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## Interdisciplinarity and Comparison in Turkish Studies

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## Introduction

# Interdisciplinarity and Comparison in Turkish Studies

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In October 2002, a number of established scholars from different academic disciplines but all sharing an interest in Turkey gathered for a one-day conference at Georgetown University, invited by the Institute of Turkish Studies (ITS) on the occasion of its twentieth anniversary. The main objectives of the conference were to survey the field of Turkish Studies and to assess whether it had made “a significant contribution to the mainstream scholarly literature.”<sup>1</sup> The proceedings of the workshop eventually appeared in the form of a book titled *Turkish Studies in the United States*, edited by Sabri Sayari and Donald Quataert.

The findings were mixed. On one hand, the surveys of different disciplines revealed a significant expansion and diversification of the field, and an increased emphasis on interdisciplinary research, all causes for celebration. On the other hand, as the editors noted,

The growth of research and scholarship during the past twenty years has not been accompanied by an equally significant rise in theoretical contributions to the literature in the social sciences and the humanities. With very few exceptions, scholars in Turkish Studies have been either content with applying the existing theories and conceptual frameworks to their studies or they have altogether ignored theoretical issues in their particular disciplines.<sup>2</sup>

In their view, the very real danger was that the research of specialists working in the field of Turkish Studies was becoming increasingly irrelevant to the broader scholarly

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community. They concluded with the warning that Turkish Studies scholars “cannot afford to remain narrow specialists.”

A full decade after the publication of this volume, ITS and the recently established Stockholm University Institute for Turkish Studies (SUITS) have jointly decided to revisit the question of the status of the field and its interactions with other disciplines. Has scholarship in the field heeded the warnings raised by Quataert and Sayari? The directors of said institutes (and authors of this introduction) invited a group of junior as well as established scholars to participate in two workshops held in Washington DC and Stockholm in May of 2014. A selection of the papers presented at the workshops has been chosen for publication in this special issue of Turkish Studies Journal. The workshops were designed to explore Quataert and Sayari’s challenge, but also departed from their approach in important ways.

First, this special issue significantly expands the geographic scope by including European scholarship in addition to work produced in North America. Second, the focus of the volume is limited to engagements with social science scholarship. Admittedly, whilst this only covers a limited segment of our field, a future special volume of the *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* (late 2015) will include a wider array of disciplines in the humanities, and will seek to further illustrate the impressive array of interdisciplinary and comparative research in Turkish Studies.

Third and finally, rather than presenting a full survey and assessment of the state of the art of research throughout the entire field of Turkish Studies, the contributions to this special issue zero in on the *benefits and challenges of interdisciplinary and comparative scholarship*, on whether and how this research can advance not only our understanding of Turkey but also *scholarship beyond the field* of Turkish studies, and on how such engagements can enrich and strengthen the field.

In this introductory note, the questions of how to characterize Turkish Studies and how the field relates to area studies writ large are explored. The editors have adopted a broad understanding of the field that encapsulates its breadth of approaches, traditions, and foci. Then, the overall relevance to Turkish Studies is considered, paying particular attention to the merits and challenges of the interdisciplinary and comparative approaches that are illustrated or otherwise addressed by the contributions to the special issue. As an area studies field that stretches from the humanities to the social sciences, the editors and contributors grapple with no less a challenge than that of striking the appropriate balance between the universal and the particular, between general explanations and subjective deep descriptions. The contributions represent a range of solutions to this challenge, and an attempt to do justice to this diversity is made in the outline of the special issue that follows below. The conclusion makes a strong case for the continued relevance of Turkish Studies and area studies more generally, as being indispensable to any attempt at finding the right balance in response to the dilemma mentioned above. Finally, the editors also point to a number of challenges that they believe should be addressed in order for this potential to be met.

### Defining Area Studies: “What?” Not “How?”

While the editors, in their capacities as directors of two Turkish Studies institutes, have a clear vision for the field, they have little interest in acting as gatekeepers or claim to lay down definitive definitions that could constrict entire lines of potentially fruitful inquiry. But it is useful to at least explore the question of defining the field. In so doing, we can draw upon an existing body of literature that explores the nature of area studies and how to best conceptualize it. One such account is David L. Szanton’s list of shared commitments:

“Area Studies” is best understood as a cover term for a family of academic fields and activities joined by a common commitment to: (1) intensive language study; (2) in-depth field research in the local language(s); (3) close attention to local histories, viewpoints, materials, and interpretations; (4) testing, elaborating, critiquing, or developing grounded theory against detailed observation; and (5) multi-disciplinary conversations often crossing the boundaries of the social sciences and humanities.<sup>3</sup>

Most of what could be called Turkish Studies would indeed satisfy several or all of the above five criteria. But while these preferences may thus *describe* much of the work conducted in this field, one would caution against using the above list in a *prescriptive* fashion: to spell out the defining criteria for what should count as Turkish Studies. Intensive language study, for example, is hardly a significant component in the scholarly training of the many Turkish (and hence native Turkish-speaking) scholars active in the field of Turkish Studies! And while some version of *grounded theory* (a sometimes rather sloppily applied label) may be a common approach in many studies published in the field, there is no reason why it should be a defining criterion of, or required approach in, all Turkish Studies research. Matthias Basedau and Patrick Köllner make a related point when commenting on area studies research in general:

Intensive language study, in-depth field research conducted in local languages, and multi- or interdisciplinary cooperation . . . are not per se essential characteristics of area studies but constitute assets of individual researchers or methods of choice . . .<sup>4</sup>

This is an important distinction. Szanton’s account is a description of *how* area studies research is typically conducted. It may be empirically accurate, but it would be needlessly restrictive as a definition of area studies as such, as a delineation of what can count as area studies research. With respect to interdisciplinary research, for example, Turkish Studies is certainly conducive to multi-disciplinary conversations between scholars from different disciplines—as several of the contributions in this special issue either observe (Sayari) or themselves illustrate (Gökçe et al.)—but this is an exciting possibility that should be encouraged,

not a practice to be taken for granted as part of the defining characteristics of the field. For similar reasons, Basedau and Köllner prefer a looser description of area studies as

A cover term for a vast array of studies whose distinctive characteristic is above all their specific and rather exclusive focus on a single country or region. Neither a specific disciplinary background nor the use of certain methods defines area studies: Area studies can be grounded in the humanities, the social sciences or in cultural studies and they make use of different methodological and epistemological approaches.<sup>5</sup>

The strength of this description is that it captures the multiple traditions that coexist under the umbrella of area studies. Contemporary Turkish Studies certainly evidences a multiplicity of influences and several major debates can be observed between different schools as well as partially divergent trajectories of scholarship on the two sides of the Atlantic.

### **Capturing the Diversity in Turkish Studies**

For all its faults, the European tradition of orientalist scholarship that emerged in colonial encounters with an exotic “near-Eastern” Other is one of our field’s oldest progenitors.<sup>6</sup> But one can find an equally important and more recent influence in post-colonial critiques of this very orientalism and in scholarship that goes under the label cultural studies. Turkish Studies in Europe thus has deep roots in philology and Turcology as well as a firm footing in the contemporary humanities. This stands in some contrast to Turkish Studies in the USA, where it would be fair to argue that studies relating to modern Turkey to a greater extent than in Europe are visible across the social sciences and humanities. Although in the past, disciplines such as history and (to a lesser extent) political science dominated studies on Turkey, today, one can observe—as Sayari and Quataert did more than a decade ago—a sizable growth in the number of disciplines and scholars which/who produce valuable research on Turkey in disciplines across the social sciences and humanities.

If one were allowed to simplify an admittedly complex reality, we might say that whereas the common American academic approach to studying Turkey has included the country as a case in search of generalizable conclusions in a given discipline, European scholarship has tended to be more interested in studying Turkey for its own sake, in trying to situate Ottoman and/or modern Turkey in the context of European history, or—especially in earlier scholarship—in defining the “other” that stood in contrast to European identity.<sup>7</sup> This could partially explain the relative dearth of integrated “Turkish Studies” programs in American universities, as such institutional settings are usually not seen as conducive to comparative approaches. However, if the contributions to this special issue—from both sides of the Atlantic—are any indication of current trends, broader comparative social science approaches are making significant contributions to our field on both sides of the

Atlantic. For its part, SUITS, a new research institute based in Europe and devoted exclusively to Turkish studies, is explicitly encouraging comparative and interdisciplinary approaches.

Therefore, a description of our field ought to take its starting point in the sociology of scholarly practice, in what actually does seem to bind the field together, but which avoids divisive epistemological or methodological questions of how scholarship ought to be pursued: in *what* is studied rather than *how* it is studied (ought to be done).

In that spirit, one could describe Turkish Studies as a label that signifies the professional activities and products (both teaching- and research-related) of a wide-tent collection of academic actors and institutions (scholars, professional associations, and academic institutions), arenas and vehicles for communicating research and discussing more or less overlapping sets of questions (specialized journals, publications referencing each other, conferences), insofar as they are focused on societal, cultural and linguistic, political, historical, and economic phenomena pertaining to the geographic area known as Turkey and its surroundings, as well as the people(s) residing or stemming from there.

The merits of such a description is that it accommodates the variety of methodological approaches and traditions that we actually observe in the field while being specific enough to exclude most scholarship that we typically would not associate with Turkish Studies. It says nothing about the quality of scholarship or preferred methods because a delineation of a field of study should not be needlessly or *a priori* exclusive. It can be left to empirical surveys of the field to identify favored lines and methods of inquiry and to determine whether some research topics have been more thoroughly examined while others may have been neglected. Indeed, several of the contributions to this issue do provide such surveys.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the discussion now turns to questions of quality, of methodology and of the relevance/impact of the research conducted in the field that the editors have just attempted to delineate.

### The Themes of the Special Issue

This special issue does not provide a broad survey of the entire field of Turkish Studies. The focus is on the field's contributions to scholarly inquiry beyond Turkish Studies, on interdisciplinary interactions, and on the impact of comparative approaches on Turkish Studies in the social sciences and history. But even with this narrow focus, the range of approaches and disciplines represented in the eight contributions illustrates the diversity that has been discussed above. The articles can be grouped into two thematic clusters, the first of which addresses the inroads made by comparative and case-oriented research designs and approaches into the field. The smaller second group of articles pertains to the question of interdisciplinary approaches. All of the contributions address or illustrate the question of the relevance of the field and its contributions to broader scholarship.

*Comparative Approaches in Turkish Studies—Benefits and Challenges*

There is an argument to be made that comparison is an inescapable component of all scientific activity.<sup>9</sup> If so, the methodological question is less whether it is done than how it is done. Certainly, any form of causal analysis involves comparison of variation, even if only against a counterfactual scenario in which the investigated cause was absent. Experimental research involves comparison (and contrast) between control groups and the group that receives the treatment, and statistics could be described as a form of large-N comparison of variation between units. Causal analysis in single-case studies can take the form of within-case comparison, and even the least obviously comparative version of this methodology—process tracing, which typically involves a close examination of a given process to identify causal mechanisms<sup>10</sup>—can be described as an approach in which different sequential states are contrasted and the links between them identified.

It is perhaps more controversial to suggest that even research that is interpretive, descriptive, or narrative in nature, or oriented towards an analysis of structure or systems rather than causal inquiry, is bound to involve comparative dimensions. But Marxist and post-Marxian analyses build on comparison between, for example, different modes of production, whereas world-system theory, as Eric Zürcher points out in this issue, revolves around the comparison between units occupying different positions in the world-system. Single-case studies, common in this field and other area studies fields, arguably also contain or assume comparisons, even if they are often inadvertent. For example, the very claim that the Ottoman Empire or Turkey is in some way unique and exceptional and should therefore not be compared is based on an implicit comparison with other empires or states (to be unique is to be different from all others, a statement that assumes a comparison). Scholarship in the traditions of critical theory, post-colonialism, and deconstructionism is in many ways far removed from explanatory, variable-oriented research and tend to be critical precisely of the reification of dichotomies and differences implicit in the latter. This important difference in emphasis notwithstanding, the identification of subject positions like the “sub-altern” in post-colonial writings involves a contrast with other subject positions in the colonial and imperial centers, and the same goes for identification of and distinction between, for example, different discourses or between the actors that stand to benefit from the victory of one narrative over another. What are called “comparative” studies are therefore perhaps better understood as those small-N research designs that make the implicit comparisons explicit. Alexander George and Andrew Bennett therefore use the concept of “structured, focused comparison” to denote such studies.<sup>11</sup>

The methodological benefits of making implicit comparisons explicit are obvious. For one thing, case selection is crucially important in a comparative research design since getting it wrong can severely reduce the validity of your study. Are the cases comparable? Are they most-similar cases or most-dissimilar and what does that mean for the research design? If variable-oriented research is being conducted, does one have the right kind of variation on the right variables for what one is



trying to do or is the case selection likely to bias conclusions? This is an important issue to address in this field, for case selection is arguably one of the area scholar's Achilles' heels. In practice, many scholars start out with a case—Turkey—because they have learned the language(s), because it is the place they know and have traveled to for field research, and not because it necessarily is the best case for the particular research question being investigated, or because it is suitable to the chosen research design. And this kind of “convenience sample” could be a problem if the risks are not considered from the beginning.

To raise but one of these risks, recall the problem of “selecting on the dependent variable.” In small-N comparative and large-N research designs, examining only cases with the same value on a dependent variable (e.g. +Y) may give entirely misleading information about its causes.<sup>12</sup> Even if one always observes a correlation between a presumed cause (+X) and the effect (+Y) in this sample, a causal relationship cannot be established ( $+X \rightarrow +Y$ ). What in the limited sample seems like the cause might be present in cases not examined but in which there are different values on the dependent variable (−Y). (In our limited sample, we observe +X and +Y, but, in a broader sample, we might observe +X and −Y. If so, all things being equal, one cannot conclude that +X is causing +Y.) Insofar as one aims to draw conclusions regarding causes or effects, looking at single cases means that similar or worse risks of bias are being taken.

Hence, case selection deserves more attention than it often receives. To make matters worse, as Murat Somer points out in his contribution to this special issue, Turkey has many characteristics that actually make it difficult to find appropriate cases for comparison:

Turkey is Middle Eastern and western, a strong and weak state, Muslim and secular, democratic with a long history of democratization and authoritarian with a long history of oppressing dissent, all at the same time.

To many, these contradictions and complexities are why Turkey is so interesting to study in the first place! But they also generate a problem since theories developed for other regions and contexts and then applied to Turkey often end up shaping the way in which the Turkish case is understood even if the fit, due to the peculiarities of Turkey, is poor. Somer's response to this problem is to turn the tables and suggest that one instead looks at Turkey's idiosyncrasies as a methodological resource that enables researchers to employ Turkey as a “critical” or “crucial” case for the development and refinement of social science theories. In his view, the very particularities that make Turkey a difficult fit in a comparative study also make it suitable as a “theory-developing critical case.” To the editors, this seems like a fruitful avenue to pursue, and a promising way in which Turkish Studies can make significant contributions to scholarship beyond our field.<sup>13</sup>

For too long, the traditional European response to the complexities of Turkey was the Orientalist view of the country as an exotic and fundamentally different place, whose mysterious and enchanting traditions meant that it stood apart from the

West and could only be understood by the Orientalist who was fully immersed in the strange religion, language, and mores of the place and its people.<sup>14</sup> As noted above, while this “sui generis” approach to Turkish studies often nominally rejects comparisons, the “Othering” is in fact based on a (comparative) assumption of an essential, underlying difference.

There is a risk that sloppy comparative approaches could further bolster such Orientalist simplifications. In her contribution to this special issue, Asli Igsiz warns of the related dangers of national teleology in a field of study named after a country. Comparisons may reify and reproduce artificial differences and dichotomies, in particular, comparisons that uncritically and unnecessarily remain on the level of analysis of comparing “nation-states” or even higher order entities. For example, Igsiz critically examines the post-9/11 era proliferation of high-level conferences and discourses aiming to develop an “alliance of civilizations” or “dialogues between civilizations” perhaps in a well-intentioned response to the Samuel Huntington’s controversial *clash of civilizations* thesis. The ruling party in Turkey, Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) adopted these discourses as part of their “branding” and marketing of the country. As Igsiz notes, the problem with such approaches is that “[a]dopting a subject position within the same discourse to negate it (i.e., promoting ‘alliance’ instead of ‘clash’ of civilizations) reifies that category (i.e., civilization) instead of debunking it.”

In light of these potential pitfalls, the editors believe that another response to the conundrum noted by Somer should be to a push for more sophisticated, carefully designed comparisons. This will improve the overall ability to make empirically grounded and nuanced judgments as to whether and in what aspects Turkey (or the Ottoman Empire) is or is not in fact exceptional and unique. Methodologically sophisticated comparisons building on insightful analyses of the component cases, and comparative studies which break down the unit of analysis to sub-national cases and processes can help transcend those simplistic notions of Turkish exceptionalism inspired either by Orientalist assumptions or, for that matter, “brand valuation consultancy” firms employed by the Turkish government to enhance the country’s image. By asking for “insightful analyses of the component cases” the editors do not simply mean that good comparative research is better, but that area studies expertise has an important role to play in comparative research, to ensure that individual cases are interpreted correctly.

Erik J. Zürcher’s contribution to this special issue contains an illustration both of the role for area experts and of the potential for sophisticated comparative work to address questions of exceptionalism versus universalism in a constructive manner. Among other things, Zürcher describes the comparative work on the Ottoman Sipahi/Timar system and other systems of military servitude and land ownership that he has been actively involved in. The project had its origins in disagreements over the extent to which the concept of feudalism—a notion with a potential bias stemming from its origins in studies of continental Europe during the Middle Ages—could and should be extended to the Ottoman Empire with its Timar system. In an attempt to overcome this problem, Zürcher worked with Sinologists

and historians of other regions in a comparative project to develop a “shared taxonomy of forms of military recruitment and employment” that was divorced of its Eurocentric biases. Through the use of focused comparisons grounded in solid area expertise, this group of historians were thus able to identify the unique and distinguishing features of, for example, the Sipahi/Timar system, as well as the cross-culturally shared institution of “relatively expensive cavalry units remunerated with land or the usufruct of land rather than wages and expected to raise a retinue out of their own retainers” across the world, as Zürcher puts it in his contribution. The latter, shared experiences were the outcome of responses to similar demands for expensive cavalry by polities that lacked the financial and administrative resources of the modern state. But the particular shape that this took in the case of the Sipahi/Timar system was a consequence of the various economic, cultural, and legal particularities of the Ottoman context.

In identifying structured and focused comparison as a potentially fruitful avenue for further research in our field, the editors do not want to be misunderstood as presenting it as the only legitimate form of scholarly inquiry. Ciddi and Levin remain fully cognizant of the continued importance of narrative single-case studies, narrative histories, and “thick description,” to mention but a few of the many forms of research approaches common in our field. More broadly, the kinds of rigorous research designs that have been described above are arguably more easily compatible with research in the tradition that Martin Hollis and Steve Smith describe as aiming for “explanation” rather than “understanding.”<sup>15</sup> And as the discussion in the preceding section made clear, the editors believe in a big-tent conception of Turkish Studies research. But several of the contributions to this special issue illustrate that even in-depth single-case studies can benefit from paying attention to questions of comparison.

For example, single-case studies of Turkey that situate it in a larger global context can refine our understanding of general concepts and how global phenomena and processes are negotiated and implemented in a particular setting. Through his analysis of the modernizing reforms of the Ottoman legal system, for example, Kent Schull explores how the Ottoman reformers did not simply adopt European legal practices wholesale, but engaged in what he calls “improvisational blending.” Rather than Westernization, Schull describes a “hybridisation process [that] created an entirely new dynamic of criminal justice and penalty that was both fully modern and Ottoman.” Schull’s research involves nothing less than a reinterpretation of the concept of modernity itself, and it generates a more refined understanding of how modernization was always negotiated against and often blended with existing practices in a given local context, resulting in hybrid institutions and practices that reflected both universal trends and the local context.

The bulk of Berk Esen’s contribution is devoted to an in-depth exploration of Kemalism, but an initial comparative frame allows him to provide a fresh approach to a much-studied topic on which there is a degree of conceptual confusion. Drawing on more extensive comparative work he has done elsewhere, Esen situates Kemalism in the context of a global phenomenon: the emergence of what he terms the

national-developmental state. Despite varied contexts, leaders like Peron, Nasser, Nehru, Vargas, Cardenas, Sukarno, and Atatürk all advanced “a common agenda of economic nationalism, state-led industrialization, mass politics, and non-aligned foreign policy.” According to Esen, however, Kemalism stands out among this group of national-developmental states in one important respect: the low level of institutionalization of the dominant party. He illustrates the differences with a comparison of the weakly institutionalized Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) in Turkey with the strong Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI) in Mexico, which is followed by a more detailed examination of the early years of the CHP. The combination of a comparative frame and in-depth case study enables Esen to present a nuanced analysis of both what was unique about Kemalism and how it was part of a larger phenomenon. The comparison with Mexico’s PRI sheds light on both cases, and the whole exercise simultaneously enhances our understanding of both the CHP in Turkey and the differences among the various national-developmental states.

### *Transcending the Disciplines*

In the discussion about the defining characteristics of area studies above, several of the writers cited observed that “multi- or interdisciplinary collaboration” is quite common in the area studies fields. The editors declined to include this in the delineation of Turkish Studies as a field, but agreed that it is an accurate characterization and that it arguably constitutes a particular strength of a field such as ours. Indeed, many of the obstacles typically in the way of cooperation across disciplinary boundaries can be at least partly removed in this field: Most standard academic departments typically follow disciplinary boundaries and the institutional logic therefore generally inhibits disciplinary border-crossings, whereas Turkish Studies centers and institutes provide institutional settings where such borders can be crossed in pursuit of research questions that transcend disciplines. Similarly, journals like *Turkish Studies* provide important outlets for research that cuts across disciplines.

Indeed, in his contribution to this special issue, Sabri Sayari argues that there has recently been “a notable increase of interdisciplinary work,” with particular contributions from “political economy, political anthropology and sociology, economic history, and gender studies.” Sayari illustrates this trend by looking closer at research on the phenomenon of patronage. Here, scholars working in anthropology, sociology, and political science made important early theoretical and conceptual contributions to the understanding of patronage in Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. A second wave of research “bears the hallmarks of the new approaches in political science and political economy” including statistics and formal modeling. Sayari’s survey makes clear how valuable these varied contributions have been in combining to generate a multidimensional understanding of patronage in Turkey, and hence to our field. But he also notes that the empirical work on patronage conducted in the field of Turkish Studies has generated a broader interest and made contributions beyond the field, citing a

number of publications that have appeared as part of prestigious international comparative and collaborative projects.

Brian Silverstien's article is an examination of the structuring and performative power of "statistics" in the context of Turkey's EU accession negotiations. The author is an anthropologist and the empirical fieldwork informing the analysis is in the anthropological tradition of qualitative interviews with key informants. But Silverstein also makes extensive use of theories and concepts developed by post-colonial thinkers and students of history and politics, among other things engaging a broader literature on "techno-politics."<sup>16</sup> His study thereby not only deepens our understanding of processes typically described as the "Europeanization" of EU accession candidates, but also engages broader literatures on the constitutive function of global expert regimes and the transformation of the domain of the political by the spread of ostensibly apolitical statistical apparatuses with substantive political implications. The case of the transformation of Turkish agriculture and its governance through the EU's statistical reporting requirements ought to be interesting to an audience far beyond Turkish Studies.

The most radically interdisciplinary contribution to this special issue comes from a team of political scientists and engineers at Sabancı University: Osman Zeki Gökçe, Emre Hatipoğlu, Gökhan Göktürk, Brooke Luetgert and Yücel Saygın. Their network analysis of Turkey's Twitter map is both evocative for its unusual approach, and highly relevant in light of recent constraints placed upon social media in Turkey. The article reports findings from a multi-disciplinary research project in which the authors produced a social network map of over ten million active Turkish Twitter users (a "theoretically complete" population of all users as opposed to the common approach of focusing only on users of a given set of hash tags). From this population, they calculated each user's score on three measures of network centrality, which allowed them to identify different kinds of opinion leaders: the users with most followers/connections, the users with the most important connections, and users whose position in-between clusters in the network allows them to serve as key intermediaries of information. This generated a list of opinion makers on Twitter in Turkey that includes both well-known and expected figures like former President Abdullah Gül, and unexpectedly influential Twitter users, including aliases whose true authors are unknown.

The contribution by Gökçe, Hatipoğlu, Göktürk, Luetgert and Saygın is particularly interesting in several ways. Substantively, it adds significantly to our understanding of power over and through social media in Turkey, not the least by adding new knowledge about previously unknown but influential opinion leaders. Methodologically, the approach to studying Twitter in Turkey that the article describes can certainly "travel" to other countries and regions of the world, and the piece arguably constitutes an important contribution to the study of the formation of public opinion in the era of new media, far beyond the field of Turkish Studies. It also stretches the boundaries of this field, challenging any overly rigid notions of what can appropriately be described as Turkish Studies and the types of methods suitable. Finally, it stands as an excellent illustration of the potential

benefits of collaborative approaches to multi-disciplinary scholarship in our field and beyond.

## Conclusion

Together, the contributions to this special issue of *Turkish Studies* evidence a highly diverse but thriving and dynamic field that engages questions of relevance beyond itself, and which therefore can be said to have heeded Quataert and Sayari's calls. In-depth area and language expertise is increasingly being complemented by comparative approaches, and interdisciplinary cross-fertilization appears increasingly common. More than commonality, however, it is also clear that the emerging field of Turkish Studies has matured beyond simply viewing Turkey as an interesting case to study. One can argue, and as can be seen from the contributions to this volume, that a turning point has been reached, whereby studies that incorporate substantive research on Turkey do in fact reach further conclusions than those which simply apply to Turkey: ones that do appeal to a wider scholarly community and increasingly help contribute to broader theoretical debates and disputes, all demonstrative of the fact that studies on Turkey do interact with numerous disciplines in a dynamic way.

But good comparisons of, for example, different regions are demanding, and truly inter- or multi-disciplinary research is difficult for individual scholars. To further boost the two trends of comparative and multi-disciplinary scholarship, Ciddi and Levin strongly encourage collaborative projects that include scholars from other area studies fields and/or other disciplines. Erik Zürcher makes the case for teamwork and collaboration as a fruitful approach for Turkish Studies scholars interested in comparative work:

[C]omparative research, if well-structured and tightly organized, is very well suited to teamwork and in this it ties in with what I believe is one of the two major methodological advances in contemporary humanities (the other being digitization): the fact that humanities scholars are now more and more embracing working in a collaborative research team as the normal work practice.

As Zürcher's own collaborative work on the Timar system, feudalism, and other systems of military recruitment illustrates, well-structured comparative research that involves collaboration between area experts immersed in their respective regions has the potential to bridge the chasm between area studies and general theory, between unexamined *sui generis* assumptions and sloppy generalizations. Hence, comparison as an approach is by no means a threat to area studies; quite the opposite, it can help it become even more relevant. Only with a strong base of area expertise can comparative approaches be made to work adequately. This means that even as comparative work is encouraged, there is and will continue to be a need for area study expertise and for research into Turkey as a single case.

As displayed in this volume, the continued development of comparative research—whether full-fledged comparisons or just in-depth case studies carefully

situated in a larger context—and interdisciplinary approaches—whether in collaborative form or just in the multiple influences on single authors exploring questions that transcend disciplinary boundaries—is indicative of how far Turkish Studies has continued to develop as a field in the last ten years.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes

1. Quataert and Sayari, *Turkish Studies*, vii–x.
2. Ibid.
3. Szanton, *The Politics of Knowledge*, ix.
4. Basedau and Köllner, *Area Studies*, 105–24.
5. Ibid.
6. The names of respected institutions such as the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) or, indeed, the Department of Oriental Languages where the Stockholm University Institute for Turkish Studies is located, serve as telling reminders of this heritage. (At the time of writing, however, the name of the latter department is in the process of being changed.)
7. Levin, *Turkey and the European Union*.
8. See Somer, Sayari, and Zürcher.
9. Moses and Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing*, 2.
10. Collier, *Understanding Process Tracing*, 823–30.
11. George and Bennett, *Case Studies*.
12. Geddes, *Selection Bias*, 131–50.
13. See Somer's essay for more on what this entails and some concrete suggestions on how to do it.
14. Said, *Orientalism*.
15. Hollis and Smith, *Explaining and Understanding*.
16. Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*.

## Notes on Contributors

**Sinan Ciddi** is an expert on Turkish domestic politics and foreign policy. He obtained his PhD from the SOAS, University of London in 2007 in the field of Political Science. Ciddi continues to author scholarly articles, opinion pieces and book chapters on contemporary Turkish politics and foreign policy, as well as participate in media appearances. In addition to his teaching and research responsibilities at Georgetown, Ciddi serves as the Executive Director of the Institute of Turkish Studies. Ciddi was born in Turkey and educated in the UK. He was previously an instructor at Sabanci University between 2004 and 2008 and completed his Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the same institution between 2007 and 2008. Distinct from his articles and opinion editorials, Ciddi's book titled *Kemalism in Turkish Politics: The Republican People's Party: Secularism and Nationalism* (Routledge, January 2009) focuses on the electoral weakness of the Republican People's Party. Between 2008 and 2011, he established the Turkish Studies program at the University of Florida's Center for European Studies.

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