The Negotiations of Masquerade, Sisterhood, and Subversiveness in Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*

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Abstract

This article analyzes Elif Shafak's novel *Three Daughters of Eve*, comparing the ethnically complex, non-conforming gender performances of the characters Shirin, Mona, and Peri in order to highlight parallels and differences in their approaches to enacting gender and ethnicity. Having different cultural backgrounds but studying at the University of Oxford together, all three women feel alienated from their ethnic roots and the female gender expectations and stereotypes that come with these roots; as a result, their approaches to ethnic and gender performance differ greatly, as do their religious views and ideas about femininity and sexuality. As I will show, they employ different types of ethnic and gendered masquerade not only to adapt to the patriarchal systems they move in, but also to resist these systems. However, in order to actualise anti-patriarchal resistance more fully, I argue, they must first confront ethnic and intrafemale alterity, deconstruct their personal biases, and overcome internalised misogynist thinking patterns. They must form a (step-)sisterhood that acknowledges common struggles as well as differences.

Keywords

9/11 produced a fundamental rupture in many Muslims' lives. It was an event with global impact that not only traumatised people but also contributed to the rise of Islamophobia in countries with minority Muslim populations. Muslim women and girls, in particular, have been severely affected by both Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sexism ever since, not least due to the visibility of the headscarf, a religious symbol that has often stood at the center of anti-Islamic political and social debates around the globe. Muslim authors have accorded these debates and their impact on female-presenting Muslims' lives enhanced relevance and visibility in their works of fiction. One of these authors is Elif Shafak, who, in her 2016 novel *Three Daughters of Eve*, explores the lives of three different Muslim women: Peri, Shirin, and Mona. Peri, who will be the focus of this analysis, is an introverted high-performing Turkish girl who has come to Oxford University for studying; her friend Shirin is a freedom-loving feminine-performing British Iranian woman; Mona, another friend and fellow student, is an Egyptian-American, headscarf-wearing activist. My argument is that Shafak's female characters masquerade as ethnically and gender non-conforming to preserve their autonomy in performing gender and express their non-conforming notion of femininity while moving in a White patriarchal system.[1] Despite their different backgrounds, the three women all share a sense of alienation from their ethnic roots as well as from the female gender expectations and stereotypes these roots bring with them. Using different masquerades as subversive performative strategies, they can move more safely in the oppressive system; yet, as individuals, they do not manage to subvert its Islamophobia and sexism. In this context, the notion of sisterhood becomes central for Peri, Shirin, and Mona because it allows for joint self-exploration and a shared questioning of patriarchal dividing mechanisms; furthermore, sisterhood enables them to recognize and overcome individual differences and, finally, to resist oppressive actions when subversion is not possible, yet.

Conceptualising Masquerade and Sisterhood: An Intersectional Approach

I work with the notion of masquerade in my reading of Shafak's novel, because employing this term analytically allows me to highlight how the three women's gendered self-performance can be subversive in the Turkish patriarchal as well as in the British patriarchal and anti-Muslim society in which they live. The notion of gender performance is significant in this context because it is fundamental for masquerading and inseparably connected to it: when one considers the different options of doing gender available to people who move between cultures, gender

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1 The word "White" is capitalised here and in the following to clarify the discursive constructedness of race and skin colour.

performance offers the opportunity of passing in a hegemonic culture.[2] At the same time, it can challenge this hegemonic culture, precisely in those instances when it becomes visible as a form of masquerading. This is the case in the novel at hand. Each of the female characters has grown up between cultures and, hence, with different cultural ideologies. The interplay of these different cultures and cultural ideologies not only leads to cultural uprooting, it also influences the women's individual acts of gender performance and masquerade. Performance and masquerade, like gender and ethnicity, receive meaning within the specific discourse(s) in which they are both constructed and enacted. This construction and enactment happens in an ideological, social space, as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe it.

Deleuze and Guattari assume that space can be semantically shaped by society (striated), untouched by humans (smooth) or hybrid (smooth-striated) (480–81). When space is striated or—as is the case more often—when it is hybrid, it frames and thus affects the perception of gender, ethnicity, and their respective performance (Deleuze & Guattari 481). The partial smoothness of this hybrid space provides individuals with opportunities of empowerment, identity negotiation, and self-expression (Lorraine 171–72). From these spaces of empowerment, a self-performance and a masquerade can be generated and can unfold their subversive potential. Within an Islamophobic and patriarchal society such as the one depicted in Shafak's novel, a visibly non-conforming and ethnically hybrid gender performance, of the kind that Peri, Shirin, and Mona each represent in their own way, can victimise the performer. In such a case, individuals can use a masquerade to protect themselves from oppressive reactions; under certain circumstances, masquerade can also be used to subvert the dominant oppressive order. This is possible because masquerade shows the characters' vulnerability by stressing their identity while also helping them to claim their difference as a means of empowerment.

Masquerade is a performative strategy of self-protection against or resistance to a hegemonic system. It functions by means of either hiding a part of the individual's identity or by highlighting another. Masquerading can be used by an individual both in order to claim its difference as a form of empowerment and to expose or resist society's biases. As Terry Castle

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2 'Passing' describes the process by which a person comes to be perceived as part of a dominant group despite belonging to an oppressed social group (Cutter 75). The advantage of passing for marginalized people is usually the ability to avoid the stigma attached to being (seen as) part of an oppressed group (Sensoy & DiAngelo 322). In this paper, I use this expression in relation to Peri because she can pass as male and enjoy male privilege due to her filiality until the arrival of her period in the initial past periods of the novel.

proposes, masquerade is a protective tool against male violence (255; Sümbül 73). Autonomy is crucial for masquerade because the latter requires a certain degree of control over one's gender performance. When masquerade is controlled, it can be used strategically, e.g. for self-protection or resistance. Indeed, Catherine Craft-Fairchild conceives of masquerade as double-coded and subversive only if it is consciously constructed and performed: by preserving performative ambiguity, masquerade can be empowering (Craft-Fairchild 171–72; Doane 48–49). According to Mary-Ann Constable, masquerade does not cover the perceived truth of the individual's identity (199; Negrin 63). Instead, it produces a construct that can be versatile (Whitefield-Madrano 73). Consequently, distance can be created between the self and the mask and the individual can wear and remove the mask based on her respective interests (Doane 49). The resulting versatility can make masquerade disruptive.

The disruption and resistance that masquerade involves are multi-dimensional, a fact that informs the complexity of intersectional identity construction and performance (Craft-Fairchild 165). However, most theories fail to consider how intersectionality influences masquerade. Tobin Siebers offers an intersectional approach to masquerading in the context of gender and disability. Drawing on M.-A. Doane, she argues that many identities that make people vulnerable to discrimination, violence, or exclusion cannot be hidden and thus require complex strategies of masquerade. Masquerade, Siebers explains, describes the strategy of exaggerating or performing difference by which this difference and identity are claimed. As a result, the performer can be targeted but, through said performance, also expose and resist social stigma (Siebers 19). "[M]inority groups […] appear to be 'too much' for society to bear" (Adam 49 qtd. in Siebers 19), Barry Adam suggests, but their masquerading can "carr[y] potential for political action" (Siebers 19). Hence, they bear a subversive potential that can destabilise the hegemonic system. Masquerade thus affords the person masquerading a means of moving within spaces that would otherwise be dangerous or not open to them. In the case of gender masquerade, as it is performed by the non-White protagonists of Shafak's novel, the attempted adaptation to masculine-coded behavior—such as when the characters claim agency, are vocal about their desires, and show dominance—serves to protect the characters from harm and it subvert male hegemony. It furthermore serves as a form of self-expression. Due to the intersectional nature of the characters' gender and ethnic affiliation, gender and ethnicity performance cannot be separated. The masquerade of gender and ethnicity here leads to the destabilisation of White

patriarchy, that is, the system which conditions Peri's, Shirin's, and Mona's self-expression.

Feminist sisterhood, as Peri, Shirin, and Mona experience it in the novel, can be both part of an individual's gender and ethnicity masquerade and a social construct that can lead to the revising of an individual's masquerade. As such, acting as members of a sisterhood, too, is a significant subversive strategy (Bolaki 243; Monteith 36; Yu 345–46). Indeed, the full subversiveness of masquerade in Shafak's text can only be actualized when women support each other in their fight against the oppressive systems from which they suffer. 'Sisterhood,' as I use the term here, is an anti-patriarchal bond that stems from shared experiences of oppression; at the same time, the idea has served among White feminists in particular as a means to obscure intersecting mechanisms of oppression as well as the complexity of intra-female relationships (hooks 27–129; Michie 10; Yu 346). Political notions of sisterhood must thus be revised, as feminists of color have suggested, by considering its ambivalent nature: jealousy and rivalry, for example, may complicate feelings of community among women and instead reinforce misogynist patriarchal ideas (Michie 10). At the same time, sisterhood can be difference-transgressive, bond-establishing, and empowering (Davis qtd. in Monteith 34–35; hooks 133; Monteith 7). Intra-female friendships can create a space for constructing, renegotiating, and displaying individual differences and for contending with and overcoming interpersonal emotional frictions and dividing "social lines" (Monteith 29; Yu 346). Moreover, they can provide emotional support for individual self-development and deepen individuals' relationships with the community (Michie 10; Yu 347). Coming to terms with the kind of intra-female alterity that is produced by ethnic and cultural differences is crucial for women's individual growth because engaging with alternative ideologies and perspectives allows for bonding despite of and due to difference. Although such intersections have widely been ignored in friendship theory (Monteith 28–29; Winch 3), female bonding in Shafak's specific novel facilitates a transgressive and effective anti-patriarchal network that is also anti-Islamophobic. In the text, the relationship between Peri, Shirin, and Mona demonstrates how masquerade can develop subversive potential through intra-female negotiation. It also shows how, through practices of sisterhood, subversiveness can be actualized as anti-patriarchal resistance.

Shirin's Gender Performance and Ethnic Equivocality
By means of a gender hybrid masquerade Shirin adapts to the gender expectations of the men around her. At the same time, her adaptation to Oxford norms provokes those around her who have been socialised in

the White patriarchy of Great Britain: her masquerade blurs the (ethnically charged) conceptual lines of gender. As becomes clear when Shirin initially meets Peri and her parents, Shirin's self-performances are strongly characterised by gender ambiguity: on the one hand, Shirin chooses a feminine-coded aesthetic style; on the other hand, she exhibits masculine-coded behaviour. Her wokeness is characteristic of the latter, just as her tendency to express strong opinions and unrelenting criticism. As a critical thinker, Shirin self-confidently questions patriarchy, religion, and other concepts of authority (Shafak 102–3). Not only is this wokeness an essential part of her masquerade that allows for questioning oppressive concepts, it furthermore allows her to maintain her sense of superiority and confidence in moments of conflict, as becomes especially clear in the discussions with Peri's parents upon their first meeting. Shirin intentionally provokes and irritates Peri's parents, particularly when she criticizes their ideological and religious convictions. As a result, both of them for once are of the same mind, which rarely is the case: they both dislike Shirin and "plan to tell their daughter to stay away from the British-Iranian girl [as she] [s]urely […] would be a bad influence" (Shafak 108). By way of her gender-non-conforming masquerade Shirin can express herself without inhibitions and performatively free herself of patriarchal gender roles placed on her. Even if she is socially expected to adapt to patriarchal gender expectations linked to how she is perceived as a Muslim woman in a place such as Oxford, Shirin does not adhere to such expectations; as a result, she destabilises the White patriarchal system of the university as well as the patriarchal system of the local Muslim community.

Shirin's masculine-coded behaviour is part of the masquerade that helps her survive in the White patriarchal space of Oxford and in the Turkish community recreated by Peri's parents upon their visit to England. Peri's parents represent the polarities of Turkish society: whereas Selma, Peri's mother, functions as a maternal reproducer of Muslim patriarchy, her husband Mensur represents the secularist forces of Atatürk's republic[3] (Furlanetto 26–27). With their arrival, a Turkish culture that is

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3 Kemal Atatürk's politics represent a departure from the traditionalist Muslim values of the Ottoman Empire by introducing the secularization of the Turkish state with the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and, amongst others, aimed at the renegotiation of Turkish national (Islamic) identity towards a westernised one (Morin & Lee 16; Waxman 8). His politics modernised and westernised Turkish society which he conducted by a set of reformative rules such as the prohibition of Ottoman and non-western clothing, e.g., the headscarf (Tuncer 34–35) and the fez in favour of western clothing and the introduction of compulsory education, also for women (Tuncer 34–35; Morin & Lee 16). It proved a challenge to him to modernize society as he could not simply abandon the established cultural values and traditions: for his undertaking he needed the approval and support of conservative forces which led to the fusion of

torn between traditionalist and modernizing forces comes to life in Oxford. Mensur contradicts the Muslim values his wife lives by: although he does not deny the existence of God, he is skeptical of many of the values his religion preaches. He regularly consumes alcohol (Shafak 17–18; 35–36), despises the idea of a mandatory pilgrimage to Mekkah (Shair & Karan 604), and is critical of religious attitudes towards women, which is why he advises Peri to be skeptical of religion, too (Shafak 87). In fact, he rejects Muslim traditionalist ideas in general as he views them as responsible for Turkey's alleged lack of progress (Shafak 18). However, being a Kemalist, he defends the power of a "central authority" that is wielded by a "strong leader" who preserves the social order against "religious fundamentalism" and may "defend [...] women" (Shafak 102). The differences in religious views between Selma and Mensur influence Peri greatly. Her parents not only often fought with each other during her childhood (Shafak 20; 32–33), they do so even when they participate in the walking tour Shirin gives Peri and her parents upon their arrival at the University of Oxford (Shafak 105). During this tour, Shirin challenges both of them, which is why they finally agree on something: they both dislike Shirin and see her as a bad influence on her daughter. The novel makes clear that Shirin, unlike Peri, is an atheist who openly criticizes traditional Muslim values and sees the headscarf as anti-feminist and as a sign of patriarchal oppression (Shafak 104–5). Hence, she seems to despise Peri's mother Selma, who wears a headscarf, and is particularly resentful in their discussions. Shirin does not submit to the patriarchal values Selma tries to uphold but instead defies them with her eloquent manner and strong opinions. These discussions cement the ideological antagonism of both women. The ways in which Shirin asserts herself can be viewed as a strategy of resistance in her interactions with Peri's religious family.

Shirin's divergence from traditional Muslim gender roles can be read as an act of empowerment. This shows in scenes in which she openly contradicts Peri's father Mensur. By undermining his dominance and male power, Shirin establishes an ideological divide between herself and Mensur, opposing him and the idea of a strictly structured society governed by one authority figure of which he is convinced. Shirin has thus found a masquerade that helps her survive in the two oppressive systems she moves in: the University of Oxford and Oxford's traditionalist Muslim community. Shirin's hyperfeminine and sexualised masquerade not only

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traditional and western values. Today, the significance of Atatürk is noticeable since he has made a lasting impact on Turkish identity. With the new rise of conservative forces in the 1990s and Erdogan's rule from 2003 on (Cagaptay 202), the front lines between secularists, who follow Atatürk's values of secularization, modernization, and westernization, and traditionalists, who support conservative Muslim values, hardened. This is noticeable in the conflict between Mensur and Selma.

unsettles representatives of patriarchy from different cultural backgrounds but, perhaps paradoxically, also helps her navigate a patriarchally striated community space. Her masquerade fortifies the impression of gender non-conformance, which allows her to preserve her own idea of female self-expression that combines hyper-femininity and self-assertion. Peri, who used to engage in self-*repressive* masquerade to protect herself while growing up in a traditionalist Muslim household, is inspired by Shirin. Shirin's masculine-coded behaviour contradicts her Westernized, hyperfeminine gender performance and the expectations still attached to her Brown body. It is this same Brown body that manifests—for herself and others—her feeling of uprooting and gendered ambiguity. It also manifests a sexual ambiguity, because Shirin is openly bisexual (Shafak 117) and thus queers conceptual boundaries, which deepens the potentially subversive nature of her gender performance. Her hyperfeminine aesthetic choices play a significant role here, too: the perceived contrast between her ethnicity, which is linked to feminine ideals of modesty, her sexuality, and her choice of shrill-coloured makeup and revealing clothes (Shafak 101) irritates White observers and defies male and White expectations.

Shirin strategically utilises the conventional aesthetic codes that signify femininity in the West to assert herself. She compensates with her outward appearance for her male-coded dominant behaviour. In this way, Shirin can soothe male anxieties about dominant women who may destabilise men's power and hide her subversive potential (Negrin 63–64; Riviere 179–180). However, Shirin does not use her make-up to conform to patriarchal beauty standards. Instead, her aim is to express herself, which is provocative, as Selma's reaction shows:

> Selma looked disapprovingly at the girl's short skirt, high heels, heavy makeup. To her eyes, Shirin didn't look like a student. And she surely didn't look Iranian. 'What kind of student is she?' Selma murmured in Turkish. (Shafak 101–2)

The description of Shirin's makeup as "the flag of an unstable country, declaring not only its independence but also its unpredictability" (Shafak 101) is significant, too. Here, cultural hybridity intersects with her non-conforming gender performance, further reinforcing its subversive potential. The fact that Shirin consciously performs acts of resistance against cultural and gender norms suggests a blurring of the conceptual borders erected by patriarchal stereotyping. This blurring makes her masquerade complex: by exhibiting a Brown body that performs hyper-femininity and bisexuality, Shirin partly conforms to White male expectations and partly resists a striated society that seeks to control her. Her strategy of resistance is thus ambivalent: While she irritates and defies male and White expectations of how she should perform gender in accordance with her ethnic roots, she confirms western expectations of

sexualized femininity. Hence, she might stand out among the other Muslim women, but even as she claims (sexual) dominance over heterosexual men, whether they are White or not, her gender performances are not always seen as subversive by male observers.

Shirin's masquerade of desirability biases men in her life in her favour, which in turn empowers her. The masquerade helps her to manage men's reactions: Prof. Azur falls for Shirin, emotionally depends on her, and thus makes himself vulnerable; Troy, whose advances Shirin rejects, becomes obsessed with her and thus loses control. Although Shirin's self-performance and masquerade adapt to male desires and seems to make her vulnerable due to the sexualised way she displays her body, Shirin is not inferior in the relationships she enters into. Her interactions with the men around her uncover their biases. Troy exposes his own misogyny (Shafak 323) and loss of control when he grows exceedingly jealous and begins to stalk Azur to gather evidence against him (Shafak 324); one of his goals appears to be 'slut-shaming'[4] Shirin (Shafak 323). The attraction of men and the triggering of emotional, physical, and sexual desire results explicitly from her hybrid masquerade. She is attractive, but she does not embody patriarchally depreciated feminine-coded characteristics. Rather, she exhibits masculine-coded ones, such as activity and strength (Shafak 363); she is "bold and confident" (Shafak 327), even as she visually performs a sexual fantasy.

Azur emotionally depends on Shirin, albeit in a different manner than Troy. He wants a "love devoid of guilt" (Shafak 363) with which he hopes Shirin can provide him, because she is such a strong person: "[She] was invincible. [...] A natural-born warrior. Next to her there was nothing to worry about" (Shafak 363). Although Azur always seems dominant, in control, and fully self-reliant (Shafak 200–204; 343–48), Shirin's self-confidence and strength attract him. His desire makes him vulnerable and willing to submit to her. Shirin utilises her sexuality to her advantage; her erotic masquerade gives her dominance over Azur, a dominance that subliminally actualises male anxieties of subordination. Interestingly, it is with this allure that Shirin destabilises two competing, but not incompatible patriarchal systems: Troy and Azur turn against each other, leading to Troy's decision to report Azur for power abuse and Azur's consequent loss of his position as a professor. Shirin's masquerade of desirability does not objectify her or make her passive; rather, she resists

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4 Slut-shaming is "the stigmatization of an individual based on of his or her appearance, sexual availability, and actual or perceived sexual behavior and is primarily aimed at women and girls" (Goblet & Glowacz 1; cf. Armstrong et al. 100–101). This strategy aims at regulating and subordinating the female body and reinforcing male dominance and control (Armstrong et al. 103; ibid. 117–18).

the patriarchal power imbalance she is confronted with at Oxford and flips it by making the men in her life vulnerable and dependent on her.

While Shirin's masquerade is certainly disruptive in some contexts, there are also moments in which it could be viewed as ineffective, or at least counterproductive in the fight against patriarchy. The novel highlights this when Shirin is confronted with (intra-female) alterity. Just as Mona uncovers Shirin's internalised Islamophobia and ideological biases (Shafak 308–11), Peri brings to light Shirin's internalised misogyny by asking about Shirin's sexual relationship with Azur. Although Shirin pretends to be superior to Peri by belittling her criticism of Azur's methods and allegedly nosy behaviour (Shafak 326), Shirin cannot uphold her masquerade and eventually snaps:

> "I'm neither paranoid nor jealous," Peri said, unable to keep her voice down.
>
> "Really?" Shirin laughed. "In Iran there's a proverb Mamani taught me. *She who makes a mouse of herself will be eaten by cats*.'
>
> 'What are you trying to say?'
>
> 'I say, stay out of my business, Mouse, or I'll eat you alive.' (Shafak 327, emphasis in original).

Shirin's internalized misogyny is exposed in her threat, which also highlights the carnivalesque nature of masquerade: Shirin and Peri are divided at this moment in the novel by the reinforcement of a power imbalance that prevents true alliance and impedes their joint resistance against White patriarchy. Shirin's performance of hyper-visible ethnic femininity is double-coded because it presents her as a rootless feminist and freethinker, while at the same time revealing previously hidden oppressive thinking patterns that she turns against Peri. Shirin's masquerade cannot be fully effective as a resistance strategy against patriarchal oppression due to her own subliminal ideological bias, and it can become truly subversive only if these biases are deconstructed and renegotiated in the dialectics with intra-female alterity.

Inherently Gender Non-conforming: Peri's Equivocal Masquerade

In contrast to Shirin, Peri learns to use masquerade to protect herself in the hybrid social space she moves in. Her initial lack of gendered self-awareness makes her vulnerable to social oppression and shows in the way she dresses and behaves. Only as a result of the interaction with her female friends at Oxford her degree of self-awareness increases. Unlike her ethnically hybrid friends, who came to England when they were younger, Peri became an adult in an ambivalent patriarchal segment of Turkish society. Even though her family was torn between her father's secularist and her mother's traditionalist religious ideologies, her upbringing, readers learn, was strongly shaped by rigid gender norms

that are emphasized by her mother in particular. However, as she was growing up, Peri began to contradict these norms through her gender-non-conformity (Shafak 3–13; 71–72).

Ever since early childhood, Peri has been torn between character traits that traditionalist Turkish culture considers typically masculine and feminine. She has also been struggling to reconcile these two, allegedly contradictory parts of her identity. As a child, Peri was particularly close to her father (Shafak 17) who influenced her to a great degree and allowed her to enjoy a relatively gender-neutral existence. Instead of raising her to become the kind of woman her mother wants her to be, Peri's father encouraged her to study hard and go to Oxford. He encouraged her to pursue the kind of education that would be considered an exclusively male privilege in patriarchal culture (Shafak 72). In supporting his daughter's education, Peri's father overrides her mother's wishes, who deems education less important than preserving her daughter's virginity, which she views as a key virtue for young women (Shafak 100). The relative gender neutrality of Peri's childhood, which allowed her to interact with and feel like one of the boys, ends with the arrival of her first period. This event presents a severe crisis for Peri, who reacts with horror because she would have liked to enjoy her childhood freedom from more rigid female gender expectations longer (Shafak 73). After she begins to menstruate, she suddenly has to be "more careful with boys" which comes with the instruction "*Don't let them touch you.*" (Shafak 73). To Peri, getting her period means the limitation of her physical autonomy due to her gender, the loss of the privilege of not being seen as an object of desire, and a new expectation to obey social etiquette. Peri is desperate about having to enter womanhood and the social expectations attached to it:

> How she wished […] [to have] instead of her newly beginning curves, a confident flatness. She would have loved to have been born as the third son of the Nalbantoğlus. Wouldn't life be easier if she had been a boy? (Shafak 73)

Peri even hides her period from her mother, managing to "conceal the truth until she was about fourteen, the age she regard[s] fitting for her first period" (Shafak 73–74). At first, Peri is reluctant to conform to female gender expectations. However, she eventually learns to accept the female-specific behavioural codes prevalent in the cultural space of traditional Turkish society and adheres to them to a large extent during her teenage years (Shafak 100). Yet, Peri still comes into conflict with her mother because, like her father, she prioritises her education and thus does not fulfill Selma's gender expectations (Shafak 100). Peri still struggles with her mother's expectations when she arrives at Oxford (Shafak 280). As she comes of age at university, a process that is aided by her female friends, Peri finds herself torn between her desire to

conform to the gender expectations her mother has tried to instill in her and her own desire to defy these very expectations.

The self-performance that Peri adopted in the striated space of her childhood and teenage years in Turkey is characterized by the lasting impact of childhood trauma. At the age of four, her mother accused her of killing her twin brother, because Peri offered him a plum that suffocated him: "Peri had witnessed […] all; uncomprehending, unmoving" (Shafak 325) and, instead of being comforted by her mother, was blamed for her brother's death because Selma could not cope with her own feelings of guilt (Shafak 325). Subconsciously acting out of self-resentment and projecting it onto her daughter, Selma deflects her guilt onto Peri and creates a lasting divide between herself and her daughter (Shafak 325). In doing so, she contributes to the separation of women from each other, a separation that is beneficial for patriarchy (Herrera 14–15). As a reaction to this childhood trauma, Peri desperately tries to please her mother (Shafak 56), which includes adhering to her mother's gender expectations for girls (Shafak 20), namely being chaste (Shafak 100; cf. 111), pious, and obedient (Shafak 158). Although Peri questions traditional Turkish gender norms and shows a certain rebellious attitude during her teenage years (Shafak 111), she always wants to please her parents' expectations. So, when she comes to Oxford, Peri's gender performance is marked by self-repression in an attempt to fulfill both her father's expectations for her education and her mother's gender expectations centering on chastity and obedience.

At Oxford, Peri is exposed to new ways of doing gender that inspire the revision of her gender and self-performance. The sentiment that something significant will happen to her at this place (Shafak 123) proves right: although the suffocating gender roles she has been socialized with follow her to England, a fact the novel depicts through magical realist episodes in which her trauma manifests as the Baby in the Mist,[5] Peri changes significantly. Not least, this is due to social interactions with

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5 The Baby in the Mist is an apparition that Peri sees whenever she is about to break her mother's rules: for example, when Peri leaves the garden as a young child to feed a cat and a stranger tries to coax Peri to come with him, intending to kidnap her (Shafak 48–50), the Baby appears and holds Peri back (Shafak 50–51). The Baby reappears throughout the story, every time Peri's trauma of abandonment is triggered, namely when she does not meet her parents' expectations or is worried that she may not do so. Peri cannot grasp the meaning of the Baby or what it conveys about her mental state (Shafak 287) until she can no longer repress her trauma. When Troy confronts her with the fact that Shirin is seeing Azur, which causes her to feel rejected by the man she desires, the baby reappears along with the memory of her brother's death. Presented with an opportunity to deconstruct its existence, Peri understands what the Baby signifies, namely a manifestation of the trauma of maternal abandonment by which Peri is haunted (Shafak 340).

people such as Shirin. Shirin is the first person Peri meets when she comes to Oxford; it is Shirin who gives Peri and her parents a tour around the campus. Moreover, Shirin is Peri's direct neighbour, which is why Peri interacts with Shirin particularly often. Shirin challenges Peri's whole belief system about gender performance and sexuality. Due to her upbringing, Peri is not used to the public and unashamed performances of physical intimacy she sees when spending time with Shirin: where she grew up, people did not talk about sexuality and were socially punished for breaking this taboo (Shafak 103). Shirin, who is not ashamed of her sexuality (Shafak 137), opens a new world for Peri: not only does Shirin perform a western notion of femininity and "disdain […] women who covered their heads" (Shafak 103), she furthermore openly proclaims her bisexuality, which leaves Peri feeling "an excitement laced with anxiety" (Shafak 117). Peri is "both ready and afraid to discover this new world into which she needed the strength to walk" (Shafak 117). Hence, Peri is confronted not only with a new kind of performing femininity that contrasts the Turkish patriarchal notion of femininity she has grown up with, she also discovers that women do not necessarily have to adhere to social expectations about female sexuality. Shirin's otherness is potentially transformative for Peri, which makes it dangerous: according to her parents, Peri should "stay away from the British-Iranian girl […because] she would be a bad influence" (Shafak 108). At Oxford, Peri is thus confronted with alterity within a group of what she considers her peers: young, highly educated Muslim women. This encounter with alterity presents new performative ways of femininity and selfhood to Peri and challenges her own gender performance, which in turn inspires her to reconstruct her own performance of femininity and to rediscover her identity as a human being and specifically as a woman.

Besides her encounter with Shirin, it is her encounter with Azur in particular that awakens a new sense of femininity and sexuality in Peri, increasingly destabilising the influence of Turkish patriarchy on her. Her decreasing need for self-repression and her new awareness about her sexuality causes her to perform her own femininity differently when she is around Azur, who she has fallen in love with (Shafak 267, 288–90). Peri is still exploring her options when it comes to the gender performance, she is most comfortable with. Her adoption of aesthetically westernized femininity is a temporary masquerade that serves to achieve the fulfilment of her desires and experiment with a new kind of self-expression. This self-exploration becomes visible when she is invited to Azur's New Year's party. Peri realises that by accepting his invitation and following her feelings, she does not only express her femininity in a new way but also defies the internalised behavioral values imposed on Turkish girls by traditionalist Turkish culture (Shafak 280). At this point in her life, her

gender performance becomes a potentially subversive masquerade because she resists the gender expectations that have constrained her and intentionally adapts her appearance and behaviour in order to get Azur's attention. She chooses to wear makeup and more Western, feminine-coded clothes that diverge from her practical and more masculine-looking everyday clothes. This choice is meant to signal to Azur that she is ready to be perceived as an object of male desire and as a woman who actively pursues her own desires. While Peri's self-aware performance of femininity may be said to mirror Shirin's performative strategy of female empowerment, Peri blurs heteronormative gender boundaries more so than Shirin insofar as she combines a long dress with "heavy boots" (Shafak 276).

Not only is a new sense of femininity awakened in Peri that she expresses in her masquerade, she also discovers desires and a new sense of her own sexuality that contradict the Turkish patriarchal and maternal expectation of female chastity. The hybridity of her masquerade reflects the fact that Peri is torn between her parents' wishes and her desires which she signals by adopting a masquerade (Shafak 280). Although it is noticeable that the gender expectations of her upbringing still have a hold over Peri, she "yearn[s] to transgress [them], she yearn[s] to err" and therefore breaks out from the established boundaries others, such as her mother, have set for her (Shafak 280). Despite feeling filial and awkward (Shafak 285), that is to say, despite feeling like she is only on the verge of adulthood rather than fully secure in her person and desires, her encounter with Azur in the hall of his house, where he gives her a kiss on the cheek, triggers a feeling of desirability in her. This feeling helps her to embrace her own femininity, which, as she realizes, does not need to exclude her masculine-coded characteristics and interests. When he kisses her, Azur blurs the professional line of their student-teacher relationship.[6] Peri is surprised, excited, and hopeful, "convinc[ing] herself

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6 The potential power abuse must be addressed here, even if it can only be addressed briefly. There is no evidence in the novel that Azur tries to abuse his position as her teacher. On the one hand, to Peri, it appears that he misused her feelings to get to know more about the Baby in the Mist as he stopped inviting her to his rooms when he had heard enough about her childhood trauma (Shafak 324). Furthermore, he is reported by Troy for having an affair with Peri and abusing his position (Shafak 337) although this is not true as Peri and Azur claim (Shafak 337; 341–43). In fact, it appears that he tries to create distance between them by not starting an affair (Shafak 337; cf. 344) and reducing their contact outside of class (Shafak 324) to not hurt her as he claims in retrospective 14 years after Peri's time at Oxford (Shafak 363). That he keeps his distance from her after he heard about her childhood trauma, particularly if she reminds him of Nour, a woman he loved, (Shafak 362–63) seems plausible. However, it is not possible to come to an unambiguous conclusion. This ambivalence of evidence is why the danger of power abuse must be kept in mind. However, it is not decisive for Peri's

that the professor, too, had feelings for her" (Shafak 288). Azur does not only convey to her that "she was special – very special" but also suggests that she should "come to [his rooms]" (Shafak 288). Azur makes this offer when he learns about her surreal visions of the Baby in the Mist (Shafak 288) in a passage told from Peri's perspective. Instead of fully supporting Peri's interpretation of the encounter, the novel views her interpretation critically: the text implies that Peri might or might not have misinterpreted the semantic nuances of his statement (Shafak 288). Although Peri is thus constructed as a potentially unreliable narrator, this scene seems to be self-revelatory for Peri as she discovers a new side of her: the awakening of sexual desire. Ironically, as she herself remarks later after her suicide attempt (Shafak 342), because she cannot have Azur, she ends up sleeping with a boy, Darren, who attended Azur's New Year's party, too (Shafak 289–90). However, during the party, when she leaves for the bathroom to collect herself, the presence of a lascivious photo of Azur's wife in the hallway of Azur's house creates a subliminally erotic atmosphere tinged with sadness (Shafak 286–87). It seems to mirror Peri's self-aware performance of femininity while it also hints at the "trespass[ing] on a forbidden zone" (Shafak 286), namely Azur's private life and sexual secrets.[7] Azur catches Peri watching the photo of his wife in the hallway, which leaves her both astounded and indignant. However, a conversation is sparked in which Azur reveals that his wife is dead and shows concern for Peri, who "look[s] pale" (Shafak 287). This revelation changed the atmosphere at the party. The resulting interaction between the professor and his enamored student implies increasing intimacy and vulnerability. Peri discovers her own emotional vulnerability, which stands in contrast to her former masculine-coded strategy of hiding her emotions to please her parents (Shafak 56). This change in her self-perception is made possible initially by her intentional use of gender performance as masquerade.

14 years later, at the dinner party in Istanbul that constitutes the frame narrative of the novel and also epitomises the Turkish patriarchal system, it becomes clear that Peri has learnt to use masquerade as self-

awakening of sexual desire and femininity and the use of her masquerade as shown in this scene.

7 From his memories, it becomes clear that he did not love his wife but was in love with her academic family that he never had. This sentiment of belonging, seems to be his motivation to marry his wife (Shafak 346). Gradually, he fell in love with her older half-sister Nour, which eventually was discovered by his wife's family and led to him being cast out (Shafak 347). After having moved away from the family, his wife was suffering from mental illness and finally was found dead, possibly due to suicide. However, his wife's father blamed Azur and the affair with Nour for his daughter's death (Shafak 347–48). In a manner similar to Peri, Azur seems to have been traumatised by these experiences (Shafak 363).

protection while moving in the Turkish social space. In Turkey, the social adaptation of her non-conforming gender performance to a feminine masquerade protects her against emotional violence and thus preserves her identity. During her university years, Peri became more self-confident and learned not to hide her opinions and feelings as much as when she had still been living with her parents in Istanbul. As a result of being exposed to alterity at university, she was challenged to grow and could perform her gender in a more masculine-coded manner. At the time, Peri did not use hyper-feminine masquerade when visiting her parents, such as when returning home for her brother's wedding (Shafak 158–59; 162–64).[8] 14 years later, in 2016, her gender performance and the use of her masquerade have changed after she has been living with her husband and children as a stay-at-home mum in Istanbul: she now uses the masquerade to protect herself against the dinner party's prosecution, which begins when a photo surfaces from her time at Oxford in which she has a more masculine appearance (Shafak 60–61; 92–93). For self-protection, the novel suggests, she has adopted the common hyperfeminine behaviour and style of Istanbul, although she feels uncomfortable in it and finds it pretentious (Shafak 7–9). Her hyperfeminine masquerade hides her more unconventional individual gender identity and she even expresses the idea in an interior monologue that the Turkish hyperfeminine gender performance is informed by an internalised misogyny through which all women, in her eyes, become "both victim and perpetrator" (Shafak 9). Indeed, the women at the dinner party turn against each other to expose Peri's masquerade of femininity and virtuousness (Shafak 60–64; 90–91; 169).

The more time passes at the dinner party, however, the more the masquerade bears subversive potential. By conforming to the patriarchal beauty standards, even if only temporarily, Peri can hide her own gender non-conformity. This way, Peri can preserve its subversive potential of resistance while also protecting herself in a situation in which her preferred gender presentation might cause her harm. Her masquerade is

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8 Peri adapts to Turkish cultural behavioural codes for example when she kisses the hands of the elderly to show respect or when she plays the host (Shafak 158). However, when it comes to expected gender-specific behaviour such as obedience, silence, and passiveness, she diverges from the standard: she does not passively bear a man's flirtatious advances but rejects him, even if this rejection leads to misogynist behaviour. By, on the one hand, accepting cultural practices that she abhors, such as the medical examination of the bride's virginity (Shafak 165–66) and, on the other hand, expressing her feelings and opinions on the man's unwanted advances, Peri oscillates between "the person she carrie[s] inside and the one she [is] expected to be" (Shafak 158). Peri knows that not engaging in masquerade at certain moments in her life can hurt her (Shafak 158), but she is not completely powerless against or entirely vulnerable to the patriarchal system.

not perfect and hence subtly revelatory; when Peri is inattentive or just momentarily "oblivious to the rules of social conduct" (Shafak 268) and wants to feel comfortable, she tends to perform her preferred non-conforming gender performance. This way, she can be targeted by misogynist behaviour; simultaneously, however, the non-conforming gender performance allows her to be subversive. Participating in the men's discussion instead of the women's circle and drawing on her elite education, she questions the men's epistemic authority:

> Through the cigar smoke Peri looked at [the men]. "To me what you're saying sounds like sheer paranoia," she said softly. "Europeans… Westerners… Russians… Arabs… If you were to get to know them, not as a category, but individually, then you would see how we are all, more or less […] the same. […] We can only recognize ourselves in the faces of…the Other." The architect and the tycoon gaped at her in astonishment. Adnan [her husband] gave her a wink. "Well said, darling." (Shafak 269)

Peri irritates the men by breaking her masquerade, an act that destabilises patriarchal power in the room. The men did not expect her to contradict them and so she can, at least for a moment, reverse the power imbalance between her and them, even as the party's patriarchal space eventually requires her to return to adhere to the gender-specific rules of gender segregation and behavioural codes.

Peri restores her masquerade when she joins a women's circle at the dinner party that has gathered to meet with a male psychic. Peri resists the psychic's exhibition of patriarchal power by returning to her non-conforming gender performance when he offers to read her past. Granting a stranger epistemic superiority over the interpretation of her past makes her vulnerable, as he suddenly seems to hold the power to uncover parts of her past she would like to keep hidden. The psychic is perceived as threatening because (Shafak 269) he seems to be especially interested in the flaws in her masquerade of femininity and her diverging gender performance (Shafak 269–70): When Peri extends her hand to shake his, he grabs her wrist, trapping her physically and emotionally (Shafak 270). In this situation, her feminine masquerade becomes a hindrance, because it makes her obey patriarchal behavioural codes of politeness. Nonetheless, Peri challenges the psychic's exertion of power: instead of charming the psychic or manipulating him like the other women, she tries to regain dominance and control by refuting his alleged supernatural powers by means of logics. Despite being increasingly defensive the closer the psychic comes to the truth about her story with Azur (Shafak 270), the more she resists his reading of her past by putting on a mask of rationality that does not show how deeply affected she is. Still, the reading presents an opportunity for self-reflection and self-expression, ultimately leading her to reconcile with Shirin. The effect of this reading is illustrated by the psychic's drawing of "three female

figures—like the three wise monkeys" (Shafak 271) – Peri, Mona, and Shirin (Shafak 271) as the physical manifestation of the resurfacing of her suppressed memories of Oxford (Shafak 271–349). Even if Peri is exposed to patriarchal emotional violence when she moves in the Turkish patriarchal space such as the dinner party, these scenes show that Peri can actualize resistance in small ways: by diverging from an expected feminine performance with her masquerade and engaging in her non-conforming gender performance.

Mona: Activist Muslim Masquerade and Feminine Gender Performance

Mona's masquerade consists of the conscious performance of a masculine-coded behavior, a behaviour which she uses to protect others and herself as well as to resist Islamophobic patriarchy. Compared to her friends, Mona performs her ethnic identity more consciously as a provocative masquerade and sign of resistance to Islamophobic patriarchal society.[9] However, her gender and ethnic performance is just as hybrid as that of the other two women. Her behaviour contradicts Orientalist stereotypes of the silent and passive Muslim woman (Badran 105; Galal 159), which is specifically illustrated in the novel by her activist pursuits that seek to undermine the oppressive forces of sexism and Islamophobia. Mona commits herself to collecting signatures for feminist petitions and organising events for the Oxford Feminist Squad, a feminist group at the University of Oxford that draws attention to sexist grievances at the institution (Shafak 127–28; 232–33). Mona does not accept the status quo but intentionally challenges what she sees as a default patriarchal and Islamophobic system (Shafak 127). Mona's actions bear subversive potential because she not only vocally challenges patriarchal, racist, and Islamophobic ideologies, but also frustrates conventional sexist and Orientalist expectations and uses masculine behaviour to do so. She becomes visible, active, and aggressive in her activism and, in doing so, destabilises White male supremacy. When she first meets Peri and protects her from a womanizer (Shafak 126–27), Mona claims male privilege and power within the historically While male space of the University of Oxford. As a result, Mona uses her power to make Peri aware of patriarchally-justified male behaviour such as the sexualisation and objectification of women for male pleasure. Mona sees this behaviour

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9 This paper sees a close correlation between ethnic and religious identity because Islam is understood as an integral part of ethnic identity (Neo 753; Hassan 92–93), specifically for Mona. Her Egyptian and Muslim heritage led to oppression in her American high school (Shafak 136) and has necessitated her activist pursuits. It can be argued that ethnicity and Islamic identity intersect here. This is even likelier if ethnicity is understood as a category that connects people via. a common culture or spiritual tradition (Sensoy & DiAngelo 22–23), although it should of course be noted that not all Egyptians are Muslim.

as a threat to female empowerment made worse if women adopt a sexualized style and manner and, thereby, boost men's egos (Shafak 126). Her activist endeavours and the adoption of masculine-coded protective behaviour help her to reduce gender-related power imbalances and to successfully resist such sexism and objectification.

Mona's masquerade is not simply masculine, but it features gender non-conformance, however. It is her ethnic masquerade in combination with her gender non-conformity that irritates representatives of Western patriarchy (Shafak 136) and challenges their internalised Islamosexism. Mona adds a feminine-and Middle-Eastern-coded nuance to her masquerade by means of a headscarf.[10] Similarly to Shirin's choice of hyperfeminine and sexualized clothes that clash with her masculine-coded behaviour, Mona's decision to adopt masculine behaviour and simultaneously wear a feminine-coded headscarf leads to a gender-nonconforming, visibly intersectional and thus provocative masquerade. Her visual performance of her femininity is inseparably connected to the performance of her ethnic affiliation, which reflects in her clothing and particularly her headscarf. The headscarf is a signifying unit of both ethnicity and of Islam in the discourse of Western Christian society and has been vicariously targeted as such, particularly since 9/11. Furthermore, the headscarf is closely related to questions of gender relations, oppression, and authenticity (Sayan-Cengiz 47–48; Badran 103–4). This is the case for Mona, too, who experiences a backlash for her choice to wear the headscarf: as Mona's narrative shows, the reactions towards her headscarf are mostly hostile and reflect Islamophobia as well as Islamosexism (Shafak 136), including their respective internalized forms. As previously mentioned, Shirin, for example, "harbor[s] a disdain for [headscarf-wearing] women" (Shafak 103) because, to her, the headscarf represents the reasons "why [her] parents left Iran: your [Mona's] *small piece of clothing* sent [them] into exile" (Shafak 310, emphasis in original). Mona's headscarf and her ethnic masquerade are provoking for Shirin, who sees in it a means of patriarchal oppression and—by not wearing it—a means of asserting resistance towards Islamosexism.

While Shirin condemns the headscarf, Mona views it as inspiring and empowering. In the West, including among many White feminists, the

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10 The Middle East is a Western Orientalist construct, but since they move in a Western space they are constructed as such. Her Middle-Eastern-coded masquerade certainly is stressed by the performance of Islamic rituals such as praying on a regular schedule daily. Mona is a deeply religious person and integrates the Islamic values into her life as we can see in minor scenes throughout the novel (Shafak 306; 319). However, the significance of her headscarf as a symbol of her Islamic affiliation is highlighted in the novel, which is why particularly this is dealt with in this essay.

headscarf is seen as a sign of backwardness and as an emblem of female oppression (Elver 160; Lister et al. 99). For many headscarf-wearers, the garment has a vastly different connotation: for them, the headscarf is partially used as a sign of resistance against Islamophobia (Lister et al. 99) and can express (American) Muslim identity and pride of difference (Elver 159–61; Sayan-Cengiz 45–46). In an Islamophobic Western space, such as the one represented by the University of Oxford in the novel, the choice of wearing a headscarf can be subversive. While some Muslim women refrain from wearing a headscarf to prevent being targeted by violence, others feel empowered by it due to its hypervisibility and the blurring of power hierarchies it can be linked to (Elver 161). While Shirin deprecates other women's decision to wear a headscarf, Peri is "not in a state of constant opposition to covered women" but instead "prefer[s] to consider not what was on top of people's heads but what was inside of them" (Shafak 156). To Mona who has chosen to wear it herself, however, the headscarf "gives [...] peace and confidence" (Shafak 136). Mona sees it as a "testimony to [her] faith" (Shafak 136) and thus as an expression of herself. Even more, despite the widespread antagonism towards the headscarf (Elver 162), she has decided to wear it as an act of resistance: to "challenge stereotypes [...] to shake things up" (Shafak 136).

Mona resents the fact that "people look at [her] as if [she is] a passive, obedient victim of male power although [she has] a mind of [her own] and [her] hijab has never got in the way of [her] independence" (Shafak 136). Her headscarf empowers her as she does not hide an essential part of her identity to protect herself, being "at peace with who [she is]" (Shafak 128). Furthermore, "it gives [her] peace and confidence" (Shafak 136), which helps her deal with experiences such as bullying because of the headscarf. Instead of hiding, she openly shows her religiosity, which can make her a target of oppression. Her religiosity is deeply embedded in Mona's everyday life and helps her organize the multiple activities she engages in, e.g., by praying 5 times a day, which structures her life, as she claims (Shafak 128). In this way, she manages her time, which allows her to educate herself in multiple university societies (Shafak 128), something her feminist agenda can profit from. Mona's Islamic identity strongly influences her masquerade that, thus, clearly contrasts with Shirin's ethnic gender performance. She counteracts the flattening of her personality through sexist anti-Muslim stereotypes by using her makeup and jewelry as a part of her masquerade. Her "kohl"-lined eyes are reminiscent of ancient Egyptian makeup and her "nose stud in the shape of a miniature silver crescent" (Shafak 126) can be interpreted as a visual hint at her ethnicity; both her make-up and her jewelry fortify her confident Muslim masquerade. The

latter might increase the risk of victimization by emphasising her identity (Shafak 136), but it also allows her to express her identity despite adversity, which makes her masquerade potentially subversive.

However, Mona's own biases towards women who visibly please the male gaze, a viewpoint crucial to her feminist masquerade, sometimes prevent her from using her subversive potential to the fullest. When she protects Peri from the "fresher-fishing" (Shafak 126) of a fellow male student, Mona displays misogynist thinking patterns. Talking about how the student tries to hook-up with girls she uses language that dehumanises women, such as when she calls the women he managed to seduce "fish he caught in one week" (Shafak 127). Although this description could be seen as part of the allegory Mona uses to describe the student's misogynist behaviour, it actually seems to reflect Mona's own internalized misogynist believes:

> "You mean, the fish are... girls?"

> "Yes, the irony is, some girls have no problem with being treated like stupid glittering fish, all dolled up." A teasing note crept into [Mona's] voice. "It's hard to break our chains when some of us love being shackled." (Shafak 127)

Instead of being critical of the social mechanisms that might cause the girls' behaviour, such as patriarchal gender expectations and internalised misogyny, Mona mocks their behaviour and thinks less of them,[11] justifying her criticism with her feminist ideas. This arguably contradicts the principles of feminist sisterhood as she distinguishes between "good" and "bad" women instead of encouraging them to work together despite their differences. As a result, Mona's feminist masquerade initially remains superficial and cannot be fully effective in its subversion of patriarchy.

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11 Certainly, it is visible that Mona feels uncomfortable when women such as Shirin behave contrary to her personal values as decency. Although she does not treat Shirin with hostility because of her sexual and romantic behaviour as she claims to "not [be] bothered by your [Shirin's] ways" (Shafak 310), Mona does not endorse Shirin's to drink alcohol and make out with her boyfriend in public. When Mona sees how Shirin engages in a "long, wet, happy kiss" (Shafak 137) with him on her birthday party and he then rushes outside to vomit because of too much alcohol, long before the women move into a house together, Mona feels the need to leave (Shafak 137). She is "bothered by the alcohol and the suggestive behaviour" (Shafak 137), however, she does not shame Shirin in the same way she does with the girls in the scene at hand. This reaction of Mona's shows that she, similar to Selma to whom Mona is compared (Shafak 136), judges the behaviour of women who follow their sexual needs but not Muslim women's choice to not wear a headscarf: when talking about her own decision to wear it, she tells Peri that her mother does so, too, but not her sister. Mona does not condemn this decision but views it neutrally by reasoning: "We have made different choices in life." (Shafak 128) It can be deduced from these points that Mona lives by the principles of sisterhood when it comes to behaviour that she deems beneficial for her feminist agenda, however, she cannot let go of her personal opinion on how a feminist woman should behave.

Instead, it betrays her own internalised misogyny that divides her and potential sisters.

In the novel, the lack of strong networks of sisterhood between Mona, Shirin, and Peri prevents Mona from using the subversive potential of her feminist activism to the fullest. Mona cannot establish a solid emotional connection with her friends: Mona and Shirin are defensive about their respective belief systems, a fact that impedes their bonding and keeps them from recognising each other's struggles and appreciating each other' differences. Likewise, they get along well, Mona and Peri stay on a surface level of emotional attachment during their university years. For example, Mona fails to help Peri, who continues to suffer from the impact of Turkish patriarchy on her life, particularly the emotional divide it creates between her and her mother. Mona cannot understand the complexity of Peri's emotional world and how it is marked by the trauma of maternal abandonment. When Peri goes on holidays with Mona and her cousins and Peri shares a room with Mona, Mona witnesses how Peri's suppressed childhood trauma resurfaces in dreams. Peri starts mumbling feverishly in Turkish "like the hum of a thousand bees trying to break free" (Shafak 214). Because Mona cannot speak Turkish but also does not talk to Peri in order to understand her better, she sees her only opportunity to help Peri by praying.[12] Although well-intended, her prayers remain

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12 Her behavioural choice is connected to her relationship to religion. For her, the rituals and routines, with which religion provides her, are central in her life. She tries to live by the principles Islam has taught her such as acceptance of other people's ways of living (Shafak 220; Ramadan 73), unbreakable faith in God (Shafak 214; Ramadan 73) and praying regularly (Ramadan 73; Katz 111). Her religion has carved her way of thinking and influences her strongly. However, Mona is not able to actualise them in every situation. They even interfere with her feminist agenda. This is clear when she discusses Islam, global politics, and feminism with Shirin after they have moved into a house together. When Shirin attacks Islam Mona is defensive and reacts by pointing out that problems as sexism and "fanaticism" (Shafak 309), by which she refers to ideologies that motivate terror attacks (Shafak 308–9), should be tackled instead of blaming a whole religion. Her biases towards her own religion are clear when she is close to shutting down as soon as Shirin criticises Mohammed; Mona makes it clear that "the Prophet [shall be left out of their discussion] when [people] [i.e. Shirin] know next to nothing about him." (Shafak 312) Since her voice is "quivering" (Shafak 312) while talking, it is clear that Shirin has crossed a line. Mona's devotion to Islam makes it difficult for her to accept criticism on parts of her religion and thus creates resentment towards critics of Islam as Shirin and Islamophobes. Hence, since these differences cannot be bridged at first, the actualisation of feminist sisterhood is impeded. Similarly, when she cannot help Peri with her emotional problems in the scene at hand, her unconditional faith to God makes it difficult for Mona to show understanding for Peri's thoughts on how cruel nature is when bees die in the process of defending themselves against predators as a result of their survival instinct (Shafak 214). Instead of asking her friend how she has come up with these thoughts or showing compassion for the animals Mona justifies this process with God being in charge and that Peri should have faith in him. Since Peri's feelings are not validated, she does not continue her thoughts although

ineffective: Peri's trauma remains unprocessed and suppressed for large parts of the novel. Mona's inability to help Peri indicates her inability to speak across differences and, in doing so, to subvert the patriarchal system under which both young women suffer.

The Subversive Power of Sisterhood: Reflection and Renegotiation of Self-Performance

Each of the women in Shafak's novel engages in a different gender performance and tries to use masquerade subversively, but individually. As individuals, none of them is completely effective, however. By themselves, they cannot fully realise their subversive potential. The three different concepts of ethnic femininity the women perform complicate mutual understanding although it eventually also allows them to establish a connection. As they are all Muslim women in a Western space, they band together in some moments, which help them challenge misogyny as a dividing instrument of patriarchy and implement an effective form of sisterhood against Islamophobic patriarchy. However, they are not fully successful because their different concepts of femininity fuel arguments between them that seem to intensify their divide and prevent authentic connections and subversive action; this is why their resistance to patriarchy remains ineffective in the end.

Their cohabitation in a house in Oxford proves to be a challenge, as their differing gender and ethnic performances result in conflicts. Living together reveals that their sisterhood is deeply rutted by differences and arguments that divide specifically Mona and Shirin, and that they struggle to overcome. The women's sisterhood has been brought about by external circumstances, namely that Mona, Shirin, and Peri are female and Muslim and thus become allies or 'sisters' in their feminist struggle. This way, their sisterhood can be subsumed under the notion '*stepsisterhood*', as Azur reminds the reader (Shafak 315). Azur, who knows all three women from his seminars, has written letters to Peri and Shirin, and perhaps also to Mona, in which he provides them with guidance for their personal development (Shafak 251, 314–15). In one of his letters to Shirin, he advises her that she "must come to know, if not to love, what she regards with contempt" (Shafak 315), namely the female alterity represented by Mona and Peri within the social group of Muslim women, which is to say a group that is all too often considered

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they show that Peri had intended to express her insecurities for connecting emotionally with Mona (Shafak 214). Again, by sticking to her religious values Mona misses the opportunity to connect emotionally with her friend which shows that these values impede feminist sisterhood that can help the women resist patriarchy. As the novels implies, Mona must renegotiate her relationship to religious values for the achievement of effective sisterhood even if the novel does not show this process.

homogenous where it is, in fact, diverse. In order to confront this alterity and in order to learn to accept people who think and act differently (Shafak 314), Azur suggests, Shirin must "love [her] stepsister [...] [as] a metaphor for the other woman" (Shafak 315). Just as Mona, whose Islamic attitudes clash with Shirin's atheism (Shafak 310–12; ibid. 320), Peri's character challenges Shirin due to "[Peri's] lack of certainty, her hesitancy, her timidity, her passivity… Qualities someone like Shirin would abhor. […] [Peri] now understood: the second stepsister was Peri herself" (Shafak 315). The three women are constructed as stepsisters, which uncovers how their friendship partly has been formed under compulsion: it reiterates the blood-relatedness of sisters brought about by legal union and external circumstances and allows familial bonds despite the lack of relatedness by blood. This does not imply that the established bonds lack in (emotional) depth; on the contrary, bonds of sisterhood, as it is the case in the novel at hand, feature a potential for deep bonding, e.g., through shared experiences of oppression as well as a potential for conflict because of individual differences. In concordance with this, the three sisters have established a connection that resembles the feminist and political notion of sisterhood previously illustrated. As Shirin implies and as the title of the novel, *Three Daughters of Eve*, indicates, too, the women's sisterhood stems from their shared Muslimness (Shafak 308). Peri, by contrast, doubts this idea and, instead, suggests that the sisterhood Shirin invokes is only feigned to conform to her self-image as feminist. However, as Azur's letter implies, establishing emotional connections could help the three young women to reflect on their religious and cultural background as well as their individual identities and personal preferences and accept each other as they are, even the character traits and behaviours they detest in each other (Shafak 315). Their confrontations about religion, culture, and things such as gender performance are potentially destructive, but they also bear the potential to become accepting of difference and thus subversive. Peri realizes this when the three women move in together: "Fate was a gambler who loved raising the stakes. At the end of this experience, Peri sensed, they were going to be great friends, sisters for life, or the whole thing was going to dissolve in fights and tears" (Shafak 306). Peri recognizes the potential of their friendship and of the things they have in common, but she also recognizes the danger of a division over individual differences. She sees how explosive the situation is due to their severe differences, yet she also believes that they can establish a stable sisterhood. So, their initial sense of sisterhood might be superficial and conceal resentments that divide them, but it can become difference-transgressive and resistant towards oppression.

Living together in one house proves to be both empowering and emotionally triggering for the three women. Each of the friends can claim a space for self-expression and shape it according to her individual interests and values without patriarchally imposed rules. As a result, all three women flourish (Shafak 319). However, as their first dinner shows, the process of reaching a consensus is strenuous and brings up old wounds for each woman. Shirin's atheism and critical attitude towards religion clashes with Mona's theism and the latter's critique of Islamophobia. Furthermore, the two women's very different concepts of femininity and ideas about performing ethnic femininity lead to conflict. This is important not only for their respective masquerades – Shirin's hyper-feminine Western one in contrast to Mona's masculine-coded activist Muslim one – but also for Peri's as the confrontation she witnesses between Shirin and Mona gives her a chance for self-reflection and self-discovery (Shafak 309; 311). Both Shirin and Mona claim to see through the complexities of social power structures. However, their discussion reveals the respective blind spots in their theories of oppression and resistance: Shirin, Mona claims, is reductionist and essentialist towards Islam (Shafak 310; 312) and Mona, as Shirin suggests, is defensive and uncritical towards her religion (Shafak 312). Despite this "pingpong of misunderstandings" (Shafak 309), their basic self-understanding as Muslim stepsisters allows for the creation of a safe space in which these different worldviews and the friction they cause may be negotiated. The discussions between the two women are productive: By arguing they create the opportunity to come to a consensus without having to erase all differences between each other. They decide to write a "Muslim Women's Manifesto" and plan to "put everything that frustrates [them] into it. Fanatism. Sexism. [...] Islamophobia [...]" (Shafak 311). The temporary peace that follows from this plan and the hope that it generates among the three women for overcoming oppression is underlined in the scene by a change in weather: as the three women come to an agreement, the rain stops and the moon, "a pearlescent talisman in the bosom of the sky" (Shafak 311), appears in the night sky. The moon—often associated with ideas of femaleness and/or femininity—not only illuminates the darkness, the scenery also visually recalls a *nazar*, an amulet believed to protect its wearers against the Evil Eye in many Islamic cultures. The appearance of the moon might also hint at the centrality of femininity and sisterhood in this scene. Despite their ideological conflicts they had over their shared experiences of femininity and sexism which is signified by their idea to create the manifesto, they are able to neglect their differences at this moment, even if it is a temporary state. Considering the metaphor of the sky's bosom that bears the moon, it can be argued that the women's consensus nurtures their difference- transgressive sisterhood. The moon's talisman-like nature, in this context, suggests that there is hope

for the duration of this hand even if Mona and Shirin continue arguing right after. In this way, the setting of the scene hints at the possible subversiveness of the (step)sisterhood that is established between the three women despite their differences, and the confrontation it allows for each of them with ethnic and feminine alterity.

Although the women's conflicts complicate the establishment of a Muslim sisterhood in the novel, the different concepts of femininity and ethnic backgrounds also inspire self-reflection, self-expression, and changes of perspective. These changes require the renegotiation of their masquerades. Like Mona, whose masquerade of Muslim feminism relies on scorning women she deems anti-feminist as well as on the notion of Islam as empowering for women, Shirin, who performs Westernised hyper-femininity as masquerade, excludes headscarf-wearing women (Shafak 5). Their differing attitudes towards Islam divide the two women and internalised misogynist thinking patterns pit them against women, such as Peri, that diverge from their respective ideas of how a feminist/Muslim woman should behave. As long as Shirin and Mona uphold their prejudices and preserve this intra-female divide, which is a patriarchal tool of control, authentic sisterhood is not possible. Mona, Shirin, and Peri must reconsider their worldviews by confronting difference. Each of them personifies an idea of ethnic femininity the other despises: Mona wears a headscarf and performs a masquerade of religiosity in accordance with Islamic ideas of feminine virtue, Shirin performs a Western hyper-femininity and adheres to expectations of male desire, and Peri performs a femininity that is informed by gender concepts of conflicting cultures and is perceived as hesitant and passive but compassionate. Only if they learn to listen, accept, and understand each other's perspectives and revise their masquerades towards more inclusivity, can they stop despising and insulting each other (Shafak 311) and form a Muslim (step)sisterhood that will benefit them all. Hope for such reconciliation exists, even if it is never fully realised, as "they [...] leave [the arguments] behind [...] until the next quarrel" (Shafak 321). Their differences can be overcome once they leave their ideological conflicts behind, the novel implies, and are there for each other without judgement. When Shirin and Mona hear of Peri's suicide attempt, they overcome their differences and visit Peri in the hospital to support her (Shafak 343). Thus, the three women stand united if necessary, which is crucial for subverting patriarchy in all forms, but especially for surviving and challenging Islamophobic patriarchy. Even 14 years after their time at Oxford, Shirin, Mona, and Peri are still friends (Shafak 331). Opening a space for confrontations and debates for them, their sisterhood has allowed them to uncover biases and suppressed feelings of resentment and, hence, given them an opportunity for self-reflection and personal

development. Ultimately, the relationship they have built with each other has been difference- and hostility-transgressive.

Only by deconstructing what male desire and their own desire for Azur means in their friendships, Shirin and Peri can eventually bridge the divide that Azur creates between them and become truly subversive: by prioritising their bond (Shafak 343) and reciprocal acceptance and support of uninhibited self-expression over male validation and hostility towards other women. Finally, Shirin and Peri manage to form a non-judgmental bond of sisterhood 14 years after Peri left university when they start talking again on the phone. It is in hindsight that they can deconstruct Azur's role and the place of their own desire for men in their bond of sisterhood. This is possible because the two women openly discuss the feelings that they held for Azur and each other in the past. Healing the rift that their rivalry caused involves communicating how their feelings have changed over the years, which enables them to reconcile (Shafak 330–32). Although Peri first makes excuses for her behaviour in the past, such as her suicide attempt, leaving Oxford, and not testifying in favour of Azur (Shafak 330), she finally is honest with herself and Shirin. Peri feels that her "words, like every other inch of her, felt brittle, breaking" (Shafak 330) while making excuses for her behaviour. She knows that her story and the reasons she gives for her actions are not convincing and that Shirin does not believe her (Shafak 330). Shirin certainly is angry as she recognizes that Peri is not honest which causes Shirin to step in and put Peri's motivation in a nutshell:

> '[…] You didn't even tell him you were sorry.'
>
> 'We had a deal. […] He made me promise never to apologize to him, no matter what.'
>
> 'Bullshit.'
>
> Peri swallowed with a sigh. 'I was young.'
>
> 'You were jealous!' Peri nodded to herself. 'Yes… I was.' (Shafak 330)

Interestingly, this is not a moment of forgiveness as one might expect. Instead, it rather is a moment of relentless honesty that Shirin apparently had needed to start communicating with Peri again: only after Peri's confession of the actual driving force behind her actions, a dialogue is opened that is free of resentment. Simultaneously, they are able to identify Azur as the indirect reason for their divide since their conflict essentially centres on him: Peri felt rejected by him and thus decided not to testify in his favour, which, in turn, hurt Shirin who loved Azur and who, in turn, resented Peri for betraying Azur, in Shirin's opinion. In the scene at hand, the central role of Azur is deconstructed and shifted from the centre of their conflict. This is done by prioritising how Peri's behaviour affected their friendship and by prioritising their bond over Azur. The emotional

divide between both women established by jealousy and resentment is erased by Peri's confession and their differences are transgressed: Peri no longer is passive and timid, and Shirin no longer clings to her resentment and appears to be satisfied with Peri's confession as Shirin no longer presses the topic (Shafak 330). As a result, they start talking like friends again about their current lives and are finally vulnerable and transparent about their feelings. The deconstruction of Azur's role in their friendship and their emotional divide, and the connected prioritization of their friendship over male validation and intra-female hostility allows them to continue their bond of sisterhood that possibly has the potential to empower them.

The emotional barrier between Shirin and Peri is removed in a phone conversation: Shirin can express all of her accumulated anger and thoughts around how she could not understand that Peri left university although she was "such a stellar student" (Shafak 331) and why she did not plea for Azur's case (Shafak 330). Similarly, Peri can finally admit that she has become "exactly the kind of woman [she] always dreaded becoming [, namely a] modern version of [her] mother", and that she "like[s] it – most of the time" (Shafak 331). The novel shows that they seem to fall back into their old roles to some extent, e.g., when Peri does not mention in her narration of her day that she was almost raped (Shafak 331) and compares her decision to the one Shirin would have made, namely to share the experience "unashamed" (Shafak 331). However, which is significant in the chosen examples above, both women suddenly talk about their everyday life as if their argument had never happened. Both women are reciprocally accepted by each other: even when Peri admits to have drunk which, might be an additional factor why her "word flow[] effortlessly" (Shafak 331), Shirin accepts this with a quiet laugh, does not judge Peri's behaviour, or that she has become a housewife. (Shafak 331) Similarly, although Peri knows that Shirin and her "long-term partner […] had lost count of how many times they had broken up and got back together" (Shafak 332), she does not judge Shirin and her relationship style but neutrally accepts it. To take this further, they bond over the shared experience of motherhood. When Peri tells Shirin about how her "daughter's waged a Cold War against [her and that] […] she's winning [so far] […] Shirin [gives] a sigh of sympathy" (Shafak 331). Azur no longer plays a role in their friendship, instead, their bonding is at the centre of their interaction, which hints at their reestablishment of sisterhood. Certainly, Shirin has forgiven her, too, ironically perhaps a lesson Shirin had to learn as Azur had pointed out in his letters (Shafak 315):

> [Shirin] was in a phase when forgiveness came more naturally than rancour. It was hard to hold grudges when you were preparing to welcome new life. [...]

> "I've hated you [Peri] [for betraying Azur] for so long, I've run out of hatred." (Shafak 332)

The 14 years apart, in which Shirin and Peri could process the events and their feelings, have contributed to their healing. As a consequence, the divide between them has decreased, which is why they seize the opportunity on the phone to connect emotionally by admitting that they miss each other (Shafak 333). This reconnection completes their reconciliation and creates a non-judgmental and difference-transgressive feeling of (step)sisterhood between them and restores the subversive potential that their friendship holds when it comes to challenging the patriarchal systems in which they still move.

Having received his current number from Shirin, Peri can reconcile with Azur, express herself freely, and empowers herself. Their roles and power hierarchies reversed (Shafak 365) when Peri no longer is Azur's student and even becomes his "professor" (Shafak 363) by giving him a lecture on Ibn Arabi and Ibn Rushd, "on forgiveness and love […] [a]nd knowledge" (Shafak 363). This, finally, serves as a point of departure for explaining her past undecidedness to Azur and its influence on her as her "worst enemy" (Shafak 363–64) when he asks why she is interested in her chosen story. Furthermore, Peri becoming Azur's professor and giving him a lecture gives her an opportunity to make sense of her past (Shafak 364), which is central for deconstructing Azur's role in her life. In addition to the reversal of the roles Peri and Azur play, Peri's and Azur's mutual vulnerability with each other neutralises their previous power imbalance. The new perspective Peri gains in the process leads her to understand the problematic role Azur played for her in the past, namely that of her "god, […] the Azur [she] had created for herself[,] [t]he one [she] needed to make sense of [her] own fragmented past" (Shafak 364). Taking the opportunity to confront her past by facing Azur herself gives Peri a chance to deconstruct Azur's patriarchal role in her past and thus to empower her. Thereby authentic sisterhood between Peri and Shirin offers opportunities for self-expression and, thus, opportunities to subvert patriarchal power over Peri.

Masquerade, Gender-Performance, and Sisterhood: A Conclusion

As I suggested at the beginning of this paper, all three women have to masquerade to survive in a White Islamophobic and patriarchal system. However, informed by their individual experience and their individual cultural alienation, each of them employs a different gendered masquerade to deal with oppressive mechanisms: Shirin performs hyperfeminine and Westernised while integrating masculine-coded behaviour into her feminist masquerade mirrors the ambiguity that has influenced her whole self-performance to contradict dominant oppressive

narratives about Muslim women. Conversely, Mona performs intentionally feminine and ethnic but undermines Orientalist stereotypes by integrating masculine-coded behaviour into her activist Muslim masquerade. Peri first needs to develop the skill of effective masquerading due to trauma-conditioned self-repression, but eventually learns to adapt her masquerade to the new spaces that she is entering. Hence, Peri fluctuates between Turkish feminine masquerade (of the kind her mother prefers), the performance of masculinity (of the kind her father prefers), and finally, her preferred non-conforming hybrid gender performance. As I have initially argued, the masquerades of all three main characters of *Three Daughters of Eve* bear subversive potential because each in a different way they challenge and blur the conceptual borders of gender and ethnicity. However, Shirin, Mona, and Peri cannot successfully subvert the different patriarchal systems in which they move without fully realizing a radical (step)sisterhood that recognizes intra-female and ethnic alterity. Only by deconstructing personal biases and the internalised anti-Islamic and misogynistic ideas that fuel these biases, Shafak's main characters can overcome patriarchal mechanisms of separation, reconnect with each other and the men in their lives, and, thus, actualise their full subversiveness as Muslim women in a predominantly patriarchal and Islamophobic world.

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