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**Cross-Cultural Dynamics and Self-Fashioning of Female
Identity in Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016)**

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Abstract

The present research offers a profound investigation of Elif Shafak's novel *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016). It centers its attention on how the author attempts to bring together eastern and western values through her three major characters, Peri, Shirin, and Mona. This research starts by highlighting the historical and socio-political conditions that played a crucial role in the novelist's career as it is seen in her works, mainly the novel under study. Through the lenses of Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism and George Jacob Holyoake's concept of Secularism, the study explores how Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* challenges the cross-cultural (eastern and western) dynamics and attempts to break the barriers built upon stereotypes and gender inequalities. It also demonstrates how this fluster can impact and reshape the individual's identity as well, particularly women's. The present work at last reflects on how the protagonists' identity has been refashioned by the constant shifts to which they have been exposed through their lives.

Key words: Cross-cultural dynamics, East, West, identity crisis, New Historicism, self-Refashioning, Secularism, women.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to myself, for having had the courage to go through this adventure proving that no effort is ever truly lost.

To my precious family and dear friends.

Liza Remila

Table of contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Dedication	iv
Table of Contents	v
General Introduction	1
1. The Review of Literature.....	3
2. The Statement of the Problem.....	7
3. The chapter Division.....	9
Chapter One: Elif Shafak’s Time, Life, and literary influences	
Introduction.....	10
1. Elif Shafak’s Life and Literary Influences.....	10
2. The Early Beginning of Shafak’s Career.....	13
3. An Interview with Elif Shafak.....	16
4. <i>Three Daughters of Eve</i> : An Overview.....	19
5. A Theoretical Framework : Self-Fashioning and Secularism	21
5-1 Stephen Greenblatt’s New-Historicist Theory	21
5-2 Jacob Holyoake’s concept of Secularism	24
Conclusion.....	26
Chapter 2: Elif Shafak’s Protagonists in a Cross-Cultural Setting and their Identity Refashioning	
Introduction.....	27
1. The Protagonists’ Journey from the East to the West.....	27

2. Religious and Cultural Clashes and the Protagonists Identity Crisis.....	37
3. A Shift from Religious East to Secular West.....	48
4. The Protagonists' Social, Cultural, and Religious Experiences and their Identity Transformation in Elif Shafak's <i>Three Daughters of Eve</i>	57
Conclusion.....	68
General Conclusion	70
Works Cited	75
Résumé	79
ملخص.....	80

General Introduction

Introduction

Women throughout history faced considerable challenges due to many societal inequalities established by men. They went further and classified women as the forsaken gender, dehumanized them, and confined them to stereotyped roles of mothers and wives, sometimes, in the name of religion. Therefore, the role of ladies consisted of serving their husbands like nurses or mothers as if they are created for these purposes. Historically, women were deprived of some of their rights including access to education. The latter widened the disparity between men and women as it was stated in Mary Wollstonecraft's foundational feminist text *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). This stance was fostered by Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* by asserting that women needed permission to access even the university libraries. Ironically, she coined the name "Oxbridge", a combination of two notorious universities' names, Oxford and Cambridge, to show how both universities were in disfavor of women's education where an authorization was compulsory to access them.

Despite all these restrictions faced by them, women surmounted the boundaries, challenged the established dogma and cooled their ink, even anonymously, to change their cursed fate. The Brontë sisters, for instance, published novels under male pseudonyms to be read because the only representation of women in literature was done by men. Step by step, women's resistance gave birth to the Feminist Movement that emerged from women's commitment and resilience. This movement has four waves starting from the 19th century until the present day, pioneered by key figures like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Sojourner Truth, who tackled issues of gender, class, race, sexual and reproductive rights, promoting diversity, tolerance, and gender equality in political and societal spheres. However, feminism was a partial success, meaning that

only women in Europe gained some of their rights; those who came from the other corners of the world remained in the shadows.

Simultaneously, the oppression of women is deeply rooted in cultural norms, where patriarchal oppression takes various shapes, from religious restrictions in some societies to sexism in others. In other words, women's status as a second class citizen is accepted as a cultural norm which was fostered by patriarchal systems. These cultural considerations pushed women as a marginalized social group to use literature as a medium through which their opinions, vindications and concerns are exposed to the public. Thanks to their ongoing struggle, women in the western societies/ cultures succeeded in making their voices heard; therefore, some of their rights were reclaimed especially the right to vote, to education and so forth. In the other side of the world, women were still suffering in silence.

Based on that, recent literary works pledged to amplify women's voices and rights for self-determination, which emerged as a highly important theme in today's literature. Contemporary works represent the uniqueness and sense of self-belonging of an individual or an ethnic community, which aims to promote minor groups' identities to a greater public by narrating their history. To explore how female identities are shaped, this analysis considers internal factors, such as personal beliefs, emotions, internal conflicts, and psychological issues that arise within a woman's psyche which contradict with the exterior factors like cultural norms, societal expectations, and the patriarchal standards.

Elif Shafak is one of today's most read authors who managed to build bridges between eastern and western narratives with her unique way of blending together Turkish and western influences. She is the acclaimed author of thirteen novels, including *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006), *The Forty Rules of Love* (2009), *Honor* (2012), and *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016), her

most renowned work and the focus of this study. Furthermore, the author achieved several awards for her narratives: The Orange Prize for Fiction (2006), The Big Book Award (2006), The Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (2010), The British Council's "Literature in Translation" Award (2004), The Granta Best of Young British Novelists (2003), The Sait Faik Story Award (2004), and The Commonwealth Writers' Prize (2004).

The Review of Literature

Scholars widely analyzed Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016), which triumphantly succeeded as a contemporary literary work. This novel, which tackles themes of identity, religion, and gender, gives an overview of women's struggles in a complex and harsh world. This research will scrutinize her novel *Three Daughters of Eve* to explore the studies that the novel received. These literary critics focused mainly on themes of freedom, religion, identity, and culture. Therefore, novelists owe their success to scholars' criticism; scholars would not recognize any literary work in this way without criticizing it. Authors gain recognition due to critics and theorists who give them credit. Similarly, the longevity of a novel depends on its readers. The majority of the critics of Shafak's works focused on feminist literary criticism, with few exploring its psychoanalytical aspects. Given that Elif Shafak is a feminist advocate of women's rights and LGBT rights, her work logically demands analysis through a feminist perspective.

Reinforcing this approach, Al-Zahrani and Al-Sharqi published an article entitled "Prismatic Identities or Authentic Selves? Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*: A Perspective of Intersectional Feminism," which was produced in 2022. This article gives a critical analysis of Shafak's novel by using intersectional feminism, exploring themes of identity, religion, and

gender in the context of contemporary literature. The scholars aimed to explore and emphasize the portrayal of women in Muslim societies as weak and inferior, who mainly require a male's protection to survive in this chaotic world. However, the notion of protection can easily dim into a violent oppression, highlighting the fact that patriarchal societies normalized violent behaviors. Similarly, the three female characters in the novel have different perspectives that reveal how gender, ethnicity, and religion reshape women's identities. Additionally, the critics in this article have separately depicted the three female characters as Peri the confused, Shirin the sinner, and Mona the believer. Through intersectional feminist literary theory, the scholars mainly examined the religious, ethnic, and gender ideologies of Muslim women.

In "Existential Threads in Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*: A Critical Reading." (2023), Tahir, R., I. Jabeen, and A. Izhar Chaudhri adopted an existential approach to the novel, seeking to examine the psyche of Peri, the main character. Peri struggles between the harsh realities of life and her personal fantasies, ultimately leading to her suicide attempt. This article uses analytical lenses to emphasize Peri's internal and external struggles, which came from her environment, especially matters of identity, faith in God, and personal freedom. The tension between Peri's devoted Muslim mother and secular father, a clash of ideologies, fractured their family dynamics and deepened her internal conflicts. Then the fact that Peri went to Oxford University to seek knowledge acts as an external factor that accentuates her confusion.

To demonstrate how Shafak, in *Three Daughters of Eve*, portrayed identity crises with their close relationship to the concept of amnesia, Mohammadi's analysis examines the novel's exploration of fractured selfhood in 2019. He conducted a research entitled "Amnesia: Identity Conflict in Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*." He used Ibtiham Bouachrine's feminist perspective to analyze gender, identity, and culture in the novel. The scholar declares that

amnesia is the key factor that leads to identity crises, especially in the characters of Peri and Shirin, who struggle between their past and present lives. One can say that the absence of Shirin and Peri's past, symbolizing their native lands, Turkey and Iran, prevents them from connecting with their present lives as Oxford University students. In other words, it demonstrates that contrast between eastern and western cultures can lead to individual dislocation. Above all, the relationship that the three female characters have with their Oxford professor, Azur, highlights a confrontation between religion and secularism to show that tolerance exists. The results of this study prove that Shafak avoided western and eastern confrontation, qualifying western cultures as multicultural and eastern cultures as mono-cultural, guided by their spiritual beliefs.

In an article entitled "Eve Between East and West: A Psychoanalytical Study of Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*" (2024), Rehman, N. U., M. A. Shah, and A. U. Khan. The critics state that the western ideologies are imprinted in the psyches of the easterners, as can be seen by the influence that Professor Azur had on Peri, the Turkish protagonist, and the two other *Daughters of Eve*. The study tends to explain family and society; these two concepts have a prominent role in shaping one's mind and personality. The researchers used different materials to demonstrate the impact of society on an individual's personal and moral development, such as online journals, books, articles, libraries, and other scholars. This psychoanalytical approach combines Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and Chodrow's theory of social reproduction to emphasize how childhood experiences leave marks on the psyche. On the one side, Erikson's theory highlights the significance of social interaction in shaping identity formation; on the other side, Chodrow's approach focuses on the role of mothering and civilization in improving relational mechanisms.

Balvantbhai explores the theme of identity in the following article, "Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*: Allegory of Identities and Authentic Selves," published in 2023. The scholar argues that stereotypes like weakness, emotions, or the need for male protection are discriminatory to women, especially Muslims. An exaggerated sense of responsibility often leads males to behave aggressively against ladies belonging to their family sphere. In support of his research, Balvantbhai used academic books, including Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* as a primary text, in addition to journal articles and historical texts. The researcher used intersectional feminism to demonstrate that gender, religion, and ethnicity redefined women's identities. It also highlights women's exposure to oppression, violence, and discrimination. This research reveals the flexibility, strength, and multifaceted nature of female identities, particularly among Middle eastern minorities.

"A Tradition of Misogyny (1)," a chapter extracted from Fatima Mernissi's book entitled *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Inquiry*, released in 1987, explores the misogynistic interpretations of Islamic texts and hadiths like those reported by Abu Bakra, who heard the Prophet say, "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity." (49). This chapter provided the historical and political background of the hadith to prove that the hadith has been taken out of context; the Prophet said the hadith after learning that the Persians had appointed the king's daughter to rule after the king's death and all the chaos that befell on them during her reign. This chapter explains that Abu Bakra used the hadith as a political weapon to avoid the conflict that occurred between Aisha, the prophet's wife, and Caliph Ali during the Battle of the Camel, to say that women were not allowed to rule. Moreover, this chapter asserts that Islam gave freedom and identity to slaves of the time, as Abu Bakra, a former slave whose paternity was missing, became a Muslim and a free man. Mernissi aimed, at last, to

clarify the misunderstandings and confusions that occurred in some sacred texts; she challenges patriarchal readings of these texts, highlighting Islam's role in granting not only freedom but also identity to every single human being.

In sum, the literature review highlights the explorations of themes of patriarchy, religion, gender, and psychological aspects of women portrayed by Shafak through the three major characters of her novel *Three Daughters of Eve*. It reflected the extensive scholarly analyses of the novel through several perspectives and theories, particularly the feminist and the psychoanalytical approaches.

The Statement of the Problem

Culture, society, and identity are constantly dictating how women should behave, act, and even think to enslave and shape their ideologies as patriarchy wishes; things have always been like this since antiquity. Therefore, women's identity formation has been the starting point of many scholars and critics, who explore how cultural, political, and social forces shape their identity across varied societal frameworks. Overall, this study examines how Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* challenges cultural stereotypes and patriarchal norms through the lenses of New Historicism and Secularism, focusing on the historical, religious, and cross-cultural contexts which refer to the way individuals from different cultures interact, communicate and behave towards each other by observing on how they influence and understand one another, that shape the identities of the three main characters. The objective of this research is to study Shafak's novel through the lenses of secular and new historicist theories. Furthermore, this analysis explores how Shafak questioned the persistence of patriarchy throughout history, highlighting tensions between religious obligations, societal expectations, and secular identities,

alongside intercultural dynamics. This research will focus on how women navigate their identities, gender, religion, ethnicity, and social expectations in different social and cultural settings.

Indeed, this novel has been put under study using several perspectives, such as feminist, existentialist, religious, and psychoanalytical approaches; however, our literature review demonstrates that the novel has not been studied from the secular and the new historicist standpoints. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* and *Shakespearean Negotiations* by Stephen Greenblatt, will be utilized in the present research to analyze the historical and cultural contexts that refashioned the three characters identities and criticize gender inequalities at the same time within eastern and western societies. As well as, *Secularism* by George Jacob Holyoake will also be used. It revolves around the way religious beliefs and secularist ideologies reshape women's identities.

This research raises the following interrogations to purposefully provide answers to them: How does Shafak depict the impact of patriarchal structures on the personal freedoms and identity formation of Peri, Shirin, and Mona? In what ways do religious and secular ideologies shape the characters' struggles with identity and societal expectations? How do cross-cultural dynamics between eastern and western settings influence the characters' sense of the self under cultural and religious constraints?

As an English literature and civilization student, my motivation to conduct this research came from my profound interest in feminist studies, which give voice to the voiceless and all the oppressed female minorities around the world. A few years ago, my teacher of literature advised us to read Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*. The book highly captivated my attention, and I immediately became deeply engaged with Shafak's feminism and women's rights activism.

Chapter Division

To reach our goal, this research will be divided into two chapters, in addition to the general introduction and conclusion. The first chapter, which is entitled Elif Shafak's Time, Life, and Literary Influences, will cover the historical context and background of Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*, along with its synopsis. Moreover, it will include an overview of the literary theories, Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism, and George Jacob Holyoake's Secularism.

The second chapter, entitled Elif Shafak's Protagonists in a Cross-Cultural Setting and their Identity Refashioning, will analyze the impact of patriarchy on the three female characters of the novel, Peri, Shirin, and Mona. This analysis includes an exploration of Shafak's portrayal of women's cultural and religious struggles and an examination of the tensions between eastern and western dynamics.

Chapter 1: Elif Shafak's Time, Life, and literary Influences.

Introduction

Elif Shafak is one of the prominent authors of contemporary literature who used her ink and writing skills to defend humanitarian causes, particularly freedom of speech, tolerance, women's rights, and LGBT+ rights activists, alongside multiple other current issues. Thereby, the author utilized imaginary characters inspired from her personal experiences to accomplish her objectives as a modern literary figure. Accordingly, this present chapter will explore Shafak's life and experiences, together with the historical context of her works, including her childhood experiences. Furthermore, this research will carefully examine her novel *Three Daughters of Eve*, the centerpiece of this study. Finally, this chapter will explore Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism and George Jacob Holyoake's Secularism, the two literary theories that will be used to dig into the heart of the novel.

1- Elif Shafak's Life and Literary Influences

Elif Shafak, born Elif Bilgin, is a widely read Turkish female writer who writes in both Turkish and English. She was born on 25 October 1971 in Strasbourg, France, to her father, Nuri Bilgin, a philosopher, and her mother, Şafak Atayman, who later became a diplomat. The acclaimed writer returned to Ankara, Turkey, after her parents' separation, where she had been raised by her mother and maternal grandmother. She affirmed that growing up in a dysfunctional family is problematic and a blessing at the same time because she was away from the traditional patriarchal environment. She affirms that growing up without a paternal figure had a positive impact on her. Interestingly, at the age of eighteen, The Istanbul-born author constructed her pen name by including her mother's first name, Şafak, in it. She spent most of her teenage years between Madrid, Jordan, and Germany.

The novelist has strong political opinions, going as far as criticizing the authoritarianism exercised by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In 2014, she signed an open letter protesting against the ban of Twitter in Turkey. She signed a letter of protest against the persecution of homosexuals in Russia in the same year.

The author of *Three Daughters of Eve* lived in Istanbul and the United States; however, in 2019 she chose to exile herself to London, United Kingdom, where she had lived since 2013. She married the Turkish journalist Eyüp Can Sağlık in 2005, a former editor of the liberal newspaper Radikal, with whom she has a daughter and a son. Following the birth of her daughter in 2006, she suffered from postpartum depression, a period she addressed in her autobiographical memoir *Black Milk*. However, in 2017, she came out as bisexual.

Shafak is an award-winning novelist and storyteller. She has published over 21 books, 13 of which are novels, and her books have been translated into 58 languages. Her novel entitled *The Island of Missing Trees* was a finalist for the Costa Award, British Book Awards, RSL Ondaatje Prize, and Women's Prize for Fiction in 2022 and was a Reese Witherspoon Book Club Pick. Then, in 2019, *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, her famous novel, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and RSL Ondaatje Prize and was Blackwell's Book of the Year. *The Forty Rules of Love* was chosen by the BBC in 2019 as one among the 100 Novels that Shaped Our World. *The Architect's Apprentice* has been chosen to feature in The Queen's Reading Room, which is a literary initiative created by the Queen Consort of the United Kingdom, Camilla.

The feminist storyteller holds a PhD in political science from the Middle East Technical University of Ankara, and her master's thesis on femininity and Islam was awarded the prize for the Best Turkish Work in Mystical Literature. She became an honorary fellow at St. Anne's

College and Oxford University in the US and the UK. She has also taught at various universities in Turkey. She also carries an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Bard College. She is a Fellow and a Vice President of the Royal Society of Literature and has been chosen among the BBC's 100 most inspiring and influential women. She is a strong defender of women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and freedom of expression. She is an inspiring public speaker who has spoken at TED Global twice. She participated in major publications around the world, and she obtained the medal of Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from the French Government in 2010.

The storyteller, in 2017, was chosen by Politico (the global authority on the intersection of politics, policy, and power) as one of the twelve people "who will give you a much-needed lift of the heart." She has judged multiple literary prizes, including the PEN Nabokov Prize, and has chaired the Wellcome Prize. Shafak holds the Halldór Laxness International Literature Prize for her contribution to "the renewal of the art of storytelling." In 2024, she was awarded the British Academy President's Medal for "her excellent body of work, which demonstrates an incredible intercultural range."

Additionally, the most prominent themes tackled by Elif Shafak are eastern and western cultures, as seen in her novel entitled *The Architect's Apprentice* (2013). She maintains a deep link to her native land, Turkey, particularly the city of Istanbul, which she describes as a multicultural country with various contradictions. Istanbul is a central theme in her works, especially in the novels *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) and *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016). Moreover, as an advocate of women's rights and freedom of expression, the Turkish author addresses themes of feminism and human rights, such as the indifference and ignorance surrounding the Armenian genocide that she explores in her novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006), a work that led to her prosecution.

2- The Early Beginning of Shafak's Career

Elif Shafak's artistic career started at a really young age; since her early childhood, she has been fascinated by novels and books. She started putting her imagination into words; writing diaries has been her only consolation from the loneliness she experienced as an only child. As she stated in a website called *Young Writer of the Year Award*, entitled "What I Wish I Had Known."

Shafak started writing fiction around the age of eight. She used to write down short stories and brainstorm ideas for longer stories in her turquoise notebook. This notebook will forever stay engraved in her memory, as it was the key element that helped begin her writing career. When she started primary school, she recalls being a left-hand user. She stated that her teacher told her to send her left hand to exile, a word that was totally strange and unknown to her. According to her teacher, people could see left-handed children as burdens that needed to be corrected to become right-hand users. She received a strict and disciplined education, unlike the other so-called normal right-handed children. These restrictions made her hate school and despise her handwriting. Exacerbated by her deep dislike of the patriarchal and hyper-conservative environment she grew up in, this too shaped her worldview.

After all the agitations going around about her being left-handed, she came to the conclusion that she should start using her right hand to write in her notebook. Writing stories was like a breath of fresh air that revived her soul. The feminist critique had an overflowing imagination; however, becoming a poet or a novelist did not cross her mind because she had no artistic figure in her surroundings. Later, writing became a refuge for her in which she could escape from the harshness and boredom of life.

The storyteller was the only child of her family, meaning that she never experienced the joys of having siblings; she was a solitary child. Her mother, who had settled in Strasbourg, France, with the man she married, later divorced him. After the failure of their marriage, her mother brought Shafak back to Ankara, Turkey, where she raised her daughter alone. These circumstances forced her mother to become a single working mother. Despite all these hardships, her mother managed to continue her studies and become a diplomat. While her mother was pursuing her professional career, her grandmother raised her, this played a pivotal role in her writing career. Her grandmother's spiritual, superstitious, and strongly opinionated but kind and compassionate character helped the novelist build up her literary style. Her grandmother's house was full of eastern stories, fairy tales, magic, and folklore, which nurtured Shafak's devotion to eastern culture ("What I Wish I Had Known").

The famous storyteller then stated that late 1970s Turkey had known a chaotic period of violence. She narrated the loneliness and isolation she faced as an only child who had no siblings or cousins to play with or share her secrets with, unlike other children from her neighborhood. That is why books became her only friends that she could trust and rely on to escape from her boring life. She started writing books out of loneliness and boredom, according to her; her life was monotonous and worn out. So she found shelter in her imaginary world, where alienated minorities faced no rejection or discrimination.

At the age of 17, a magazine accepted one of her stories. She then requested extra time before publishing her work. A time that she needed to choose a proper and suitable artistic name. She wanted her narrative to be published under a pen name; therefore, she took her mother's forename, "Shafak." One week later her first narrative was published under the name of Elif Shafak. When she turned twenty-two years old, she wrote her first novel. After completing her

manuscript, she headed to the post office and sent her work to a renowned publishing house in Istanbul. At that time, she was ignorant about the uncertainties of the publishing and poetic world. Somehow her ignorance was a blessing that made her free from the worries and fears of the artistic life. She left her novel in the post office like a drop in the ocean, hoping for something miraculous to happen.

Shortly after, the Turkish literature figure was hit by the harsh reality of the literary industry, which tends to marginalize women and favor the western or elitist culture over the eastern one. A few weeks later, the renowned publishing house from Istanbul contacted her via a telephone call to inform her that her novel would be released in the upcoming spring season. This phone call marked the beginning of her career as a gifted author. Moreover, she stated that being a writer or a novelist is not an easy matter; even if it is his tenth novel, an author will always go through the same turmoil; the literary world is full of peaks and valleys. That said, over time, one grows accustomed to it (Shafak).

The art of storytelling, like any other art, requires an author's devotion, time, love, and loyalty. An author should remain an eager reader for the rest of his life to grow his thirst for writing. Even though Shafak held a deep interest in reading and writing stories, taboo issues that should be kept secret also fascinated her. Her novels were full of inquiries and questions about the silenced minorities or matters that one cannot speak of freely. That is why she decided to dedicate her narratives to giving voice to the voiceless or the marginalized minorities.

When the humanitarian causes defender started her artistic career by writing in English, which is a foreign language to her. Some of her Turkish fellow citizens accused her of treason because, according to them, she betrayed her mother tongue as a Turkish writer; she was supposed to promote the Turkish language. However, for her, writing in English or Turkish was

the same, as she always built bridges between the eastern and western cultures. However, to be more ironic or humorous, she used English because irony does not exist in the Turkish language. The award winning writer was emotionally attached to both the English and Turkish languages because expressions of melancholy and sadness resonate more profoundly in Turkish.

Shafak opened up about her emotions and perspectives regarding the literary world, shedding light on her personal experiences and reflections. It was said that a writer or storyteller is not just a lonely artist, which is what Walter Benjamin called this kind of art. A writer shares affinities and manages to procure emotions for the human race as a whole. An author also tends to break walls and chains set by society to silence the unwanted minorities. Regardless of their individuality, authors can have homes in every place around the world; whenever there is storytelling, a storyteller can call it his homeland.

3- An Interview with Elif Shafak

In an interview hosted by Bassem Youssef on the Women in the World YouTube channel, titled *Elif Shafak Talks 'Turkishness'—and Staying Out of Jail*. The Turkish-British novelist discussed themes of religion, personal life, Middle East issues, patriarchy, and defying stereotypes. Shafak started by giving an overview of her personal life as an only child raised by both her single working mother and grandmother. She highlighted the fact that her mother was a secular and westernized woman, contrary to her grandmother, who was more spiritual, traditional, eastern, and less educated. She tended to shed light on the solidarity and sisterhood that occurred between these two important women in her life by explaining that her grandmother supported her mother's intellectual journey by suggesting to care for her child (2:39-5:19).

Shafak then started talking about books as life saviors; she took her personal experiences as examples when she stated that books saved her from loneliness and that the world of storytelling and reading was the loneliest form of art; at the same time, they kept her company. She states that even if reading or writing novels is considered to be a lonely form of art, it helps people connect and travel to different places and periods of time without going outdoors. Reading makes people become more empathetic and more open to the world's differences. She supported her theory by citing an example of her Turkish homophobic audiences, who assumed they preferred a specific character in her novels, one who was homosexual, transgender, or bisexual. Even some xenophobic readers empathized with the Armenian Jews who were persecuted during the Armenian genocide that she spoke of in one of her novels (5:20-7:09).

The storyteller testified that her book *The Bastard of Istanbul* cost her legal repercussions because she denounced the atrocities committed during the Armenian genocide. She was accused of opposing and betraying Turkishness, then she affirmed that memory is a responsibility and that people need to remember the past to have a better future and be able to coexist together in harmony. She said that every novelist, cartoonist, or artist in Turkey keeps in mind that they can get into trouble because of a single word or sentence or even for sharing a tweet on social media. The lawyer defending her during the trial had to defend fictional Armenian characters that figured in her novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* (8:24-10:04).

Moreover, Shafak spoke about the Islamic world, which she pictured as a controversial world that is not monolithic or stagnant. According to her, the Islamic world has different voices and opinions; some are supporting the idea of tolerance and living together in peace, while others are encouraging division and disunion. She discussed the fact that she raises questions and leaves room for her readers to provide answers; she also tends to challenge the silences and the political

and sexual taboos that exist within the Islamic world. She provided an answer to the question of Islam being a religion that encourages violence and brutality. She criticized the overgeneralization of Islamophobia; to support her idea, she took her grandmother as an example of being a traditional eastern, religious woman and supportive and encouraging at the same time. She specifies that these stereotypes should be nuanced (11:08-13:28).

The Bastard of Istanbul's write tried to demonstrate some universal problems, such as the patriarchal system and domestic violence. She observes that people can protest against several problems at the same time. She highlighted the fact that extremist ideologies support each other; one cannot exist without the other. The interviewer Bassem Youssef made a comparison between the Islamic world in the past decades and nowadays to shed light on how these Islamic countries have been destroyed. He also assumed that these calamities are purely economic and political. The interviewer proclaimed that if any other religion received the same support that Islam received to enslave its people for the good of their countries, the results would have been similar (13:48-15:40).

Similarly, Shafak is promoting the idea of fairness around the world; she articulates that the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, compared to the Judeo-Christian tradition, is underrated. Even though these three religions have so much in common, they persist in diminishing each other's position. Simultaneously, one must think critically about the inequalities that figure inside these traditions. She proclaims that people should criticize the injustices that may happen because of someone's misreading of the religious text, like the fourteen girls who were not allowed to escape from a burning school because they were not veiled. (15:57-16:44).

The writer of *Three Daughters of Eve* declares that she is not a religious person; however, the fact that she writes about Sufism and people in Turkey often leads to the assumption that she

must be extremely religious. She condemns the idea of duality that puts people in boxes. She exposes that these religions support the ideology of us versus them: each tradition claims to be ahead of the others. She says that Islamic mysticism has been a source of inspiration to her; she points out that Jewish and Christian mysticisms are not much different from the Islamic one. She maintains that these religions can perfectly coexist together. She spoke about her worrying about the Middle East because of the two alternatives they have to choose between; Middle easterners face a dualistic choice of religious extremism or authoritarianism. She concluded the interview by stating that the people are always ahead of their governments and that people should not be blamed for the evil doings of their leaders (17:20-24:00).

Elif Shafak's interview underscores storytelling's power to confront oppression and bridge divides. Despite backlash, she challenges stereotypes, defends free expression, and advocates for empathy, urging societies to learn from the past to build a more inclusive future.

4- *Three Daughters of Eve*: An overview

Elif Shafak published her famous contemporary novel entitled *Three Daughters of Eve* in 2016, which narrates the story of Nazperi Nalbantoğlu, or Peri. The story begins in Istanbul. The narrative portrays Peri as a middle-aged, wealthy housewife. Yet, her personal trauma molds her into the disillusioned person the novel depicts. Peri, while in her car accompanied by her daughter Deniz, was driving calmly to a fancy dinner party to which she was invited when suddenly she got robbed by a street thief. *Three Daughters of Eve* describes the present-day city of Istanbul as submerged in political turmoil. Peri confronted her burglar to take back the stolen handbag. During the fight, an old photography was dropped from her bag, revealing young Peri with her Oxford friends Mona and Shirin, along with their favorite professor, Azur.

The novel is marked by several time shifts from Peri's present life to the past as an Oxford student when she decided to take a lecture on God given by Professor Azur to solve her confusion between Islam and secularism, known in Turkey as Kemalism (a term that refers to Kemal Atatürk's religious reformation). The fact that she grew up around contradictory parents, as her mother, Selma, was pictured as a devout, strictly observant, and zealous Muslim. Meanwhile, the novel portrayed her father, Mensur, as a heavy drinker, petulant Kemalist, and atheist. The clashes between her parents created perplexity in Peri's psyche and divided the family. Her siblings further amplify these tensions: her Marxist brother Umut faces brutal government persecution, while her younger brother Hakan adopts a fiercely nationalistic and religious stance.

During her journey as a student at Oxford University in 2002, Peri met with two other girls who were different from her, but she perfectly got along with them. Shirin, a rebellious and free-spirited Iranian, challenges patriarchal norms and openly questions religion on the one hand. On the other hand, Mona, a devout Egyptian-American who wears a hijab and passionately defends her faith against western stereotypes, stands in contrast. Their trio represents the *Three Daughters of Eve*; each of them has her unique perspective and view of life. Shirin, the sinner; Mona, the believer; and Peri, the confused, embody distinct identities. Professor Azur's seminar on the philosophical nature of God deeply impacted Peri's vision of life.

Peri's incapacity to choose between faith and freedom reflects her internal conflict and search for identity. Similarly, her personal growth occurred when she decided to follow her own perspectives and ideologies; she decided to make her own decisions and be whatever she wants to be, regardless of others' validation. Besides, Peri's decision to steer her destiny allowed her to

determine herself and become autonomous. This journey highlights her evolution from uncertainty to a stronger, more independent sense of self.

Finally, the novel shifts into present Peri's life again in 2016, while having dinner at the fancy party she was driving to on the same day as she got robbed. Peri witnessed an attempted military coup showing the country's political position. At that precise moment, she saw the course of her life flash before her eyes; she recalled the times she spent with Mona and Shirin while attending Professor Azur's seminar.

5- A Theoretical Framework : Self-Fashioning and Secularism

New Historicism is a literary theory that emerged in 1980; this theory tended to build a bridge between the two worlds of literature and history. It encourages the idea of studying a text in accordance with its cultural, social, and political contexts. Then, secularism encourages the separation of religion from political, social, and economic spheres. It tends to promote freedom of faith and belief to prevent religion from interfering in people's intimacy.

5-1 Stephen Greenblatt's New-Historicist Theory

Stephen Greenblatt, an American Harvard University professor and a legendary Renaissance scholar, is known as the pioneer of New Historicism that emerged in the early 1980s. This theory aims to analyze literary texts regarding the cultural and historical background in which they were created; it rejects the idea of examining them in isolation. Greenblatt described the theory of New Historicism as a contemporary form of literary criticism in his essay *The Improvisation of Power* (1980) and in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980). The

term New Historicism knew its success in 1982 when Greenblatt's introduction to a special issue, *Genre* Vol. 15, was published.

A key illustration of this approach appears in Greenblatt's book entitled *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare*, where he argues that:

My starting point is quite simply that in sixteenth-century England there were both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned. Of course, there is some absurdity in so bald a pronouncement of the obvious: after all, there are always selves-a sense of personal order, a characteristic mode of address to the world, a structure of bounded desires-and always some elements of deliberate shaping in the formation and expression of identity (1).

The above passage provides a deeper understanding of Greenblatt's concept of *Self-Fashioning*, stating that in sixteenth-century England, people were both aware and self-conscious about the reshaping of their identities. This awareness suggests that identity was not seen as fixed but rather as something malleable, shaped by social, political, and cultural influences. Greenblatt's argument highlights how individuals actively participated in crafting their personas, reflecting the dynamic interplay between personal agency and external forces in Renaissance society.

Greenblatt's works have influenced early New Historicists like Louis A. Montrose, Walter Benn Michaels, and Catherine Gallagher. While Greenblatt originally referred to New Historicism as "cultural poetics," the term "New Historicism" gained wider acceptance in academic circles. Some of the foundational New Historicist works were published in the journal *Representations*, which Greenblatt co-founded in 1983 during his time at the University of California, Berkeley.

Shakespearean and Renaissance studies see Greenblatt's principle of subversion and containment as an important framework. Greenblatt's approach, which incorporates "anecdotalism," examines texts using both literary and non-literary materials, exploring mainstream and marginal perspectives. This method, known as "thick description," is a hallmark of New Historicism. Additionally, Greenblatt adapts terms like "social energy," "circulation," "exchange," and "negotiation" from economics to analyze Renaissance literary works, enriching the field with these interdisciplinary tools (Lyu 1076-7).

Greenblatt, as a New Historicist, rejects Old Historicism's notion of history as a fixed reality. Instead, he argues that history is always "narrated" and the past exists only through "representations," shaped by power, ideology, and discourse. Moreover, old historicists assume that history is objective and original. However, new historicists contend that history is neither a precise nor objective discipline; while open to multiple interpretations; it remains fundamentally akin to traditional storytelling. Other authors' narratives have influenced history. In other words, the past is not represented as a tangible or an objective entity; instead, it is constructed through previously written texts, interpreted in the context of specific historical concerns. Furthermore, history is fundamentally about storytelling, where narratives about the past are shaped using other texts as sources, with literary works treated as texts among many others.

New historicism notably contrasts with traditional historicism, meaning that it sees history as a series of objectively verifiable factors. New Historicists argue that scholars study the past regarding its contemporary authorities and that history is deeply textual in nature. New Historicism highlights the contradictions and tensions that might occur between past and present events to equally deal with marginalized events and figures as well as prominent ones. Rather than celebrating established aesthetics, New Historicists focus on exploring the processes behind

the creation of ideologies and their material foundations (Lyu 1076). “Not its innovative zeal, but its capacity to produce profound and illuminating readings will validate a new method of interpretation, and Greenblatt's ideas and readings are both provocative and rewarding.” (Veenstra 174).

In conclusion, Stephen Greenblatt, the pioneer of New Historicism, modernized literary criticism by emphasizing the strong relationship between literature and its cultural and historical backgrounds. Rejecting the fact that a text should be studied in isolation, this approach views history as a collection of competing narratives constructed and mediated through textual representation. Greenblatt's theory uses several methods, like subversion and containment, with detailed descriptions to reveal both important and marginalized histories. Its impact goes beyond *Shakespearean* and *Renaissance* studies, reshaping literature analysis across genres. New Historicism shows the complex connection between literature, culture, and history.

5-2 Jacob Holyoake's concept of Secularism

Secularism emerged in the early 1850s as a new philosophical, social, and political movement that aims to separate religion from social and political life. The free thought tradition of Thomas Paine, Richard Carlile, and Robert Owen gave importance to reason, science, and human growth rather than religious doctrine. George Jacob Holyoake (1817–1906) founded secularism and coined the term, influenced by Owenism, a movement led by Robert Owen advocating socialism and cooperative movements, and Chartism, a 19th-century British political movement pushing for democratic reforms outlined in the People's Charter of 1838.

Holyoake was a freethinker who, after working in free thought publishing, became an atheist. However, when he witnessed the strong reactions from the government, the church, and

the press in response to opposing religion, it led to the appearance of secularism in 1851–1852, a movement that prioritized science over religion. Lately, Holyoake stated that he was the first to use the terms “Secular,” “Secularist,” and “Secularism” in his periodical *The Reasoner*, published in 1846. These terms referred to a new way of thinking that focused on living by reason and ethics, without relying on religion, and described a movement based on this idea. By using these new derivatives, he redefined, in positive terms, what had previously been a nickname for the ordinary concerns of worldly life or a label for a lesser degree of religiosity within the western Christian imagination.

The Oxford English Dictionary validates Holyoake’s bold claims regarding the original mobilization of secularist terms. Before Holyoake’s mobilization, the term 'secular' had never been used as an adjective to describe a set of principles, nor had 'secularism' been used as a noun to positively define principles of morality and epistemology or to describe a movement dedicated to advancing them (Rectenwald 31-2).

According to Holyoake, the goal of free thought within Secularism was not about removing religion from public life any more. Instead, he views secularism as going beyond both theism and atheism, stating it as a new approach that studies science, education, and morality. Furthermore, he assumes that the emergence of a secular system based on moral values and knowledge could go along with or surpass the traditional religious structure (Rectenwald 32). Holyoake, in his book titled *The Principles of Secularism*, Chapter III, Section 1, explains that “Secularism relates to the present existence of man, and to action, the issues of which can be tested by the experience of this life—having for its objects the development of the physical, moral, and intellectual nature of man to the highest perceivable point, as the immediate duty of society”.

To conclude, Holyoake's concept of Secularism emerged as a movement that separates religion from socio-political affairs. Moreover, his views go along with freethinkers and philosophers' ideologies, which assert that religious doctrines come below science, philosophy, and development. Holyoake's secular approach to life emphasized the importance of morality and knowledge to be independent of religious influence, influencing the course of modern secular thoughts and movements.

Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter provided an overview of Elif Shafak's artistic life and experiences, as reflected in her literary works. It includes a detailed summary of her novel *Three Daughters of Eve*, which serves as the key element of the study. This part also offered a general overview of Shafak's early life, literary influences, and advocacy for the voiceless minorities' rights. The author intentionally fuses her personal writings and history to be able to connect with her audiences. This chapter provided a profound understanding of Greenblatt's New Historicism and Holyoake's concept of Secularism, which will be used to explore the socio-historical and religious backgrounds addressed in Shafak's novel *Three Daughters of Eve*. Besides, the theory and the concept will be used to explore how the social fabrics of the East and West have a great impact on the female protagonists' identity transformation that will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Elif Shafak's Protagonists in a Cross-Cultural Setting and their Identity Transformation

Introduction

Contemporary writing has brought a refreshing breath to literature in general. Elif Shafak is one of the most influential contemporary authors, known for her talent to merge the eastern and the western cultures together. Tackling pivotal themes like societal and political issues, and gender inequalities marked her literary career.

The present chapter will demonstrate how the author of *Three Daughters of Eve* intended to represent contemporary Turkey's fluster between eastern tradition and western culture, embodied mainly in her Turkish protagonist, Peri. The exposure of Peri and the other Shafak protagonists to different worlds, the eastern and the western cultures, made them lose their sense of belonging. In other terms, the clash of cultures that the protagonists face confirmed their existential crisis. Ultimately, this crisis due to the cultural, social, and religious influences contributed to the reshaping and refashioning of their identity.

Through the critical lens of Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism and George Jacob Holyoake's Secularism, we will reflect on how the three main characters strove to rebuild their fragmented selves during their time at Oxford. In *Three Daughters of Eve*, Shafak uses her protagonist Peri to inquire about the sociopolitical tensions of contemporary Turkish society, while Mona embodies the struggles of Muslim women facing cultural alienation and identity conflicts in the West. Through Shirin, Shafak demonstrates the consequences of Islamic extremism, illustrating how rigid dogma can generate a profound loss of the self.

1) - The Protagonists' Journey from the East to the West.

Elif Shafak is known as a humanitarian cause defender; her narratives center on women and gender dynamics within an intersectional feminist framework. She often challenges

patriarchal norms and seeks to reshape traditional stereotypes of women as mothers and wives. Through her novel *Three Daughters of Eve*, the storyteller portrayed the cultural clashes that exist between eastern and western countries due to their constant trials to spot their differences and tendencies to show their dominant hegemonies.

The author used her three female protagonists, Shirin, Mona, and Peri, to represent the East, whereas the character of Professor Azur represents the West. The novelist's exploration of cultural alienation that an easterner can feel in the West mirrors New Historicism's argument in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* that "Social actions are themselves always embedded in systems of public signification, always grasped, even by their-makers, in acts of interpretation, while the words that constitute the works of literature that we discuss here are by their very nature the manifest assurance of a similar embeddedness." (5) This perspective accentuates that social actions can alter power structures such as colonialism or religious doctrine that oppresses marginalized communities. Accordingly, it also reflects literature's capacity to silence exploited voices. Holyoake's secularist critique rejects both religious and secular dogmas, opposing all forms of despotism. This resistance anchors the narrative's challenge to systemic oppression.

Elaborating on these themes, Shafak in a YouTube video entitled "*Trois Filles d'Eve*"—Entretien avec Elif Shafak published by Editions Flammarion. She discussed her novel *Three Daughters of Eve*. She explained that writing this novel was emotionally and intellectually challenging. She used Peri's journey as a reflection of Turkey's social, cultural, and political turmoil, along with the struggles faced by women in Muslim or eastern countries. She declared that her homeland is deteriorating with each passing day; she assumes that this deterioration has affected women more than it has affected men. When a society falls into authoritarianism, Islamism, populism, or any other form of extremism, women are the first to suffer. Women who

belong to these societies could lose their autonomy. This focus on Turkey's sociopolitical turmoil aligns with New Historicism's emphasis on how power structures like authoritarianism or religious extremism reshape self-perception. As Stephen Greenblatt observes, that individuals

cling to the human subject and to self-fashioning, even in suggesting the absorption or corruption or loss of the self. How could they do otherwise? What was-or, for that matter, what is-the alternative? For the Renaissance figures 'we have considered understand that in our culture to abandon self-fashioning is to abandon the craving for freedom, and to let go of one's stubborn hold upon selfhood, even selfhood conceived as a fiction, is to die.'(257)

Greenblatt's concept of Self-Fashioning reveals the double bind faced by Eastern individuals like Peri—they are expected to preserve their cultural identity rigidly, yet are simultaneously judged for resisting assimilation into Western norms. This tension reflects a broader colonial dynamic where the East is often viewed as static and authentic, while the West represents progress, forcing Eastern subjects into an impossible choice between loyalty and liberation.

However, this erosion of women's autonomy stands in tension with Turkey's earlier progress. The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 by Kemal Mustafa Atatürk raised the status of women in Turkey, making them equal to men, due to the president's understanding of the importance of the process of modernization. The Turkish government, after witnessing the arrival of feminism in Turkey, led by elite and intellectual women, decided to adopt new laws such as the recognition of women as persons equal to men, the right to vote, and the banishment of polygamy. The ban on the Hijab, equal rights in divorce, property, and political rights. When

Turkey witnessed the Islamist Renaissance, it led to the appearance of Islamic feminism, which sought to disclose the misuse of the Koran to subjugate women.

These tensions between Atatürk's reform and religious authoritarianism echo New Historicism's claim that shifting power influences an individual's freedom, particularly women. In 2004, the amendment of the Turkish criminal law was passed by the AKP government and was beneficial to women because it strengthened the laws for sexual harassment, honor crimes and genital examination (Zacharia and Senthamarai 223-4). These judicial changes demonstrate New Historicism's concentration on how political powers can reshape gender dynamics. As Greenblatt observes, "Self-fashioning for such figures involves submission to an absolute power or authority situated at least partially outside the self-God, a sacred 'book, an institution such as church, court, colonial or military administration.'"(9) It proves that the concept of submission exists among all institutions, religious or political, as patriarchal systems have encouraged male domination over women to obtain absolute power.

These legal reforms in Turkey highlight how political shifts influence societal structures, just as Shafak contrasts the East's disregard for history with the West's respect for it. Shafak, in her novel, addressed an important theme that distinguishes between the East and the West: easterners usually struggle to remember their heritage, whereas westerners always glorify and honor their past by constantly making references to it. She added that the East, particularly Turkey, should focus more on reconciling with its historical legacy. To support this argument, the author of *Three Daughters of Eve* acknowledged that "In Istanbul, ancient though the city was, the past was treated like a visitor who had overstayed his welcome. Here in Oxford, it was clearly the guest of honour."(Shafak 98).

Shafak used her novel *Three Daughters of Eve* to relate the debates about identity, religion, sexuality, and gender that occur privately between young women who live in the eastern part of the world to expose them to the public. She reflected these debates through the characters of Shirin, a British-Iranian woman who is very critical of religions, particularly Islam, due to its gender inequalities; Mona, a veiled Muslim woman who is fighting against the Islamophobia that she experienced all along her life; and Peri, a Turkish girl who grew up in a religiously divided family. These three women called themselves The Sinner, The Believer, and The Confused. Shafak confirmed that the novel focuses more on the confused one, who reflects the confusion of contemporary times (0:47-5:25).

Through these three women's opposed views, Shafak highlights intimate debates that arise in eastern societies but also dramatizes their confrontation with western culture, as seen in Peri's painful encounter with her parents at Oxford. Specifically, the following excerpt from the novel illustrates the controversies that exist between oriental and occidental countries after Peri's parents paid her a visit during her time as an Oxford student. Shafak, through Peri's character, explained the loneliness and clash of cultures an easterner could feel in a western land:

After her parents left for the train station, with a sickening sense of loneliness Peri returned to her staircase in the front quad of her college. Thrilling though it was to be free of their quarrels and bickering for once, at least they were familiar to her, and in their absence she was left with an unsettling feeling, as if a carpet had been pulled out from underneath her feet and she was forced to walk on rough terrain. Now that the pride and the excitement of the day had dissipated, she was overcome by a profound disquiet. She realized she was not as ready for

the next big stage in her life as she had liked to imagine. Holding herself tense against the wind, so unlike the salty breeze of a late afternoon in Istanbul, she took a breath and slowly let it out. Her nose searched for habitual smells – deep-fried mussels, roasted chestnuts, sesame bagels, grilled sheep intestines blended with the aromas of Judas trees in spring, daphne plants in winter. Like a demented sorceress who had forgotten the formulas of her potions, Istanbul mixed unlikely aromas in the same cauldron: rancid and sweet; stomach- churning and mouth-watering. Here in Oxford, however, the resinous odour hanging in the air seemed unwavering, reliable (Shafak 110).

The above illustrates the feelings of loneliness and dislocation that Peri experienced as a foreigner at Oxford University. The moment her parents left, she felt lonely and hollow inside, a stark contrast to the warmth and familiarity they brought. Her dislocation came from the fact that she left her homeland, Turkey, to go to the opposite side of the world, England. Then, the cultural clashes resulted from the quietness and calm that reign in the English streets, unlike the noisiness and vivacity of Turkish ones. Even the smells were different; “smells of deep-fried mussels, roasted chestnuts, sesame bagels, or Judas trees in spring and daphne plants” disappeared and left their place to the “resinous odour” of Oxford streets.

Peri’s confusion, caught between eastern heritage and western innovation, mirrors Greenblatt’s claim in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988) that even a genius would not be able to "complete unto himself," reflecting that societal norms can alter someone's self-perception (2). For instance, Peri’s misery took place when she realized that she was not ready for “the next big stage.” She was not ready to move from her dreamland to the bitterness of adult life.

Shafak, in her novel, supported these viewpoints about the contrast between east and west when Shirin explained to Peri's parents during their visit to Oxford that English people, unlike easterners, lack hospitality and cheerfulness, as she argued that "the English, though polite and well-mannered, could be too reserved and too cautious for a lonely foreigner in a new country, and Peri would be better off hanging around with other international students or those from a mixed cultural background—like herself." (Shafak 108).

Another thing that this passage demonstrates is the solidarity that exists between people from the east; easterners are always willing to assist and support one another. The sisterhood that eastern women have is shown when, "before parting, Shirin gave Peri a hug as if they were long lost friends." (108) Even though Shirin barely knew Peri, she acted warm and friendly with her to show her that she was not alone in this foreign and unwelcoming country.

Shafak highlights easterners' solidarity, support, and partnership but also contradicts this unity by exposing how geopolitical tensions, such as the tensions that exist between Turkey and Iran, can ruin their solidarity, reducing their relationship to a binary: either friends or enemies, as Shirin confessed to Peri:

'Actually, you're just opposite me. And if you dare to make noise, I'll raise hell ... just kidding. Turkey and Iran, neighbours, just like on the map. We'll be great friends. Or great enemies. Maybe we'll start a war. World War Three! Because you know that's what's going to happen, right? There'll be another fucking war because the Middle East is totally screwed up – oops, excuse my bloody language.' (109)

Shirin used the expression “neighbours, just like on the map” to make an allusion to the fact that proximity is not always a sign of flawless relations. This dynamic aligns with Stephen Greenblatt’s argument in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* that “the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society” (256). In other words, the awkward relationship between Turkey and Iran illustrates the conflicts that exist within eastern societies that are purposefully sponsored by the West to keep the East underground to maintain its superiority. Shafak shows how outside forces turn eastern unity into simple 'us vs. them' conflicts, proving that bigger power systems create these divisions.

The novel points out that international students cannot suppress their cultural origins, no matter how smart and educated they are. When Peri arrived at Oxford, she was seeking part-time work to finance her studies. Shirin offered to help by creating a CV for her, but when Peri read it, she discovered that it was filled with false job experiences, claiming that Peri had been “a bartender in a trendy Istanbul bar until it burned down,” “worked in an Ottoman manuscript library,” and even “cared for an octopus at a private aquarium.” Shirin's exaggerated lies, meant to increase Peri's chances of getting a job, ironically reflect on how foreign students feel pressured to conform themselves to western culture while remaining bound to their eastern roots.

Later, Shirin explains why she lied on the CV by showing that westerners expect foreigners to act a certain way, arguing that “it’ll make you a foreign curiosity. Trust me, educated Brits get a thrill out of multiculturalism. Not too much, though, just enough. People like you and me are allowed to be a bit ... eccentric. It makes us fun to be around. So you might as well play it up, take advantage of it. If foreigners aren’t going to bring excitement – and good food – who wants them in England!” (Shafak 188-9). These quotations confirm the idea that an easterner should make himself useful or interesting to fit in or at least be respected in a western

society. Moreover, it would be preferable for a foreigner to highlight the aspects that his society or ethnic group excels in, rather than conforming to external expectations. As Shirin notes, foreigners are often valued only for their lively spirit and cooking abilities, reducing their identity to simplistic stereotypes rather than acknowledging their full humanity and cultural depth.

This pressure to perform cultural stereotypes reveals a deeper hypocrisy: while western societies demand assimilation, they simultaneously enable the same extremism they claim to oppose. Accordingly, extremism can take several forms, like Mona, who felt isolated or unwanted in a western country that claims to be a democratic state that encourages freedom of expression, is persecuting a woman because of a piece of cloth that covers her head. Or Iran, that Islamic country that imposes the hijab, or that piece of cloth, on women in the name of Allah. Some people, like Shirin's family, have been forced to flee their homeland due to the misuse of religious beliefs. In the end, they all have the same goal of subjugating or controlling women's bodies.

Shafak, throughout her novels, particularly *Three Daughters of Eve*, wanted to encourage the ideology that the East and West are not very different from each other as they pretend to be. They share more similarities than differences; they just have this tendency to prove their superiority. Shafak used her narratives to highlight the similarities they share and to convince them to stop considering their relationship as fire and ice (Ichim 78). In *Three Daughters of Eve*, the novelist portrayed these similarities through Mona's character, who is both a Muslim and a feminist, stating that "if some people think that's impossible, it's their problem. Not mine." (127). Mona is a headscarved Muslim who was born in New Jersey to Egyptian parents. Mona asked Peri, while conversing with her, to

‘Ask people around here, who needs feminism?’ the girl went on. ‘They’ll say, “Oh, women in Pakistan, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, but not Britain, we are so over it! Surely not Oxford, huh?” But the reality is different. Did you know that women students do unusually badly here? There’s a massive gender gap in exam results. A fresh woman in Oxford needs feminism just as much as a peasant mother in rural Egypt! If you are with me, sign our petition.’ She offered a pen and a paper that read ‘Oxford Feminist Squad’ at the top. (Shafak 127)

The above quotation is a perfect example of the fact that feminism is needed in every single part of the world, not only in non-western societies. Yet paradoxically, women in developed countries tend to deny their need for feminist institutions to protect them, fearing association with, or being viewed similarly to, eastern women, who are usually oppressed under patriarchal systems that govern their countries.

To conclude, Elif Shafak, through her novel *Three Daughters of Eve*, is seeking to represent the struggles of women to fit in contemporary societies due to the patriarchal codes imposed by traditional, cultural, religious, and social expectations. Women are striving for their freedom, as Shafak is showing it in the characters of Peri, Mona, and Shirin. More importantly, she showcased the existential fragmentation the protagonists went through due to the religious and cultural clashes between eastern and western lands.

2)- Religious and Cultural Clashes and the Protagonists Identity Crisis.

Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* records the journey of three female characters who respond differently to the clash between eastern religious tradition and western secularism. The novel refers to them as Mona the Egyptian, who battles with Islamophobia; Shirin the Iranian atheist, who rejects religious and cultural constraints; and Peri the confused, who is neither a believer nor an atheist. These religious and cultural clashes led them to face an identity crisis. The novel interrogates how these brutal changes reshaped their sense of self and mainly influenced their perception of life. Similarly, contemporary Turkey's struggles are embodied through Peri's character; it mirrors its difficulty to position itself between Atatürk's secularism, or Kemalism, and the Islamic tradition.

Just as Turkey struggles between secular and religious forces, Peri's inner conflict mirrors this struggle over Turkish identity. Accordingly, Shafak, in her novel, emphasized the theme of identity crisis that her protagonists, particularly Peri, faced during their time as Oxford University students. Peri challenged the way cultural and religious pressures on women reshape or change their identity and perception of life. The Turkish protagonist faced a cultural dislocation due to her parents' opposed beliefs and thoughts, reflecting New Historicism's focus on how power, such as patriarchal, cultural, and religious systems and structures, reshapes identity and secularism's tension with inherited religious beliefs seen in her parents' opposed views.

This tension between internal identity and external pressures becomes visible through clothing, like the hijab, which Shafak uses to show how societal forces shape self-expression. She wanted to demonstrate that a person's way of expressing his identity can take multiple forms; sometimes one's identity can be seen in the way he dresses. The author, in the major part of her

works, mainly *Three Daughters of Eve*, incorporated traditional or religious dress codes such as hijab, niqab, or burka. The headscarf is considered to be a sign of revolution or freedom of expression, as Mona argued while debating with Shirin about the impact a piece of cloth can have in different parts of the world: “I’ve been bullied, called names, pushed off a bus, treated as if I were dumb – all because of my headscarf. You’ve no idea how horribly I’ve been treated! It’s just a small piece of cloth.”(310).

Mona reflects the everyday life of a Muslim woman who covers her head in a non-Muslim country. She then added, “It’s my choice, my identity! I’m not bothered by your ways, why are you bothered by mine? Who is the liberal here, think!”. Her reflection about wearing the veil as a personal choice and a way of expressing her identity as a Muslim goes along with the secular principle that an individual’s choice should be taken independently from any institutional dogma (Holyoake 1). In other words, she wanted to show the world that she has the right to exist and practice her religion wherever she goes. It also echoes with Greenblatt’s argument in his *Shakespearean Negotiations* that “There may be a moment in which a solitary individual puts words on a page, but it is by no means clear that this moment is the heart of the mystery and that everything else is to be stripped away and discarded. Moreover, the moment of inscription, on closer analysis, is itself a social moment” (4-5). It explains that Mona’s decision to wear a hijab may not be a private choice but a social or cultural influence.

Similarly, Shirin portrayed the negative effect of that piece of cloth when it is used for malicious purposes, as some eastern governments do. Shirin said, “First, it’s just one, then it’s ten, then millions. Before you know it it’s a republic of headscarves. That’s why my parents left Iran: your small piece of cloth sent us into exile!” (310). This implies that there is strength in

numbers; even a flawed or oppressive ideology can survive as long as it obtains significant support from a large enough group, ultimately leading to an identity crisis.

This sense of ideological inferiority and its power to shape easterners' identity while immigrating into the West, where the feelings of non-belonging are accentuated. Shafak's novel *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016) illustrates the non-belonging that an eastern individual could feel while immigrating or seeking asylum in a western land. To be more specific, a foreigner will always be singled out in a country that is not his own. The natives will constantly remind him of his inferiority, emphasizing that full acceptance remains elusive, even if they excel in every field. Peri, the Turkish protagonist in *Three Daughters of Eve*, experienced an internal struggle with freedom and faith during her scholarship at Oxford University. Upon arriving in Oxford, Peri encountered Shirin and Mona, who, to her, mirrored the opposing ideologies of her parents, ideologies she had left behind in Turkey. As the author argued:

Their arguments focused on God, religion, faith, identity and, a few times, sex.

Mona believed in remaining a virgin until marriage – a devotion she expected of both herself and her future husband –while Shirin poked fun at the whole idea. As for Peri, who was neither devoted to the notion of virginity nor as comfortable with sexuality as she would have liked, she listened, feeling somewhere in between, as she often did. (320)

The above quotation reflects the thoughts of the three main characters of the novel, Mona, Shirin, and Peri, about their religious beliefs and the reshaping of their identities due to the dominant patriarchal system that exists in the eastern lands. In his chapter “Open Thought the First Step to

Intelligence,” George Jacob Holyoake defines “open thought” as “sometimes called “self-thought,” or “free thought,” or “original thought”—the opposite of conventional second-hand thought—which is all that the custom-ridden mass of mankind is addicted to.” (2) Mona’s strict commitment to virginity represents Holyoake’s “conventional second-hand thought”—an unquestioning acceptance of patriarchal tradition. In contrast, Shirin’s sarcastic dismissal of religion embodies “free thought,” outright rejecting inherited dogma, while Peri’s wavering position mirrors the tension of “open thought,” caught between progress and the oppressive weight of societal expectations.

Shafak’s contrasting depictions of Istanbul’s chaos and Oxford’s tranquility expose how cultural imagery perpetuates East-West divides. Similarly, Ichim observed in her article entitled “Cultural Images of the East and West in Elif Shafak’s Novels” that Shafak’s audience is mainly captivated by the allusion to cultural images and stereotypes that she incorporates in her novels. What catches the eye the most is that many of her books, particularly *Three Daughters of Eve*, strive to emphasize the parallels that the East and the West share. As illustrated in *Three Daughters of Eve*, the city of Istanbul is characterized by its chaotic noise and oppressive atmosphere, contrary to the peaceful and tranquil environment of Oxford (76).

In other words, the loud and suffocating city of Istanbul alludes to the vivacity and energetic behavior of eastern people, as well as their warmth and hospitality. Unfortunately, it also reflects the turmoil and troubles faced by eastern countries. In contrast, the narrative pictures Oxford as a calm, stable, and reserved city, embodying the coldness of the West. A society that faces several power shifts leads its cultural images to evolve in time. The historical backdrop tends to influence their creation and the existing perceptions or stereotypes that the audience may

associate with other cultures or nations (Ichim 76). This aligns with New Historicism's focus on how power shifts can impact the formation of cultural stereotypes.

This cultural determinism extends to faith and environment, as Shafak illustrates how societies, particularly the eastern ones, have such enormous faith in God that it often makes them believe that the environment can control them. The use of some expressions like “In sha Allah” or simply saying that it is Allah’s will makes them feel better. Shafak, in *Three Daughters of Eve*, frequently used the expression Allah, which is the Arabic equivalent of God, to show that Muslims, or easterners, believe that God planned everything that happened, is happening, and will happen in the future. As it is mentioned in the novel, “Allah sees through every lie.” (54), or as Peri’s husband said that he owes his fortune to “Allah the Almighty” (60).

The climate or the weather is another important element that symbolizes culture in Shafak’s novel; she often describes the climate of the cities the characters live in. As illustrated in the novel, when Peri saw the Polaroid picture with her two best friends, she remembered “the worst winter in Oxford in decades” (80) or that “one afternoon on the cusp of winter, the wind tasting of sea salt and sulphur, Peri arrived in Istanbul”(153). Similarly, the geographical location can give much information about a person or family’s culture and history; the different locations the protagonists came from gave an insight into their personality; and it is obvious that their moving to Oxford impacted their behavior.

As Shirin argued while debating with Mona about the crisis that an individual who moves from one place to another: “Those who are exposed to more than one culture! We’re asking big questions. Eat your heart out, Jean-Paul Sartre! Get a load of this! We have an existential crisis like you’ve never seen!” (308). This passage portrays the feelings of isolation and betrayal felt by individuals like the novel’s protagonists. They feel isolated due to their struggle to fit in a

completely opposed society; they could feel that they have betrayed their culture if they adopt the culture of the other. Feelings of non-belonging can emerge due to the identity crisis they manifest.

Shafak lived her life between the eastern and western lands; she has absorbed the cultures of each country. Accordingly, Shafak has written novels in English to provide an image of her eastern culture, precisely Turkey and Istanbul, to the westerners, aiming to recount and denounce stereotypes that go around the “Other” or Europe’s unwanted part. For westerners, when it comes to easterners, they often emphasize the contrast between their respective cultures, defining easterners in opposition to themselves. Challenging this dichotomy, she examines the existing similarities between the two cultures that must be recognized and valued.

Shafak wants eastern and western knowledge to combine, creating harmony that helps them learn from each other and work together for a brighter future. Shafak’s views also go along with Edward Said’s opinion that identity is defined by establishing the differences between us and the others, stating that the otherness changes through time and place (Said 332). The ideologies that people spread about the West being exemplary or the East being deficient are baseless. These fabricated divisions are used mainly by the West to establish their identity by isolating the other. The common belief that the West is perfect is merely an illusion; the West is a wolf in sheep’s clothing. The East is seen as evil because the West has constructed this ideology. After all, you need an antagonist to justify a protagonist's behavior.

Unlike eastern societies, the western ones have a different vision of God Almighty; easterners venerate and rely on him in their misfortunes or thank him if anything good or bad happens in their lives. In the East, every single thing that happens is God’s will; westerners have a totally opposed view of God, as it appears in the following passage:

Europe's problem was that it had abandoned God. People were finally waking up to this historical mistake. It was time to bring God the Saviour back – back into academia, back into the family, back into the public space. Freedoms should never be confused with Godlessness. Europe had been wasting its time debating foolish subjects – like same-sex marriage – while the barbarian hordes were massing at our gates. If people chose to be gay, fine, but they had to bear the consequences. They could not lay claim to marriage – clearly stated as a covenant with God between a man and a woman. The present turmoil – terrorism, refugee crisis, Islamic extremism on European soil – was God's way of teaching Europeans a lesson. Testing, correcting, honing, perfecting. In the past the Lord had rained down fire and brimstone on sinful cities; today He rained refugees and terrorists upon us. Every age brought its own punishment. (Shafak 359)

This passage extracted from *Three Daughters of Eve* explains that Europe's misfortune came from Godlessness; Europeans focused too much on futilities like marriage between individuals of the same sex instead of trying to find ways to please their God. Stating that the migration of easterners to their countries was God's punishment for their misbehavior. Mainly it shows Europeans' incapacity to accept other races in their countries; to even call them a curse from God is utterly pitiful.

The novelist showed how westerners often push stereotypes, fake identities they created, onto others. She related this from her own experience, even though she is an international novelist who writes in both English and Turkish, who lived in both the East "Turkey" and the

West “USA” and “England”, felt discriminated against, and has always been associated with her Turkish identity. Especially in the artistic world, an artist will always be regarded as an identity or a stereotype. As Shirin argued with Peri about the bitter truth of easterners and Muslims being regarded through their origins or identity:

“What I’m saying is they either have a sunny impression – sandy beaches and Eastern hospitality, that kind of shit. Or a gloomy one – Islamic fundamentalists, police brutality and Midnight Express. When they want to be nice to you, they throw in the first; when they want to challenge you, it’s the second. Even the most educated are not immune to clichés.” (Shafak 189).

This passage highlights how easterners are treated in western lands; easterners are always pointed out as the bad seeds or the unwanted race. Even if they behave well or obtain high degrees, their identities will always hold them back.

Just as western societies confine easterners within narrow identity stereotypes, rigid gender roles similarly trap individuals within historically imposed expectation. In other words, gender roles were defined by societies to fit patriarchal norms, in which women were reduced to the traditional roles of caregivers who possessed the maternal instinct and were assigned to take care of the household. Whereas, men who possess a more developed physical and so-called mental strength are charged to provide food and take decisions concerning their beloved ones. Blackstone defines gender roles as society's expectations of individuals based on their sex and beliefs about gender. The portraits drawn by previous generations now create a conflict that

makes every man or woman who acts differently from how they are supposed to in the societal norms created before seem problematic.

However, Shafak challenges these norms by emphasizing the emergence of the feminist movement, explaining that women in the present day can be what they decide to be and not what society wants them to be. Women can even work and support the economic prospects of the family (Zacharia and Senthamarai 222-3).

Shafak in this novel highlighted the fact that the Turks are desperately trying to distinguish themselves from other easterners and Muslims by blindly imitating or mimicking the West. It also pins down Turkey's fragmentation or confusion between eastern and western cultures. Additionally, Turkish people are more worried about how they are perceived by foreigners rather than assuming their culture and identity (Ichim 82). *Three Daughters of Eve* showcased the richness of the Turkish culture by shedding light on one of its prominent figures who helped Turkey distinguish itself from other eastern countries, Kemal Mustafa Atatürk. Shafak portrayed the respect and consideration Turkish people gave to Atatürk, as seen in the following passage:

From the ornate picture frame on the wall, Atatürk – the father of the Turks – would glance down at them, his steel-blue eyes flecked with gold. There were portraits of the national hero everywhere; Atatürk in his military uniform in the kitchen, Atatürk in a redingote in the living room, Atatürk with a coat and kalpak in the master bedroom, Atatürk with silk gloves and flowing cape in the hall. On national holidays and commemorative days Mensur would hang a Turkish flag

with a picture of the great man outside a window for everyone to see.(Shafak 17-18)

The passage features the symbolic presence of Atatürk in every Turkish house and qualifies him as the father of the Turks. His presence symbolizes the resistance of Turkey against extremism and Islamism. His different outfits show him as a military leader who successfully drove Turkey to its independence; the redingot outfit features Atatürk as a reformer who adopted western style along with the cultural and traditional one, like the kalpak, a traditional fur hat. Additionally, the portraits of Atatürk watching over the household evoke the idea of a guardian deity or saint, his gaze symbolizing both surveillance and protection.

Mensur, to support the idea of Atatürk as Turkey's hero and reformer, argued that "if it weren't for him, we'd have been like Iran," Mensur often said to his daughter. 'I'd have to grow a round beard and bootleg my own booze. They'd find out and flog me in the square. And you, my soul, would be wearing a chador, even at your young age!'" (18). Atatürk's thoughts go along with Holyoake's reflection of "The Secular" as a "mode of instruction" and "Secularism" as a "code of conduct" (Holyoake 1). It emphasizes the impact he had on the survival of the Turkish culture and identity, unlike other eastern countries like Iran, which succumbed to extremism. Mensur's devotion to Atatürk reflects the fact that Kemal's will is still alive in people's brains. Peri enjoyed listening to conversations of her father and his Kemalist friends; Peri's interest in their talks symbolizes that the younger generations too are willing to carry Atatürk's secularist and revolutionary thoughts. Shafak stated that "Peri stayed around, sipping orange juice from her father's favorite mug, which had the signature of Atatürk on one side and a quote from the national leader on the other: The civilized world is ahead of us; we have no choice but to catch

up.” (18). It symbolizes Atatürk’s high hopes for a more developed Turkey that assumes its culture and identity.

Shafak brought eastern cuisine to the forefront to distinguish between the eastern and western traditions. Cooking for eastern women is viewed as a way of showing their love and devotion to their families, whereas in the West, cooking is seen as a survival task. Today’s western wives are too occupied to cook. In *Three Daughters of Eve*, Shafak makes allusions to traditional Turkish dishes multiple times, such as Selma’s “slow-roasted lamb with mint leaves” (26) or “stuffed cabbage leaves, börek with feta, pickled cucumbers, cracked bulgur salad, grilled meatballs, and apple cookie rolls” (48).

Shafak’s rejection of a dominant ideology, culture, and religion reigning over the world is reflected in the following passage: “The absolutists, they venerate purity; we venerate hybridity.” They wish to reduce everyone down to a single identity.” (Shafak 267). It means that the upper class or high culture tends not only to dominate the others but to completely erase them.

Concretely, as Shafak, in her novel *Three Daughters of Eve*, states to support her opinions about cultural clashes occurring between eastern and western civilizations: “Her name was Sujatha. She spoke about the differences between Eastern philosophy and its Western counterpart—or Middle Eastern, I should say, since Abrahamic religions all come from the same region. It takes an outsider to notice how similar they are” (202). This quote highlights the fact that eastern and western cultures are closely linked to one another. It shows how wicked the idea of cultural and religious clashes is. “It takes an outsider to notice how similar they are.” This phrase demonstrates that an outsider or someone with hybrid identities is more apt to understand the connections and similarities between cultures and religions.

In conclusion, Elif Shafak strives to create cultural symbiosis and peace between eastern and western cultures, which encourages the two opposed sides to join together and push each other to a more flourishing future. Even though Shafak faced several persecutions, she remained faithful to her opinions. Her thoughts and ideologies are being reflected through the three protagonists of the novel, who represent the eastern world, and the way they are viewed by the western world.

3)- A Shift from Religious East to Secular West.

Shafak, in her novel *Three Daughters of Eve*, tried to give an overview of contemporary Turkey that struggles between religion and secularism, or Kemalism. Turkish people are facing an existential crisis by being torn between Islam and secularism. These struggles are pictured in the novel through the characters of Peri's father, Mensur, and friend, Shirin. Both characters are secular atheists; on the other side, Peri's mother, Selma, and friend, Mona, are both staunch Muslims. Peri finds herself caught between these two states of mind; she is confused, as Shafak called her in the novel. Her confusion reflects New Historicism's focus on how political power shifts fracture individual and collective identities.

The novel pictured Selma as a devoted Muslim who is pressuring other women, including her daughter Peri, to follow the right path, the path of religion and faith. Selma is very strict about wearing the veil. She even went so far as to scare women by talking to them about the Day of Judgment and how God will be merciless with those who show their bodies. This contrasts sharply with secularism's emphasis on individual autonomy and the separation of religious doctrine from public life, as well as Holyoake's assertion that "FREE THOUGHT" is founded upon reason. It is the exercise of reason, without which free thought is free foolishness. Free

thought being the precursor of Secularism, it is necessary first to describe its principles and their limitation” (9). Selma’s fixation on hijab as a necessity contrasts with secularism’s principle of free thought, which prioritizes reason over doctrine.

The following passage gives an overview of Selma’s strong opinions about women who refuse to wear hijab: “With a circle of like-minded spirits, Selma organized trips to beaches in and around Istanbul, trying to convince women sunbathing in bikinis to repent of their ways before it was too late for their souls to be saved. “Every inch of flesh you show today will scorch you in hell tomorrow.” (Shafak 20). It shows her categorical rejection of secular values, which encourage free thought rather than religious doctrine. Here, the author demonstrates Selma’s determination to manipulate women’s faith by using the fear of the afterlife and by explaining that hell isn’t a quiet place. This passage also highlights her attempts to impose her views on others.

Shafak, in her novel, wanted to demonstrate the way contemporary Turkey was divided between freedom and faith by using the characters of Selma and Mensur. This ideological clash is highlighted in the following passage, which perfectly pictures how Selma is trying to bring her husband to the right path and how Mensur maintained his position as an atheist.

Animated though she always was, Selma had become even more talkative and argumentative in this new stage of her life, keen to bring others, especially her husband, to the path of the righteous. Given that Mensur had no intention of being corrected, the Nalbantoğlu household was divided into her zone and his zone – Dar al-Islam and Dar al-harp – the realm of submission and the realm of war. (20).

This quotation gives an overview of Turkey's resistance against Islamic extremism through the character of Mensur, who, regardless of his wife's efforts to convert him to Islam, remained stuck to his views. It also shows that the Turkish Muslims aren't eager to abandon their faith and their mission to reconvert others. These two opposed ideologies managed to create tensions and confusions between people.

The character of Mensur, Peri's father, unlike his daughter, does not have any doubts about his beliefs; he is not confused. Mensur assumes that religion is an emotional matter that has nothing to do with reason or logic. Religious individuals often describe their faith as a guide or manual that directs them on how to live their lives, dedicating themselves entirely to God without questioning or challenging His existence. In contrast, Mensur is portrayed as a secularist character, through whom Shafak reflects her secular thoughts. He also criticizes the hypocrisy of certain religious individuals, who only turn to God when they need material things or when they are unhappy. Once they achieve success and happiness, they completely disregard God's existence (140). The following passage provides an excellent summary of Mensur's attitudes toward God and Muslims, notably his wife.

'I know you're curious about God,' Mensur said pensively. 'I can't answer all your questions. No one can, frankly, including your mum and that cuckoo preacher of hers.' He downed the rest of his *raqi* in a single swallow. 'I have no sympathy for religion, or for the religious, but you know why I'm still fond of God? [. . .] 'Because He is lonely, Pericim, like me ... like you,' Mensur replied. 'All alone up there somewhere, no one to talk to – okay, maybe a few angels, but just how much fun can you have with the cherubim? Billions pray to God, "Oh

give me victory, give me money, give me a Ferrari, do-this-do-that ...” Same words over and over, but hardly anyone goes to the trouble to get to know Him. (Shafak 38)

This idea demonstrates the way Mensur despises religion; when he referred to Selma’s preacher as a “cuckoo,” it showed that he sees religious leaders or imams as misleading or pathetic. In spite, the fact that Mensur feels no sympathy for religions and the religious, but he acknowledges the existence of God by saying that God is lonely, shows his ability to distinguish between God and religions; he also shows some empathy towards God.

Shafak in *Three Daughters of Eve* used her protagonist Peri, a Turkish woman who grew up in a divided household composed of a Muslim mother and an atheist father, to reflect the influence that family has over their children in the East. The fact that she went to Oxford for a scholarship furthered her confusion and bewilderment, leading to her self-destruction. Peri’s relationship with God and divinity is awkwardly complicated; she constantly interrogates the authority and almightiness of God over his people. Contrary to her parents, Peri struggles to take a stance on her religious beliefs. Despite her persistent attempts to reconcile with God, Peri continually fails to achieve this spiritual connection. She started an endless war in her inner self where she endlessly questions and investigates the Almighty to achieve a compromise between freedom and faith. Peri, while referring to God, used the word Almighty, meaning that she unconsciously assumes that God is above his people.

It was around those days that Peri began to reframe her relationship with Allah. She stopped praying before going to sleep, contrary to the way her mother taught

her, but she also refused to remain indifferent towards the Almighty, contrary to her father's advice. Instead, all the anguish and hurt she dared not to voice within earshot of her parents, she turned into a cannonball of words and hurled headlong at the skies (33).

This evidence from the novel gives a glimpse of how profound and deep Peri's confusion can be. It also depicts her internal struggle with Allah. She started by distancing herself from God; it can be interpreted as a rebellion against the rules her mother imposed on her, like praying before going to sleep. Similarly, she refused to align with her father's complete rejection of divinity. The metaphor "a cannonball of words" suggests that Peri, instead of being a staunch believer like her mother or a completely indifferent and atheist individual like her father, shows her willingness to confront Allah directly with her anger, inner turmoil, and intense emotions that she holds against her parents. The expression "headlong at the skies" describes that Peri broke from traditional rules required in prayers; instead, she addressed God by directly looking up to the sky.

The depth of Peri's conflict with her faith, with which she often engages in internal debates about the nature of God. Her struggles are particularly evident when she questions divine justice, as illustrated when Peri constantly challenged God with answerable questions; fearing to be overheard led her to lower her voice. She condemned His carelessness while permitting horrible misfortunes to the nicest ones. Inquiring whether His power extended to the oppressed in prisons or His mercy to the miserable ones. If God was not able to intervene, He was powerless; if He refused to, He was heartless. Either way, He fell short of His divine promises, exposing Him as a fraud (Shafak 33-34). This excerpt proves that questioning and having doubts

is a major phase that each individual in this world goes through to find his salvation. The fact that Peri is asking her questions about everything related to faith and human existence to God in a lowered voice so that nobody could hear her suggests that in eastern societies, voicing your opinions when they are contradictory to the public opinion can lead you to harsh consequences. Furthermore, there is the fact that in Islam, people do not have the right or authority to question God's almightiness or the holy book. She raises inquiries about God's supernatural force, who cannot move a finger to put an end to all the injustices that occur continuously in our everyday lives.

Paradoxically, the following passage is a reflection on how void and null the debates about whether God exists or not can be. It was extracted from a dialogue between Professor Azur and one of his students during his seminar about God. Azur quoted the passage from his book entitled *Smash the Duality* to deny what the student claimed.

'The prevailing question whether God exists elicits one of the most tedious, unproductive and ill-advised disputations in which otherwise intelligent people have been engaged. We have seen, all too often, that neither theists nor atheists are ready to abandon the Hegemony of Certainty. Their seeming disagreement is a circle of refrains. It is not even accurate to call this battle of words a "debate", since the participants, irrespective of their points of view, are known to be intransigent in their positions. Where there is no possibility of change, there is no ground for a real dialogue.' (178)

The above passage demonstrates the philosophical and intellectual themes discussed during Azur's seminar, particularly the struggle between faith and secularism faced by several people,

Peri included. Shafak wanted to draw a line on the fact that atheists and theists would not let go of their “Hegemony of Certainty,” which makes debating with them about the existence of God pointless. This idea parallels New Historicism’s focus on how institutionalized dogma suppresses intellectual capacities. This passage critically examines themes of divinity, secularism, and identity.

Shafak in *Three Daughters of Eve* referred to Atatürk multiple times to reflect the respect and recognition Turkish people showed him. She mainly pictured through Mensur and Selma the struggle Turkey had between Islam and secularism, as illustrated in the following passage: “Mensur took his place at the raqi table earlier than usual, between Atatürk and the prayer clock,”(Shafak 75). This passage represents the political division among Turkish people; the prayer clock that Selma brought from Mecca symbolizes Islamic Turkey, and the portrait of Atatürk refers to secular, nonreligious Turkey. Similarly, Peri’s determination “to make her father proud, she could already see her degree certificate framed, polished and hanging on the wall of their living room, next to the portrait of Atatürk.” (Shafak 123). It mirrors her desperate attempt to reconcile the two opposed sides.

Notably, this clash of identities is embedded through the characters of Shirin and Mona, who share opposite opinions about patriarchal norms and Islamophobia. Shirin constantly rebels and rejects patriarchal norms, mainly set by eastern societies, as she confessed during Azur’s seminar: “as a free spirit, I have a problem with the religion I was born into. I can’t stand the arrogance of so-called “experts” or “thinkers” or the self-serving platitudes of imams and priests and rabbis.”(177). While Mona is facing Islamophobia in a so-called democratic country, as she suspected Shirin to be one of these anti-Islamic people, she assumed that “there’s something else. I can’t put my finger on it. We’ve known each other for some time but I’ve always had the

feeling she doesn't like me because of ... my headscarf, probably.''(137). Their unpleasant experiences highlight how social and religious pressures fracture or fortify selfhood. This inquiry, "Was religion an empowering force for women who otherwise had limited power in a society designed for and by men, or was it yet another tool for facilitating their submission?" (167). It exposes the novel's critique of societal hypocrisy.

Peri's journey as an Oxford University student gave her the opportunity to express her frustrations and confusion about God, faith, and secularism that came from her parents' opposed religious convictions. Azur's seminar about God that Peri joined helped her to verbalize her thoughts that she kept in her turquoise diary, in which she constantly questions and confronts God. She wrote a letter to God, which explains that Peri back then was just a child who loved both her parents and was perplexed about their attempts to bring her to their respective sides. On the one hand, her mother wants to save her from becoming a sinner like her father; on the other hand, her father wants her to follow his secularist path, more precisely Atatürk's path.

Dear Allah,

Mother says You watch me all the time, which is nice, thank You; it's also a bit spooky because sometimes I want to be alone. Mother says You hear everything – even when I talk to myself.

Even the thoughts inside my head. You also watch all that happens. Can You see the baby in the mist? No one notices it but me, though I am sure You do too.

Anyway, I was thinking, our eyes are small and it takes us about a second to blink. Now, Your eyes must be huge, so it must take You at least an hour to shut Your eyelids, and maybe in that time You can't gaze at my father.

When I get cross at someone, Dad tells me, 'You are not a little child, you can forgive.' If You are angry with my father, please forgive him and make him well again. He is a good man.

From now on, please can You blink every time my father sins?

I promise I'll start praying again. I'll pray every night for the rest of my life.

Amin. (77)

The letter accentuates Peri's ambivalence between freedom and faith, becoming religious as her mother expected her to be or a secularist like her father. This led to Peri's becoming an individual with a fragmented state of mind. This also pushes her to seek answers for her inquiries by attending Azur's God seminar. Peri explained when he asked about the reasons why she was keen to join his seminar, she confessed, "Well, I've always felt ambivalent about matters of faith – and also curious. I need to clarify my thoughts." (202). Azur adds, 'The angry and the aggressive cannot study God' (201). This confusion culminates in her suicidal attempt was reported to Azur by the president, who said, "a Turkish student. She's in your class.' He affirms: 'She tried to commit suicide last night.' by a 'Paracetamol overdose.'" (336). Peri's suicidal attempt shows that the destabilizing burden of unresolved identity conflicts can end in self-destruction and reflects the heavy weight of identity conflicts mirrored by England's "peculiar way of making foreigners feel exhilaratingly free and depressingly alone." (265).

To conclude, Elif Shafak, in her novel *Three Daughters of Eve*, aimed to explore themes of religion, faith, secularism, and identity conflicts that may result from an inability to choose between freedom and faith as embodied in Peri's character. The author wanted to illustrate the division of contemporary Turkish people by using the characters of Selma, who represents the

religious and devoted population, whereas Mensur's character pictures the Kemalist and atheist side. Professor Azur's philosophy about God shows that conversing with people who are obsessed with the idea of certainty can be infertile and pointless. In the end, the novel challenges its audience to confront their beliefs, identity, and existence to gain internal peace and free their souls.

4)- The Protagonists' Social, Cultural, and Religious Experiences and their Identity Transformation in Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*

The novelist in *Three Daughters of Eve* delves into analyzing how the protagonists' social, cultural, and religious experiences managed to refashion their identity. The novel describes Oxford as a symbol of transition where eastern tradition, religion, and conservatism meet with western secularism, freedom, and liberalism. Oxford is not only an intellectual space; it also acts as an environment in which one can express his internal conflict and frustrations, as demonstrated by the three protagonists: Peri, Shirin, and Mona.

Peri: The Confused

Peri's character as depicted in the novel is a troubled young woman who is desperately trying to resolve her fluster between faith and secularism, which makes an allusion to post-Ottoman Turkey's identity crisis, where secularism and Islamism are brutally clashing with each other. Her confusion started before she could know it. Raised by a staunch Muslim mother and a secularist father, both her parents were trying to bring her over to their side, reflecting Turkey's socio-political turmoil. She grows up in an extremist environment; her mother uses every means

necessary to bring her into the light of Islam, and her father is using Atatürk's ideologies to turn her into a secularist individual. These mirror Turkey's clash between old and new values.

Shafak's examination of fractured identities across generations that deprives a woman of her identity can lead to the emergence of an identity crisis in future generations. The following passage reflects the injustices applied to women in male-dominated societies, especially in the eastern countries. "Children scared of particular family members and new brides of their fathers or brothers-in-law; nurses and teachers and secretaries harassed by infatuated lovers just because they had refused to date them in the past; housewives who would never speak a word, for there were no words in this culture to describe marital rape." (41). This passage portrays how women and children are continuously exposed to danger due to their society's failure to provide them security and protection while the victim-shaming mentality, which is normalized by their societies. Her journey to Oxford is viewed more as a desperate attempt to restore her fragmented self than as an intellectual journey.

Peri, before becoming an Oxford University student, was determined "to make her father proud; she could already see her degree certificate framed, polished, and hanging on the wall of their living room, next to the portrait of Atatürk." (Shafak 123). In other words, if we set aside religion, Peri remains an ordinary girl who intensely wants to make her father proud, almost like an Oedipus Rex syndrome. However, Peri's dynamic with her father is not about Freudian desire; it is more about her existential need for validation and belonging, a search for belonging influenced by the roles society imposed on women in Turkey's secular modernization.

Oxford University acted as a space that promotes identity and perception of life; it exposed Peri to a new society that promotes multiculturalism, freedom, and intellectual debates. These debates gave her the opportunity to express her opinions freely, especially when she

joined Professor Azur's seminar about God. Additionally, Oxford gave Peri the occasion to encounter two other women who awkwardly mirror her parents' opposed ideologies: Mona is a devoted Muslim like Peri's mother, and Shirin is a revolted atheist who closely resembles her father.

Peri, before getting in touch with the West, was an undecided and naive person, but her journey to Oxford left her traumatized due to her love deception with Azur, which led to her suicide attempt. This incident forced her to quit her studies and abandon her dream of making her father proud. Instead, she came back to Turkey without a diploma, decided to marry a wealthy businessman, and became a devoted housewife and mother of three children.

The excerpt below proves the transformation of Peri's identity. When she attended the fancy dinner party at the seaside mansion, she witnessed an attack and a hostage-taking; the only reflex she had was to call Azur to confess that "It wasn't you," Peri said. "It was the Azur I had created for myself. The one I needed in order to make sense of my own fragmented past. That's the professor I was infatuated with. The Azur in my mind" (Shafak 364). These words show that Peri is no longer torn between two opposed sides, assuming that she created an idealized version of Azur to resolve her fragmented self. She admits that she lied to herself to navigate her struggle with her identity. It also proves that she is no longer the fragile girl who was seeking his validation as she was back then, as shown here: "If she testified on his behalf, as she felt morally bound to do, maybe he would understand how much she cared for him and he would love her – at least a little. Maybe ... Yet in her heart she knew none of these things was likely to happen." (341).

At Oxford she gave Azur the role of intellectual and spiritual savior who could rescue her from being overwhelmed by her tormenting thoughts. This aligns with Holyoake's affirmation

that “Free thought means fearless thought. It is not deterred by legal penalties, nor by spiritual consequences. Dissent from the Bible does not alarm the true investigator, who takes truth for authority not authority for truth.” (10). Azur, for Peri, is a symbol of truth, certainty, and reason, who contrasts with the suffocating religious environment she came from.

Peri, during her telephone conversation, gave a lecture to her former professor, Azur, symbolizing a shifting of power. The novel asserted that “Today she was the tutor; he, the pupil. Roles shifted, words never stayed still. The shape of life was a circle, and every point on that circle was at an equal distance from the centre – whether one called that God or something else altogether.” (364-5). The metaphor of life as a circle in which every point is at an equal distance from the center explains that all human beings are equal before divinity, meaning that stereotypes and all other distinctions are created by society.

Peri’s acknowledgement that both Shirin’s and Mona’s contradictory opinions hold truth depending on the cultural setting appears in the following citation: “In some respects, Shirin was right,” she said. “In other respects, Mona.” For instance, she agreed that life could be systematically unfair for a member of a minority—be it cultural, religious, or sexual—in a closed Muslim culture, though she was also aware of the hardships facing a headscarved woman in a western society. For her, it always depended on the context.” (311) This quote demonstrates how creative societies are when it comes to oppressing women. In other words, oppression exists everywhere in all cultures and societies. Shafak’s message is clearly to encourage women to be independent and strive for their freedom.

In conclusion, Peri’s identity underwent a profound transformation before, during, and after her time as a student at the University of Oxford. Professor Azur played a colossal role in her attempt to rebuild her self. Her decision to open the door of the wardrobe and step out in the

seaside mansion while hearing the police coming signifies that she decided to take a new direction in life.

Mona: The Believer

Mona, unlike the two other protagonists, is harder to pin down because she is torn between her religious beliefs (being a devout Muslim) in the prime of her youth and adapting to the new society she lives in, all while refusing to abandon her eastern identity. She, like Peri and Shirin, also is an eastern girl who was born in America but came back to Egypt, her motherland, with her parents during her childhood to receive an Islamic education, as her parents wished.

Mona came from an Egyptian family who lived in America, where she was born, and then when she turned 10 years old, her parents decided to go back to their native land because they wanted their children to receive an Islamic education and get in touch with their Egyptian culture. However, years after judging that life in Egypt was becoming harder, they went back to America. Then Mona joined Oxford University, where she met Peri while introducing herself to her and confessed that “Her mother was covered, she said, but not her older sister. “We have made different choices in life.” (128) This passage proves the tolerance that Muslims have to love and respect their family members even if they have different beliefs. Mona, even though she had been at Oxford for only two years, had changed considerably. She is not only a human rights activist and feminist, but she also showed an interest in music, as shown in the following passage:

Besides championing feminism, Mona was involved in a series of volunteer activities: Aid to the Balkans Society, Friends of Palestine Society, Sufi Studies

Society, Migration Studies Society; and the Oxford Islamic Society, where she was one of the leading members. She was also about to launch a ‘hip-hop society’ because she loved the music. Drawing on her encounter with diverse cultures, she wrote lyrics, hoping that one day someone would rap them. (128)

Despite the slight change that occurred in Mona’s selfhood, she never thought to stop being a Muslim, never stopped praying, or removed her hijab. “Allah gave us five prayers a day – to structure our lives.” (128). Consequently, like any other easterner in a western country, she experienced the feelings of alienation and non-belonging; these feelings created an identity crisis, which she attempted to remediate and fix.

As a result, Mona, desperately or subconsciously seeking westerners’ validation or acceptance, went to Shirin’s twentieth birthday party even though she knew that there would be alcohol, music, nudity, and many other things that Islam forbids. Her presence there lets us think that she is trying to negotiate her belonging within a western social hierarchy, as Greenblatt’s perspective suggests. However, the fact that she dressed “in an orange long-sleeved tunic over trousers and a matching headscarf” suggests that she wants to impose herself and let her religious beliefs and Egyptian culture shine. It goes along with Greenblatt’s *Self-Fashioning*, saying that Mona’s choice to wear an orange tunic and her headscarf, which is a religious and cultural symbol, suggests a resistance to cultural dominance. Also, she “was sitting at a corner table, sipping a glass of cola.” demonstrating her resilience or rebellion against western customs, refusing to blend into the crowd. In other words, she is indirectly or unconsciously trying to challenge western norms by rebelling against contracted stereotypes and Islamophobia that she witnesses in her everyday life (136).

When she saw Peri arrive at the party, she felt “relieved to have someone to talk to.” It demonstrates that she rejects the idea of adapting and mixing with westerners because, among all the people that were invited to the party, Mona waited until Peri, who is an eastern girl like her, arrived to have someone to talk to. Mona’s refusal to drink alcohol and sitting apart is a rejection of western practices. The fact that she accepted Shirin’s invitation even though she assumes that they are “not exactly friends, but she invited me and I thought...” makes an allusion to the fact that Mona is afraid of being isolated or seen as the *other*. Additionally, she could not express her thoughts openly even to Peri, which shows her fear of being rejected or despised.

The above highlights the fact one cannot “easily turn down an invitation from one of the most popular students in college. So Mona – outgoing and self-confident – had come, not knowing quite what to expect. Now, among dozens of uninhibited, rollicking party-goers swaying to a rhythm only they themselves could hear, she felt an unease she dared not show.” (Shafak 136) Mona’s need to destroy the societal, cultural, and religious norms of the West to preserve her identity is impossible to achieve; thus, she found a way to negotiate or compromise by partially rejecting western secularism and attempting to adapt her beliefs into the new background she lives in. This idea goes hand in hand with Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980). He writes, “Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other—heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist—must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed.” (9)

Mona, after Shirin’s persistence, agreed to join Azur’s seminar about God. She made a memorable first impression during her first session there, as reported in the novel:

The first to speak was Mona. She said after the tragedy of 9/11, she was extremely worried about the perception of Islam in the West. Careful with her words, she said she was proud to be a young Muslim woman, loved her faith with all her heart, but was frustrated by the amount of prejudice she had to deal with almost every day. ‘People who don’t know anything about Islam make gross generalizations about my religion, my Prophet, my faith.’ She added quickly, ‘And my headscarf.’ She said she was here to engage in honest discussions about the nature of the Almighty, since they were all created by Him and created differently for a reason. ‘I respect diversity, but I also expect to be respected in return.’(221-2).

This excerpt demonstrates that Mona affirms and assumes her religious pride as she identifies herself as a “young Muslim woman” She also criticizes Western overgeneralization about Muslims and Islam. She supports her argument by taking herself as an example, saying that she is judged for wearing her hijab and that she faces Islamophobia in her everyday life. She then links the prejudices Muslims are subjected to in the West to historical events that occurred in Muslim countries, like 9/11. She concluded her speech by giving a message about tolerance and the importance of respecting cultural diversity.

Mona at Azur’s seminar declared that she respects diversity and expects to be respected in return, asserting that her personality drastically changed from a devoted Muslim who practices her religion perfectly and quietly into an activist whose goal is to challenge worldviews about Islam. Despite the Islamophobia that she faces in her everyday life, she kept quiet about it, except when she shared a house with Shirin and Peri; she constantly engaged in violent

arguments with Shirin, who was born Muslim yet chose to become an atheist, as demonstrated in the fourth part of the novel in the chapter entitled “The Face of the Other.” Mona explicitly accused Shirin of betraying the wonderful religion she was born into and refusing to follow the prophets' legacies.

Then Shirin attempted to voice her thoughts about the Prophet; nevertheless, Mona would not let her say a word about him, arguing that attacking her or Muslims in general is fine, but the Prophet is a line that she should not cross. Mona then assumes that Shirin and all those who criticize her prophet are ignorant (312). This excerpt proves that Mona's identity has negatively transformed from a tolerant Muslim who accepts diversity and is open to dialogue into an extremist who does not accept others' opinions and becomes sensitive as soon as Shirin talks about Islam. It also highlights a contradiction in her character, as she enjoys music and hip-hop despite being a staunch Muslim.

In conclusion, Mona's journey as an Oxford student impacted her life, leading her identity to transform from a devoted Muslim into an activist who fights against Islamophobia and constantly challenges worldviews about Islam. Even though she had a developed ear for music and loved hip-hop, she eventually embraced religious extremism. Despite going to a western country where Islam is underrated and nearly nonexistent, she remained faithful to her beliefs.

Shirin: The Sinner

Shirin in *Three Daughters of Eve* is described as an atheist who is influenced by western culture since she grew up in England even though she is Iranian; her parents fled their motherland due to Islamic authoritarianism. This aligns with Greenblatt's theory in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, which explains that “the power generated to attack the alien in the name of the

authority is produced in excess and threatens the authority it sets out to defend.” (Greenblatt 9), which mirrors Shirin’s rejection of her eastern heritage in favor of the West. The feeling of non-belonging is strongly present in her personality, as Peri said to her daughter when she asked who this woman was in the polaroid photo: “Her family was from Iran, but they had moved around so much she didn’t feel like she belonged anywhere.” (81)

The British identity is more visible in Shirin than it is in Mona and Peri. The reason why is that she was born in Tehran, but she never went back there, as she told Peri when she first met her in Oxford. It is also said in the novel that “she surely didn’t look Iranian” (101). This gives us a glimpse of how Shirin knows nothing about her eastern origins. However, when she guided Peri and her parents to show them around, she gave them a “long discourse on the history of Oxford” (102). Her western identity is also seen in the way she dresses: “short skirt, high heels, heavy makeup” (101) showing that she rejects her eastern identity.

Shirin’s identity transformation started in her childhood, as she recounted to Peri; she lived in multiple destinations. She was born in Tehran, Iran, to Iranian parents, and then her parents agreed to move to Switzerland because the Iranian authorities were too tough for them to handle. They spent four years there living in harsh conditions; their next destination was Portugal. Shirin confessed that she liked Lisbon, in which they spent two years; she even learned Portuguese. She enjoyed herself there; however, her father did not have the same opinion. Then they finally moved to England; her father died the same year, when she was fourteen. Shirin concluded her story by saying that she has no place to call home since her grandmother died; her home was six feet underground, and even though she lived in different places, she feels homeless. (106-7) The above explains that Shirin is going through a severe identity crisis; her feeling of homelessness shows that she experienced marginalization.

The following quote highlights Shirin's identity crisis, as she struggles to reconcile her sense of the self with the arbitrary labels imposed by birth, culture, or religion: “I’ve never understood people who’re proud to be American, Arab or Russian ... Christian, Jewish or Muslim. Why should I feel satisfaction with something I had no role in choosing? It’s like saying I’m proud of being five foot nine. Or congratulating myself on my hooked nose. Genetic lottery!” (312). Here, Shirin rejects her eastern identity and religion that she inherited from her parents; she sees them as burdens imposed by society rather than sources of pride. This deepens her struggles to find a sense of belonging or an identity to call her own. This goes along with Greenblatt’s theory, as argued, “Perhaps the simplest observation we can make is that in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process.” (2)

Shirin’s identity started transforming the moment she joined Azur’s seminar, as the following excerpt demonstrates that she reflected on her extremist atheism mixed with a feeling of pride and accomplishment: “Well, I used to be a militant atheist ... I’m no more, thanks to Professor Azur,” Shirin said with a theatrical flair. ‘But I really worked hard for my scepticism. I put my mind and heart and courage into it. I separated myself from crowds and congregations! I didn’t find it dropped into my lap. Yeah, I’m proud of my journey.” (312)

Shirin acknowledged her identity’s evolution from a fragmented one that she rejected, leading her to become a harsh atheist, into a more nuanced nonreligious person. However, she still resists the idea of being put into systemic boxes.

Following Peri’s suicidal attempt, Azur, with whom Shirin had an affair, lost his status as a respected university professor. In contrast, Shirin becomes a fine academic who carried out her studies at Princeton, and then “she had found a teaching position at her old college.” (355). This

reflects the evolution of her identity from a rebellious atheist into an established academic and a mother. She announced to Peri during their last telephone conversation, “actually, I’m pregnant. I’m due in May” (332). The upcoming passage shows that Shirin’s rejection of all labels changed; now she fully condemns prejudices. She even thought about Mona’s reaction if she were there. “Look, this man is awful. Racist. Homophobe. Islamophobe, poor Mona would have had a heart attack. He has no shame. He says God speaks through his mouth.” (355)

To conclude, the religious, cultural, and societal experiences Shirin faced since her young age gradually refashioned her identity from a strong, stubborn, and natural-born warrior who rejected her belonging into a more skeptical and rational educated woman. This transformation proves that even the most determined and confident individual is not immune to an existential crisis that is furthered by external pressure.

Ultimately, this section gave an overview of the evolution of the protagonists' identities, refashioned by their cultural, religious, and societal experiences. The characters' transformation is studied through Greenblatt’s perspective about self-fashioning. Elif Shafak used her novel *Three Daughters of Eve* to challenge the worldviews about constructed stereotypes that reign over the contemporary world. Her literary works offer a well-illustrated insight into how women suffered due to the overwhelming power of patriarchal groups, who aim to subjugate women. She demonstrates their resilience and endurance to challenge societal norms, affirm, and restore their freedom.

Conclusion

This chapter managed to provide an interesting insight into themes of identity crisis and the contrast between secularism and Islam that reigned in Turkey and eastern countries for so

long. Through her three protagonists, Shafak, in her novel *Three Daughters of Eve*, embedded the cross-cultural clashes that arise between eastern and western individuals. This analysis sheds light on the feelings of marginalization that an easterner can experience in the West, as seen in Mona's character, who is constantly being discriminated for assuming and keeping her identity as a Muslim. This chapter concluded that Oxford University brought a colossal change in the three protagonists' personalities, reshaping them, and challenging their religious beliefs, identities, and their ongoing struggle between freedom and faith.

General Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that Shafak's novel *Three Daughters of Eve* was carefully studied through the lenses of secularism and new historicism, looking at how women are portrayed from both historical and secular perspectives. Additionally, this study provided a clear picture of how Shafak explored the ongoing presence of patriarchy across time and pointed out the conflicts between religious duties, social expectations, secular identities, and the interactions in a cross-cultural setting. Moreover, the research emphasized the author's exploration of identity transformation, along with the dynamics of a cross-cultural context.

This research successfully explains how women responded to the challenges they faced in terms of their identity, gender, religion, ethnicity, and social expectations through the lenses of New Historicism and secularism. The theory of New Historicism, as explained by Stephen Greenblatt, has been applied to Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* to analyze the historical and cultural contexts that refashioned the three characters' identities. In addition, this theory enabled us to put the novel under scrutiny, and to consolidate Stephen Greenblatt's theory, we injected a dose of Holyoake's concept of Secularism.

The first chapter explored the biography of Elif Shafak and a synopsis of the novel. This chapter covered the historical context and background of Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*, along with its synopsis. Moreover, it included an overview of the theoretical framework and concepts of Self-Fashioning and Secularism.

The biography of Shafak offered an excellent overview of her early childhood, beginnings as an artist, and the personal experiences that modeled her literary works. The exploration of her background gave us a detailed understanding of the internal and the external factors that fashioned her literary career. Additionally, understanding the socio-political environments in which Shafak flourished allowed us to comprehend the larger societal and

political issues she got herself involved in by denouncing all forms of injustice and segregation vis-à-vis minority groups in general and women in particular.

Ultimately, the first chapter explores how the author's mixed identity and lived experiences served as a foundation for her storytelling, as reflected in her artistic works. A detailed summary of her novel *Three Daughters of Eve*, which served as useful material for this research, is provided. This chapter examines Shafak's childhood, her literary mentors, and her activism for women's and minority rights. Her experiences gave her the ability to share a part of herself with her audience. More importantly, this section delivered a profound understanding of Greenblatt's New Historicism and Holyoake's Secularism, which are used to explore the historical and religious contexts of the novel.

Building on this, applying Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism and George Jacob Holyoake's Secularism illuminated Shafak's identity as a feminist, secularist, and advocate for silenced minorities, highlighting how her works challenge oppressive societies. Her novel drew an implicit connection between her self-imposed exile from Turkey and high educational achievement with Peri's journey, who sought education overseas; it mirrored Shafak's yearning for personal and intellectual growth in foreign lands.

The last chapter provided an insightful explanation of themes of identity crisis and the contradictory perspectives of secularism and Islam that dominated Turkey for so long. *Three Daughters of Eve* depicted the clash of cultures that progressively manifested between eastern and western people embedded in Shafak's three protagonists. The observation of Mona's character, which was constantly discriminated for imposing herself as a veiled Muslim woman, represents the feelings of non-belonging and isolation that easterners experienced in foreign

countries. This chapter concluded that Oxford University brought an upheaval in the three protagonists' personalities and furthered their identity transformation.

Likely, in her novel *Three Daughters of Eve*, Elif Shafak intended to represent contemporary Turkey's struggles between faith and secularism embodied in her Turkish protagonist, Peri. Shafak's stories interrogate the binary oppositions between East and West by portraying identity crises as acts of defiance against rigid cultural categorizations. Eastern women faced an even greater crisis due to the cultural influences that contributed to the reshaping and the remodeling of their identity.

Three Daughters of Eve uncovered themes of cultural clashes and identity crises by exemplifying eastern cheerfulness, describing Istanbul as a city full of warmth and comfort, while the West is portrayed as indifferent and lifeless by describing Oxford as an unwelcoming place for foreigners. These opposed lifestyles accentuate the feelings of otherness and dislocation that easterners feel in western countries, as reflected in Peri's character. Moreover, the discrimination that Peri, Shirin, and Mona faced helped the reshaping of their identities; they were always associated with their stereotyped origins regardless of their intellectual level.

The novel studied Turkey's struggle between secularism, which was Atatürk's legacy embodied in the character of Mensur, and religious conservatism, reflected in Selma's character. Attaturk's efforts to modernize Turkey by liberating women were incomplete because Turkish people are still torn between Islamic tradition and secularism. For these reasons, Turkey's existential crisis is mirrored through Peri's ambivalence. Her letter to God and suicidal attempt highlight the destabilizing effect of unresolved identity struggles, framed by Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism, which links personal trauma to socio-political contexts.

Shafak, in *Three Daughters of Eve*, opposed the idea that feminism is only a necessity for oppressed minorities, specifically in eastern societies. Mona's Islamophobic experiences in the West and Shirin's critique of eastern patriarchy reveal systemic oppression across cultures. The novel proves that feminism is universally needed. Shafak used Mona's headscarf as a symbol of resilience to defy the Islamophobia that reigns over western societies, while she used Shirin's position to represent Iranian authoritarianism and to denounce the eastern patriarchal government that aims to control women's bodies.

The second chapter studied how migration can result in an individual's identity transformation, as reflected in Peri's character, who was pushed to confront her fragmented self while taking Azur's seminar, which encouraged critical thinking. Oxford's intellectual and serene environment, as opposed to Istanbul's oppressive expectations, helped Peri build up her fragile personality. George Holyoake's secularism is reflected in Shirin and Peri's respective quests for self-determination beyond religious oppression. Shirin's existential crisis appears while she desperately tries to erase her Iranian identity and religious faith. While Peri is having a rough time shifting to adulthood, it shows the consequences of cultural clashes.

This research found out extremism can take several forms, as reflected in Mensur's obsession with Ataturk's secular thoughts and Selma's religious zealotry, which led her to use fear to convince her daughter to become a devoted Muslim like her. Professor Azur's critique of the "Hegemony of Certainty" in theism/atheism explains the futility of rigid ideologies. The novel criticizes both eastern and western societies, demonstrating the patriarchal norms that rule over the East and the Islamophobia and xenophobia that dominate western societies that define themselves as democratic states and think that refugees are "God's punishment."

This study successfully gave an overview of Shafak's literary style and serves as an introduction to Turkish literature. Sadly, like any research paper, this study has its limitations. The study focuses on one single novel, which gives us a meager insight into Shafak's writings. This study also sheds light on female perspectives; male characters are not profoundly explored. These flaws carve the way for future researchers to conduct comparative studies of Shafak's other works to investigate themes of identity and travel. An intersectional analysis of class, ethnicity, and sexuality in Shafak's portrayal of Turkish society could be conducted. Along with an examination of postcolonial secularism in contemporary eastern literature.

To sum up, it is crucial to recognize the continued relevance of the themes explored in Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*. The struggles faced by women in general, especially those who come from marginalized groups, as depicted in the aforementioned novel, go along with the challenges that started in the past and persist today. By learning from the past and embracing the principles of tolerance, freedom of expression, and collective understanding, one can strive towards a future that embraces diversity, equality, and justice for all.

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Résumé

Cette recherche met en lumière l'œuvre d'Elif Shafak intitulée *Trois Filles d'Eve* (2016). Cette étude se concentre sur la manière dont l'auteur tente de réconcilier les valeurs orientales et occidentales à travers ses trois personnages principaux : Péri, Shirin et Mona. Notre travail de recherche a commencé par mettre en avant les conditions historiques et sociopolitiques qui ont joué un rôle éminent dans la carrière de la romancière. Afin d'apporter de la profondeur et de l'intensité à cette recherche, cette dernière a fait appel aux théories de Stephen Greenblatt, dit le Nouvel Historicisme, et à celle de George Jacob Holyoake, le Sécularisme. En se basant sur les théories citées précédemment, l'étude explore comment *Trois Filles d'Eve* de Shafak remet en question les dynamiques interculturelles. Ce mémoire a aussi exploré la manière dont le roman a étudié et interrogé l'animosité qu'il existe entre l'Est et l'Ouest, ainsi que la tentative de destruction des barrières qui avaient été construites en se basant sur des stéréotypes. Il démontre également que ce conflit peut impacter ou remodeler l'identité d'un individu, des femmes en particulier. Enfin, ce travail s'achève en montrant la transformation de l'identité des trois protagonistes au fur et à mesure des changements qui ont métamorphosé leurs vies.

Mots Clé: Orient, Occident, crise identitaire, dynamiques interculturelles, réinvention de soi, Nouvel Historicisme, Sécularisme, femmes.

ملخص

يقدم هذا البحث دراسةً معمقةً لرواية إليف شافاق "ثلاث بنات حواء" (2016). ويركز على سعي الكاتبة للجمع بين القيم الشرقية والغربية من خلال شخصياتها الرئيسية الثلاث: بيرري، وشيرين، ومنى. يبدأ هذا البحث بتسليط الضوء على الظروف التاريخية والاجتماعية والسياسية التي لعبت دورًا حاسمًا في مسيرة الروائية، كما يتضح من أعمالها، وخاصةً الرواية قيد الدراسة. ومن خلال منظور "التاريخانية الجديدة" لستيفن غرينبلات ومفهوم العلمانية لجورج جاكوب هوليوك، تستكشف الدراسة كيف تتحدى رواية شافاق "ثلاث بنات حواء" الديناميكيات الثقافية (الشرقية والغربية) وتحاول كسر الحواجز القائمة على الصور النمطية وعدم المساواة بين الجنسين. كما يوضح كيف يمكن لهذا الاضطراب أن يؤثر على هوية الفرد ويعيد تشكيلها، وخاصة هوية المرأة. ويتأمل هذا العمل أخيرًا في كيفية إعادة تشكيل هوية البطلات من خلال التحولات المستمرة التي تعرضن لها طوال حياتهن.