

Seeing like a nation-state: Young Turk social engineering in Eastern Turkey, 1913–50

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Introduction

“The twentieth century,” Anthony Giddens solemnly reminds us, “is a bloody and frightening one.”¹ Specifically, the first half of twentieth-century world history was marked by a tremendous body count resulting from wars and genocidal violence. Prosecuting these crimes in Nuremberg, Justice Robert H. Jackson provided a succinct historical summary of them: “No half-century ever witnessed slaughter on such a scale, such cruelties and inhumanities, such wholesale deportations of peoples into slavery, such annihilations of minorities.”² In a lucid article Ian Kershaw paraphrases this interpretation:

[H]owever pessimistically we look back on world history in recent decades, it is plain that the ultra-violence that characterised the first half of the century had no equivalent in the second half, though the later decades could still witness the horrific episodes of violence in, for example, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Khmer Rouge Cambodia or Rwanda. This first half of the century—or, more precisely, the years 1914 to 1950 that spanned the period from the beginning of the First World War to the end of the Second World War, embracing also its immediate aftermath, when high levels of violence against civilian populations with the resulting misery of millions continued—has indeed claim, more surely than any other period in history, to be labelled “the era of violence.” That is to say: in these four decades of the twentieth century, violence had *epochal* character; it determined the age.³

Micha Brumlik identifies three fundamental aspects of this “epochal character”: first, the industrial killing of non-combatants; second, the establishment of lawless enclaves embodied in concentration camps; and third, the politically motivated deportation and expulsion of indigenous peoples.⁴ Götz Aly agrees with this idea and notes about deportations: “There was nothing taboo about the forcible resettlement of population groups and entire peoples in the first half of the twentieth century. [...] Resettlement programmes were routinely justified by reference to economic and ideological arguments.”⁵ Although the period 1900–50 merits special attention for scholars interested in nationalist violence,

in general nationalist population policies constitute more than outright violence and include a broad range of possible political strategies.

The concept of social engineering provides us with a useful analytical tool that is broad but does not lapse into a catch-all category. It originates from late nineteenth-century discussions by sociologists on the application of scientism (most notably social science) in ordinary government population policies.⁶ In short, social engineering encompasses the exercise of all possible state policies aimed at changing a given society. In the era of nationalism and nation-states it became tantamount to the enforced maximization of ethnic, religious, economic, cultural (in other words: *identity*) homogeneity by any means. Moreover, in the twentieth century social engineering acquired a decidedly calculated character, involving refined plans and calculating bureaucracies.⁷ Most importantly, the exercise of these policies was always unidirectional: the political elite coerced the population as it saw fit. In situations of frustration, crisis, or war, coercion could easily gain in violence. As Amir Weiner has argued: “Whatever its ideological coloring, social engineering possessed a tremendous capacity for violence.”⁸

States can apply several techniques of social or demographic engineering.⁹ Laid out from the least violent to the most violent, first, it includes the manipulation of censuses. The twin principles of sovereignty and democracy, entrenched in the paradigm of nationalism, prescribe that being the ethnic majority guarantees political power. Nationalist elites therefore closely follow the ethnic composition of the population. The second strategy, closely connected to the first one, is natalism: government policies that are pro-birth and aimed at increasing a country’s ethnic majority, often at the expense of minorities. A third technique is border alteration, which aims to achieve total overlap between ethnic and political borders. A fourth method of social engineering is forced assimilation. Nationalist regimes may endeavour to subject minorities to pressure to “become like the majority” in order to produce greater homogeneity. Many scholars interpret these policies as “ethnocide” or “cultural genocide.”¹⁰ Population exchanges to create mutually homogeneous societies, such as the ones between Greece and Turkey in 1923 or India and Pakistan in 1947, are a sixth strategy. Finally, deportation, ethnic cleansing, or in the most extreme case genocidal destruction, are the most violent (and least employed) of all the possible strategies of social engineering.

The leading question in this exercise is: how was Eastern Turkey molded by Young Turk social engineering?¹¹ In other words, this article addresses population politics in the broader Young Turk era (1913–50), which included all of the above techniques of social engineering against various minority populations. The focus will mostly lie in an account of the implementation of these nationalist population politics in the eastern provinces to exemplify these policies in detail. The article argues that a generation of traumatized Young Turk politicians launched and perpetuated this violent project of societal transformation in order to secure the existence of a future Turkish nation-state. It further advances the argument that a strong continuity of population politics can be observed between the CUP era (1913–18) and the Kemalist era (1919–50). Before turning to a brief overview

of the genesis of Young Turk social engineering, a synopsis of the literature in this field will be provided.

A review of the literature

The Ottoman Empire and its successors, including the Turkish Republic, have not remained immune to Kershaw's "era of violence." Apart from the many wars, an incomplete list of mass violence in the Ottoman Empire would include: the 1909 Adana massacre, the violent expulsion of European Muslims especially after 1912, the 1915 deportation and genocide of Armenians and Syrians, the 1921 Koçgiri and Pontus massacres, the mass violence against Kurds from the 1925 Sheikh Said conflict to the 1938 Dersim massacre, the 1934 anti-Jewish pogrom in Thrace, all the way up to and including the 1955 pogrom against Greeks and Armenians in Istanbul. Sociologically speaking, one could interpret these events as constituents of the "dark side" of the Turkish process of nation-building, of which violence was a defining feature. Unlike violence in modern German history, Young Turk violence and social engineering remains remarkably under-researched, both in Ottoman-Turkish studies and in genocide studies in general.

Together, the violence and counter-violence cost millions of people from all walks of life their lives and livelihood. Listed one by one in this bookkeeping of violence, these campaigns may seem incidental and isolated events, sudden explosions neatly encapsulated in time and space. But a closer look reveals clear ideological, motivational, and organic links and interdependencies between them. Were it not for the fact that almost all of these episodes of mass violence took place under Young Turk rule, the breadth and difference between each singular event would seem to preclude any interconnections. Given the status quo of isolated case studies, contextualization seems a challenge. It is an aim of this article to call this into question by pulling these scattered events together in order to problematize them and to consider what can be posited about any possible bigger picture. Turkish-nationalist social engineering consisted of a broad scope of policies ranging from marginalization, isolation, incarceration, border alteration, deportation, forced assimilation, population exchange, to outright indiscriminate massacre, and in the most extreme case: fully fledged genocidal destruction. The fate of the victims depended on their perceived ethnic and political distance to the newly proclaimed Ottoman Muslim and Turkish national identity, as well as on the contingency of war or international politics. The nationalist mindset of Young Turk social engineers allowed them to disregard feedback from the population so that ethnicity was equated with loyalty. Thus, loyal Christian Armenian government employees were doomed to be excluded whereas tax-evading Muslim Turkish peasants were categorized into this new identity. Others, such as Muslim Kurds or Sephardic Jews were considered slightly more "Turkifiable" than others, albeit ambiguously. Much of this was carried out with little regard for proclaimed and real loyalties. Once these processes of persecution escalated, points of no return were reached fast enough to erase millions from their ancestral lands in just years.

What is the score so far of research on Young Turk social engineering? It is not widely contested that the establishment of the Turkish Republic was a watershed in the modern history of the Middle East, marking the turn of a multi-ethnic empire into a nation-state set upon homogenizing its population. Students of Young Turk social engineering have established that in Turkey, encompassing campaigns of thorough homogenization were carried out by a generation of politicians who managed to maintain power and persisted in implementing plans of demographic homogenization, carried out under the banner of nation-building. In what follows, I will summarize the main debates on Young Turk social engineering, utilizing key studies and seeking to patch them together to contribute to an integrated perspective of this small but burgeoning field.

On the historiographic level, Fatma Müge Göçek detects three discourses on Young Turk violence: an “Ottoman Investigative Narrative” (being the accounts of Ottoman citizens before 1923), a “Republican Defensive Narrative” (the nationalist master narrative denying all kinds of state-led violence), and a “Post-nationalist Critical Narrative” (comprised of critical intellectuals challenging the previous narrative and opening up new avenues of research).¹² One could perhaps add to this portrait the “Minority Memorial Narrative”: the growing attempts (political and scholarly) of a plethora of community activists of various victimized peoples to document the violence perpetrated against their groups and popularize accounts thereof, which were silenced and were relegated to oblivion by official Turkish historiography. Had they not drawn attention to these historical sufferings, fewer scholars would have picked up on these signals and problematized them in academia. Beyond descriptive studies of the violence itself, Hamit Bozarslan has analysed minutely the language of Young Turk violence, periodizing broadly and cutting through the mystifying barrier of 1923. His article catalogued how the Young Turk elite apprehended the nature and meaning of its violent policies.¹³

In an early article Mark Levene argued that once the western ideology of nationalism percolated into Ottoman politics, it was only a matter of time before “Eastern Anatolia” became a laboratory for nationalist visions of the future. When the Young Turks gained the upper hand in the region, the violent process of nation formation they launched came to engulf a mosaic of victims.¹⁴ Hilmar Kaiser deepened this notion and demonstrated in purely historical yet extremely detailed research that the treatment of the Armenians and Syriacs, nothing short of genocide, and the deportation of Kurds and Greeks were integral parts of the CUP scheme of social engineering. Arguing that this scheme envisioned the cultural assimilation of Muslims and exclusion of non-Muslims, he drew a parallel with wartime Nazi policies in Eastern Europe by aptly characterizing the project as “Generalplan Ost 1915.”¹⁵ Aspects of Young Turk social engineering were catalogued by Fuat Dündar in his work on the forced resettlements of Muslims.¹⁶ An authoritative and definitive study written by Hans-Lukas Kieser described many aspects and detailed histories of CUP social engineering. He rightly emphasized that the homogenizing efforts between 1913 and 1938 could be seen as nation-state policies on an imperial

scale.¹⁷ In a later article Kieser made the persuasive argument that in the Young Turk era the notion of “modernity” became a discourse legitimizing the use of state violence.¹⁸ These were the first instances in which the debate on Young Turk social engineering was taken seriously as an autonomous and legitimate field of study and expertise.

Periodization remains far from a settled issue. In an account of the Turkish nation-building process, Taner Akçam traced its key aspects and linked it to the forced Turkification of Anatolia up to the establishment of the Republic. According to this interpretation, the Armenian genocide was a constituent aspect, as well as the apex, of this long and at times very violent process.¹⁹ Others, on the other hand, have periodized social engineering from 1923 on. In a massive volume describing anti-Jewish measures and policies of the Kemalist regime, Rıfat Bali has pointed out that although the Ottoman Jews may never have been targeted genocidally, neither were they ever to be included in the Turkish nation. His study described how during the Kemalist era the Turkish Jews were targeted for linguistic assimilation and economic and administrative exclusion.²⁰ An alternative interpretation was offered by Ayhan Aktar, who wrote that no Muslim ethnic group was considered to be a minority. According to Aktar, the Kemalists excluded Armenians, Greeks, and Jews from society through economic Turkification, isolation, and expulsion, due to these groups being perceived as “non-Turkifiable” minorities.²¹

Some scholars have rightly pointed at the variegated nature of Young Turk social engineering, involving not only a human cost, but also the reorganization of space. In a recent article Erol Ülker wrote: “Turkification was a project of nation-building, aiming to keep the unity of the empire under the domination of a Turkish national core.” Mildly glossing over the genocidal persecution of Ottoman Armenians and Ottoman Syrians,²² as well as the formative influence of these events for the infrastructure of the envisioned Turkified state, Ülker argued that the CUP had “Anatolia” incorporate “Kurdistan” as a form of nationalist geopolitics.²³ In a comprehensive analysis of Turkish-nationalist social engineering using the local example of Urfa, Kerem Öktem defined it as a double-edged sword, involving the exclusion of non-Turkish people but the nationalist incorporation of their space.²⁴ In his detailed study of the Armenian genocide, Donald Bloxham adds nuances and complicated the image of clear-cut categories of perpetrators and victims in the post-genocidal period. He too extended the chronological reach forwards, confronting a series of episodes of violent population politics in Eastern Turkey.²⁵ Utilizing Republican archival material, Soner Çağaptay traced the roots of nation formation in the Turkish Republic to the *millet* system with its established categories of people. According to him, potential Turks could only become Turks after a process of filtration, involving a full identity change.²⁶ Finally, in a recent article Nesim Şeker discussed the deportation of the Ottoman Armenians as a “radical shift in the management of ethnic conflict from an imperial tradition to one peculiar to nation-state formation” and recognized that only proactive decisions by political elites could bring forth massive processes such as the Armenian genocide.²⁷

Were it not only for the fact that these works constitute a sophisticated and impressive corpus of research literature on the subject,²⁸ they should not be easily dismissed as drops in the ocean, especially considering the reluctance of scholars to work dedicatedly on these themes. These drops have managed to quench the thirst of students of Young Turk social engineering. One can synthesize from the previous that although research on this theme is developing rapidly, at present it still lacks many elements as well. Examples include: the positioning of the Armenian genocide within the larger framework of Young Turk social engineering, the economic motivation and consequences of the persecutions, the treatment and experiences of less well studied minorities, longitudinal perspectives of continuity between the CUP and Kemalism, and descriptive historical studies on specific locations or regions.

The genesis of Young Turk social engineering

It is highly unlikely that the mass violence as it unfolded during World War I was prepared by conspiracy and meticulously planned before 1915. Rather it emerged from the unpredictable circumstances from December 1914 to April 1915. Nevertheless, well before the war, the CUP dreamt of building a strong, united society that was dominated by Ottoman Muslims. The radical wing of Turkish nationalists in the CUP believed that coercion, if not outright violence, could eventually help achieve their political visions for the future in ways that negotiations could not. In order to reconstruct some of the key processes and decisions that led to shaping wartime policies, it is important to understand three parallel developments that were in effect during the immediate years before the war. First, a profound crisis, emanating from the loss of the Balkan wars and threatening the very existence of the empire, not only deeply traumatized the Young Turks,²⁹ it also polarized relations among Ottoman political elites. The CUP leadership now steered away from political pluralism even more. From then on, only their vision was an acceptable trajectory for the Ottoman Empire and any opposition was met with harsh domestic repression and violence. Second, the Ottoman eastern provinces, which had become contested territory under the forces of both imperial competitions and various nationalisms, had to be “rewon” once and for all. This required both the production of new (nationalist) discourses and societal penetration by the CUP infrastructure. Third, having seized power in a coup d'état, the CUP was now in a position to ordain population politics by virtue of superior authority. It organized the conduct of detailed ethnographic research on almost all ethnic groups in the country and simultaneously initiated a policy of launching several trial balloons aiming at Turkification of many domains of Ottoman society.

The huge losses of the Balkan wars, the ensuing establishment and expansion of nation-states by formerly Ottoman subjects, and the persecution and ethnic cleansing of Ottoman Muslims in those regions, confirmed suspicions in the CUP that non-Muslim and in particular non-Turkish Ottomans could not be trusted. The conclusions the CUP drew from its analysis of the political predicament of the Ottoman minorities quickly turned very hostile. In the tense ambience of the

Ottoman parliament, the various (Turkish, Greek, Arab, Albanian, Armenian, Kurdish) politicians couldn't stand each other any longer and ignored, accused, cursed, provoked, or even threatened each other. Especially from the Balkan wars on, ethnic minority members of parliament often polemicized with CUP members about the laws of Turkification they continuously issued. Often these ethnic minority members supported each other in common solidarity during plenary debates against the CUP.³⁰ In this political battleground, the CUP kept emphasizing the victimization of the Ottoman Muslims in the Balkans and threatened discordant minorities with sanctions.

The internal colonization of the Ottoman eastern provinces by the Young Turks originated partly from the competition between the Great Powers for influence in the region. The CUP's fear for further loss of territory was only matched by its desire to ensure and maintain a firm and preferably permanent grip on the region.³¹ After the loss of the Balkans the Young Turk press, aware of the existence of a virtual "Armenia" in the minds of Armenian nationalists and European diplomats, repeatedly warned the Great Powers to relinquish any ambitions slated to "occupy" or "cause turmoil" in the eastern provinces.³² When the issue of the "Armenian reform plan" was brought to the arena of international politics in 1913, it induced a Pavlov's reflex in the Young Turk mind. The CUP saw Great Power interference in internal politics as a humiliating breach of Ottoman sovereignty, a harbinger of the doomsday scenario in which an independent Armenia would be established in the Ottoman eastern provinces. *Tanin*, the chief press organ of the CUP, wrote: "If there is a genuine effort for reform, a solution can be found that does not violate the honour and legal sovereignty of the Ottoman state. [...] Accepting European control runs counter to the basis, spirit, and purpose of [the Committee of] Union and Progress."³³

CUP members had brainstormed about the notion of Turkishness and Turkification since the organization's inception.³⁴ At the party congresses in Salonica (1910, 1911) and Istanbul (1912, 1913) Turkish nationalism came to grow in support and influence as CUP members emphasized "national education" and a "national economy."³⁵ The resulting process of political polarization only exacerbated ethnic unmixing since "it did not take long for the non-Turkish parliamentarians to withdraw their support for the Committee and join the liberals."³⁶ Due to the secretive nature of the CUP and the sensitivity of the "nationality questions," critical decisions were taken behind closed doors. According to Halil Mentese (1874–1948), chairman of the Ottoman parliament, Talaat stated to him in a meeting that "he was preparing to cleanse the country of treacherous elements."³⁷ The battle cry "Turkey for the Turks" came into use in this period.³⁸

When the CUP seized power in a bloody coup on January 23, 1913, they set themselves the task of building a nation-state in the vast landscape of the Ottoman Empire, a territory populated by hundreds of different peoples belonging to a vast multitude of religious, linguistic, and ethnic groups. The formation of a new cabinet launched Talaat and Enver into power and enabled the CUP to gradually but resolutely introduce a campaign of Turkification on practically all domains of Ottoman society. It obliged all state organs (including all schools)

to correspond and communicate in the Turkish language and began harassing businesses in non-Muslim hands by forcing them to use Turkish in all corporate transactions. This linguistic nationalism was in essence a method to have more Muslims employed in the Ottoman economy. This would serve the advancement of the “national economy” the CUP dreamt of.³⁹ In May, June and August 1914, Enver Paşa organized a series of secret meetings at the War Ministry, at which “the elimination of non-Turkish masses” and “the cleansing of internal tumours” was discussed with Special Organization operatives, most notably one of its commanders, Kuşçubaşı Eşref (d. 1922), Enver’s close trustee.⁴⁰ During these meetings, the weaknesses of the Ottoman Empire were equated with the presence of clusters of non-Turkish people in strategic areas, such as in the Aegean area with its hundreds of thousands of Ottoman Greeks, or in the eastern provinces with its hundreds of thousands of Ottoman Armenians and Kurds. CUP loyalists decided that these “internal tumours” had to be removed, once and for all.⁴¹ Party ideologue Ziyâ Gökalp wrote extensively about the necessity of “Turkifying” the empire by instilling Turkish nationalism into the Ottoman Muslims, who according to him were oblivious of their national identity.⁴²

The introduction of this policy of “nationalization” required a great deal of organization. Existing Ottoman bureaucratic tools sufficed and needed minor creative adjustments to carry out the programme of social engineering. First of all, the hierarchical fabric of Ottoman state organs allowed for the highest echelons of any ministry (such as the Minister of the Interior) to telegraphically communicate with even insignificant civil servants and police officers at county level. Discipline was reinforced not only by the proverbial Ottoman political culture of obedience, but especially by the CUP’s notorious reputation for ruthlessness. Still, many written orders were revoked and replaced by covert oral orders, a typical CUP practice. Another important bureaucratic apparatus was the “Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Immigrants” (*İskân-ı Aşâir ve Muhacirîn Müdüriyeti*, henceforth İAMM). This organization was established in early 1914 and served two purposes: on the one hand, to advance the sedentarization of the many Turkoman, Kurdish, and Arab tribes, and on the other hand, to provide accommodation for homeless Muslim refugees, expelled from the Balkans and Russia.⁴³ It would later be expanded to constitute four branches, namely, Settlement, Intelligence, Relocation, and Tribes.⁴⁴ The most prolific name in the İAMM became Şükrü Kaya, the “Director of Relocation” (*Sevkiyat Müdürü*), who would manage most of the deportations.⁴⁵ Since the army would play a secondary role in the programme, the concentration and purposeful canalization of a huge reservoir of violence was delegated to the Special Organization, which was reorganized in 1914 and split into an external branch assigned with instigating rebellions in Iran and Caucasia, and an internal branch charged with supervising the programme of nationalization. The organization’s rearrangement meant that it was detached from regular Ottoman military jurisdiction and brought under the direct control of the CUP, most specifically under the auspices of Dr Bahaeddin Şakir (1877–1922) and Dr Nâzım (1872–1926).⁴⁶ With a single order the CUP could now deploy

tens of thousands of ruthless and heavily armed paramilitary troops to all corners of the vast empire.

Along with infiltrating the Ottoman bureaucracy and key government agencies, the CUP ordered the conduct of detailed research on the demographic and anthropological characteristics of the targeted ethnic and religious groups. These investigations were initiated in 1914 by the CUP and carried out by İAMM specialists of the Tribes and Intelligence bureaus who drew inspiration from the methods of Western European colonial administrative machineries. The research missions continued during and after the war, and consisted of both fieldwork in the provinces and careful examination of previous studies. Thus, Baha Said led expeditions to study Kızılbaş and Bektaşî communities, Mehmed Tahir and Hasan Fehmi were assigned with researching Ahi communities. Esat Uras conducted research on the Armenians, while Zekerîya Sertel concentrated mainly on Kurdish Kizilbash tribes.⁴⁷ One of the most intriguing CUP ethnographers was Naci İsmail, charged with mapping out details on Turkoman and Kurdish tribes. Under pseudonyms such as “Dr. Fritz,” “Prof. White,” and “Habil Adem” he wrote books bearing titles such as *International Methods of Assimilation*, *The Settlement of Tribes*, and *Non-Sunni Communities in Anatolia*.⁴⁸ One of the employees who worked at the Tribes division of İAMM wrote in his memoirs that the purpose of these research programmes was “to gather information in order to act accordingly.”⁴⁹ Also, since Diyarbakir was the hometown of CUP party ideologue Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), he himself assumed the task of researching the region’s Kurds and Armenians, as well as the ethnic division of labour. According to one of his closest students, his reports were functional as they provided the ideological framework and legitimization for CUP population politics. The books were distributed to the CUP elite, in particular to the interested Talaat.⁵⁰ In the end, the CUP research programme produced thousands of pages of documented research and commentary detailing various ethnic groups, most of whom were inhabitants of the eastern provinces.

Confronted with the harsh reality of ethnic majoritarianist population politics as the main legitimizing force propelling modern European politics and coupled with a desire to join the European concert on terms of full equality and sovereignty, the state of affairs in Ottoman society was not what CUP nationalists had in mind. The discovery of Ottoman society disillusioned the CUP elite: the residual Empire in Anatolia was an ethnically and religiously heterogeneous peasant society largely based on subsistence agriculture, local markets, and little societal integration. In Young Turk eyes, the eastern provinces were strategically pivotal, therefore the population’s loyalty to the state was absolutely necessary. Since from 1913 on loyalty was thought to be expected only from Muslims (preferably Turkish ones), the equation of loyalty with ethnicity entailed a transformation of the region’s very demography.

In 1914, most businesses on the Aegean littoral were owned by Ottoman Greeks. When persuasion didn’t cause the desired effect, the CUP took recourse to more violent methods of Turkification of the economy. It sent emissaries such as Special Organization agent Kara Kemal to assist Responsible Secretary

Celal Bayar (1883–1986) in Turkifying the economy of Smyrna/İzmir.⁵¹ In the summer of 1914 this political and nationalist persecution gained momentum as boycotts and expropriations escalated into kidnappings and assassinations of Greek businessmen and community leaders, and even wholesale deportations of villages.⁵² The fact that after this terror campaign many Ottoman Greeks opted to emigrate to Chios or Greece, abandoning their territory to the benefit of Ottoman Muslims, was celebrated by the CUP as an administrative success. Turkification was beginning to yield its fruits at a time when the outbreak of the war foreshadowed bad times for the population of the eastern provinces.

The outbreak of the First World War gave the CUP the opportunity to obtain dictatorial powers and carry through and expand their schemes of social engineering. When in the winter of 1914–15 the war entered a brutal phase, population politics radicalized commensurately. Though still under-researched, the evolution of a general process of persecution of Ottoman Armenians is relatively well known.⁵³ In April 1915, some Armenians had already sporadically been deported from their native regions, though this was not an empire-wide campaign. The deportation of practically the entire Armenian *millet* was officially organized from May 23, 1915 on, when Talaat issued orders for the integral deportation of all Armenians to Der ez-Zor in the Syrian desert, starting with the north-eastern provinces.⁵⁴ That same day he urged the Fourth Army Command to court-martial any Muslim who collaborated with Christians.⁵⁵ The Third Army had been put under command of General Mahmud Kâmil Paşa,⁵⁶ who had issued a similar order. His orders instructed “any Muslim who protected an Armenian hanged in front of his house, the burning of his house, his removal from office, and his appearance before a court-martial.”⁵⁷ These massive arrests and persecutions prompted the Entente powers to announce a joint declaration on May 24, denouncing CUP policies against the Armenians. The CUP leaders, especially Talaat, panicked and attempted to disguise the deportations, requesting permission from the Grand Vizier on May 26 to issue a temporary deportation law. Although the deportations had already begun, the Grand Vizier endorsed Talaat’s law on the 29th, rushing the bill through parliament the next day. This legal cover was the official inception of the deportation of Armenians to the Syrian desert, authorizing the army to proceed with this *fait accompli* and delegating its daily implementation to the İAMM.⁵⁸ The Armenian genocide had officially begun.

Social engineering in Eastern Turkey: phase one, 1913–18

The history of forced relocation in the Ottoman Empire can be traced back centuries.⁵⁹ However, the conduct of the CUP deportations were nationalist and thus constituted a fundamental breach with conventional Ottoman imperial statecraft. The internal campaigns ran parallel to the external war effort with the Great Powers, especially on the eastern front against Russia. It was no coincidence that most of the direct killing of non-combatant Ottoman Christians occurred in the eastern provinces, where the threat of a Russian invasion backed by “Armenian insiders” was most immediate in the paranoid minds of the CUP dictators.

However, the deportations and persecutions were relatively autonomous processes and only partly linked to the ebb and flow of the war. The initiation and conduct of the persecutions and deportations were mostly in the hands of Interior Ministry civil bureaucrats, not military personnel of the Ministry of War.

By the autumn of 1915, the Ottoman bureaucracy had depopulated most Armenian settlements, isolated or eliminated Armenian community leaders, and was already micromanaging the expropriation of Armenians and the allocation of their property to CUP loyalist Muslims. The destruction of the Ottoman Armenians denuded a vast economy of its owners: farms, businesses, factories, workplaces, ateliers, in some cities entire sections of bazaars were confiscated. Turkification of that economy was decreed with the enactment of several regulations of 1915, through which all remaining businesses were transferred to Muslim owners and the proceeds taken by the state. The practice of mass confiscation and plunder was in fact a shortcut to the notion of the aspired “national economy.”⁶⁰ On January 6, 1916 Talât ordered an empire-wide decree on the factories confiscated in the genocide. The order read:

The movable property left by the Armenians should be conserved for long-term preservation, and for the sake of an increase of Muslim businesses in our country, companies strictly made up of Muslims need to be established. Movable property should be given to them under suitable conditions that will guarantee the business' steady consolidation. The founder, the management, and the representatives should be chosen from honourable leaders and the elite, and to allow tradesmen and agriculturists to participate in its dividends the vouchers need to be half a lira or one lira and registered to their names to preclude that the capital falls in foreign hands. The growth of entrepreneurship in the minds of Muslim people needs to be monitored, and this endeavour and the results of its implementation needs to be reported to the Ministry step by step.⁶¹

The fate of one of the silk factories in Diyarbekir epitomizes this policy. The factory was owned by the Tirpandjian family and provided work for dozens of employees, mostly Armenians and Syrians. Silk was extracted, woven, dyed in various colours, and processed into regional textiles, characteristic for Diyarbekir and in great demand in the region. The Syriac weaver Lütfü Dokucu was the grandson of one of the employees. In June 1915, his grandfather was killed in the genocide when militiamen rounded up the employees, executed them outside the city walls, and threw the bodies in the Tigris. The factory and its assets, all the way up to the silkworms and mulberry leaves, were confiscated by the CUP government and allotted to local CUP member Müftüzâde Hüseyin (Ulğ), who exploited it in the decades after the war.⁶²

In April 1916, the CUP ordered the mass deportation of Kurds from the eastern provinces through a sweeping quadripartite decree. For the Kurds “not to live their tribal lives and preserve their nationalities where they are sent,” the CUP deemed it “absolutely necessary to separate the tribal chieftains from their people” and to “settle them separately in Turkish-populated areas in the province.” Those who were unable to travel were to be “distributed individually in Turkish villages in the province.” In the minds of CUP social engineers all of these measures

would prevent the Kurds from “remaining a useless element by preserving their traditions and nationalities in regions populated by Arabs and Kurds.” Throughout the entire operation, officials were expected to report to the Ministry of Interior “how many deportees are sent when and where.”⁶³ In the following months, Kurds were taken at gunpoint from their villages and nomadic routes and deported to Central and Western Anatolia. During the deportations many Kurds died from frost or hunger.⁶⁴ Examples of the official correspondence are clear evidence on the nature of the deportations. The CUP aimed at forcibly assimilating the Ottoman Kurds into the envisaged Turkish nation. When initiating the deportations, Talât personally paid attention to the efficiency of the Turkification project. He requested specific information on the Kurds living in more than a dozen provinces and districts, inquiring: “How many Kurdish villages are there, and where? What is their population? Are they preserving their mother tongue and original culture? How is their relationship with Turkish villagers and villages?”⁶⁵ At later times he checked again, this time asking how and where which convoys were being deported, and whether the Kurdish deportees had begun speaking Turkish.⁶⁶ Demographic dilution was another major aim: a general order prescribed that wherever sent, the population of Kurds was not to exceed the general population up to an upper limit of 5%.⁶⁷ Again, the correspondence speaks for itself: the CUP orchestrated a large-scale attack on Kurdish culture, language, and demography, constituencies that could define the Kurds as a nation in the eastern provinces and therefore supposedly posed a threat.

Along with deporting tens of thousands of Kurds *from* the eastern provinces, the CUP also ordered non-Kurdish Muslims sent *to* that region. This two-track policy was expected to expedite the demographic Turkification process. Most of these settlers were Bosnian Muslims, Bulgarian Turks, and Albanian Muslims who had fled war and violence in the Balkans. Another group of settlers were refugees from Bitlis and Van, the Turkish ones being filtered out for immediate settlement in the vicinity. At first the settler-deportees were lodged in the seminaries and mosques, where other poor and miserable villagers were temporarily housed as well. These settlers were to be housed in the empty Syriac and Armenian villages. Some were moved to the Adana region, others were settled on the Mardin plain. Beginning in the summer of 1915, the settlement policy continued until the end of the war. The colonizers were Muslim victims of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans who had sought asylum in the Ottoman Empire. Many of them had lived in Istanbul in shabby dwellings, impoverished, traumatized, and often vindictive. When the war broke out, the CUP accelerated its policies of social engineering and these refugees were incorporated into them. Albanians were but one group to be deported and settled. In June 1915 the İAMM ordered their “scattered settlement in order for their mother tongue and national traditions to be extinguished quickly.”⁶⁸ Albanians were to be settled all over the eastern provinces, including Diyarbakir.⁶⁹ Bosnian refugees were to be settled in Diyarbakir as well. On June 30, 1915 the İAMM ordered 181 Bosnian families temporarily residing in Konya to be sent to Diyarbakir and settled in its “empty villages.”⁷⁰

The next day, the movement and settlement of Muslims from Bulgaria and Greece was ordered from İAMM headquarters.⁷¹

The information on the settlements of the Muslim settlers in the districts and towns of the eastern provinces is sparse. Little fieldwork has been conducted as to whether the settlers remained in the designated towns and villages, or if they migrated somewhere else. Armenian survivors recalled how in the late summer of 1915 Muslims were settled in villages formerly theirs. Local officials saw to it that the settlers were given the best houses of the deported Armenians.⁷² One example is the village of Tell Ermen in Diyarbekir province, the Christian population of which had been integrally massacred in July 1915. Tell Ermen was repopulated with Circassians and Chechens. Since the settlers already had ploughs and oxen, all they needed for subsistence farming was seed. The Ministry of War was ordered to provide the requisite seeds, distributing 1,000 cups of barley and 300 cups of wheat from storage depots to the settlers.⁷³ When the Chechen population surpassed Tell Ermen's capacity, the construction of a new village for the Chechens was ordered in September 1918.⁷⁴ Later Tell Ermen ("Armenian hill" in Arabic) was renamed Kızıltepe ("red hill" in Turkish). All physical traces of its Armenian past had been effaced from the face of the earth.

In the meantime, the genocide was raging in full force. While Armenians and Syrians were being destroyed, the Muslim settlers were on their way. However, preparations were needed on arrival in order to lodge the settlers successfully. On June 17, 1915 the İAMM headquarters reiterated its request for economic and geographic data on the emptied Armenian villages of Diyarbekir. In order to send settlers to the province, the local capacity to absorb immigrants had to be determined.⁷⁵ A week later it ordered educational commodities to be provided for the settlers:

It is necessary to appropriate the schools of the towns and villages that have been emptied of Armenians to Muslim immigrants to be settled there. However, the present value of the buildings, the amount and value of its educational materials needs to be registered and sent to the department of general recordkeeping.⁷⁶

This national order was a warrant for the seizure of all Ottoman Armenian schools and their conversion into Ottoman-Turkish schools. School benches, blackboards, book cabinets, and even paper and pens were allocated to the yet-to-arrive settlers. Local branches of the Commission for Abandoned Properties were assigned to carry out this operation.⁷⁷ In Diyarbekir, the large Armenian village of Qarabash was affected by this order. After the autochthonous inhabitants had been destroyed in May 1915, Balkan Muslims were settled in the village in the summer of 1915 and their children were sent to the school previously run by Armenians. According to elderly villagers, when they arrived in Qarabash they scrubbed the blood stains off the school walls first before they brought it into use.⁷⁸

CUP social engineering came to a halt only with the end of the war. In October 1918 the Ottoman Empire suffered a catastrophic defeat when all of its frontlines disintegrated, triggering a sudden implosion of the army. On October 30, 1918 the parties signed a truce that sanctioned unconditional surrender.⁷⁹ Paralyzed by

panic and defeatism, that next night the inner circle of the CUP burnt suitcases full of documents, disbanded the CUP as a political party, and fled on a German submarine to Odessa. The seven escapees were the triumvirate (Enver, Talaat, Cemal), the doctors Bahaeddin Şakir and Nâzım, and two others.⁸⁰ The power vacuum was filled by a new cabinet led by the Freedom and Coalition Party, the CUP's sworn enemy. They ruled the Ottoman Empire during the interregnum (1918–23) as long as the Istanbul government wielded sufficient actual power in Anatolia.⁸¹ The very day after their rise to power, they immediately began reversing CUP policies: Armenians and Kurds were encouraged to return, orphans were allowed to go back to their families, and most importantly, the Ottoman press broadly exposed and discussed CUP war crimes. But with the resurrection of the CUP in Anatolia this process of reckoning would soon come to an end.

The relevance of studying CUP social engineering in its mutual interdependence lies in the notion that the deportations can function as control groups for each other. Ultimately, the separate policies were too interconnected to be understood in total isolation. Understanding the treatment of Armenians during the forced relocations requires contrasting it with the treatment of Kurds and Balkan Muslims during similar experiences. It then clearly appears that whereas Armenians were not given proper nutrition and rest during the endless marches, the Muslims were. Mass death was nothing to be fatalistic about, it was a consequence of deliberate choices and orders for rationing issued from Istanbul, and popular conduct only exacerbated the suffering. For a large part, this can explain why hundreds of thousands of Armenians died of exhaustion and starvation in 1915, but hundreds of thousands of Muslims survived the same distances and heat in the same year, or later years, when, *nota bene*, the empire had even less resources at its disposal. Also, colligating the Armenian genocide with the deportation of the Kurds and settlement of Turks strongly suggests that without the former, the latter could not have been financed and carried out to the extent it was.

Social engineering in Eastern Turkey: phase two, 1923–50

When the CUP dissolved itself in 1918, it continued functioning under other names and succeeded in launching Mustafa Kemal to organize the Anatolian resistance it had planned since 1914. After a transition process many of the CUP's diligent social engineers ended up working for Mustafa Kemal's Republican People's Party (RPP). The resurrection of Young Turk elites gave rise to the establishment of a modern dictatorship of repressive rule, driven by zealous devotion to the tenets of a Gökâlpian ideology, a set of ideas and goals that assumed the mystical character of religious doctrine. The ultimate totalitarian aim of this cohort of men was to continue recreating the population in their own image and to extinguish the plurality and differentiation of it.⁸² As such, the Greco-Turkish and Armeno-Turkish wars (1919–23) were in essence processes of state formation that represented a continuation of ethnic unmixing and exclusion of Ottoman Christians from Anatolia. The Kemalists assumed control of local elites who

had collaborated in CUP crimes, and Armenian villagers who returned to their farms and fields were chased out, terrorized, and bullied away.⁸³ The subsequent proclamation of a Turkish nation-state on October 29, 1923 was more of an intermezzo than a starting point or an end. Its analytical use for the historiography of the Young Turk era has been convincingly proven shaky, due to compelling continuities in power structure, ideology, cadre, and last but not least, population policy.⁸⁴ No matter how thorough the Young Turk campaigns of social engineering were between 1913 and 1923, they were not the end to nationalist homogenization. Untroubled by restraints of any kind, Turkification now continued behind the tightly knit curtains of national sovereignty and widespread international support for the Young Turks' policies of "modernization."⁸⁵

Decades of Young Turk social engineering triggered many different responses throughout Turkey.⁸⁶ One of these involving heavy resistance was the Kurdish uprising of Shaikh Said, erupting in mid-February 1925. An alliance of Kurdish intellectuals, officers, civil servants, and clergy assumed control of a part of the eastern provinces and marched on Diyarbakir city without success.⁸⁷ The uprising was poorly understood by the Young Turk political elite, which, instead of listening to the Kurds' claims and requests and negotiating a way out of the conflict, silenced moderate oppositionists and resorted immediately to mass violence. Built into the government's system of domination was the tendency to proclaim its own normalcy, so to acknowledge the Kurds' mass resistance was to acknowledge the possibility that something might have been wrong with the system. Thus, the government quelled the insurrection with huge levels of violence, destroying villages and summarily executing thousands of combatants and non-combatants. The official correspondence euphemistically referred to "severe precautionary measures" against "brigands" to describe what eyewitnesses point-blank related as "cramming villagers into haylofts and burning them alive."⁸⁸ In the northern region of Lice, some formerly Armenian villages with Kurdish inhabitants were burnt for the second time in a decade. After a scorched earth policy in which the government employed aerial bombing, Shaikh Said was arrested and hanged on June 29, 1925 with 46 of his supporters and relatives, including his son.⁸⁹

The uprising only served to confirm established Young Turk prejudices and fears that Kurdish society was a centrifugal, tribalist, reactionary, and potentially separatist threat that needed to be dealt with urgently. On September 8, 1925, Mustafa Kemal personally authorized a special council to devise a report that would serve as a blueprint for a pursuance of Young Turk social engineering in Eastern Turkey. Although his exhortations for "comprehensive reforms" in the East made clear a general direction Kemalist policy was to follow, they were barren of specifics. On the one hand, these exhortations constituted a *carte blanche* to the various Young Turks descending on the East that the restraints under which they had operated thus far, if any, were now lifted. No one was going to be called to account for being too energetic or ruthless. On the contrary, ambitious Young Turks now had to prove themselves capable of living up to their rhetoric. On the other hand, Mustafa Kemal's communications were an incitement to Young Turk social engineers to produce proposals for policies that would turn

his vague nationalist pronouncements into specific programmes with well-defined goals. Those who authored proposals most attuned to Mustafa Kemal's wishes were awarded with enhanced powers to carry them out. Those who not only proved themselves capable of carrying out the drastic measures of "reform" but also displayed an organizational and creative finesse for "solutions to the eastern question" became the instruments of these more articulated policies.⁹⁰

The council, formally named "Reform Council for the East" (*Şark Islahat Encümeni*), was chaired by İsmet İnönü and its positions were held by politicians and officers such as parliamentarian Mustafa Abdülhalik Renda, Interior Minister Cemil Uybadın, Minister of Economy Ali Cenani, Minister of Justice Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, Lieutenant-General Kâzım Özalp, and Chief of Staff Fevzi Çakmak.⁹¹ All of these were former CUP members or sympathizers. Among these officials were those who had experience in this field: Şükrü Kaya, Celal Bayar, and Mustafa Abdülhalik Renda. Within two weeks they completed the report and presented it to parliament for evaluation. The final report these men signed on September 24, 1925 was nothing short of a radical expansion of existing Young Turk fantasies and methods of social engineering. It reflected a staunch belief in the feasibility of crafting a society through large-scale, top-down authoritarian politics, coupled with an ethno-nationalist vision of "landscaping the human garden" at distance. In previous explorations this approach had been characterized by Cemil Uybadın as a "colonial administrative method," thus explicating the plan as a form of internal colonization.

In the report they sketched the East's future, recommending patching together the eastern provinces and rejoining them into "Inspectorates-General"⁹² that would exercise authority over an expanded military administration, hereby ruling all of the eastern provinces by martial law for indeterminate time. A total of seven million Turkish lira would be allocated to supervise a comprehensive set of measures. The Kurdish intelligentsia and chieftain class was to be prevented from reviving as a ruling class once and for all, so that the East would never again become a battlefield. The territory would be cleared of "persons, families, and their relatives whose residence in the east the government considers inappropriate" through resettlement in Western Turkey. East of the Euphrates a policy categorically prohibiting "the use of all non-Turkish languages" and "the employment of Kurds in even secondary offices" would be put into vigorous practice. Kurds who had taken up residence in Armenian villages were to be immediately evicted, deported to the western provinces, and Turks were to be settled in those villages.⁹³ The fate of the deportees was outlined in a top-secret order issued by the Interior Ministry in January 1930. The Kurds who were sent west were never to exceed the local population in order to be "made Turkish in language, tradition, and desire."⁹⁴

Prior to implementation, the government had a detailed, top-secret inventory of Kurdish tribes prepared and published for internal circulation. This booklet identified per province dozens of Kurdish tribes and included details on their perceived loyalty to the state. Tribes were classified into "loyal" or "disloyal" ones and details were provided on their mutual relationships.⁹⁵ The plan conceived of

deportation as a powerful and legitimate tool to subdue and assimilate Kurds as a “solution” of a “problem,” or an “answer” to a “question.” On July 17, 1927 the government passed a law that empowered the Ministries of Justice, Interior, and Economy to co-organize the deportation of 1,400 people and 80 families to various western provinces.⁹⁶ Very soon after, those Kurds who were earmarked for deportation were taken from their homes and carried off to an isolated and hostile environment in various western provinces. Shaikh Said’s daughter had been living in an empty house with her children when gendarmes arrived to gather surviving family members, picking up her son out of his crib, and deporting them all to Thrace.⁹⁷ At the same time, the government summoned Armenian and Syriac survivors and returnees who were living in various cities and towns in the Southeast to leave. More than 10,000 people were expelled to Syria, where they settled in refugee camps near Aleppo and in Qamishli.⁹⁸

The Turkification campaign achieved some degree of success in certain areas, particularly in easily controllable plateaus and valleys. Overall, though, the regime’s ham-fisted methods only alienated non-Turkish ethnic groups and stimulated the inception of nationalist movements by their elites. Hence it was no surprise that resistance to the Kemalists continued, simmering in the Sason region and erupting around Mount Ararat in 1930. When the existing policies did not reach the imagined result, the government’s frustration turned into radicalization. The existing plans, ambitious as they were, did not match the major acceleration in Kemalist social engineering after the consolidation of the Kemalist one-party dictatorship in 1931.⁹⁹ From then on, social engineering intensified markedly, particularly towards the eastern provinces. On June 14, 1934, the government ratified the “Settlement Law,” a very elaborate legal text sanctioning the mass deportation of entire categories of peoples, everything from “itinerant Gypsies” to “anarchists” and “those who are not devoted to Turkish culture,” sweeping notions that would most of all target and strike Kurds. Again, the eastern provinces were the object of large-scale, broad-brush social engineering.¹⁰⁰

These policies, formulated at national level, produced local implementations that have been left virtually unexplored. On January 1, 1928, the government established the First Inspectorate-General, centred in Diyarbakir, and appointed İbrahim Tali Öngören (1875–1952) its first Inspector-General. The Inspector’s tasks were to implement the general policies laid out in the Reform Plan in the huge area under his jurisdiction. The many reports these men sent to Ankara offer a unique insight into the local dynamics of social engineering in the eastern provinces. All of the themes mentioned in the Reform Plan return in daily practices such as militarization, disarmament, assimilation, infrastructure, and most interestingly, deportation.¹⁰¹ The aforementioned booklet on Kurdish tribes included ten pages on Diyarbakir province. One of these was the influential Azizoğlu dynasty, a branch of the Narek tribe residing in and around Silvan, a town east of Diyarbakir.¹⁰² Although the report identified the Azizoğlu as a loyal and obedient family that had not participated in any rebellion, in 1925 dozens of Azizoğlus were rounded up and deported to Thrace. A second wave of deportations in 1935 sent hundreds more to Western Turkey.¹⁰³ The

Cemilpaşazâde were another wealthy and influential family who were deported in two phases. They were expropriated according to the Reform Plan and while many were deported to the Aegean region many others were expelled to Syria and denaturalized.¹⁰⁴ Their businesses and property, including a huge mansion in Diyarbakir city, were transferred to the state and to Turkish owners.¹⁰⁵ The campaigns were accompanied by a thorough erasure of the memory of the events. Official historians wrote volume after volume, silencing the voices of the erased and persecuted and recasting all ethnic minorities as Turks, trivializing their historical and contemporary existence.¹⁰⁶

The key discursive devices which the Kemalist centre employed to represent their relationship with the Kurdish periphery was “civilization” (*medeniyet*). The non-Turkish population of the eastern provinces was looked down upon as primitive and inferior, fit for colonial rule by a Turkish master nation which operated in the name of progress and rationality.¹⁰⁷ They were viewed, moreover, as inherently treacherous and anti-Turkish and hence threats to security against which Turkish state and army personnel had to be permanently on guard. Such an attitudinal climate would prove to be highly conducive to the harsh treatment of the civilian population of the East and the committing of mass violence. In the period after 1931 official discourse acquired a particularly denigrating and racist undertone towards Kurds, among others. *Cumhuriyet*, the mouthpiece of the Kemalist party-state, wrote about Kurds, that “they allow their emotions and brains to be lead by simple instincts like ordinary animals and therefore can only think crudely and foolishly [...] there is absolutely no difference between African barbarians and cannibals and these creatures who mix raw meat with cracked wheat and eat it just like that.”¹⁰⁸ In a series of articles, the nationalist journalist Yusuf Mazhar wrote about Kurds:

Even though they may be more capable than the redskins in the United States, they are—history is my witness—endlessly bloodthirsty and cruel [...] They are completely bereft of positive feelings and civilized manners. For centuries, they have been a plague for our race [...] Under Russian rule they were prohibited to descend from the mountains, where they did not lead humane and civilized lives, therefore these creatures are really not inclined to profit from civilization [...] In my opinion, the dark spirit, crude mental state, and ruthless manners of this Kurdish rabble is impossible to break.¹⁰⁹

These Young Turk ideas have been portrayed in a different form by Ussama Makdisi as “Ottoman orientalism,” which, in the case of the Young Turks featured a complex of attitudes produced by exposure to an amalgam of modern European ideas “that implicitly and explicitly acknowledged ‘the West’ to be the home of progress and ‘the East,’ writ large, to be a present theatre of backwardness.”¹¹⁰ Interwoven throughout much of the Young Turks’ writings was the belief that Turkish is the language of civilization, administrative rationalism, and cultural enlightenment—and that the non-Turkish peoples operated at a lower cultural plane. Social engineering during the Young Turk era was therefore also a civilizing mission, comparable in discourse and practice to the European colonial ones.¹¹¹

After the elimination and forced removal of the Kurdish elites from the East, the Kemalists saw the remaining Kurdish population of peasants, nomads, and city-dwellers as “raw material” for the Turkish nation. The Kurds were “future Turks,”¹¹² an anonymous and memory-less mass that would metamorphose easily through a sustained process of forced assimilation. The government believed that if Turkish supplanted existing languages, all existing non-Turkish Muslim minorities would assimilate into Turkish culture. In the eastern provinces, with its complex cultural and socio-economic mosaic and bewilderingly diverse array of tongues, this was quite a challenge. The Ministry of Education was to hold children in its powerfully assimilationist embrace and the newly established nationalist institution called “People’s House” (*Halkevi*) would gear Turkish identity and Kemalist ideology to the popular audience.¹¹³ Within months all over Turkey, especially in the eastern provinces, the Houses spread in major cities, provincial towns, and larger villages. At establishment, inspectors from Diyarbekir province reported that people spoke Kurdish, Zaza, and Arabic in their homes, in the bazaar, in the coffeehouse, and even in the People’s House, and solicited their superiors for measures that would “eradicate the deplorable influence of these cultures and render our national culture and mother tongue dominant.”¹¹⁴ These social engineering policies continued as long as the Kemalists stayed in power, and made them thoroughly unpopular and hated by a large majority of the population.¹¹⁵ Only when the Young Turks lost power in the elections of 1950 were their high-modernist projects of social engineering halted. By that time, the human map of Eastern Turkey had been radically altered.

Discussion: continuities and interdependencies

A balance sheet of the Young Turk era presents a sobering view. Between the years 1913–50 more than a million people were destroyed and many more exiled, deported, interned, taken hostage, victimized, ostracized, or subjected in other ways to (violent) forms of social engineering. Although violence existed all throughout Ottoman and Turkish history, never before and never after have so many people in the eastern provinces been subjected to so much violence in modern Middle Eastern history. The Young Turks, themselves traumatized, have in their turn scarred the lives and memories of millions of people. This article has meant to give serious consideration to the notion that the Young Turk era is marked by a continuity of inextricably linked population policies. Such a wider interpretational scope as argued in this article allows us to view the Armenian genocide as a major stage of homogenization in a broader palette of nationalist social engineering in the Young Turk era. Two tentative conclusions may be drawn from the available evidence for this interpretation: first, the continuity of the population politics, and second, their interdependence.

In order to support the claim of continuity it is sufficient to cross-reference CUP social engineers with RPP social engineers and accentuate overlap in the composition of the political elites ordering and carrying out the campaigns. It is no coincidence that names such as Mustafa Abdülhalik Renda, Mahmud Celal

Bayar, Kazım Özalp, İbrahim Tali Öngören, Ali Cenani, and Şükrü Kaya reappear in post-1923 reports on population politics. These were the men to be employed in policies of social engineering since they had acquired the requisite know-how and experience in this field during CUP rule. Even though some men were tried and hanged in 1926, most in mid-level positions remained in office and many were even promoted. Local elites too remained largely intact and assisted in continuing policies of social engineering. The perpetrators and their families profited from the genocide to the extent that, after 1923, entire generations were educated and provided for by the starting capital of Armenian property acquired in 1915. Existing Muslim dynasties became even richer and are still highly influential in the eastern provinces. A comparison of CUP versus RPP social engineering also reveals strong continuities in method, including ethno-territorial thinking, separation of elites from populace, and settlement regulations of percentages.

The various episodes and elements of Young Turk population policy constituted an indivisible whole in which every part reinforced the other parts. This interpretation of interdependency is based on the presence of elements of *construction* besides the obvious elements of *destruction* in the policies. The elimination of the Armenian population left the state an infrastructure of Armenian property, which was used for the progress of Turkish (settler) communities. In other words: the construction of an étatist Turkish “national economy” was unthinkable without the destruction and expropriation of Armenians. Moreover, traces of Armenian culture were wiped out in the eastern provinces, including architecture, libraries, and even music. All of that material and immaterial culture was appropriated by Young Turk regimes and re-used for their ends. The anti-Kurdish campaigns too were part of a plan to reconstruct the Kurds as Turks. The cases of Kurdish elites exemplify the double-edged nature of inclusion and exclusion in nation formation. Then again, only the deportation and expropriation of Kurdish elites in the 1920s could have obviated competing loyalties and facilitated cultural assimilation of the general Kurdish population in the 1930s. Combined together, what seem like isolated events were part and parcel of a violent process of nation formation through social engineering.

At the present time there is very little detailed research on this transformative programme of social engineering. In many ways, we have only scratched the surface of a vast and complex history. These remarks are therefore tentative and only serve to point in a new direction and open new avenues of research.

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