Depolarizing the Polarized: Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* and Turkey

Ali Yiğit[1]

Abstract

The modern Republic of Turkey has been plagued with political, cultural, and religious polarization due in large part to the antithetical interpretations of modernization by different regimes in the history of the country. In recent years, it has been exacerbated by the ascendancy of the religious right, particularly after the attempted coup in 2016, which has created a volatile situation that is almost insoluble. Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* presents a rich portrait of the people of Turkey, the Middle East and on a wider scale the world who are variously represented as, and pushed to be, secular, conservative, nationalist, and religious, from the perspective of an irresolute woman character. Zooming in on the Turkish historical and social context, this paper argues that Shafak's treatment of polarization also offers an insight into the possibility of depolarization and social unification despite existing challenges. As I shall attempt to demonstrate, Shafak achieves this purpose by using a kind of ecumenical language and applying a strategy in which past and present, and opposite poles are agglomerated in a particular style that we can situate within the multiple modernities approaches.

Keywords Elif Shafak · *Three Daughters of Eve* · Polarization · Turkey · Multiple modernities · Depolarization

I. From Cosmopolitanism to Official Monoculture in the Turkish Republic

The dazzling technological, military, economic, and scientific advances carried out in the West in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries impelled Anatolia to undertake radical reforms of modernization and development which had started in the late Ottoman period and skyrocketed after the establishment of the Turkish

✉ Ali Yiğit
  aliyigit46@gmail.com

1 Faculty of Humanities, Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICON), Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Republic. It is, however, difficult to claim there has been a consensus among Turkish politicians, intellectuals, writers, and the public dealing with the character of the modernization process since modernization movements commenced. As İnci Enginün succinctly put it, there were basically three views regarding modernization in early period of the Republic: "(1) The radical pro-Westerners who clamoured for all that is European, (2) Those who were against everything that came from Europe and, (3) The intellectuals who tried to make a synthesis" [author's translation] (quoted in Oğuzhan, 2007, p. 114). Paralleling this, since the genre of fiction appeared in Turkish literature, numerous Turkish novelists including Ahmet M. Efendi, Halide E. Adıvar, Yakup K. Karaosmanoğlu, Peyami Safa, Reşat N. Güntekin, Ahmet H. Tanpınar, Oğuz Atay and Orhan Pamuk have dealt with the East vs. West and modern vs. traditional dichotomies, the themes of modernity, modernization, secularization and Westernization, and most of these authors along with many others stressed the importance of a synthesis/appropriation rather than a mere imitation or pure rejection of the Western modernity.

The precursors of the first group were represented by influential reformists like the Young Ottomans and Young Turks who argued that the path of development and modernization was embedded in the knowledge and practices of Western civilization. Similarly, the founder of the new Republic, Atatürk, understood "modernization as reaching the level of contemporary civilizations represented by the Westerners". For him, "if a nation wanted to become modernized, it had to be Westernized too" [author's translation] (İnalcık, 2016, p. 62). This view—which, from now on, I will call orthodox modernism—held by the former pro-Western groups including Atatürk exemplifies the postulation of liberal tradition of modernity asserted by Ali Mirsepassi as:

> The liberal tradition of modernity (Montesquieu, Hegel, Weber, Durkheim, Orientalism) privileges Western cultural and moral dispositions, defining modernity in terms of Western cultural and historical experiences. The liberal vision of modernity […] considers Western culture an essential part of modernization, viewing non-Western cultures and traditions as fundamentally hostile to modernity and incompatible with modernization (2003, pp.1-2).

The transfer of secularism or *laïcité* in the early period of the Republic from Europe was also a result of this vision of modernity emphasized by Mirsepassi that idealized European cultural norms in every aspect of life, yet, since its appearance in the Turkish arena, dissensus on this term has never been lacking. For, longstanding controversies in modern Turkey concerning secularism have always understood it differently from both French *laïcité* that aimed at separation of state and religious affairs, and the Anglo-Saxon secularism that guaranteed the religious life independent of state control, irrespective of religious tradition (Topal 2012). As Jenny White rightly observes, "the Turkish term *laiklik* means state control over religion and a strong state role in keeping religion out of the public sphere" (2014, p. 28), which has for sure created deep fissures in the socio-cultural texture of the country.

On the other hand, several Turkish writers as mentioned above and intellectuals like Ziya Gökalp, Cemil Meriç, Şerif Mardin and Nilüfer Göle critically

approached the type of Westernization "that did not go beyond blind imitation of the West" during the early Republican period [author's translation] (Mardin, 1991, p. 21), whereby they converge the multiple modernities approach led by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt. Eisenstadt conceived history of modernity "as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs" (2017, p. 2). Multiple modernities, according to Luis Roniger, "have developed *in a plurality of paths, forms and expressions* [emphasis original] due to distinctive visions, ways of interpretation and representation, yet also various modes of construction of identity, attribution of meaning and projection of power and charisma" (2016, p.128). Therefore, like Eisenstadt (2000a, pp. 2-3) but differently from the founding elites of the Turkish Republic, Roniger does not equalize modernity with Westernization as if they were identical processes. Likewise, Peter Wagner, emphasizing the epistemic, economic and political problèmatiques all societies face during modernization, suggested that "societies need to effectively address these problèmatiques by searching for their own answers" (2011, p. 96). In this sense, Wagner observes that:

> (a) the questions are open to interpretation; (b) there is not any one answer that is clearly superior to all others (even though one answer can certainly be better than others and societies will search for the better ones and/or those that are more appropriate to them); and (c), thus, that several answers can legitimately and usefully be given constitutes the possible plurality of modernity (2011, p. 96).

A citizen of both the Ottoman State and the Republic and a master of modern Turkish literature, Ahmet H. Tanpınar is one of the earlier critics of Turkish modernization solely directed towards the West. Many of his works particularly *Mind at Peace* and *Time Regulation Institute* criticize the radical modernization projects conducted in early period of the Republic. As an alternative to these radical projects, under the influence of the Bergsonian concept of time, Tanpınar offers the idea of *terkib* which means "continuity in change, or the coexistence of evolution and preservation of the past traditions" (Kaya, 2014, p. 10). For him, as Kaya claims, "modernity is not against traditional and spiritual values" (2014, p. 14). Concordantly, one can both wish to be modern and remain spiritual or traditional because one does not necessarily exclude or negate the other.

In the same vein, drawing on the thesis of multiple modernities, the reputed Turkish sociologist Nilüfer Göle suggests a model of non-Western modernity which aims at "decentring the Western model of modernity", "switching from a progressive understanding of time to the simultaneous modernity conception[1]", "observing what is extra modern rather than what is missing", and which criticizes the kind of modernity "grounded on the theses of becoming traditionless" [author's translation] (2000, pp. 164-65). Göle, though accepts that traditions are

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[1] According to this view, "the Western world see non-Western ('others') as not sharing the same level of progress and the same age with themselves", in brief, uncontemporary [author's translation] (Göle, 2000, p. 166), and the author criticizes this point of view in her non-Western modernity thesis.

destined to change, also argues that "modernity and tradition should not be seen as utterly opposite to each other" [author's translation] (2000, p. 24).

In *Three Daughters of Eve* (hereafter *TDE*) written by Turkish-British novelist Shafak, as I shall try to demonstrate, it is the acknowledgement of multiple identities, negotiations of the opposite poles and a unifying language that are presented as an ideal way of experiencing modernity, and more important, proffered as a way of depolarizing, which can be squared with the multiple modernities approach advocated in Turkey by Tanpınar and Göle among others. What is suggested in the fiction of Shafak is neither the earlier radical orthodox modernists who, after placing themselves in the center, ignored the values and holies upheld by the conservatives and other minorities like the Kurdish people, nor the neo-conservative political Islamists who replaced the earlier seculars and leftists, then authoritatively started to impose their own conception of modernity on the country overall, but a version of multiple modernities which emphasizes the need to remember the past peaceful coexistence of numerous religious and ethnically different groups within the country, and which is cemented by the use of a conciliatory unifying language that includes and appeals to all different social, ideological and ethnic groups without one dominating or oppressing the other. This strategy to deal with polarization thus amounts to the minimization of political and ideological pressures on and interference with different sections of the society, and toleration of opposite voices by allowing them to pour their hearts out (as exemplified in the story by three girls with different ideologies and lines of thoughts) thus confront each other, sounds quite significant and timely especially today when Turkish society has polarized more than ever before.

The antithetical interpretations of modernity and modernization have spawned in the young nation unending debates and conflicts mainly between the conservatives and seculars. As a reflection of such dichotomies at the communal level, secular groups fear losing their relatively advantageous position to the conservatives and Islamists, who have been in power since 2002. At the same time, conservatives who were silenced under the Kemalist regime still "fear a return to a repressive secular state" (Jongerden, 2018, p. 261) if leftist or secular groups regain power and impose restrictions as in the earlier Republic. In Turkey's Muslim-majority democracy, the headscarf ban at universities and public institutions had long occupied the center of contentious debates between conservative and secular Kemalists. In the midst of these concerns, people of all groups are nowadays complaining about backsliding of civil and human rights, individual freedoms, and democracy via the concentration of power in the hands of the current AKP (Justice and Development Party) government, which is deeply steeped in political Islam.

Although the history of political and ideological polarization in Turkey dates back to the end of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the new nation, it has recently become increasingly entrenched particularly after the coup attempt in 2016. According to a report by Aydın-Düzgit and Balta, following the coup attempt conducted by a confidential organization in the military, "Turkey's population is currently polarized more than ever over many political and cultural issues, including economic policy, democracy, secularism and foreign policy" (2017, p. 4). E. Fuat Keyman draws attention to the same issue, remarking: "in

fact for the first time in history, Turkey is not only facing the risk of being polarized but also of becoming a more and more divided society" (2014, pp. 19-20).

In polarized societies, according to McCoy et al., "[o]ne camp may become hegemonic and curtail liberties, tend toward authoritarianism or even establish an autocratic regime. At the societal level, citizens become divided spatially and socially. They come to believe they can no longer coexist in the same nation" (2018, p. 19). In Turkey, the Islamist party came into rule with democratic elections, but, according to Özlem İ. Tolunay, has begun to "dominate the key arms of the state in its second period covering the years between 2007 and 2012" (2014, p.49). In the opposite ideological view, members of Turkish society are divided by political rhetoric into loyal patriots and noncompliant traitors who negotiate and act together less than ever.

This locus of intolerance is one of the driving forces behind the bicultural feminist Elif Shafak's recent novel. She expresses her concerns in an interview: "[t]here are only three areas left that still have the potential to bring people from different backgrounds together: art, literature and football" (2014b). She uses her writing to touch on sensitive national issues and make them more explicit and recognizable, thus helping to ameliorate the vehemence of polarization. As an author from a nation where democracy has been frequently interrupted and has thus remained an unfulfilled dream, Shafak has said that she cannot be apolitical but must support the consolidation of Turkish democracy (2015), whereby she reveals her motivation for dealing with political issues. On the other hand, we can't ignore her cosmopolitan identity considering her words:

> I am an Istanbulite. But I am also deeply attached to the Balkans… Equally, I carry many elements in my soul from the Middle East... At the same time, I am a Londoner, a British citizen and I feel deeply and passionately attached to this country where I have found the freedom to write. I am European—by birth, by choice and the values that I uphold. And despite what our politicians have been telling us of late, I would like to think of myself as a citizen of the world, a citizen of this planet, a global soul. I have multiple belongings (Shafak, 2020b).

Accordingly, it comes as no surprise that the Turkish–British author Shafak attempts to harmonize radically different groups in her novel, *TDE*, in which she puts ideologically, nationally and ethnically diverse characters under the same umbrella, pointing to the roots of political, ideological, and social polarization that have been haunting the world and in particular Turkey. Shafak is not alone in taking up such delicate issues; in fact, according to Sibel Irzık, "[t]he Turkish novel has seen itself as a means of social critique and mobilization ever since its beginnings during the last decades of the nineteenth century … [often] exhibit[ing] a preoccupation with social and historical themes" (2003, p. 555). Another significant voice, Pamuk, like Shafak, kept away from mainstream nationalist and secularist approaches while tackling Turkish history, identity, and culture artistically. As Erdağ Göknar expresses,

Pamuk uses the novel form to pose political challenges to the legacies of Turkism (the ideology of Turkish nationalism) that advocated the dismissal of Istanbul cosmopolitanism and the denigration of the Ottoman Islamic past. In so doing, he pits city against nation, championing the multifaceted cultural history of Istanbul over Anatolian nationalism (2012, p. 305).

In the same vein, Zülfü Livaneli, a singer, author, and politician representing secular Turks, grumbled in an interview on Kanal D about the politicians who polarize society for their personal and ideological ends as well as about the past coups and coup perpetrators who impaired the integrity of Turkish society (2016).

In what follows, I will address the controversial recent history and political issues unfolding in Turkey and occasionally in the world as described in *TDE*, reveal how Shafak's art deals with polarization, and in light of multiple modernities approach, focus on her strategy to depolarize despite potential risks.

II. Traces of Polarization in *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016)

As its title and the picture on the book cover (2017 version) that features three girls physically very different from each other suggest, the novel *TDE* refers to people— in its calling them "daughters of Eve" rather than boys or children of Eve, we can sense Shafak's feminist approach—with different or opposite worldviews. Three girls on the cover page are Shirin, the Sinner, Mona, the Believer, and Peri, the Confused (2017a, p. 152), which obviously points to the religion-based polarization in the world and the Middle East. With a universal perspective, Shafak delves into this societal polarization, which basically emanates from different interpretations of religion and political/ideological manipulations of it. Since the central focus is on the Turkish character Peri, her family and Turkish near history, I will concentrate upon the representation of societal polarization mainly in Turkey without overlooking the wider global context.

The novel subtly captures the recent history of Turkey (particularly from the 1980s to 2016) marked by haunting controversies over secularism, conservatism, nationalism, communism, and Islamism, all of which have had a big role in fragmenting society and creating artificial borders between people. Alternating between past and present, Turkey and England, *TDE* tells the story of a middle-aged upper class Turkish woman Peri, whose life intersects in England with Shirin, the daughter of an Iranian expatriate family who has secular worldview, and Mona, an Egyptian American, when she is studying at Oxford University.

Peri's family structure is quite significant in terms of picturing the sharp antagonisms in Turkey and Turkish society: her mother is an Islamist conservative, her father, Mensur is a secular Kemalist—a kind of marriage which can be read as the marriage[2] of the conservatives who claim Ottoman legacy with the

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[2] A similar type of marriage can be found in Halide E. Adıvar's *The Clown and his Daughter*, a novel which mirrors the tumultuous transition period from Ottoman Empire to Republican Turkey in Anatolia, and suggests just like Shafak, the fusion of Eastern mysticism with Western rationality over the marriage of a conservative woman character Rabia and the pianist Peregrini character as a solution to the crises induced by the westernization and secularization attempts in early twentieth century Anatolia.

Western-infatuated seculars who came into power after the establishment of the Republic, which thus represents the composition of the social structure of modern Turkish society—her elder brother, Umut, is a political leftist, and her brother Hakan is an ultranationalist rightist (ultra nationalists or idealists in Turkey are also known with the nickname of the Grey Wolves), while Peri herself is caught in the middle of all searching for an alternative path.

The Sinner and secular Shirin closely resembles the non-religious secularists in Turkey who are at odds with Islam and the religious conservatives, and who constantly despise Islamic symbols, clothing style, rituals, and practices. As an example, irritated by Mona's veiling, Shirin says, "[t]hat's why my parents left Iran: your small piece of cloth sent us into exile!" (2017a, p. 310). Though the novel generally alludes to Turkish domestic issues, at this point it indicates an ingrained problem (veiling) revolving around modernity and modernization in the Middle East. Shafak directly refers to the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 when shariah rules in its Shia version began to be applied and thus those seculars like Shirin's parents who did not want to wear the veil had to leave the country, a typical example of the conflict between the Shia-Islamist understanding of modernity and the Western secular one. In other words, the Iranian revolutionists settled accounts with the previous Shah regime that allowed Iranian women to wear Western-style clothing,[3] a symbol of secular modernity. Almost around the same years, in early 1980s, in Turkey headscarved girls were taking a crack at entering universities wearing their veils. While the former state was forcing women by law to wear headscarf for religious concerns, the latter was prohibiting wearing an Islamic style of clothing, finding it unmodern. In this respect,

> Iran is like a mirror or a distorted mirror of Turkey because it reflects the implementation of a purified official public sphere, but it is a counter-reflection because Turkish secularist elites see the authoritarianism of their "Other" in the mirror of Iran, and Turkish Sunni Islamic politicians see their sectarian Other, namely Shia fundamentalism, in Iranian Islamism (Kömeçoğlu, 2016, p. 46).

What Shafak criticizes is that modernity or contemporaneity meant and still means for some secular groups to imitate the West in every aspect. Depicting these female characters who have become victims of different interpretations of Islam and modernity in two different countries, Shafak's novel apparently incites us as the readers to look for an alternative interpretation of Islam, in which both veiled and unveiled can live together and an alternative interpretation of modernity, and in which both veiled and unveiled can study at the same university. With a good or bad grace, we find ourselves at the door of Eisenstadt's multiple modernities approaches interpreted in Turkey by Göle as non-Western modernity, in which one does not need to compromise on one's belief, one's education or anything else in order to become modern.

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[3] "Before the Revolution, a lot of women were wearing Western-style clothes like tight fitting jeans, mini-skirts, and campshirts" [author's translation] ("Fotoğraflarla" [With Photos], 2019).

As the girls quarrel over who is more oppressed in the Middle East, the seculars or the Muslims, Mona, whose past experiences are similar to that of thousands of Turkish girls in the near past, mentions how she has been mistreated for wearing the veil and accuses the secularists of oppressing behaviour toward pious Muslims. Mona, like Peri's mother Selma, represents pious Muslims who endeavor to maintain their religious rituals, customs, and strong bonds with their faith, which often disturbs Shirin and other secular, non-practicing Muslims. Similar reactions to traditional conservatives have been frequent in the history of Turkey. For example, the former president Süleyman Demirel, for fear that secularism could be endangered, stated that "veiled students who want to study at university should go to Saudi Arabia" [author's translation] (2012). In another example, the presidential candidacy of Abdullah Gül was heavily opposed by the Kemalist party (CHP) for fear that his headscarved wife could jeopardize *laiklik*. Both reactions indeed embody the Western-centered orthodox modernity represented by Atatürk and his followers, which is incongruous with the visibility of Islamic symbols and rituals in public sphere and thus seeks to wipe them from the public sphere.

In another exchange, Mona objects to Shirin's perception of her: "You despise … me. For you, I'm either backward or brainwashed. Oppressed. Ignorant" (2017a, p. 312), which reminds us of the Western-centered, almost Orientalist discourses used by secular Kemalists for religious people in the early decades of the Republic. As Melda Yeğenoğlu observes, secular Kemalists then "aimed to establish a new republic out of what was regarded to be a religious and backward society by the secularist elite", which inevitably "resulted in the formation of a Western-looking new republican elite group, who view those who do not conform to the new social and cultural decorum and punctilios as backward, traditional and Islamic" (2011, p. 227). Furthermore, as a person directed by concrete facts and secular values, Shirin finds her prayers futile, if not superstitious. Similarly, in Turkey, since the 1930s, there have always been secular Kemalists, who, like Shirin, disapproved of praying and frequenting mosques. This acknowledges the partial success of *laiklik* projects by Atatürk and the founding elite to create a non-religious young generation and a secular community who are alienated from Islamic prayers, mosques, and other Islamic practices (Çelik, 2018, p. 200).

During the frequent arguments between Selma and Mensur, Selma gathers an increasing influence within the family indirectly in the country and goes on a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia by herself, bringing numerous holy staff and gifts, and lays the holy rug she brought from Saudi Arabia just below the portrait of Atatürk at home, all of which demonstrate that "religion has in the modern context become a form of self-expression" (White, 2014, p. 5) for Selma and the conservative Muslims particularly for those political Islamists who want to make Islamic symbols and motifs more visible in public sphere. Shafak deftly locates the scene of Selma's pilgrimage in the series of events that pass in the 1990s when the political wing (the Refah Party) of conservative Muslims gained strength in Turkey and eventually came into rule by the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan. As Göle notes, "in the mid-1990s, the Refah Party transferred the Islamic sections who had gained countenance and power through education, market and media into public sphere" [author's translation] (2000, p.14), which would soon lead to the 1997 military memorandum also

called postmodern coup perpetrated by the Turkish military leadership on February 28, 1997 against then government led by Islamist Prime Minister Erbakan. Therefore the rise and progress of the Islamic party along with the appearance of conservative Muslims in the public sphere were temporarily impeded by the secular Kemalists until 2002. Interestingly enough, Selma marries off her son Hakan according to her own ideological stance, and outwits or silences her husband in 2000 when the Islamic right restarted to loom large in Turkish politics. Selma, who represents those suppressed or alienated women of the Middle East and particularly of Turkey "in the preceding secular public space" (Amineh & Eisenstadt, 2016, p. 172), thus projects the increasing success of religious conservatives in the politics and rule of Turkey in 2002, which results in "the reshaping of the social and cultural construction of women, and the construction of a new public identity for women rooted in Islamist vision" (Amineh & Eisenstadt, 2016, p. 171). Another example that shows the ascendancy of political Islam in the Middle East and Turkey is the Shirin-Mona dialogue that takes place exactly in 2002: "You have millions standing with you. Governments. Conventional religion. Mainstream media" (2017a, p. 310). Shirin's observation is relevant to several Middle Eastern countries, but certainly to Turkey, where almost all media organs have been taken under state control, and secular and opposing voices have largely been suppressed on a vast scale (Rethink, 2014, p. 16), which caused the country to be placed in the 152nd rank according to World Freedom Press Index (RSF, 2021).

Despite Selma's rising potency, the winner in the debates between Mensur and Selma over religion and science remains uncertain throughout the story, just like the never-ending disputes over secularism in the country and the world. *TDE* thus forces us to question the coerced choice between God/religion and science. Mensur, representing orthodox modernists, reveals his dependence on scientific doctrines, advising his daughter, "The civilised world, Pericim, was not built on unfounded beliefs. It was built on science, reason and technology. You and I belong in that world" (2017a, p. 53). Mensur's claims evoke both the Kemalist line of secular thought and the positivist materialist philosophy that cast religion aside and replace it with science because it sees science as only valid knowledge and rejects "metaphysical inquiries" like religion and belief (Long, 2000, p 74). The significant positivist mathematician and philosopher W. K. Clifford claimed "traditional religious beliefs must also be founded on evidence and if they are not so founded, we have no right to hold them" (quoted in Long, 2000, p. 75), which parallels Mensur's above given words.

In a similar manner, Peri says, "God was always a contentious issue in our house. Or religion, I should say" (2017a, p. 183). Although the house symbolizes Turkey, it can also be taken as the symbol of the world divided into countless factions. That the representative of conservative Muslims in the novel, Selma strongly adheres to her faith and attends Islamic traditions at times bothers secularist Mensur.

As an assiduous adherent of the Kemalist ideology, Mensur warns his daughter against the threat that may come from conservatives:

Remember, if it weren't for him, we'd have been like Iran. 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! (2017a, p. 18).

Thanking Atatürk for establishing a country unlike neighboring Islamic states, Mensur exposes his deep fear of the severe punishment he would face on the presumption of a shariah rule, reminiscent of Shirin's fear of the shariah regime in Iran. Indeed, this fear can be extended to other Middle Eastern countries and to the whole world where secular Muslims live. Mensur's fear exemplifies the claim by McCoy et al. that in a polarized environment "each camp questions the moral legitimacy of the others, viewing the opposite camp and its policies as an existential threat to their way of life or the nation as a whole" (2018, p. 19).

Averse to Mensur's secular orthodox modernist position, Selma obviously stands for conservative Islamists who conceive modernism not directly as secularism or irreligiousness but rather as freedom of choices and styles. However, it would be naïve to locate her and thus the political Islamists she represents within the multiple modernities approach which celebrates multiplicity of cultural programs mainly because Selma leaves neither Peri nor Hakan free to make their own choices with their own lives. She unremittingly tries to pull Peri to her conservative views by teaching her prayers to recite before sleep, taking her to a *hodja*—a mosque *imam* or a Muslim religious leader—to be exorcized, and advising her to protect her chastity when she goes to Oxford. As a result, Peri finds her mother too superstitious and her father too rational and indifferent to religion, as she writes in her diary:

Is there really no other way, no other space for things that fall under neither beliefs nor disbeliefs—neither pure religion nor pure reason? … It's as if I'm searching for a new language. An elusive language spoken by no one but me…. (2017a, p. 57).

Another example of polarization stemming from interpretation of religion is the declaration of Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb within the same country, which Shafak places in the context of the family:

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-harb—the realm of submission and the realm of war. Religion had plummeted into their lives as unexpectedly as a meteor, and created a chasm, separating the family into two clashing camps (2017a, p. 29).

Having an extensive meaning in Islamic history and jurisprudence as regards what is permissible and required in each, the concepts of "Dar al-Islam" and "Dar al-Harb" not only reveal the extent of division within the family, but also in the whole nation and the world. Traditionally, these terms refer to countries ruled according to Islamic law, rules, and principles, and non-Islamic countries respectively. Yet, because Turkey adopted Swiss law in 1926, and the law of the harmonization code of the European Union in recent decades, these terms have been blurred and it is difficult to characterize Turkey as either Dar al-Islam or Dar al-Harb. Although such terms have lost their appositeness for modern Turkey, they continue to be relevant in the agenda of secular and conservative Muslims as a result of the long-lasting

political struggles between these groups as they wish to impose their own ideology in the guise of modernity on the country. In the last line of the quote above is also obvious the religion-based division that inflicted the world. Suffice it to remember the 2005 London bombings and 2015 Parris attacks organized by radical Islamic organizations like ISIL targeting innocent Western civilians; and the Christchurch mosque shooting in 2019 and the burnings of the Holy Quran in Sweden and Denmark perpetrated by extreme rightists, targeting innocent Muslim populations, all of which explicitly demonstrate the global extent of societal polarization.

Peri's two brothers stand for two different ideological and political fronts: communism and ethnic nationalism which have worldwide followers. In the context of Turkey, the once popular ideology of left-wing communism is represented by Umut, a pallid character whose ideology was weakened by the 1980 coup investigations, imprisonments, and torture. For the official governments of the 1970s and 1980s who saw leftist intellectuals and ideas as "the most dangerous threat" to the unity and security of the country (Freely, 2009, p. 48), which reminds us of the anti-communist policies and witch-hunts in the US spearheaded by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy. In contrast to Umut, Hakan embodies the ultranationalist ideology. Throughout the republican period, competition and conflict between such groups as nationalists, leftists, and minorities (like the Kurdish people) have never ceased. In fact, the ethnic nationalism represented by Hakan in Turkey is most often understood as loyalty to ultranationalist political parties who boast of their Turkish ethnic origin, blame foreign interference for Turkish domestic problems, exalt symbols such as the Turkish flag, and shout patriotic slogans at the funerals of martyrs. In global scale, it is possible to find both ultranationalist groups and extreme rightists who stage similar demonstrations as partly mentioned before. In *TDE*, this kind of nationalistic perception is condemned for lack of scholarly and intellectual basis. Hakan is at odds with studying at a university and reading books:

> Every week he revealed the traitors of the nation—the rotten apples that, if not taken care of, could putrefy the entire basket: Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Kurds, Alevis … there wasn't a single ethnic group that a Turk could trust, other than another Turk (2017a, p. 68).

This quote bluntly demonstrates how the atmosphere of coexistence is scuppered by extreme rightists/nationalists. Although this example refers to Turkey, the same problem persists in many parts of the world including Europe. For this reason, Shafak says, "I see nationalism as the most dangerous inclination of our times" (2003, p. 57). Because of her lack of support for Turkish nationalism and patriotism, Shafak was prosecuted for "insulting Turkishness" in her *Bastard of Istanbul*. In his article on nationalism and perception of Turkishness in Shafak, Kırımlı evaluates the author's position as neutral, neither supporting Turks nor denigrating them, but rather focusing on universal understanding among human beings (2010, p. 279).

In such a polarized family environment, Peri is forced to choose a side, "mother's defiant religiosity" or "father's defiant materialism," (2017a, p. 20) or her elder brothers' leftist or nationalist ideologies. Yet, none of them appeals to Peri, who is inclined more to seek and adopt a third way between her parents' attitudes. She is "The Turkish hero, caught between tradition and modernity who fails to actively

engage in the 'social reality' of her own time" (Glassford & Kara, 2020, p. 464). Thus, through Peri's ambivalence and scepticism, the author suggests questioning the possibility of a third option for the people in Turkey and the world who are beleaguered by communal impositions.

Like its characters in conflict, the dominant atmosphere of the novel bristles with traces of polarization in Turkey. The chapter "The Last Supper" terrifically shows it:

> But things had changed dramatically over the last years. Colours congealed into blacks-and-whites. There were increasingly fewer marriages in which— like that of her mother and father—one spouse was devout and the other not. Nowadays the society was divided into invisible ghettos. Istanbul resembled less a metropolis than an urban patchwork of segregated communities. People were either "staunchly religious" or "staunchly secularist": and those who had somehow kept a foot in both camps, negotiating the Almighty and the times with equal fervour, had either disappeared or become eerily quiet (2017a, p. 92).

According to a recent report by Emre Erdoğan, seventy eight percent of people surveyed disaffirm "their daughters marry a supporter of another party" (2018, p. 1), which legitimizes the fictional portrait of the decline of marriages between different ideological and political views due to societal polarization. The excerpt also reflects how Istanbul, which "has long been a site of geographical, cultural, and historical interactions between Asia and Europe" (Bulamur, 2011, p. 2), has lost its cosmopolitanism and been reduced to a place of a few opposed camps, with no room for more nuanced views.

In addition, during the "Last Supper," while the elites of Turkey discuss democracy, an architect says it is not a system suitable for Turkey, arguing, "I don't believe in democracy…. Democracy is a loss of time and money" (2017a, p. 131). The architect, whose "firm had made huge profits from construction projects across the city" (2017a, p. 131), instead advocates dictatorship, finding it benevolent. The author refers here to the close relationship between government and business. As Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu inform us, the present "AKP government has created a loyal business class through an elaborate system of rewards and punishment since 2002", by distributing "rents and resources to its supporters, transferring capital from its opponents to its supporters, and disciplining dissidents in business circles" (2018, p. 349). Consequently, a new pole has emerged between Turkish business elites; those who are close to the government and those who are not, which reinforces Aydın-Düzgit's argument that Turkey's political and business elites recognize that polarization takes precedence over democracy (2019, p. 18).

Due to rising polarization, the modernization and Westernization reforms that were supposed to raise Turkey to a modern democratic Western nation have to some extent ended in tears. This failure is expressed in the opening of the story: "[e]veryone once said that Turkey had great potential—and look how that had turned out. So she had comforted herself that her potential for darkness, too would amount to nothing in the end" (2017a, p. 3). In the Republic, it was sincerely believed that Turkey would become a leading, exemplary secular democracy in the Middle East thanks to Westernizing and modernizing reforms (Somer, 2019, p. 44). Yet, the reverse has

proved true over almost 100 years of history, with frequent coups (1960, 1971, 1980, 1997) and finally the failed 2016 coup attempt, each of which shook Turkish democracy sharply and heavily furthering societal polarization.

III. Deepening Polarization

Published just before the coup attempt of 2016, from which the veil of mystery has not been entirely lifted yet, *TDE* describes the pressures, tortures, and silencing policies employed by earlier Turkish governments, which can also be found in the histories of many other Third World countries like Iran and Egypt. In Iran, since 2000, "independent newspapers have been almost completely destroyed", not to mention "the systematic arrests of journalists, writers and intellectuals in the following years, and the treatment of political prisoners" (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Similarly in Egypt, which has been scarred by coups like Turkey, since the military takeover in 2013, "more than a thousand people have died in Egyptian custody" (Yee, 2022), along with the countless men tortured in prisons. What's common to these nations and Turkey is that those who supported an opposite ideology to the government, criticized it or took part in anti-government protests/demonstrations were and are still terribly punished by the authorities.

In Turkey, both during and after coups and coup attempts, pressure on intellectuals, journalists, writers and academics, leftists, communists, and rightists has continued, leading to intensification of already existing polarization. Even if some scholars like Jongerden identify short periods of relief from this pressure between 1999–2006 (the "golden years") and 2007–2013 (the "slowing down" period), the last coup attempt in 2016 was initiated opportunistically, to sideline and purge Kemalists and secularists and help the conservative party take control of the state (Jongerden, 2018, p. 265). Regardless of which group takes control under such circumstances, however, it is chronic political ambiguity and polarization that win, because "[t]he parties that should be subjects of reconciliation become the subjects, reason and carriers of conflicts and social polarization" (Ağırdır, 2010, p. 3).

Harking back to the 1980s, when the country was under authoritarian rule, and "the society was divided into militantly opposed secular and Muslim forces" (White, 2014, p.4), the narrator of *TDE* criticizes the pressure on the writers of this period: "[t]hey were free to say whatever they pleased so long as they didn't criticize the state and its rules, the religion and the Almighty, and, above all, the sovereign" (2017a, p. 15). During this period, both leftists and rightists were arrested and tortured in prisons by the putschists (the Kemalist junta) who were then seeing themselves as the real owners/protectors of the secular order within the country. Following the coup, hundreds of thousands of people were judged, imprisoned and tortured in different ways on the grounds that they were not sharing the same worldview with the coup plotters. In fact, one of the chief reasons (as confessed by the military junta) for this military coup was the Jerusalem Meeting organized in Konya by a conservative party led by Erbakan. As an author who has always fought to give voice to the silenced and bring the groups in periphery such as "marginalized, underserved, disenfranchised and centered" (Shafak, 2020a, p. 11) to the center, just

like the alternative modernists attempt to decenter the Western-centered conception of modernism, Shafak highlights the tyranny the young leftist Umut was exposed to so as to make his screams be heard by the majority. The intolerance of differing views and ideologies is verbalized by the policemen of the then-regime: "[y]ou are a Muslim Turk, your father is a Muslim Turk, your mother is a Muslim Turk…. What is it to you, huh, all this foreign crap? … We are all Muslim and we are all Turks" (2017a, p. 27). To the point of fact, these words by the policeman account for why the doors to alternative identities, cultures and alternative world views were closed just like it happened during the early years of the Republic. Yet, this time, it is not the Muslims or Turks who are persecuted but the leftists. From here, though, his interrogation proceeds to the severe and almost unbearable: "[w]hen the electrodes were attached to his testicles and the voltage was doubled, he admitted to being the leader of a cell that was plotting a series of assassinations of state officials" (2017a, p. 30).

Abiding by then official orders, the police try to silence Umut's opposition through torture and oppression. These tactics of fear also serve to deter others, as in Shafak's "Hide-and-Seek", where a grandmother advises her granddaughter, "You must hold your tongue. If you talk too much, your tongue will bleed" (2003, p. 178). In an interview: Shafak blatantly expresses this grim reality: "The downside in Turkey is that words are heavy. We do not have fully fledged freedom of speech or freedom of imagination. Words can get you into trouble. Every writer, every journalist, every poet knows this deep inside" (2014b). Turkish people, as Shafak underlines here, are aware of the fact that articulating what is "banned" or "unwarrantable" by the government/official authorities may get one into trouble. This knowledge transferred from generation to generation becomes more and more normalized and internalized, a case that without fail impedes democracy and freedom of speech being firmly established within Turkey and any country.

In the "Last Supper", the secular mini-skirted girlfriend of a famous journalist brings the overbearing pressure she feels into light: "[y]ou go and live abroad in comfort…we're the ones who deal with the extremism and fundamentalism and sexism…It's my freedoms that're in danger…" (2017a, p. 317). Her words indeed reflect the gender-based polarization numerous women in Turkey, the Middle East and the world particularly in the Third World have been suffering. Suffice it to remember the decision taken by the Turkish government to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, which is "a legal instrument to tackle violence against women, covering not only domestic violence but other forms of violence against women including psychological and physical abuse, sexual harassment, rape, crimes committed in the name of so-called "honour", stalking, and forced marriage" (Council of Europe, 2021), and the poor track record of the country in women's murder.[4] Therefore, the worries that the secular lady expressed above have a justifiable ground. Although veiled conservatives complained about the restrictions on their freedom in the

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[4] Recent reports about femicide in Turkey state that 217 were murdered by men in 2021 (SCF, 2022), and in 2022 the toll rose to 327 (Buyuk, 2022), similarly, the scene in many other Middle Eastern nations is no better than that of Turkey.

past, today secular women voice the same complaint, which demonstrates how one camp, as McCoy et al. assert, came to be hegemonic and trammel the liberties of out-of-faction members of society (2018, p. 19). Accordingly, the deep-seated strife between religious fundamentalists and secularists over painting the country with their own ideological colors still persists and afflicts individual liberties.

These bitter experiences and events of recent history have driven the country toward a narrow submission. Although decades ago Turks were silenced through torture, today, Shafak states, they are silenced in different ways: lots of TV channels, newspapers, and radio stations have been closed (Shafak, 2017b). Most people in Turkish media, academia, the intelligentsia, and non-governmental organizations have chosen either to remain silent or to turn a blind eye to unfair applications or misdeeds within the country. However, Shafak articulates and criticizes the polarization and its malignant results in her fiction, essays, and interviews, reflective of her zeal for a depolarized Turkey and world.

IV. The Path to Depolarization Despite Potential Risks

Social and political polarization in contemporary Turkey and its bitter fruit for most of the community is demonstrated by many books, essays, magazines, newspapers, and official reports. While politics can deal with problems related to polarization and coexistence, Shafak's fiction and non-fiction works, both rife with pluralistic and embracing messages, can be regarded as an unofficial step addressing this serious problem.

Shafak particularly identifies the origin of these reiterated social conflicts in the ability to forget, which she considers prevalent in Turkish society: "[w]e Turks are good at amnesia" (2017a, p. 285). She employs the trope of amnesia extensively to highlight national polarization, as in the personality of Ömer in her *Saint of Incipient Insanities*, who repeatedly listens to a song about amnesia. It goes "*[d]o you suffer from long-term memory loss?*"and Ömer shouts: "*I don't remember…*"(Shafak, 2004, p. 283). According to Shafak, "[o]ur historical consciousness is scant and therefore we cannot learn lessons from history" (2014a). Depolarization requires overcoming this mindset. By amnesia, Shafak means ignorance of the pluralistic values and policies of the Ottomans, Sufism, and ignorance of the bitter events and tragedies that occurred in the country in the late Ottoman and early republican periods. She does not favor or exalt the past; instead, she maintains that "[t]he past is important. You should not be trapped in it. But you shouldn't be ignorant of it either" (2014a). In this fashion, she is in rapport with both the multiple modernities approach and the thesis of *terkib* that Tanpınar advocated. The vantage point of Tanpınar is succinctly put by Kaya as:

Unlike the supporters of Turkey's modernization/Westernization in the *Tanzimat* period and in the early Republic, who insistently ignored the past and wanted to adopt "the new" without considering the in/compatibility of the new with the cultural wealth in Turkey, Tanpınar wanted to make the bond between

the past and the present stronger; in other words, he was not a defender of the past for its own sake (2014, p. 98).

Tanpınar's notion of *terkib* particularly holds true for keeping the delicate balance Shafak underlines between the past and present, between tradition and modernity in a way to preserve a multicultural policy without letting one group override the other.

With a slight difference from Shafak, Mardin identifies as the root source of polarization the split between the center represented by the founding elite, supporters of the republican order, and secular intellectuals; and the periphery, represented by more conservative groups and other minority groups who wanted change, which then culminated in coups like that of 1960 (1973, p. 186). Mardin's significant observation, for sure, retained its appropriateness until the Republican center or secularist status quo was seriously challenged by the advent of the rule in 2002 of a conservative party (AKP). The AKP government, representing what was formerly the periphery has now become the new center, establishing its authority in all institutions. This translates especially for the secular groups the repetition of previous political and social conflicts in the new millennium.

As a solution to Turkey's and the world's long and turbulent polarization, Shafak frequently asserts the need to retrieve a cosmopolitan cultural and social policy, following the Sufi way of love and universal acceptance which is both traditional and modern. Like several other Turkish authors, including Ahmet Ümit, Sinan Yağmur, and Melehar K. Ürkmez, adopting the tolerant, universalist philosophy of the Persian Sufi poet and Islamic scholar Rumi, Shafak brings important recommendations in her fiction to address polarization in Turkey and the whole world. While undertaking this task, Shafak offers a culturally ecumenical language that is described by Elana Furlanetto as *Ottomanesque* (2017, p. 263), as an alternative to the monolithic nationalist model. To this end, she creates the hybrid character of Professor Azur who supports multivocalities in the world in a more democratic setting (England) so as to open the long-haunting controversial (religious) issues to debate. The description of the seminar to be held by Azur, seemingly the authorial voice—if we look at the explanations of the author who, on a TV program stated that "she often prefers to give her own messages and views through male characters" [author's translation] (Afşar, 2016)—resplendently exemplifies it:

> The seminar does NOT promote any particular religion or adhere to any particular view. Whether you are Jewish, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, Muslim, Tibetan Buddhist, Mormon, Bahai, agnostic, atheist, New Age practitioner or about to initiate your own cult, you will have an equal say. In the lecture room we hold our discussions sitting in a circle so that everyone is equidistant from the centre (2017a, p.205).

This excerpt can quite plausibly be syncretized with the tenets of the multiple modernities approach Wagner listed as:

> (a) the questions are open to interpretation; (b) there is not any one answer that is clearly superior to all others (even though one answer can certainly be better than others and societies will search for the better ones and/or those that are

more appropriate to them); and (c), thus, that several answers can legitimately and usefully be given constitutes the possible plurality of modernity (2011, p. 96).

For Azur does not impose any kind of ideology or system on his students, but appreciates all religions/beliefs and world views equally rendering each student an equal opportunity to live and develop his/her own model, which is congruous with the "plurality of modernity" underlined by Wagner. Thus, Shafak brings characters with opposing beliefs together under the same frame so that they can converse closely with each other, but she leaves the conclusion to the reader. Such a gathering of the opposites around the same table in a circle confirms the multiplicity of the "center" cherished by multiple modernities. For Shafak, "the circular form contains positive attributes and may eradicate all sorts of hierarchies" (Atayurt-Fenge, 2017, p. 287) via dismantling established centers and hegemonies, which means in Eisenstadt's terms "the reconstruction of the center" (2017, p. 9). The shape of the circle also recalls the whirling, circular movement of Sufi dervishes, who aspire to reach unity with the divine, before whom all are equal. In this way Shafak pushes her Turkish readers to defy their amnesia and to reawaken the mentality and philosophy of the Sufism that has existed in Anatolia since the advent of Seljuks. If reawakening Sufi tradition in Anatolia is construed within the time formulation of Tanpınar who was inspired by Bergson's notion of pure duration,[5] it will be immediately clear that both authors indicate almost the same address for co-existence and an unpolarized world. Actually, many of her works like *The Forty Rules of Love* and *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* promote cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism rooted in the Sufi way of reconciliation. Further, the cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism Shafak supports are resolutely practical and concrete, "a manifestation of a multicultural lifestyle that is formed and enacted through local, cultural, and ethnic aspects of an individual" (Şimşek, 2016, p. 160). Through this notion of multiculturalism, Shafak aspires in her fiction and nonfiction to create a peaceful harmony and reconciliation of social differences.

Leftists like Umut and rightists and nationalists like Hakan, secularists like Mensur and religious conservative Muslims like Selma are all agglomerated, and are granted opportunities to defend their views in the presence of their challengers, leaving the final resolution to the reader. In other words, their fictional co-existence serves the installation of a real liberal democratic stage as argued by Kietzman who, hinging on Bhabha's counter narratives conceptualization, declares that "for a truly liberal democratic nation to exist, women, secularists, Islamists, communists, and Kurdish militants must first emerge as individuals who are then free to seek social and textual affiliation with others" (2010, p. 325), which can be squared with what Eisenstadt professed as "multiple modernities were propounded not only in different nation-states, communist and fascist movements, and later on fundamentalist

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[5] It refers to "the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states", and thus "forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole" (Bergson, 2001, p. 100).

and communal-religious ones, but each of these projects also had an international dimension" (2000b, p. 593).

The incessant confrontations between Mensur and Selma evoke the perpetual discussions between secularists and conservatives in Turkey. The more Mensur attacks religion and traditions, the more Selma stakes a claim to them. The more Selma criticizes Mensur for not obeying religious rules and principles, the more Mensur digs in. This dialectical method is expected to lead the discussions to a plausible or possible end. This end in the Mensur-Selma confrontation seems to be the acknowledgement of the presence of the opposite side, if not confirmation of its mentality and philosophy. This method of social harmonization can be interpreted as the result of "conflict" then "staying in purgatory," finally evolving into the "accordance" phase that Esra Sazyek claims to operate in most of Shafak's works for the sake of a multicultural configuration of society (2013, p. 1222) that we can relate with the emergence of multiple communities and minorities in their own way. Besides, notwithstanding long skirmishes between them, their marriage is one of its rare examples, which indicates the very possibility of such marriages no matter how fragmented the society has become.

Just as *ashure* pudding in *The Bastard of Istanbul* and chocolate in *SII* symbolize the mixture of different tastes in food with the purpose of appreciating plural identities and ideologies, "supper" in *TDE* represents the merging of the poles in the Turkish melting pot: "[t]onight's gathering, therefore, was unusual in that it brought together people from opposite camps" (2017a, 92). At this gathering for supper of the Turkish bourgeoisie are present the representatives of diverse ideologies and mentalities: a state-supported businessman, a media baron, secular Kemalist women, pious men like Peri's husband Adnan, and Peri, the piggy in the middle. In harmony with the varied personalities and identities of the participants, the dining hall is decorated with "Italian furniture, English chandeliers, French curtains, Persian carpets, and a plethora of ornaments and cushions with Ottoman motifs" (2017a, p. 91), thus qualifying as half Oriental half European, in a style that vexes no side. Even if it is implied in the text that such meetings of opposite camps are few because of the depth of polarization, the atmosphere they share around the same table, facing and challenging one another, promises hope with respect to overcoming divisions, or at least accepting and affirming the obstinate existence of opposite poles and tolerating each other's satirical and sometimes cynical voices.

The other supper in the novel takes place at Azur's home on New Year's Eve as a coalescing organization, which can also be evaluated within the same category as the last supper of the Turkish bourgeoisie. The dinner companions consist of "a mixed bunch of scholars and students from various disciplines" (2017a, p. 282) at a table behind which are majolica tiles of different prophets and saints, which convey the message that it is possible to be at peace with different religions and worldviews on a global scale. Thus, the images of supper meetings within the novel point to the possibility of coexistence and reining in social polarization at home, in Turkey and on a larger scale in the world.

In Peri's in-between, questioning character, which evokes the critical perspective endorsed by Tanpınar toward Turkish modernization and reforms, Shafak draws a model that tends to harmonize or depolarize not only Turkey but

the world. Her tolerant attitude makes her able to see political issues, familial relations, traditions, and different ideologies with a critical and equitable eye. Throughout the book, this colorful aspect of Peri is emphasized. For example, when she goes to Oxford, she takes books of both national and international writers: "[i]n truth, Peri read both local and world literature. Her tendency was to lose herself in any books that captured her imagination and awakened her curiosity, regardless of the nationality of its author" (2017a, p. 111). In this sense, Peri resembles the assertive Alegre in *SII*, who remarks,

> This looks like the case […] where if you were born a Mexican, you try to live like an Arab for one year, the following year like somebody else, selecting another from the "Others." Change your name, identity. Don't have a name and identity. Only when we stop identifying ourselves with the identities granted to us, only when we are able to achieve this, can we eliminate all kinds of racism, sexism, nationalism, fundamentalism and everything that divides us into different groups and subalterns, putting borders among people (Shafak, 2004, p.167).

Alegre empathizes with others and emphasizes the insignificance of national identity to avoid the impact of all kinds of radicalism, and polarization since they create borders among people.

Perplexed and hesitant, Peri is burdened with a mission to keep a middle path in an attempt to pacify opposite poles. She begins this pacification with religion because it is one of the chief topics on which conservative Islamists, secular Kemalists, and leftists have not been able to agree upon for long:

> But Peri was determined to a find a way. For she had come to believe through some twisted logic of her own that if she were to bring together her mother's Creator and her father's Creator, she might be able to restore harmony between her parents. With some kind of agreement as to what God was or was not, there would be less tension in the Nalbantoğlu household, even across the world.

For the rest of the story, this desire to change people's perception of God becomes more and more puissant as Peri interrogates polarization at home and in the world. With a staunch belief in reconciling people, Peri continues, "As for me, I would love to change God. Now that would be something. Wouldn't everyone in the world benefit from that?" (2017a, p.128). Peri's line of thought seems to ratify Shafak's perspective of impartial love of religion and God that is embedded in Sufism. She even at times resembles the Sufi hero in a poem by Rumi:

> I am neither a Moslem nor a Hindu
> I am not Christian, Zoroastrian, nor Jew
> I am neither of the West nor of the East (Furlanetto, 2013, p. 202),

Here, the boundaries of multiple identities and thus multiple modernities once more converge on each other. For unbelonging to any religion or location here does not mean repudiating them all, but ignoring them in order to avoid religious and ethnic polarization. By this means, the beauty of the whole will be

foregrounded, which can again be related with Wagner's argument; "there is not any one answer that is clearly superior to all others" (2011, p. 96).

Correlatively, Peri even rejects the religious identification given her by her parents at birth saying she would have chosen "undecided" if she had been asked which religion to choose. Thus, she transmits the unimportance of religious labels given at birth in order to avoid the religious arguments at home and abroad. In one of her articles, Shafak, referring to the dervishes in the Sufi fraternity who used to live in poor conditions in a *tekke* or *zaviya* to seek intimacy with God (Kasapoğlu & Ecevit, 2004, p. 155), underlines that: "[f]or the dervish, as Ibn Arabi stated, there was no religion more sublime than the religion of love" (Shafak, 2005), which eliminates individually exalted faiths and religions. Another Turkish master of fiction, Tanpınar, not so different from Shafak, in his most read and studied novel, *A Mind at Peace*, prioritized the soothing voice of *ney*[6] played by Emin Dede while melting sharp points of individual tendencies in search for wholeness cherished dear in Sufism (Ertuğrul, 2009, pp. 639-44).The point is, then, to make compromises in personal or schismatical dogmas in order to open space for supra-religions, and supra-ideologies but all-embracive universal values and peaceful coexistence: if Mensur and Selma, Shirin and Mona, secularists and Islamists, leftists and rightists were to cast their most dearly held ideologies and views aside at least for a while, then perhaps they would have a chance to enjoy a peaceful coexistence within the family, Turkey, and the world.

In his dialogue with Peri, setting out from a discussion on the concepts of "self and other," the learned Professor Azur, coming from a British father and a Chilean mother and seemingly the mouthpiece of the author, explores the matter of multiple identities constructively:

> We can find our true selves only in the faces of the other. The absolutists, they venerate purity, we hybridity. They wish to reduce everyone down to a single identity. We strive for the opposite: to multiply everyone into a hundred belongings, a thousand beating hearts (2017a, p. 267).

Azur first makes a distinction between his flexible position and those absolutists and emphasizes the need for multiple belongings which is possible solely with evading monolithic approaches to culture and identity. Peri yearns for the Professor, who resembles the knowledgeable guide Dürri Baba in *The Mystic*, where he leads the young Pinhan to confront all examples of shatterings and insufficiencies in life (Akar, 2015). In this regard, Azur presents a perfect model not only for the confused Peri but also for her country and the whole world.

The last but not least example that embodies depolarization in the text is the shift observed in the lives of conservatives in modern Turkey who lean towards a secular lifestyle. Numerous studies propound that in Turkey since the transition to a secular government model in 1923, but particularly with the coming of the AKP into rule, conservatives (especially women affiliated with AKP) have tilted toward a more secular and modern life in their preference for clothing, leisure activities, and many other

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[6] *Ney* is an end-blown reed flute which is used to play *Mevlevi* music.

aspects of social life, which reflects the "adoption of aesthetic values of the Western culture" by conservative circles in the country [author's translation] (Barış, 2014, p. 224). Shafak notes this change: "In the past, dog owners had been an almost identical lot—modern, urban, secularist, Westernized. Since conservative Muslims regarded dogs as makrooh, detestable, they were not keen to share their living space with canines" (2017a, p. 236). However, today, numerous pious Turkish Muslims own and feed their dogs at home because "[o]bviously religious Muslims are changing" (2017a, p. 237). Viewed from a wider angle, this change in Turkey exemplifies a sort of cultural globalization that relies on "the universalization of western values and cultural patterns and at the same time the revitalization of local values and traditions", which "paves the way to the universalization of western modernity and the emergence of alternative modernities" (Keyman & Koyuncu, 2005, p. 111).

The project of depolarization in the novel is, however, accompanied by risks and refractions. For instance, just as the elites in Turkey are entertaining themselves, the friendly and unifying atmosphere of the supper is overshadowed by an external threat whether from an "organized mafia, ordinary robbers or terrorists" (2017a, p. 350), which can be associated with one of the frequent coups in the history of Turkey. However, since the police come to the attendants' rescue before they are killed by the saboteurs, the author does not entirely extinguish the hope for the emancipation from bullies. In this violent scene, it is noteworthy that Peri remains passively hidden in a wardrobe rather than taking action notwithstanding her education and high social position. Through her quietness, the author seems to criticize the intellectuals and academics of the country who remained silent or indifferent before the impositions and threats of different tutelage groups like military and political. Namely, amidst the coups and coup attempts in different periods of Turkey, just like the threatened/frightened bourgeoisie in the story who are oppressed, blackmailed or imprisoned unexpectedly, there have always been people of various ethnic and ideological backgrounds who suffered from infringements of human rights. In this sense, Shafak decries the passivity of these mentioned groups and urges them to speak out, defend the oppressed, and challenge the status quo, sometimes represented by military (coups), and sometimes by political (authoritarian governments) tutelages. Interestingly, the novel was published in June 2016, one month prior to the July 15 coup attempt that resulted once more in retrogression of democratic and pluralistic values.

Another risk is dealt with in the seminars Azur organizes, intending to promote pluralism and inclusiveness in the university campus. They welcome students from different backgrounds in a peaceful atmosphere, but, at the same time, they alienate some students like Troy. He is jealous of and inimical to Azur, calling him a "devil." Just like the gun-wielding group sabotages the last supper of Turkish bourgeoisie, Troy sabotages Azur's efforts to create an all-encompassing rich environment by complaining against Azur to the university administration, which coincides with Peri's suicide attempt. Both events cause Azur's teaching career at Oxford to be ended, but he does not give up his academic career at the university and leave the campus, which implicates Azur will continue to resist challenges.

V. Conclusion

This study, making use of the theoretical discussions revolving around modernities, has attempted to explain societal polarization in Turkey that stems from political and religious fragmentation, as depicted in *TDE*, proceeding to explore the potential ways of avoiding it.

Although previous strict boundaries between the opposing groups have blurred with the appropriation of secular values by the majority of the society including conservatives, seculars, and nationalists, the binaries of secularist versus Islamist or *laik* versus *anti-laik* are still manipulated for political interests, which culminates in a polarized and anxiety-ridden Turkish society. In other words, it looks like the sometimes overt, sometimes covert contest between the secular children of the modern Republic and conservative descendants of the Empire over formalizing or designing the cultural identity of the nation will continue so long as the elements of secularism and religion are used for political interests.

TDE adroitly deals with the problem of polarization whose roots go back to the late Ottoman and early Republican eras and reach out today in varying patterns. Societal and political polarization, as demonstrated, brought together the painful coups afflicting a major part of the society, censorship, and pressures felt by different groups who are at odds with the ruling government ideology. Because of polarization, the unity of Peri's family members is disrupted; Umut is nearly left to oblivion, Mensur and Selma are always at odds with one another; Peri is an outcast from the whole family because of her distance from the ideologies of all family members. Even Hakan does not act in harmony with the other family members.

On the other hand, *TDE* suggests ways of reconciling opposing groups, both through Sufi traditions and through a dialectical method of arranging meetings among the family members, and Peri's milieu in England, all of whom have differing beliefs and ideologies. They are placed in appropriate conditions in order to confront one another and thereby to see themselves through their adversaries. In Sazyek's words, the sense of "ego" of each character is silenced by listening to the "other," (2013, p. 1230) so they can learn to appreciate diverse religions, ideologies, and psychologically distinct individuals.

In a similar vein, through her world-embracing Azur character that seems to imitate Rumi, Shafak demands that her readers across the globe recognize and face their cultural and social prejudices and preconceptions so as to dispel them for the sake of celebrating a pluralistic existence, which can be viewed from the vantage point of the multiple and alternative modernities approach that renders every individual, every ethnic, religious or ideological group equidistant to each other and the center composed not of a certain group or ideology but of universal human values of the past and present. This is seemingly suggested as an ideal way for depolarization in Turkey and in the world. On the other hand, the fact remains that it is not an easy feat to achieve. Although the text furnishes Azur with ideal qualities sufficient to cope with polarization, he falls short of reaching his goal of "promoting empathy, knowledge, understanding and wisdom" and "providing students with a wide array of answers to the most demanding questions of our times" (2017a, p. 205) as

described in his seminar objectives. This, however, does not come to mean that all is compromised on Azur's side. Though discredited by the university administration, he prefers to stay at the university rather than quickly part ways with the university, a stance that suggests there is still a possibility to rejoin his past circle and university community. Concordantly, it implies the possibility of resolution of opposite camps on earth despite past and present resentments/conflicts and the wounded democracies.

Considering the dialogues and discussions in Peri's homes in Turkey and in Oxford, it has been ascertained that using a divisive language each time results in fragmentation of the members of a family, community and in a wider scale of the world. A fact that unequivocally compels us to recognize the need for an embracing conciliatory language, no matter what name it goes by. Perhaps such a language projects the first step for promoting democratic ideals such as equal rights and individual liberties, which in turn may combat various forms of polarization.

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