1 | *Hard Binaries and Their Discontents*

1.1 A Coup Defeated: Conflicting Accounts

On a humid, midsummer evening in 2016, the Bosphorus Bridge, which links Istanbul's Asian and European shores, shone red, white, and blue. The lights were a tribute to the victims of a jihadist attack in France the previous night on the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. But in a hectic city of some 16 million, few noticed the colors of the bridge – or irregular military movements unfolding across the city. As dusk approached, army helicopters circled in clusters, warships plowed the waterways, and troops and tanks deployed across town. By 10 p.m., the iconic bridge in its French revolutionary *tricoleur* had been occupied. Meanwhile, F-16s began low-flying swoops over Ankara, Turkey's capital, and explosions were heard near parliament. At 12:13 a.m., the state television network was seized, and its anchorwoman forced to announce that a coup was in progress.

Within minutes, the private TV channel CNN Türk reached the country's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Looking pale but resolute, the leader called on citizens to resist via FaceTime on live TV. The message was amplified by millions of text messages sent in his name and intensive mobilization across social networks.[1] Supporters were spurred also by the *sela* prayer playing relentlessly from the country's state-run mosques.[2] Pouring onto the streets, some prayed hastily as they entrusted children to family. Opposition politicians, including leaders of Turkey's restive Kurdish minority, likewise declared their support for the elected government. Fierce fighting unfolded in pockets

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[1] H. Akın Ünver and Hassan Alassaad, "How Turks Mobilized against the Coup: The Power of the Mosque and the Hashtag," *Foreign Affairs*, September 14, 2016.

[2] The *sela* is recited before Friday prayers or to announce events such as a death. Mosques in Turkey are administered by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet).

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across the country. By dawn, over 240 were dead.[3] Naming Fethullah Gülen, a US-based Islamic cleric as the plot's mastermind, the government declared victory.[4] But it called for continued vigilance, exhorting supporters to continue occupying public spaces.

In shock and trying to make sense of events, many turned to the visual record of "July 15th" – a date that henceforth would resonate with larger-than-life significance. Images from the streets radiated popular, patriotic, and pious fervor. Civilians of all ages had overwhelmed armed soldiers. A grandmother, veiled in head-to-toe black, ferried protestors in a massive truck.[5] Blood-splattered men, wrapped in Turkey's star and crescent flag, clambered onto a tank, seizing the gun turret. A mother in her thirties single-handedly confronted a tank and armed soldiers. The imagery evoked iconic stands for freedom but with an Islamic twist (although, unlike the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, the 1968 Prague Spring, or the French Revolution of 1789, citizens on Turkey's night of reckoning rallied in defense of, not in opposition to, the government).

Troubling images also emerged. Pictures proliferated on social media of mobs beating privates who, like most low-ranking soldiers that fateful night, were unlikely to have known the nature of their orders. Images also circulated – later denounced as doctored – of summary executions of soldiers. In a country where male conscription is universal and military service is revered, these scenes were deeply disturbing. As the dust settled, rumors also circulated of religious vigilantes harassing people perceived to be behaving improperly.

Confronted with this mélange of Islamic and liberal imagery, observers at home and abroad sought answers. Were the events a victory for Turkey's democracy? Or were they a "Reichstag fire,"[6] that is, a

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[3] Sources differ on the number who perished with figures ranging from 248 (*Sabah*) to over 300 (*Medyascope*).

[4] On how the once symbiotic relationship between Gülenists and the AKP soured, see Hakkı Taş, "A History of Turkey's AKP-Gülen Conflict," *Mediterranean Politics* 23, no. 3 (2018): 395–402.

[5] The woman was lionized by the country's leadership and media, but the authenticity of her narrative was later challenged. "15 Temmuz'da Kamyonlu Fotoğrafıyla Bilinen Şerife Boz Tartışması: 'Dolandırıcı' mı, 'Kahraman' mı?" *BBC Türkçe*, April 15, 2018.

[6] The term referenced the 1933 arson attack on the German Parliament that enabled Hitler to seize power a month after being democratically elected. Ayşe Kadıoğlu, "Coup d'État Attempt: Turkey's Reichstag Fire?" *OpenDemocracy*, July 16, 2016. For a vivid account of the evening and its consequences, see Ece

pretext for authoritarian consolidation? Were the coup plotters members of an Islamist sect, as the government claimed?[7] And if so, how did the putschists' agenda compare to the religious nationalism of the thousands of supporters who had risked their lives to defend the democratically elected, Islamist-rooted authorities: Erdoğan and the AKP?

Above all, what would be the consequences of July 15? Could the crosscutting condemnation of the putsch across an otherwise polarized society catalyze new solidarities? Erdoğan and the AKP had aligned, after all, with diverse groups over the course of their almost fifteen years in power. Or, was it more likely at this critical juncture that the triumphant authorities would use the opportunity to further entrench the ruling coalition of ethnic and religious nationalists?

Since little was publicly known about the precise drivers of the evening's enigmatic events, few analysts could address these questions from a position of knowledge. Answers thus coalesced around two narratives.

1.2 A Tale of Two Turkeys: Between Orientalism and Occidentalism

One set of responses registered dismay at the coup attempt but was skeptical that democracy had triumphed. This view was informed by the government's illiberal turn in the preceding period. Skeptics included a wide range of people who no longer – or had never – believed the AKP's early claim to model Muslim democracy through its reconciliation of pro-religious politics with political and economic liberalism.[8] In the 2000s, the AKP's claim had been more credible, as it was accompanied by democratizing reforms toward European Union (EU) accession, and an economic transformation that propelled the country into the G20 – a grouping of the world's twenty largest

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Temelkuran, *How to Lose a Country: The 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship* (Harper Collins, 2019).

[7] An explanation offered by some pundits at the time was that Gülenists sought to turn Turkey into an imam-led theocracy like Ayatollah Khomeini's transformation of Iran after the country's 1979 revolution.

[8] Binnaz Toprak, "Islam and Democracy in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 6, no. 2 (2005): 167–186.

economies. Toward the end of the decade,[9] however, democratic back-sliding and attempts to Islamize public spaces – that is, to promote legal and social practices informed by Islamic law – undermined perceptions of the AKP as a pluralizing force.

As the larger-than-life face of the party and government, Erdoğan's ambitions, in particular, were increasingly seen as "sultanistic."[10] This view was encouraged by the populist leader's extravagant public performances. These evoked the glories of the Ottoman past, promising to "make Turkey great again."[11] In such displays, Erdoğan was cast as the Sunni steward of an "authentic" Turco-Islamic project. By way of contrast, citizens whose politics or identities did not align were portrayed as "alien."[12] As polarization – and resistance – mounted, the authorities used an increasingly heavy hand. This pattern was consistent with the massive purge that would follow the failed putsch under the umbrella of emergency rule.[13] Skeptics, as such, decided that far from democratic consolidation, the events of "July 15th" were a watershed in Turkey's illiberal turn.

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[9] As this book shows, the timing an analyst attributes to the illiberal turn depends on their subject position. Kemalists, for example, were highly critical in the 2000s, whereas religious and ethnic minorities, who were not averse to the AKP sidelining of Kemalist ethno-nationalism, tended to give the party the benefit of the doubt into the 2010s.

[10] An oft-used adjective in popular commentary, "sultanism" bundles in many Orientalist assumptions. Debates about Turkey's illiberal turn in less loaded language inform the rich literature that I describe later in this chapter as a burgeoning "third wave" of scholarship that challenges Orientalism and Occidentalism.

[11] The project predated US president Donald Trump's campaign slogan. In fact, as I will show, Erdoğan's deployment of nostalgia for an imagined golden era helped to write the right-wing populist playbook.

[12] Namely, nonpracticing Sunnis, non-Sunnis, and citizens for whom Turkish is not "mother-tongue."

[13] According to Amnesty International, some 130,000 people were dismissed from government employment in sectors from the judiciary and security apparatus to public academe; wide-ranging human and political rights were suspended under emergency rule; the Kurdish political leadership was arrested en masse; hundreds of academics who had denounced the clampdown on Kurds were fired and blacklisted, with some accused of "abetting terrorism"; over 120 journalists were incarcerated pre- and posttrial (a claim the government rejected on grounds that the journalists were charged with terrorism rather than their journalistic endeavors). "Turkey: Almost 130,000 Purged Public Sector Workers Still Awaiting Justice," *Amnesty International*, October 25, 2018.

This empirical assessment was soon assimilated, however, to a highly problematic and remarkably resilient story in the coverage of Turkey by commentators across the globe. At the core of the story was the notion that Islam and liberalism are *fundamentally* incompatible. Part of a broader Orientalist outlook, for centuries this assumption has informed Christian, European, and Western views of Oriental or Islamic rule as intrinsically despotic (in contrast to presumptively emancipatory government in the West).[14]

In European encounters with the Ottoman Empire, the "Turk," singular and monolithic, was said to embody this Oriental mode of governance.[15] The reading persisted even after European powers eclipsed the Ottomans, militarily and economically. For example, William Gladstone, a prominent liberal and Britain's prime minister several times in the nineteenth century, viewed Islamic/Turkish political culture as incompatible with Western "freedoms." Wherever Turks' "dominion reached," Gladstone declared, "civilization disappeared from view … they represented everywhere government by force, as opposed to government by law."[16] In the historical context of European global hegemony, this narrative rationalized attempts to rule "Orientals," including Muslims, or, alternatively, to exclude them from the West.

After World War I, the Republic of Turkey's secularist founders sought to shed the stigma[17] by distancing themselves from the Ottoman-Islamic heritage. Yet lingering suspicions that Muslim Turks are incapable of meaningful political liberalization continued to shape many strands of political, scholarly, and popular commentary.[18] This historical baggage means that despite the complexities of real-world events – such as the intertwined Islamist and liberal resistance on

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[14] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin, 1979).

[15] Noel Malcolm, *Useful Enemies: Islam and the Ottoman Empire in Western Political Thought, 1450–1750* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

[16] William Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (Lovell, 1876), 10.

[17] On stigmatization as an impetus to defensive modernization, see Ayşe Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[18] Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, "Appropriating Islam: The Islamic Other in the Consolidation of Western Modernity," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (2003): 25–41.

"July 15th" – Turkey's experience was uploaded by many a pundit to an Orientalist template.

Meanwhile, back in Turkey, frustration coalesced into a second account of the evening's ordeal. Dismayed by the lack of Western empathy, in the days following the coup attempt, AKP supporters, but also observers across camps who were otherwise critical of the government, expressed anger that unsympathetic reporting missed a major part of the story: citizens of diverse stripes showing great courage to save their democratically elected government.[19] Similarly, the reticence with which Western governments responded – appearing to hedge until the coup failed – contrasted with the swift support that came from non-Western leaders such as Russia's president Vladimir Putin. This disparity reinforced suspicions that the West did not respect Turks' and Muslims' rights.

Such sentiments emanated, much like the skepticism of Ankara's liberal credentials, from the empirical record. Mainstream EU leaders had candidly expressed civilizational arguments against Turkey's EU membership, dampening the accession process. Widespread indifference and hostility in the West to growing numbers of refugees from the Middle East were also read as Islamophobic. For AKP supporters, in particular, double standards appeared glaring, given Western support for authoritarian but secularist regimes across the region.[20] Critics pointed to the selective nature of Western interventions in the Middle East, which, despite trappings of democracy promotion, appeared to prioritize energy and security interests over support for Muslim peoples' democratic aspirations.[21] Western responses to the coup attempt, including American reluctance to extradite the US-based Gülen, were read through this prism. Given the long history of

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[19] For example, Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı, "Coup Attempt Unifies Turkey but Could Distance West," *Transatlantic Take*, August 2, 2016; Kemal Kirişçi, "Erdoğan's Real Opportunity after the Coup Attempt," Brookings Institution, July 16, 2016.

[20] See Chapter 7 for US support for an Egyptian regime that brutally ousted the country's democratically elected, moderate Islamist government (albeit after the Islamist president had attempted a clumsy power grab).

[21] Raffaella Del Sarto, "Normative Empire Europe: The European Union, Its Borderlands, and the 'Arab Spring'," *Journal of Common Market Studies (JCMS)* 54, no. 2 (2016): 215–232.

anti-Americanism as a "default ideology of opposition"[22] in Turkey, pundits spun suspicion into conspiracy theories. The claim – as singular and monolithic as the "Turk" of the Orientalist imagination – was that the CIA or "America" had planned the coup. As the editor-in-chief of a leading, pro-government newspaper declared in his column on July 16: "USA Tried to Kill Erdoğan."[23]

Thus, in tandem with the uploading of skeptical perspectives to a meta-Orientalist template, outrage at Western responses was uploaded to a meta-Occidentalist template. According to this frame, the racist West – exploitative to its core – had sold its soul to greed. Therefore, while Western powers dominated the "Rest" in general, and the Islamic world in particular, hegemony would be fleeting. This was because its terms – power at the cost of morality – were degenerative. The torch of humanity, meanwhile, remained with Islam (or "Orthodoxy" or "Asia" as proponents of Occidentalism claimed in contexts such as Russia and China). Occidentalism thus delegitimizes Western condemnation of Turkey's illiberal turn, dismissing criticism as Islamophobic. It serves, moreover, to discount the domestic political opposition as inauthentic minions of the West. Yet, by exonerating illiberal politics Occidentalism inadvertently mirrors Orientalism, bolstering the claim that Islam and democracy are irreconcilable.[24]

The incompatibility thesis has proven highly consequential for at least four reasons. First, it informs support among Western powers for tutelary and authoritarian, secularist regimes in the Middle East (e.g., Egypt) due to the perception that they represent necessary bulwarks against intrinsically illiberal Islam(ism). Second, if and when Islamist

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[22] Füsun Türkmen, "Anti-Americanism as a Default Ideology of Opposition: Turkey as a Case Study," *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 3 (2010): 329–345. On "why the alliance persists in spite of diverging perceptions of threat and worldviews," see Didem Buhari Gülmez, "The Resilience of the US–Turkey Alliance: Divergent Threat Perceptions and Worldviews," *Contemporary Politics* 26, no.4 (2020): 475–492, 475.

[23] İbrahim Karagül, "ABD Erdoğan'ı Öldürmeye Çalıştı," *Yeni Şafak*, July 16, 2016.

[24] On Occidentalist responses to being Orientalized, see Dietrich Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists and the Global Public Sphere: A Genealogy of the Modern Essentialist Image of Islam* (Equinox, 2011); on how actors on the ground subvert Occidentalism and Orientalism alike, see Nora Fisher-Onar, "Frames at Play: Beyond Orientalism and Occidentalism," *Islam and International Order*, Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) Papers 15 (September 2015), www.researchgate.net/publication/344178817.

authoritarians capture states (e.g., Saudi Arabia), Western powers continue to engage on the basis of strategic and economic interests. After all, if meaningful democratization in Muslim-majority societies is impossible, practical cooperation with oppressive regimes is no betrayal of democratic values. Ironically then, Western support for authoritarian incumbency discounts the democratic aspirations of *both* pro-religious and pro-secular Muslims across the region. Third, the incompatibility thesis impacts the movement of Muslim peoples to the West, since they are thought to bring illiberal Islam(ism). This perception impacts migration and refugee policies with profound humanitarian consequences. Fourth and finally, it fuels right-wing movements within Western polities, which pose their own serious challenge to pluralistic democracy.

The stakes, in short, are significant. But what if the incompatibility thesis is not, in fact, correct?

1.3 Overcoming Orientalism/Occidentalism: An Intellectual and Political Journey in Three Waves

This book challenges Orientalism and Occidentalism alike – and the "Islam" vs. "democracy" or "secularism," among other binaries – which these meta-paradigms inform. Instead, I offer a framework for capturing real-time mechanisms of political contestation. To develop my alternative approach, however, it is necessary to first confront how the political thinkers and practitioners whose intellectual production and activism constitute this book's main source of data have themselves grappled with Orientalism/Occidentalism. In the remainder of this chapter, I unpack the tension between Orientalism/Occidentalism's epistemological power, yet explanatory poverty, via exemplary works in interdisciplinary Turkish studies.

My contention is that since the foundation of the Republic in 1923, there have been three "waves"[25] or logics via which analysts and

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[25] My conceptualization of these waves of response to Western hegemony has affinities with the feminist metaphor of "three waves" of response to patriarchy. According to this logic, first-wave thinkers and activists – who like the "Oriental" were not deemed full subjects – sought "equality" with men in a patriarchal world. First wave activism in the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century met with considerable success. The equality approach was overtaken by a second wave starting in the 1960s that additionally sought

practitioners have sought to reckon with Orientalist/Occidentalist binaries and their limitations. These waves were characterized, first, by thought and activism in pursuit of parity with the West. This strategy, in effect, sought to transcend Orientalism by performing "Westernness." Dissatisfaction with its results, in turn, spurred intellectuals and politicians to seek a better understanding of – and, in some cases, to celebrate – the features that make Turkey different. Especially in its celebratory vein, the second strategy was aligned with Occidentalism. Both waves continue to undulate today, at times hurtling against each other with force. Yet, their energies have also generated a mounting, third wave. Analysts and activists within this third wave arguably take a neither/nor position, seeking to dispense with Orientalism and Occidentalism alike by making clear-eyed sense of the complex, interacting forces that, in fact, shape contests over state and society.

1.3.1 The First Wave: Pursuit of Parity

The first wave of grappling with Orientalism/Occidentalism in the study and practice of Turkey's politics was generated by early republican nation-builders.[26] It was led by the charismatic, general-turned-civilian politician, Mustafa Kemal, who later acquired the surname "Atatürk," meaning the "Father of Turks," and whose program would come to be called "Kemalism." Kemalists aimed to secure Muslim-majority Turkey an equal, sovereign footing within an international system dominated by Christian-majority powers. They did so by seeking to transform visible markers of Turks' "Muslimness" in domestic

affirmation of women's specific concerns (the negation of which had been implicit in the original demand for full equality). Second-wave feminists, in other words, championed women's "difference" from men. And while both first- and second-wave logics resonate in women's mobilization to this day, both confronted a third, intersectional wave of thought and activism. It demands that the pursuit of equality and difference alike reckon with gender's intersection with other social structures (e.g., race/ethnicity and class) and the implication for diverse women's empowerment.

[26] To be sure, the reckoning with Orientalism/Occidentalism originated earlier, as mapped in Chapter 3. The discussion here focuses on the field of Turkish studies, an interdisciplinary space that – by definition – coalesced after the Republic's foundation.

political culture and diplomatic interactions.[27] Parity with the West
was pursued via a modernization program that brought organized
religion under state purview while seeking to privatize religious life.
This strategy went hand in hand with the production of a national
narrative that downplayed the Ottoman inheritance.[28] At the same
time, however, Kemalists remembered European powers' role in
Ottoman collapse and were wary of European imperialism in
the post-Ottoman Middle East.[29] They sought fervently, therefore, to
secure Turkey's autonomy. Despite this ambivalent streak in Kemalist
Westernism, the project was lauded by observers such as
Arnold Toynbee, a distinguished British scholar and diplomat who
declared:

the tide of evolution is running, and . . . the ideals of Western civilization are
permeating the country and gradually converting it from an Oriental com-
munity, depressed by the weight of Islamic laws and customs and the incubus
of superstition, into a Westernized community enlightened in its outlook and
progressive in its attitude.[30]

Key figures who came of age in this period internalized elements of
Toynbee's logic. Binary assumptions about Islam(ism) vs. secularism
were evident, for instance, in Niyazi Berkes' sociological *oeuvre*, which
spanned the single- and multiparty eras.[31] Berkes attributed the decline
of Islamic empires to civilizational "decadence," which he contrasted
with generative Western pathways to modernity.[32] Berkes also saw a

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[27] For a nuanced disscusion of this general claim, see Sarah Shields, *Fezzes in the River: Identity Politics and European Diplomacy in the Middle East on the Eve of World War II* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

[28] The Ottomans were situated – and trivialized – within a grander trajectory of "Turkish" historical development, with emphasis on pre-Islamic Anatolian civilizations.

[29] Such endeavors were echoed in early readings of republican Turkey by analysts such as Sir Harry Luke, Eleanor Bisbee, and Henry Allen, who, on the tenth anniversary of the Turkish Republic, declared the reforms of "energetic Ankara nationalists" to be a "supreme triumph of social engineering." Henry Allen, "The Outlook for Islam in Turkey," *The Muslim World* 24, no. 2 (1934): 115–125, 125.

[30] Arnold Toynbee and Kenneth Kirkwood, *Turkey* (Scribner, 1923), 243.

[31] His most notable work, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Routledge, 2013), was first published in 1964 and can be read as bridging the first and second waves of scholarship, as modernization theory replaced more explicit forms of Orientalism.

[32] Ibid.

binary pattern of "diametrical opposition" between "progressive liberals" and "reactionary Islamists" in Turkey's politics since the nineteenth century.[33] Yet, like Turkish Westernism itself, Berkes was simultaneously ambivalent. He saw continuities with the Ottoman past. And he lamented Westerners' simplistic readings of the "East," even if, in his view, the nation could only flourish by pursuing secular modernism à la West.[34]

When, at the dawn of the Cold War, Turkey formally joined the Western camp, the civilizational timbre of Toynbee and Berkes' binaries became muted. Yet, binary logic persisted among a rising generation of thinkers and practitioners who imported the modernization paradigm. Driven by students of comparative politics such as Dankwart Rustow, the program perpetuated the Orientalist assumptions that infused Western political science more broadly.[35] Modernization theory, after all, took Western experiences as the baseline, categorizing phenomena into binaries such as "secularism vs. Islam" and "modernity vs. tradition." In keeping with the behavioralist revolution in American social science, such frames were used to "objectively" measure Turkey's progress from Islam/tradition to secularism/modernity. As Carter Findley put it vis-à-vis the proliferation, in the 1950s and 1960s, of "scholarly" studies "of Ottoman and Turkish modernity," such works "greatest flaw … was their teleological vision of an upward march from Islamic empire to secular republic."[36]

This body of knowledge contributed to social engineering in Turkey. Scholars such as Daniel Lerner, for example, glossed over state violence in the name of Westernist progress when he described Turkey's

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[33] Niyazi Berkes, "Sociology in Turkey," *American Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 2 (1936): 238–246.

[34] For a fine-grained account of Berkes' complex relationship with Western frames, see Şakir Dinçşahin, *State and Intellectuals in Turkey: The Life and Times of Niyazi Berkes, 1908–1988* (Lexington, 2015).

[35] Begüm Adalet, *Hotels and Highways: The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey* (Stanford University Press, 2018). See also Kansu's critique of modernization and dependency theories' erasure of complex patterns of political contestation in the post-1908 period as laying the foundation of contemporary Turkey's political system. Aykut Kansu, *Politics in Post-Revolutionary Turkey, 1908–1913*, vol. 70 (Brill, 2021).

[36] Carter Findley, *Turkey: Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789–2007* (Yale University Press, 2010).

intermittent military coups as a "force for modernization."[37] Similarly, for Bernard Lewis, whose influence on academia and policymaking spanned the twentieth century, Turkey's status as the "only" if imperfect "Muslim democracy in a region of age-old authoritarian traditions" was due to the Kemalist decision to disestablish Ottoman Islam.[38] Lewis' argument thus affirmed the incommensurability of "Islam" and "democracy," vindicated the state's top-down secularism, and reinforced the claim – pervasive in twentieth-century Kemalist historiography – that the cultural revolution of the 1920s was a clean institutional and sociological break with the Ottoman-Islamic past.[39]

Ambiguities born of this need to negotiate hegemonic East/West binaries informed the work of a generation of analysts who came of age after Turkey's shift to multiparty democracy in 1950.[40] Within the academic mainstream, many such scholars were Western-trained and operated within the modernist paradigm with its Orientalist inflections. Nevertheless, in a context of greater intellectual freedom and access to sources/archives, historians such as Halil İnalcık and Kemal Karpat produced layered economic and sociological accounts of the Ottoman Empire's rise and fall, and the role of "Islam" therein. Their work destabilized the claim that the Republic represented a radical departure from the Ottoman past (even if İnalcik remained invested in the binary view that the "past was another country").

A major figure who shook up this assumption was Şerif Mardin. A political scientist, sociologist of religion, and intellectual historian, Mardin proposed a seminal "key to Turkish politics" in a 1973 article.[41] The key – his "center-periphery" thesis – unlocked contestation between pro-secular, urban elites and pro-religious, provincial notables and peasants, bridging the imperial and republican periods. To be sure, the framework retained a foundational binary in its clash between central and peripheral forces. In Mardin's articulation, however, the key was

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[37] Daniel Lerner and Richard Robinson, "Swords and Ploughshares: The Turkish Army as a Modernizing Force," *World Politics* 13, no. 1 (1960): 19–44.

[38] Bernard Lewis, "Why Turkey Is the Only Muslim Democracy," *Middle East Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1994): 41–49.

[39] Echoes of this telos would be reinscribed, a generation later, in the similarly linear and Western-centric theories of democratization advanced by Samuel Huntington.

[40] Adalet, *Hotels and Highways*.

[41] Şerif Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics," *Daedalus* 102, no. 1 (1973): 169–190.

dynamic. It situated events within their shifting historical and socio-logical contexts.[42] And it captured a multiplicity of agents *within* as well as across camps, reading their interests and identities – and fraught negotiations thereof – as fluid rather than static. The center-periphery key would prove a double-edged sword. In subsequent uptake, its binary logic reinforced notions of a monolithic, Westernist center vs. Islamist periphery. These "culture wars"-type arguments came in Orientalist and Occidentalist variants and today are grist to the mill of populist polar-ization. Historically, however, Mardin's approach helped to inspire a second wave of thought and praxis that attended to the specificities of Turkey's experience, rather than basing explanation on Western cat-egories and experiences.

1.3.2 The Second Wave: Recognition of Difference

Driven by the desire to confront – and sometimes to celebrate – the features that made Turkey different from the West, a second wave of thought and praxis grappled with an implicit paradox of the first wave. This was the fact that despite the determined pursuit of parity, both people in Turkey and the West continued to experience the country as somehow "exceptional" (otherwise, why the need to become more "civilized" or to "catch up" developmentally?). This recognition drove a reckoning with Turkey's alterity across scholarly and political spaces that diversified rapidly in the second half of the twentieth century.[43] A flourishing body of historical scholarship, for instance, sought to understand Ottoman specificities and how these features had shaped contemporary Turkey.[44]

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[42] To be sure, the state of the art has evolved and critics today point to contextual elements that Mardin missed or got wrong. See, for example, Michael Wuthrich, "An Essential Center–Periphery Electoral Cleavage and the Turkish Party System," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 4 (2013): 751–773.

[43] For Kemalist/republican, liberal/leftist, and conservative/Islamist strands, see Nora Fisher-Onar, "Between Memory, History, and Historiography: Contesting Ottoman Legacies in Turkey, 1923–2012," in Kalypso Nicolaïdis, Berny Sebe, and Gabrielle Maas, eds., *Echoes of Empire: Memory, Identity and Colonial Legacies* (I. B. Tauris, 2015), 141–154.

[44] Covered in Chapter 4, Ottoman economic, social, and religious history was complexified in works such as Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), and Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam:*

An adjacent set of interventions sought to recover Turkey's "authentic" cultural difference. This tendency was especially evident in pro-religious intellectual production that sought to redeem the Ottoman-Islamic past – a nostalgia project backed by right-of-center politicians.[45] Notable contributions were the impassioned Occidentalism of Islamist idealogue Necip Fazıl Kısakürek,[46] but also the leftist Ottomanism and East-West syntheses of intellectuals such as Kemal Tahir and Cemil Meriç. Much of this work was produced and consumed in Turkey, making little initial dent in Turkish studies as practiced in the West. By the 1980s and 1990s, however, rising intellectuals from Mardin's socially conservative "periphery" penetrated elite, academic, and policymaking institutions inside and outside the country. With their mobility, the quest to understand Turkey's "authenticity" as per Kısakürek – or its "hybridity" as per Tahir and Meriç – began to inform debates at the transnational scale.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, a flourishing body of interdisciplinary work sought to explain phenomena for which modernist assumptions about Islam/ism's opposition to democracy, secularism, or modernity could not easily account.[47] These debates unfolded in conversation with global academic trends. In positivist political science, studies confronted a major puzzle posed by pro-religious

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Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith and Community in the Late Ottoman State (Oxford University Press, 2001). Kafadar challenged Orientalist readings of the early Ottoman Empire; Ortaylı, Deringil, and Hanioğlu shed light on syncretic, late Ottoman transformation, Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (University of California Press, 1995). İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğunu En Uzun Yüzyılı* (Hil,1983); Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (I. B. Tauris, 1998); Şükrü Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford University Press, 1995). Zürcher's and Ahmad's accessible modern Turkish histories incorporated the late Ottoman/republican transition. Erik Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (I. B. Tauris, 1993), and Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (Routledge, 1993).

[45] Gavin Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk: Provincial Newspapers and the Negotiation of a Muslim National Identity* (University of Texas Press, 2011).

[46] As will be seen in the historical and contemporary sections, Kısakürek was initially active in the single-party period. His work gained greater salience, however, after the 1960s, with the establishment of a political Islamist party tradition.

[47] For example, Yael Navaro, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton University Press, 2002); İsmail Kara, *Türkiye'de İslamcılık Düşüncesi* (Dergah, 1986); Ruşen Çakır, *Ayet ve Slogan: Türkiye'de İslami Oluşumlar* (Metis, 1990).

mobilization to modernization theory: namely, the rise of Islamist parties and social movements.[48] After all, according to the modernist "secularization thesis," Turkey's socioeconomic development during this period should have meant decreasing religious observance. Instead, there was a growing demand for public religion.

Scholars who used critical research methodologies also developed accounts of religious resurgence. Given that Islam/ism was the underdog in and beyond Turkey throughout this period, much work in this critical vein, while not celebratory of religious resurgence per se, problematized the privileged position of secularism.[49] Some works explored the transitive power of religious referents in helping people to navigate transitions to urban, economic, and social modernity.[50] Others unpacked Kemalist secularism's imbrication in anti-pluralist corporatism, nationalism, and patriarchy,[51] among other exclusionary practices. Such studies aligned with broader, postmodern, and postcolonial critiques of Western universalism. For example, the notion of "alternative modernities" gained salience, with its argument that there are multiple pathways to modernity besides the one prescribed by hegemonic forces within the West.[52] This recognition helped analysts to engage marginalized perspectives – including the experiences of conservative Sunnis in Turkey.[53] The result was that "post-Kemalist"

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[48] For example, Ali Çarkoğlu and Barry Rubin, eds., *Religion and Politics in Turkey* (Routledge, 2006); Çarkoğlu and Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, *The Rising Tide of Conservatism in Turkey* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009); Attila Eralp, Muharrem Tünay, and Birol Yeşilada, eds., *The Political and Socioeconomic Transformation of Turkey* (Prager, 1993).

[49] For example, Andrew Davidson, *Secularism and Revivalism in Turkey: A Hermeneutic Reconsideration* (Yale University Press, 1998).

[50] For example, Nilüfer Göle, *Modern Mahrem: Medeniyet ve Örtünme* (Metis, 2004); Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, eds., *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (University of Washington Press, 1997).

[51] For example, Taha Parla and Andrew Davison, *Corporatist Ideology in Kemalist Turkey: Progress or Order?* (Syracuse University Press, 2004); Fatma Müge Göçek, "Through a Glass Darkly: Consequences of a Politicized Past in Contemporary Turkey," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617, no. 1 (2008): 88–106; Ayşe Kadıoğlu, "Women's Subordination in Turkey: Is Islam Really the Villain?" *The Middle East Journal* 48, no. 4 (1994): 645–660.

[52] The argument also suggests that there were and are alternative modernities within the West.

[53] For example, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Duke University Press, 2001), and Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities* (Routledge, 2017).

interventions among critical secular scholars often aligned, in their postmodern challenge to Western/ist modernity, with Islamist intellectuals' deconstruction of Kemalism. This overlap informed both ad hoc and coordinated mobilizations against the ruling ideology.[54]

The alignment was reinforced when, in the aftermath of the September 11th, 2001 militant Islamist attacks on the United States, Muslims everywhere were stigmatized. Scholars of the second wave pushed back, challenging the reduction of "Islam" to a fanatical monolith. Globally, many in the progressive academy likewise sought to debunk the claim that the world was enmeshed in a "clash of civilizations." The moment generated studies of diverse, Muslim political movements,[55] including strands that overlapped substantially with secular left-[56] and secular right-wing programs.[57] Analysts unpacked the complex motives driving Islamists' "politics of engagement"[58] with democracy and modernity,[59] and the ways that bourgeoisification could bring moderation.[60] Comparative work de-exceptionalized the "Islam" factor, reading the relationship between politics and religion, secularism, and democracy from a cross-case and cross-regional

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[54] For a critique of this alignment, see İlker Aytürk, "Post Kemalizm," *Varlık* 1337 (2019): 4–7.

[55] For example, Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Haldun Gülalp, "Whatever Happened to Secularization? The Multiple Islams in Turkey," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (2003): 381–395; Recep Şentürk, "Sociology of Rights: 'I am Therefore I Have Rights': Human Rights in Islam between Universalistic and Communalistic Perspectives," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 2, no. 1 (2005): 24–49; Fuat Keyman, *Remaking Turkey: Globalization, Alternative Modernities, and Democracy* (Lexington, 2007).

[56] Cemil Aydın, "Between Occidentalism and the Global Left: Islamist Critiques of the West in Turkey," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 3 (2006): 446–461.

[57] For example, Tanıl Bora, "Nationalist Discourses in Turkey," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (2003): 433–451; Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (Utah University Press, 2016).

[58] Berna Turam, *Between Islam and the State: The Politics of Engagement* (Stanford University Press, 2007).

[59] For example, Alev Çınar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Sultan Tepe, "Turkey's AKP: A Model Muslim-Democratic Party?" *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 (2005): 69–82.

[60] Sebnem Gumuscu, "Class, Status and Party: The Changing Face of Political Islam in Turkey and Egypt," *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 7 (2010): 835–861.

perspective.[61] Still further studies dove into urban or community experiences as microcosmic of larger dynamics, unpacking the intersections of (ir)religiosity with gender, ethnic, and sectarian commitments.[62] The purchase of these accounts was amplified by the apparent embrace – noted earlier – of economic and political liberalism by the AKP when it came to power in 2002.[63] However, congruence between anti-Orientalist intellectual production and the AKP's project of conservative democracy would prove short-lived.

1.3.3 Toward a Third Wave? Making Sense of Complexity

As the AKP became more authoritarian, a new body of inquiry and praxis gained momentum. This "third wave" was driven, at one level, by established, second-wave scholars who knew that the relationship between political religion, democracy, and secularism was more complex than any Orientalist/Occidentalist binary but who now needed to explain democratic backsliding. They were joined by a rising cohort that had come of age in a Turkey where the promise of conservative democracy had hardly materialized.[64] For some, this experience

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[61] For example, Katerina Dalacoura, *Islam, Liberalism and Human Rights: Implications for International Relations* (I. B. Tauris, 1998); Ahmet Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: The United States, France and Turkey* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[62] For example, Amy Mills, *Streets of Memory: Landscape, Tolerance, and National Identity in Istanbul* (University of Georgia Press, 2010); Kabir Tambar, *The Reckoning of Pluralism: Political Belonging and the Demands of History in Turkey* (Stanford University Press, 2014).

[63] For example, İhsan Dagi, "Rethinking Human Rights, Democracy, and the West: Post-Islamist Intellectuals in Turkey," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 13, no. 2 (2004): 135–151; Ergun Özbudun, "From Political Islam to Conservative Democracy: The Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey," *South European Society & Politics* 11, nos. 3–4 (2006): 543–557; Murat Somer, "Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey: Implications for the World, Muslims and Secular Democracy," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 7 (2007): 1271–1289; Ioannis Grigoriadis, "Islam and Democratization in Turkey: Secularism and Trust in a Divided Society," *Democratization* 16, no. 6 (2009): 1194–1213.

[64] For example, Bahar Başer and Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, *Authoritarian Politics in Turkey: Elections, Resistance and the AKP* (I. B. Tauris, 2017); Utku Balaban, "The Islamist-Secularist Coalition and Social Class in Turkey," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (2021): 271–297; Koray Çalışkan, "Toward a New Political Regime in Turkey: From Competitive toward Full Authoritarianism," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 58 (2018): 5–33; Antonino Castaldo, "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey," *Southeast*

reinforced conviction in the Islamist vs. secularist cleavage – an act of and political retrenchment no doubt informed by political tension and very real repression.

For others, however, the illiberal turn only further demystified "secularism" and "Islam/ism" alike. Disillusionment, I contend, is characteristic of a third wave of thought and activism that seeks to pinpoint the actual mechanisms transforming Turkey beyond polarizing slogans. The goal, to paraphrase Edward Said's famous words, is to speak empirical truths, not preformed binaries, to power. This impulse is reflected in political developments that Selçuk and Hekimci describe as "a rising democracy-authoritarianism" divide that increasingly "overshadowed historically rooted social cleavages … incentivizing … opposition parties to coordinate in the name of

European and Black Sea Studies 18, no. 4 (2018): 467–487; Menderes Çınar, "From Moderation to De-moderation: Democratic Backsliding of the AKP in Turkey," in John Esposito, Lily Zubaidah, and Naser Ghobadzadeh, eds., *The Politics of Islamism. Middle East Today* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 127–157; Selim Çevik and Hakkı Taş, "In between Democracy and Secularism: The Case of Turkish Civil Society," *Middle East Critique* 22, no. 2 (2013): 129–147; Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, "Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 9 (2016): 1581–1606; Ayla Göl, "The Identity of Turkey: Muslim and Secular." *Third World Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2009): 795–811; Fuat Keyman and Şebnem Gümüşçü, *Democracy, Identity and Foreign Policy in Turkey: Hegemony through Transformation* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014); Ahmet Kuru and Alfred Stepan, eds., *Islam and Democracy in Turkey* (Columbia University Press, 2017); Mehmet Gürses, "Is Islam a Cure for Ethnic Conflict? Evidence from Turkey," *Politics and Religion* 8, no. 1 (2015): 135–154; Ceren Lord, "The Persistence of Turkey's Majoritarian System of Government," *Government and Opposition* 47, no. 2 (2012): 228–255; Kerem Öktem and Karabekir Akkoyunlu, "Exit from Democracy: Illiberal Governance in Turkey and Beyond," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 469–480; Filiz Çoban Oran, *Religion, Nationalism and Foreign Policy: Discursive Construction of New Turkey's Identity* (Bloomsbury, 2022); Yusuf Sarfati, "How Turkey's Slide to Authoritarianism Defies Modernization Theory," *Turkish Studies* 18, no. 3 (2017): 395–415; Murat Somer, Jennifer McCoy, and Russell Luke, "Pernicious Polarization, Autocratization and Opposition Strategies," *Democratization* 28, no. 5 (2021): 1–20; Sabri Sayarı, Pelin Ayan Musil, and Özhan Demirkol, eds., *Party Politics in Turkey: A Comparative Perspective* (Routledge, 2018); Sultan Tepe, "Contesting Political Theologies of Islam and Democracy in Turkey," *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 2, no. 2 (2016): 175–192; Jeremy Walton, *Muslim Civil Society and the Politics of Religious Freedom in Turkey* (Oxford University Press, 2017); Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (Princeton University Press, 2014); Halil İbrahim Yenigun, "Turkish Islamism in the Post-Gezi Park Era," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 31, no. 1 (2014): 140–154.

fighting for democracy."[65] In this context, as Makdisi puts it, being "secular or pietistic is hardly as important … as whether and how" to pursue "equality and emancipation in [a] societ[y] that remains diverse."[66] In short, "the terms 'secular' and 'Islamic'" have become increasingly "empty signifiers" – mere "tropes mobilized by contending political actors in their search for hegemony and the consolidation of their power."[67]

To be sure, the charged popular politics of these contests mean that the third wave of nonbinary intellectual production is unfolding within a context of heightened polarization.[68] This circumscribes the public spaces within which critique can operate. It also means that works that I situate within the third wave – for their challenge to binary readings of secularism and Islamism that also eschew pro-government apologetics – include analysts who critique each other's work. These tensions can be explained by the different theoretical, political, and socioeconomic sources of each analyst's anti-Orientalist/Occidentalist journey. Some interventions emanate from post-Kemalist and post-Islamist reckonings with "what went wrong." Others entail a reflexive Kemalist sensibility shaped by the relatively recent transition from a hegemonic to an oppositional positionality.[69] Still others feature minority ethnic, religious/sectarian, and gendered challenges to Orientalist/Occidentalist binaries. Another body of flourishing work takes a critical political economy approach to the relationship between Turkey's illiberal turn and neoliberal capitalism. According to such approaches, pro-secular and pro-religious groups' overlapping support

[65] Orçun Selçuk and Dilara Hekimci, "The Rise of the Democracy – Authoritarianism Cleavage and Opposition Coordination in Turkey (2014–2019)," *Democratization* 27, no. 8 (2020): 1496–1514, 1496.

[66] The statement describes a parallel search for demystified pathways to pluralism in (post-)Ottoman Lebanon; it nevertheless aptly describes my "third wave" in Turkey scholarship. Ussama Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World* (University of California Press, 2021), 217.

[67] Deniz Kandiyoti, "The Travails of the Secular: Puzzle and Paradox in Turkey," *Economy and Society* 41, no. 4 (2012): 513–531, 513.

[68] Senem Aydın-Düzgit and Evren Balta, "When Elites Polarize over Polarization: Framing the Polarization Debate in Turkey," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 59 (2018): 109–133.

[69] For an edited collection that includes both reflexive and redoubled takes, see İlker Aytürk and Berk Esen, eds., *Post-Post-Kemalizm: Türkiye Çalışmalarında Yeni Arayışlar* (İletişim, 2022).

for capitalism – and the inequalities it engenders – renders them more similar than different.[70] The diversity of – and debates within – the third wave only underscores my argument that its protagonists are fomenting a generative challenge.

1.4 The Argument: Political Change Driven by Cross-Camp Alliances over Pluralism

This book contributes to the burgeoning third wave by offering an analytical framework and extensive evidence to argue that since the late Ottoman period, only rarely have political contests in Turkey actually pitted Islamists versus secularists. Instead, change is driven by shifting alliances – and betrayals – across camps. Alignments are strategic but, normatively, have important implications for when and why the political system evolves in a more or less pluralistic direction. In short, political change is driven not by clashes between Islamists and secularists but by shifting alignments of pluralizing and anti-pluralist actors across camps.

The pattern is evident at critical inflection points of the AKP era, the empirical explanations for which defy Islamist vs. secularist binaries. In short, it was (i) an *Islamist-liberal alliance* in the early 2000s that pushed democratizing reforms but also enabled the AKP's anti-pluralist wing to consolidate power; (ii) an *intra-Islamist clash* of the early 2010s that accelerated Ankara's authoritarian turn;[71] and (iii) successive pivots to religious populism after 2013 and ethno-religious nationalism after 2015 – enabled by an *alliance of Islamist and secularist nationalists* – that has entrenched Turkey's illiberal turn.

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[70] For example, Halil Karaveli, *Why Turkey Is Authoritarian from Atatürk to Erdoğan* (Pluto Press, 2018); Cemal Burak Tansel, ed., *States of Discipline: Authoritarian Neoliberalism and the Contested Reproduction of Capitalist Order* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

[71] The causal role of intraparty competition is empirically substantiated and theorized by Gumuscu who argues that rivalry between "liberal" and "electoralist" factions explains pluralizing or authoritarian trajectories within Islamist ruling parties in Turkey, Egypt, and Tunisia. Sebnem Gumuscu, *Democracy or Authoritarianism: Islamist Governments in Turkey, Egypt and Tunisia* (Cambridge University Press, 2023). For an account of intraparty dynamics leading to the marginalization of more "pluralist" AKP figures, see Hakkı Taş, "Turkey – From Tutelary to Delegative Democracy," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2015): 776–791.

1.5 Book Overview

To operationalize the argument, in Chapter 2, I introduce an original analytical framework in the language of political science and international relations. My approach captures causal complexity by rekeying, as it were, Mardin's seminal thesis to envisage politics as driven by pluralizing and anti-pluralist coalitions. I define pluralism with a lowercase "p," rather than referencing the culturally loaded treatment of pluralism in Western political theory.[72] In my decentered reading, it is simply a human orientation amenable to sharing public spaces with one's "Others." This is juxtaposed with an anti-pluralist orientation that seeks uniformity in public life, demanding that "Others" look or speak, love or believe, like oneself. This culturally agnostic framing retains, to be sure, a dualism in its juxtaposition of pluralizers and anti-pluralists – a porous binary that I use to capture dialectical patterns of contestation. The approach rejects, however, the hard, identitarian binaries of Orientalist/Occidentalist accounts. Instead, my "key" captures a multiplicity of agents, the plasticity of ideas, and the fluidity of processes that drive transformative outcomes.

In the following, historical Part II of the book, the (anti-)pluralist key is used to unlock a series of inter- and intra-camp alignments that have transformed the political system over the "long nineteenth" and "short twentieth" centuries.[73] Drawing mostly on secondary sources, Chapter 3 speaks to an emerging approach to intellectual and political history that reads late Ottoman reforms syncretically, employing, for instance, what I call "Islamo-liberal," among other hybrid frames. I situate this literature within the growing third wave in Turkish studies because it challenges older historiography that pits Islamic

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[72] Tambar, *The Reckoning of Pluralism*, likewise treats pluralism in Turkey via this inductive, analytical-descriptive strategy.

[73] Eric Hobsbawm's famous periodization references critical junctures in Western history. Hence, his long nineteenth century starts with the French Revolution and ends with the onset of World War I, while the short twentieth century spans from 1914 to the 1989 fall of the Soviet Union. Chapters 2 and 3 of this book cover roughly the same periods but with reference to critical junctures for Turkey. Therefore, the long nineteenth century extends until the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, and the short twentieth century culminates in 1999 with the acquisition of EU candidacy.

"traditionalists" against Western "modernizers."[74] Similarly, the twentieth century is read in conversation with innovative work that questions binary accounts of political change, capturing the oftentimes conflicted motives and contingencies that produced key outcomes.[75]

Chapter 2 tells the story of alliance making and breaking in a context where Ottoman legal pluralism jostled against the need to centralize governance in order to manage centrifugal and external pressures. Chapter 3 turns to how early republican nation-builders responded to the late Ottoman experience of semi-colonization[76] by installing a unitary national project. Yet, this chapter also argues that early Kemalism entailed what I call "embedded liberalism." This feature would help actors across the century to navigate what Philliou calls "the challenge of reconciling aspirations for liberal democracy with the political exigencies of authoritarianism."[77]

Part III turns to the twenty-first century, assessing how shifting coalitions of pluralizing and anti-pluralist actors have transformed Turkey. Mapped via extensive primary and secondary materials collected across the period surveyed, sources include over 100 interviews conducted during a decade of immersion in Turkey's civil society and academy.[78] Chapters are organized around causal sequences encompassing three periods:

[74] For example, Frederick Anscombe, Madeleine Elfenbein, Aylin Koçunyan, Butros Abu Manneh, Burak Onaran, Murat Şiviloğlu, Stefano Taglia, Alp Eren Topal, Einar Wigen, and Alper Yalçınkaya, among others.

[75] For example, Adalet, *Hotels and Highways*; Nicholas Danforth, *The Remaking of Republican Turkey: Memory and Modernity since the Fall of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Christine Philliou, *Turkey: A Past against History* (University of California Press, 2021); Hakan Yavuz, *Nostalgia for Empire: The Politics of Neo-Ottomanism* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

[76] For more on this hybrid positionality that combines "post-colonial" sensibilities vis-à-vis the West, but "post-imperial" aspirations as a former empire in its own right – as well as similarities with Iran, Russia, and China – see Nora Fisher-Onar, "The Capitulations Syndrome: Why Revisionist Powers Leverage Post-Colonial Sensibilities toward Post-Imperial Projects," *Global Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2022): 1–11.

[77] Philliou, *Turkey: A Past against History*.

[78] Over 100, formal semi-structured, and informal interviews inform this book project. During my doctoral research, I conducted fifty-one semi-structured interviews with leading commentators across political camps. The findings also informed an essay recognized by the Sakıp Sabancı International Research Award: Nora Fisher-Onar, "A Righteous Civilization? Turkish Perceptions of European Universalism," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford; Nora Fisher-Onar, "Beyond Binaries: 'Europe', Pluralism, and a

- Islamo-liberal synthesis and pluralizing reform (1999/2002–2007, covered in Chapter 5);
- A mixed period of simultaneous attempts to advance ethnic and religious pluralism, even as anti-pluralist political and media practices gained momentum (2008–2012, covered in Chapter 6); and
- Hard turns to religious populism (after 2013) and ethno-religious nationalism (after 2015, covered in Chapters 7 and 8).

The findings that emerge are threefold. First, synthetic frames for and against pluralism have been used to gather support across camps, enabling policies that have shaped Turkey's trajectory. Of the seven major pluralizing alignments to date, all have employed Islamo-liberal, among other syncretic frames, in attempts to pluralize public life. Key results, for better or worse, include the first and second Ottoman constitutions; the 1950 transition to meaningful, multiparty politics; political and economic (neo)liberalization in the 1980s; Islamo-liberal democratization in the early 2000s; and the radically inclusive repertoire of a diverse coalition of pluralizers who – at the time of writing – govern major cities.

Similarly, Turkey has been shaped by anti-pluralist alliances that are counterintuitive if read in terms of thick commitments to "secularism"

Revisionist-Status Quo Key to Turkish Politics," *Sabancı University Essay Contest Finalist* (2009). Insights from these interviews are cited in Chapter 4. In addition, Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are informed by interviews conducted in the context of three further research projects. The first was for a piece on women's mobilization across political camps that culminated in a coauthored article, Nora Fisher-Onar and Hande Paker, "Towards Cosmopolitan Citizenship? Women's Rights in Divided Turkey," *Theory and Society* 41, no. 4 (2012): 375–394.

A second round of interviews was conducted via a Ronald Asmus fellowship from the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) in 2012–2013 when I interviewed dozens of policymakers about Turkey's domestic/foreign policy linkage in Turkey, Egypt, and Israel, including advisors to each country's leadership. This phase of research yielded a policy paper: Nora Fisher-Onar, "From Model to Bystander and How to Bounce Back: Turkey, the Middle East, and the Transatlantic Alliance," *Foreign Policy Papers*, German Marshall Fund (July 2013), 1–17.

Third, thanks to a year-long residential fellowship at the GMF's Transatlantic Academy in Washington, D.C., I was able to engage dozens of high-level Turkish and transatlantic commentators whose insights informed Nora Fisher-Onar, "Islam and Turkey: From Muslim Democracy to Islamist Autocracy?" in Michael Barnett et al., eds., *Faith, Freedom, and Foreign Policy: Challenges for the Transatlantic Community* (Transatlantic Academy, 2015), 53–75.

or "Islam." Coalitions nevertheless formed to exclude forms of alterity – religious/sectarian, ethnic, and gendered – that hardliners *across* camps condemn. In such arrangements, participants prioritized their overlapping commitment to a unitary national identity in pursuit of concrete policy goals, bracketing their substantive differences. Antipluralist triumphs include the Young Turk triumvirate's 1913 coup d'etat, the racist turn of the 1930s and early 1940s, the Turkish–Islamic synthesis of the post-1980 coup era, and today's "Turkish-Islam*ist* synthesis 2.0" which was installed by a coalition of religious and secular nationalists.

Second, this book shows that alliances are neither forged nor broken because of immutable ideologies. Rather, agile actors appropriate elements of overlapping repertoires – including more or less pluralistic variants of Islamism, liberalism, and/or nationalism – in strategic-cum-performative response to evolving pressures. Recognizing the causal interplay of ideational, agential, and contextual factors eschews essentialist attribution of causality to ideas alone, or of nefarious agendas to entire groups. In other words, ideas are a necessary but never a sufficient condition for coalition formation and rupture.

Third, absent meaningful checks, there is a tendency for pluralists-in-opposition to become anti-pluralists-in-power[79] (and vice versa). This elision occurs irrespective of ideology. A pluralizing orientation, after all, is not a fixed feature of personalities or party programs (all of which have more inclusionary and exclusionary expressions that evolve in response to the changing context).

Among pro-religious leaders who endorse Islamo-liberalism when in the political opposition, the elision from pluralism-in-opposition to anti-pluralism-in-power is related to the temptation of majoritarian populism. This is because they lead the only camp in a conservative country with the potential – albeit often unrealized – to command a majority of the electorate (if only, as this book will show, due to microinstitutional features of the political system like high electoral thresholds which disproportionately rewards parties that can carry a plurality of the electorate). As such, there is an incentive to weaponize

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[79] That said, the state and bureaucracies are not monolithic with more or less pluralist factions vying for influence. See, for example, Elif Babül, *Bureaucratic Intimacies: Translating Human Rights in Turkey* (Stanford University Press, 2017).

democracy's majoritarian mechanisms, especially once in power.[80] That said, not all proponents of Islamo-liberalism succumb to the temptation.[81] Moreover, populism's majoritarian reliance on elections for legitimation means that democratic renewal remains possible as new coalitions of pluralists-in-opposition coalesce.

By tracing when and why pluralizing platforms succeed, and at other junctures, exclusionary, ethnic or religious nationalisms prevail, *Contesting Pluralism(s)* challenges the widespread but misleading reading of Turkey and the Muslim-majority world as torn by a perennial clash between Islamists vs. secularists, traditionalists vs. modernists, Sunnis vs. Alevis, or Turks vs. Kurds, among other binary cleavages.

Rather, the overall finding is that change is driven by a recurring contest between those who would pluralize politics and public life and champions of a unitary vision. This book thus explains the current governing coalition's embrace of ethno-religious nationalism while accounting for the extraordinary resilience of ideas and actors committed to pluralism.

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[80] Yunus Sözen, "Populist Peril to Democracy: The Sacralization and Singularization of Competitive Elections," *Political Studies Review* 17, no. 3 (2019): 267–283.

[81] This argument differs from Hamid's reading of the "temptation of power" that confronts elected Islamists. Hamid effectively ascribes *takkiye* to pro-religious actors who are "forced" to moderate while in opposition, but whose intrinsic will to Islamicize the state and society manifests when opportunities arise. As will be seen, *Pluralism in Turkey* takes a processual approach, arguing that a given, pro-religious leader's embrace of majoritarian populism is determined by the contingent interplay of individual calculations, normative resources, and domestic/international pressures at that juncture. Shadi Hamid, *Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East* (Oxford University Press, 2014).