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Turkish Experience with Totalitarianism and Fascism: Tracing the Intellectual Origins

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Abstract

Many facets of ideological transformation in Turkey between the 1910s and 1930s have been extensively discussed but many more still remain to be studied and contextualised. One of these aspects concerns the existing disagreement in the scholarship over Turkey's experience with another manifestation of totalitarianism, and particularly with fascism. The present paper explores this generally overlooked dimension and argues that even the limited research on fascism in Turkey has been mainly done from comparative perspectives. This dominant methodological approach has long prevailed the field and diverted scholarly attention from the essence of the problem. Therefore, the author aims to explore the problem by not identifying similarities and differences of the Unionism of the Young Turks era and Kemalism with their contemporary totalitarian currents; instead, the analysis will be mainly limited to the Turkish context and practices in order to trace the local manifestations of "global fascism". He also argues that there is a compelling continuity of totalitarian ideological and political practices between the Young Turks and the Kemalists.

Keywords

Turkey, Young Turks, Kemalism, Fascism, Totalitarianism

LOCATING FASCISM IN TURKEY

The question of "How fascist the Kemalist Turkey was", that Fikret Adanır (2001: 313-361) and many others have raised, still remains a valid and pertinent one. Adanır poses this question and basically leaves it unanswered relying on Mete Tunçay's warning that a specific compound, which brings about fascism did not exist in Turkey during the inter-war period. He further claims that a definition, as well as an all-encompassing and generally accepted theory of fascism do not exist (*ibid.*: 359). Thus, agreeing with the applicability of the term "fascism" in essence and accepting that the

Kemalist political system of the inter-war years had a strong fascist content as, in many respects, it had a parallel development to that of fascism elsewhere, he points to the limitations of the paper in exhaustively answering the above-mentioned question (*ibid.*). He also demonstrates his inclination towards following Roger Griffin's claim to establish a "mythic core" of generic fascism. He brings the following ingredients of "minimum fascism" and tends to agree with them while trying to reflect on the Turkish context: a) anti-liberal, b) anti-conservative, c) tending to glorify certain epochs in nation's history, d) inclined to charismatic leadership, e) deifying such mythical concepts as the nation, the leader, national identity, etc, and f) idealising homogeneity in the national community (*ibid.*: 360). Adanir efforts, however, stop half-way although he comes extremely closer to the essence of fascism in Turkey.

Such an approach is not unique, as other instances to delve into this subject led to more or less the same conclusions. Taha Parla and Andrew Davison choose to prefer the analytical categories of "partly fascist", "partly totalitarian" and, more holistically, "rightist tendencies" to study specific parts of Kemalism, which they refer to as a solidaristic corporatist ideology. They consistently refuse to apply these categories without attaching the word "tendencies" to them. They further claim that, even though some of the political ideological aspects of Kemalism exceeded "the limits of the solidaristic corporative perspective", they, however, were not full-fledged developments, but rather leanings (Parla/Davison 2004: 244). The authors also claim: "Fascistic and totalitarian ideological tendencies do not dominate Kemalism, but they are present and were active so that fascistic tendencies could form themselves within and out of Kemalism, as the existence of deeply rightist, Kemalist tendencies in the history of the republic shows" (Parla/Davison 2004: 247). Thus, they accept the presence and active nature of "rightist tendencies" but are reluctant to relate Kemalism to fascism or totalitarianism. However, when describing Mustafa Kemal's own discourse and certain judgments they indicate that at the ideological level fascism was visible (*ibid.*: 256).

Bozarslan (2006: 29) claims that between 1930 and 1938 the Kemalist regime was an openly and self-consciously anti-liberal and anti-democratic regime thereby projecting itself "as the third pillar of an anti-democratic world, Fascism and Bolshevism constituting the two other poles".

Gökmen (2006: 678). lists a few features of the Kemalist regime between 1931 and 1945, which, according to him, overlapped with fascism: “a single party, a strong reaction against the old regime, the existence of solidarist and corporatist and later on, totalitarian tendencies, coalescence of state with party, adoption of a national leader system, and increasing state interventionism in the economy”. However, he does not fully support the idea of fascism in Turkey, as he refers to the assumption that Kemalism was a pragmatic ideology and, unlike fascism, “it did not have thoroughgoing totalitarian pretensions” and did not possess “the complex compound that made fascism possible in Italy” (*ibid.*). Others claimed that the Kemalist revolution secured far-reaching social changes and made Turkey “free from sharp social cleavages and class conflicts”, which existed in Germany and Italy (Parker/Smith 1940: 75). In his discussions of Kemalism religion, Mateescu (Mateescu 2006: 225-226, 238) describes the comparisons between Kemalism and fascist and communist dictatorships as “naïve”. He further explains that the Kemalist regime “falls in the democratic category” and, therefore, “original Kemalism cannot be defined as authoritarian in itself, and it was far from totalitarianism”.

A similar argument about the lack of “specific” or “complex compounds” of fascism in Turkey have long dominated the scholarship. This lacuna becomes more complex when we consider the rather convincing arguments of Stanley Payne and Roger Eatwell about fascism being the vaguest of the major political terms, about the lack of agreement about its definition, and the greater differences between “fascisms” (Payne 1995:15, 20). The experts of Turkish history have generally refrained from dealing with the totalitarian essence of the Unionist and Kemalist regimes. Quite interestingly, many scholars simply relied on the fact that neither of two consecutive regimes ever referred to themselves as dictatorships, therefore, according to them, these regimes should not be qualified as such. In reality, there have been different accounts by contemporaries who qualified these regimes as dictatorships, and many other qualifications were done retrospectively. For instance, there is a general consensus in the scholarship that the dictatorship in Turkey was firmly put in place since January 1914 and was heavily applied until 1918 (Kevorkian 2011: 191). For the Kemalist period it had a bit different manifestations, albeit on

different occasions (the once recorded in 1923, 1929 and 1935), Mustafa Kemal refuted claims of the media, which coined him a dictator.¹

SETTING A FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING FASCISM IN TURKEY

The study of fascism and totalitarian regimes of the 20th century had a cyclical development. In the 1920-30s, it had a mainly descriptive nature; in the 1940-50s, it had a condemning feature and sought a generic totalitarian system; in the 1960s, as Richard Overy claims, historians started to focus on a narrative that emphasised the peculiar character of each national dictatorship, and played down the resemblances (Overy 2004: xxxii). The interrelation between totalitarianism and fascism has always been complex. In the Turkish context the fine lines between them are more difficult to draw because of overstretched ignorance of the subject. In some instances, researchers have no choice but to use these two concepts interchangeably, while in some cases the definitional approaches are so neatly drawn that one needs to follow them to get the arguments through. The impact of that gap will not affect our analysis and the two concepts will be used separately, albeit in some cases their parallel usage is unavoidable. However, for methodological clarity fascism will be viewed as a radical type of totalitarianism and deriving from that, first it will be proved that dominant ideological currents in Turkey in the first half of the 20th century fall into the category of totalitarianism, whereas in certain periods and timeframes the fascist nature of the ruling regimes were becoming more discernible.

It needs to be underlined that the basic shortcoming of those approaches, which reject the fascist nature of any regime, is that they take "Italian Fascism as the point of departure for every comparative study" (Adanir 2001: 359). Turkish experience is no exception because, in studying fascism there, conceptual, semantic, methodological and theoretical flaws were present. Most of the time, when comparing it with Italian fascism and to a lesser extent with German Nazism, the Turkish experience was put mainly under a positive light and was left out of the picture for not qualifying as a fascist regime. Another misconception, dismissed by Kieser (2007), was that the Young Turk leadership almost always was pre-

¹ *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri* 2006: 176, 484, 489.

sented “as naïve, benevolent, and relatively powerless in the face of an overwhelming political crisis”. In another instance, after the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, an official from the German embassy reported to Berlin: “The broad term ‘Young Turks’ covers those people who are consumed by and infatuated with western European concepts without having a real understanding of them”.² Other accounts also regarded the Young Turks as “a little band of mad anarchists”, “foolish visionaries”, “dreamers” and their movement as “innocuous” and “bogus” (Knight 1909; Miller 1913). The impact of these approaches had methodologically limited the framework of the general discussion of the problem. Those studies also fell short of uncovering the elements of the Unionist and Kemalist regimes, political systems and cultures, which had significant parallels with likeminded regimes of the 1910-1930s.

Another problem in the scholarship was the overconcentration on the 1930s in trying to find the fascist nature of Kemalism, whereas Kemalism, as a system of thought, was the outcome of developments unfolding long before its emergence. Extending the Young Turks’ period of governance from 1908 until 1945 (instead of 1908-1918), suggested by Zürcher (1992: 237-253), is yet another indication that there was tangible continuum of ideas, practices and cadre resources between two regimes. Thus, Kemalism in the 1930s was only one of the phases of Turkish experience with fascism. Sternhell (1987: 32) mentions at least three levels of analysis while approaching fascism: looking at it as an ideology, as a political movement, and as a form of government. These levels also illustrate the evolution of fascism in different contexts. In the Turkish context these three levels have also been clearly visible as the examples below illustrate.

Six basic features or traits of a totalitarian regime, suggested by Friedrich/Brzezinski (1956: 9, 10), serve as helpful guidelines for identifying the essence of such a regime. For the authors the following “universally acknowledged ... features” are important to be termed totalitarian dictatorships: “a) an ideology, b) a single party typically led by one man, c) a terroristic police, d) a communications monopoly, e) a weapons monopoly, and f) a centrally directed economy”, which altogether aim at the “to-

² Botschaft, Kiderled to Bülow, *Therapia*, July 10, 1998, PAAA/R14159/A11112/Nr. 111 cited in Weitz 2011: 182.

tal destruction and total reconstruction” of the state and society. They also warn that there might be others, “now insufficiently recognized”. Through the effective control, indoctrination and manipulation of the population, the totalitarian regimes strive to achieve socialisation and ideological homogenisation. Thus, they possess a more radical programme of change, deliberately mobilised masses, equipped with ideology, “a quasi-religious philosophy with a claim of exclusivity” (Bracher 1984). The majority of scholars are inclined to claim that those regimes were anti-modernists and they wanted to reassert the old community, whereas others insist that they were progressive forces interested in rapid development in all spheres of social and economic lives (Eatwell 2001: 17-18). Totalitarianism has also been criticised for its wide variety of applications for different regimes and also for being normative, analytical and non-teleological (ibid.).

Speaking of classifications and common objectives of totalitarian regimes, Stephen Lee argues that at least four sectors—individual/societal, ideological, political and economic—need total reorganisation and control to qualify as a totalitarian regime. On the individual/societal levels totalitarian regimes sought to create new men empowered by a radical change of attitudes and beliefs. These changes would ultimately subordinate “new men” through coercion, propaganda, indoctrination and control.³ Lee further posits that totalitarian regimes aim to control man’s and society’s existence according to doctrinal goals. As for the objectives of political systems of the totalitarian regimes, Lee continues, they were composed of a single party backed by the army and aimed at mobilised mass support, particularly among the youth. The political system is also characterised by the executive branch controlling the legislature and the only single party being headed by a strong leader with clear inclinations

³ The detailed breakdown of the subordination tools as provided by Lee is helpful to lay down the cognitive map of the totalitarian ideologues—*coercion* (a system of physical and psychic terror, effected through party and secret police control), *propaganda and indoctrination* (complete monopoly of mass communication, manipulation of culture, history, a destruction of cultural pluralism and shaping of education, literature, art and music according to the political ideology) and *control* (terror, brutal forms of repression, purges and penal, labour or concentration camps, identification and elimination of all enemies (racial or class)).

towards personality cult. Concerning the economic system, Lee argues, totalitarian regimes strove to have complete control over the economy and to provide “bureaucratic co-ordination of formerly independent corporate entities” (Lee 2005:300, 305-307). Being confident that these are reliable criteria for differentiating between “strong and weak models of totalitarian systems”, he arrives at two interdependent conclusions: a) there has never been a strong totalitarian model;⁴ b) all other regimes in Spain (under Franco), Greece (under Metaxas), Poland (under Pilsudski), Austria (under Dollfuss), Portugal (under Salazar), and Hungary (under Gombos) were aptly termed authoritarian regimes and not even partly totalitarian, because “they lacked any consistent attempt to mobilize the masses behind the regime; some of them even relied upon traditional ideas and distrusted anything which was remotely radical and revolutionary; there were hardly any attempts at mass indoctrination” (Lee 2005: 301). Turkey, and for that matter no other regime outside Europe, was not even considered as weak totalitarian or even authoritarian regimes by Lee and many other authors dealing with the problem.

In addition to Griffin’s “mythic core”, another identification of a “fascist minimum” was provided by Ernst Nolte (1965), who combined three ideological trends: anti-Marxism, anti-liberalism and anti-conservatism, plus two movement characteristics (the leadership principles and the party-army) all oriented toward a final goal, “totalitarianism”. Payne’s other approach, which was aimed to refine different definitions and manifestations of fascism, brought yet another working definition: “a form of revolutionary ultra-nationalism for national rebirth that is based on a primarily vitalist philosophy, is structured on extreme elitism, mass mobilization and the Fuhrer-prinzip, positively values violence as end as well as means and tends to normalize war and/or military virtues” (Payne 1995: 14). Michael Mann (2004: 10) refers to Payne to define the list of essential components the fascist core contains “nationalism, authoritarian statism, corporatism and syndicalism, imperialism, idealism, voluntarism, romanticism, mysticism, militarism, and violence”. Criticising Payne’s definition

⁴ According to Lee (2005: 301), Stalinist Russia was a weak totalitarian model, Nazi Germany was an imperfect totalitarianism, Italian Fascism was on the borderline between the weak model of totalitarianism and authoritarianism, Ustashi regime in Croatia and Szalasi’s regime in Hungary were partially totalitarian.

on several counts, Eatwell (2001: 33) proposes his own definition of fascism: “an ideology that strives to forge social rebirth based on a holistic-national radical third way, though in practice fascism has tended to stress style, especially action and the charismatic leader, more than detailed program, and to engage in a Manichean demonization of its enemies.” Mann (ibid.: 11) sides with Eatwell’s third-way definition of fascism (not as anti-modern, like Nolte does, but as an alternative vision of modernity) and considers it closest to his own definition. These two definitions contain a lot in common and, therefore, should be seen as mutually reinforcing, particularly having in view the fact that fascism in the interwar period had different durations for different regimes with different manifestations. Paul Wilkinson (1987: 227-228) mentions more tenets of fascist ideology: “the belief in the supremacy of the chosen national group over all other races and minorities; the total subordination of the individual to an absolute state... etc.” Wilkinson adds another feature of fascism—exaltation of the role of youth.⁵

Another dominant assumption was that since fascism was born in Europe and it had European intellectual, social, organisational and political origins, fascism outside Europe was treated with skepticism. Fascism of the inter-war period was largely seen as a purely European-epochal phenomenon being alien to non-European political systems (Eatwell 2001: 33), a generic argument, which largely deviated attention from non-European manifestations of totalitarian/fascist movements and regimes. In addition, totalitarian dictatorship/fascism is historically “unique” and *sui generis* (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956: 5), which, in turn, suggests that in different contexts different causal origins and dynamics should be sought. Hence, the temptation of seeking “a generic definition that might apply across many times and places” (Mann 2004: 5) initially limited various scholarly undertakings.

It goes without saying that different movements and ideas active outside Europe, with their regional, historical, social and local identities, absorbed the European models with certain modifications, therefore, fas-

⁵ This became a prominent feature of the Kemalist regime as in his 1927 “Great Speech” (*Nutuk*) Mustafa Kemal dedicated a whole page to the youth reminding them “to save Turkey’s independence and the Turkish Republic” by finding the noble blood in their veins (Kemal 2008: 715-716).

cism, like other similar currents existing hitherto, could not appear in different contexts as exact copies (Larsen 2001: 717). Based on that warning, Stein U. Larsen further urges to acknowledge this difference in order to grasp “the essence of the [fascist] phenomena” (ibid.). Formation, ascendance and application of fascism in Turkey was a different experience, therefore, the most important question remains how consistent and different were the components of Kemalist Turkey from Italian Fascism, German Nazism or other fascisms elsewhere.

Payne’s definition looks far more Eurocentric, drawing mostly from Italian and German experiences, whereas Eatwell’s take is driven more from a universalist approach even though it does not preclude the fact that some non-European fascist movements could have gone through the typically European, “classical” fascist pathway. Although different components of both Payne’s and Eatwell’s definitions are helpful in locating fascism in Turkey, Eatwell’s approach is more helpful to explain the Turkish experience with fascism between 1910s and 1930s.

INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS OF FASCISM IN TURKEY

The history of fascism as a system of thought began at the end of the 19th century with the intellectual revolution and with the entry of the masses into politics (Sternhell 1987: 148-150). This approach is different from the one, which seeks to locate fascism in the interwar era. Even though this claim is made for the European context, many of its features are applicable to our study too.

At the turn of the century, common fears and passions specific to Europe did not bypass the declining Ottoman Empire. Expanding communications since the 1860-90s peculiar for that period allowed the Ottoman/Turkish/non-Turkish intellectual and political elites to be aware of the intellectual atmosphere, which “was saturated with Darwinian biology and Wagnerian aesthetics, Gobineau’s racialism, Le Bon’s psychology, as well as the black prophecies of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, and, later, the philosophy of Bergson” (Sternhell 1998: 171). In turn, the intellectuals, ideological currents and “native intelligentsia”, which for fifty years, through persistent efforts had created the soil for political, legal, cultural and economic transformations, immensely influenced both the Unionists and the Kemalists (Kohn 1943: 254). Ideological quasi-discourses starting from the

Tanzimat period (from 1839 until 1876) and the subsequent or parallel waves of ideological currents like Pan-Turanism, Pan-Islamism, Pan-Ottomanism, Westernists (*Garpcular*) constituted a fertile ground for development and further empowerment of the Unionist and the Kemalist discourses. In some spheres the Kemalists continued the job where the Unionists left off, while in other aspects the republican policies constituted either a clean break with the ideas of the previous era or went way too far (Zürcher 2005: 16, 18).

Active members of Turkish émigré centers in Europe like the ones in Switzerland⁶ and, particularly in France, which Sternhell identifies as “the real birthplace of fascism” (Sternhell/Sznajder/Asheri 1994: 4), played a key role in transforming the intellectual and political climate in the Empire. In addition, the leaders of the Young Turks were affected by the increasing tide of French nationalism, which called for revenge in order to overcome the 1871 humiliation. The leaders and intellectuals of the Young Turk movement, headquartered in Paris, were influenced by the writings of the popular intellectuals and thinkers of the period such as Albert Sorel and Emile Boutmy, Gustave Le Bon, Charles Darwin, Emile Durkheim, philosopher and historian Ernest Renan, Auguste Comte, Pierre Laffitte, Herbert Spencer, Pittard, Alexander Helphand (Parvus), and many others (Hanioglu 2006: 10-11). For instance, Le Bon’s writing on the role and psychology of the masses, on race and the need to lead masses by an elite (otherwise they could be ruled to irrational behaviour), were deeply-seated convictions of the intellectual elite of the time. Also the questions of guided transformation/revolution from above, not popular unrests and upheavals from below, were omnipresent among Young Turks (Zürcher 2005: 12). Laffitte’s version of an ideal society envisaging “an orderly progress through a division of labour under the enlightened guidance of a ‘scientific’ elite” was broadly embraced by many Young Turk intellectuals (e.g. Ahmet Riza, one of the leaders of the Young Turks, was an outspoken proponent of that idea) (ibid.: 21). The first Turkish nationalist thinkers and later CUP intellectual publications (*Genç Kalemler*) were much influenced by the racial theories of Arthur de Gobineau (Akçam 2006: 53). Influenced by the German con-

⁶ For a comprehensive analysis of Turkish émigré activities in Switzerland, see Kieser 2008.

cepts of nation, based on race, blood and culture, Ziya Gökalp has developed the expansionist version of Turkish nationalism (*ibid.*: 53). The Young Turks became aware of the Marxist revisionism by Georges Sorel who replaced the rationalistic, Hegelian foundations of Marxism with anti-materialist, voluntarist and vitalist elements. Sternhell also refers to Sorel's preposition to activate masses through intuition, the cult of energy and *élan*, activism and heroism, as well as through myths, systems of images, which strike the imagination (Sternhell 1987: 148-149). Speaking of the impact of those authors (historians, racial and physical anthropologists) and their writings on the formulation of the republican ideas and concepts (science, race, social-Darwinism, progress, etc.). Hanioglu (2011: 160-198) brings a long list of authors who influenced Mustafa Kemal (to mention only a few—Wells, Alfred Cort Haddon, George Montandon, Eugene Pittard, etc.). It needs to be also stressed that starting from the 19th century, especially the last quarter of it, “the French language had a very significant cultural dominance on the Ottoman meaning system” (Göçek 1996:121). Hence, penetration of French revolutionary ideas and literature to the Empire, as well as the exposure of the literate people and the Ottoman intellectuals to them was an unhindered process.

Thus, the Ottoman elite of the time became the witnesses of a period what Sternhell referred to as an intellectual revolution, which paved the way for mass politics and mass revolt against “the world of matter and reason, against materialism and positivism, against the mediocrity of bourgeois society, and against the muddle of liberal democracy” (Sternhell 1998: 170). Like their European pairs, Turkish intellectuals were also obsessed with the prevailing contention that sentiment and feeling count for more in political questions than reasoning (*Ibid.*: 171). Turkish political elite entered WWI under a deep influence and inspiration of these mentioned currents. WWI did not bring these ideas to halt, they played a critical role in the 1920s and 1930s as well. Some of these vogue authors and names became even more popular in Turkey parallel to the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe.

These ideas and thoughts, actively circulating in different corners of Europe, influenced the writings of Turkish nationalists and intellectuals such as Ali Suavi, Ahmed Riza, Tekin Alp, Ziya Gökalp, Mehmet Emin, Ahmet Riza, Abdullah Cevdet, Halide Edip (Adivar), Mehmed Fuad

(Köprülü), Ahmet Hikmet. Particularly Turkish-speaking Muslim immigrants from Russia like Yusuf Akçura, Ahmet Ağaoğlu (Agayev), Mehmed Reşid Şahingiray, Ali Hüseyinzade, Musa Akiyığitzade, Halim Sabit transferred the revolutionary atmosphere and transplanted many fashionable writings of Russian revolutionary movements into the Turkish context and circumstances and thereby decisively influenced the Turkish national movement (Kieser 2011: 127). These are only a few of the names who left an important impact on the Young Turks, on the late Ottoman state and Republican ideological currents. Some of these preachers were radical nationalists who were very well integrated into the CUP power system, some had key administrative positions (e.g. Reşid Şahingiray was the governor of a few provinces including Karesi and Diyarbakır) in the government or were the members of CUP's Central Committee (*merkez-i umumi*) (as was the case with Gökalp and Agaoglu), which gave them practical leverages to implement their ideals. Understandably, these scholars had different perspectives on most of the urgent issues that the Ottoman state was facing at the time—minority questions, nationalism, religion, etc.

Another avenue for spreading these revolutionary and scientific ideas were periodicals published inside and outside of the Ottoman Empire. Most well-known periodicals of the time were “Türk Derneği” (*Turkish Association*), “Genç Kalemler” (*Young Pens*), “Türk Yurdu” (Turkish Homeland), which were founded since 1908 and gained wide recognition. Articles published in these journals promoted cultural and linguistic pan-Turkism through promotion of Turcological studies. Almost all the intellectuals of the time discussed above, which one way or another were affiliated with the Young Turks, contributed to these journals urging the need for awakening, attaining national pride, self-help, defining the boundaries of Turkishness and purifying the Turkish language by getting rid of Persian and Arabic loan-words (Araji 1992). The ideas and ideals discussed in these journals were instrumental in shaping the fundamentals of the Unionist and the Kemalist worldviews particularly in the matters related to nation-building and construction of national identity. Names of the contributors reappeared in the republican era too.

For a while, the Ottoman Empire and the early republican period were also viewed as largely weak and hence marginalised from global affairs, and that assumption affected the way the political and social processes

were understood. Following this erroneous line, it was a general supposition that the rulers of the Ottoman Empire were conscious about the upcoming collapse of it and incapable of doing anything. That line of reasoning also entailed that Turkey was alienated from prevailing intellectual and political currents. Whereas, in reality, Turkey was a part of *Weltpolitik*, hence global affairs and intellectual currents could not by-pass it. Meanwhile, thoughts, lifestyles and forms of production originating in Europe had peculiar pathways of adoption and adaptation in Turkey in the first decades of the 20th century. Therefore, positioning the theory of totalitarianism in Turkey without due consideration of local origins and country-specific causes of totalitarianism is a vain endeavour. Since detailed analysis would lead us too far afield, a few general dimensions should be discussed.

For decades, the leaders of the Ottoman Empire were striving to execute systemic reforms, which were either slow and non-efficient or superfluous. The famous questioning of the time “How can this state be saved?” (*Bu devlet nasıl kurtulur?*) was the main driving force for many of the Young Turks, initiatives both in the opposition and in the government. For the Young Turks and Kemalists many reforms by the earlier decades created more problems than solutions and eventually led to the collapse of the Empire. Being the victims, and to some extent responsible for the previous experience, the republican leadership chose to distance itself from the immediate past to create a new state, a new nation and a new society. In the eyes of the Kemalists those objectives could not be achieved through mere adoption of laws. The society had to be inculcated with new ideals, ideas and visions. However, even after those measures the political elite in Turkey questioned the efficacy of its own efforts. Being dissatisfied with the results, they became the staunchest defenders of the heavy-handed policies of Kemalism in the 1930s.

Once in power from 1908 to 1918 (with a brief interlude in 1912) and particularly after 1913, the Committee for Union and Progress had the chance to experiment with some of the constitutive elements of the fascist ideology, although the word came into existence later. The political and social implications of the Balkan Wars and most importantly WWI served as historical opportunities to implement some of the ideological and political objectives that were proposed by different political and in-

tellectual circles of the period. It would be an overestimation to claim that the political leaders of the CUP were acting as if they represented fascist forms of government. However, the way some of the political objectives were carried out were of no difference of those developments that had taken place in Europe decades later. Moreover, the pace of transformation of theoretical and scientific understandings into practice was short enough, which resulted in spontaneous application of many policy features (Pan-Turkism, unification of all Turks to build the Turkish fatherland, expansionist ambitions, homogenisation, assimilation, resettlement of population). Sternhell (1987: 149) correctly claims that the constitutive elements of the fascist ideology, elaborated prior to August 1914, re-appeared in an almost identical form in the 1920s and 1930s both in Italy and elsewhere. It may reasonably be supposed that all three levels of fascist phenomenon, as identified by Sternhell above (ideology, political movement and form of government) were exemplified in Turkey between 1910s and 1930(40)s. One may point to certain interludes during these decades, however, that does not change much the central argument.

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