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Liberal thought and democracy in Turkey

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ABSTRACT Turkish Republican history has witnessed the subsequent formation of liberal circles and/or political parties. The circles and/or political parties concerned were either immediately dissolved due to their opposition to Republican principles or they came to terms with these principles, either by force or consent. This had de-liberalising effects on liberal identity. In the 1990s, an intellectual circle was formed and it adopted neo-liberalism as its basic frame of reference. The circle seems to promise a break with Republican encroachment on liberal identity. However, its referential theoretical framework is questionable in terms of democratic extensions. It is the aim of this article to provide a critical assessment of the relationship between Turkish liberal thought and democracy. In order to do so, liberal thought in Republican Turkey is analysed with a view to three themes: anti-étatism, individual and nation-state, and democracy.

Introduction

Because of the prevalence of the military as a constant actor in politics the democratic credentials of Turkish Republican regime have been under critical scrutiny. Turkey has experienced three subsequent military interventions in 1960, 1971 and 1980. Since 1982 the country has been ruled by the constitution devised under the auspices of the military regime (1980–1982). On 28 February 1997, the military again took steps which led to the dissolution of the coalition government of pro-Islamic Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP) and Doğru Yol Partisi (True Path Party, DYP). Although this intervention has not led to an interim regime, it once more attested to the tension between civilian politics and military priorities regarding the Republican regime. Today, this tension is manifested by the ongoing conflict between the pro-Islamist Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP) government and military.

An analysis of the problematic nature of democratic practice in Turkey shall not be limited to the dominance of the military in politics and to the official
ideology that reinforces this dominance. A wider perspective is required to include the underlying (civilian) elements that are expected to oppose the militarisation of politics. It is in this respect that the course of liberal thought throughout the Republican history gains relevance. In theory, the liberal disposition is expected to provide substantial opposition to the militarisation of politics and a viable democratic option. However, an analysis of liberal formations in the Turkish context, at least until the 1990s, reveals the relationship between liberalism and democracy to be rather problematic.

Several liberal circles and/or political parties have been formed in republican Turkey. The circles and/or political parties concerned were either immediately dissolved due to their opposition to Republican principles—predetermined by the state—or they came to terms with these principles, either by force or consent. This, in turn, had de-liberalising effects on liberal identity itself. Liberal Düşünce Topluluğu Derneği (Association for Liberal Thinking, LDT), which was formally launched in early 1994 by a group of (neo-)liberal intellectuals, seems to promise a break with Republican encroachment on liberal identity. However, their referential theoretical framework is questionable in terms of democratic extensions.

In this article I analyse the evolution of liberal discourse in the Turkish context with a view to particular socio-political constellations in subsequent historical periods, to elucidate the close connection between a system of thought and the particular context in which it is ingrained. I interrogate three issues related to liberalism and democracy in Turkey. First, I examine the possible causes of why liberalism as an ideological framework has never been able to dominate civilian politics. Second, and related to the first issue, I examine the contextualised pattern that liberalism has taken in Turkey. In so doing, I aim at moving beyond essentialist arguments for a ‘pure’ liberalism. I look at the basic themes of reference of Turkish liberal intellectuals and try to depict the meanings that different liberal intellectuals have loaded on the themes concerned. Third, I try to arrive at a tentative conclusion on the nature of the relation between Turkish liberalism and democracy.

The article is composed of four parts. In the first part, I introduce the approach that I adopt to study Turkish liberalism. In the second part, I provide a brief account of significant historical dynamics in Turkish political history that formed the background to the emergence of different generations of Turkish liberal intellectuals. In the same part, I also give brief biographical notes on the intellectuals whose works I analyse. In the third part, I analyse the works of intellectuals concerned on the basis of common themes of reference; namely, anti-étatism, individual and nation-state, democracy. In the final and concluding section, I provide a summary of the pros and cons of Turkish liberal thought with a view to democracy. All in all, the underlying argument of the article is that the failure and/or indifference of liberal intellectuals in putting democracy at the centre of their approaches have led to a compromise with undemocratic measures and/or the subordination of democracy to ‘higher’ statist or liberal values.
Contextualising liberalism

Andrew Vincent has distinguished among four approaches in studying liberal thought. Roughly, he has cited the nation-state approach, the approach to particular liberal traditions, the approach that takes liberalism as the companion of a particular type of economic structure, that is capitalism, and finally the constitutionalist approach. In this article, liberalism as an ideology is conceived to be integral to capitalist society, whose socio-political contours are framed within the nation-state. However, this does not necessitate a reading of liberalism as a universally coherent and monolithic stream of thought. In this respect, the main approach that underlies this study is that liberal ideology is formulated differently in different historical and cultural contexts, which assumes that its core concepts are articulated in accordance with particular dynamics.

The core concepts of liberal ideology can be summarised as the emphasis on individual as the main actor in history, a free-market mechanism that is built upon the faith in the individual who possesses rationality, an ideal socio-political configuration that is derived from the working of the free-market mechanism and the privileging of liberty over equality; and thus an emphasis on the protection of individual rights and liberties as the raison d'être of the state. In this framework, the state is conceived as an instrument to protect the ruled and its legitimacy lies in their consent. The institutional reflection of this socio-political configuration has been the parliamentary regime and constitutional rule. However, it is the different interpretations of these core principles that necessitate the contextualisation of liberalism as an ideology. For,

[L]iberalism actually emerged as a contested space already divided into its more conservative and its more radical tendencies—a tension, which has been repeated again and again throughout its history. Depending on which tendency was the dominant one, liberalism could be articulated to the demands of different social strata... Both conservative and radical basis were premised on the fundamentally liberal concepts of individual liberties and rights and a conception of society as an association of free and rational persons bound by contract and consent. The quarrel between those who saw good government as the extension and preservation of their property and those who saw liberty as the end of ‘one rule for the rich and one for the poor’ was a quarrel between different classes initially within liberalism.

The historical background to the evolution of Turkish liberalism

The early-Republican agenda (1923–1945) was dominated by the task of nation-state construction. In the official rhetoric the Ottoman heritage was totally denied. The mentality of eliminating all that was believed to belong to the Ottoman past was compiled within the project of modernisation. In line with building a modern, secular state, the project also contained the transformation of the (Ottoman) religious community on the basis of national identity. The proclamation of the Republic, based on the sovereignty of the nation, provided a new conceptualisation of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. As
a corollary of the ‘modern’ state, the Republican task involved the ‘citizeniza-
tion’6 of the once Ottoman subject. Both the Republican citizen and the state 
were defined in terms of the (Turkish) nation.7

According to the official view, the Turkish nation was epitomised in the 
Republican state. This view also involved the conceptualisation of the state as 
the highest authority, which exceeded the will of the individual and/or collectiv-
ity.8 This meant a rejection of the argument that the legitimacy of the state is 
based on the consent of the people, as well as the denial of the pluralist 
conception of government.9 The concept of the state also dominated in the 
economic sphere. In this respect, the first decade of the Republic (1923–1930) 
can be read as a period of search for the appropriate economic policy that would 
provide the Turkish state with competitive leverage in the international sphere. 
This was perceived to be the economic dimension of modernisation, understood 
as the existence of a national bourgeoisie and of industrialisation. Ironically, the 
period concerned has been referred to as one of ‘open economy’ and requisites 
of liberal economy were recognised as international standards. However, due to 
the disadvantageous position of the country in the international sphere and 
especially due to the protectionist era that started after 1929 Great Depression, 
the economic agenda was devised in line with an étatist mentality.10

The “dominant, taken-for-granted conception of politics” in the period, which 
also marked the whole republican history, can better be comprehended with a 
view to the rather short experiences of two organised liberal oppositions. 
Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkasi (Progressive Republican Party, TCF) was 
formed in November 1924 and closed down in June 1925. Serbest Cumhuriyet 
Fırkasi (Free Republican Party, SCF) was formed in August 1930 and dissolved 
in November 1930. TCF based its opposition against the centralisation of power 
in Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People’s Party, CHP)—the state-party of 
the period.11 In Article 2 of the party programme, TCF was defined as liberal. 
This definition was substantiated by the articles proposing decentralisation in 
local administration (Articles 14, 15, 16), encouragement of private enterprise, 
restriction of public works only to those spheres where private initiative proved 
to be incompetent and nullifying all restrictions on foreign trade (Articles 
29–39).12 The party was closed down not due to these outstandingly liberal 
premises, but because of Article 6 of its programme, which touched the soft 
belly of the Republic–religion. Apart from the rather hostile statist stance against 
any kind of opposition that was perceived to be ‘untimely’, and thus unneces-
sary, the article stating the party’s recognition of the principle of respect for 
public opinion, faith and religious belief was read as a shield for ‘reactionary’ 
propaganda. The party was closed in the aftermath of Şeyh Said uprising (13 
February–31 May 1925).13

SCF, on the other hand, emerged as a tutelary opposition and can be 
interpreted as a test case in the state-led experiment with democracy and a 
multi-party regime.14 The formation of the party was encouraged by the Repub-
lican state, but not as an alternative focus of power against CHP. The liberal 
identity of the party, which was expressed in the articles of its programme,
eventually put the party into a position of effective opposition, especially in a period when protectionist measures were intensified and the transition to étatist policies was underway.15 The participation of the party in the 1930 municipal elections and the popularity it acquired during its election campaign alarmed the state in that the SCF was no longer perceived to be the ‘loyal opposition.’ This conviction, on the part of the state, was further enhanced when SCF submitted an interpellation, questioning the compatibility of elections with democratic principles and the validity of the election results.16 Apart from the popularity of the party as evinced in municipal elections, this political act was faced with the traditional action of the state against any perceived threat towards the maintenance of political power. The party was forced to dissolve itself. This was legitimised on the basis of its exploitation by ‘reactionary’ and ‘anti-revolutionary’ forces.17 However, unlike the (official) reasons behind the dissolution of the TCF, now, the incompatibility of liberalism with the conditions in Turkey was also spelled out.18

Especially with respect to SCF experience it might be argued that, initially, liberal political identity had a rather ‘forced’ emergence in the early-Republican context. While religious and leftist opposition was perceived to be the most detrimental threat against the existence of the Republican state, the liberal stance seemed to ensure a relatively secure polity, at least for a short time. This was also related to the perception of liberal-democracy as the model for ‘Westernisation.’ However, when organised liberal opposition started to appeal to a wide range of social opposition against the state-party, it was immediately excluded from the legitimate political sphere. This exclusion was continued until the transition to a multi-party regime in 1945.

The dominant Republican texture, furnished by statism and nationalism, not only pre-empted and/or shortened the life-span of organised (liberal) opposition, but also infused the republican intellectual layout, including the liberal strand. The liberal intellectual of the early-republican era was caught between the inevitable acquiescence to the existence of the Republican state, the liberal stance seemed to ensure a relatively secure polity, at least for a short time. This was also related to the perception of liberal-democracy as the model for ‘Westernisation.’ However, when organised liberal opposition started to appeal to a wide range of social opposition against the state-party, it was immediately excluded from the legitimate political sphere. This exclusion was continued until the transition to a multi-party regime in 1945.

Ahmet Ağaoğlu (1869–1939), who can be considered as the main mentor of SCF, voiced his liberal opposition against CHP in such a setting. Before his participation in SCF and after the dissolution of the party, Ağaoğlu served under the Kemalist regime. He worked as a member of parliament, taught at the Ankara Law Faculty and Istanbul University, and was also engaged in journalism. He published the daily, Akın, and wrote in other dailies and journals of the period. He also published several books.19 He is, in fact, well known for his contributions to Turkism and is also studied among the conservative circles of early-Republican era. He was, however, positioned at the margins of those
circles. His liberal opposition can be found mainly in his works that were published after 1930. In line with the way that SCF was founded, Ağaoğlu, too, was more or less forced to participate in the party. However, both during SCF’s brief opposition period, and afterwards, Ağaoğlu turned out to be a severe critic of CHP, especially its economic policies.

Ağaoğlu’s works, which contain liberal premises, are significant since they represent the articulation of liberalism into the statist–nationalist paradigm. Such an articulation inevitably resulted in an ambiguous framework, which can be summarised in Ağaoğlu’s own words:

I entered the SCF as a revolutionary democrat, liberal, statist and Kemalist. … Until the foundation of the SCF, I sincerely believed that the CHP was a liberal, democrat party, and even as statist as I am.

Ahmet Emin Yalman (1888–1972) was more convincing in his liberal stance as compared to Ağaoğlu. He worked as a journalist starting from the late Ottoman era. In 1923 he began publishing the daily Vatan, and wrote editorial articles until 1925 when the daily was banned by the government. In 1935 he started to publish the journal Kaynak. In 1936, he engaged in the publication of the daily Tan, which was well-known for its leftist tendencies. He started republishing Vatan in 1940. Yalman also published several books.

Yalman participated in the foundation of Demokrat Parti (Democratic Party, DP) (1947–1960), which came to power by 1950 elections, and supported the party in its opposition years through his articles. However, because of the criticisms that he directed against the DP government on liberal grounds he was imprisoned in 1959 and released in the aftermath of the 1960 coup d’état. Defining himself as a liberal, he repeatedly expressed his admiration of the ‘Anglo-American’ world. His outwardly liberal stance was displayed not only in his writings, but also in his participation in the first meeting of Dünya Liberaller Birliği (World Union of Liberals) on 9–14 April 1945 and in the foundation of Hüri Fikirleri Yayıma Cemiyeti (Society for the Dissemination of Free Ideas), as its branch in Turkey. He also took part in Oxford Milletlerarası Liberal Kongresi (Oxford International Liberal Congress), convened by Milletlerarası Liberal Hareket (International Liberal Movement) in 1947.

Unlike Ağaoğlu’s participation in the foundation of SCF, Yalman’s involvement in DP was voluntary from the start. The historical dynamics of the period in which DP was formed and rose to power were different from the early-Republican era. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Turkish statesmen expressed their preference for an alliance with the American camp. This preference was not only connected with taking the side of the liberal world vis-à-vis the ‘communist bloc’ and the extension of financial aid mainly from the U.S.A., but it also signified a decisive turn towards the transition to multi-party politics. At the same time, CHP was seeking to revise étatism due to both internal and external pressures.

DP was formed in 1947 through the initiative of some former CHP members. The opposition led by the politicians concerned was well underway in 1945,
mainly against CHP’s étatist policies. During the years of opposition prominent DP members published articles in Vatan. In his own words, Yalman acted as a ‘shadow member’ in the foundation of DP and in the preparation of its programme. This was confirmed by the parallelism between liberal themes in the party program and the main points of criticisms that Yalman was directing against the single party rule of the CHP in Vatan between 1923 and 1945. The party came to power in the 1950 general elections and stayed in power for a decade, until the 1960 military intervention.

The party’s opposing discourse was built mainly on democracy accompanied by an indictment of CHP, on the grounds that it tended towards dictatorial tendencies. In a similar vein to TCF and SCF, in DP’s programme, too, private initiative, abandoning étatist policies and the need for practising what the party leaders termed ‘real democracy’ were emphasised. Briefly, real democracy meant ‘… a move from bottom up…’. Thus, the realisation of the will of the nation could be achieved by a movement led by the masses, rather than by a regime dominated by a ‘top down’ mentality, which the party leaders associated with CHP rule.

Yalman’s affiliation to DP on liberal grounds lasted hardly until 1954. After the shift in the party’s economic policies away from liberal principles to restriction in foreign trade and to arbitrary decision-making, and in the political sphere from tolerance to hostility in the face of any criticism, Yalman severed his ties with DP, again on liberal grounds. The shift towards authoritarian measures on the part of DP was, in turn, justified in party rhetoric on the grounds that the party represented the ‘national will’ at large. Such a shift not only disappointed liberals such as Yalman, but also provided the grounds for the justification of the 1960 coup d’état, employing the rhetoric of ‘saving democracy’. The justification seemed to work well, since Yalman, too, gave support to the military in the overthrow of the DP government.

In Turkish politics, the 1960–1980 period can be characterised as an experiment with pluralist democracy, side-by-side with the gradual increase in the visibility of the military in Turkish politics. This was due to the double-sided nature of the 1961 Constitution. While the 1961 Constitution was developed within a social–liberal framework, it also secured the position of the military by establishing Milli Güvenlik Kurulu (National Security Council, MGK) as a permanent constitutional organ. MGK’s authority was increased by subsequent military interventions in 1971 and 1980. Initially, the social–liberal framework was more decisive in the course of political developments that marked the following two decades. The period was characterised by a plurality of political tendencies, provided with constitutional guarantees to organise and have parliamentary representation, as well as a rather unsuccessful trial with the welfare state, which in the final analysis resulted in parliamentary instability and street violence that intensified throughout the 1970s. Both the 1971 and the 1980 military interventions were justified on the grounds of saving democracy against the usurpers of the rights and liberties provided by the 1961 Constitution.

Aydın Yalçın, who defined himself as a liberal, also thought that the main
causes of the devastating political situation in the country lay in the excessively libertarian 1961 Constitution. Yalçın received his degree in economics and worked in Faculty of Political Science in Ankara University. His engagement with politics started in the 1950s. He was one of the founders of Forum group, which was formed in opposition to the authoritarian policies of DP, in 1954. He participated in Hürriyet Partisi (Freedom Party), founded on 19 November 1955. Shortly after its foundation the party merged with CHP. Yalçın departed from Forum group in 1958. In the early 1960s, he engaged both in journalism and party politics. He published the daily, Öncü (1960–1962), and fortnightly Yarın (1963–1968), and participated in the formation of Yeni Türkiye Partisi (New Turkey Party) (1961–1964). In the second half of the 1960s he joined Adalet Partisi (Justice Party, AP). He withdrew from party politics after 1973. In 1979 he led the formation of Yeni Forum (New Forum) group and acted as the editor of the journal, which was published under the same name. His most representative work is Vatan Hıyanetinin Anatomisi (The Anatomy of Treason), a collection of his selected articles.

Like Ağaoglu, Yalçın, also, is one of the prominent intellectuals who best characterises the liberal ambivalence within the Republican intellectual layout. His and Yeni Forum circle’s extensive support for the 1980 coup d’état confirms this ambivalence. As in the case of Ağaoglu, this ambivalence should again be read within the parameters of the statist–nationalist paradigm, which almost turns the liberal stance into a preference for capitalism, devoid of a systematic liberal political content. The political content is, in turn, filled with the sanctity of the state and nation as the highest values in themselves.

The 1980s formed a turning point in Turkish political history. As documented in the 1982 Constitution, the dominant governing style was based on repressing or eliminating and/or ignoring the points of conflict in the society. This authoritarian pattern prepared the appropriate framework for the practice of the technocratic mentality that had underlain the military-backed coalitions in the early 1960s and early 1970s. In other words, in the 1980s the distinction between the economic and political was consolidated, and provided the grounds for the appropriate practice of neo-liberal policies in Turkey. Here, it should immediately be noted that while the 1980 coup d’état represented the formal break with the previous two decades, the change in the politico-economic configuration had already been introduced by the implementation of the economic stabilisation package of 24 January 1980. The package concerned is especially important since its architect was Turgut Özal, who assumed the dominant role in neo-liberal ‘civilian’ politics of the coming decade.

Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party, ANAP) under the leadership of Özal, has represented the rise and demise of neo-liberalism within the context of party politics. This experience has evolved on two axes in the socio-political plane: a pragmatic rhetoric, which manifests itself in opportunism, and a new populism nurtured by the former. The basis of this populism is personalistic politics, well known in Turkish politics. Such a co-existence, which is not specific to Turkey,
can be taken as one of the factors of the impasse that troubled ANAP in the late 1980s, and neo-liberalism in the late 1990s.35

ANAP started its political life by flirting with the military and by adopting the rhetoric of ‘consensus’. It represented the centre-right compound that combined liberalism, nationalism and conservatism.36 This is in line with the general neo-liberal experience since nationalist-conservative themes prevail in the pioneers of Anglo-American neo-liberalism–Reaganism and Thatcherism–which inspired Özal’s, and hence ANAP’s policies. However, the problem in the Turkish context was related to the framework in which neo-liberalism had found roots.

As mentioned above, the 1980s witnessed a radical transformation along with the consolidation of certain aspects of the Republican tradition. When read between the lines, it can be observed that the most significant aspect of this tradition is the dominance of the military and the state in politics and the maintenance of the statist mentality. This is so, despite the basic premises of neo-liberalism. In other words, despite the emphasis on the individual equipped with economic rationality, and on minimising the role of the state in the economic sphere, the state, not capital, turned out to be the basic actor in the implementation of neo-liberal policies. In a structure based on the requisite of distinguishing the economic from the political, capital, which finally started to acquire an identity free of the state and dared to adopt an anti-statist attitude, has been repressed in the name of the survival of the state. The statist–laicist anti-propaganda against ‘green capital’, and the failure of Yeni Demokrasi Hareketi (New Democracy Movement, YDH), are significant examples in this respect. Islamic capital is defined in terms of an Islamist ethical, political and economic stance and in official and popular laicist terminology it is referred to as ‘green capital’—the symbolic colour of Islam. The businessmen and enterprises associated with Islamic tendencies have faced statist–laicist anti-propaganda.37 The YDH, on the other hand, led by Cem Boyner, the incumbent president of the Association of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen (TÜSİAD), failed to ensure itself a secure place in active politics due to its arguments concerning basic points of conflict within the society, which somewhat challenged the statist disposition.

As ANAP, under the lead of Özal, was inspired by Reaganism and especially by Thatcherism, Liberal Düşünce Topluluğu (Association for Liberal Thinking, LDT), which was formed by a group of neo-liberal intellectuals, took F. A. Hayek as its main mentor. The group was initially organised as a society in 1992 and turned into an association in 1994. The founding members of the LDT circle have organic links to Yeni Forum.38 The circle is known by its academic publications both in the form of translations from selected ‘Western’ liberal thinkers and by its quarterly, Liberal Düşünce (Liberal Thinking).39 In addition to Hayek, it is also possible to observe the influence of Karl Popper and Isaiah Berlin in the dominant theoretical stance that the circle has adopted.

LDT is significant since it represents both continuity and a break with the past generations of liberal intellectuals. The circle has managed to survive for more
than a decade despite the predominance of an illiberal atmosphere in the country. It has aspired more to act as an ideological mentor, rather than to engage in active politics. Despite the solemn support given to Liberal Demokrat Party (Liberal Democratic Party), it concentrates on introducing neo-liberalism to Turkish public and on offering proposals for the resolution of basic problems, which are considered on a selective basis. Like its precedents, the liberal discourse of LDT is shaped by a negative disposition; i.e. a counter-positioning vis-à-vis the state/centre, Marxism and collectivism, and constructivism.40

Main themes in Turkish liberalism

Anti-étatism

It can be argued that opposition to étatist policies has been the main common point among different generations of Turkish liberal intellectuals. However, the grounds on which they justified their opposition hint at the differences in their stances. These differences are best comprehended by taking into consideration the historical dynamics in which they produced their works. Besides, their positioning vis-à-vis party politics had an effect on the nature of their opposition. Thus, while analysing the opposition voiced by the liberal intellectuals it is necessary to consider, first, the ‘dominant, taken-for-granted conception of politics’ of the period concerned, and, second, their political connections.

As elaborated above, Ağaoğlu, who, for the purposes of this article, represents the ideal–typical liberal intellectual of the early-Republican era, wrote in a period of nation state construction. This is revealed when the theoretical framework on which he based his opposition to CHP’s étatist policies is analysed. Rather than displaying a consistent and absolute faith in the individual, as the rational private entrepreneur, his conception of history was decisive in this respect. Ağaoğlu interpreted history as the scene of a constant struggle that arose out of contradictions inherent in society. In this respect, history is composed of subsequent stages of ‘becoming’,41 which engender progress.42 Every new stage of progress, in turn, involves new contradictions that provide the ground for a continuous evolution.43 In Ağaoğlu’s terms two actors regulate this process of ‘creative evolution’: the individual, and the state.44 The individual, in her/his active capacity, is the main motor behind the contradictions.45 The state, on the other hand, represents order, and, moreover, it is the main mechanism that resolves the contradictions. For Ağaoğlu, the tense and productive interaction between the individual and state is shaped by differing historical exigencies.

Basing his opposition on such an understanding of history, Ağaoğlu did not totally dismiss state interference in the economy. While he advocated ‘the statism of the state’46 as sui generis, his opposition was rooted in the conviction that the time was not yet ripe for state intervention. For him, the conditions that necessitate the state to step in the market as a decisive actor to reinstate social harmony had not yet emerged.47 When read from within the contextual dynamics of the period in question, this stance reveals the articulation of economic
liberalism into a particular political setting. The setting was dominated by the statist–nationalist paradigm, which at the same time contained the construction of a capitalist structure as an aim.

Similar to Ağaoğlu, Yalman also, repeatedly criticised CHP’s étatism on liberal grounds. He explained his advocacy of liberalism on the grounds of his belief that liberalism was the only remedy against fascism and communism. The form of liberalism to which he referred was revealed by his pro-American stance,48 which was in line with the dominant foreign policy preference of the country in the aftermath of the Second World War. Yalman viewed étatism ‘… as a means that shall only be used in cases required by the common good.’49 For him, CHP’s étatist policies were ‘… arbitrary [and they] turned people into means and made the state and bureaucracy the principal beneficiaries ….’. He claimed that this practice gave rise to ‘a state, which does not serve, but which dominates.’50 He argued for a state that would take the initiative when private initiative proved to be incompetent. On the other hand, he grounded his argument neither on the creativity and productivity of individual initiative nor on a categorical preference for individual liberty, but on common—national—interest.

Yalman’s understanding of common interest is revealed in his approach to the nature of the relation between state and private initiative. He did not adhere to the contention that private initiative is good in itself, and that economic activities be left to the spontaneous working of the free market and ‘individual initiative’. He viewed the right to free enterprise as a ‘trust’ given to the citizens. The state, in turn, was the guardian of the common interest. It had to function first as a regulatory institution to ‘… guide, give support … to the citizens who take initiative …’, and second, as a control mechanism against ‘… the usurpers of the trust’.51

At this point, it can be argued that the statist tune was also effective in Yalman’s works, as was the case for Ağaoğlu. It is clear that both were against CHP’s étatist policies. However, this opposition did not amount to an unconditional support for the free-market mechanism. For Ağaoğlu, such support depended on historical dynamics. As for Yalman, the common good was the decisive factor. The common point of reference of both intellectuals was the inevitability of the state’s interference when the common good was at stake.

Yalçın, on the other hand, produced his works at a time when the historical dynamics presented a totally different scheme. In the period when he was active both intellectually and politically (1954–1994), the building blocks of the nation-state had long been established and multi-party politics was consolidated in Turkey. But the main target of his opposition was still the same. Like Ağaoğlu and Yalman, Yalçın’s liberal discourse was most manifest in his anti-étatist positioning. He criticised CHP’s étatism on the grounds that it carried a ‘totalitarian’ mentality. However, unlike the other two intellectuals, he had unconditional faith in the free-market economy. This, in turn, effected his alternative conceptualisation of étatism, according to which the state’s interference in the economy was a necessity, so long as ‘… it provides the most
extensive means for private initiative, and thus makes the latter the main pillar of economic development. Underlying such a conceptualisation was an individualism that assigned economic rationality to the individual. However, this did not lead Yalçın to avoid the statist-nationalist paradigm in his approach to socio-political issues.

It is at this point that LDT’s anti-étatism stance signifies a rupture in Turkish liberal thought. LDT borrows from the Hayekian conceptualisation of the individual in substantiating its anti-étatism and anti-planning positioning. The circle takes étatism as the most significant manifestation of the constructivist mentality of the Republican state. It criticises the static nature of planning, on the grounds that it inactivates both economy and society. Unlike the earlier generations of anti-étatist liberal intellectuals, it builds its liberal framework on the recognition of the individual as a value in her/himself. The circle accepts the Hayekian assumption that the knowledge and potential of the individual to achieve harmony between her/his means and ends are restricted by time and space. It is for this reason that it argues for minimising state intervention in the economy and in society. In other words, due to the limited nature of the human capacity to know, it is always uncertain that state intervention in the form of socio-economic planning would achieve the objective of increasing individual welfare. However, it is certain that the constructivist mentality inherent in planning and state intervention will restrict the creative capacity of the individual and thus restrict freedom.

Thus, the circle rejects étatism thoroughly, without due regard for exploring alternative conceptualisations. Moreover, by proposing the free-market mechanism as the ideal model for the socio-political order, it also carries the liberal stance beyond party politics. The latter was built almost exclusively upon opposition to CHP’s étatism, and contextualised in accordance with the dominant conception of politics. This liberalism, however, is constructed on a particular theoretical framework, which involves the de-contextualisation of liberalism in accordance with a set of universal principles. The principles concerned are individual liberty, the rule of law and the free-market economy.

**Individual and nation-state**

As hinted in the account on anti-étatism, the concept of the individual as an independent category is included within Turkish liberalism as late as the 1990s. Although the concept was featured in the works of Ağaoğlu, Yalman and Yalçın as a common thematic point of reference, it was subordinated to the state and nation. LDT, on the other hand, opposes this statist–nationalist delimitation by resorting to a Hayekian conception of the individual.

Among the liberal predecessors of LDT, Ağaoğlu provided the most comprehensive theoretical approach to the concept of the individual. He defined the individual on the basis of two opposing dimensions: the ‘outer self’ and the ‘inner self’. The outer self refers to the egocentric, interest-seeking side of the individual, entailing no commitment to any other being. The inner self, on the
other hand, contains solidarity, virtue and knowledge-based consciousness. The opposition between the two selves can also be formulated with respect to the tension between reason and will. Ağaoğlu preferred to take the side of the will. In his works the emphasis was on the wilful acts of the individual, who for him was always in a state of ‘becoming’ that shaped historical development. In other words, he conceived the inner self as the source of the constructive acts of the individual, which would lead to ‘creative evolution’. Ağaoğlu bestowed on the state a critical responsibility in this instance. For him the state was responsible for the liberation of the individual from the possible domination of the outer self.

In Ağaoğlu’s conceptual matrix, the political reflection of this liberation process is national consciousness. Ağaoğlu’s approach to (individual) liberty was configured within the framework of national freedom, which was symbolised by the independence of the state. For him, the individual could not be considered in solitude. On the contrary, s/he was an integral part of the society and the nation. S/he inherently had a sense of belonging, which might not yet have been raised to the level of consciousness. And it was the responsibility of the state to provide the groundwork for raising national consciousness in the individual.

Within this framework, Ağaoğlu rejected the argument that liberty might cause anarchy. He thought that social order, harmony and unity could only be maintained by the apposite exercise of liberty. On this view, liberty is not understood as the independence of the individual from outside intervention in her/his actions. Rather, it is a duty of citizenship. Liberty, in turn, is the ethical dimension of social discipline, which enforces compliance with the principles of the state. Thus, while national consciousness liberates the individual, the individual’s compliance with the principles of the state ensures that liberty is appropriately practised.

Ağaoğlu’s conceptualisation of the individual and individual liberty fit well into the dynamics of the early-Republican era. For him, the major task was to revive the national consciousness, which had already been inherent in the (Turkish) people. In the realisation of this task, Ağaoğlu emphasised a second hindrance from which the individual ‘… and hence the collectivity composed of individuals …’ should be emancipated. He coined the term ‘Eastern dogmatism’ for this additional impediment, and, in line with the official ideology he characterised the Ottoman past as exhibiting Eastern dogmatism. Thus, the individual was portrayed as the object of nation-state construction. S/he would become the subject of her/his life only after s/he had fulfilled the credentials of the responsible citizen.

Like Ağaoğlu, Yalman’s approach to the concept of the individual was restricted to the nation-state framework. As noted in the previous section, although he based his preference for liberalism on the privileging of individual rights and liberties vis-à-vis the state, he was keen to assign the state the responsibility of guarding the common good. Yalman refrained from giving unconditional support to private initiative, since he thought that it would mean
accepting a laissez-faire mentality. For him this would result in ‘unlimited freedom’, and endanger the common interest. Instead, Yalman argued, ‘… liberty should be practised appropriately … in the way that it serves benevolent aims and the resolution of the issues under discussion.’67 As with Ağaoğlu, who defined individual liberty in terms of citizenship responsibility, he shared the contention that ‘the inevitable cost of freedom is service. Each is bound with a duty in return for a right.’68 Thus, his conception of liberty was based neither on the concept of individual as an end in her/himself, nor on individual liberty, understood in terms of the pursuit of self-interest.

In fact, in Yalman’s works, the concept of individual had only a symbolic value for his liberal political stance. This was manifest in his approach to religion in general, and Islam in particular, as a matter of individual conscience. He believed that Islam was an ideal religion since ‘… it denounces any kind of priesthood and presents full trust in individual conscience.’69 This conviction also led him to oppose state control over the social functions of religion, and the politicisation of religion.

On the other hand, Yalman did not refrain from integrating his approach to religion into the statist–nationalist paradigm. In this respect, his perception of the nation is important. In line with Ağaoğlu, Yalman, too, repeatedly took issue with the nation-state. Especially in the 1940s, he argued that the goals of Turkish revolution had been achieved and the task of nation-state construction was accomplished. For him, the spirit of the time called for the consolidation of order. He thought that Islam had a significant role in this consolidation process because, he believed, religion in general was a component of a nation’s tradition. In this respect, he argued that Islam was a ‘source of unity’ that was essential for the ‘national spirit’. Underlying this perception was his separation between ‘the universe of reason’ and ‘the universe of sentiments’. He argued that unless a balance between these two universes was achieved by means of Islam, national unity would be at risk.70

The second point of divergence between Ağaoğlu and Yalman is revealed at this point. While Ağaoğlu pointed at ‘Eastern dogmatism’ as the obstacle for the emancipation of the individual, Yalman warned against the threat of ‘dogmatised modernisation’.71 Briefly, he viewed ‘Turkish Revolution’ and ensuing reforms as acts of reason and emphasised the significant function of Islam in bridging the possible gap between the rulers (managers of modernisation) and the ruled (objects of modernisation). Likewise, Yalman approached the East—the Ottoman past—not as an obstacle for individual emancipation. He argued that total rejection of the Ottoman past would result in a gap between the state and the people since it contained ‘memories, sentiments of unity, thoughts that are accumulated in the political and geographical unity’ of a nation.72

Although Yalçın differed from both Ağaoğlu and Yalman in substantiating his anti-étatist stance with regard to the conceptualisation of individual as the rational economic actor, his approach to nation and state showed parallelisms. First, he viewed the state as the guardian of the national interest. This suggests a split in Yalçın’s conceptualisation of liberalism between the economic and the
political, for he defined the individual in the political sphere as the citizen who had personal responsibility and respect for freedom of thought. Second, Yalçın believed such an individual could only be formed by means of education that would ensure the creation of ‘… a real Western mind that finds its expression in freethinking.’

His emphasis on free-thinking did not prevent Yalçın from adopting a staunchly statist–nationalist discourse, at times when he thought ‘national security’ was at risk. Compared to Ağaoğlu and Yalman, he was more concerned with protecting the nation and the Republican state than delineating national identity. This was most evident in the works he produced in the late 1970s and afterwards. His participation in, and contributions to, the Yeni Forum circle are informative in this respect. In fact, the editorial article published in the first issue of Yeni Forum seems to oppose the dominance of the statist–nationalist paradigm in Yalçın’s and the circle’s stances. In the article it was asserted that ‘… the problems caused by freedom can only be resolved by more freedom.’ On the other hand, shortly before the 1980 coup d’état, by May 1980, the content of the freedom as understood by the circle was specified in terms of the freedom of the nation-state. In other words, national liberty and security, were privileged vis-à-vis individual liberty. This was implicit in the proposal on the issue of constitutional reform that the circle published on the eve of the 1980 coup d’état. The proposal called for a restructuring process to strengthen the state in order to secure national survival. Unsurprisingly, both Yalçın and Yeni Forum circle gave unconditional support to the 1980 coup d’état in the name of the regime of freedom. For, according to them the main problem ‘was not restricted to domestic problems …’ rather ‘… it was a national security issue in which some foreign powers were also involved in the aim of destroying the Turkish state.’

The post-1980 era witnessed a shift in the dominant conception of politics in the Republican context, a conception that had previously been taken for granted. The rising tide of the period was symbolised in an economically liberal and socio-politically nationalist and conservative stance. The period witnessed the use of Turkish–Islamic motives not only by conservative political groups but also by the military. The military maintained its dominance in politics and the functions of civilian governments were restricted to the management of economic issues. It is possible to observe the shift in official ideology in the works of Yalçın, that signified the articulation of liberal political stance into a nationalist–conservative ideological frame. Emphasising ‘national essence’, Yalçın argued for a political attitude that was ‘… right of centre, a blend of liberalism and conservatism, nationalist, anti-leftist and anti-communist’, which showed significant parallelisms with ANAP’s identity. As a counterpart of this political attitude Yalçın proposed ‘the creation and internalisation of a Turkish–Islamic–Western civilisation’.

The meaning of this project was further revealed in the articles published in Yeni Forum in the 1980s, which mainly focused on the responsibility of (Turkish) intellectuals. In this respect, Yeni Forum was identified as a model
group, which ‘... represented the force of resistance of the unorganised, voluntary and silent Turkish people’. Thus, the intellectuals in general, and the intellectuals gathered around the circle in particular, were held responsible for a dual task. The first task was to construct the social basis for the realisation of a democratic life style. The second task was to revitalise ‘Turkish history and national culture, religious and moral values; [and] strengthening national unity; forming close connections with the countries and societies, which share the same historical heritage ...’.

LDT, on the other hand, presents another break with the subordination of the individual to the state and nation. By taking the individual as an independent category it reverses the connection between the individual and national liberty, as formulated by the Republican liberal mentality. This reversal is summarised as: ‘... [by the term] “free” nation we mean either a society composed of free individuals or a society which has institutions that guarantee liberty.’ Thus, for the circle, the main reference point of individual liberty is the individual her/himself. The individual is free so long as s/he is independent from outside forces in the pursuit of her/his choices. And a system is libertarian so long as it provides the means for the practice of liberty as such. As elaborated in the previous section on ‘anti-étatism’, this approach does not amount to the glorification of the individual as the most knowledgeable actor who can decide the ‘best’ for her/himself and for the society at large. In its stead, it is based on the Hayekian conviction in the limited capacity of the individual to know, and thus on the idealisation of a spontaneous order.

In this respect, the circle perceives the free-market mechanism as the ideal format for the pursuit and protection of individual liberty, thus as a model for socio-political order. Such a perception fits well into the non-nationalist and anti-statist arguments voiced in the circle. Here it should be emphasised that the ideal socio-political order for LDT, which is modelled on the spontaneous functioning of the free-market mechanism, does not call for a ‘stateless’ society. On the contrary, Turkish neo-liberals argue for an instrumental state, based on contract. The principles of the rule of law and constitutional democracy are proposed as guarantees against the state’s encroachment on the consent of individuals. It is on these grounds that LDT formulates its criticisms against not only étatist but also statist measures that have almost become a tradition in Turkey.

The criticism is most conspicuous in the articles on the issue of Islam in Turkish society. In that respect, and reminiscent of Yalman, the starting point of the group is individual freedom of expression and conscience. The circle criticises the laicist policies of the Turkish state on the grounds that these policies restrict individual liberties. It offers a ‘liberal’ reading of laicism from a pluralist perspective. Briefly, it argues for a neutral state vis-à-vis different systems of values—i.e. religions. Additionally, it rejects restricting religion to the realm of personal conscience and takes religion as a socio-political entity. This leads to a call for the state to come to terms with ‘Muslim reality’ in Turkey and to set the grounds for the realisation of ‘Muslim democracy’. It also leads
to an argument in favour of the individual having the capacity to carry her/his religious faith into social and political spheres. In short, the circle takes Islam as an asset of civil society and advocates the representation of religion by associations and/or political parties.89

In this respect, the American system, characterised as ‘libertarian’ and ‘participatory’, is considered an ideal example. LDT substantiates this characterisation on the basis of the dominance of civil society over the state in the U.S.A. The reason for this dominance is found in the effective function of religion in American society and politics, which has guaranteed both social solidarity and an ethical basis for politics.90 At this point, it is possible to observe the parallelism between Yalman’s and LDT’s approaches to the connection between religion and social unity more clearly. The parallelism is not surprising since both Yalman and the circle adhere to an American version of liberal practice. On the other hand, the circle is more convincing in its pro-American stance since it does not concede to statist priorities regarding the common good. On the contrary, for the circle, the decisive actor in determining the common good is not the state, but the individual.91

This theoretical framework, which forms the main point of reference for LDT, confirms the rupture within Turkish liberal thought. The rupture is further signified in the approach to democracy that prevails in the circle. The theme of democracy is important for understanding the continuities and breaks in Turkish liberal thought, since for almost 60 years it has provided the main basis of political opposition for liberal intellectuals.

**Democracy**

Ağaoğlu, Yalman and Yalçın shared the same Republican grounds in approaching democracy as an ‘enlightened debate’ between parties which represented the nation. They held the parties responsible for dismissing their own selfish interests and working for the national good.

Ağaoğlu explained his participation in SCF on the grounds of this understanding. For him, SCF was a necessity for the Republican regime. He believed that power had a corrupting effect on human beings in that it might lead them to resort to oppressive practices.92 An opposition party was necessary to pre-empt such a tendency. He also thought that the second party represented constructive opposition in the parliament by revitalising the political life in the country and avoiding indifference and passivity among the people, which he perceived as a risk inherent in CHP’s single-party rule.93 In this respect, SCF would be functional as a means for not only checking and balancing the deeds of CHP, but also for raising consciousness of the political system among the people. However, upon the dissolution of SCF, his commitment to Republican values, determined by the state, led him to acquiesce in the contention that the conditions in the country were not yet ripe to provide a suitable atmosphere for the existence of opposition parties.94

Yalman, also, equated democracy with the existence of opposition parties.
Similar to Ağaoğlu, he argued that the opposition party should act in a constructive manner by functioning as a control mechanism against the party in power in the name of the nation. He believed that the ‘Turkish Revolution’ and the Republican regime were the ultimate bulwarks of democracy. According to Yalman, the real threat against democracy was the absolutist mentality inherent in a single party regime, and CHP displayed such a mentality.

The recipe that Yalman proposed for breaking with CHP’s absolutist mentality, exemplified in its centralised and tutelary rule, was in accordance with the statist–nationalist paradigm. For although he repeatedly expressed his pro-American stance, he did not assume a pluralist conception of democracy. Instead, he emphasised the responsibility of political parties to represent the national interest, and to renounce class and group interests. Thus, his ideal model for democracy was a multi-party system, composed of political parties each of which represented not divergent and/or conflicting interests, but the national interest at large. This understanding also led Yalman to support the 1960 military intervention in the name of democracy.

In comparison to the rather derivative and limited use of the concept of democracy by Ağaoğlu and Yalman in support of their opposition to CHP rule, the theme of democratic order, in terms of freethinking, occupied a substantial place in Yalcın’s works at least until the 1980s. In reference to K. Popper, Yalcın defined democracy as an ‘open regime’, which connoted a liberal society and a democratic state. His main emphasis was on the appropriate functioning of democracy that should ensure free discussion. In Yalcın’s words, ‘democracy is nothing but a method of organized discussion for finding the best way in the name of society.’ For him, the appropriate functioning of democracy would be possible by ‘harmonious, regular and qualified argument between the party in power and the party in opposition.’ However, partners in this discussion process were required to agree on the fundamental principles—that is, the indivisible unity of the nation and the state. It was the acknowledgement of this requisite that led Yalcın to support all the three military interventions in Turkish political history, on the same grounds as Yalman.

Yalcın argued that the first coup d’état in Republican history, which led to the overthrow of the DP government, was a ‘revolution’, representing the ‘national spirit’. Moreover, he believed that it symbolised the military’s ‘faith in freedom and democracy.’ In other words, for him, the military intervened in politics not to hinder democratisation in the country but to protect it against the ‘monopoly of political professionals.’ Underlying this conviction was his emphasis on the ideal politician who had the responsibility to shape and direct democracy. Responsible political leaders were needed not only for conveying the demands of people to the political sphere, but also to articulate these demands on the basis of a scientific mentality. In accordance with such a conviction, Yalcın accused DP leaders for lacking a ‘tradition of thought’, falling short of fulfilling their natural responsibility and inviting the military to step in.

Yalcın thought that the post-1960 setting, documented in the 1961 Constitution, provided the appropriate framework for democratic practice. For him, the
main issue of the period was sustaining democracy. Thus, he continued to emphasise organised discussion within a nation-state setting. His faith in liberalism initially led him to include socialism and communism in the discussion platform. He believed that both were doomed to fail in the face of liberalism. Basing such a belief on the example of the British Labour Party, he argued that the dynamics of the period no longer necessitated class-based politics and that engaging in ‘... a movement, which is out of date even in Europe’ would be futile. However, by the 1970s, when political turbulence reached its peak, he shifted towards a more hostile stance. This shift was epitomised in his perception of the Left in general as containing totalitarian tendencies and thus posing a detrimental threat to the fundamentals of the Republican regime. He further proposed to eliminate the political parties, groups and movements that were perceived to oppose the state.

As with Ağaoğlu’s reference to ‘apposite freedom’, and Yalman’s emphasis on ‘appropriately practiced freedom’, when order was endangered, Yalçın, too, resorted to fine-tuning his liberal framework in the name of order. This was substantiated by his opposition to the 1961 Constitution, which he had once viewed as the document through which to consolidate democracy. Moreover, the contextual dynamics of the late 1970s led him to postpone his engagement with the theme of democracy. He became more concerned with the external and internal threats to the state and in the final analysis welcomed the 1980 coup d’état. This delay is understandable when we take into consideration that Yalçın’s conceptualisation of democratic practice was built on the privileging of the nation-state.

In addition to Yalçın’s works, most of the articles published in Yeni Forum both before and immediately after the 1980 coup d’état were in line with the dominant statist-nationalist paradigm of the period in justifying the coup d’état on the grounds of freedom, democracy and peace. This stance was best summarised in the quotation from one of the founders of LDT, who in his own words was educated in Yeni Forum: ‘By means of the 12 September 1980 military intervention Turkey, which was on the brink of civil war, was saved from terror, and peace was re-installed.’

However, the permanent effect of the Yeni Forum circle on LDT was more related to the translations of the works of ‘Western’ liberal thinkers. The choice of the texts for translation reflects the line of development in the liberal thinking represented by the circle. In this respect, Isaiah Berlin, Peter L. Berger, Ayn Rand and Friedrich A. Hayek are the most significant thinkers. As elaborated above, the theoretical framework provided by Hayek was the ultimate choice of LDT. It also took the formation and functioning of the Institute of Economic Affairs as its model.

The Hayekian influence on the circle is manifest in relation not only to his theoretical blueprint, but also to the responsibility that he puts on the intellectuals:

... for the survival of the liberal ideals a great intellectual task is required: both purging
traditional liberal theory of certain accidental accretions which have become attached to it in the course of time, and also facing up to some real problems which an over-simplified liberalism has shirked or which have become apparent only since it has turned into a somewhat stationary and rigid creed.\textsuperscript{111}

Thus, while sharing the same contention with Yalçın and \textit{Yeni Forum} circle that it is necessary to educate the people in line with the principles of a ‘regime of freedom’, LDT opposes the restriction of this education by Republican principles. Rather, it aims to introduce a de-contextualised liberalism, and to approach contextual political issues from a universal framework. This preference also shapes its approach to democracy.

Unsurprisingly, democracy is also conceptualised with resort to the idealisation of the free-market mechanism. The circle voices a thoroughgoing rejection of the Republican conception of democracy. It points at the artificiality of state-dominated democratic practice and denounces Turkish democratic experience as a display of ‘tutelary democracy’.\textsuperscript{112} It offers a ‘liberal’ conceptualisation, according to which democracy has an instrumental role in the functioning of ‘spontaneous’ order. Briefly, the function of democracy is to provide the means for individuals’ to participate in politics. For the circle a democracy without the prefix ‘liberal’ is not instrumental to individual rights and liberties. The prefix, in turn, stands for a pluralist conception of democracy, based on the liberty of the individual to pursue her/his own choices.\textsuperscript{113}

The neo-liberal period that commenced with ANAP’s policies is in this respect appreciated—in the person of Öзал—by the circle. The common argument is that the policies of Öзал and the ANAP governments in the 1980s introduced the liberalisation process to the Turkish context and they can thus be considered as attempts to move beyond the encroachment of the military in civilian politics. The fact that Öзал was the architect of the 24 January stabilisation package and asked for political stability on the eve of the 1980 \textit{coup d’etat}, and that the following interim military regime eased the implementation of these policies, are taken as separate issues. In accordance with this approach the 1982 Constitution is criticised on the basis of individual rights and liberties; and the 28 February military intervention, rather than the 1980 \textit{coup d’etat}, is perceived as the main interruption in the political ‘liberalisation’ process that started with ANAP’s coming to power in 1983.\textsuperscript{114} The relative lack of criticism against the 1980 \textit{coup d’etat} can be read in relation to the perception of the incident as ‘paving the way for further liberalisation unintentionally … since it provided the grounds for the rise of ANAP, by the ban on political parties of the previous decade.’\textsuperscript{115} This assessment can be interpreted in terms of an appeal to the ‘unintended consequences of intended action’. However, such a lenient reading of the 1980 \textit{coup d’etat} sounds ironic when the circle’s rejection of the dominance of the military in politics is taken into consideration.

All in all, LDT is significant in that it develops a liberal posture without paying tribute to the Republican state. However, when its referential theoretical framework is taken into consideration it is possible to criticise the circle’s stance
with regard to democratic extension. First, in the Hayekian approach, the emphasis on the rule of law is based on a certain national tradition. For Hayek, the ideal practice of the rule of law is the British common law tradition. At this point, it is possible to question the means that LDT proposes for the development of a similar tradition in the Turkish context, which for the circle has traditionally been state-dominated. Second, the British neo-liberal experience hints at possible answers to the question concerned. In the British case, the consolidation of neo-liberal policies under Thatcherite rule was achieved by means of restricting citizenship rights—in the name of eliminating any intermediate factor between the market and the individual—and of educating the ‘entrepreneurial individual’ with an overwhelming emphasis on Christian culture. While the Hayekian spontaneous order is postulated as the ideal model, in the 1970s attempts were made to re-construct the education system in line with the workings of the free-market mechanism. In other words, the consolidation of neo-liberalism required a cultural project. As for LDT, the Turkish counterpart of this project has not yet been explicitly defined, since the articles on ‘liberal’ education that have been published in Liberal Düşünce are mostly translations. On the other hand, it is not difficult to understand that the ideal education system is modelled in terms of privatisation, and again with reference to the values of the free-market mechanism.

Third, while discarding the statist–nationalist pitfalls of their liberal predecessors, LDT still falls short of providing a substantial alternative that would enable democratic extension in the Turkish context. For, while avoiding the Republican restrictions to democratic practice the circle also locks the latter into the free-market. While ending the almost complete separation between the economic and the political in the conceptual frameworks of Republican liberal intellectuals, it establishes the dominance of economic preferences over the socio-political sphere. In the final analysis, it rests content with the restriction of democracy to the electoral space, based on the choice of individuals from among existing alternatives. This, in turn, precludes any concern with the extension of participation on the basis of substantial equality.

Conclusion

Until the 1990s, liberal thought in Turkey developed in allegiance with statist–nationalism, which hindered attempts at democratisation. Within the statist–nationalist framework, the Republic—officially taken as the sine-qua-non of democracy—has been identified with the state, while representation has been conceptualised in terms of national unity and differences on the basis of individual, group or class interests have been rejected. In this respect, the LDT circle introduces a nouveau liberal position in Turkey, since it categorically rejects any allegiance to the state and nation. However, this rejection does not necessarily imply the privileging of democracy. This is so since LDT offers a counter-conceptualisation of democracy with reference to the market mechanism.
The idealisation of the free-market economy not only in the economic sphere but also in the socio-political sphere is inherently problematic, and is not specific to the conceptual framework of Turkish neo-liberals. First, neo-liberalism, both in theory and practice, operates through a disregard of and/or compromise with the deficiencies of capitalism, and thus reproduces the tension inherent in liberal-democracy. Second, counter-positioning the market vis-à-vis the State is not an appropriate means for providing extensions of democracy, neither does it provide an escape from the impasse that liberal-democracy has been undergoing. Third, the separation between the economic and the political—inherent in this counter-positioning, reveals a methodological commonality with the Republican approach. The difference lies in the component that has been privileged. While the Republican approach privileges the public, the private prevails in the neo-liberal framework. However, for democratic extension in the Turkish context, an argument for democracy-as-participation, which would transcend the chimera of distinguishing between the economic and the political, should be the starting point.

Notes and references

2. Vincent, ibid., pp. 24–5
5. Hall, ibid., p. 50.
8. ÅfetIınan, ibid., p. 27.
13. Tunaya, ibid., pp. 621–22; N. Yurdsever-Ateş, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin Kararlaşısı ve Terakkı receiver Cumhuriyeti Fırkasi (The Foundation of Turkish Republic and Progressive Republican Party) (İstanbul: Sarmal, 1994).
14. The state’s tutelage was given expression in the colloquia and correspondence between Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and Ali Fethi (Okyar), the founding chairman of the FRP, on the formation of the party; in the state financing that the party received in its formation, as well as in the selection of the founder of the party and party members by Mustafa Kemal himself. For a detailed history of FRP see A. Ağaoğlu, Serbest Fırka Hayratları (Memoirs of the Free Party) (İstanbul: İletişim, 1994), 3rd edn.
15. Article 5 of the party programme advocated the abolition of all state restrictions on private initiative and restriction of state involvement in the economy only to those spheres where private initiative was insufficient.
LIBERAL THOUGHT AND DEMOCRACY IN TURKEY

18. ‘...liberalism is a system, which has been practised in the colonies! ... However, we are not a colony, and will never be. Thinking of liberalism is denying the revolution.’ Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk). Quoted in Başar, ibid., p. 30.
19. The most significant books of Ağaoğlu are İslamiyette Kadın (Women in Islam) (Tiflis, 1901), trans. Hasan Ali Ediz (Ankara: Birey ve Toplum Yayınları, 1985); Hilalet ve Millî Hâkimiyet (The Caliphate and National Sovereignty) (Ankara, 1939) (1923); Türk Teşkilât-ı Esasiyesi (The Turkish Constitution) (Ankara, 1925–1929); Üç Medeniyet (Three Civilisations) (Ankara, 1927); Hindistan ve İngiltere (India and Britain) (İstanbul, 1927–1928); Serbest İnsanlar Ülkesinde (On the Land of Free Men) (İstanbul: Sanayiyenfise Matbaas, 1930); Devlet ve Fert (State and Individual) (İstanbul: Sanayiyenfise Matbaas, 1933); Ben Neyim? (Who Am I?) (İstanbul; n.p., 1939); Azerbaycan’ın Ehemmiyeti (The Importance of Azerbaijan) (Ankara, 1940); İran ve İnkılabı (Iran and Its Revolution) (Ankara, 1941); Gönülüşiz Olma (Not Without Heart) (Ankara, 1941–1942); İhtilal mı, İnkılab mı? (Revolution or Reform?) (Ankara, 1941–1942); op. cit., ref. 14.
22. The most significant books of Yalman are Gerçekleşen Rıya (The Dream that Came True) (1938); Yakın Tarihte Gördüklerin ve Geçirdiklerin (1944–1971) (My Observations and Experiences in Recent History (1944–1971)), (1970–71, 4 volumes); Nazlıgın İççiz (The Inside Story of Nazism) (1943).
25. In this respect see the ‘Statement by Adnan Menderes on the occasion of his and Fuad Köprül’s expulsion from CHP due to the Proposal of the Four’, Vatan (22 September 1945); ‘Statement by Menderes’, Vatan (1 April 1946); ‘Teessir Verici Bir Manzara’ (A Regretful Panorama), Vatan (19 May 1946); ‘Demokrat Parti’nin En Bariz Vazfı’ (The Most Obvious Quality of the Democratic Party), Vatan (23 May 1946); ‘Ulus Gazetesi’ndeki Bir Cevap Münasebetiyle’ (On the Occasion of a Response in Ulus Daily), Vatan (22 June 1946); ‘İdarecililer Kongresi Dolayısıyla’ (On the Occasion of the Administrators’ Congress), Vatan (25 January 1947); Menderes, ‘Açık Konuşma Zaureti’ (The Necessity of Speaking Solemnly), Vatan (28 January 1947); Vatan (2 November 1949).
26. Apart from acknowledging the adherence to democracy (Article 1), in Article 3 of the DP programme private initiative and private capital were viewed as the principal actors in the economic sphere. The state was held responsible for providing a free and secure environment for the functioning of the free-market mechanism and for providing new opportunities for the private sector. Article 44 pointed to the necessity of planning in the economic activities of the state and for drawing the boundaries within which the state would act. In Article 53, the state’s role in the economic sphere was restricted to sustaining competitive mechanism and for providing new opportunities for the private sector to the private sector when appropriate. Apart from that the party also brought forth a new definition of eiatism. In Article 17, eiatism was presented as arising out of exigency. It was viewed as a transitory policy, which would harmonise state activities and private initiative and protect the latter vis-à-vis the former.
27. Initially, the party could not define its political stance clearly: ‘Since our party program refers to political, economic and social spheres it is difficult to prefigure whether we stand on the right or the left of the CHP in each one of these spheres. These issues are stated in our program more clearly. We believe that Turkey is at a stage of democracy that it has to transcend. We reject the theory that perceives class struggle as imperative. We are determined to protect national interest as a whole.’ Celal Bayar, Press Declaration as the Chairman of DP, 7 January 1946, quoted in Celal Bayar Diyor ki: 1920–1950 (Celal Bayar Says: 1920–1950), Nazmi Sevgen (ed.) (İstanbul: n.p., 1951), pp. 33–34.
28. In the first congress of the DP, Celal Bayar—the first chairman of the party—stated that ‘[I]It is a fact that a mono-party regime, which by definition is not accountable, leads to the emergence of some deficiencies in the national structure … Our people … were aware that a new development could only be achieved by the realization of control over the whole state administration by the nation. It is in this
respect that the "Democratic Party" is the first party founded and created by the Turkish nation itself. Cited in Sevgen, ibid., p. 141.

For the relation between DP and military see F. Ahmad, The Turkish Experiment in Democracy (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1977), pp. 147–59.


The Forum circle is the topic of another study, because of its quite heterogeneous membership structure and of the fact that it can be categorised into a ‘social liberal’ strand, which extends beyond the scope of this article. Among the prominent members of the circle were figures such as Yaçcn, Bulent Ecevit, Muammer Aksoy, Osman Oksay, Bahri Bahri Savci and Turhan Feyzioglu, who all had different political tendencies.

Yeni Forum was first published in September 1979.


At its inception the party was defined as merging ‘four tendencies’—i.e. as a nationalist, conservative party that accepted the principles of the free market economy and social justice. It can be argued that in the early 1980s ANAP functioned as a ‘melting pot’ for those politicians who in one way or another had connections with pre-1980 political parties. Ü. Ergüder notes that a survey study conducted with 203 active ANAP members ‘revealed that 52.2 percent of the respondents had served in the local organizations of the pre-1980 political parties. Of those who had pre-1980 political experience 73 percent had worked in AP organization, 8.7 percent each in CHP and MHP [Milliyeci Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party)] local organizations.’ Ü. Ergüder, ‘The Motherland Party, 1983−1989’, in Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey, M. Heper and J. M. Landau (eds) (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991), p. 155.

‘Green capital’ as a phenomenon gained prevalence especially in the 1990s, with the rise of small and medium Anatolian enterprise. The Independent Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association (MÜSİAD) has been perceived as its most significant representative. MÜSİAD Chairman Ali Bayramoglu has noted that the Association represents the people that ‘lives in accordance with religious rules and that practices Islam.’ Ali Bayramoglu, ‘Din toplay кудur, ekonomiyi icерir’ (Religion is all-encompassing, it contains economy), Interview by Neşe Düzel, Radikal (Turkish daily), 9 December 2002. For more information on the issue of Islamic ‘green’ capital in Turkey, see Ayşe Buğra, ‘The Claws of the “Tigers” ’, Private view (5) (Autumn 1997), http://www.tusiad.org/yayin/private/autumn97/html/bugra.html; Kemal Can, ‘Tekkeden Holdinge Yeşil Sermaye’ (Green Capital: From Lodge to Holding), Milliyet (Turkish daily), 11–18 March 1997.

Most of the founding members of LDT had also participated in Yeni Forum. When their articles in Yeni Forum and in the journal of the Society, Liberal Düştince (Liberal Thinking) are analysed it is possible to demonstrate continuity.

The group publishes academic and non-academic books, which thematise selected issues in Turkish politics with resort to liberalism. For further information see http://www.liberte.com.tr. In that article, I analyse the articles published in Liberal Düştince. I also restrict my analysis to the articles of those authors, who are included in the editorial and advisory boards of the journal.


Ağaoğlu, op. cit., ref. 21, pp. 35–37.

Ağaoğlu, ibid., p. 40.

Ağaoğlu, ibid.
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44. Ağaoglu, op. cit., ref. 21, pp. 98–99; ‘Yaratıcı Tekâmül’ (Creative evolution), Kültür Haftası (29 January 1936).
45. Ağaoglu, op. cit., ref. 21, pp. 34–35; 40–42.
46. Ağaoglu, ibid., pp. 62–76.
47. Ağaoglu, ‘Ziraat mi, Sanayi mi?’ (Agriculture or industry?), Akm (3 June 1933).
49. Yalman, ‘İktisadi siyasetin temelleri’ (The foundations of political economy), Vatan (21 December 1945).
50. Yalman, ‘Devletçilik ve Halk’ (Estatism and People), Vatan (4 September 1945).
51. Yalman, ibid. In this respect, see also his ‘Beş nevi mukavemet’ (Five types of resistance), Vatan (4 December 1945); ‘Ticari birliklerin acıklı hali’ (The tragic conditions of commercial associations), Vatan (24 June 1942); ‘Yılların kimildanırken’ (While the snakes are moving), Vatan (12 August 1942).
54. The circle also tries to fortify this conception with regard to human rights. See Zuhtu Arslan, ‘Anayasa Hür Fikirleri Yayma Cemiyeti Beyannamesi (Istanbul: Ismail Akgun Matbaası, 1930). In this contrast one can trace the implications of the conflict between the abstract individual of classical liberalism and the altruistic individual of the personalistic approach.
56. Ağaoglu, Serbest Işınlar Ülkesinde (Istanbul: Sanayinefise Matbaası, 1930). In this contrast one can trace the implications of the conflict between the abstract individual of classical liberalism and the altruistic individual of the personalistic approach.
57. Ağaoglu, op. cit., ref. 54; ref. 43.
58. Ağaoglu, ibid.
59. Ağaoglu, op. cit., ref. 54. See also Ağaoglu, op. cit., ref. 55.
60. Ağaoglu, op. cit., ref. 55, p. 105; ‘Mbaarifimizin Islahi’ (Reformation of our education system), Akm (21 June 1933).
61. Ağaoglu, op. cit., ref. 21, p. 22; ‘Türk Entellektüellerinin Zaatları’ (The Weaknesses of Turkish Intellectuals), Akm (7 June 1933).
62. Ağaoglu, ibid.
63. Ağaoglu, ibid.
64. Ağaoglu, op. cit., ref. 21, pp. 29ff, 74–75, 122.
65. Ağaoglu, op. cit., ref. 55, p. 69; ‘Milliyetçilik’ (Nationalism), Akm (10 June 1933).
69. Yalman, ‘Ideal Din Sistemi: Diğerlerine Üstünülüğün Esaslı Sebepleri’ (An ideal system of religion), Vatan (27 November 1941). See also, his ‘Din Bahsinde Vardiğımız Neticeletr’ (Results concerning the issue of religion), Vatan (4 December 1941); ‘Din, milliyetçilik bahsine Bayar’in konuşması’ (Bayar’s speech on the issue of religion, nationalism), Vatan (25 April 1949).
70. Yalman, ‘Dâma beçici olacağımız beç esas’ (Five principles that we will always guard), Vatan (23 November 1941).
71. Yalman, ‘Kendi kendimize kâvusmak ihtiyacı’ (The need to be reunited), Vatan (16 December 1941).
72. Yalman, ‘Bizi maziye bağlayan köprüler’ (The bridges that tie us to the past), Vatan (9 October 1940). Yalman opposed the attempts for radical Turkification of language on the same grounds. Yalman, ‘Dilde istikrar ve birlik’ (Stability and unity in language), Vatan (10 August 1940); ‘Yarım ve tam vatanlaşık’ (Semi- and full citizenship), Vatan (20 November 1941).
73. Yalcın, 'Gercek Atatürkuluğ' (Real Ataturkism), Öncü (10 November 1961).
76. According to Yalcın ‘[T]he failure of civilian rule, the incompetence and irresponsibility of the leaders of civilian parties inevitably [led] the military to intervene...’ Yalcın, op. cit., ref. 23, p. 334.
79. Yalcın, ‘Yeni Bir Dönemin Başında’ (In the beginning of a new era), Yeni Forum, 11 (248) (January 1990), p. 6. This formula, which originally belonged to one of the most prominent nationalist intellectuals of the late Ottoman and early-Republican era, Ziya Gökşalp, can also be read as another attempt to articulate liberal principles into a particular national framework. Briefly, while the ‘Turkish’ component clearly referred to geographical and historical bonds, the Islamic component corresponded to an indispensable social and cultural element of Turkish society, and the ‘Western’ one would presumably provide the source for the universally validated liberal framework.
80. ‘Yeni Forum’un Covahı’ (Yeni Forum’s Response), Yeni Forum (editorial), 5 (111) (15 April 1984), p. 3.
82. Yalcın, op. cit., ref. 78.
83. Erdoğan, op. cit., ref. 53, p. 10.
90. In this respect, Ömer Çaha’s article is representative: ‘Amerikan Modeli: İnanç ile Özgürlüğün Buluşması’ (The American model: the meeting of belief with liberty), Liberal Düşüncesi, 8(30–31) (Spring–Summer 2003), pp. 15–44.
91. Erdoğan, op. cit., ref. 83.
92. Ağaoğlu, op. cit., ref. 55, p.35.
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94. Ağaoğlu, ‘Müstakil Meb’usluklar’ (Independent memberships of parliament), Akın (15 June 1933).
95. Yaliman, op. cit., ref. 23, pp. 32–33; ‘Yeni Parti Kurulurken’ (While the new party is founded), Vatan (3 December 1945); ‘Demokrat Partinin Mesuliyetleri’ (The Responsibilities of the Democratic Party), Vatan (10 December 1945).
97. Yaliman, ‘Bazı Esaslı Noktalardı’ (Some essential points), Vatan (27 September 1923); ‘En Esaslı Mesele’ (The most essential issue), Vatan (8 January 1925).
98. Yalıçın, ‘Partiler ve Demokrasi’ (Political parties and democracy), Öncü (17 November 1960); ‘Siyasi Ortam’ (The political milieu), Öncü (25 October 1960).
99. Yalıçın, ‘İlim ve Demokrasi’ (Science and Democracy), Öncü (1 October 1960); ‘Farklı Düşünceye Saygı’ (Respect for different thoughts), Öncü (25 November 1961).
104. Yalıçın, ‘Demokrasi ve Lider’ (Democracy and the leader), Öncü (14 September 1960); ‘Siyasi Liderlik’ (Political leadership), Öncü (3 July 1961); ‘Karsılıklı Etki’ (Mutual influence), Öncü (14 July 1961).
105. His criticism of C. Bayar, the founding chairman of DP, and A. Menderes, the second chairman of DP after Bayar, as ‘ordinary and ignorant’ men was significant in this regard. Yalıçın, op. cit., ref. 102.
107. Such a stance led him to argue at the time that the fascist movement in Turkey had emerged in opposition to Marxism and resorted to violence with ‘patriotic intentions’. Yalıçın, op. cit., ref. 34, p. 23.
112. Akahin, op. cit., ref. 84; Okyar, op. cit., ref. 52; Berzeg, op. cit., ref. 84.
113. Yayıla, op. cit., ref. 84; Erdoğan, op. cit., ref. 84; Yürüşen, op. cit., ref. 83.
114. As an example for such an approach, see Çaha, ‘Yüzülün Son Seçiminde Anadolu’nun Yükselen Sesi’ (The rising voice of Anatolia in the last elections of the century), Liberal Düşünce, 4(14) (Spring 1999), http://www.liberal-dt.org.tr/dergiler/ldsayi14/1404.htm.
118. In this respect see, Ülser, ‘Demokrasi İçin Gerekli ve Yeterli Koşullar’ (Necessary and sufficient conditions for democracy), Liberal Düşünce, 2(6) (Spring 1997), pp. 94–100. See also Yürüşen, op. cit., ref. 84. Although Yürüşen does not directly address the issue of education, his reference to the mechanisms of the free market economy as a means for moulding pluralist consciousness indicates the yet-to-be explained stance in the circle.
119. Such an exclusion can be understood in Karl Mannheim’s terms: ‘The absence of certain concepts
indicates very often not only the absence of certain points of view, but also the absence of a definitive drive to come to grips with certain life problems.’ (K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (trans.) (San Diego: HBJ Publishers, 1985), p. 274.