

Between Veil and Voice. Boundaries of Identity in “Three Daughters of Eve” by Elif Shafak and “Snow” by Orhan Pamuk

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This article examines the construction of Muslim female identity in Elif Shafak’s Three Daughters of Eve through a comparative and interdisciplinary lens, drawing on intersectionality theory, postcolonial critique, and feminist debates on representation. Focusing on the characters of Peri, Shirin, and Mona, the study explores how the novel destabilizes essentialist understandings of Muslim womanhood by revealing the competing cultural, political, and emotional forces that shape their subjectivities. Integrating Anna Carastathis’s critique of intersectionality, the article argues that identity categories—such as secular, devout, or conflicted—risk becoming static when divorced from the historical and ideological structures that produce them. To broaden this framework, the discussion juxtaposes Shafak’s work with Orhan Pamuk’s Snow, highlighting how veiling, secularism, and political Islam function as shifting sites of negotiation rather than fixed markers of belief or oppression. Through this comparison, the article contends that both authors challenge binary narratives of East and West, tradition and modernity, by portraying female agency as emergent, relational, and fundamentally unfinished. Ultimately, the study proposes a cosmopolitan feminist praxis grounded not in identity as a precondition for politics but in solidarity, ethical action, and the ongoing process of becoming.

Keywords: Muslim womanhood; intersectionality; veiling politics; cosmopolitan feminism; postcolonial identity

Introduction: Framing Identity Between Worlds

In *Three Daughters of Eve*, Shafak traces the intersecting lives of three young women from different corners of the Muslim world, each carrying the weight of unique sociopolitical pressures, family expectations, and personal questions of faith. When their paths converge at Oxford University, the campus becomes a backdrop for intellectual discovery as well as a crucible for identity formation. Through their conversations, conflicts, and private reckonings, the novel explores how cultural heritage, belief, and modern aspiration collide. Their internal dilemmas echo the external tensions of a globalised era, creating a layered narrative about the universal search for belonging, purpose, and a place to stand amid competing worlds.

In addition to the topic of defining identity through religious practices, Orhan Pamuk’s *Snow* (2002) provides a compelling counterpoint to Elif Shafak’s *Three Daughters of Eve*, as it revisits similar concerns—veiling, political Islam, and female subjectivity—through a more overtly political and socially charged lens. Pamuk’s main

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protagonist, Ka, a Westernised poet, travels to the provincial town of Kars to investigate the suicides of young women excluded from school for wearing headscarves. What initially appears to be a binary conflict between Islam and secularism, East and West, veiling and unveiling, gradually unfolds into a complex interplay of faith, desire, grief, and ideological allegiance. The novel thereby destabilizes the perceived dichotomy between modernity and tradition, exposing the contingent and contradictory processes through which identity is shaped in contemporary Turkey.

By juxtaposing these two novels, the act of veiling can be traced through both female and male characters. In *Three Daughters of Eve*, Peri, the Turkish protagonist, emerges from a chaotic household torn between her atheist father and devout mother. Her inner confusion mirrors Turkey's broader geopolitical and cultural liminality. Her encounters with Shirin—an outspoken secularist of Iranian descent—and Mona—a proud American Muslim feminist—draw her into a philosophical, emotional, and existential exploration. The description of their physical appearances leads the path to a deeper understanding of their characters:

Their differences contrasted with the architectural harmony of the street: Mona with her long umber coat and beige headscarf; Shirin with her full makeup, short black dress and highheeled boots; Peri in her jeans and blue trenchcoat. (Shafak 2016: 317)

These three daughters of Eve stand as allegorical figures of belief (Mona), disbelief (Shirin), and confusion (Peri), representing broader tensions within contemporary feminist and postcolonial discourse. By framing them explicitly as the daughters of Eve—the primordial mother in both Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions—the text taps into a universal, ancient origin myth. While mainstream scriptural narratives focus heavily on Adam and Eve's sons (Cain and Abel), leaving daughters largely to the margins of traditional folklore and commentary, the allegorical symbolism here is a deliberate subversion. The three young women symbolise a modern fracturing of the primary feminine psyche. By adding a third category to the rigid binary of absolute faith and absolute skepticism, the text highlights the liminal space in the middle—an existential grey area defined by doubt, questioning, and beautiful confusion. These allegorical connotations are further reflected in the semantics of their names.

Tracing the origin of the characters' names deepens the perspective regarding their nature. The name Mona, for example, appears in numerous languages with varying meanings worldwide, but in Arabic it derives from the word *munya*, meaning 'wishes', 'desires', or 'hopes'. It is widely used across Arabic-speaking countries and Muslim communities worldwide. Mona embodies the figure of belief, not only through her convictions but also through her physical expression of faith, such as veiling her hair.

The name Shirin originates from Persian and means 'sweet'. Shirin is also a prominent historical figure – a Christian princess of Armenian descent who married the powerful Sasanian king Khosrow II. This historical allusion blurs the boundaries of the traditional East–West dichotomy, as Shirin used her influence to protect the Christian minority in Iran, though she had to act discreetly. This illustrates that true

faith does not require public display or spectacle but can be preserved through quiet, profound acts.

The name Peri, or as her full name Nazperi, comes from the Turkish words *naz* ‘charm’ and *peri* ‘fairy’, itself derived from Persian. It can refer to a beautiful young woman and is associated in Persian mythology with winged, ethereal, and sometimes mischievous beings. The character of Peri in the novel embodies this liminal quality – existing on the threshold between the real world and the world of dreams and desires – which results in her inability to fully belong to either realm. Peri grows up in a family divided by ideology: “The thought that she had to make a choice, once and for all, between her mother’s defiant religiosity and her father’s defiant materialism almost paralysed her.” (Shafak 2016: 28)

Shafak’s structuring of the female characters as reflections of ideological positions enables a reconfiguration of the East-West dichotomy not as a binary but as a spectrum. Peri, the character suspended in confusion, spends much of her life merely observing ideological disputes—first between her parents, and later between Mona and Shirin—without asserting her stance or “paralysing her”.

Theoretical and Historical Foundations: Hegemony, Secularism, and the Veil

Pamuk situates this spectrum of belief, disbelief, and confusion within Turkey’s broader socio-political transformation. The Kemalist principle of *laiklik* (secularism)—one of the six foundational “arrows” of the Republic’s ideology—was intended to separate religion from the affairs of the state in order to facilitate modernisation. Since the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002, however, religion and politics have become increasingly intertwined, challenging the secular consensus and reconfiguring the visibility of Islam in the public sphere. The fictional Kars in *Snow* functions as a microcosm of these national tensions: a space where the ideological rigidity of both secularism and Islamism collapses under the complexity of lived experience. Ka’s ambivalent position as a Westernised intellectual oscillating between atheism and spiritual yearning mirrors the existential uncertainty of Turkey’s urban elite—suspended between inherited secular modernity and resurgent religiosity.

Pamuk’s engagement with the politics of veiling resonates strongly with Turkey’s historical reality. The headscarf bans of the 1980s and 1990s—defended in the name of Kemalist modernity—transformed the veil into a politically charged emblem of dissent. As Shafak (2007) notes in *Divided by the veil*, the Turkish language offers multiple words for the headscarf (*yemeni*, *türban*, *eşarp*, *çarşaf*), reflecting its social and emotional plurality. Once a marker of prestige in Ottoman society, the veil was redefined during the Republican era as a sign of patriarchal backwardness, then reappropriated by Islamist movements as a symbol of resistance and autonomy.

Kadife is a complex embodiment of these tensions. Through her character, Pamuk foregrounds the veil as a dynamic site of negotiation where ideology, emotion, and aesthetics converge. Her character is saturated with contradictions. After beginning her studies at the Pedagogical Institute, she decides to cover her hair. This surprising decision is further compounded by her initial “mocking curiosity” toward the girls wearing headscarves, as she describes it herself. Her act of veiling cannot be

reduced to religious submission or political conformity; it is instead a performative gesture shaped by love, grief, and defiance, rooted in her feelings for a religious man. *Snow* thus transcends simplistic dichotomies, revealing the porous boundaries between Islamism and secularism, belief and scepticism, East and West.

Elif Shafak offers a similar reflection in her article *Divided by the veil*:

As a novelist, when writing in Turkish I can encounter more than eight different words to stand for the headscarf, each is different. Different women wear the headscarf for different reasons. Some wear it out of habit or for traditional reasons rather than religious ones. For others the motivation is political. Not all women wear a headscarf because of religious conservatism. And not all headscarved women are “ignorant” or “repressed”. (Shafak 2007)

This linguistic diversity illustrates the cultural and psychological significance of the headscarf in Turkish society. Originally reserved for the Prophet’s wives as a symbol of high status, it later became a marker of backwardness under Kemalist reform, which aimed to modernize women’s roles in public life. The military, often seen as the guardian of Kemalist values, reinforced this secular ideal—most notably through the coups of 1980 and 1997, which imposed strict bans on veiling in universities. Many women resorted to wearing wigs over their headscarves to circumvent these restrictions.

The processes of the “Westernization” of Turkish society can be traced back to Mustafa Kemal, who rose from the ranks of the military, embodied their ideas, and in the following decades it was they who carried out military coups in the name of democratic Kemalist principles. One such example is the bloodless coup of September 12, 1980, after which the military commanders acquired almost unlimited power. The new regime introduced a ban on headscarves in universities. The restrictions imposed by this coup were tightened after the so-called “Postmodern Coup” of 1997, when, under pressure from the generals, Necmettin Erbakan resigned as prime minister. In fact, he could be considered the ideological father of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül and their Justice and Development Party (AKP). This raises a fundamental question regarding the nature of these reforms and shifting ideologies: it is clear that the issue is not merely religious, but deeply cultural and political. To understand this, one might look to Edward Said’s characterisation of European culture in relation to the Orient through the lens of ‘hegemony’:

In any society not totalitarian, then. Certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as hegemony, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West. (Said 1979: 7)

This hegemony is understood primarily at the ideological level, manifesting not only in the relationship between coloniser and colonised, but also between centre and periphery. What we can summarise, then, is that the relationship between these pairs is directly proportional: the West (the coloniser) corresponds to the centre, and the Orient (the colonised) to the periphery (for example, the Balkans). On the other hand, the centuries-long dependence of the Balkans on the Ottoman Empire has left a lasting

imprint on each of their cultures—linguistically, ethnographically, architecturally, etc.—which signals both the hegemony of Ottoman cultural ideas over the Balkan ones, and also the converse process of penetration. This hegemony was both accepted and rejected, yet its presence is evidenced even by the religious conversion carried out by various social and missionary groups. It is important to note, however, that when speaking of hegemony, Gramsci is referring his assertions to non-totalitarian societies. Their nature may be thought of as opposed to totalitarian ones. Undeniably, however, this hegemony of ideas possesses a certain universality that allows it to be applied to different socio-cultural contexts.

Edward Said makes several other meaningful generalisations concerning Orientalism, which continue to resonate today—especially when considering how processes in both the Near and Far East influence world politics, along with the relative political instability of those regions. For Said, the cultural and the political are intertwined in the understanding and exploration of the Orient:

My idea is that European and then American interest in the Orient was political according to some of the obvious historical accounts of it that I have given here, but that it was the culture that created that interest, that acted dynamically along with brute political, economic, and military rationales to make the Orient the varied and complicated place that it obviously was in the field I call Orientalism. (Said 1999: 19)

Moreover, the European cultural model has functioned for centuries as a hegemonic cultural-civilisational model, which partitions the intercepted cultural space (i.e., the colonised or peripheral societies) by imposing norms and values that cannot be fully recognised as authentic by their members. This division is reflected not only in abstract theory but also in personal and familial dynamics. For example, in the portrayal of Peri's life, the parental figures embody this schism: the mother is the religious, "everyday" Turkish woman, rooted in the traditions of the Orient; while the father is the supposedly Westernised individual whose actions and choices remain defined by his mental and ancestral memory. This duality exposes how the peripheral subject is caught between the hegemonic centre's model of civilisation and the inherited cultural memory of the periphery—neither of which can claim full authenticity for the subject. In Pamuk's *Snow*, on the other hand, Kadife, supposedly devoted muslim woman, is actually the ex-marital lover to an islamist, which entirely contradicts the virtues in which muslim women believe.

This framework of hegemony and cultural-political entanglement can be brought to bear on subjectivity and identity-formation in literature. As Anna Carastathis (2008) notes, a critical obstacle to agency in contemporary subjectivity is what she terms "intersectional overload", wherein the subject—rather than being liberated by intersecting identities—is rendered paralysed by them. In the case of Elif Shafak's portrayal of Peri, this paralysis is dramatised: she remains in passive roles until moments of revelation or solidarity compel her to act. In Peri's familial and cultural context, then, we can see how the hegemonic European cultural-civilisational model and the peripheral inherited memory both converge to shape a subject who is beset by conflicting identities—religious and secular, traditional and modernized, centre-oriented and periphery-rooted—thus illustrating how the external model of civilisation and the internal memory of tradition alike constrain authentic subjectivity.

Faith and Power: Azur and Blue as the Ambivalent Patriarch

The Oxford professor Azur, a charismatic yet controversial figure who hosts seminars on God, science, and morality, embodies both the intellectual seducer and the moral transgressor. In Eastern narrative tradition, the elder man typically functions as a sage or spiritual guide; however, Azur's romantic involvement with Shirin subverts this archetype, revealing the fragile boundary between moral authority and personal compromise. Azur can be seen as a modern Byronic hero, with his image shifting in the perception of each woman: to Shirin, he is a lover; to Mona, a philosophical adversary; and to Peri, a surrogate father or lost ideal.

Extending the semantic chain of the characters' names, Azur derives primarily from the Old French *azur* 'sky blue', which in turn originates from the Arabic word for the gemstone lapis lazuli. In some Hebrew and Biblical contexts, it can also mean 'one who helps', while in Old Norse it carries the sense of 'to answer' or to 'respond'. These layered meanings resonate with Azur's multifaceted role in the narrative – as an object of longing, an intellectual catalyst, and a reflective surface for the three women's inner conflicts. His character thus functions less as an autonomous moral center than as a mirror refracting each woman's search for faith, transcendence, and, on a more worldly plane, the "fruitful symbiosis" between political ideologies and religious belief.

The women's divergent responses to Azur illuminate the subjective construction of faith and the gendered frameworks through which women negotiate authority and knowledge. The tension between intellectual enlightenment and emotional dependency complicates feminist discourse on power, particularly regarding the possibility of mentorship within hierarchically structured, patriarchal systems. This dynamic invites a broader inquiry: to what extent do the protagonists' feminist or religious orientations represent autonomous belief systems, and to what extent are they symptomatic of internalized trauma – both personal and collective – rooted in the sociocultural and historical contexts that shape female subjectivity within postcolonial modernity?

This intersection of intellectual charisma and moral ambiguity is not exclusive to Shafak's novel; it finds a stark, provincial counterpart in Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*. Just as the "three daughters" must navigate the magnetic yet destabilising presence of Professor Azur to define their own ideological landscapes, the female characters in *Snow* are similarly thrust into orbit around male figures who wield religious or political authority. The transition from Azur's seminar room to the volatile streets of Kars reveals that the struggle for female subjectivity is a universal constant, whether it is being played out through the lens of secular academia or within the high-stakes, uncompromising arena of radicalized political Islam.

Orhan Pamuk's gallery of political figures is enriched by one of the most vivid among them – the Islamist leader Blue. His character is introduced ambiguously, as both a religious preacher and a man accused of inciting young veiled girls to suicide. Despite his role as a spiritual figure, Blue himself deviates from religious principles, maintaining an affair with the veiled Kadife and previously with her married sister Ipek. Like other leaders in *Snow*, he represents the hypocrisy of ideologies whose advocates pursue power while ordinary people bear the cost.

Pamuk portrays Blue as a strikingly attractive, educated, and self-assured man – far from the stereotypical image of a provincial fanatic. His questions to the West reveal a sharp critique of its perceived double standards: he challenges whether Western nations truly value democracy and human rights or merely wish to see “backward” countries imitate them. Through this, Pamuk highlights the ideological clash between East and West, and the manipulation of religion for political ends. Blue’s statements about state violence and media censorship expose the distortion of truth in times of political upheaval. His discourse merges nationalism, religion, and anti-Western rhetoric into a single ideological front, while paradoxically seeking Western attention and validation.

The color blue serves as a symbolic bridge between these two characters. It is compelling to trace the resonance of this hue within Islamic culture, where it is frequently associated with the infinite sky, the depths of the sea, and divine protection. This sense of transcendence suggests an overcoming of boundaries—a reaching for the “beyond”—which is also contained in the poem by Hafez that Azur cites when asked about his favourite poem about God, regardless of whether he believes or not:

*I have learned so much from God
that I can no longer call myself
A Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Jew
The Truth has shared so much of itself with me
that I can no longer call myself
a man, a woman, an angel or even a pure soul* (Shafak 2016: 191)

Ultimately, while these male characters appear to function as embodiments of concrete academic, religious, or political ideologies, they actually reveal a greater capacity for transcendent consciousness than the female protagonists. In contrast, the women in both narratives often find their identities gravitating around the figures they love, admire, or, conversely, detest; their subjectivity is frequently constructed through their proximity to, or resistance against, the male influence that dominates their respective spheres.

This dynamic can be further explored through the character of Kadife in Pamuk’s *Snow*. The paradox is deepened by Fazıl and Necip’s perception of Kadife, most clearly implied in Ka and Necip’s conversation in a teahouse. The high school student reads to the famous writer the beginning of a science-fiction novel he is writing. The story is set in the year 3579, and the main characters are also two high school boys – close friends and confidants. They read the books written by Fazıl and Necip thousands of years earlier and take their names. Both are in love with the virgin Hicran, so they decide that one of them will die and the other will marry her. Thus, Fazıl dies, and Necip marries Hicran. On their wedding night, Necip realizes that his wife had loved his friend, and for many years their marriage remains unconsummated.

In this story, Hicran (from Turkish *hicran*, meaning ‘separation’) – a figure that symbolically mirrors Kadife – is idealized, portrayed as pure and moral, which in real life turns out not to be true. The following conversation between Ka and Necip reveals more about Kadife’s mysterious nature. According to the student, she had been an unbeliever only because of her atheist father’s influence. She came to Kars from Istanbul to film a commercial in which with a single turn of her head she waves her

long, chestnut hair down to her waist like a flag (Pamuk 2013). The advertisement symbolizes the West, and the association of her hair with a flag refers to the manifestation of certain ideals.

Thus arises the opposition between the veiled and the freely flowing hair – a metaphorical representation of the contrasts between East and West (an opposition external to Turkish society) and between religion and democracy (an internal political opposition). One day, Hicran is invited for tea by the veiled girls and takes the opportunity to mock them. She continues visiting them until one day she joins them and abandons her life in Istanbul. This creates yet another internal opposition within Turkish space – Istanbul as a metaphor for Western thought and provincial Kars as a metaphor for traditionalism and religiosity.

Necip concludes his story about Hicran with the words that she is a saint who would help turn the headscarf into the political banner of “the oppressed Muslim Anatolian woman” (Pamuk 2013). Thus, Kadife’s freely flowing hair – the banner of Western thinking – will be covered and become a symbol of religious conviction. For the reader, the question of why the heroine puts on the headscarf remains open.

However, another detail proves equally significant. At the end of Ka and Necip’s conversation, Hicran appears on the street and enters the teahouse – but the real Kadife turns out to be somewhat different from Necip’s Hicran. She wears “a rather plain headscarf, rather than a turban, the political symbol of Islam” (Pamuk 2013: 145). Thus, she is not a proclaimer of ideological causes but a woman with personal motives for wearing a head covering.

Could this be Orhan Pamuk’s hidden message—that a veiled Muslim woman is not necessarily a bearer of political ideology, that the fixation on a single religious attribute is exaggerated and should not be of such importance? And above all—that personal choice stands higher than imposed religious conventions?

Pamuk deepens this paradox through the story told by Necip, the idealistic student who portrays Kadife as both saint and symbol. His fictional tale of the virtuous Hicran—whose name means ‘separation’ as mentioned above—mirrors Kadife’s transformation from unveiled modernity to veiled devotion. Once the woman who “waves her long chestnut hair like a flag” in a commercial symbolising Western ideals, Kadife now conceals that same hair as a sign of faith and defiance. The opposition between covered and uncovered hair thus becomes a metaphor for East–West and religion–democracy divides. Yet, Pamuk leaves the question of why she veils ultimately unresolved—inviting readers to confront the ambiguity at the heart of modern Turkish identity.

Against this backdrop, Kadife’s voice emerges as a counterpoint. She refuses to act as anyone’s representative, insisting instead on the right to tell her own story, shaped by both her faith and her reading of European novels that grant individuality to their characters. Her stance reflects a deeper humanist message – the individual’s right to self-expression beyond ideological or religious confines.

Intersectionality, Representation, and the Politics of Identity

The novel's engagement with intersectionality challenges the reader to consider how religion, ethnicity, gender, and class operate simultaneously in constructing identity. Yet, as Carastathis (2008) and Bilge (2010) warn, intersectionality can be diluted or even depoliticised when it becomes an overly descriptive catalogue of "differences," thereby reifying the very categories it aims to unsettle. Crenshaw's critique (Crenshaw 1989) is also pertinent here: an overreliance on single-axis frames obscures how forms of oppression are co-constitutive rather than merely additive, and risks reproducing hegemonic assumptions by privileging one axis—such as gender or religion—at the expense of their complex entanglement.

Peri's experience of gender-based violence—from childhood abduction attempts to harassment at her brother's wedding—demonstrates how women's bodies in patriarchal societies become sites where multiple structures of domination converge. Her father's silent consent to a virginity test, despite being a secular and ostensibly progressive man who drinks and admires Atatürk, reveals how deeply entrenched patriarchal norms can override individual dispositions. In this moment, he aligns not with his professed modernist values but with the communal logic of honour. This reflects broader feminist critiques, echoed by Crenshaw, that violence against women is legitimised through structural, rather than merely cultural, mechanisms, and that the regulation of female sexuality functions as a form of communal property management.

The novel thus suggests that political or symbolic representation is insufficient without interrogating the underlying power relations that construct identity (Carastathis, 2008). Shafak illustrates this through the invisible constraints that shape the lives of all three women, regardless of their apparent freedom, privilege, or defiance. Their experiences embody the intersectional insight that emancipation cannot be fully understood, let alone achieved, without confronting the mutually reinforcing structures—legal, cultural, familial, and political—that circumscribe women's agency.

Shirin, described as a "born warrior," represents resistance to both religious conservatism and Western infantilization of Muslim women. Her hyper-feminised appearance—short skirts, high heels, and heavy makeup—serves as a political aesthetic, signaling both personal agency and rejection of stereotypical expectations. Her anger toward the hijab stems from its role in exiling her family from Iran and its symbolization of state oppression.

Citing Sadeghi (2008), Shirin's performance can be read as a form of *misveiling*, a tactic used by Iranian women to subvert legalistic religiosity. Yet, even in the West, she faces patronizing savior complexes, notably from Troy, an Oxford student who treats her as a vulnerable subject needing protection—thus echoing colonial narratives of the "civilized man rescuing the veiled woman".

Her refusal to embody any fixed identity—religious, ethnic, or gendered—reflects Ridgeon's (2005) observation that many Iranians remain ambivalent about their cultural authenticity, torn between tradition and Western liberalism.

Mona's choice to wear the hijab is an assertion of spiritual autonomy. Though raised in a progressive Muslim household, her decision is personal and politically

charged. She challenges the idea that feminism and faith are mutually exclusive: “I am a Muslim feminist, and if that’s a contradiction to someone, it’s not my problem.”

Despite her assertiveness, Mona is continually subjected to suspicion and reductive stereotyping. Her hijab is interpreted by some as a sign of gendered oppression, compelling her to explain and justify her choices in ways not demanded of others. These interactions exemplify what Bilge (2010) identifies as a core concern of intersectional analysis: the ways in which social categories such as gender, ethnicity, and religion become sites of differential power, producing complex and often contradictory expectations for minority women. Mona’s experiences thus illustrate how intersecting structures of inequality shape the meanings imposed on Muslim women’s appearance and identity.

Mona’s creation of the “Oxford Feminist Avengers” critiques the selective universality of Western feminism, which often excludes non-Western women by assuming their “oppression.” She insists that women in Oxford need feminism just as much as rural women in Egypt, thereby exposing the racial and geographical boundaries that undermine solidarity.

Rather than simply showcasing differing perspectives, Shafak uses the tensions between the three women to suggest an alternative feminist ethic—solidarity. Despite their clashes, moments of empathy and shared struggle emerge, particularly through Peri’s evolving recognition of other women’s burdens. Her realization that her mother’s silence was survival, not weakness, marks a turning point from judgment to compassion.

This echoes Carastathis’ (2008) call for solidarity as a more effective feminist norm than the mere inclusion of “difference”. By centering the relational and affective dimensions of identity, Shafak offers a model of feminism grounded not in fixed categories but in mutual recognition of struggle.

Solidarity as Praxis: Toward a Feminist Politics of Becoming

In her theoretical framework, Carastathis (2008) contends that political identity should not be seen as a precondition for participation in feminist struggle but rather as something that emerges from that struggle. This is reflected in Peri’s slow realization that her identity is not merely inherited (from her secular father or religious mother), but formed in the space between competing loyalties, emotional alliances, and ethical commitments. By the end of the novel, when Peri protects the professor’s reputation and embraces her mother’s lived resilience, she begins to embody what Carastathis describes as a “transformative subjectivity”—one that moves between being “of/in” and “for” communities in struggle. This movement signals a shift from static notions of identity toward a feminist praxis based on solidarity, collective responsibility, and ethical action. In this way, *Three Daughters of Eve* serves as a literary testament to the possibility of a “politics of becoming”—an unfinished, ongoing process of negotiating one’s place in a fractured world. In invoking Istanbul as a metaphorical and literal bridge, Shafak places the burden—and the promise—of synthesis on women like her protagonists. In the face of systemic pressures, whether from patriarchal

families, religious institutions, or Western secularism, their collective resistance lies in reclaiming the right to define themselves.

Pamuk's nuanced portrayal of the veiled character Kadife exemplifies this call to shift feminist analysis from identity to solidarity and "subjectivity-in-action." The young women of Kars, who refuse to remove their headscarves despite state orders, embody a central paradox: the state pursues secularism in the name of democracy, while the women assert their personal faith and honor. Thus, Pamuk exposes the tension between collective political ambition and individual conviction—a central conflict in modern Turkish identity.

Kadife's motivations for wearing the veil are ambivalent—rooted in personal grief, romantic entanglement, and sociopolitical defiance. Initially portrayed as ironic and performative, her veiling gradually acquires depth and sincerity. The evolution from a politicized headscarf to an "elegant Istanbul scarf" not only signals a shift in aesthetic self-presentation but also redefines agency itself—from collective rebellion toward an individualized, cosmopolitan identity. As in Shafak's novel, the symbolic weight of the veil is destabilized: it is no longer a clear-cut indicator of oppression or resistance but becomes a site of negotiation where power, identity, and belonging intersect in unpredictable ways.

Conclusion: Toward a Cosmopolitan Feminism

Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* and Pamuk's *Snow* collectively illustrate that Muslim female identity is not a monolith but a dynamic negotiation shaped by personal, political, and spiritual forces. Through their respective characters, both novels critique religious fundamentalism and secular liberalism, showing how both systems can reduce women to ideological caricatures. Anna Carastathis's critique of intersectionality as an identity model proves particularly illuminating here. While Shafak's novel ostensibly celebrates the diversity of Muslim women's voices, it simultaneously exposes the very limitations that Carastathis identifies. The narrative presents these women as already-formed intersectional subjects—confused, secular, or devout—who achieve political consciousness through their preexisting identities. Yet, intersectionality often fails to interrogate the historical and ideological conditions under which such identities are produced. Consequently, it risks reducing complex social subjects to static points on a diagram rather than recognizing them as participants in transformative political processes.

Peri's paralysis and inarticulateness throughout the novel exemplify not only personal confusion but also a broader structural failure: the difficulty of rendering visible a subject situated at the intersection of multiple oppressions without collapsing her into abstraction or stereotype. The roots of this paralysis can be traced back to the colonial dynamic that Edward Said describes between colonizer and colonized. As the colonizer imposes a foreign cultural model upon the colonized, identity becomes fragmented—divided between what is authentic to one's native culture and what is imposed from without. This tension is vividly manifested in contemporary cultural contexts. Turkish identity, for instance, oscillates between its religious affiliation with the Muslim world and its political aspiration to be recognized as a modern, secular

member of the European community. Similarly, Iran remains split between the liberal intellectualism of its pre-revolutionary past and the enforced religiosity symbolized by the veil after 1979. Muslim expatriates, particularly women, experience this same fracture in the diaspora: torn between a homeland that is no longer entirely familiar and a host culture that never fully accepts them.

Taken together, *Three Daughters of Eve* and *Snow* reveal how the politics of gender, religion, and modernity in contemporary Muslim societies cannot be reduced to simplistic binaries. Shafak and Pamuk, in distinct but complementary ways, confront the same core dilemma: the struggle of women to define themselves amid ideological pressures that seek to fix their identities in advance. Both authors demonstrate that veiling, faith, secularism, and feminist self-expression are never stable categories but dynamic practices shaped by emotion, memory, power, and historical contingency.

This study has shown that intersectionality, while useful for mapping overlapping forms of oppression, reaches its limit when it treats identity as a pre-given essence rather than a process shaped by struggle. Peri's paralysis, Mona's politicized piety, Shirin's defiant misveiling, and Kadife's shifting relationship to the headscarf all illustrate how subjectivity becomes fragmented when the structural forces that produce "difference" remain unexamined. Carastathis's critique therefore becomes crucial: political agency emerges not from possessing certain identities but from participating in ethical, relational acts of solidarity.

Both Shafak and Pamuk ultimately push beyond representational politics. Their narratives refuse to romanticize either secular modernity or religious revival, exposing the hypocrisies and vulnerabilities embedded in each. More importantly, they center women as the primary interpreters—and disruptors—of the ideological boundaries that shape Turkish and Middle Eastern societies. Women's choices, whether to veil, unveil, resist, or conform, are shown not as signs of cultural essence but as responses to specific historical, emotional, and political conditions.

What emerges from this comparative reading is a vision of cosmopolitan feminism grounded in becoming rather than being. Instead of anchoring political emancipation in identity categories, both novels advocate for forms of solidarity that recognize the instability of identity itself. In these stories, transformation happens not when characters fully reconcile their contradictions, but when they learn to inhabit and negotiate them. The cosmopolitan feminism proposed here is therefore not a universalizing ideal but a practice: a willingness to listen across difference, to act ethically amid uncertainty, and to acknowledge the complex entanglements of power that shape women's lives. In this sense, Shafak's and Pamuk's works stand as literary interventions into global debates on Muslim womanhood, challenging the reader to rethink the assumptions underlying both Western feminist narratives and local patriarchal discourses. Their protagonists resist being read as symbols of East or West, Islam or secularism, modernity or tradition. Instead, they exemplify a feminist politics oriented toward agency, relationality, and the continual making—and remaking—of the self.

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