cited in Akman, 2020, p. 4). By doing so, she situates her work within the continuum of postcolonial feminist discourse, where the personal becomes political and the body becomes a text of resistance. As Mohanty (2003) explains, postcolonial feminism seeks to "decolonize the category of 'woman'" by foregrounding the diversity and agency of women's lived realities (p. 42). This study therefore explores how Shafak's *Honor* and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* construct the female body as a locus of confinement and revolt, and how the "unhomely self" emerges as a response to patriarchal, cultural, and existential displacement. Drawing upon the frameworks of postcolonial feminism (Spivak, Mohanty, Suleri) and the unhomely (Bhabha), the paper argues that Shafak redefines womanhood not through victimization but through resilience. Her characters' fragmented identities reflect the complexities of global modernity, where belonging is always provisional, and freedom is an act of perpetual negotiation. In this way, Shafak's fiction not only amplifies marginalized female voices but also reimagines the body as a revolutionary archive of memory, loss, and transformation.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Lens

2.1. Representation of Women in Postcolonial Feminist Discourse

The representation of women within postcolonial contexts has long been contested in both feminist, cultural (Ahmad et al., 2022; Amjad et al., 2021), and psychological studies (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025; Ramzan et al., 2025, 2023). Postcolonial feminism emerged as a critical response to Western feminist generalizations that often homogenized women's experiences under the universal category of "woman" (Nawaz et al., 2022, 2021; Ramzan & Javaid, 2025). Scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) have argued that this universalization erases the diversity of women's voices, especially those from the Global South. Mohanty (2003) emphasizes the need to "decolonize feminism" by acknowledging that "women's lives are shaped by historical, cultural, and social contexts which differ radically across the globe" (p. 42). Similarly, Spivak's (1988) seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* questions whether marginalized women, doubly silenced by patriarchy and colonialism, can articulate their subjectivity without being re-inscribed into dominant Western frameworks. This theoretical backdrop is crucial to reading Elif Shafak, whose work resists essentialist depictions of Muslim and Middle Eastern women. As a transnational feminist writer, Shafak portrays her female characters as complex subjects negotiating hybrid identities. Her fiction aligns with what Suleri (1992) calls "the rhetoric of postcolonial intimacy," where the female body becomes a contested space between colonial history and gendered experience (p. 147). In *Honor* and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, Shafak's women navigate multiple systems of oppression, religious orthodoxy, patriarchal family structures, and moral policing, while simultaneously reclaiming their narrative authority. In this sense, Shafak's work resonates with Sara Ahmed's (2017) concept of "feminist living," which entails "a refusal to accommodate the very structures that make life unliveable" (p. 12). Pembe's and Leila's defiance, whether through forbidden love or the act of remembering after death, embodies this feminist politics of refusal. These women challenge the socio-cultural orders that attempt to define their worth, ultimately transforming confinement into resistance.

2.2. The Politics of the Body: Embodiment, Control, and Agency

The body has been a focal point of feminist theory, serving as the primary site where gender is performed, controlled, and contested. Judith Butler's (1993) notion of performativity in *Bodies That Matter* asserts that gender is not a fixed essence but a series of repeated social acts that produce the illusion of coherence. Within this framework, the body becomes a text upon which ideological and cultural norms are inscribed. Similarly, Susan Bordo (1993) conceptualizes the body as "a cultural text, a site of practical control and symbolic investment" (p. 165). Elif Shafak's portrayal of the female body as simultaneously vulnerable and defiant echoes these theories of embodied politics. In *Honor*, Pembe's body bears the consequences of patriarchal morality, her perceived transgression invites violence sanctioned by the very cultural codes that claim to protect women's dignity. Her death, orchestrated in the name of familial Honor, exemplifies how women's bodies function as repositories of collective shame and control. As Butler (2004) suggests, "vulnerability is not a weakness but a condition of relationality that can itself become political" (p. 43). Shafak transforms this vulnerability into an act of revolt: Pembe's silence becomes a haunting presence that indicts the patriarchal order long after her death. In contrast, Leila's posthumous narration in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*



reconfigures bodily death into narrative agency. Her consciousness, persisting beyond biological limits, resists the objectification of the female corpse, a recurring trope in patriarchal and sensationalist narratives. Braidotti's (2011) theory of "nomadic subjectivity" aptly applies here; she defines nomadic identity as one that "refuses fixity and embraces the mobility of embodied experience" (p. 56). Leila's fragmented memories, of smell, touch, and taste, reflect a body that transcends both death and social marginalization. By reclaiming the physical as a medium of storytelling, Shafak dismantles the dualism between body and mind, sin and sanctity, death and voice.

2.3. The Unhomely and Displacement in Postcolonial Feminism

Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) concept of "the unhomely" is pivotal to understanding Shafak's literary imagination. Bhabha posits that postcolonial subjects experience a sense of "unhomeliness" when the private sphere of domesticity becomes contaminated by the public forces of colonial and cultural displacement (p. 13). The unhomely space is thus not merely geographical but psychological condition of fragmented belonging and identity. In *Honor*, the Turkish immigrant family's relocation to London generates precisely this dislocation. The home, instead of being a refuge, becomes a site of alienation where traditional gender hierarchies persist even in exile. Pembe and her daughter Esma embody what Bhabha (1994) calls "the in-between", neither fully Turkish nor fully British, caught in a perpetual liminality (p. 2). Similarly, in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds*, Istanbul functions as an unhomely landscape: vibrant yet cruel, cosmopolitan yet exclusionary. For Leila, the city becomes both womb and tomb, a place of simultaneous belonging and estrangement. Scholars have noted this recurring motif in Shafak's fiction. Öztürk (2020) observes that her characters often "oscillate between multiple homes, only to realize that none can contain them" (p. 115). The unhomely thus becomes a metaphor for the diasporic and gendered self, rootless yet imaginative, confined yet creative. Through this lens, the female body in Shafak's novels is not only a victim of displacement but also a mobile archive of cultural memory.

2.4. Scholarship on Elif Shafak and Feminist Resistance

Existing scholarship on Elif Shafak reveals a consistent interest in her negotiation of gender, spirituality, and cultural hybridity. Akman (2020) emphasizes that Shafak's female characters "refuse the binary of victimhood and emancipation, instead inhabiting a spectrum of embodied resistance" (p. 8). Similarly, Choudhury (2021) highlights Shafak's use of transnational spaces to critique "Honor-based moral economies that commodify female virtue" (p. 62). These studies situate Shafak within a global feminist tradition that transcends regional boundaries. However, a closer reading of *Honor* and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* reveals a unique intersection between the politics of the body and the psychology of unhomeliness, a dimension that has not been sufficiently addressed in existing criticism. The concept of "bodies in revolt" introduced in this paper extends beyond resistance to encompass the creative reconstitution of selfhood within uninhabitable worlds. In doing so, this research aligns with Bhabha's (1994) assertion that "to dwell in the beyond is to inhabit an interstitial intimacy that transforms the boundaries of cultural identity" (p. 19). Therefore, this article situates Shafak's novels at the confluence of postcolonial feminism, corporeal theory, and psycho-spatial displacement. By reading *Honor* and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* through these overlapping

lenses, it aims to demonstrate how Shafak constructs the female body as a site of revolt, where the unhomely self negotiates belonging through acts of memory, narration, and defiance.

3. Confinement and Patriarchal Spatiality in *Honor*

Elif Shafak's *Honor* (2011) unfolds as a complex meditation on gendered confinement within both domestic and diasporic spaces. Set between a Kurdish village near the Euphrates and an immigrant Turkish community in 1970s London, the novel interlaces themes of Honor, shame, and exile through the lives of twin sisters, Pembe and Jamila, and Pembe's son, Iskender. The narrative exposes how patriarchal ideology constructs the female body as a spatial and moral boundary, where purity, family reputation, and social belonging converge. In this sense, Shafak dramatizes what Foucault (1977) calls the "microphysics of power", the subtle, disciplinary mechanisms that regulate women's bodies within familial and cultural institutions (p. 26).

3.1. Honor as Spatial Confinement

The notion of "honor" in Shafak's novel functions as a socio-religious architecture of confinement, defining permissible spaces for women's physical and emotional movement. As Akman (2020) observes, "Shafak transforms honor from a moral abstraction into a spatial metaphor, a wall that both shelters and suffocates" (p. 7). Pembe Kazim, the novel's central female figure, lives under the weight of this invisible architecture. When she arrives in London with her husband Adem and their children, she exchanges the open landscapes of Anatolia for the claustrophobic interiors of a migrant household transition that mirrors the transposition of patriarchal control into diasporic space. Shafak (2011) writes, "The home was no longer a home but a cage, with invisible bars of duty and silence" (p. 132). This metaphor encapsulates how the domestic sphere, traditionally idealized as a woman's sanctuary, becomes a site of surveillance and submission. Despite living in a modern metropolis, Pembe's social world remains bounded by the same patriarchal codes that governed her village. Her honor is "portable", a burden she carries from one geography to another. This continuity demonstrates how cultural confinement transcends physical displacement, illustrating Bhabha's (1994) notion of "the unhomely," where the home becomes an uncanny extension of historical domination (p. 13).

3.2. The Policing of the Female Body

The regulation of the female body emerges as a central motif in *Honor*. Pembe's transgression, her emotional and physical involvement with Elias, becomes the ultimate violation of the familial order. Her body is no longer her own; it becomes a symbolic repository of collective shame. Shafak (2011) captures this in the devastating reflection: "A woman's sin was never her own; it belonged to the men who failed to control her" (p. 213). This collective ownership of women's morality aligns with Spivak's (1988) observation that the subaltern woman's body "is both the ground of patriarchal exchange and the site of its betrayal" (p. 299). Iskender's eventual decision to kill his mother in an Honor killing represents the internalization of patriarchal codes by the younger generation. Although born in Britain, he becomes the agent of an inherited cultural violence. In one of the most chilling passages, Shafak (2011) writes, "He saw himself as a soldier of tradition, restoring order to a world gone astray" (p. 231). The militaristic imagery, *soldier of tradition*, reveals how masculinity itself is produced through the enforcement of gendered boundaries. This policing extends beyond physical violence to encompass moral and psychological surveillance. Pembe's husband, Adem, exerts control not through affection but through neglect. His absence forces Pembe to uphold domestic stability alone, turning

motherhood into another form of servitude. As Ahmed (2017) explains, “The burden of happiness often falls on women, who must repair what patriarchy breaks” (p. 69). Pembe’s maternal labour, her silent endurance, and her obedience constitute invisible acts of confinement, forms of gendered imprisonment disguised as virtue.

3.3. Diaspora, Displacement, and the Unhomely

Shafak’s representation of confinement extends beyond gender to include the spatial disorientation of migration. The London of *Honor* is not a space of liberation but of layered exile. Pembe’s experience of dislocation transforms the diasporic home into what Bhabha (1994) calls an “unhomely threshold,” a space “where the borders between the world and the home become confused” (p. 15). This confusion manifests vividly in Shafak’s narrative structure. The novel alternates between Anatolia and London, past and present, weaving memory and exile into a continuous cycle of unfulfilled belonging. Jamila, Pembe’s twin, embodies the *other side* of this confinement, remaining in the homeland, she becomes a midwife, confined within tradition yet spiritually free. Pembe, by contrast, seeks freedom in migration but finds herself confined within invisible walls of diasporic patriarchy. As Öztürk (2020) observes, “Shafak’s diaspora is not geographical but psychological; her characters migrate across moral geographies rather than continents” (p. 118). This moral geography is inscribed upon the female body: Pembe’s movements are constantly monitored, restricted, and finally terminated by patriarchal violence. Even after her death, the boundaries that confined her body persist as guilt and trauma within her children, especially Esma, who must reconstruct her mother’s story to reclaim agency. In this way, *Honor* dramatizes what Butler (2004) terms “the precariousness of embodied life,” where vulnerability itself becomes the foundation of ethical resistance (p. 43). Esma’s act of narrating her family’s tragedy transforms inherited shame into a storytelling symbolic revolt against the silence imposed by patriarchy.

3.4. The Domestic as a Political Space

Shafak’s reconfiguration of domesticity aligns with feminist geographers such as Massey (1994), who argue that space is socially constructed and gendered. The private sphere, often idealized as feminine, becomes a political space where power, discipline, and rebellion converge. In *Honor*, the home is simultaneously a site of control and of latent resistance. Pembe’s clandestine meetings with Elias, though tragic in outcome, represent moments of embodied selfhood, brief ruptures in the spatial regime that confines her. Shafak’s lyrical prose captures this duality: “For the first time, she felt her body not as burden but as breath, a living part of the world around her” (Shafak, 2011, p. 209). This moment, though fleeting, signifies a reclamation of bodily subjectivity. It is precisely this reclamation that patriarchal violence seeks to extinguish. Yet, through Esma’s narration, the domestic becomes reimagined as a space of memory and testimony. Esma refuses to let the family home remain a monument to silence; instead, she transforms it into a discursive site of accountability. In doing so, she embodies what Ahmed (2017) calls “feminist willfulness”, the insistence on naming the wrongs that patriarchy seeks to erase (p. 177).

3.5. Honor, Guilt, and Intergenerational Trauma

The cyclical nature of confinement in *Honor* extends beyond Pembe’s generation. Iskender’s guilt and Esma’s fragmented memories reveal how trauma becomes inherited a “transgenerational haunting,” in Caruth’s (1996) terms (p. 11). The Honor killing, rather than

restoring order, fractures the family's collective identity. The narrative's temporal shifts and multiple perspectives mirror this fragmentation, suggesting that confinement is not merely physical but epistemological: a distortion of perception, memory, and identity. Shafak's decision to interweave first- and third-person narration allows the reader to inhabit the perspectives of both victim and perpetrator, exposing how patriarchal ideology colonizes consciousness. Even as Iskender realizes the futility of his act, his remorse cannot undo the inherited logic of Honor that shaped him. This tragic ambivalence situates *Honor* within what Braidotti (2011) describes as "the ethics of becoming," where subjectivity is formed through pain and transformation (p. 120). By the novel's end, confinement has been transfigured into a narrative process through which the silenced body speaks. Esma's reclamation of her mother's story constitutes what Spivak (1988) envisioned as the moment when "the subaltern begins to speak through the fissures of representation" (p. 308). The domestic and diasporic spaces that once confined Pembe become, through storytelling, the very arenas of revolt.

4. The Unhomely Body and Post-Mortem Consciousness in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*

Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019) deepens her exploration of embodied confinement by presenting the female body as both a site of trauma and a medium of transcendence. The novel opens at the moment of death, "Her heart had stopped beating, but her mind was still working" (Shafak, 2019, p. 3), introducing readers to Leila, a murdered sex worker whose consciousness persists for ten minutes and thirty-eight seconds after her death. Through this narrative device, Shafak transforms the body from an object of violence into an agent of narrative reclamation. In contrast to the silenced death of Pembe in *Honor*, Leila's posthumous voice dismantles the boundaries between life and death, silence and speech, body and memory. The result is a profoundly feminist reimagining of subjectivity: the body as a repository of lived experience that resists annihilation even in decay.

4.1. The Liminal Body: Life, Death, and Memory

Shafak's structuring of the narrative around Leila's final moments constructs what Kristeva (1982) terms "the abject", a state in which the body destabilizes the distinctions between self and other, life and death (p. 4). Yet unlike the traditional abject female corpse, often rendered passive and voiceless, Leila's body becomes an active narrator. Her memories unfold through sensory triggers: "She could still smell cardamom coffee... taste the syrupy baklava, feel the salt on her lips" (Shafak, 2019, p. 10). This sensual recall transforms decomposition into a mnemonic process; the dying body literally "remembers" itself into existence. In Braidotti's (2011) terms, this is the performance of a "nomadic body", a material consciousness that resists fixity and embraces transformation (p. 57). Leila's body refuses finality; it narrates, breathes, and remembers beyond death, reclaiming the agency denied to her in life. This liminality situates her within what Turner (1969) describes as "the threshold phase of ritual," a condition of in-betweenness where structures dissolve and new identities are possible (p. 96). Shafak converts the post-mortem moment into a ritual of resistance, in which memory becomes a form of revolt against erasure. The first part of the novel, "The Mind", is structured around these sensorial memories, with each chapter linked to a taste, smell, or texture. The materiality of the body, its fluids, senses, and decay, anchors Leila's consciousness, countering the cultural tendency to disassociate women from corporeality. As Bordo (1993) argues, "To write the body is to reclaim

it from the symbolic orders that define it as lack” (p. 182). Shafak enacts precisely this reclamation.

4.2. Patriarchy and the Politics of Disposability

Leila’s death is not accidental; it is symptomatic of a social system that devalues women who deviate from patriarchal norms. As a sex worker, Leila occupies what Butler (2004) calls “a socially undriveable position”, a life that “cannot be mourned because it never counted as a life” (p. 38). Her murderers dump her body into a dumpster, reducing her to waste, a powerful metaphor for what Grosz (1994) calls “the leaky, uncontrollable female body” marginalized by patriarchal discourse (p. 202). Shafak’s Istanbul, like the London of *Honor*, is an unhomely space, simultaneously intimate and hostile. The city promises cosmopolitanism but enforces exclusion; it shelters difference yet punishes it. As Leila recalls her childhood in a conservative Turkish household, readers witness the origins of her estrangement. Her father, a devout man obsessed with purity, confines her mother within the domestic sphere, insisting that “a woman’s Honor is her husband’s face in public” (Shafak, 2019, p. 47). This patriarchal proverb foreshadows Leila’s lifelong conflict between the desire for freedom and the cultural policing of female desire. Leila’s eventual decision to flee home parallels Pembe’s migration in *Honor*, both women seek escape from suffocating moral orders, yet both confront new forms of confinement in urban spaces. Leila’s work in Istanbul’s red-light district exposes the intersection of gender, class, and morality in defining which bodies are deemed legitimate. As Öztürk (2020) notes, “Shafak’s fallen women occupy a paradoxical space: they are excluded from home but become the conscience of the city” (p. 119). Through Leila’s perspective, Shafak critiques how modern patriarchies replicate the same control mechanisms as traditional ones, simply relocating them to new geographies of power.

4.3. The Unhomely City: Istanbul as Liminal Space

In *10 Minutes, 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, Istanbul itself becomes a living organism, beautiful, chaotic, and indifferent. Bhabha’s (1994) concept of “the unhomely” illuminates Shafak’s portrayal of this city. For Bhabha, the unhomely arises when “the border between home and the world becomes confused” (p. 15). Leila’s Istanbul embodies this confusion. It is at once maternal and monstrous, a space where belonging is continually negotiated and denied. Shafak’s descriptive passages blur the line between the corporeal and the urban. The city’s smells and sounds fuse with Leila’s memories, turning Istanbul into an extension of her dying body: “The Bosphorus smelled of salt and sorrow, and Leila’s lungs filled with it as though it were her own blood” (Shafak, 2019, p. 121). Here, the body and the city share the same rhythms of decay and renewal. The unhomely city absorbs the woman who no longer belongs anywhere, making the body itself a metaphor for exilic consciousness.

The burial of Leila’s body in the “Cemetery of the Companionless”, a real location in Istanbul where unclaimed corpses are interred, crystallizes the theme of social unhomeliness. The irony lies in how a woman denied dignity in life becomes the emotional and moral center of the narrative. Through her posthumous reflections and the efforts of her friends to retrieve her body, Shafak reconstitutes the notion of home, not as a fixed place but as an act of communal care. As Ahmed (2017) reminds us, “To make a home in a world that was not built for you is a feminist project” (p. 52). Leila’s chosen family, her friends Sabotage Sinan, Nostalgia Nalan, Zaynab122,

and Hollywood Humeyra, represent precisely this feminist reconstruction of belonging. They form an alternative home in defiance of the normative one that rejected her.

4.4. Friendship, Memory, and the Feminist Afterlife

The second part of the novel, “The Body”, reverses narrative focus, shifting from Leila’s consciousness to her friends’ efforts to honor her memory. This structural inversion embodies what Butler (2004) calls “the ethics of relationality,” the recognition that lives acquire meaning through interdependence (p. 22). Through these friendships, Shafak reconstructs an ethics of care grounded in shared marginality. Each friend carries a history of social exclusion, transgender identity, racialized poverty, sexual nonconformity, yet together they form a collective resistance to erasure. As Akman (2020) notes, Shafak’s “marginal characters create a microcosm of solidarity that subverts heteronormative and national boundaries” (p. 9). Their retrieval of Leila’s corpse from the Cemetery of the Companionless is a symbolic act of reclamation: the return of dignity to a body society deemed disposable. Leila’s final memory before her consciousness fades, of floating in the sea, feeling “at home in the waves, weightless and forgiven” (Shafak, 2019, p. 236), suggests a spiritual reconciliation between body and world. The sea functions as both burial and liberation, echoing what Braidotti (2011) terms the “affirmative ethics of becoming,” where death itself becomes a process of transformation rather than closure (p. 120). Shafak thus reframes mortality not as an end but as a continuation of feminist revolt, a persistence of memory against forgetting.

4.5. From Object to Voice: Narrative as Rebellion

Shafak’s choice to narrate through a posthumous female voice directly challenges patriarchal narrative structures that reduce women to silent victims. By granting speech to a murdered sex worker, she engages in what Spivak (1988) identifies as the political necessity of “allowing the subaltern to speak” (p. 308). Leila’s narration reclaims agency in the very space where she was denied it, the intersection of body, voice, and mortality. Furthermore, Shafak’s temporal structure, dividing the novel into “The Mind,” “The Body,” and “The Soul”, mirrors a feminist triptych of resistance: remembering, reclaiming, and transcending. The narrative thus performs what Bhabha (1994) describes as “the re-inscription of identity through the repetition of loss” (p. 71). Leila’s voice, fragmented yet enduring, resists closure, ensuring that her story becomes part of Istanbul’s living memory. The novel concludes with Leila’s friends lowering her body into the sea, fulfilling her symbolic desire for freedom. In this act, confinement is transfigured into movement; the body in revolt achieves peace through motion. Shafak ultimately redefines the unhomey not as estrangement but as an ethical openness, a space where love, memory, and solidarity reconstruct home from the margins.

5. Comparative Discussion: Revolt, Memory, and Reclamation

Elif Shafak’s *Honor* (2011) and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019) both stage the female body as a battlefield where patriarchal, religious, and cultural forces intersect. Although the two novels differ in setting and tone, one grounded in diasporic domestic realism, the other in lyrical post-mortem narration, they share a common thematic architecture: confinement as an instrument of control and revolt as an act of self-reclamation. In both texts, Shafak transforms the female body from a passive recipient of violence into an active site of meaning-making. Through her transnational feminist lens, Shafak interrogates how women’s suffering, memory, and resistance can reshape the narrative of identity itself.

5.1. The Body as Archive of Violence and Resistance

In both *Honor* and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, the body functions as an archive, a repository of collective trauma, memory, and revolt. Pembe's body in *Honor* becomes the medium through which cultural codes of shame and purity are inscribed. Her murder, an Honor killing, translates the abstract moral system of patriarchy into a literal act upon the flesh. In contrast, Leila's body in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds* resists such erasure by transforming decomposition into recollection. Her posthumous consciousness narrates her story through sensorial memory, making the dying body the very engine of narration.

Braidotti's (2011) idea of the "nomadic body" helps bridge these representations: both women's bodies traverse boundaries, between tradition and modernity, life and death, silence and voice. The corporeal becomes the medium through which agency is reclaimed. As Braidotti (2011) argues, "The embodied subject is neither fixed nor closed, but a threshold of transformations" (p. 58). Pembe's and Leila's bodies, though violated, refuse finality. They persist through memory, narration, and empathy, subverting the patriarchal narrative of female disposability. Furthermore, the violence inscribed upon these bodies is not only physical but epistemic. Both women are written out of their societies' moral vocabularies, Pembe as a "fallen wife," Leila as a "discarded prostitute." Yet through Shafak's re-narration, these women re-enter discourse as subjects of knowledge. As Spivak (1988) insists, reclaiming the subaltern voice requires disrupting dominant structures of representation. Shafak achieves precisely this: her novels make visible the subaltern's embodied experience, transforming silence into testimony.

5.2. Confinement Across Geographies: From Domestic to Urban Exile

Spatially, *Honor* and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* map different forms of confinement, the domestic and the urban, but both reveal how patriarchy transcends geography. In *Honor*, the family home in London replicates the moral rigidity of the Anatolian village. The "invisible bars of duty and silence" (Shafak, 2011, p. 132) that imprison Pembe underscore how diaspora does not necessarily liberate women; instead, it often exports patriarchal systems into new spaces. Similarly, in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds*, Istanbul's streets, brothels, and alleys operate as moral panopticons, surveilling and discarding those who transgress social norms. This spatial continuity highlights Bhabha's (1994) concept of the unhomely, the condition in which home itself becomes uncanny, "where the borders between the world and the home are confused" (p. 15). For both Pembe and Leila, home ceases to signify safety or belonging. It becomes a site of estrangement, an extension of patriarchal surveillance. Yet this unhomeliness also generates critical consciousness. As Ahmed (2017) writes, "To be unhoused is not only to be without shelter but to be aware of the structures that deny you one" (p. 94). Shafak's unhomely women thus occupy a paradoxical position: alienated, yet profoundly aware of the systems that confine them. The diaspora of *Honor* and the metropolis of *10 Minutes 38 Seconds* thus represent two facets of the same spatial logic, control masked as belonging. In both, confinement is not merely external but internalized, shaping women's self-perception and moral worth. Similar to Iqbal et al.'s (2021) analysis of media depictions that position women as "others," Shafak's *Honor* exposes the internalized forms of othering within familial and diasporic spaces. Both reveal how patriarchal ideologies discipline women through language and image. However, by narrating from within these confinements, Shafak reclaims the possibility of revolt through introspection, memory, and storytelling.

5.3. Memory as Counter-Narrative

Memory functions as both a narrative structure and a political act in Shafak's novels. In *Honor*, Esma's reconstruction of her mother's story becomes an act of generational redemption, an attempt to convert inherited guilt into understanding. The fragmented temporal structure of the novel mirrors the fractured psychology of the diasporic family, reflecting what Caruth (1996) describes as "the latency of trauma, which returns belatedly through acts of narration" (p. 11).

In *10 Minutes 38 Seconds*, memory acquires an even more radical function: it collapses the divide between life and death. Leila's sensory recollections transform her body into a narrative archive that outlives mortality. Through the fusion of the sensual and the spiritual, Shafak demonstrates how memory resists both biological decay and social erasure. Butler's (2004) concept of "grievability" applies here, Leila's act of remembering asserts that her life is worth mourning, worth narrating. In giving her a voice, Shafak performs a feminist ethics of care that restores dignity to the ungrievable.

Both novels use memory to challenge patriarchal historiography, which privileges male experience as normative. In this way, Shafak aligns with Mohanty's (2003) project of "decolonizing knowledge," which involves retrieving women's lived experiences from the margins of discourse (p. 87). Memory, for Shafak, becomes a decolonizing tool, a means to rewrite the narratives of shame, silence, and sin that patriarchal systems impose.

5.4. Friendship, Solidarity, and Collective Reclamation

While *Honor* focuses on familial structures of oppression, *10 Minutes 38 Seconds* offers an alternative model of community through friendship. Leila's circle of outcast friends, transgender, migrant, and queer individuals, reconstitutes home as an affective rather than biological space. Their bond exemplifies what hooks (2000) calls "the politics of love," a radical form of solidarity that challenges hierarchies of gender, class, and sexuality (p. 94). In contrast, *Honor*'s nuclear family becomes a microcosm of patriarchal dysfunction, illustrating how traditional kinship can perpetuate confinement. The juxtaposition between family and chosen kinship underscores Shafak's critique of moral exclusivity. As Ahmed (2017) notes, "To live a feminist life is to reorient intimacy toward those who share your refusal" (p. 121). Leila's friends enact precisely this refusal: they reclaim her body from the state, defying both religious and legal exclusion, and in doing so, they redefine belonging through care. The contrast between *Honor*'s silence and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds*'s collective voice also signals Shafak's evolution as a feminist writer. In the former, revolt is implicit, surviving only through narration; in the latter, it becomes explicit communal performance of reclamation. Together, these novels trace a trajectory from individual suffering to collective healing, from muted endurance to vocal solidarity.

5.5. Narrative Form as Feminist Revolt

Shafak's narrative structures themselves constitute acts of feminist resistance. *Honor*'s fragmented chronology and multiple perspectives destabilize linear storytelling, reflecting the fractured subjectivities of her characters. This technique embodies what Bhabha (1994) describes as "the temporality of cultural translation," where hybrid identities unfold in discontinuous time (p. 218). Similarly, *10 Minutes 38 Seconds*'s tripartite structure, *The Mind, The Body, The Soul*, encodes a metaphysical resistance to binary thought. The division between corporeal and spiritual dissolves, suggesting that liberation is not achieved through transcendence but through a renewed intimacy with the material. As Akman (2020) argues, Shafak's hybrid narrative style



“disrupts the patriarchal expectation of closure, allowing multiple temporalities of female survival to coexist” (p. 10). The refusal of neat endings, Pembe’s story continued by Esmā, Leila’s life extended through her friends, demonstrates an ethics of openness. For Shafak, revolt is not a single act but an ongoing process of re-narration. Her storytelling becomes what Braidotti (2011) calls “an affirmative politics of becoming”, a continuous negotiation of loss, identity, and transformation (p. 121).

5.6. Comparative Synthesis: From Victimhood to Agency

Ultimately, both *Honor* and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* chart the evolution of Shafak’s feminist consciousness from tragedy to transcendence. Pembe’s narrative exposes the structures of confinement, religious dogma, moral policing, and diasporic patriarchy, while Leila’s story enacts the reclamation of agency through narrative, friendship, and memory. The shift from the domestic to the urban, from silence to voice, marks a movement from representational critique to embodied revolt. Through her female protagonists, Shafak reconstructs the meaning of womanhood within postcolonial modernity: not as purity or sacrifice, but as resilience and redefinition. Her fiction embodies what Ahmed (2017) calls “the feminist promise”, a refusal to let pain be the final word (p. 192). Both novels reveal that the unhomey self, though fragmented, can become a powerful site of transformation. Shafak’s women are not reconciled with the world; rather, they re-make it. Their bodies, memories, and friendships form the scaffolding of a new ethics of existence, one rooted in empathy, resistance, and the insistence on being seen. In this way, Shafak’s narrative of “bodies in revolt” becomes a postcolonial feminist testament: a reimagining of the unhomey not as alienation, but as the birthplace of creative and moral freedom.

6. Conclusion

Elif Shafak’s *Honor* (2011) and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019) together form a narrative continuum that interrogates the relationship between confinement, body, and identity in patriarchal and postcolonial contexts. Across both novels, Shafak constructs what this study has termed “bodies in revolt”, corporeal subjects that defy cultural silencing and reclaim agency through memory, storytelling, and solidarity. Her female characters inhabit what Bhabha (1994) calls “the unhomey,” a psychic and spatial liminality in which belonging is perpetually contested. Yet within this dislocation lies the possibility of resistance: through pain, dislocation, and vulnerability, Shafak’s women transform marginalization into moral and creative autonomy. In *Honor*, the domestic sphere emerges as a disciplinary architecture that reproduces patriarchal hierarchies within diasporic spaces. Pembe’s confinement, her silencing, and eventual death reveal the continuity of gendered control across cultural and geographic boundaries. Her daughter Esmā’s narration, however, transforms this tragedy into testimony, a narrative act that reclaims female subjectivity from erasure. The novel’s structure of interwoven temporalities and perspectives re-enacts the fragmentation of identity under patriarchy while simultaneously exposing the redemptive power of storytelling.

In *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, Shafak advances this exploration by granting narrative voice to a murdered woman whose consciousness outlives her body. Leila’s posthumous narration converts abjection into authorship, making death itself a space of rebellion. The novel’s sensory structure and its focus on friendship as an alternative kinship network subvert patriarchal definitions of home, family, and morality. Through Leila’s chosen family,



her fellow outcasts , Shafak offers a vision of collective resistance grounded in care and emotional solidarity. As Ahmed (2017) observes, “Feminist living requires that we build homes from the remains of what we refuse” (p. 177); Shafak’s characters exemplify this ethic of reconstruction amid ruin.

Together, these two works chart Shafak’s literary evolution from depicting the tragedy of confinement to articulating the ethics of reclamation. Both novels reconfigure the female body as a narrative agent rather than a passive vessel , what Braidotti (2011) calls “a threshold of becoming” (p. 58). The shift from silence (*Honor*) to voice (*10 Minutes 38 Seconds*), and from guilt to solidarity, signals a profound reorientation of feminist discourse within transnational literature. Shafak’s women are no longer defined by victimhood but by their capacity to remember, narrate, and reimagine belonging. Thematically, the study contributes to postcolonial feminist scholarship by emphasizing embodied resistance and unhomey consciousness as central paradigms of identity formation. It demonstrates that confinement, while oppressive, also generates spaces for critical self-awareness and transformation. The “unhomey self,” rather than being a site of despair, becomes a generative space where fragmented identities coalesce into new modes of existence. Ultimately, Shafak’s fiction invites a rethinking of what it means to inhabit a body, a home, or a history. Her narratives challenge readers to confront the moral costs of silence and the political urgency of empathy. The revolt of the body , whether through memory, storytelling, or solidarity , emerges as both an aesthetic strategy and a feminist manifesto. By turning abjection into articulation and exile into agency, Shafak transforms her characters’ unhomey selves into symbols of resilience, bridging the boundaries between life and death, East and West, and self and other. In doing so, she reaffirms the enduring power of literature to render the silenced visible, the marginalized audible, and the forgotten unforgettable.

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