

## **2-Nora Fisher Onar**

### **Beyond Binaries: ‘Europe’, Pluralism, and a Revisionist-Status Quo Key to Turkish Politics**

**Abstract:** This essay is built on the recognition that analyses of contemporary Turkish politics are all too often framed by a binary logic which misrepresents processes afoot in the country. It begins by considering the relevance and limitations of three modes of binary thinking about Turkish politics—the East-West binary, the secularist-Islamist binary, and the center-periphery binary. It builds on this critique to argue that any new key to Turkish politics must recognize three things. First, the historical and contemporary interaction with ‘Europe’ did indeed play an important role in shaping the Turkish national project but it did so in a dialectical rather than binary fashion. Second, the secularist-Islamist binary is a necessary but insufficient instrument in our toolkit for understanding Turkish politics. This is because the battle over secularism is but one of the two major axes of contention in Turkey. The other is the equally enduring and impassioned conflict over identity pluralism in public life. To fully capture the dynamics of Turkish political contests, we must employ a ‘pluralist-unitary’ axis in conjunction with the ‘secularist-Islamist’ axis. Third, it is argued that the seminal center-periphery key to conflict and change in Turkish political life is losing its analytical purchase with the transformation of ‘center’ and ‘periphery’ in recent decades. By recognizing that the long-standing battle between center and periphery was fought over principled or governing ideas as well as over material structures, and by identifying those ideas as lying along precisely the ‘pluralist-unitary’ and ‘secularist-Islamist’ axes, this paper aims to develop a novel frame for the study of Turkish politics: a revisionist-pluralist paradigm. It uses this key to trace patterns of continuity, change, and conflict in Turkish politics from the *longue durée* to the present. It then reconstructs three recent debates over identity pluralism and secularism in contemporary Turkey to show how the revisionist-status quo paradigm elucidates patterns in Turkish political life today. It concludes by reflecting on the promise and limitations of a revisionist-status quo approach. Analysis is based on extensive primary and secondary sources including in-depth interviews with fifty-five public intellectuals and politicians from across the political spectrum.