

# MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF WAR PROPAGANDA AND THEIR WANT IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

## **‘War of Words’: War Literature and Propaganda in Europe**

Due to its wide scope and to the fact that it lasted for a very long time, the First World War introduced many new concepts and applications. The stalemate that began on the European fronts in 1915 introduced new terms that reflected the situation into the war lexicon, terms like ‘trench warfare’, ‘war of attrition’, ‘total war’, or ‘psychological war’. All these new terms were also a sign that the war was to last much longer than was thought likely at the beginning. The length of the war did not concern just those fighting on the various fronts. The fact that the war lasted longer than expected obliged all the interested countries to adapt their economies, state administrations and cultural and social organizations to the needs arising from the war. That is why the term ‘home front’ becomes particularly relevant. The civilian population on the home front was not fighting the enemy, but nevertheless they were contributing to the war effort by participating in productive activities and making sacrifices, like spending less on food, clothing and other personal needs. Social class and political differences and all related conflicts were suspended, especially during the first years of the war, and all nations had united behind a common objective.

This situation also determined the nature of the literature created during the war. The intellectuals and artists of various countries cooperated with their governments for the benefit of their nations and created their works accordingly. At the beginning of the war, this was due to a patriotism widespread among the population, but as time went by, even though the people started to become disen-

chanted with the war, both national cultural institutions and their writers continued to support their governments' war efforts. This was largely due to the increasing importance given to propaganda as a public opinion forming instrument since the nineteenth century. When the First World War broke out, all countries began, to greater or lesser degrees, to institute systems of state propaganda designed to monitor and control what we may call cultural output.

In 1914, when the war had just begun, the British novelist H. G. Wells, who himself participated in propaganda activities, summarized this need: "The ultimate purpose of this war is propaganda, the destruction of certain beliefs, and the creation of others. It is to this propaganda that reasonable men must address themselves."<sup>1</sup> Another book published in Germany in 1916 with the aim of increasing the importance given to propaganda activities underlined the same objective: "More than any other conflict hitherto, this is a war of words, a war which is about the power of words."<sup>2</sup>

Propaganda is nothing new, nor was it new even in 1914. Propaganda, as something used to convince and guide people, has been known and used since ancient times. Its novelty value in 1914 and during the First World War derives from other factors. Propaganda grew increasingly important in the nineteenth century. The expansion of the public sector in the Western world had brought about a development of the importance of public opinion. Interest groups became aware of this and started developing propaganda methods with the aim of influencing public opinion and making sure that the public behaved in accordance with their wishes. In Britain, for example, the church, the press, political parties and philanthropic associations tried to influence public opinion by means of newspaper advertisements, brochures and conferences. Propaganda became increasingly sophisticated but remained outside the scope of government activities until the First World War. When the war started, the British government felt the need to use all of the resources at its disposal and, with this in mind, decided to guide public opinion by creating a centralized propaganda network.

Germany had understood the importance of a state controlled propaganda mechanism even before the war. Germany's source of inspiration on this subject was Clausewitz, the famous war theorist. His observation according to which "the morale of soldiers and of the civilian population has become an important variable of the war

equation", instilled into the commanding cadres of the armed forces the importance of propaganda.<sup>3</sup>

When the war started, the most prestigious operators in the field of public opinion shaping were literary figures. Writers like H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, Rudyard Kipling, Conan Doyle, John Galsworthy and Bernard Shaw in Britain; Mark Twain, Henry James and Upton Sinclair in America; and Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Gerhart Hauptmann and Hugo v. Hofmannsthal in Germany and in the Austro-Hungarian empire, contributed to the formation of public opinion. Their thoughts on a wide variety of subjects aroused the interest of the educated classes even before 1914.<sup>4</sup>

As the war began, all of the writers, with a couple of exceptions, started to write in accordance with the interests of their own countries. In Britain especially this took on an institutional aspect from the very beginning due to government intervention. This institutionalization became a necessary response to the German propaganda activities, which were effective from the very beginning. Writers participated in visits to the front organized by the government and later described their experiences in reports, short stories and novels. Inevitably, they saw only what they were permitted to see. They were kept well away from the difficulties of life on the front and from the barbaric massacres and the unbearable conditions of the trenches, which later led to the creation of what is known as the movement of *disillusionment* in literature. On their part, the writers were more than ready to overlook such unpleasant situations and describe the imaginary war they had created in their minds. For example, John Masefield describes Gallipoli as if it were not the defeat it actually was, while John Buchan describes the defeat at the Battle of Somme as if it had been a great success. Even though the front, the site of so many difficulties and losses, was very near to Britain, these writers who participated in the propaganda effort created an illusion that lasted until the end of the war. According to this illusion, the blame for starting the war lay squarely with German militarism. The Germans, who were portrayed as the descendants of the Huns, were guilty of spilling blood, instilling fear and committing massacres, rape and destruction everywhere they set foot. The French, on the other hand, were described as the most civilized people on earth, people who were courageously defending their country. Loyal and jolly British troops, under the command of successful generals, were running to the aid of the French people and fighting with the aim of destroying German militarism.<sup>5</sup>

At this point, an examination of German propaganda activities will shed some light on how Germany, which had taken the advice of Clausewitz seriously and at the beginning of the war had the strongest and best-organized propaganda mechanism, lost that war. How did German propaganda fail? During the first days of the war, Germany subjected its own soldiers, the soldiers of enemy nations and the public of all concerned nations, be they allies or adversaries, to a barrage of propaganda. In August 1914, before the war had even started, Germany published 'popular scientific treatises', articles and poems by German writers and intellectuals that analyzed the ethical, military, religious, philosophical, commercial and political reasons for the war. The number of poems published during the first months of the war exceeded one million.<sup>6</sup> Exactly as in the case of Britain and naturally of all other countries, the Germans claimed that their country had been attacked and that they were simply fighting to defend themselves.

I should touch on a factor that was very important for the effectiveness and success of propaganda, both in Germany and in the other warring countries of Europe. In 1914, except in the case of Russia and of the Ottoman Empire, the literacy rate was very high throughout Europe. Thanks to such a situation, literary output could play an important role in the propaganda effort. There are other elements confirming this. For example, letters written by German soldiers at the front are full of lists of the books they had been reading. Among titles were the New Testament, Goethe, Schiller, Keller, Fichte, Kleist and Nietzsche.<sup>7</sup> Novels published during the war had circulations in the hundreds of thousands.<sup>8</sup>

This situation underlines how closely related nationalism is to a high literacy rate and in general with the level of education in a country. The nineteenth century was witness to a leap forward especially in the rate of attendance at elementary schools. For example, in the 1860's, even before the creation of a unified German state, the rate of attendance at elementary schools in Prussia was almost one hundred percent.<sup>9</sup> These children were not just learning how to read and write, but they were also learning the geography, literature and history of their country, thus acquiring a national consciousness.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding its developed educational system, its high literacy rate and the fact that it had gained consciousness of the importance of propaganda early on, Germany all the same lost not just the actual war but also the propaganda war. There are two impor-

tant reasons for this. The first one was the fact that German propaganda activities were directed from many different places, with different institutions having their own propaganda organizations. Sometimes coordination between these different institutions proved to be impossible. The second and more important reason was a lack of understanding of foreign public opinion:

There were many causes of the difficulty, including a certain bluntness in the character of many Germans; the extreme nationalism which led Germans to proclaim the superiority of their views and to assume that whatever was good for them ought to be good for others; blustering mannerisms proceeding from overcompensation for the nation's recent arrival as a major power; the consequences of growing up in an autocratic culture, where debate was not always permitted and practice in listening to opposing points of view was limited; and the even more autocratic habits of the military, where propaganda officers worked in an atmosphere which assumed that people would do what they were told to do and that civilians would accept arguments based on claims of military necessity.<sup>11</sup>

Given this situation, it is not surprising that the less glamorous British, French and American propaganda activities should in the end have been more successful than those of the Germans. For example, the Fourteen Points declared by American president Woodrow Wilson towards the end of the war, when the U.S.A. were already in the war, are by themselves a masterpiece of propaganda. The Fourteen Points convinced not just the Allied public opinion but the public opinion in enemy countries as well that America and its allies were waging the war with noble purposes. This favourable impact was due not just to the content of the declaration but also to its language, which was similar to that employed by advertisers. The declaration was expressed in short, easily understood points.<sup>12</sup>

### **Ottoman War Propaganda: Destined for Failure**

Apart from a few exceptions, the organized, state-led, institutional propaganda activities of the main European countries were absent in the Ottoman State. Ahmed Emin Yalman describes this situation in two short paragraphs of his book written in 1930:

Educational war propaganda was extraordinarily neglected in Turkey. The main activity in this regard was negative. Everything was done to hinder the spreading of the truth. The positive work coexisted in publishing the illustrated and popular War Review and a series of books. Writers were occasionally invited to the various fronts, and asked to write poems and books. An artificial system of trenches, and small models of service stations immediately behind the front were set up in Constantinople to give the public an idea of war conditions. A few information bureaus based on German models were also started.

The Germans were much more active in this regard. There were German exhibitions of war literature and pictures in Constantinople, Konya, Aleppo, Bagdad, etc. And other German organizations both secret and public, were busily engaged in educating the Turks as to the course of the War, —or its course as interpreted by German propaganda.<sup>13</sup>

These two paragraphs are all that Ahmet Emin wrote on the subject of propaganda during the war in his otherwise wide-ranging book and, although what he says is true, it is also a bit of an oversimplification. Even though the Ottoman State was unable to organize a propaganda effort similar to the ones organized by the European states, the need for it and the lack of it were discussed and attempts, even if of a limited and ineffective nature, were made to establish one. All the initiative regarding Ottoman propaganda was in the hands of Enver Pasha, who considered Germany's behaviour a model to be followed after in all respects. The broad-based German propaganda pushed Enver Pasha, and through him all the other politicians and intellectuals of the CUP regime, to do something. What is most interesting is that not only were propaganda works being published, but also a similar quantity of works extolling the usefulness of propaganda itself and bemoaning its lack. This kind of output underlining the lack of a propaganda effort increased especially during 1916, a time which saw deterioration in the fortunes of the war, and continued to increase until the end of the war.

Actually, from the outbreak of war in Europe up to Ottoman entry in the war in November, and even up to the first months of 1915, there were signs pointing to the probability of the emergence of strong propaganda activity in the Empire. In particular, Turkish

nationalist intellectuals discussed the war and participation in it, in approving terms very similar to those used by the leadership of the CUP. For example, Halide Edip, who in later years would distance herself from the CUP because of the Armenian event, began from 1917 onwards to develop an Anatolian nationalism in contrast to Turan nationalism, which was in favour of a Pan-Turkic union. At its very beginnings, however, Halide Edip fully supported the war, as evidenced by her article titled “Halâs Muharebesi” (Battle for Salvation), published in 28 November 1330 (1914) in the newspaper *Tanin*. Ever since her childhood, she had been aware that such a “battle for salvation” was inevitable. Although she had expected such a war to begin after a long period of preparation, she was happy that “by declaring war on Muscovy, Germany and Austria, which have the most modern and scientific military organization and equipment” the Empire had created an opportunity for such a war of deliverance to start immediately. According to Halide Edip, aiding Germany in this war, provided an opportunity to “begin the process of Turkish reunification and create prosperous Turkish states full of modern and hard-working Turks”.<sup>14</sup>

Simultaneously, Yusuf Akçura echoed his support for the war by expanding on the words of Halide Edip: “Almost all Turkish nationalist authors are unanimous in their thinking that the war that we have entered is a just war of salvation.” In the same article, Akçura uses an expression stating that the Ottomans had entered the war with the aim of achieving “the independence and freedom of nationalities and religions”.<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of the fiscal year 1331 (March 1915), he wrote an article in *Türk Yurdu* (Turkish Homeland) evaluating the year 1330, in which he declared that this war had an “atmosphere of idealism” for all Turks and was a sign of the future deliverance of the Turkish community throughout the world.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, this approving and optimistic atmosphere, present in the press output of the first months of the war, would not have satisfactory results. For example, at the beginning of 1916, Celâl Sahir [Erozan], a poet with close ties to the ruling CUP, wrote an article titled “Literary Year” in which he evaluated the literary scene of the previous year and observed that literary output had been very poor and that this was due to conditions arising from the war. During a war, he continued, although sentiments are stronger than usual, writers have difficulties expressing them. That is why it was to be expect-

ed that the year 1915 would not see the birth of any literary masterpiece. He also observed that, even if rarely, quality literary output could be seen in magazines and these rare literary works published in 1915 were also characterized by their description of the same subjects in “similar monotonous tunes”.<sup>17</sup>

A few months after this evaluation, an article by Hüseyin Cahid [Yalçın] describing contemporary Turkish literature appeared in the German newspaper *Ottomanischer Lloyd* on 7 and 8 July 1916 in both German and French. Translated excerpts from this article were published in *Tanin*, dated 9 July, while the whole article was published in Turkish in *Türk Yurdu*. He stated his belief that the stagnation of Turkish literature was not due to war conditions but to the fact that the search for a new national literature had not yet been successful. Despite this, he stated his belief that once the war conditions and various crises that had afflicted the Ottoman State for the previous seven years came to an end, a real literature would emerge.<sup>18</sup>

A few months later, *Türk Yurdu* introduced a series of articles titled “The Thoughts of Our Allies”. These were supposed to be reviews of German books on the subject of war. The unsigned (although most probably written by Yusuf Akçura) introduction to the first review argued that in the present war “mobilization” could not be limited to armies but should encompass the whole society. All writers, intellectuals and scientists published articles in favour of and about the war. The author of this introduction, who made it clear that he was closely following the European literary scene, stressed the importance of writing about war time and post-war conditions. His opinion of the Ottoman situation was not just a recognition of the deficiencies, since Ottoman poets and writers were among those most frequently writing about the war. His main complaint concerned the lack of books and articles on the subject of war and post-war conditions, in the fields of economics, politics, law, history and philosophy.<sup>19</sup>

While writers were embroiled in debate as to whether they were ‘doing enough’, the poem “Asker ve Şâir” (The Soldier and the Poet) by Ziya Gökalp, a member of the Central Committee of the CUP and in a sense the representative of the regime in the sphere of culture, was published in issue 14, dated November 1916, of *Harp Mecmuası* (War Journal). This blunt poem admonishes all writers not participating in propaganda activities. The starting point of this poem was a photograph published on the cover of the same issue, showing a Turkish soldier on the Galicia front, sleeping in a trench and

holding a hand grenade to his chest. Gökalp ordered all poets to look carefully at this photograph, because this soldier was the real poet since he was the one who “felt and heard”. With his grenade, which he did not let go of even when sleeping, he was writing a poem inspired by his motherland and dreaming of war even then. Perhaps this soldier was about to be martyred for his country and would thus become part of history. This sacrifice was in complete contrast to the laziness of the poet who could not even be bothered to write an epic on the heroism of this soldier. Gökalp ended his poem with a threat: The pen of the lazy poet should be taken away from him and he should be sent to the front and made to dig the graves of the martyred soldiers.<sup>20</sup>

The letter of a reader, signed R.T., was published a few months after this poem, in issue 130 of *Türk Yurdu*. This letter referred to the need for reading material felt by the soldiers on the front. The great majority of Turkish soldiers were illiterate but felt a great need for someone to read the newspapers for them. When there was an article written in a comprehensible way, they would read it many times, even if they had by then learned it by heart. Since writers preferred writing in a complex language, the average person had to make do with going to coffee shops and village halls to listen to folk stories of love and heroism. The letter concluded with an implicit call to all writers to write novels, satirical pieces, national poems and books on history, agriculture, military affairs and religion, using a simple language similar to that of the popular literature mentioned in his letter so that people would be certain to read them.<sup>21</sup>

All the same, these ideas under the guise of threats, debates or admonishments had far from satisfactory results. The subject continued to be analysed throughout 1917. During the summer of 1917, ‘war literature’ became conspicuous in its absence. The “Weekly Conversation” published in issue 5 of *Yeni Mecmua* (New Magazine), dated 9 August, called attention to this situation. The starting point of this piece was a short article published in *Tanin*, in which the author reported that the shop windows of Swiss booksellers were “flooded” with “an interminable flow of literary works published continuously, with the aim of awakening in the German and the French a sense of national self-sacrifice and heroism and of keeping their taut nerves in a state of continuous alertness”. He asked why such works were not being created in Turkey and blamed the Turkish intellectuals, writers and poets for this lack. The writer in *Yeni Mecmua*

agreed with the writer of the *Tanin* article and added that all European nations were in the midst of a “taut activity”, not just on the front but also in the fields of philosophy and art: In comparison, the situation in Turkey should shame all artists and writers. The reason for this was that the country’s elite had no national character. As long as the gap between the people and the upper classes remained, not only would there be no war literature, but there would be nothing else as well.<sup>22</sup>

By the last year of the war, all the articles analysing the lack of propaganda reflected a loss of hope, because the effort to explain the advantages of propaganda had been in vain. All the same, the year 1918, at the end of which the Ottoman Empire was to lose the war and surrender unconditionally, was not without its moments of hope up until autumn. The Tsar had been removed from power in Russia and the new government had preferred to come to an agreement with its adversaries. As a consequence, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was signed with Russia on 3 March 1918 and Turkish armies advanced as far as Azerbaijan in the Caucasus, strengthening Pan-Turanism. On 7 May 1918 another treaty was signed with Romania in Bucharest.

During this period, *Yeni Mecmua* published “Çanakkale Nüsha-yı Fevkâlâdesi”, a special issue dedicated to the Battle of Gallipoli, which expounded the Turkish thesis according to which the Russian regime of the tsar had fallen because of the Turkish defense of Gallipoli. This special issue, which was published in May 1918, must have been planned at the end of 1917 or at the beginning of 1918, but its publication was then delayed for various reasons, as explained by magazine editor Mehmet Talat in his introductory article titled “Birkaç Söz” (A Few Words). Talat begins by saying that all belligerent countries attach great importance to war literature, which has become an indispensable instrument. The example he gives is France where a “class of intellectuals” strengthens the front and the general will to fight. The members of this class create an “outcry” as a response to even the smallest incident. For example, when the Germans were defeated at the Battle of Marne, France was the scene of enthusiastic celebrations that lasted not just days but months. In Turkey, however, even though the fronts in Galicia, Dobrudja and especially Gallipoli had been the scenes of heroic events, nothing noteworthy had been written about them. This *hâtıranâme* (commemorative book) had been prepared with the aim of breaking this silence. With this in mind, the aid of Istanbul intellectuals had been sought, but

“they must have been too busy” for they had not “deigned to answer” and this anthology was therefore not as complete as desired.<sup>23</sup>

### **Reasons for the Lack of Propaganda Activities**

#### *The Strictness of Censorship*

All of these analyses and criticisms of the lack of propaganda activities between 1916 and 1918 have one point in common: None of those criticizing this situation, not even those following and describing the propaganda activities in Europe, advocated state intervention or the necessity for the state to organize the spheres of art and literature. These articles blamed, or in rare cases defended, the writers, artists and intellectuals, describing them as incapable of creating works about the war because of their lack of national characteristics, their detachment from the common people or plain egotism. The critics who themselves had close relations with government circles seemed to be unaware or to ignore that the vivacity of European war literature, which they admired so much, was due to government coordination, which established in advance topics suitable to be taken up by writers and artists.

One of the main culprits of the lack of propaganda activities during the war was the CUP regime. We know that propaganda had been well organized and had become institutionalized in the more developed western countries since the very beginning of the war, and even before the war in the German case. The intervention of the state was the most important factor in this situation. The development and application of master plans were possible only in the presence of well-functioning governmental mechanisms, which was not the case in the Ottoman Empire, where the development of a master plan encompassing all propaganda related activities and of a long-term strategy had not been possible.

There is a complete absence of criticism on the lack of state propaganda activities during the war years. During the armistice and the National Struggle years, nationalist writers never criticized the CUP's incapacity to establish a propaganda mechanism. They only mentioned the strict censorship of the war years, which they had experienced personally and which had deeply influenced all cultural aspects. In fact, the censorship of the war years had really been an important factor in the lack of an effectual Ottoman propaganda mechanism, and the blame for that lay squarely with the regime.

Due to the strict censorship applied by the government, public opinion could not be informed as necessary, and this meant that the psychological aspect of the home front, which in the case of a long war like the First World War is at least as important as the battlefield, could not be managed as required. Ottoman intellectuals, who would have been the ones to manage this process of producing information and providing guidance, were already having great difficulties in finding enough work to subsist on in the pre-war years—when there was no censorship—because of infrastructure problems in the Ottoman economy. During this period of strict censorship, they had great difficulty in finding subject matter and this increased their economic difficulties. There was also the fact that writing even the briefest article that failed to meet the frequently unclear and not very rational government guidelines would land its writer in a difficult situation.

All the governments fighting during the First World War applied censorship; from that point of view, what happened in the Ottoman Empire is normal. What was exceptional was its irrationality and rigidity. The reasons for this lay in the historical events of the years 1908-1914. During the more than fifteen years between the overthrow of the authoritarian Abdülhamid II and the consequent introduction of a constitutional monarchy in July 1908 and October 1923, freedom of the press in Istanbul, which was the cultural as well the political capital, was enjoyed for only one and a half to two years, with the remaining time being spent under a strict regime of censorship, if not outright violence, against the press.<sup>24</sup>

This situation is reflected in the number of periodicals published. During the last days of Abdülhamid II, there were around 120 newspapers and magazines actively being published in the Ottoman Empire. After the introduction of the constitution, this number shot up to 730 within one year. Of these, 377 were published in Istanbul. By the end of the war in 1918, there were only fourteen newspapers and periodicals left in Istanbul.<sup>25</sup> This unfavourable environment in which the press operated was due to the difficult circumstances of the period 1908-1923. Wars, revolts, the imperialist pressures of the great powers and economic difficulties were applying a great deal of pressure on the Unionist or anti-Unionist<sup>26</sup> governments, which as a consequence tried to impose their absolute will on the press as they saw this as the only way to guide public opinion. While there were problems concerning economic sources or political legitima-

cy, the publication of even the slightest hint of oppositional ideas was perceived as a grave threat.

During the period of the jealously guarded absolute power of the CUP, beginning with the *Babiali* (Sublime Porte) Raid of 23 January 1913 until the defeat of 1918, the government banned the publication in newspapers and periodicals of even the slightest opposition related view. In particular, the outbreak of war in 1914 in Europe and the declaration of a general mobilization in the Ottoman Empire brought about the introduction of military censorship. With the introduction on 7 August 1914 of a temporary law, the existing censorship became even stricter.

Actually, the regime had planned for censorship to be even stricter than the way it ultimately turned out to be in practice. Kâzım Karabekir, who at the time was Chief of Intelligence at the Office of the General Staff, included in his memoirs of the war an event related to the introduction of censorship. He had a meeting on 3 August 1914 with İsmail Canbulat, an undersecretary in the Ministry of Interior, who said that, with the exception of *Tanin*, which was the mouthpiece of the government, all newspapers would be closed to prevent them from publishing anti-war views. Karabekir opposed this move and said that it would destroy the credibility both of *Tanin* and of the constitutional system and would be in conflict with the principle of "armed neutrality". He later complained to Enver Pasha about this proposal. Enver concurred with Karabekir's views and prevented the newspapers from being closed.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, the official censorship regulation introduced a few days later was also very strict and all encompassing. According to this new regulation, no new newspapers or press agencies were to be founded; newspapers could not publish additional editions; all newspapers were to be distributed only after having been brought to the censorship room at the Istanbul Post Office, where they were to be checked and stamped as being "in accordance with regulations" and finally signed by the censorship official and censorship officer on duty; and no telegrams were to be sent in languages other than Turkish, Arabic or French.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, official censorship was not the only leverage that the government enjoyed over the Ottoman press. Opportunities to import paper into the Ottoman Empire, which was not an industrialized country and thus dependent on foreign sources for all manufactured products, had become almost nil from the very beginning

of the war. Consequently, the supply of newsprint had also become haphazard. Since both Germany and Austria had paper monopolies, it was not possible for newspapers to import paper from those countries directly. Paper had to be distributed by the German and Austrian embassies in Istanbul. The embassies rationed the paper, seeking to gain leverage over the Turkish newspapers. Editors complained about this to the government but failed to receive any response. *Osmanlı Matbuat Cemiyeti* (The Association of Ottoman Press) was created with the aim of breaking the embassies' stranglehold over the supply of newsprint. This association contacted the German Association of Newspaper Publishers, inquiring after the possibility of importing all the necessary newsprint directly.<sup>29</sup>

All the same, the problems related to supply lasted throughout the war, resulting in a decrease in the number of pages even though circulation rates were increasing in response to the many unfolding events.<sup>30</sup> Especially during the first years of the war, the number of pages fell to one third of the pre-war number. Even this reduced number of pages was filled with official military communiqués and the general war news obtained by German and Austrian sources, because there was nothing else to print.<sup>31</sup>

By the time the Ottoman government finally understood that by applying such strict censorship it was losing a very important outlet for frustrations, it was too late. Beginning in 1917, the authorities began to allow some articles critical of unjust profits. On 11 June 1918, military censorship was completely abolished. From that date, newspapers were free to publish whatever they felt like printing. Upon this belated relaxation of the rules, the attitude of the press became more critical but remained prudent at the same time. When the triumvirate abandoned the country after the signing of the armistice, the press became fiercely anti-CUP.

### *The Triumvirate and the Negative Impact of Cliques*

In the post-war period, those subjected to the harshest criticism in all of the works about the First World War were the three leaders of the CUP: Talat, Enver and Cemal Pashas. They were held responsible for all of the internal conflicts of the CUP, which was also an important factor in the inability to put together an effective propaganda network during the war. When in 1916 Said Halim Pasha resigned from his position as grand vizier and Talat Pasha was appointed in his place, it looked as if Talat Pasha had become leader

of the CUP. The truth was that while Talat was the leader of the civilian section of the party, Enver was the leader of the military section. In addition to these two, there was Cemal, who since the First Canal Mission of 1915 had become governor-general of Syria and was governing it as if he were a monarch or a dictator. These three made up what was to become known as the Triumvirate.

These conflicts were also due to the fact that during the decade 1908-1918, all of the internal and external problems and wars had prevented the CUP from consolidating its power; it had always been obliged to govern in times characterized by emergencies. The difficult circumstances deriving from the wars had prevented the leaders of the CUP from acquiring the cool statesmanship required of them and a kind of quasi-feudal structure, developing from top to bottom, had prevented the party from becoming homogeneous.

The leadership, the members of which seemed to be undecided as to whether they were statesmen or members of a revolutionary secret society, was riven by the presence of cliques. Talat did not trust the men close to Enver, while Enver did not trust the men close to Talat. Even the problems related to food rationing, which lasted throughout the war and were one of the main reasons behind the population's hostility towards the government, were influenced by the presence of these cliques. The Istanbul delegate of the CUP, Kara Kemal, who was a member of Talat's group, and İsmail Hakkı Pasha the Lambe, who was commander of the supply corps of the Army and a member of Enver's group, could never get along with one another. Members of the same party were obliged to watch their backs at all times.

One of the main reasons for the heavy criticism aimed at the CUP in the post-war period was the indifference shown by all high level government dignitaries to the sufferings of the population, beginning with Enver Pasha himself, and their reluctance to abstain from luxury expenditures at a time when the population was having difficulty finding bread, which was rationed.<sup>32</sup>

These problems, related in particular to the Triumvirate, and in general to the CUP administration, were a reflection of a certain mentality and were closely related to the material circumstances of the time. It has always been discussed how the members of the CUP, who were the heroes of the 1908 revolution, were as a matter of fact completely ignorant of the requirements of statesmanship. The young revolutionary cadres, who in 1908 were placed at the lower levels of

the military or civilian bureaucracy, stopped being in positions controlling the government and suddenly found themselves at the centres of power between 1908 and 1914. It was their misfortune that this transfer of power happened at a time requiring a constant struggle with extremely unfavourable internal and external circumstances. During this struggle, they continuously had to employ extraordinary methods. Actions like murdering journalists, administering elections with the force of sticks and *coup d'états* opened, slowly but surely, an unbridgeable gap between them and the opposition. Every difficulty encountered and the methods used to solve it only served to reinforce CUP's leaders' ties to their respective cliques and to increasingly estrange them from their opponents within and outside the party. In sum, the CUP, which had consolidated its power after the murder in 1913 of Mahmut Şevket Pasha by sending into exile or hanging its opponents, ended up in a situation in which power could be maintained by the use of force.

However, the creation of real power required not just the use of force, but also a capacity to persuade, the latter being a much more effective instrument. During the war, material circumstances became especially harsh and an incapacity to persuade the intellectuals, who would have been the main instrument in any campaign to capture the hearts and minds of the population, brought about an increase in the estrangement between the government and the people.

The CUP was too complicated, too complex and too ambiguous. These may be desirable qualities when struggling against difficult circumstances, but when trying to convince people and to create hegemony, they are not desirable. In particular they are not at all suitable when propaganda activities, which should be based on simple premises and run effectively, are of necessity. Even taking into account all the economic difficulties, the CUP administration was particularly unsuccessful in putting together an all-encompassing and coherent propaganda policy that was capable of managing the psychological circumstances affecting both the battlefield and the home front. All propaganda efforts ended up being ad hoc affairs taken up according to the conditions and requirements of the moment. At times, the concept of *Ottoman-ness* was underlined; when there was the danger of an Arab revolt, Islam was stressed. Moreover, all this while the temporary advance in the Caucasus served as an inspiration for a policy based on Pan-Turanist ideals. They had a hard

time establishing continuity and coordination between these disparate approaches and even when they did manage to do this, they could not explain it to the public. In addition to this, the CUP leaders ran their own propaganda campaigns, which were based on their superficial needs, were not coordinated and were at times even at odds with each other. Consequently, the blame for the ineffective propaganda activity throughout the war years lay in particular with the CUP leadership and in general with all management cadres of the party.

### *Infrastructure Problems*

The crisis, which lasted between 1908 and 1918 and saw the zenith of the Ottoman modernization process, actually had its roots in the late eighteenth century and became a laboratory for the ideas that were to be applied after the foundation of the Republic. This period was very important for the attempts made to find correct applications by learning from the mistakes made. This was a period characterized by the CUP, the party that was blamed for the fall of the Ottoman Empire by the historians of the period encompassing the armistice of 1918, the war of independence and foundation of the Republic in 1923. Even though this judgment was not totally wrong, it was incomplete. The CUP, and in particular the Triumvirate which held power during the First World War, were responsible for much that went wrong. All the same, their problematic mentalities were a product of their age and cannot be explained by way of their individual psychologies alone. As was the case in many problems of the time, it was not only the CUP leadership that was responsible for the failure to set up a propaganda mechanism. The material circumstances, which set limits to their behaviour and in particular the infrastructure problems afflicting the Ottoman State, also call for careful analysis in this regard.

The Ottomans were not ready for the First World War, neither in terms of infrastructure nor superstructure. As a consequence of the infrastructure deficiencies, national culture, which would have contributed to the moral strength of the nation during the war, had not completed its formation process. Let us start to analyze this underdevelopment, beginning with material circumstances. First, the Ottoman Empire had in 1914, just before entering the First World War, a population problem. The Empire had a total area of approximately two million square kilometres and a population of between

twenty and twenty-six million. This population had varying degrees of concentration and was multiethnic; forty to forty-five percent of the total was made up of Turks living mostly in Anatolia and thirty-five to forty percent of Arabs, while the rest was made up of groups such as Kurds, Armenians, Greeks and Jews.<sup>33</sup> During the same period, developed European countries had populations twice or three times as large as that of the Empire. In 1914 Germany had a population of sixty-five million, Britain of forty-five and France of thirty-nine.<sup>34</sup>

Before 1914, the rate of increase of population in the Ottoman Empire was less than one percent. According to researchers, this rate, which was lower than the world average, was due to unfavourable health conditions, war and revolts. Another reason was the extraordinarily long time men served in the army.<sup>35</sup>

During the period 1880-1914, the world economy as a whole grew. The yearly growth rate of the Ottoman economy was 2.2 percent. While this rate was satisfactory for developed countries, it was a bit low for a developing country. During this period, the Ottoman economy displayed characteristics similar to those of the world economy, with stable price and monetary conditions and a slight growth. Nevertheless, its dependence on other countries increased, the financial health of the state deteriorated and economic policies were devoid of coherent objectives.<sup>36</sup> Even if a certain conversion into a capitalist economy did occur as a result of contact with external markets, the Ottoman economy was still based primarily on agriculture, with eighty percent of the population employed in this sector.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, the levels of economic activity and of welfare in the port cities of the empire, cities like Istanbul and Izmir that had lively commercial scenes, were much higher in comparison to less developed areas. Ottoman state employees and salaried workers were those that most enjoyed these favourable circumstances, because they had been able to benefit from the price stability present throughout the world during the period 1880-1913. During its modernization process lasting over a century, the Ottoman Empire had acquired, in parallel with the rest of the world, an increasingly vast bureaucracy and a mass of state employees. The salaries received by these employees were higher and the prices they had to pay lower than those in neighbouring countries. Before 1914, a mid-level employee could buy 100 kg of meat with his salary. The richest class was not made up of merchants and industrialists, as was the case in industrialized countries,

but of high-level government employees. As a result of this situation, the highest rates of import in the region, after Romania and Egypt, belonged to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>38</sup> Apart from luxury goods, the items imported in the greatest quantities by the Ottoman Empire before the war were basic consumer goods like flour, grains, rice, sugar, coffee and tea. The main export items were tobacco and dried fruit.<sup>39</sup>

This relatively high level of welfare present in the main cities was in a sense also the source of the discontentment felt during the war years. Prices in the Ottoman Empire were lower in comparison to those in neighbouring countries but varied from one region to another. The main reason for this was that, because of the lack of a satisfactory transport infrastructure, the lands making up the Empire had not been made into a single market.<sup>40</sup> Once war began, the Ottoman urban classes, who thanks to their high purchasing power had grown accustomed to imported goods, suddenly found themselves in a state of want due to the interruption of imports and to price inflation, which reached incredibly high rates. The job of feeding Istanbul was to become one of the greatest headaches of the wartime government, with the population having to live through great difficulties and becoming increasingly estranged from the governing classes, because of the presence of black-market operators and war profiteers, who used the 'national economy' policies to their own advantage. According to the *Düyûn-u Umumiye* (public debt administration) index, the level of prices in October 1918 was fifteen times the pre-war level; during the four-year war, state employee salaries increased by fifty percent while their purchasing power fell by sixty to eighty percent. The purchasing power of one hundred Ottoman Liras in 1918 was equal to the purchasing power of twenty-five Ottoman Liras of the pre-war period.<sup>41</sup>

Between 1914 and 1918, the daily per capita consumption of calories fell and basic foods were rationed in all countries, including the most developed ones.<sup>42</sup> In the Ottoman Empire bread was the foodstuff that created the greatest trouble from the very beginning of the war, especially in Istanbul. The quality of bread grew increasingly worse as the war progressed. While at the beginning of the war one loaf could be given to each person, this quantity fell to 250 *dirhem*<sup>43</sup> in 1916 and to 150 *dirhem* in 1917.

The Ottoman economy, which suffered from financial mismanagement and a consequent need of foreign credits vital for the state

budget, was not ready for the First World War from the point of view of its level of industrialization either, especially as the world had just emerged from a period of intense technological innovation. In the Ottoman Empire there were only 269 companies employing more than five workers in 1913. By 1915, this number had increased by only a fraction to 282 companies. A total of fifty-five percent of the companies operating in the food, construction, leather working and printing sectors were located in Istanbul. Most were small and eighty-one percent of them were private. In 1913, 16,975 people were employed in the industrial sector, a figure which decreased to 14,060 by 1915 because of the war.<sup>44</sup> With the exception of the defence industry, all industrial sectors shrank throughout the war. While before the war only three thousand people were employed by the defence sector, this number had risen to over ten thousand by the end of the war.<sup>45</sup>

Within this general picture, the Ottoman transport infrastructure was also very primitive. The Ottoman economy was static. Commercial activity was limited to ports like Istanbul, Izmir, Salonika and Beirut and their hinterlands. People ventured outside their hometowns only to serve in the army and for work purposes. Never mind the transportation between cities and different areas, even transportation between different districts of the same city was very low.<sup>46</sup> In Istanbul, which had a population of approximately one million in 1914, there were eighty-four million single transport operations, with a per capita yearly average of eighty-six. In 1914, there were only 187 motor vehicles throughout the empire.<sup>47</sup> Foreign vessels carried out ninety percent of maritime transportation, and the Ottoman commercial fleet largely was made up of small sailboats. There were few highways and the few existing ones were in a state of disrepair.

The greatest deficiency of the Ottoman transport infrastructure was to be found in its railroad network. The railroad was to be the most important means of transportation during the First World War. By 1914, all industrialized countries had completed their railroad networks, both from a military and an economic point of view. Germany had a 64 thousand kilometre network covering an area of 540 thousand km<sup>2</sup>, France a 51 thousand kilometre network covering an area of 536 thousand km<sup>2</sup>, India a 55 thousand kilometre network covering an area of 3,160,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and the U.S.A. a 388,330 kilometre network covering an area of 7,739,524 km<sup>2</sup>. In contrast to all this, the Ottoman Empire, with an area of approximately two

million km<sup>2</sup>, had a railroad network of only 5,759 kilometres.<sup>48</sup> In addition to this, most of the Ottoman railroads were foreign-owned and most of their employees were not Turkish.

Apart from all the negative aspects of the situation, there was also the fact that these railroads built with foreign capital had been planned only for commercial advantage and without taking into consideration military requirements.<sup>49</sup> The railroad, which began in Istanbul, was interrupted in Southern Anatolia at two points, first in Pozantı in the Taurus Mountain Range and then at Osmaniye in the Amanos Mountains. At these points, the connection with the next station was made via very unsuitable mountain roads. The Amanos Tunnel was completed only in January 1917, while the Taurus Tunnel had still not been completed by the end of the war.<sup>50</sup> There was no railroad connection between the western and eastern parts of the country. That is why military units leaving Istanbul reached the eastern front only after a journey lasting almost two months.

The Ottoman armies had to rely on animals for their transportation needs throughout the war. Unfortunately, the animal population was also quite limited in number and was under the constant threat of contagious diseases like the bubonic plague. In 1913, there were only 250 veterinary surgeons.<sup>51</sup>

The communication network of the Empire was also very limited, even though the country was not unfamiliar with the telegram, which was the main communication medium of that time. The first telegram line had been set up in 1854 during the Crimean War. Just before the First World War, there was a network of 50 thousand kilometres. During the war, this network would turn out to be insufficient, with censorship adding to the inefficiencies arising due to technical reasons. The phone, which was another communication medium of the time, was definitely a novelty. It had begun to be extensively used in Europe in 1877, but in the Ottoman Empire it came into use only in 1909 and then only by the state bureaucracy. In 1911 the Istanbul Phone Company, which had been created with British and American capital, began putting up a phone network, which by 1914 had 4,159 subscribers.<sup>52</sup> The underdevelopment in this sector had adverse effects during the war; while someone in Istanbul could communicate with Berlin, Vienna or Sofia, no phone communication was possible between Istanbul and the various battlefronts.<sup>53</sup>

The difficult material circumstances present in the Ottoman Empire meant that public education, which has a vital importance

as far as the formation of a national culture and the existence of an environment receptive to war time propaganda is concerned, also did not develop sufficiently. The Ottoman modernization process had begun at the end of the eighteenth century in the military field, and the greatest part of these reforms consisted in the creation of modern military schools. In a sense, the modernization of the Ottoman Empire had begun in the field of education. Unfortunately, by 1914 education had become one of the fields in which the efforts to modernize had been least successful. In relation to the fact that Ottoman reforms had always been a top to bottom effort, the reform of education began at the university level and proceeded down towards the elementary level. Since the reform of Ottoman elementary schools would have required enormous financial resources, it was always neglected.

There were efforts in the field of education, which began in 1908 and continued on after 1914, but they were unfortunately not destined to be successful. The fact that the Balkan and First World Wars began just as these efforts were starting to produce results prevented the education reforms from taking root. The lack of a well-organized elementary school system in the Ottoman Empire prevented the formation of a national unified curriculum.

The low literacy rate was also an obstacle to the efforts to support the morale of the soldiers in the Ottoman army and the civilians on the home front. There is no precise data concerning the literacy rates, but it is thought to have been less than ten percent in the period 1914-1918.<sup>54</sup>

Another of the reasons for the wartime Ottoman governments' incapacity to put together an effective propaganda network was the lack of development in the publishing sector. Printing presses reached the Empire some hundred years after being invented by Gutenberg, and then via non-Muslim communities. For religious reasons, they were not used to print books in Turkish until 1729. After this date, the Turkish publishing sector began to develop very slowly and during the two centuries between 1729 and 1928 managed to print only about thirty thousand books.<sup>55</sup> As in the case of education, it is a known fact that by the time the war began the process of creating a national consensus also had not achieved the desired results in this sector.

The Ottoman Empire was in very unfavorable circumstances from the point of view of its material infrastructure and superstructure

at the beginning of the twentieth century. All the efforts undertaken to eliminate these disadvantages prevented the organization of an effective propaganda network during the war. Therefore, the Ottoman State had not even the strength left to understand the importance of propaganda and to establish what its requirements were and to try and fulfil them.