

THE EFFECT OF TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF MOTHERHOOD

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand how the trauma of witnessing a suicide and the trauma of abandonment affect women's maternal orientation. In-depth interviews were conducted with two mothers who were abandoned by their parents and three mothers who witnessed a suicide. The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using discourse analysis. The results from this analysis showed that the trauma deeply affected the women's maternal orientation, and that they developed a counter-reaction to the people and events responsible for them experiencing the trauma and tended to protect their children against these kinds of situations. In addition, the social actors who played a healing role in their trauma served as role models for the women. It was also observed that generally the women adopted the socially-constructed ideal form of motherhood.

Keywords: construction of motherhood, trauma, suicide, abandonment, discourse analysis.

The concept of motherhood has held importance for the social sciences in terms of both its socio-cultural construction and its effects on the reconstruction of society. In this study, we focus on how traumatic experiences affect women's maternal behavior.

While motherhood is practically synonymous with the development of human history, it was not until the modern period that it attracted the attention of the social sciences, a field that has conducted significant research on the subject and conceptualized it (Giddens, 2014). With the expansion of liberties provided in the modern period, women have tended to pursue a course of independence for themselves, opposing the traditional role-sharing paradigm based on gender perception (Beauvoir, 2010) and attempting to facilitate a reconstruction of gender roles. One of the most important parameters of this reconstruction is motherhood. The removal of motherhood from its physiological context as part of the socio-cultural construction of motherhood has led to the unquestioning acceptance of women's subordination in social life. The empowering of the underlying grounds of the subject through the use of sacred social metaphors (Fidan, 2019) has influenced the acceptance of this subordination even by women, with little to no objections. While the ideal mother type defined by the masculine paradigm has also been largely adopted by women and constitutes

the mortar of motherhood, those who oppose this definition are marked as “non-ideal and bad” and are excluded from society. (Oakly, 2018; Fidan, 2016, and 2019; Meeussen, & Laar (2018); Miller, 2010; Badinter, 2011; Ford, 2009; Mokobocho-Mohlakoana, 2008; Simkin, 1996; Johnson, 1988). Anxiety over fulfilling the role of an ideal mother type that does not reflect the reality of daily life in the experience of motherhood can negatively affect mothers’ health due the impact it can have on the already excessive burden they have to undertake in this period (Ross, 2016; Ambrosini & Stanghellini, 2012). On the other hand, in families with equal gender role sharing, a healthy living space is formed for all members of the family (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005).

Motherhood is a unique experience for every woman, one that is fed by both the socio-cultural construction of motherhood and the physiological changes experienced by the woman (Kawash, 2011). Therefore, it is not possible to reach definitive conclusions and come up with fixed definitions on the subject. Trauma, a sudden and unpredictable occurrence of human life that can cause permanent damage to individuals who are subject to it, is in one sense like motherhood, in terms of the various psychological and social effects it can have on individuals’ emotional states and personal characteristics (Uğurluoğlu & Erdem, 2019; Yöyen, 2017). In this study, the focus is on understanding how traumatic life experiences affect women’s construction of motherhood by attempting to trace the subjectivity in question.

Some events that occur suddenly and at unexpected moments can cause traumatic shock to individuals (Duggan, 2018), deeply affecting their psychological well-being and playing a permanent and transformative role in their identity construction (Uğurluoğlu & Erdem, 2019; Yöyen, 2017)¹.

Durkheim (2002) argues that suicide, an act that is generally prompted by trauma, and that has a traumatic effect on victim’s family, friends and relatives (Rajalin, Hirvikoski, and Jokinen, 2013), is primarily a social problem. Of course, some suicides have their basis in psychopathological disorders (Harris & Molock, 2000; Brent & Mann, 2005; Greening & Stoppelbein, 2002). Recent studies have shown that suicide cases based on psychopathological effects are not independent of familial effects (Kim, Seguin, Therrien et al., 2005). Suicide is both a result and a cause in terms of the social problems responsible for precipitating the decision and its negative impact on social construction. Furthermore, suicide, which is known to be contagious in families, inner circles, and even social life (Pouliot,

¹ Trauma is defined as an event (such as death of a relative, accident, terminal disease) experienced or witnessed by a person where death or threat of death is present and serious injury or a threat to physical integrity occurs (Duggan, 2018; Uğurluoğlu & Erdem, 2019). A variety of events, such as exposure to physical and psychological violence, sexual assault, rape, being taken hostage, loss of a nuclear family member, loss of life and property as a result of natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, fires, floods), diagnosis of a family member, friend, or relative with a terminal disease, deception, fraud, unhealthy divorce, abandonment, dismissal, and witnessing a relative’s suicide, can have traumatic effects (Uğurluoğlu & Erdem, 2019). It has been reported that children who have been exposed to any type of trauma at a young age have low self-esteem, low sense of self-worth, and self-confidence problems in their later years. It has been observed that these children are less able to develop their abilities and are more unsuccessful in their social lives compared to that of individuals who have not experienced trauma (Yöyen, 2017).

Mishara, and Labelle, 2011; Kim, Park, Nam et al., 2013; Belinda, 2014), has lasting effects on the lives of the individuals left behind (Gibbs, J. T., 1997; Stack & Wasserman, 1995; Kaslow & Aronson, 2004; Xing, Tao, Wan et al., 2010; Frey, Hans, & Cerel, 2015 and 2016).

Like suicide, abandonment by parents is another phenomenon that can have a traumatic effect on individuals. Abandonment of children by their families for different reasons, the false identities created by those abandoned, and the changes this generates in their life stories are at the center of oral traditions all around the world (O'Donovan, 2002). Child abandonment has a long history and continues today, but there is a lack of information about its conditions and effects (Mueller & Sherr, 2009). There is nonetheless definitive evidence showing that abandoned children experience significant problems in developing self-esteem, adapting to new environments, and establishing healthy social relations (Garcia-Torres & Guerrero, 2000; Yurdakul, A., 2016). Studies have reported that cases of abandonment have increased in Turkish society over the last decades due to increasing social change, social mobility, and economic hardship, and that the relevant measures of these cases are insufficient (Tuncer & Erdoğan, 2018; Yurdakul, A. 2016).

In this study, we focus on the effects that the trauma experienced by mothers who have a person close to them who committed suicide and by mothers who were abandoned by their parents have on their maternal behavior and maternal orientation. In-depth interviews were conducted with five mothers, one of whom was abandoned by her mother and raised by her father², one who was abandoned by her parents and raised by her grandmother, and three mothers whose relatives committed suicide. The interviews lasted an average of forty minutes, and audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed.

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using discourse analysis. Daily life transpires within a social area where discourses, even those of an ordinary nature, contain deep meanings. Discourse involves the communication of meaning that undergoes reconstruction in daily life and is thereby responsible for building daily life (Johnstone, 2018; Gill, 2000). Discourse analysis serves to identify the deeper meaning behind responses given to questions, and as such, is multimodal, seeking to understand the answers to questions in the context of this feature. One of these modes, *practices*, is concerned with the content included in a person's speech and writing, focusing on how adaptations in their speech and texts are constructed, while the other, *explanatory repertoires*, deals with the types of linguistic/discursive resources people use in these practices (Fidan, 2019).

² An unrecorded interview was held with the participant's father about how she overcame this process. The data obtained from this interview are only presented as a footnote and are not included in the discourse analysis.

Personal information of the interviewees

Interviewee	Age (year)	Occupation	Number of Children	Marital Status	Trauma
HL	36	Worker	2	Married	Her cousin committed suicide
SB	41	Teacher	1	Married	Her cousin committed suicide
DR	51	Public servant	4	Married	Her mother committed suicide
NR	31	Public servant	2	Divorced	She was abandoned in childhood
ŞN	47	Shopkeeper	2	Married	She was abandoned in childhood

Explanatory Repertoires

1- Emotions and action orientations after the traumatic event

a) Fear of witnessing the same event again

As a common feature, all the women who participated in the study have undergone emotional changes and transformations due to the effects of the trauma they experienced.

HL describes the change to her emotional state after the sudden suicide of her cousin, with whom she spent her childhood and adolescence.

“When my children were little, I was always afraid that they would do the same... Because of how bad it is... However, by thinking about it, we may have invoked the devil, I mean, if we always think or speak about it, we may have brought the evil (bad things) upon ourselves. I always think about it, so I’m always afraid of it... I mean, I’m afraid that it may happen to us when I think about it, because it happened right in front of my eyes. Yeah, that’s why I don’t want to think and talk about such things.” (HL)

The feeling of fear that HL expressed during the interview was apparent in her facial expressions, voice, and gestures. A new fear (invoking the event) caused by this feeling of fear transferred her to contradictory routes. The fact that it was her male cousin that had committed suicide caused HL to have a growing fear for her teenage son. The negative expressions of her fifteen-year-old son, who in her words seems to be depressed about his

family and life because of his father's oppressive and authoritarian approach, feeds this fear in HL.

“Because my son also says, ‘We live on the eighth floor, if I didn't believe in God, I would throw myself out of here.’ He's so fed up with this. Lately, my husband says 'He (son) wants to scare us.' But he doesn't scare us; he is crying when he says these things... My son got so depressed that it became a constant struggle with him. For example, we went to a psychologist, but he always says to me, ‘There can be no better psychologist for me than you.’ He couldn't talk to the psychologist.” (HL)

The suicide of a family member affected HL's feelings and thoughts towards suicide and strengthened her awareness of the threatening existence of suicide in daily life. The fact that her son stated that he did not commit suicide because of his religious feelings and thoughts affected the participant in two ways: First, while the mother fears that her son will commit suicide due to the depression he experiences, her son's religious feelings diminish to a certain extent the fear she experiences. Second, to keep her son away from suicidal thoughts, HL takes actions to strengthen religiousness in the family (not committing haram) and encourages family members to seek psychological satisfaction through religiosity.

The father, who is the secondary source of the mother's fear due to his violent actions towards their son, does not seem to be as affected by the suicide as the mother. The fact that the father, who the mother accuses of violent attitudes and behaviors, does not find his son's attitude towards suicide credible can be coded as an escape behavior. It is also possible that the father thinks his own behaviors are not violent.

b) Raising children who are prepared and strong enough to deal with similar emotional states

DR, whose mother committed suicide when she was only thirteen and whose struggles with life started when she experienced loneliness after her father remarried, sought to strengthen her children to be able to face similar events and situations of loneliness.

“Like every mother, I love my children very much. But I've never been a protective mother like my friends are. I am aware that I am not going to live to a grand old age, therefore I believe that my children should be able to stand on their own feet.” (DR)

From this statement it can be seen that the mother, in some measure, internalizes the ideal mother type accepted in the social world but distinguishes herself from other mothers in terms of the responsibilities associated with motherhood. In DR's statements, all mothers are cast in the subject position of "women who love their children very much", and the possibility for mothers not to love their children is not mentioned. Her critical attitude towards the motherhood of those in her immediate environment has caused her to construct herself in the subject position of a "mother who raises individuals who bear her own responsibilities" or a "protective mother who inadequately prepares her children for life".

DR, who keeps a critical distance from the attitudes of protective mother, bases this attitude on the possibility of dying at any moment and leaving her children alone, just like her mother

did to her. Far from suicidal thoughts and orientation, her attitude instead stands out as a rational approach to the reality of life

c) The feeling of anger and development of objections to oppression

SB³, who went through a difficult period following the suicide of her cousin, of whom she had memories from her early youth, expressed her feelings as follows:

“I had a lot of anger at the time. I was so angry at everyone and everything, because I realized that the cause of this event was oppression. And I was very angry with anything that put pressure on me... Also, we lived in a country where we experienced great pressure. (This feeling) made me a very rebellious girl, and this rebellion attended my growth into a woman... My brother did this (he committed suicide) because of the pressure on him. This is something I will not discuss anymore, I know that.” (SB)

In the case of SB, the anger observed in the relatives of the person who committed suicide was directed at the source of the oppression that prompted the person to commit suicide. Anger has been transformative in the life of SB. She used it in her placement of the parents of the suicide victim in the subject position of 'oppressive and intolerant parents', coding the current pressure as the reason for her cousin's suicide. This situation led her to develop a counter reaction to the situations and attitudes in which she felt pressure, instead of remaining silent and unresponsive.

d) The love conferred by children on a mother who could not receive motherly love is problematic.

NR, who was abandoned by her parents when she was only three-years-old, was raised by her grandmother and had to take responsibility for her two younger siblings, could not escape the trauma of her childhood⁴. She expressed her feelings and thoughts as follows:

“(She pauses, stammering) Unfortunately, I guess I have to admit that now I don't know whether to love or to be loved, or what exactly love is. For example, it is always said that when mothers love their children so much, they are flooded with love for them and become exuberant. (She stammers) I mean, of course I love my children, I feel their love, but I guess I have this feeling less than most mothers. So, I can't explain this very much. But when I think about it now, I feel like a stranger to my children.” (NR)

The lack of parental love in her later years has made NR⁵ feel a sense of inadequacy about the love she has for her children, making it difficult for her to talk about the subject. The fact that

³ SB said that it was the first time in 20 years since her cousin's suicide that she had talked about the subject. She was constantly crying during the interview, as the interview had brought back all the memories of the trauma she had experienced years ago.

⁴ The participant stated that she received psychological support from time to time, and that her need for psychological support continues. Brezending (2008) claims that motherhood creates an irreversible change in women's brains, whereby their love for their children changes them in various ways. Although this claim is confirmed by the way many women experience motherhood, this is not necessarily the case for a significant number of women who abandoned their children.

⁵ According to NR, her mother remarried after her divorce from her father, and after getting accustomed to her new life, NR and her siblings visited her at her home once a week. During these occasions, however, she would leave her children at home and visit her neighbors. NR also intimated that once she became a high school

she was deprived of the love she needed during her childhood has led her to feel *deficient* in motherhood, as well as in many other areas of life (Güneş, 2016). By constructing herself in the subject position of a 'woman who does not know how to love or be loved', NR distinguishes herself from other mothers when she talks about mothers' feelings of exuberant compassion. In describing the emotional distance between her and her children with the concept of "alienness", she is expressing the deep sense of guilt she has because of these feelings.

A stranger is not an "unknown and feared" person, as conventionally understood, but rather, a person who is known and kept apart from the social group because of their characteristics (Bauman, 2021). Although the 'alienness' felt by NR seems to be the manifestation of personal feelings, it is actually a reflection of the divergence between the roles of motherhood defined by society and her own motherhood. She is a mother who avoids describing her feelings for her children as a 'lack of love', but instead, deviates because she cannot love her children as a 'normal' mother does. Alienness is to a certain degree inherent to liberation from being a person kept at a distance from the familiar and well-known. However, the prominent sense of alienness experienced by NR is inherent to the distance that cannot be closed, despite the desire to do so, and to not being able to form a close relationship with her children. Rather than liberating her, this limits NR to feeling inadequate and maybe even serves to subjugate her.

e) Orientation towards completing the incomplete self and assuming the role of mother

When ŞN was four years old, she, along with her two-year-old and ten-month-old brothers, were abandoned by her mother⁶. In her experience, the role-sharing that occurred between her and her siblings while under the care and love of only her father developed in a natural way.

"I used to cry all the time, but who was I crying for? A child cries for her mother and asks things from the mother... That's why I never knew how to ask for something for myself when I was a child... Everything was always being asked of me... I was never able to ask anything from anyone in my life, and this is still the case. I have two brothers, and besides meeting my own needs, I have had to be like a sister and a mother to them. I would get very upset when my father was upset, and I would try so hard not to let him get upset. I only had half a personality. In my adolescence, I was drawn to learning about psychology; how can I complete myself... how can I conceal my lack of self-confidence?" ŞN

student, she began to realize that she had her mother's smell and reported feeling disgusted with the smell of dirty sweat she inherited from her mother.

⁶ The father left his two older children in an orphanage and his ten-month-old son with his own mother due to the trauma he experienced after his wife left home. After a five-month recovery period, the father took back his children. The father, who has tried to be both mother and father to his children for six years, has benefited from government-run nursery services for his children, as he is a civil servant. The father married for a second time six years later but remained committed to the care and upbringing of his children, stating: "I was inspired by women. If they can do it, I can do it too." (Interview dated August 22, 2021.)

In the emotional and intellectual state of ŞN, the mother is coded as the only authority to whom one cries for and makes demands of. Despite being a child in need of care, ŞN, who was constructed in the position of a subject being asked to fulfill domestic responsibilities, had to, being without a mother, take on domestic roles that did not belong to her. By feeling responsible for caring for and meeting the psychological needs of her two siblings, ŞN assumed the role of being a mother to them. This orientation, which we also observed in the experiences of NR, who was abandoned by her parents, shows that older sisters take on the role of mother in a natural way. In having to take on the emotional burden of her father, meet her own needs, and care for her siblings, ŞN is aware of the split this caused to her personality while coming of age.

Understanding that children who are abandoned by their parents tend to have a lack of self-confidence, ŞN sought to benefit from the healthy influence of her father and her social environment, despite the existing negative conditions. The idea of completion expressed by ŞN implies her recognition of deficiency. Here, the deficiency that needs to be completed corresponds to the emptiness created in her personality by growing up deprived of maternal love and care and the insecurity that arises due to this emptiness.

“When I was a kid, I used to go to my father's workplace, that is, to the hospital. He had very good friends there; they took care of me. They got me into reading books... Maybe I made up for my mother's absence with books. I said that I had to improve myself. Otherwise, it doesn't happen; it doesn't happen when there is no maternal feeling, I mean, that emptiness is not filled. It is not filled by reading either, but at least I feed myself in a different way, benefiting my children.” ŞN

The contribution of ŞN's social environment to her development is clear. Although she read psychological books to make up for the absence of her mother and to improve herself, she eventually accepted that the absence of a mother in her life was not able to be compensated for by other factors. Concepts such as 'emptiness, filling, completion, satiation', which were repetitively used by her throughout the interview, point to the sense of inadequacy she felt in terms of 'maternal love and care'. This sense of inadequacy led to her developing a counter reaction, where concepts like 'raising, feeding, integrating' come to play a prominent role in her construction of ideal motherhood.

2- Attitudes and Behaviors Related to the Subject of the Traumatic Event

Our participants developed different attitudes and behaviors towards the actors of the events responsible for producing the traumatic effects on them and their orientations.

a) Adopting a different lifestyle

HL attributes her cousin's suicide to his non-religious life (he used to drink a lot and steal money) and accuses the suicide victim's mother (the participant's aunt) of insensitivity.

“(...) For example, my aunt does not pay attention to her children; she turns a blind eye to their faults... I try to live honestly and prayerfully. I think it's good to have faith in God. I

hope that if I feed my children halal food, something like this [suicide] won't happen to my children." (HL)

The details HL uses to describe the daily life of her cousin who committed suicide steers clear of directly basing the suicide on his non-religious life and directly blaming the suicide victim's family and inner circle. However, HL's indirect expressions are centered on the idea that the risk of suicide is the product of a non-religious life. By emphasizing her son's 'strong religious beliefs' throughout the interview, HL signals the sense of trust that religiousness gives to people and places her aunt and cousin in the position of subjects who have suffered bad things because of 'their non-religious lives'. HL separates herself from the suicide victim and his family by constructing a position for herself as a subject who keeps out of harm's way (i.e., avoids bad events) by remaining committed to a religious life.

The fact that HL does not openly blame the suicide victim and his family for their non-religious lives may rest on a different fear, one based on her belief that 'one does not die without living what they condemn'.

b) Developing a counter-reaction

SB, who witnessed the suicide of her cousin when she was a twenty-year-old university student, attributes the suicide to parental pressure and develops a counter-reaction to the pressure mechanisms present in all aspects of social life.

"As women, we experience more oppression in our lives. I had a personality at odds with the rest of society, but society can nonetheless tolerate 'you' because of this personality by simply acknowledging and accepting the idea that 'she's crazy as a loon. Never mind her'. I have never been a normal person in anyone's eyes, that is, I have always been an outlier since my childhood. So, by using this 'madness', I was able to easily dodge the family and social pressures placed on me." (SB)

In her statements emphasizing gender discrimination, SB was observed to switch from first person singular (me) language to first- and second-person plural (we/you) language, conveying the holistic nature of the problem by shifting the social pressure to which she was personally exposed to a plural plane. The 'normal' that SB refers to in her personal experiences is the female figure who adapts to traditional social rules. By constructing herself in the subject position of a 'woman who does not obey social rules and does not submit to pressures', she has succeeded in normalizing the orientations in her personal life that are not considered normal in the social world.

The fact that those who were responsible for the unexpected suicide of her cousin were the suicide victim's parents was a breaking point in the revolt and emancipation orientation in the personal history of SB. An unfair attitude (pressure) resulting in the end of a human life seems to have minimized SB's sensitivity to social control mechanisms and directed her to take actions.

c) The mother learning to love

NR was abandoned by her parents and fell into an emotional void unable to be filled (Güneş, 2016). This has caused NR to develop a counter reaction in her experience of motherhood.

“Preventing them [her children] from being hungry and homeless, you know... I have this sense of responsibility, I feel this responsibility inside me. You know, they are entrusted to me... When I say this, I get really angry, I get sad, I feel ashamed, but I struggle to get over it. I have to get over this. That's why I want to talk about it. So, I say this frankly ‘I need to learn to love. I need to learn to love truly, beautifully’. Actually, I can't say I don't love them either. Sometimes when looking at a bird or a tree, that is enough to make me emotional, or seeing a loving person. But there are also times when I suddenly suffer an emotional breakdown. I mean, these are serious emotional states.” NR

NR, who does not feel a sense of inadequacy or guilt as a mother in meeting the physiological needs of her children and who uses religion to strengthen the sense of responsibility attending motherhood (they are entrusted to me), experiences confusion due to the lack of her ability to love, and she tends to turn to the awareness of her own emotional deficiency as a way to heal herself. The first step in healing herself is to acknowledge and admit her deficiency; this attitude she has adopted stood out throughout the interview. Furthermore, in referring to nature's creatures to demonstrate that she is not completely deprived of the feeling of love, she is in fact encoding the sudden changes in her emotional state as a ‘problem’ (“these are serious emotional states”).

The difficulty NR experiences in expressing her feelings and thoughts on the subject is an indication that she has failed to reach the socially constructed ideal mother type. Her sense of failure in this regard must therefore be based on her observations of the current socio-cultural discourse on mother-woman behaviors.

d) Developing empathy

DR, who attributes her mother's suicide to external factors and is angry at the source of those factors⁷, develops empathy for her mother by comparing her own possibilities with her mother's impossibilities.

“I never thought I was a strong woman. Of course, my mother had weaknesses; she was a weak woman. There were, I would say, places where my mother was weakened (emphasis). Unlike my mother, I was able to benefit from self-help books, but my mother did not have such opportunities. My mother was 34-years-old when she committed suicide. It is necessary to consider her phases of aging. I look at marriage durations and divorce rates from time to time. My mother committed suicide in the fifteenth year of her marriage. This means that my

⁷ DR stated that her mother was excessively restricted by her father and left emotionally unsatisfied. Accordingly, the suicide victim was unhappy in her marriage, and her efforts to divorce were not supported by her family. The suicide victim, who was a teacher, found the emotional satisfaction that she could not get from her husband in a janitor working at her school, but she could neither get a divorce nor have a love affair with the person she loved due to traditional cultural norms.

mother was weak in terms of the things she was trying to establish up to that point. I also have weaknesses, but I can support myself by reading self-help books.” (DR)

According to DR’s statements, suicide is a tendency peculiar to weak people. DR’s emphasis on not being strong is important in terms of showing that she has not developed a critical approach to her mother's weakness. Furthermore, during the interview, she did not say anything negative about her mother’s decision to commit suicide, instead, attributing the weakening of her mother to the point of suicide to the negative effects of her social environment.

DR legitimizes the fact that the suicide victim (her mother) was a weak woman by pointing to the lack of resources/opportunities and the periodic breakdowns she suffered as a result during the period of time her mother lived and sought to understand rather than judge her mother who was responsible for causing this trauma that so completely changed the course of her life. The presence of the intense external factors that drove her mother to suicide and the fact that her mother was a positive role model influenced the attitude adopted by DR towards her mother’s suicide.

e) Irreparable loss of emotion towards the subject who committed the abandonment

This study has revealed that women who grew up apart from their mothers during childhood experience a loss of emotion about their mothers that seems impossible to recover.

“My mother and I never talked about her abandoning us. She never blamed herself. She was pitying herself for what my father had done to her, she was comforting herself, so she thought she would convince us too. She can never convince us though. The hatred held by my brother, whom she left when he was ten months old, still continues. He never sees my mother; he does not say 'I have a mother' to anyone. He says, “As she deleted me from her life, I too deleted her out of my life”... After I had a child of my own, I tried to understand my mother. She helped a lot, especially in the first period of my marriage, and I am grateful for her. But I have no love for her, no feelings of her being my mother, only gratitude for her. She's not like a mother, and that feeling doesn't come later either. I can't hug and kiss her. I don't know the feeling of having a mother at all, how to love a mother...” ŞN⁸

In the statements made by ŞN, there is no doubt or confusion over the emotions she has towards her mother. ŞN, who does not find her mother’s legitimization of the abandonment of her children convincing, constructs her mother in the subject position of a "mother who

⁸ ŞN described her meeting with her mother after she had abandoned them: “We were playing in the schoolyard on October 29. I was a fifth grader, and my siblings were third and second graders. My brothers came to me and said, “A woman wants to see you at the entrance door, she is my father's friend, come.” I went, I was shocked! I didn't remember my mother, but I had seen a black and white photo of her in my father's wallet. Oh, this was my mother... I never wanted to look her in the face. My father had been married for a year at that time, and my brother had just been born. My mother asked, “Do you remember me?”. Without thinking, I responded, “Yes, I remember, you are our mother.” The woman looked elegant, well-dressed, with make-up, very beautiful... My siblings and I were in complete shock! We were in shock! (emphasis) My brothers asked, “Is she our mother?” We all stood unresponsive, as if standing next to a stranger. She took my two brothers on her knees and said to me, "Come if you want!" Of course, I didn't go to her lap.

abandoned her children for groundless reasons, purified herself, and felt pity for herself", while she constructs both herself and her siblings in the subject position of 'children who are not convinced by the groundless reasons given by their mother for abandoning them'. With this transference of the feelings experienced by her siblings, she strengthens her emotional legitimacy.

In trying to understand her mother again after becoming a mother, ŞN could not empathize with her mother's act of 'abandoning her children'. When she talked about her father, she expressed a divine-like love for him (I almost adore my father), whereas when she described the emotions she had towards her mother, it was not in the context of maternal love, but rather, on the grounds of gratitude. By mentioning the emotional alienation she feels towards her mother at every turn, ŞN was emphasizing her mother's alienation towards her children.⁹

There was no doubt or confusion about the 'maternal lovelessness' the women who were abandoned by their mothers experienced. If it is not experienced as a child, maternal love does not emerge in later ages, and thus motherhood remains an unrecognized feeling. Another remarkable issue here is the lack of love felt for their children in mothers who abandoned their children. Both of our participants stated that they experienced this lack of feeling at every stage of their lives. In this context, the asserted positive change and transformation that motherhood produces in the female brain (Brizendine, 2008) cannot be generalized to all mothers.

3- The Effort to Be a Good Mother

All the participants in this study strived to be good mothers by taking responsive actions to the traumatic life experiences. These efforts appear in the form of modeling and developing counter-responses.

a) Modelling

DR, whose mother committed suicide, models her mother's method of interaction in communicating with her children.¹⁰ During her adolescence period, she shared with her mother the emotional states she was experiencing and received affection and attention from her. DR adopted the same attitude and behaviors in her interaction with own children.

"I believe it's important that they [children] talk to me about everything. Because my mother... When I was in middle school, a boy told me he loved me. He wrote it in my book. I told my mother about it, saying, 'Mom, he loves me'. My mother said, 'Daughter, what do you think about him, how do you feel about him? You can write to him about how you feel but let

⁹ ŞN, who lived with her mother for a while after her first marriage, which lasted two months, said that she was repeatedly kicked out of their house by her mother during this period. "Here's an opportunity, use it... Wouldn't you take your child under your wing? No, my mother never knew how to love, she has no love." ŞN

¹⁰ DR's mother was also her teacher. In this teacher-mother role, DR's mother distanced herself from her daughter at school for fear of being misunderstood by other students and acted harshly towards her, and this attitude upset the participant. Her mother tried to repair her daughter's feelings once or twice, but she did not change her behaviors. The participant does not blame her mother for this attitude and prefers not to talk much about the subject.

me know what you say or write'. I said 'Ok'. So, this response from her was like a door that opened up a great amount of insight for me.” (DR)

Her mother's approach to the subject played an important role in the emotional development of DR. The fact that her feelings for this boy who showed interest in her at the age of twelve were nurtured by her mother fed DR's self-esteem, so much so that the control mechanism established by her mother regarding the relationship with the opposite sex was not coded as 'oppression' by her. DR refers to the effect of this orientation of her mother on her life as "a door that provided her with great insight ". The door here functions as a symbolic critical point that provides a transition between two environments; if the door had been closed, it would not have been possible to enter this new, unfamiliar area. In DR's childhood social environment, the relationship between opposite sexes was taboo. These types of relationships, which are inherent in human nature but not considered legitimate in the culture she was born into, became an area able to be penetrated by entering through the door opened by her mother, and in this sense, it served to liberate DR to a certain extent. By taking this positive orientation of her mother as a model, DR treats her three sons and daughters, who are in the adolescence period, in the same way, establishing mutual satisfaction through the communication she has with her children.

“I have three sons and one daughter (the youngest), and I told them all about this. I said, 'Share your feelings with me, son, without forgetting that a woman is a human being, and that she is your friend'. 'Something could go wrong, but if something goes wrong without my knowledge, I cannot help you. But if I know, I will be with you, even if it is wrong; I will support you if you are truthful with me.' Our relationship has been like this. The dialogue I have with my children is very good. I can say that none of them has ever hurt me. (Laughs)” (DR)

It is clear that DR also models the mechanism of control her mother used in her communication with her children. DR's statement saying that she would try to correct the 'wrong' experiences of her children by approaching them with tolerance, suggests that she assumes she is on the same plane with her children in terms of value judgments. The implicit codes of effective communication clearly demonstrate the effect of the limits set by DR, from which it is understood that the possibility of the children being endowed with a sense of self-perception that is independent of existing value judgments does not enter the mental processes of DR.

b) Developing a stance of objection to the source of violence

HL, who had never offered much of a response to her husband's harsh and strict attitudes during their seventeen-year marriage, has now changed her attitudes and behaviors towards her husband out of the fear she has of the possibility of her son committing suicide.

“I told my husband, I love you very much, but do not touch my children... My children are entrusted to me. That's why I can't live like this with you, I can't do this to my children, this is not the life I wish to live. I will take my children with me. I hope we can establish another life in my own country, without you, without fights. Maybe we will go hungry, maybe we won't

be able to eat meat, but we can survive without bread and sit and play with a laugh'. I think he had to change himself a little bit after I said, 'I don't want to live with you like this'." (HL)

HL is a woman who left her home country for her marriage and who loves her husband. However, when it comes to the future of her children, she preferred to put her children at the center of her life, forcing her husband to make a choice. The fact that she took into account the economic difficulties she would face after the divorce reveals her belief that violence at the hands of a father feeds the phenomenon of suicide.

c) The feelings of guilt and repair-oriented response

NR, who was abandoned by her parents and reported that she has never felt the love of her parents at any time in her life, states that she cannot love her children very much because she does not know this kind of love and therefore blames herself.

"I blamed myself a lot. I searched for myself a lot, blamed myself a lot. I attributed much of this to not being able to live as a human being... how can I explain it... because I became a mother without being myself... because I don't think I am a self-actualized person. I didn't think I was. I still think about similar things from time to time. I find that my children are very hurt, I feel very sorry for them because they have such a (emphasis) mother. You know, children are like diamonds who deserve to be loved more. I mean, they are children who deserve to be appreciated more, but I feel that I am not enough for them because I'm not complete, something is missing inside me... I don't know what's missing, there is something like... I feel like I can't give them what they deserve; I feel I can't satisfy them. And motherly love, yes, I don't know it." NR¹¹

NR questions herself to achieve self-consciousness. Ideas like 'searching for oneself, being a mother without oneself, and realizing oneself' are extensions of such an orientation. By positioning herself outside the act of mothering as a result of not being able to come to a conclusion about herself, NR bases her determination of "not being an ideal mother" and her sense of guilt on the essential value children hold. The emptiness created inside her by her dissatisfaction with parental love corresponds to her sense of anonymity. Being expected to satisfy her children with a feeling she has not experienced before, NR constructs herself in the subject position of "a mother who meets her children's physical needs but cannot love them enough". The placement of herself in the subject position of a 'mother who does not know maternal love' is the basis of the previous construction. Furthermore, in constructing her children, who are exposed to the care and guidance of an incompetent mother, as "valuable

¹¹ NR describes an experience she had with her child: My son entered puberty, he learned some things and talked to me about them. You know, he talks but he's shy, you know, he feels embarrassed, wondering if he is saying something wrong. He is afraid about whether it's proper to talk about these things with his mother. When I acted like these things were natural to discuss and gave information to him, he hugged me and sobbed, crying out "my mother, my mother, my mother"... it was like he was having a seizure. Poor baby, mommy... what a cry, I can't explain. I mean, this is how I saw my son for the first time; I cried, I felt bad... but again, this place doesn't ache... (she takes her hand to her heart); and when I said that it didn't ache, I realized this: what does it feel like to love a mother like that? I could not understand my son. (...) I don't know what it's like to love a mother so much, the child [her son] comes to me with such a big thing, and I accuse myself of not being able to respond to him, that is, of not being able to respond to that love.

beings who deserve to be loved but cannot have what they deserve", NR is specifying herself distant from the concept of the ideal mother by using bumpy expressions.

At this point, the following questions about the idea of motherhood as a socio-cultural construction emerge: Would NR describe herself as an inadequate mother if she lived in a society where motherhood is not defined by the role of being an unlimited source of love and self-sacrificing for her children?

Is it an internal and emotional decision for NR to conclude that she cannot love her children enough, or is it the result of what she has learned from the mother models around her? Is there a scientific measure of a mother's love for her child?

Different answers can be given to these questions. However, considering that motherhood is a learned and modeled role, it can be argued that the source of guilt felt by NR stems from socio-cultural factors.

d) Orientation towards the construction of a life free from oppression

Suicide cases that are the outcome of oppressive domestic behavior patterns tend to lead those who witness this type of suicide to build a daily life far removed from mechanisms of oppression, as seen in the following statement.

"...And now... I try to be a person who encourages her son as much as possible... allows her children and students to express themselves freely without putting any pressure on them... and be a person who will bring out their creative personalities." SB

SB, a teacher and a mother of one child, grounds the construction of a daily life free from oppression with emphatic expressions. According to her, violence is embedded in many areas of social life, threatening individuals' life and personal development.

"I realize that I have it too... authoritarianism can be confused for oppression in a classroom or in motherhood or at home... for example, now I can understand how much my looks of anger at children hurt them. Or how much I was suppressing my son when I would say 'don't cry!' to him... instead of saying 'heal it, empty it out'... For example, I read personal development books, I talk to a pedagogue about my son, I constantly get help with being a conscious mother. I am now learning to apply to my students what I apply to my child. They are children of almost the same age as my son. For example, I am reading a book now (with students)." SB

From SB's statements, it is understood that she internalized the idea of being a figure of authority in her role as a mother at home and as a teacher in school. Accordingly, it is the duty of the authority – in this case, SB's role as mother and as teacher – to maintain order. While it appears she adopted her authoritarian role in a social environment where she is dealing with primary school children, she is nonetheless sensitive to behavioral patterns that may negatively affect her students. The suicide that she witnessed earlier in her life influenced this sensitivity shown by the participant.

Her cousin was unable to find the opportunity to express himself in the family environment and therefore, it appeared that he committed suicide without any apparent reason. In the mind of SB, the right of individuals to live independently of all mechanisms of oppression and to realize themselves freely emerged as a necessity of life. The same fear that HL had about the possibility of her son committing suicide is also observed in SB. The latter's construction of herself in the subject position of "a mother sensitive to the personal development of her child", corresponds to the subject position of "a mother who feels inadequate and wants to be a conscious mother".

e) Modeling the maternal orientation seen in the father: Educating her children by educating herself¹²

This study found that the participants developed different reactions to the behaviors of those responsible for causing their trauma and modelled the attitudes and behaviors of those who played a role in healing their trauma. ŞN, who frequently expressed her love and admiration for her father during the interview, modeled his parenting methods.

"I adopted that self-sacrifice I saw in my father and the learning habits he established by educating himself. What I saw from my father, I applied to my children. I always consulted with psychologists, read books, got advice from my educated neighbors, thus I always learned and improved myself." ŞN

The 'incomplete' childhood she lived with her siblings left a deep impression on ŞN, leading her to put her children at the center of her life¹³. The positive effects of the father's social environment on him seem to have played an important role in the repair of the family, nurturing and supporting the positive attitude he developed towards learning and self-development. ŞN modeled her father's 'motherhood' role by constructing herself in the subject position of a 'mother raising her children by raising herself'. This approach of ŞN, who reported that she thinks of her father every Mother's Day and remembers him with divine love, is clear evidence that motherhood is a cultural construction. Here, in the case of ŞN, motherhood is detached from both its physiological and spiritual contexts and finds itself in a father figure.

ŞN's emotional orientation towards her children is different from NR's. Being abandoned by both her parents, NR grew up completely devoid of parental love. Her grandmother's love seems to have failed to persuade her to 'love and be loved'. NR's statement, "No one who is

¹² ŞN's father is a cook in a public hospital. He received a strict religious education as a child and led a religious life in his early youth. The friendships he has had with (leftist) people from his work who have different worldviews have had a permanent influence on him. After his wife left the house, he discussed this situation with his friends and benefited from their ideas. His friends said, "The revolution starts inside of oneself. Start with yourself first, then change your children. Revolution is not shouting slogans in streets; a real revolution is to educate oneself." By adopting their words as his principles, the father went through this process by reading a lot of books and consulting relevant experts for almost every problem he encountered. (Interview dated August 22, 2021.)

¹³ ŞN ended her first marriage, which lasted two months, by saying "No children should be raised by this man; I am missing something, he is missing something... How can we and our children be a whole?"

not loved by their parents can love. Or we cannot perceive love.”, points to the emotional breakdown abandoned children experience. ŞN, on the other hand, bases her belief on love and being loved on her father's love and sacrifice and states that she does not experience a lack of love for her children.

CONCLUSION

The nature and basis of women's objections to the sharing of gender roles and the actions they take differ when it comes to motherhood. The effect of motherhood on women's world of emotions and meaning, and thereby, on the construction of their daily lives, is significant. As a universal definition of motherhood is not possible due to the multipolarity of socio-cultural factors in its construction, the subject of motherhood continues to exist as an open-ended issue.

One of the factors influential in the construction of motherhood is the effects of traumatic experiences on the emotions and thoughts of mothers. This study, where we focused on how traumatic events affect women's experiences of motherhood, examined the effects associated with the trauma of witnessing suicide and of being abandoned on the construction of motherhood.

The following summarizes the results obtained from the study:

Traumatic experiences were shown to have a direct effect on the women's mothering. It was also revealed that in their construction of motherhood, the mothers tended to protect their children from the intense effects of the trauma they experienced earlier in their lives. Each of the mothers developed different attitudes and behavior patterns towards the attitudes and behaviors of the actors responsible for the traumatic events they experienced. Generally, those who witnessed the suicide of their relatives built a daily life that was far removed from the oppressive attitudes and behaviors that were believed by the mothers to have caused the suicide and developed a holistic counter-reaction to oppression in general. On the other hand, those who were abandoned by their parents tended to build their daily lives on the basis of their children's happiness. One of the mothers who was abandoned by her parents had a sense of guilt about inadequately loving her children, while another mother, who was abandoned by her mother and raised by her father, did not have such a sense of guilt towards her children. In addition, the mother who was abandoned by her parents, as compared to the mother who was abandoned by her mother but derived emotional satisfaction from her father, experienced more emotional confusion and problems. From these examples, it can be argued that growing up without the love and attention of both parents has more traumatic consequences than that of growing up away from only one of the parents.

Rather than directing their anger towards the victims of the suicide who were responsible for producing the traumatic effects on them, the mothers who lost a loved one to suicide felt anger towards the actors and social situations that led the persons to commit suicide. The relatives of the persons who committed suicide openly expressed their anger towards the lifestyles and social actors believed to have led them to commit suicide, and they placed

themselves in positions directly opposite of these sources of anger. This response had a major effect on the mothers' lives, insofar as it led them to adopt religious values in the construction of daily life and to seek liberation by defying social norms.

All the mothers who were close relatives of the persons who committed suicide placed responsibility on the suicide victims' family/inner circle or on wrong lifestyle for producing the suicidal ideations that ultimately led to the death of their close relative. While they had an intense feeling of anger towards the suicide victim's social environment, which they considered to be the cause of the suicide, they also had feelings of pity and compassion towards the victim of the suicide. The mothers adopted an empathetic approach to the person who committed suicide in terms of their harsh living conditions and even modelled their positive behaviors.

Regardless of the trauma they experienced, all the participants aimed to achieve the ideal mother type and oriented their actions to this end. The mothers tended to focus on improving their living and social conditions to prevent their children from being exposed to similar trauma, and they all faced many challenges to achieve their goals. When it came to protecting their children from experiencing trauma, it was observed that the mothers were less concerned about preserving their current familial order and more focused on directing their emotional and intellectual efforts towards achieving the goal of creating a healthy and happy environment for raising their children. It was further revealed that the mothers took behavioral measures to be strong for their children should their children encounter a situation similar to the trauma they had experienced.

In the final analysis, it can be stated that women who have experienced traumatic events cannot construct their motherhood independently from this experience, and that the effects of trauma play a central role in the construction of motherhood.

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