

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: FAMILIAL EXPECTATIONS IN THREE
MULTICULTURAL NOVELS

by

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By using the commonality of family, this cross-cultural investigation hopes to highlight some of the similarities and differences among three vastly different cultures with the hope that readers discover the ways in which their cultures are alike and different from those represented in this paper. The paper begins with an overview of how academics have defined family as well as how family is defined within more general populations. Working under the assumption that literature is an artistic representation of life and it can provide insight into cultures that are different from our own, this investigation into the inner workings of family is anchored in one novel per culture including Elif Shafak's *Honour*, Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Because not all people within the cultures these three novels represent are the same, this paper serves as point of origin for readers interested in multicultural literature or cross-cultural studies rather than a definitive representation of familial expectations within these cultures.

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: FAMILIAL EXPECTATIONS IN THREE
MULTICULTURAL NOVELS

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CHAPTER 1: FORMULATING THE FAMILY

In our lifetimes, we are likely to have many careers, places of residence, and friendships, but we will ever only be born into one family. This network of support, or lack thereof, shapes us for the rest our lives. How is it that such a finite fact is rooted in such a complex concept? What defines the family? How does the culture of the family alter its expectations for its members? Are these expectations both similar and different across cultures? These are the questions that have led me to this cross-cultural investigation rooted in familial expectations.

I grew up in the Midwest where the majority of my friends, neighbors, and colleagues looked like me – nearly all of European descent. White culture is generally relaxed in that we have the privilege to choose those cultures with which we want to identify. Like others in my geographical area, my lack of knowledge about people from other cultures intimidated me and, for a long time, made me anxious when talking with people of other cultures. I thought I was expected to have all the answers, meaning my lack of knowledge could only embarrass me and offend others. Even while working through this cross-cultural investigation into family and after a master's program concentrated in multicultural and transnational literatures, I battled this self-diagnosed ineptitude. Just as the previously mentioned questions are the crux of this particular study, the questions we need to be asking of ourselves and others will arise when we pay attention to cultures that are different from those we inhabit.

Intentionally, I selected three multicultural novels representing three extremely different cultures with the commonality of family trauma. When examining Elif Shafak's *Honour*, Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, readers can gain insight into a variety of cultures, including Muslim, Turkish, Native American, Nigerian, Catholic, and Igbo. These cultures are broad even within these defined groupings, so the

experiences of these families should not be equated to the experiences of all families within these cultures. An investigation of these cultures and how they shape familial expectations, however, cannot begin without a working definition of the family both within and outside of academia.

For the last thirty years, scholars in Family Studies have participated in an ebb and flow of research stemming from the waves made by Jan Trost's "Conceptualising the Family." Trost stated, "There is no possibility of defining the family," simply because, "we would never be able to agree on one definition of the family" (301). Trost's 1988 stance challenges G.P. Murdock's 1949 "nuclear family," which consists of a man and woman, who engage in an emotional, economic, and sexual relations, and their children, a definition that certainly still affects the view of family in today's societies (Trost 303). Thus, the ebb and flow, or the choice that scholars in the field must make is this: to attempt to define or not define the family?

Most scholars, to some degree, have chosen to define the family, or at least pinpoint the factors that contribute to the ways in which societies define the family. As a whole, scholars accept that the family is defined by one of three general perspectives as categorized by A. F. Koerner and M.A. Fitzpatrick (2004). The first of these perspectives is through a *structural* definition, which is based on the presence or absence of family members including parents, children, and extended family (Weigel 1427). The second perspective is through a *functional* definition, specifically psychological functions and tasks, including "maintaining a household, socializing children, providing emotional and material support, and fulfilling roles" (Weigel 1428). Other than Koerner and Fitzpatrick, T. Parsons saw the functional definition as containing two main facets: "the family as a stabilizer of adult personality and socializer of children" (Weigel 1428). While maybe more accommodating than the structural definition, issues with a functional definition, according to K. Floyd and their colleagues, are rooted in its biogenetic

focus, which inherently privileges some families over others (Baxter 171). The third perspective is through a *transactional* definition, which Koerner and Fitzpatrick explain is when “‘groups of intimates through their behavior generate a sense of family identity with emotional ties and an experience of a history and a future’” (Weigel 1428). Jon Bernardes extends the transactional definition arguing that these families are not forever, but rather “[g]roups of individuals whose life-courses coincide on the same pathway [,] [meaning they] may refer to themselves as ‘a family’ for some time” (32). From a literary standpoint, readers see representations of family in a variety of cultures that fit neatly within these three definitions, but some is not all. While scholars in Family Studies generally have definitions that fall within these three categories, others are more concerned with how the family is defined within various societies outside of academia, thus contributing to those literary representations that fall outside these parameters.

Seeking to find a layperson’s view on what the family is, Trost followed “Conceptualising the Family” with a 1990 survey of a Swedish population. In 1994, D. Y. Ford replicated this study among university students in the United States (Baxter 170). In both Trost and Ford’s studies, participants were presented with sixteen basic configurations of families. A 2009 study by Leslie A. Baxter and colleagues replicated and extended Trost and Ford’s original sixteen configurations. The group added additional family constellations, manipulated the amount of communication attributed to a given family constellation, and manipulated the linguistic marker being provided (“a family” versus “the family”) (171). As far as the sixteen scenarios replicated from the Trost and Ford studies, three family constellations appeared in the top five across the three studies: the nuclear family, the nuclear family with a non-residential child, and the divorced mother with her child. Similarly, four constellations appeared in the bottom five across the three studies: the ex-spouses, the childless homosexual couple, the fictive

kin constellation with a close friend of the mother, and the separated, homosexual couple and their child (Baxter 180). As far as the effect communication has on the distinction of family status, the study revealed that frequent communicative contact increased the judgement of family status compared to limited communicative contact (Baxter 184). The study, however, did not show that the linguistic form (“a family” versus “family”) had any effect on the participants definitions.

A previous study by J. A. Holstein and J. Gubrium (1994) argues that the linguistic form plays a larger role in how a population defines family. Weigel summarizes Holstein and Gubrium’s distinction in this way:

They view THE family as a more static description of “the thing” family and contend that those scholars who have attempted to define family are trying to describe THE family as if it were an actual entity. Holstein and Gubrium prefer to focus on family, which they see as a fluid concept, socially constructed and changing from person to person (1428).

Holstein and Gubrium’s study does show how people define the central features of family by Koerner and Fitzpatrick’s three perspectives, but more with the emotional and functional definitions than structural (Weigel 1435). What makes Holstein and Gubrium’s linguistic investigation noteworthy is their procedure. Previous studies asked participants to respond only with a “yes” or “no” regarding the presented structures and their classification as a family. Holstein and Gubrium asked participants to rate the groups, which included athletic teams, firemen, coworkers, and students among others, on a scale of one (not a type of family) to six (a type of family). It is no surprise that groups connected by blood, marriage, or adoption, those closest to the nuclear family, were ranked the highest (Weigel 1437). The relatively high

rankings of the transactional groups, however, show that laypeople's definition of family is more an intertwining of structural, functional, and transactional perspectives, making for a "complex and holistic" understanding (Weigel 1442). With such varied results, what should be taken away from so many studies? As Trost notes, "Evidently no-one 'knows' what a family is: our perspectives vary to such a degree that to claim to know what a family is shows a lack of knowledge" (Bernardes 22). The lasting effect for scholars and laypersons alike is *how* we are influenced by one view of family rather than *what* a family is. When it comes to artistic representations of the family, individuals must account for perspective when validating these variations of family, even when they are conflicting.

Conceptualization, it seems, dictates who does and does not count as "family;" members of various societies are fed information about certain kinds of relationships, which leads to a marginalization of others (Baxter 171). It is these marginalized people that are now, and only in recent literary history, give societies a fighting chance at understanding all its people and the ways how they are interconnected. Despite any marginalization, how do individuals learn about family relationships and how does this knowledge affect their formative understanding of their function within a family? When looking at the research done by child psychologists, their works "ten[d] to suggest that children develop cognitively in ways that internalize society norms of 'family'" (Baxter 173). Nathan C. D. Perron's "The Four Cs of Parenting: Applying Key Counseling Concepts for Raising Healthy Children Across Countries, Cultures, and Families" echoes this sentiment:

Regardless of where a household exists across the globe, parents participate in creating an emotional climate that is communicated among children based on modeled behaviors and expressions [. . .] These repeated patterns of behavioral

influence are important to consider because children will internalize the behaviors and cognitions of parents and independently act in a manner that is consistent with that family's culture and the larger society (48-49).

Perron also contends that parents, despite any cultural differences, display common goals of raising children who are “well adjusted, adequately developed, self-regulating, emotionally intelligent, and exhibit behaviors that benefit others” (48). As these children grow into adolescents and then adults, the methods by which they view and function within a family are still grounded in these childhood impressions. As Bernardes reiterates, “Our first and most important experiences occur within, and are largely determined by, family life” (28). Even as adults, “family life relates to our own sense of ‘who we are’ and how we ‘fit into’ the lives of others” (Bernardes 29). While society may not be able to reduce the concept of family to one definition, it is, referencing K. J. Gergen (1994) “through socialization, interaction, and language, individuals construct the realities in which they live” (Weigel 1429). Part of societies’ socialization and interaction should come from an investigation of literature and its representations of family cross-culturally.

Inasmuch that we accept Trost’s belief that reducing the family to one definition is impossible, any such aspirations are further complicated by the multicultural reality of the world; however, just because one element of the mission is impossible, this does not mean we cannot use our resources and knowledge of other cultures to begin to understand family using a cross-cultural approach. For decades, literary scholars, and societies on the whole for that matter, have accepted that literature is a representation of life, and according to Nancy Livingston and Catherine Kurkjian, “[a]n often overlooked but most effective and appropriate way to develop

cultural awareness and multiethnic understanding” (696). Authors, even in fictional works, write about what they see, know, and experience; they write about and from culture.

Referencing Elsie Belger’s “Global Cultures: The First Steps toward Understanding,” Livingston and Kurkjian explain Culture versus culture this way: “[Belger] characterized culture with a big ‘C’ as high culture as in the fine arts, literature, philosophy, classical music, and other forms that represent the aesthetic achievement of a society. Culture with a little ‘c’ includes the social, economic, and political systems of a society with people’s values and beliefs, providing a framework for all other aspects of culture” (696-697). Referencing Janet Tolulope Awokoya and Christine Clark, Allison L. Bear says that multicultural education, obviously including multicultural literature, based in culture-centered theory, allows the opportunity to learn about our cultural selves, cultural communities, and the world from both our own and others’ cultural perspectives. Foundationally, “Effectively using multicultural literature can build and support understanding of other cultures” (24). Dissenters might only see multicultural literature as an insight into the cultures of those different from themselves, but multicultural literature shows us how we are both different and alike: When “we read culturally relevant literature in which [we] see [our]selves, [we] are more engaged and find [our]selves wanting to know more” (Baer 25). One can, therefore, make an argument for multicultural literature as a starting point for a cross-cultural study of how our families, and our roles and expectations within these families, influence our individual thoughts and actions. In *Honour*, *The Round House*, and *Purple Hibiscus*, the family incurs some major conflict whose resolution can only be reached after the individual family members consider how it will affect the family moving into the future and explore all possible avenues to break the cycle of trauma.

CHAPTER 2: FATE, FATHERS, AND ATTEMPTED-FATALITY IN ELIF SHAFAK'S *HONOUR*

The first novel in this cross-cultural study is Elif Shafak's 2012 novel *Honour*, which centers on the Toprak family, who are Muslim, of both Turkish and Kurdish descent, and migrants to London. Just as reducing the family to one definition is impossible, reducing these co-existing cultures to a bulleted-list of characteristics and values is impractical. An investigation into the Topraks should yield two results: first, while the Topraks are a representation of their cultures (Muslim, Turkish, Kurdish), this artistic representation can never represent the whole of these cultures; and second, while the Topraks are not a cultural absolute, this artistic representation is true enough for readers to accept commonalities and differences among these cultures and their own as credible. Before analyzing the familial expectations placed on mother and son, Pembe and Iskender, we must establish a baseline for the cultures they represent and the affect these cultures have on the family.

According to Nuraan Davids, the Qur'an, the centrally divine text of Islam, places emphasis on social justice, truth, honor, and compassion (48). Davids later concludes that with Muslims, "religion and culture are inextricable intertwined in the individual and in the community" (49). In "Muslim Families and Family Therapy," Manijeh Daneshpour outlines some differences between Muslim and Anglo-American families (although many of the American familial qualities speak for much of the Western world, and vice-versa) that mental health professionals should consider when providing services for a Muslim family. One difference Daneshpour notes is that many Muslims value unity and connectedness. This value stems from the importance of maintaining harmony between individuals and nature, which also includes the preservation of family ties and the importance of collectivist behavior over

individual behavior (361). Members of a Muslim family are likely to sacrifice their individual needs and identities for the sake of a united family, one that “involves intensely emotional intimate relationships, high levels of empathy and receptivity to others, and strong identification with the reputation and honor of the family” (Daneshpour 361). Cigdem Kagitcibasi extends Daneshpour’s analysis in stating, “[F]amily culture emphasizes obedience-oriented discipline designed to lead to socially connected and responsible young people. Children and youth are not granted autonomy because an autonomous youth may separate from the family and look after his/her own needs rather than the needs of the family” (160).

Another difference Daneshpour notes between Muslim and Anglo-American families is that members of Muslim families do not hold the need to control their world as a supreme value because they believe that God controls human destiny (362). This belief is a collect-all-of-sorts, leaving no room for “conflict and dissension either between individuals and their environment or among family members [. . .] Change is often kept to a minimum. Leadership is authoritarian, negotiations are limited, and decisions are usually imposed by parents” (Daneshpour 361).

A final difference is that while explicit communication is considered the norm in Anglo-American families, for Muslim families, implicit expression is common, which includes frequent allusions to proverbs and old parables (Daneshpour 362). As being in-line with collectivist behavior, Muslims are not encouraged to directly state their desires to others, and, in being in-line with the Qur’an’s emphasis on compassion, they are expected to “be highly sensitive to what other people have in their minds despite the minimal use of verbal interaction” (Daneshpour 362). All of these findings, however, are only those of one expert in the field, and academics must avoid applying these findings to a whole culture in order to combat stereotypes, even when they are positive observations.

But, as previously stated, the Topraks are not only Muslim but immigrants. In their case, which is common of those living in places than their country of origin, the inclusion of extended family in the inner workings of the family is more limited than normal. Being immigrants in a country where the primary culture is vastly different from their own, the Topraks face a barrage of conflict. The individual family members could react in a variety of ways, one being a grasping anything familiar. Referencing A. Kaya, Kagitcibasi contends that if immigrants feel like outsiders in a uni-cultural dominant society, they “tend to reactivate their communal networks to whatever degree possible given the external constraints. Working through the proximity of ethnic ghettos, traditional values and characteristics get reaffirmed by strengthened religious/ethnic identities” (164). The other response is to try to develop an understanding of this different culture in order to successfully navigate it: “When there is substantial change in life styles, mismatches can occur between established ways (culture) and changing environmental demands [. . .] In other words, new competencies are required for adapting to new life styles” (Kagitcibasi 155). Jessica Halliday Hardie and Judith A. Seltzer echo this response saying, “[C]lose ties among immigrant families reflect cultural values and adaptive strategies developed in response to the immigrant experience” (325).

Regardless of how the individual members of the family approach navigating as immigrants in their new country, the parents often have the most difficulty managing these conflicts. As Perron states, “Parents also may find themselves wrestling with different parenting expectations when raising a child in a culture different than the one in which they were raised” (51). Luckily, as Hardie and Seltzer state, “Immigrant youth express greater approval of family interdependence and a greater sense of familial obligation than do non-immigrant youth” (325). Even if the parents have a more difficult time, “Muslims believe that the family is responsible for

the greatness of deviance of family members,” so the need to reconcile for the harmony and unity of the family are likely to ultimately win out (Daneshpour 363). Again, this discussion assumes that speaking of Muslim families in general can only go so far. As Daneshpour deduces, “Most important[ly], the attitudes of the family members toward their own ethnicity and its values and their own perception of their position in the dominant culture influence every Muslim family differently” (356).

So, what familial expectations can be seen within the Topraks in Shafak’s *Honour*? The two characters the readers see being most influenced by their expected familial roles are mother Pembe and son Iskender. Pembe and her husband Adem have three children: Iskender, Esma, and Yunus. After first moving to the city of Istanbul in the first years of their marriage, the couple eventually migrates to London when Iskender is nearly eight, Esma nearly seven, and Yunus not yet born. Pembe and Adem’s marriage is one of inauspicious beginnings as it was actually Pembe’s twin sister Jamila that Adem first set out to marry after she “rescues” him from a pack of baying dogs. After arranging to meet with the headman and visiting Jamila’s father, Adem learns that not only is it a possibility that Jamila is tainted, but in order to protect the family’s honor, Jamila is betrothed to an older uncle. Having already contacted his eldest brother Tariq about marrying a village girl, and fearing Tariq would want an explanation if he does not return with a bride, Adem responds to the headman with his decision: “‘I haven’t changed my mind,’ Adem said resolutely. ‘I do want to marry.’ ‘Really?’ The headman’s eyes glinted with appreciation. ‘You surprise me, lad. I thought you wouldn’t want Jamila.’ ‘And I don’t,’ Adem said, after a pause. ‘I’ll take the other one.’ [. . .] ‘The other twin. I’ll have her’” (100). While Pembe and Adem’s marriage is never volatile, it also is not a happy one. Pembe, does the best she can in her circumstances though, because she has faith in Allah’s plan. After a shaking

experience with a racist sweet-shop owner, Pembe reasons, “If Allah had wanted to create human beings alike, He surely would have done so. Pembe had no idea why He had introduced so much variety into His creation, but she trusted His intentions. [. . .] [I]n the end, everything was God’s work and His alone, she could not nurse disparaging sentiments against anyone for too long” (111). Knowing that it is God’s destiny for her life, Pembe sets out to fulfill her familial roles as wife and mother.

Referencing Muhammad Husayni Behishti and Jawad Bahonar, Daneshpour explains that a marriage in Islam has two objectives: “(1) Securing a comfortable atmosphere for the husband and wife, and (2) producing a new generation and bringing up healthy, faithful, and virtuous children” (356). Using this as an evaluation tool for success, Pembe and Adem’s marriage is mostly successful. Daneshpour, however, does not stop here: “A Muslim husband and wife should always be a source of comfort to each other. Their mutual relations should be far above mere sexual enjoyment and should reach the stage of cordial friendship accompanied by mutual benevolence” (356). It is possible that Tariq anticipated a marriage begun so hastily would not reach this level of comforting friendship, but readers can be certain of his dislike for Pembe nonetheless: “Adem should have never married *that* woman. There were better girls for him and yet, inexplicably, he had fallen for Pembe. Why her, and why so suddenly, Tariq never understood. Not that he didn’t see Pembe’s beauty. But in his eyes this only added to her unreliability [. . .] From the very beginning he had opposed this marriage” (153). Even if Pembe’s marriage was never supported by Adem’s family, something good still came from it – their children.

First and foremost, Pembe’s role within the Toprak family is to be a mother to her children. In Muslim families, the mother’s role is nearly sacred:

In her representation of the sanctity of Muslim family life, and hence society, a Muslim woman's social role and responsibility are inherently linked to moral purpose. In terms of Muslim theology, a Muslim woman as mother is considered three times more honorable than a Muslim father. This particular honor, in terms of wife and mother and as the custodian of family values, modesty and purity, places a Muslim woman at the center of both the Islamic religion and Muslim culture (Davids 52).

Like many mothers, Pembe juggles many roles. Readers see, even in one of those rare moments of "me" time, that her children are always on Pembe's mind: "Pembe left the salon feeling light and heavy at the same time. Light, because she had a full hour for herself. Heavy, because things had not been going well recently. Esma was always sulking, a book in her hand, going through another phase. Iskender was worse. He came home late every evening, and she was worried that he had befriended the wrong kind of people" (108). Not only concerned for their well-being, Pembe, who is superstitious by nature, does everything she can to protect her children from any dangers than might be lurking in the world. As Iskender recalls in one of this journal entries, the evil-eye beads were everywhere – around the house, in their pockets, and even sewn into their clothes. These evil-eye beads, along with other forbidden activities such as whistling at night, were her way of doing "everything in her power to protect me from others" (162). Even for virtuous Pembe, the weight of the family and her expectations within it become almost too much to bear.

Adem has a problem that cannot be ignored, even by his brother Tariq. As with any other problem, Adem's gambling grows in magnitude. Shafak introduces this magnitude to the reader saying, "My mother first started to work shortly after my father had gambled two months' worth

of wages” (75). At first, Pembe went to the homes of the rich to cook, clean, and care for their children. One of these positions was full-time; however, Pembe had no choice but to leave that position after the man of the house, in a drunken state, made sexual advances toward her. After she rejects the man, he refuses to pay Pembe her monthly wages. After getting lost and delayed in returning home, Adem reacts this way to Pembe’s recounting of that evening’s events:

‘Where have you been?’ [. . .] ‘I didn’t have money for the *dolmush*.’ ‘What do you mean you didn’t have the money? How much did they give you?’ ‘Nothing. I’m not going to work for them again.’ ‘What the hell are you talking about?’ my father asked, raising his voice a notch, but no more, ‘I have debts, you know that.’ [. . .] ‘You come home at this hour and you think I’m going to believe your lies. Where’s the money, you whore?’ (78-79).

At this point, Adem was still living at home with his family. In the novel’s main time frame, however, Adem has completely abandoned his family. Pembe finds work in the neighborhood at a hair salon owned by a Jamaican woman named Cleo; she does not even have an address for her husband. Adem’s gambling is out of control and what money he is lucky enough to win, he lavishly throws at Roxana, an exotic dancer with whom he is now living.

Despite how far Adem has fallen, Tariq still places some of the blame for the unsuccessful marriage on Pembe. Tariq does fault Adem for allowing Pembe to work in a “distant place among strangers,” yet simultaneously believes that Pembe was not woman enough to keep her husband at home (151, 153). Tariq reveals that an imbalance in the marriage might bleed into the rest of the family, vowing to have a serious talk with Adem, but not because he feels bad for Pembe, or even because he wants what is best for his niece and nephews, but because they share the same surname and “if one of them was disgraced, shame would attach

itself to him as the eldest Toprak” (154). While certainly revealing of a selfish character, Tariq is right to worry that Adem’s actions could bring the family shame, as they give Pembe grounds for divorce.

In Muslim marriage, financial maintenance is a legal responsibility entitled to the wife from her husband (Daneshpour 357). Daneshpour explains that a wife may file for divorce in a court of law if one of the following six qualifications apply to the marriage: “(1) refusal to provide economic sustenance, (2) change of religion, (3) impotence, (4) infectious disease, (5) willful desertion, and (6) disappearance of the husband” (359). Pembe’s marriage meets two of these qualifications: the refusal to provide economic sustenance and the disappearance of the husband. Instead of filing in a court of law, as Pembe had a right to do according to Islamic customs, Pembe requested a divorce from Adem, likely out of respect as the father of her children or because “[a] wife may not directly criticize her husband because of her subordinate position” (Daneshpour 365). Unfortunately, because Adem ignores Pembe’s request for divorce several times, every Toprak’s life is altered when Pembe’s relationship with Elias creates a major conflict.

Confiding in her sister Jamila just before Elias rescues her from the racist in the sweet-shop, Pembe writes, “Adem is no husband to me. He doesn’t come home anymore. He has found himself another woman. The children don’t know it. I keep everything inside. Always” (90). This aligns exactly with Daneshpour’s discussion of the preferred way to solve conflict in Muslim culture: “They tend to internalize concerns, which is a way of maintaining an integrated whole and making a strong connection to God” (365). Considering this proneness to internalizing emotions related to conflict within the family, it is no surprise that Pembe and Elias’s relationship progresses as slowly as it does. As previously stated, Elias and Pembe’s first

interaction comes when he inserts himself into the interaction between Pembe and the racist sweet-shop owner. Even in this first meeting, readers can see patterns in Pembe's behavior that will continue until their relationship ends – a reluctance to share personal information and a consciousness of watching eyes. Pembe understands the latter almost immediately: "It flashed into her mind that one of the passers-by might see them together and tell someone else. People would gossip, and from there the word would reach her family's ears" (118). As Daneshpour explains, "[O]ne's self-image, esteem, excellence, security, and identity are evaluated on the basis of their relationships with family" (361). Pembe whole-heartedly understands that if she sees Elias again, it must be covert. Going out on a limb, hardly believing she has, Pembe goes to see Elias at his restaurant on Christmas Eve; since it is not a Muslim holiday, Pembe had an exorbitant amount of time on her hands which allows her some time for which can be unaccounted. Elias returns the favor by surprising Pembe at Cleo's, where she pretends she does not know him, but leaves her a ticket for the first of their many movie theater rendezvous.

It is fitting that Pembe and Elias meet so often in movie theaters. The dark theater provides a built-in disguise. It is not unusual for two people to arrive separately to watch a movie together. The movie times are solidified far enough in advance that Elias can purchase tickets for their next meeting to give to Pembe at their current meeting, removing the need for a second handoff, thus avoiding added risk of being seen together in the light of day. The number of movie theaters in the London makes it less likely that the couple will be seen together by providing a variety of meeting places. Finally, movies provide a symbolic representation: together, Pembe and Elias sit watching others' lives unfold, yet because of Pembe's familial expectations, their life together is one they will never see unfold.

It is, however, outside of a movie theater that Pembe and Elias are spotted on two different occasions, once by her son Yunus and the other by her brother-in-law Tariq. Yunus describes this scene saying, “The man reached out and touched her wrist, caressing lightly, lovingly. Her slender body was tilted into him, as if at any moment she would put her head on his shoulder [. . .] The man pulled the woman towards him and whispered something in her ear, touching her neck with his lips, a quick, short brush, perhaps an accident, innocent and unintended” (193). Yunus keeps this knowledge to himself, harboring his emotions much in the same way his mother does. Tariq, although, shares this information with Iskender, who at first, writes it off as exaggeration. Iskender’s knowledge of Elias’s relationship with his mother and Shafak’s foreshadowing bring the conflict to a boiling point:

That afternoon, when the children were at school, Elias walked into the house on Lavender Grove. As soon as he passed the threshold, he regretted the entire idea. He could see Pembe had not wanted to do this. The only reason she had yielded to the plan was to please him. She was so tense that the slightest sound sent a surge of panic through her. He felt terrible, not only for being there, but also for being in her life and causing so much distress. He had wanted his love to create wonders, but perhaps it was only producing troubles (288).

While Pembe allows a degree of intimacy to permeate their relationship, this description shows that Pembe’s expected behavior, both culturally and familiarly, is still in the forefront of her thoughts and actions. Pembe saw firsthand as a child how dishonor affects both the family and individual. When her older sister Hediye returned home after the man with whom she eloped abandoned her, she is literally served her fate in a cauldron – the rope she should use to hang herself to restore her family’s honor (268). When Iskender returns home early from school, he

confronts the conflict head on, though interpreting the misbuttoning of Pembe's blouse to mean Elias and Pembe are sleeping together when really she had only spilled hot tea on her blouse and needed to change. Regardless, Iskender's role in this conflict, and how he will work toward a resolution, are irrevocably linked in this moment.

Iskender, however, had been aware of his role and expectations within the Toprak family long before finding Elias and Pembe together in the Lavender Grove apartment. As Daneshpour states, a "common problem in Muslim immigrant families is insufficient connectedness. This occurs when a significant family member is absent, when there is too much distance in the marital relationship, or when individuals are isolated from the support network" (361). The disconnect that Iskender feels flows from many springs, the first of them being his name. For the first five years of his life, Iskender existed in the world with no name. Pembe finally yields to Adem's insistence, agreeing only insofar as she can obtain both her family's blessing and return to the village to consult the elders. After spending some time with Pembe and her son, an elder concludes that he does not like to serve only to be served and that he will remain a boy for a long time and mature very late (24). Finally, the name Askander is given in honor of Alexander the Great. This does not end the disconnect for Iskender, as he forever feels like three persons in one: "So it was that her first child, the apple of her eye, would become Askander in Kurdish and Iskender in Turkish. When the family immigrated to London, to the children and teachers in his school, he was Alex" (25). Names are the outward most part of our identity, the part that is most exposed, and by having three names in one, Shafak makes her character Iskender more vulnerable than most.

In 2017, Sarah E. Martiny and colleagues surveyed Turkish-origin immigrants in Germany to study interrelationships among multiple identities focusing on three areas: ethnic,

national, and dual. In Iskender's case, his ethnic identity is Turkish/Kurdish, his national identity is English, and dual identity is Turkish-Kurdish-English. The authors state, "Exploring the relationships between immigrants' different social identities is important because the perceived incompatibility between a person's identities can affect well-being and can cause stress" (401). Furthermore, the authors argue that this incompatibility results from intergroup conflicts, the sociocultural distance between groups, and the incongruent norms and values attached to each identity (Martiny 401). We see these incongruent norms and values when the Orator chides Iskender for allowing his sister Esma to call him Alex, and anyone else in England for that matter, simply because Alex is easier for the English to pronounce (217). This manifestation of identity is heightened in Iskender's case as his name represents the three identity-lenses through which he is being viewed.

Going back to Daneshpour's discussion of insufficient connectedness, the plight of many migrants, Iskender does have a significant family member absent: his father Adem who has abandoned them in favor of Roxana. While this a newer development, Iskender has felt isolated from any parental support nearly his entire life. Pembe has many pet names for her son, two of which are "my sultan" and "my lion." Both sultans and lions must be strong and fearless; Pembe's pet names, when pitted against some of Iskender's most traumatic experiences, solidify his notion of what it means to be strong, to be a man. The first of these experiences, his circumcision, ultimately divides Pembe and Iskender, if only just below the surface, for many years to come. On the day of his circumcision, Iskender is told that he is going to become a man with one cut of the knife, and that even though it would certainly hurt, he should not cry. This if/then statement (If I am a man, then I will not cry) is one that is implied throughout the novel. Motivated by fear, Iskender flees the ceremony and hides in a tree. When the group finds him,

Iskender only agrees to come down from the tree after Pembe promises that he will not be circumcised. Not only does Pembe break this promise, but she slaps him hard saying, “Do not ever shame me again!” before allowing the man performing the circumcisions to take Iskender away (30-31). In the end, Iskender did as he was told and did not shed a tear, learning the lesson that would resurface that fateful day on Lavender Grove: “Until that day, he hadn’t known that you could love someone with all your heart and yet be ready to hurt them” (31). As previously mentioned by the elder on the day he receives his name, Iskender is fated to break his mother’s heart.

The effects of the circumcision did not stop there, though. A few weeks after the ceremony, after he had fully healed, Iskender has a run-in with a group of local bullies. The boys pin him to the ground, pull down his pants, call his penis an okra, tease him for running away from his ceremony, threaten to finish the circumcision, and only throw his clothes into the canal after Iskender’s wetting of himself deters them from harassing him further (163-164). After only ten days, Iskender is ready to respond with his gang of five “Gypsy” kids he said were tough and which no one wanted to befriend. They beat up two of the boys but did not touch the leader of the group so that he might always be on edge, never knowing when they might strike. When one of the boys’ moms comes to ask Pembe if she has any information on her son’s attack, the readers also learn that the boy was forced to drink his own urine and would have drowned in the canal had he not been able to grab ahold of a plank to get to safety. Iskender describes his state of mind at this time saying, “By then I had had my first serious quarrel with my father. The ram incident. I had promised myself never to be weak again and I was keeping my promise” (164). After migrating to London, Iskender also looked to violence, using boxing as an outlet, and the security as a leader with a gang of followers to navigate his daily interactions, as noted by the

Orator (224, 252). If his circumcision was the one event that made Iskender feel isolated from the support of his mother, the “ram incident” was that event with his father.

When Iskender was seven-years-old, the same age of his circumcision, his parents bought a ram that they would serve at goodbye dinner of sorts before they left for England. The problem, which Uncle Tariq can see, is that Iskender views the ram as his pet: “‘Don’t get too fond of that ram.’ ‘Why?’ I asked. He frowned. ‘Didn’t they tell you? It’ll be slaughtered soon.’ Crying, I ran to father. He seemed in a jolly mood and promised not to touch the animal. ‘I have only one son,’ Father said. ‘I’ll let you have the ram’” (140). It took only until the next day when Iskender was out running errands for Adem to go back on his word. It is when Iskender refuses to eat the expensive meat, knocking his plate to the side, that Adem forces him to eat, shoving his face in the plate so forcefully that he has to come up for gulps of air. Sounding much like his mother in her discussion of keeping things inside, Iskender explains, “Then and there I understood it was no good shaking in your shoes. If I displayed weakness, he would step on me. The whole bloody world would step on me. But if I were strong, really strong, no one could. Since then I have never been weak. At fault, yes. Entirely wrong. But not weak” (141). After the circumcision and the ram incident had both passed, Iskender says he feels something festering inside of him (162). This festering, his anger and resentment of his parents, establishes his response to crises – instead of turning to his parents for support, Iskender simply does what he believes the rest of his family, specifically his Uncle Tariq, expect him to do.

With almost a flourish of irony, Iskender is forced to become the man of the family before he is ready, despite his aversion of his circumcision ceremony and the village elder’s insistence that he will take a long time in maturing. For a while, Iskender can still live his own, separate life while being the man of the house, but once he comes home to find his mother and

Elias alone in the apartment together (with Pembe's blouse misbuttoned to boot), that life of anonymity is no more. Unfortunately, this is not the only catastrophic change in Iskender's adolescent life: his English girlfriend Katie is pregnant with their son. Iskender, at first, tries to calmly deal with the situation. He goes to see the only father-figure he has for help – his Uncle Tariq. After explaining that “a friend” needs money to take his pregnant English girlfriend to the clinic, Tariq relinquishes the money, saying “‘Tell your friend that you’ll help him’ [. . .] ‘But also let him know that this will be the last time you’re cleaning up his mess. Your friend needs to get a hold of himself. Otherwise he’s in for deeper troubles. You send him my regards and make sure he understands’” (229).

Tariq knows that the “friend” is really Iskender but is relieved that this girl is not Muslim, so there will be “no fathers or big brothers with a vendetta” (229). This interaction exemplifies that indirect and covert communication Daneshpour describes in “Muslim Families and Family Therapy,” saying this vague method “respects people’s judgement about their own understanding of context in the dialogue. If one is explicitly criticized or given orders by others, self-autonomy and independence are threatened and one loses face” (363). Because of the custom, Iskender has a guise to hide behind while still being able to manage his crisis. This issue is not handled so simply, though, because when Iskender meets Katie to give her the money for the clinic, she declares that she has told her mother she is pregnant, she has decided to keep the baby, and her mother has agreed to let Iskender come live with them.

What Katie does not know, although, is that Uncle Tariq just met Iskender coming into the restaurant to tell him about his mother’s supposed infidelity. This emotional conversation would have been the perfect time for Iskender to confide in Katie, to tell her he is managing another family crisis in addition to their baby, but this is not the Muslim custom: “Discussing

personal problems with someone outside of the kinship network brings a deep sense of shame” (Daneshpour 364). In a journal entry Iskender confirms this aspect of Muslim culture: “Nobody at school was aware of what was going on. And I wanted it to stay that way. School was school, and home was home. Katie didn’t know a thing either. Your girlfriend was your girl, your family was your family. Certain things had to be kept separate. Like water and oil” (50). Assuming that Katie has made her decision, Iskender turns his full attention to the conflict stemming from Pembe and Elias’s relationship.

Iskender has two people to ask for advice. The first of those people is Uncle Tariq. Uncle Tariq is the one who first brings the information to Iskender’s attention, that he has seen Pembe and Elias together outside a movie theater; Iskender does not see it for himself until he stumbles upon them in the apartment. When Iskender is thanking Tariq for the money for the clinic, Iskender admits that he is like a father to him and says, “Some day soon I’ll pay you back. You’ll see” (229). It is with the management of Pembe’s dishonor that Tariq plans to collect on this debt, to have his teenage nephew do what is necessary to protect the family’s honor. The second person from whom Iskender believes he can ask advice is the Orator. The Orator responds this way: “There was an uneasy pause before the Orator remarked, ‘Well, talk to your father. It’s his duty, more than yours. But if he is not in . . . then it’s down to you. I’d never let my mother or sister or wife shame me”” (254). Finally, as his last resort, Iskender seeks out his father. Adem does not give the answer Iskender expects but instead admits fault in his marriage with Pembe and questions whether or not she loves the man she is seeing. Iskender can clearly see that his father is not going to return home to take care of things, and in one last-ditch effort as he is leaving mutters, ““If you don’t take of this matter, then I will”” (260). Iskender might sound, in

this moment, like he is ready to do what is necessary, to handle the situation, but is he really ready to do what is expected: to kill his mother to resolve his family's conflict?

Aisha Gill categorizes an honor killing as “the murder (or sometimes attempted murder) of a woman by members of her family who do not approve of her sexual behavior” (479). At this point, what Iskender decides to do, and the attack that follows, match this definition. Shier and Shor later share the four characteristics that many scholars have come to support in their advocacy for a narrower definition. First, the killing is planned and carried out by a member of the victim's family, usually the family of birth rather than marriage. This could somewhat account for why Uncle Tariq feels it is Iskender's responsibility even though he seems more preoccupied with honor than Adem, Pembe, or any of their children. Second, the perpetrator does not act alone. If we assume that the advice Iskender receives from Uncle Tariq and the Orator and the indifference he receives from Adem count as not acting alone, then Iskender's actions are still aligned with those characteristics of honor killings. Third, suspicion is usually enough to prompt a killing. By the time of the action, Tariq and Iskender both feel they have seen enough to prove Pembe's infidelity, even though they have not been caught while engaging in a sexual act. And fourth, honor killings are premeditated (Shier 1165). In Iskender's case, the attack was premeditated, but the killing was not.

As is characteristic of Shafak's style, readers find out bits of the whole story and are often unable to piece them completely together until the end. By the end, readers know that Iskender meant to teach Pembe a lesson, to leave her with a physical scar that would remind her of her roles and expectations within the family. Iskender does not actually find out that he has killed “his mother” (it is actually his aunt Jamila, however, he will not learn this for many years) until four days after the attack. He is picked up by the police, and during questioning, one of the

officers shows him that day's newspaper headline declaring a teenage boy's murder of his mother as an honor killing. Both Pembe, who watches the stabbing of her twin sister Jamila, and Iskender describe the attack in a way that confirms his reluctance to commit murder. Iskender's experience is seemingly out-of-body, a common reaction to traumatic experiences:

There I was on Lavender Grove, a knife in my hand. I heard the screams. ShriII, unending. Somebody was howling. Oddly, it sounded like my mother. But it couldn't have been her, for she was lying on the ground, bleeding. Echoes growing inside my brain. I looked at my left hand. My stronger hand. But it had gone slack, as if it had been attached to my body only temporarily and now belonged to someone else. I tossed the knife under a parked car. If I could, I would have thrown away my hand (247).

In Pembe's similar description of the scene, she sees Iskender pause for an instant, frowning at and confused by the knife in his hand and what he has done as "a puppet dancing to the pull of strings [who] was only now waking up" (313). Ultimately, Pembe's metaphor of Iskender as a puppet is appropriate, the strings being pulled by Uncle Tariq, the Orator, and even Iskender himself in an attempt to fulfil his assigned role, meeting those familial expectations.

To summarize, *Honour* is a fair representation of familial expectations within Muslim, Turkish, and Kurdish cultures. Readers see a collectivist nature within the Toprak family complicated by a tendency toward implicit versus explicit communication, seen most keenly between Iskender and Tariq and then Iskender and Adem concerning Pembe's dishonoring of the family. Iskender, like his siblings Esmā and Yunus, and unlike the adults in his family, is more comfortable within the cultures that now surrounds him rather than those he left behind in Turkey. The lack of extended support systems and a differentiation between those who are in the

family (privy to certain information) rather than outside of it (like Iskender's girlfriend Katie) lead to the loss of one of their own and the trauma that much be endured by the whole family. Like Shafak's *Honour*, readers will see a collectivist mentality and the effects of rippling trauma and the effects on the family in Erdrich's *The Round House*.

CHAPTER 3: PREDATORS, PEACE OF MIND, AND PUNISHMENT IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S *THE ROUND HOUSE*

The second novel in this cross-cultural study is Louise Erdrich's 2012 novel *The Round House*, which centers on the Coutts family, members of the Ojibwe Native American tribe, who reside on a reservation in North Dakota. Native American cultures and families create a wide expanse of language, geography, and customs. As was the case with the Topraks and a look into Muslim culture and family, a preemptive investigation into Native American familial cultures merely serves as an origin for understanding father and son, Bazil and Joe, and the familial roles and expectations pertaining to the culture they represent.

Alexander C. Grey and colleagues identify a strong respect for tribal elders, family, and community as strong values in many Native American cultures (590). As recently mentioned, language, customs, and traditions vary among tribes, but "the essence of traditional life is captured through important markers such as spirituality and relationship patterns among kin" (Red Horse 243). Some Native American family structures are similar to that of Muslim families in that extended family members, which can include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, are often intimately involved with the inner workings of the nuclear family. Three generations might live in the same house, but with aunts, uncles, and cousins as neighbors, daily contact with extended family is the norm. More so than with Muslim families, Native American cultures consider blood, marriage, and adopted relatives as equally important within family organization and structure (Red Horse 244). To an extent, the community and tribe are also factors of family structure, since traditional communities have optimal populations ranging from 250 to 350 individuals (Red Horse 244). Citing G. T. Wilkinson in their dissertation *Parameters of Parenting in Native American Families*, Tamara Camille Newcomb explains that "family is at

the core of the Native American culture,” which is quite logical as a tribe is merely a collection of families (9). Traditional Native Americans communities value collectivity over individuality, resulting in a “collective, cooperative, social system that is dynamic and systematic” (Newcomb 9). Being dependent on the tribe is better than being independent of it. Members of traditional tribal communities, therefore, have obligations beginning in the individual family and extending into the community at large.

These responsibilities to the family, community, and tribe often begin at younger ages than is customary in other cultures: “Responsibility is a bilateral phenomenon in that it is adopted by and binding across the generations. Every age cohort, regardless of gender, is accorded respect because each fulfills critical functions in the community” (Red Horse 245). As John Red Horse explains, “In traditional Indian communities [. . .] age and independence are negatively correlated. Essentially, this assumes that as individuals become older they are expected to assume increased kinship responsibilities. In marriage, for example, individuals unite but uniquely marry into a larger kin system” (245). Essentially, parents teach their children respect by seeing that they feel love and affection and have respect for themselves (Red Horse 246). With responsibility comes freedom, and Native American families have been known to provide their children more freedom than children in other societies. As with Daneshpour’s observations of Muslim culture, Red Horse’s observations of Native American cultures are those of only those of one expert in the field.

Citing Teresa LaFromboise and K. Low, Newcomb outlines an approach to parenting often seen in Native American cultures: children should be autonomous, allowed to make their own decisions, and operate semi-independently. Again, Newcomb’s note that this is characteristic of some Native American cultures does not mean it is characteristic of all Native

Americans or not characteristic of other cultures, those being discussed in this cross-culture investigation or otherwise. In some Native American families, toddlers might choose when they want to eat and sleep. Elementary-aged children have the choice to attend or not attend school. Middle and high school-aged children are welcome to travel by themselves and entrusted to make decisions about their own futures (31). Parents do “want their children to be giving, respectful, to relate well to others, and to make responsible choices,” but Native American cultures do not seek one correct method or way of parenting, so often there is no need for parents to interfere with a child’s development (Newcomb 30-31). Newcomb also states, “The roots of Native American childrearing practices, interpersonal relationships, and family dynamics are deeply entwined in history as they have been passed down from generation to generation,” and are therefore a shared, cultural-belief about the way to raise children (1).

Just because Native American parents often choose not to interfere with a child’s development does not mean they will not if it is necessary. The best outcome is that children will experience natural consequences, but knowing that the collective is valued over the individual in traditional Native American communities, there is a limit to the amount of personal freedom one may have (Newcomb 31). Red Horse, citing R.K. Thomas, elaborates in this way: “Indian value orientations allow considerable tolerance for individual deviations in behavior; however, such levels of tolerance ha[ve] limits if the well-being of the community [is] at risk” (246). Keeping one’s individuality in check is part of an all-encompassing respect for one’s community and its members. Those outside or unfamiliar with Native American communities often note characteristics such as non-competitiveness and unobtrusiveness in its members (Red Horse 246). Upholding responsibilities to the family and to the community guarantees harmonious

relationships; in such small communities, where nearly everyone is related by blood, marriage, or adoption, this is the only viable option, making such attributes necessary.

Native Americans have also dealt with a list of tragedies that still affect their communities today. To begin with, Native Americans “suffered familial, cultural, economic, and social degeneration caused by decades of assimilating and discriminatory practices and policies” (Gray 590). Many were forced to relocate, the most famous of these forced-relocations being the Trail of Tears. New territories made Native Americans targets for sickness, disease, violence, hunger, and loneliness. Native Americans lost their self-sustainability as increasing industrialization moved wealth into cities; Native American communities left in this wake did their best to survive on poverty-stricken reservations (Gray 590). An equally traumatic aspect of Native American history was the practice of sending Native American children to boarding schools far away from their communities. These children were forced to assimilate, adopting the language and behaviors of the American majority, to try to avoid extreme punishments, isolation, physical abuse, and neglect (Gray 590). Furthermore, foster care and adoption policies throughout much of the 1900s allowed the United States government to place Native American children in Caucasian homes, where they were “learning a culture hostile to their own” and further alienating them from the communities they originally called home (Gray 589-590). Citing Maria Yellow Horse, Brave Heart and DeBruyn, Gray summarizes these experiences: “These experiences and their negative effects, jointly defined as ‘historical trauma,’ have significantly impacted American Indians across many generations” (590).

While some improvements have occurred in recent years regarding the treatment of Native Americans by the United States government and mainstream American society, historical trauma lives on into future generations. Cultures utilizing a collective lifestyle do not require

personal suffering or experience as a prerequisite. Effects are felt in both individual identity and relationships because Native American family patterns are intergenerational (Gray 590).

Historical trauma and the resulting poverty certainly contribute to higher rates of substance abuse, violent victimization, teenage pregnancy, anxiety, depression, and suicide among Native Americans. Pessimistically, these risk factors have, over time, contributed to a weakening of Native American familial and cultural defenses. Optimistically, the traditional values, beliefs, and practices that continue from one generation to the next are strong, making many “resilient against the[se] risk factors [even if they are] more frequent in their ethnic group” (Grey 589).

Regardless of one’s choice to view Native American families with a glass half-full or half-empty approach, according to G. Glover, “Family, community, balance, nature, accordance, and multiple other variables are crucial for health” (Newcomb 11). As they have always done, Native Americans, within their families, community, and tribe, generally choose to focus on the present rather than the future, allowing some variation to tradition as is necessary as long as these changes do not alter the focus on spirituality or extended kin systems (Red Horse 246).

As mentioned in chapter one, the family in each novel incurs some conflict and resulting trauma which they must try to resolve before they can hope to move on with their individual lives and their collective life as a family. The roles and familial expectations held by both Bazil and Joe are indeed complicated by a direct attack on their family: readers become aware of wife and mother Geraldine Coutts’s rape on only page six of Erdrich’s *The Round House*. While all the events that follow stem directly from her sexual assault, Joe is the story’s narrator, and he moves seamlessly between the thirteen-year-old adolescent he was at the time of the crime to the successful lawyer and family man of the present who is looking back on the events that would forever change his life. Geraldine certainly endures the brunt of this trauma, but her rape and its

aftermath provide readers insight into the familial roles and expectations that are at play in the Coutts family. What is different about *The Round House* is that readers discover the novel's artistic representation of familial roles and expectations within Native American families by what is now lacking or disrupted within the Coutts family rather than seeing it in its normative state.

Readers see from the get-go that Bazil Coutts is devoted to his wife Geraldine. Joe as narrator explains, "Women don't realize how much store men set on the regularity of their habits. We absorb their comings and goings into our bodies, their rhythms into our bones" (3). Bazil is no exception. Recognizing Joe's concern that Geraldine has yet to return home from work, and that she should have been home already even if she first stopped by to see her sister Clemence, Bazil springs to action. After passing Geraldine on the road during their search, Bazil and Joe soon find Geraldine at home, still in her parked car in front of the garage. Joe narrates the briefest of moments when Bazil forgets he must remain calm for Joe's sake, showing readers just how devoted he is to Geraldine: "'Oh, Geraldine!' Just from those two words, it was clear that he was and had always been in love with my mother. He had never stopped being grateful that she had married him and right afterward given him a son, when he'd come to believe that he was the end of the line" (6). As Julie Tharpe explains, "the attack of [Geraldine] silences her, renders her voiceless" (29). Geraldine copes with her trauma by retreating within the master bedroom and within herself. In the early stages of the investigation, Geraldine's attacker has not yet been confirmed. The Coutts family is vulnerable, and while Bazil is working with the authorities to find answers, they need as much additional protection as possible, for his peace-of-mind as well as Geraldine's. This includes locking the back door, something that has never happened in Joe's life, and accepting Whitey and Sonja's dog Pearl into their home. As Bazil

explains, “Joe, we need a protection dog. There is a man we suspect. But he has cleared out. Which means he could be anywhere. Or, he might not have done it but the real attacker could still be in the area” (27). Once Bazil feels he has fulfilled his obligation to protect his family in their home, he can begin trying to bring Geraldine out of her protective shell and back into the family.

Bazil reasons that if Geraldine feels that Bazil and Joe need her, then she will slowly begin to feel like herself again. Bazil is successful in his scheme to prepare and present an inedible meal; however, the whole family realizes that the meal is just a ruse: “My mother and I probably realized at the same time that my father, who had taken care of my grandmother for many years and certainly knew how to cook, had faked his ineptitude. But the stew with its gagging undertone of rotted onion was so successfully infernal that it cheered us up, as my mother’s decision to cook had done” (36). For a week, everything in the Coutts family seems to be on the up-and-up. Geraldine cooks and even feels safe enough to venture out into the yard to sit in a lawn chair with Pearl by her side. Bazil is still working with the local authorities and now a federal agent, even traveling to talk to a U.S. attorney, but makes sure to spend as much time at home as possible, comforting his wife with his presence and support as he has done throughout their marriage (40-41). Something else Bazil has done throughout their marriage, although, brings Geraldine’s progress to a screeching halt, causing her to retreat once again into the master bedroom and herself. Joe narrates this familiar moment, almost in slow motion, like a bystander to an accident that will inevitably happen:

We were not churchgoers. This was our ritual. Our breaking bread, our communion. And it all began with that trusting moment where my father walked up behind my mother and she smiled at this approach without turning. But now

they stood staring at each other helplessly over the broken dish. [. . .] [M]y mother flushed darkly and an almost imperceptible shudder coursed over her. She took a gasping breath, and put her hand to her face. Then she stepped over the mess on the floor and walked carefully away. [. . .] (43).

Again, Geraldine brings out the defenses to protect herself against further attack; what has changed, however, is that the walls of defense are now between Bazil and Geraldine rather than a means to protect them both from outside threats.

Being denied the ability to physically comfort his wife, Bazil turns to the law, believing that justice is the only means to bring Geraldine comfort. As Joe's narration explains, "My father had become convinced that somewhere within his bench briefs, memos, summaries, and decisions lay the identity of the man whose act had nearly severed my mother's spirit from her body" (45). At this point, Bazil begins trusting Joe with details of his mother's attack, explaining the trickiness of tribal law and thus, in a way, making him an honorary police partner and detective. As Jacob Bender and Lydia Maunz-Breese state, "In one telling scene, Joe's father, Bazil, deploys a moldy casserole to demonstrate to Joe the rotten foundation of 'Indian Law'" (144). While Joe is only thirteen and the details of his mother's rape are sickening, Bazil is attune to Joe's need to understand those factors in play that are affecting his family so greatly and tries to explain the situation and its complications in ways that Joe can comprehend.

Bazil also feels compelled to right the injustice taken against his culture: "In violating Geraldine within the precincts of the round house, Lark simultaneously profanes the sacred feminized body representative of the Ojibway tribe and culture" (Bender 145). Bazil is expected to protect his community and tribe as well as his family. It is the details that Bazil and Joe discover both individually and together which bring the real travesty to the surface: without

explicit knowledge of exactly where the crime took place, chances of justice are slim, meaning the family, community, and tribe are still at risk. According to Bender and Maunz-Breese, “[B]ecause of the complex land legalities surrounding the scene of the crime, the Coutts family has no recourse to justice through the U.S. legal system, in spite of Basil’s position as a judge” (147). Julie Tharp echoes the resonance of Erdrich’s choice to use the Coutts family and their proximity to tribal law as a point of insight into the issues plaguing Native American communities: “Having the victim married to a tribal judge provides us with natural access to the history and complexity of tribal law while also showing us a man deeply affected by his paralysis within it, his complete inability to try the man who has brutally attacked and attempted to immolate his wife. Judge Coutts is essentially emasculated” (30). Native American communities are systematic, and Basil does everything he can, exhausting all available resources to no avail. It seems all hope may be lost for Basil to find a way to comfort Geraldine.

Not being able to offer Geraldine comfort, either as her husband or as a pillar in the community, leaves Basil questioning his faith in the justice system and losing his bearings, even within his own home: “From the foot of the stairs, I watched him shuffle to the bedroom door, which was outlined in black. He paused there, and then went past. To the bathroom I expected. But no. He opened the door to the cold little room my mother used for sewing. There was a narrow daybed in that room but it was only for guests. None of us had ever slept in it” (78). This scene, as witnessed from Joe’s perspective, shows the full weight of the situation. Joe looks up to Basil, both as his father and from his physical location in the home. Basil’s banishment to the sewing room solidifies the shifting of roles within the family, which have shifted to the point that Basil now feels like an outsider, or guest, rather than head of the household.

Regardless of how enfeebled Basil feels in his ability to protect and provide for his wife, he still tries to keep Joe safe. Originally, Basil keeps Joe safe by keeping the details of his mother's attack secret. Then seeing that Joe has just as much of a fire in him for trying to find a solution to their conflict as he does, Basil brings Joe into the world of court cases and investigation. Basil, although, eventually comes to regret the seed he has planted in Joe: "I am going to have to appeal to you, Joe. I am going to have to ask you to stop. No more hunting down the attacker. No more clue gathering. I realize it is my fault because I sat you down to read through the cases I pulled. But I was wrong to draw you in. [. . .] I'm afraid. You could get yourself...if anything happened to you..." (92). Native American parents allow their children a great deal of independence and autonomy, but this scene serves as an example of parental intervention when necessary. This interaction between Basil and Joe also marks a transition: Basil is now acting out of emotion, specifically fear, rather than the logical mind of a judge.

Readers see Basil reach his boiling point on a seemingly routine trip to the grocery store, a rage that stems from his ineptitude and the shame of not being about to provide exactly what his family needs. Basil and Joe run into Linden Lark, Geraldine's attacker who had recently been released from police custody, at the open meat case. After standing in shock and awe for the briefest of moments, Basil lurches toward Lark: "As an honorable upholder of justice, [Basil] cannot bring himself to vigilante justice. His sudden attack on Linden Lark in the grocery store when he is taken unawares shows the degree to which he has been repressing his need for violent revenge. He is so upset that it leads to his first heart attack, further extending the negative effects on the family" (Tharpe 30-31). Even when presented with the opportunity for revenge, Basil is mentally and physically unable to perform. Revenge, although, does not fall in line with standard Native American beliefs about healing:

Part of healing might consist of distinguishing the person who placed the curse on the individuals, however native healers strongly discourage revenge or retribution, which is thought to hinder or prevent the healing process. Rather, the individuals are taught to mentally and physically avoid the individual who cursed them and to concentrate on the individuals, family, and friends who can aid them through their recovery (Newcomb 11).

While all of the Coutts have their individual reasons for wanting to take revenge on Linden Lark, it is only Joe who has the ability to act on these urges.

As previously mentioned, *The Round House* is different from Shafak's *Honor* in that readers learn the expectations of Native American families not by what they see within the Coutts family but by what is missing. One characteristic that the novels have in common, however, is that they allow readers the opportunity to view a scene or exchange from two or more perspectives. In *The Round House*, many defining moments for Bazil as head of the household and pillar of the community are also defining for Joe as son and adolescent of the community. The first of these defining moments for Joe is in the hospital as he waits for his mother to be treated for the physical injuries sustained during her sexual assault. Both Geraldine and Bazil try to protect Joe from knowing too many details about the attack, but Joe resists being forced away from what is going on in the family, even if it is unpleasant: "Dr. Egge turned and saw me frozen at the doors. He pointed toward the waiting room. My father's emotion was something, his gesture implied, that I was too young to witness. But during the last few hours I had become increasingly resistant to authority. Instead of politely vanishing, I ran to my father, flailing Dr. Egge aside" (13). This desire to keep the family united, even if under duress, is one that Joe strives to maintain throughout the novel.

For Joe, part of wanting to keep the family united means taking things back to the way they were before Geraldine's rape. This speaks to his innocence at the beginning of the novel because things will never be exactly the same as they were before, since each member of the Coutts family has been altered by the attack in some way. Joe seems to take the noticeable changes in his family's chemistry to heart more than Bazil. Coming back home from school, Joe immediately encounters changes as he finds the back door locked, which has never been the case before. Eeriness builds as Joe encounters the wall clock with its hands stopped at 11:22. After describing the sunlight streaming onto the floor as "an ominous radiance," Joe takes a big swing from a carton of milk out of the refrigerator (23). Because Geraldine has never before let the milk go sour in the fridge, Joe bolts up the stairs to let her know about it: "I set the glass on the table and bolted up the stairs. Burst into my parents' bedroom. My mother was sunk in such heavy sleep that when I tried to throw myself down next to her, she struck me in the face. It was a forearm back blow and caught my jaw, stunning me" (23). Joe is literally struck with the realization that what he could previously expect from his parents is no longer guaranteed.

Joe's expectations, both within his family and his community, come from his unexpected birth. Joe says, "I was lucky: I was a boy doted on by women. [. . .] As I said, I was born late, into the aging tier of the family, and to parents who would often be mistaken for my grandparents. There was that added weight of being a surprise to my mother and father, and the surging hopes that implied. It was all on me – the bad and the good" (25). Joe has, thus far, been a point of attention in the family while also carrying all of the weight for the family's future – an obvious foreshadowing on Erdrich's part to Joe's involvement in Linden Lark's murder.

The expectations that first surfaced with fresh milk in the refrigerator are replicated with a phone call to Bazil. Since Joe left a brief note saying only "Lake," Joe phones to let Bazil know

he is currently eating with his friends at Grandma Thunder's. When Joe ends their conversation with "I love you, Dad" he does not get the reply he expects as Basil had already hung up: "The words *I love you* echoed. Why had I said those words and why into the phone just as I knew he was replacing it on the cradle? That I had said those words now made me furious and that my father had not responded singed my soul. A red cloud of anger floated up over my eyes" (71). When Joe returns home from his day at the round house and dinner at Grandma Thunder's, he eavesdrops on a conversation Basil is having with Uncle Edward. After watching Basil make his way upstairs and into the sewing room rather than the master bedroom, Joe goes upstairs, gets ready for bed, and realizes "my father hadn't even made sure I was home. He's forgotten all about me" (78). Hardie and Seltzer provide insight into the feelings of neglect Joe is battling: "We distinguish between two forms of parental support: perceived support and actual support. *Perceived support* refers to whether young people feel supported by their parents and whether they would turn to their parents for advice. *Actual support* includes economic and social capital that children receive from their parents" (322). While Joe is certainly receiving actual support, at least from Basil, he feels a lack in perceived support, which will later set up the decision he makes independently to kill Linden Lark.

As previously mentioned, Basil decides to make Joe privy to the details of his mother's attack. While Joe does feel a certain obligation to help Basil protect Geraldine, there is more to this partnership than Basil might realize. As they both are both bent to the ground, cleaning up the mess left by the casserole incident, Joe remarks, "[Basil] bowed his head and at that moment I was first aware that he exuded a desolation that would grip him with increasing force. When he remained there motionless, I truly became frightened. I put my hand urgently on his arm. I could say what I was feeling, but that time, at least, my father looked up. Help me get those files in.

His voice was hard and urgent. We'll start tonight" (44). To Joe, this investigation is a way to make his father notice him, to provide the joy that being his only son used to provide. Joe seems to find his purpose in his investigations, both with and without his friends, and he actually unearths some useful information. Bazil, however, feels this useful information makes Joe a target as well. Bazil cannot stand the idea of both his wife and son being in danger and pleads to Joe, asking him to cease all investigations and other involvement with the crime committed against Geraldine. In a burst of anger, Joe responds, "You gave me life [. . .] That's how it's supposed to work. So let me do what I want with it" (94). Joe's rebuttal connects to a number of facets. First, Bazil invited him into the investigation, so to refute his help now goes against his word. Second, Native American families traditionally allow adolescents the ability to determine their own future, and trying to harness Joe with tight reins at this point goes against generally accepted tribal customs. Third, Joe responds this way because he is hurt; his help with the case highlights some potentially important evidence but not on the finder, as Joe had hoped.

Bazil does discuss the case with Joe at a later point using a moldy casserole to demonstrate the intricacies of tribal law, and after Geraldine finally breaks her silence concerning Mayla Wolfskin, her baby, Curtis Yeltow, and Linden Lark, Joe insists that Bazil update him with everything relating to the case. Like the casserole illustration, Bazil discusses some aspects of the case with Joe, but he does not see him as the partner he might have before. Bazil's selective adherence to Joe's request is confirmed when Joe's friend Zack hears about a search-and-rescue outfit with dogs coming from Montana, yet Bazil himself never makes mention of a dog search to Joe (197). It is at this point that Joe's adolescent awareness comes to pass, the insight readers received early from an adult Joe commenting on the unfolding of these events: "That would come later, after I became accustomed to the fact that I had begun to lead a

life apart from my parents” (80). It is Joe’s success, being both in and out of the family happenings, that allow him to take action in a way that still resonates years later as an adult.

After Bazil’s opportune attack on Linden Lark is thwarted by his first heart attack, Geraldine is called to action to support rather than be supported. This is really the first-time readers can see the inner workings of Joe and Geraldine’s relationship. They both desire the protection Bazil usually offers, both of them sleeping in an article of Bazil’s clothing by the end of their hospital stay. While on a brief excursion out of the hospital for burgers, fries, and milkshakes, Geraldine and Joe consider their current family status as it correlates to the freedom of Linden Lark. Joe had recently received word from his friend Cappy that “some members of our family paid a visit” to Lark to persuade him to leave the Coutts family alone (246-247). This news, unfortunately, is not enough to halt Geraldine’s fears and anxiety. Joe as narrator describes the scene at the diner:

We ate silently. Then all of a sudden, my mother put down the hamburger. She laid it on her plate and said, No. Still chewing, I stared at her. The slight droop of her eyelid gave her a critical air. Is there something wrong with that burger, Mom? She gazed past me, transfixed by a thought. The knife crease shot up between her eyebrows. It’s something Daddy told me. A story about a wiindigoo. Lark’s trying to eat us, Joe. I won’t let him, she said. I will be the one to stop him (247-248).

It is this moment in which Joe realizes what is expected of him, and what will happen to his family if he does not fill this role.

As Bender and Maunz-Breese explain, “Her use of pronouns is telling; she does not say that Lark is trying to eat *her* [. . .] Geraldine understands the violation of her body as a violence

committed against an all-inclusive ‘us,’ identifying Lark’s act as intended to strike at the heart of the entire reservation community” (152). The use of “us” refers to the entire community of which the Coutts family is a part. Even though she has lost so much of her own voice, Geraldine is ready to face her attacker again if it means protecting her tribe from a similar trauma. This is a choice that Joe is not willing to stand by and let his mother make: “Joe is an ambitious character, but he finds himself in the difficult situation of having to save his parents. He truly believes that either his mother will try to kill Linden and instead be killed by him or his father will die of a heart attack, unless he takes the law into his own hands” (Tharp 32-33). Other than being concerned for their health, any involvement Basil might have in Lark’s murder will ruin his career and their family’s financial security, something rare in reservation life and certainly not something to throw away lightly. Joe, it seems, is the only one that can rid his family of the monster lurking about. As Bender and Maunz-Breese summarize, “Thus, Joe’s decision to deploy extralegal means to contain the Linden Lark menace lies in the fact that legality itself is part of the problem” (144). Joe is willing to accept whatever repercussions might come, but finally bringing harmony back to his family and community is worth the risk.

Immediately after they shoot Linden Lark, Cappy and Joe cleanse their insides with alcohol. Returning home, Joe becomes ill, likely a physical manifestation of the sickness weighing on his soul. Before being interviewed by Federal Agent Bjerke, Basil and Geraldine ask to speak to Joe about Lark’s murder. Readers can infer that Joe’s parents, at a minimum, suspect that he murdered Lark. The family sits down, not to extract a confession from Joe, but to rather explain that, while the shooter might not have realized it at the time, “It could be argued that Lark met the definition of a wiindigoo, and that with no other recourse, his killing fulfilled the requirements of a very old law” (306). The laws of the tribe are able to save Joe from

criminal punishment, and the community at large is also saved. Joe's role within his family might have a mostly positive ending, but his actions serve as another example of the strength that familial expectations have in influencing the thoughts and actions of its members.

To summarize, like Shafak's *Honour*, Erdrich's *The Round House* is a fair representation of the Native American cultures it represents. The entire Coutts family displays a strong respect for the community, and it is this respect for both the nuclear family and community at large that makes Joe's decision to kill Linden Lark crystal clear: in order to protect the collective "us" he must eliminate the individual "I," thus chancing the certainty of the direction of his life post-Linden Lark. Joe's grandfather passes down the tribe's traditional values, beliefs, and origins to Joe who also witnesses the lasting effects of historical trauma within Native American cultures. These lessons Joe learns from his nuclear and extended families make the need to eliminate the threat of danger that much clearer. Like in Erdrich's *The Round House*, readers will see one a intense respect for family and one family member's clear decision to eliminate the threat from the family in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.

CHAPTER 4: TYRANNY, TRIBULATION, AND TRUTH IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI
ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2003 novel *Purple Hibiscus* follows the Achike family, which includes father Eugene, mother Beatrice, son Jaja, and daughter Kambili. Readers of this bildungsroman novel see Kambili not only navigate her maturation but her awakening to the harsh world governed by her extremist father. Augustine Nwoye's comments this way concerning family therapy relate to any investigation of values and expectations within African families:

It needs to be mentioned that when studying and making general remarks about my approach to family therapy in Africa, it is important to keep in mind that the continent has an area of about eleven and a half million square miles, a population of more than 650,000,000, and an ethnic identity comprising more than 1,000 groups. It would therefore be unrealistic to expect that in such a large continent with so many people there are no differences in the manner and methods of family therapy practice. The fact is that there are many differences (2).

Purple Hibiscus is set in the southeastern Nigerian state of Enugu, but even trying to understand familial expectations within the nation of Nigeria is complex. In Enugu, and much of the southeast, Igbo tribal practices still influence family practices, but to the southwest, we see Yoruba practices functioning in a similar way. Colonization brought Catholicism to the continent, but Nigeria also hosts Protestants and Muslims, particularly in the northern states. Indeed there are differences in the factors that shape Nigerian families.

Gloria L. Kwashi argues, "All family members are products of the culture and religion of their parents and undoubtedly these factors will set the base upon which the families of the next

generation will be shaped and raised” (19-20). Kwashi’s article “Cultural/Religious Factors in our Understand of Family” includes a list of ten cultural factors that influence Nigerian families: leadership of the family, domestic chores and child rearing, education, slavery, economic control, right to inheritance, divorce, ownership of children, communication, and child-bearing. Echoing Nwoye, Kwashi clarifies, “In Africa, and particularly Nigeria (which is itself made up of many varied traditions), culture shapes our understanding of the family in [. . .] many ways,” so these ten factors “apply to many but not necessary to all African cultures” (20). One factor of Nigerian families many scholars agree on is the importance of children.

According to Nwoye, “One defining characteristic of the people of Africa and certainly other people from non-Western cultures is their treasuring of children” (3). As discussed in “Reproductive Motivation and Family-Size Preferences among Nigerian Men” by Uche C. Isiugo-Abanihe, “Perhaps more than their wives, African men place a high premium on having children [as] they gain socially and economically from having large numbers of children” (150). From a traditional standpoint, the most important duty a wife has to her husband is to give him children. Because a man with more children has more status within the traditional community and promise for a strong economic future, African men may even take more than one wife. Regardless of the number of wives a man has, it is his voice and mind that steers the family. Citing Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, Megbowon Funmilola and colleagues outline the oppressive nature of traditional African marriages:

[M]arriage is one of the most relevant forms of oppression in the African tradition that, most times, empowers the man and disempowers the woman. Within traditions, marriage has been very oppressive for African women. First, the woman loses status by being married because in the indigenous systems, which

are still at the base of society, the woman (as daughter or sister) has greater status and more rights within her birth lineages. Within marriage, she becomes a possession; she is voiceless and often sightless in her husband's family except, in some groups, through what accrues to her through children (7895).

A husband has obligations to his descendants and ancestry, and a wife is expected to "abide by his spoken decisions or his perceived wishes" (Isiugo-Abanihe 150). Clifford Odimegwu and colleagues explain the opposing views of what might be expected in the Africa of the future: Growing rates of migration, nonmarital fertility, and divorce "have resulted in a breakdown of the traditional family structure in the region. While some researchers have applauded these changing family dynamics as a sign of women's autonomy [. . .], others have suggested that it could have social and economic consequences for youth and the society" (2). Again, what is true of one family (or one artistic representation of family, like Adichie's) cannot be considered commonplace, but changes within the nation and the continent will affect the family regardless.

Just as women learn traditional expectations through socialization, "[G]rowing boys and girls learn one very important thing which sums up all the others, and that is manners and deportment proper to their status in the community. [. . .] [Furthermore] [t]he same socialization process makes them remember that presumption, conceit, and disobedience to those above them are grave offences" (Nwoye 5). As an investigation into Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* soon will suggest, Kambili and her brother Jaja bear the weight of these grave offences. Karen Pfeffer also emphasizes the importance of looking to culture when navigating familial expectations: "Cultural features are particularly important when discussing close personal relationships among young people. These include strong kinship ties, respect for the opinions of elders, the

importance of family consent to marriage and the emphasis placed on child bearing” (502).

While *Purple Hibiscus* ends before readers can see either Kambili or Jaja move toward marriage or child bearing, their connection as siblings is often their only means for survival under Eugene Achike’s tyrannical rule.

Despite a push for tradition or reform, it cannot be disputed that today’s Africa is different from the Africa of twenty years ago and certainly of 120 years ago. According to Daniel Jordan Smith, “Africans are not simply abandoning traditional practices in favor of modern ones, but are creating their own systems of marriage and family organization that use resources of the past and the present, negotiating the tensions that emerge, and drawing on both traditional and modern moralities as they see fit” (132). In the past when marriages were governed solely by tribal customs, few Igbos (the tribe from which the Achikes descend and is prevalent in southeastern Nigeria) would have considered marrying from other ethnic groups, but because today’s Nigeria (and much of Africa for that matter) is urbanized, “many young Igbos from distant communities meet while they attend school, work, or seek business opportunities, and romantic relationships often evolve into marriage proposals (Smith 135-136). Smith argues that even though the pool of potential romantic partners has grown in size, the historical importance placed on fertility, child-bearing, and parenthood remains intact (133). Karen Pfeffer’s survey of young Nigerians’ perceptions of the qualities of a “good husband” and “good wife,” although, shows the opposite. Pfeffer states, “Despite the influence of Western cultures in Nigeria, this is not strongly evident in the students’ responses. Not as much emphasis was placed on childbearing or producing healthy children as we expected” (513). Pfeffer does account for the chance that Smith’s findings are indeed correct if the young men and women surveyed

considered childbearing so essential to a successful marriage that it is not considered a debatable issue and was therefore not appropriately included in their findings (513).

As Gloria L. Kwashi states, “[C]ultural and religious factors that place unnecessary restrictions on family members are bound to threaten, cripple, and hinder the attainment of the individual’s potential” (22). For Beatrice, Kambili, and Jaja, Eugene is the human-embodiment of such factors. Eugene is a traditionalist when it comes to the regulation of his family, and Beatrice is indeed without a voice for nearly all of the novel. As Anna-Leena Toivanen explains, “One of the novel’s governing tropes is silence. The family members lower their voices in order not to disturb the father and due to this habit they end up speaking in whispers even in his absence. [. . .] Questioning is something that neither Kambili, her mother, and her brother want to do. There is a constant tension between the said and the unsaid” (109). Readers see Beatrice exhibiting this behavior early on in the novel during one of many uncomfortable family meals. Beatrice comments that the cashew juice delivered from the factory earlier in the day is good and likely to sell.

When Jaja does not compliment the drink like he is supposed to, Beatrice quickly tries to recover from this slight. Beatrice again compliments the cashew juice, comparing it to a fruity, white wine, an elegant comparison that might be convincing enough to avoid an eruption; however, Kambili as narrator admits, “She was nervous, I could tell – not just because a fresh cashew tasted nothing like white wine but because her voice was lower than usual” (13). The expectation that Beatrice’s tastes should mirror Eugene’s is seen later in the novel when she is selecting fabric for that year’s new curtains. Even though Eugene usually picks Beatrice’s favorite, her favorite is always a different shade of beige, which is Eugene’s favorite (192). Kambili shares early on about her mother, “[T]here was so much that she did not mind” (19).

Whether it is that Beatrice really does not mind, or that she has no other option, her silence and modified tastes are only the beginning of her expected loyalty to Eugene.

Beatrice is expected to stand by her husband, showing the upmost loyalty even when facing physical harm. The first of these instances occurs when Beatrice, who is battling morning sickness from her pregnancy, asks Eugene if she can stay in the car rather than going inside to visit Father Benedict after Mass as they all usually do. Eugene asks her twice if she is sure she wants to stay in the car, creating a palpable warning until Beatrice finally reneges her request declaring, “I’ll come with you. It’s really not that bad” even though Kambili comments that she is noticeably drawn as they walk toward the Father’s house (29-30). Eugene waits to punish Beatrice for this indiscretion at home, his beating resulting in her overnight hospitalization and the miscarriage of their baby. Despite his violence and the cost, Beatrice does not betray Eugene when she explains to Kambili and Jaja, “There was an accident, the baby is gone” (34). Furthermore, Beatrice does not object when Eugene declares that Beatrice needs forgiveness (even though Kambili cannot think what for), and that they all would recite sixteen different novenas at dinner and stay after Mass to be sprinkled with holy water (35-36). Through it all, Beatrice remains steadfast to her expectations as Eugene’s wife.

Beatrice not only remains loyal to Eugene when she faces physical harm but also when physical harm threatens her children. After returning home from visiting Aunty Ifeoma and their cousins in Nsukka, Eugene catches Kambili and Jaja admiring Amaka’s portrait of their recently-deceased grandfather. Because this action goes against everything Eugene has instructed them to do regarding their pagan grandfather, Eugene promptly rips the painting into tiny pieces. As Kambili lies on the ground, attempting to protect the only piece of her grandfather she has left, Eugene kicks her repeatedly in a fiery rage that nearly kills her, as is evidenced by Father

Benedict giving Kambili extreme unction (212). Kambili is immediately aware that Beatrice's loyalty is to her father Eugene rather than to her and Jaja: "Mama reached out to hold my hand. Her face was puffy from crying, and her lips were cracked, with bits of discolored skin peeling off. I wished I could get up and hug her, and yet I wanted to push her away, to shove her so hard that she would topple over the chair" (213). When Auntie Ifeoma and Father Amadi arrive at the hospital, Beatrice maintains her loyalty to Eugene with her excuses, first to Ifeoma, claiming twice, "It has never happened like this before," and then to Kambili, "Your father has been by your bedside every night these past three days. He has not slept a wink" (214). It is when Kambili receives her report card after taking her exams in the hospital, earning back her first-place class ranking, that readers see the weight of Beatrice's forced loyalty in her robotic "Thanks be to God" response rather than her typical Igbo praise songs (215). It is during these trials that readers are reminded of Beatrice's figurines on the *étagère*.

Because the novel's structure begins with the climax followed by flashback, readers are aware of the symbolism surrounding the figurines from the beginning. Beatrice cherishes her ballet dancer figurines. It is by no mistake of Adichie's that they are ballet dancers, as Beatrice, Kambili, and Jaja must dance around Eugene as one might dance around a landmine. After any blow up, and in their lowest moments as a family, Beatrice polishes her figurines, even once when one of her eyes was nearly swollen shut (192-193). During the novel's climax, Eugene throws his missal (a book containing the texts needed for Catholic Mass) at Jaja, breaking some of Beatrice's figurines. According to Kambili, "I meant to say I am sorry Papa broke your figurines, but the words that came out were, 'I'm sorry your figurines broke, Mama.' She nodded quickly, then shook her head to show that the figurines did not matter. They did, though" (10). Soon after Beatrice shares that she will not replace the broken figurines, and Kambili comes to a

realization: “Maybe Mama had realized that she would not need the figurines anymore; that when Papa threw the missal at Jaja, it was not just the figurines that came tumbling down, it was everything. I was only now realizing it, only just letting myself think it” (15). The Achikes are just as fragile as the figurines, but for all its despair, this moment plants a seed in Beatrice.

As Susan Z. Andrade states, “Beatrice intervenes between her husband and children and attempts to protect them from his more brutal forms of punishment. She is meeker, made so by Papa’s regular beatings, which at least once, though probably twice within the space of the novel, cause her to miscarry” (97). Beatrice flees to Ifeoma’s house instead of returning home to rest after Eugene breaks a table over her belly, causing another stay in the hospital and a second miscarriage. This is when readers see the seed of resistance beginning to grow within Beatrice. This resistance, however, is still not strong enough to allow Beatrice to rise up once and for all; after Ifeoma answers Eugene’s phone call and hangs up on him, Beatrice calls him right back and then declares that she and the children will be leaving for home the next day (249). One potential explanation is, “Although some women may influence their children more than their husbands do, women remain socially powerless and personally dependent upon their husbands” (Isiugo-Abanihe 154). Logistically, Beatrice cannot support herself and divorce would result in the loss of her children, which is really no choice at all. While Beatrice’s prompt decision to return home might seem flabbergasting or difficult to accept, readers eventually find out that her seed of resistance is being fed by a long-term plan.

Eugene dies, and for the briefest of moments, readers glimpse the resolution they had hoped for all along. Beatrice tells her children that poison was found in Eugene’s body during the autopsy. Knowing the truth will soon come out, and that they do not have long together before the police arrive, Beatrice explains, “I started putting the poison in his tea before I came

to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor” (290). What Beatrice likely does not account for when she confesses to her children, however, is that Jaja would protect her, claiming he killed his father by putting rat poison in his tea. Andrade concludes, “That Beatrice takes the initiative to poison her husband runs counter to her general passivity, but after that bold act she becomes passive again, allowing her son to take the blame, and she herself begins truly to ‘fall apart’ at the novel’s end” (97). What Andrade labels as passivity is the culmination of Beatrice’s response to her expectations as wife and mother within her traditionalist family.

As *Purple Hibiscus* is Kambili’s coming-of-age story, the sympathy readers feel for Beatrice is easily doubled for Kambili as she strives to meet her father’s rigid expectations. Eugene is certainly the king of his kingdom, as previously shown by Beatrice’s thoughts and actions. The Achike home is large, evidence of Eugene’s success in business and society, but his expectations make Kambili feel suffocated in her own home (7). As Ogaga Okuyade states, “Kambili’s home is very typical of children from the aristocratic class, yet they are empty psychologically. Kambili is thus alienated socially, culturally, and psychologically from everyone around her, except her brother” (156). This alienation is confirmed a few times throughout the novel, even within her extended family when her cousins come to visit at Christmas and when Kambili and Jaja first visit them in Nsukka, but Kambili is alienated from her classmates too. One classmate offers, “I’m not saying you feel too big, I am saying that is what Chinwe and most of the girls think. Maybe you should try to talk to her. Maybe after school you should stop running off like that and walk with us to the gate” (51). Okuyade elaborates on Kambili’s alienation at school: “Because of her inability to make her tongue function in school, she is labeled as a ‘backyard snob.’ To aggravate her plight, when the closing bell rings, she dashes off to her father’s waiting car without exchanging pleasantries with her classmates before

she is chauffeur-driven home. Her classmates interpret this as aristocratic arrogance” (157).

When Kambili is in Enugu, the only places she ventures away from home are school and Mass. Because Eugene expects perfection from Kambili, both in her education and faith, she never finds respite from her feelings of suffocation, even when free from the confines of her home.

Furthermore, Kambili is alienated from her parents, especially her mother, finding it nearly impossible to communicate with her. Early in the novel, before her awakening to the horrors of the life she has accepted as normal, Kambili chides her mother for comparing Eugene to Mr. Ezeudu, or with anyone for that matter, because it lowers him, soils him, which is not fair in her opinion because he is different, as evidenced by his refusal to take another wife to have more sons (20). Communication simply is taxed between mother and daughter for a couple of reasons. First, the family must speak in whispers and with their eyes for fear of upsetting Eugene. Second, while Kambili, on some level, desires intimacy with her mother, this desire is not as strong as her desire for her father’s love. Kambili describes a family ritual known as the *love sip*, the most prominent example of Kambili’s desire for Eugene’s love:

I waited for him to ask Jaja and me to take a sip, as he always did. A love sip, he called it, because you shared the little things you loved with the people you loved. Have a love sip, he would say, and Jaja would go first. Then I would hold the cup with both hands and raise it to my lips. One sip. The tea was always too hot, always burned my tongue, and if lunch was something peppery, my raw tongue suffered. But it didn’t matter, because I knew that when the tea burned my tongue, it burned Papa’s love into me (8).

Toivanen explains the complexity of this seemingly simple ritual: “This ambiguous mixture of suffering and affection marks Kambili’s feelings for her father from the beginning of the novel to

the end when the abusive father dies and Kambili starts to realize that domestic violence is not a normal condition of family life” (108). In Kambili’s case, her father’s love hurts both physically and emotionally.

As previously mentioned, Eugene expects educational perfection from both Kambili and Jaja. Eugene has created a daily schedule for each child, which is posted above each of their desks. Before her mother’s first miscarriage of the novel, Kambili contemplates whether her father will create the baby’s daily schedule when it is born or wait until it is a toddler, summarizing Eugene’s compulsive need to micro-manage in few words saying, “Papa liked order” (23). Okuyade believes, “The kind of educational system Eugene wants for his children is dehumanizing. He is mechanical in all sphere of life, and as such he condemns and discourages all forms of leisure” (158). If the schedule does not make the importance Eugene places on education clear enough, his reaction to her second-place class ranking certainly does, a mortifying experience for Kambili as Eugene walks to her class and asks her how many heads Chinwe, the girl who earned first place, has and why, if they both have one head, this girl could have possibly usurped her for the coveted title (47). After viewing her report card on the car ride home, Kambili shares, “The principal, Mother Lucy, wrote, ‘A brilliant, obedient student and a daughter to be proud of.’ But I knew Papa would not be proud. [. . .] I wanted to make Papa proud, to do as well as he had done. [. . .] I needed him to smile at me, in that way that lit up his face, that warmed something inside me. But I had come in second. I was stained by failure” (38-39). Adichie’s use of the word *stained* is noteworthy; *stained* is a word commonly used when discussion one’s sins and impurity which is especially fitting in Kambili’s case, as her father expects perfection in both her education and faith.

Kambili also fails to meet her father's expectations in her faith. Kambili is struggling with menstrual cramps one morning before Mass, needing some Panadol, but also needing to eat something if she is to take the medicine. Both Beatrice and Jaja encourage her to quickly eat some corn flakes before Eugene comes up to leave for Mass, but Kambili is caught in the act. He swings his belt at all three of them, they change clothes, and instead attend later Mass (101-103). Eugene's expectations for Kambili's faith are clearly seen in her early interactions with her grandfather. Even though Kambili admits that she examined her grandfather for "signs of difference, of Godlessness" and "didn't see any," she and Jaja do their best to adhere to Eugene's fifteen-minute visitation allowance, and reject all offers of food or drink within the heathen's home (63). Whether related to her educational, religious, or other familial expectations, "Kambili is always anxious that she, Jaja, or someone else will be punished for not doing what their father expects" (Andrade 95). It is during her first trip to Nsukka that Kambili begins to see that who she can become is very different from the person she is forced to be when at home and under her father's omnipotent eye.

The Nsukka trip is meant to give Kambili and Jaja an opportunity to get to know their cousins. Amaka and Kambili jive about as well as oil and water at the beginning of Kambili and Jaja's visit. When she does not think Kambili can hear her, Amaka questions her mother about why Kambili is so strange. Amaka also challenges Kambili's words and behaviors directly. In one such episode, Amaka asks Kambili, "'Why do you lower your voice? [. . .] 'You lower your voice when you speak. You talk in whispers'" (117). As Amaka and Kambili are not yet close, she does not understand that "Kambili, Jaja, and their mother have [. . .] learned to communicate with their eyes, and as Kambili believes, with their minds, and there are many things that Kambili feels that she would like to say without ever having the courage to do so" (Toivanen

109). While Amaka thinks Kambili acts strangely, the freedom granted to Aunty Ifeoma's children feels foreign to Kambili. Even though Aunty Ifeoma takes their schedules to keep until they leave, Kambili chooses to go to bed at the appointed time, the time set by her father's schedule, her first night in Nsukka. It is also during this first visit in Nsukka that Kambili admits, "I had never thought about the university, where I would go or what I would study. When the time came, Papa would decide" (130). It is only when Kambili is exposed to a way of life that balances familial expectations with personal freedoms, the way of life that Ifeoma and her children lead, that Kambili's digression from her father's expectations can begin.

These digressions start with Papa-Nnukwu's arrival at Aunty Ifeoma's house. Kambili finds herself at a crossroads: she is starting to enjoy her time in Nsukka, but she also remembers her father's strict guidelines for dealing with his heathen father. With so many people under one roof, the only possible room for Papa-Nnukwu to use is the one Kambili shares with Amaka. Kambili wonders what this close proximity means for her future: "I wondered if I would have to confess that I had shared a room with a heathen. I paused then, in my meditation, to pray that Papa would never find out that Papa-Nnukwu had visited and that I had shared a room with him" (149). As readers likely feared, Eugene does find out that Papa-Nnukwu stayed at Ifeoma's house when Kambili and Jaja were visiting, information they intentionally withheld from him. Kambili describes the scene this way: "I saw the moist steam before I saw the water. I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed. 'That is what you do to yourself when you walk into sin. You burn your feet,' he said" (194). As Okuyade explains, "Adichie's novel shows the protagonist growing apart from society especially her father's standards. As she journeys on, the possibility of her integration into her father's world

recedes” (155). If placing this punishment on a scale, Kambili’s punishment for this sin of omission comes second only her father’s beating that nearly kills her.

Just as Kambili describes the water flowing from the kettle as happening in slow motion, she describes Eugene finding her and Jaja looking at Amaka’s portrait of Papa-Nnukwu in a similar way:

I did not tell Jaja [. . .] I did not put the painting right back. Instead I moved closer to Jaja and we stared at the painting, silently, for a very long time. [. . .] I knew Papa would come in to say good night, to kiss my forehead. [. . .] I knew Jaja would not have enough time to slip the painting back in the bag, and that Papa would take one look at it and his eyes would narrow, his cheeks would bulge out like unripe udala fruit, his mouth would spurt Igbo words. And that was what happened (209).

While Kambili anticipates her father’s reaction, it is unlikely that readers anticipated Kambili’s response to his reaction. Kambili lowers herself to the floor, gathering the pieces, and shields them with her body, lying in a fetal-position of sorts, using her instincts to protect one of the shortest and truest relationships she has had in her life. Okuyade explain just what it is that makes Eugene more enraged than any other moment in the novel: “The furtiveness with which she handles the painting embarrasses everything her father stands for. [. . .] [T]he painting symbolizes the collapse of her father’s system. Rather than realize and admit his philosophy is inhumane and inefficacious, with a doleful expression on his face he degenerates into an uncontrollable fit of anger and slaps Kambili into a state of unconsciousness” (162). The events that follow only further separate Kambili from her father’s expectations, eventually leaving her and the rest of the family to deal with the trauma and emotional scarring left after his death.

To summarize, Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* is a fair representation of Nigerian and Igbo cultures as well as the culture and influence of Catholicism brought to Nigeria during colonialism. Kambili and her brother Jaja are certainly products of the culture and religion of their parents while Beatrice displays a traditional wife's duty to abide by her husband's decisions and wishes. While Eugene dictates the expectations within his family, he is also the point of origin, the genesis for his family's conflict and trauma. Beatrice killing Eugene, much like Joe killing Linden Lark and Iskender killing "Pembe," stems from what is expected or what must happen in order to protect the family

CHAPTER 5: A CALL FOR CROSS-CULTURAL STUDIES

Just as I intentionally selected three multicultural novels representing three extremely different cultures with the commonality of family trauma, while conducting research for this cross-cultural study I also made a conscious effort to utilize the research of scholars within the culture whenever possible. The work of the novelist is to understand the culture their characters will represent as an insider. I write about these cultures through my cultural lens, and as I am not a member of any of the aforementioned cultures, it is the lens of an outsider. While academics can certainly become experts on various cultures, having knowledge of a culture does not make one an insider of that culture, so using academics who are both experts and insiders can help alleviate the anxiety of writing about cultures that are personally unknown.

Literature is not definitive; it is a representation, therefore, using literary analysis as a source for understanding culture can never be absolute. Using multicultural literature as a basis for cross-cultural study, however, brings as much promise for the future as it does frustration with the present limitations. There are strides to be made and interdisciplinary bridges to build. Currently, cross-cultural studies are like cloths of many fibers straining to bear the weight of an overwhelmingly large, one single story or experience because they lack needed support. As Andrade states, “[A]ll texts and especially all works of literature, are involved in conversations with other texts” (94). The experiences that led me to this study are not unique. There are many others in various stages of academia like me that seek to understand the similarities and differences of their culture and others but, as of yet, have limited avenues to pursue this knowledge. Letting the texts talk, and letting those conversations begin in academia will hopefully draw more cultures and societies within the mainframe and to other curious individuals like myself to similar studies.

Cross-cultural studies like this one are a beginning point if they are rooted in objective observations of literature and the artistic representations of the peoples within. They are, if nothing else, worthwhile for seeing how all works of literature engage in conversation among themselves and with their readers. As the bank of cross-cultural research develops, the more definitive the conclusions that can be reached. This study started with one concept – family – a concept that touches all individuals. By gathering relevant definitions of “the family” within academia, societies, and cultures, I have established a framework against which the artistic representations of three multicultural families were compared and evaluated.

Shafak’s *Honour* gives readers a look into how Turkish, Kurdish, and Muslim cultures affect the thoughts and actions of various family members, as well as the additional complications facing migrant family norms and expectations. In the case of Pembe and Iskender, these expectations lead to a death and a family forever severed. Erdrich’s *The Round House* allows readers a look into how tribal and the white, majority cultures intersect in Native American cultures. Joe and Bazil are both navigating what is left of the family roles they once held while also doing everything in their power to bring justice for Geraldine the trauma stemming from her sexual assault. *The Round House* shares many similarities with *Honor*, yet gives readers insight into how tragedy alters familial expectations. Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* mirrors *The Round House*, with members of the family working together to deal with a conflict; although, in the case of *Purple Hibiscus*, the main source of conflict is within the family. The artistic representation of family within *Purple Hibiscus* is a collection of Nigerian and Igbo cultures, while also showing readers how religion can shape familial expectations. In the case of the Achikes, abandoning expectations and ridding the family of conflict is the only way to move toward a healthy family life.

To move forward with all the insight that multicultural literature can provide to scholars across many disciplines, we must ask the necessary questions so these conversations can happen to prevent future generalizations and assumptions about the family, regardless of definition, values, and expectations, within today's and future societies.

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