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The Use of Islamic Discourse as a Political Propaganda Tool by Young Turks Before the 1908 Revolution

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Abstract

From the classical period of Ottoman civilisation to the modern era, religion was one of the major reference point for Ottoman politics. In the decades following the *Tanzimat* reforms, the desirability and applicability of the new political ideas and institutions cherished by Ottoman intellectuals were justified with reference to Islamic law; these reformists took from the primary religious texts of Islam in order to convince first themselves and consequently the masses of the soundness of their programme. Matters of administration, constitutionalism, legitimacy of political opposition, and so on were among the many subjects discussed with reference to the Qur'an and hadith starting from the 1860s. The use of Islamic terminology and discourse as a means of political propaganda could easily be seen in the selection of religious terms and phrases as newspaper names, in their motto and news-commentary content that reflect the basic perspectives of these publications. This methodology was widely embraced by both the Young Ottomans and later the Young Turks, and was highlighted during the debates and political events of the last fifty years of the Ottoman Empire. This article aims to analyse the ways in which Qur'anic verses and hadith were used in the political debates of the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks.

Introduction

The Ottoman world saw two major ideological movements in the second half of the XIX Century: the Young Ottoman and Young Turk movements. The former, the first of its kind in the Ottoman Empire, had a far-reaching effect on the political application of ideological thinking not only among the Ottomans but also in the Muslim world at large. In contrast, the Young Turks were distinctly different from other contemporary Muslim movements; nevertheless, their ideological outlook inspired years of political struggle which culminated in practical achievements that shaped the course of Middle Eastern history. Much has been written on the emergence of these movements and their ideologies, and their impact upon the political traditions of Muslims and Muslim countries. However, it is also important to examine *how* they advocated their ideas and carried out their political opposition—the instruments they employed and the language they used. This paper attempts to address this issue by highlighting some of the methods both the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks frequently resorted to, and in particular the recurrent use in various contexts of the language of religion to influence and sometimes incite the Muslim public—using Islam as a mobilising force.

Theoretical Framework

In this framework, the hypothesis of the study is that the Young Ottomans and Young Turks, who emerged a few decades apart from each other, preferred to use an Islamic discourse as a way of mobilizing, agitating and simply reaching out to the target public opinion, even referring to Qur'anic verses and hadiths as a direct way to do so. In order to test the hypothesis of the study, the following research questions were identified: Why did the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks need a dominant Islamic political discourse? Can traces of Islamic discourse be traced in the newspapers published by the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks? How the Young Ottomans and Young Turks did use Islam as

a propaganda tool? Which religious data did the Young Ottomans and Young Turks use in their Islamic discourse?

Literature Review and Main Sources

The sources that deal with the Young Ottomans and Young Turks as a focus of opposition tend to stick to the contradictions they saw in the Tanzimat reforms and the political problems created by the Tanzimat period. Very few of these sources focus on the discourses of the opposition movements that emerged during this period. This article, on the other hand, focuses on the use of Islamic discourse as a propaganda tool as a common element in the opposition discourses of the Young Ottomans and Young Turks. In this respect, it differs from other studies on the period. At this point, a major question and one of the issues discussed in this study is why the political opposition group demanding a constitution and constitutional monarchy as a more democratic form of government needed an Islamic discourse to present these modern means of governance. First of all, the Young Ottoman and Young Turk movements that emerged in the 1860s and 1890s, respectively, are part of some historical processes of continuity and rupture (Braudel, 1958)[1]. The Tanzimat Edict's claim to unite all Muslim and non-Muslim societies of the empire under the Ottoman identity was replaced by the idea of politically mobilizing the Muslim elements of the empire and experienced a rupture. This situation resulted in the generations that had the opportunity to engage in political opposition through journalism addressing the Muslim public as their target audience. Although the use of Islamic rhetoric in these propaganda tools was common, the segments of the population they had a fundamental impact on differed from one another. While the Young Ottomans wanted to reach a more general literate public, the Young Turks first tended to influence the young people with higher education and then the bureaucratic and military sectors, and thus a more revolutionary social structure.

Methodology

In order to answer the research questions determined within the framework of the hypothesis of the study and to reveal the data on the process of politicization of Islam by the Young Ottomans and Young Turks, content analysis and discourse analysis methods were employed. **Content analysis** is one of the most frequently used methods among qualitative data analysis types, enabling the systematic analysis of media texts (Turan & Özen, 2013). Content analysis is primarily a method used to analyze written and visual data. In content analysis, the researcher first develops categories related to the research topic. The researcher then counts the words, sentences, or images that fall into these categories in the data set they have examined (Silverman, 2001). The purpose of content analysis is to analyze texts produced and constructed for the public sphere. It is also used to analyze religious and divine texts, historical works, novels, and all speeches and discourses produced for the public. The purpose of content analysis is not to elicit personal reactions, but to obtain systematic and common data about the contents of a large number of texts (Gökçe, 2006). In our study, content analysis was performed on news texts found in relevant press sources, which were used as the main source. To this end, the relationship between the

concepts used in conjunction with the Young Ottomans and Young Turks and the concepts related to Islam and Islam was determined.

Discourse analysis, another method used in the study, focuses on how people use language in daily events to create their own perceptions. According to the basic assumption of discourse analysis, language is an environmental orientation towards action and function, and the individuals willingly use language to construct social values (Elliott, 1996). It is functional in revealing the meaning of the message within the text (Binark, 2014). As Dijk points out, discourse analysis is not only concerned with the formal aspects of discourse or the use of language, but also shifts the focus to the social phenomena of language users communicating within a social and cultural context (Dijk, 1997). Critical discourse analysis documents the role of language use in the reproduction of hegemony, discourse or communicative events, and language, and only in this way can it shed light on social and political analyses. Information about the context and background in news texts can only be clarified through critical discourse analysis (Özer, 2009). Using these two methods, an attempt was made to answer the research questions of the article based on the messages contained in the news items published in the press outlets mentioned above.

Data Collection

This study approaches the late Ottoman history, which witnessed regime change, from the perspective of political discourse and its transformative power. For this purpose, it focuses on the most basic media organs, such as newspapers, in which the religious political discourse of the political opposition was reflected. Within this framework, the news items in which the Young Ottomans and Young Turks used Islam as a political discourse were analyzed in the newspapers Hurriyet, Inkilab, Istikbal, Intikam, Mesveret and Muhbir, and the differentiation in the political discourses of these two political movements was traced in this article. The newspaper archives held by the Atatürk Library, the National Library, and the Hakkı Tarık Us Library contain 27 articles published in the press by the Young Ottomans and Young Turks between 1867 and 1909, the period covered by this article, which may serve as examples of the politicization of Islam and its use as a political tool. The relevant news items were obtained from these archives, transcribed, and converted into the Latin alphabet. After this stage, content and document analyses of the relevant news items were carried out. By analyzing the semantic structure of the texts and the language used in these news, the political and socio-cultural dimensions of the discourses were tried to be revealed.

Conditions and Actors in Which Political Opposition Emerges

The birth of politically oppositional generations in the modern sense in the Ottoman Empire is largely dependent on the political atmosphere created by the Tanzimat period. One conspicuously positive development of the era was, however, the flourishing of intellectual life in the Empire as a result of the relatively free climate of the reform period. There was a rapid growth of literature and the press. The

newly emerged Ottoman intellectuals, some of whom were later referred to as the 'Young Ottomans', soon started their criticism of government policies and the implementation of reform projects (Mardin, 1962; Tevfik, 1973).[2] The Young Ottomans, among whom Namık Kemal was the most prominent and most influential, had been inspired by Western ideas and believed in 'reform for Ottomans, by Ottomans', but along Islamic lines. Opposed to the traditional system of administration but also to the government-imposed reforms, they proposed constitutionalism, emphasising the consultative and representative character of government. Such proposals and criticisms predictably incurred the displeasure of the government, and in 1867 the prominent figures of the Young Ottomans, Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha and Ali Suavi, were exiled from the capital. However, they soon found their way to Europe, where they continued their activism through such newspapers as the *Muhbir* and the *Hürriyet*, which they published in Paris and London respectively. Three years later, however, they were allowed to return home after a general amnesty, and their writings continued to stir up public opinion, which was already agitated due to the effects of the *Tanzimat* reforms.

The humiliating developments in Muslim lands outside the Ottoman Empire were another source of discontent in Turkey. The newspapers were already highlighting stories of alleged massacres and the plight of non-Ottoman Muslims in many places at the hands of the Western powers.

Outlines of Young Ottoman's Ideology

It was against this background that the Young Ottoman intellectuals, the first ideologues of the country, began formulating ideas and programmes for what was called *Islamism*, toward the survival of the Ottoman Empire. They were a small committee, not a political party in the modern sense, but were influential out of the proportion to their small size. The main thrust of their thinking was about how to resist European pressure and how to preserve the integrity of the Empire in the face of internal separatist trends. Their concern was not exclusively limited to the Ottoman Empire, though its survival and maintenance were of primary importance, as it was feared that if the Ottoman Empire disappeared, there would be nowhere for Muslims to turn. Hence, extensive discussions about the possibility and the necessity of a new state ideology of *İttihad-ı Islam*, the union of all Muslims, began in the press. To begin with *İttihad-ı Islam* was presented as an alternative to the *Tanzimat's* failed ideology of the *İttihad-ı Anasır*, the unity of the Ottoman nations (Türköne, 1991; Davison, 1953).

In evolving their ideology, the Young Ottomans were also influenced by political and ideological currents in Europe. As a matter of fact, the first expressions of the Young Ottomans' ideology had appeared when they were in London in the late 1860s. According to them, the Ottoman State was based on the Islam, which was the sole remedy that could guarantee the survival of the Empire. If the Islam, the life and soul of the Ottomans, were properly understood and implemented, it could meet all needs. Islam had been was a sort of democracy when it first arose, and hence democracy was in fact more Islamic than it was European (*Hürriyet*, 14 September 1868, 7 June 1869, 30 November 1868, 29 February 1868; *Muhbir*, 29 February 1868). Because Islam contained all the necessary principles of justice and laid the political

basis for civilisation, the Young Ottomans believed that the state would be preserved and reformed within this framework, which would be flexible enough to adopt new institutions like a parliament, the sovereignty of the people, and representative government from Europe (Sungu, 1940; Mardin, 1962; Kaplan, 1948). They reluctantly approved the *Tanzimat* but bitterly opposed the 1856 *Islahats*, which they regarded as a concession given to the Europeans and as fatally detrimental, being an injustice to Muslims and an advantage for the non-Muslims.

By and large, the Young Ottomans were loyal to the state, the Caliphate, and the Sultanate. Their attacks were not directed against the *Padişah* or the institution of the Sultanate itself. On the contrary, towards the *Padişah*, except for some extremists they always showed great respect, and were firm in their belief that the Sultan-Caliph should remain as head of the state, because he was the centre of loyalty within the Empire and also the head of the Islamic *Ummah.* But they were opposed to absolute monarchy, and they wanted a constitutional check on administration: a representative assembly that could act as a brake on executive authority by expounding the virtues of democracy at length in contrast to autocracy. In short, the Young Ottomans were determined to save the empire through reforms, and never considered engaging in revolt. Theirs was an attempt to infuse Islam into a modern political ideology, as a response to modern challenges (Koçak, 2003; Davison, 1963).

Hence, trying to build their ideology on Islam as such was the purpose of their first and main action, which was journalistic agitation through which they aimed to affect public opinion both in Europe and in Turkey. They wanted to influence their readers against the regime of the Porte and convince them that the disabilities of the Ottoman State were not because of Islam (on the contrary, Islam was compatible with modern reforms) but because of a series of incapable ruling men, more notably Ali Pasha and Fuad Pasha, two of the primary statesmen responsible for the *Tanzimat*. These two were accused of being tyrants and depicted as ‘Kaisers’, despots, inefficient, weak, destroyers of the faith of the Muslims, and adopters of the most useless and immoral parts of European culture, like theatres, ballrooms, etc. Among the repeated criticisms by the Young Ottomans of Ali and Fuad was that they had exhibited a shallow secularism by abandoning the *Şeria*. For the Young Ottomans, the *Tanzimat* statesmen not only sundered ties with the past but also violated the essential democratic principles of Islam that constituted the basis for the existence of the State (*Hürriyet*, 22 February 1868). In short, the presentation of a *Tanzimat* statesman in the writings of the Young Ottomans was as a perfect atheist, bitterly against any kind of religion or religious feelings whatsoever.

Usage of Islamic Discourse by the Young Turks

No doubt the Young Ottomans were conscious of their position when they deliberately chose religious terminology especially to belittle their opponents. They knew that to get their message across they had to use the means of mass communication. This was in fact a novel social role played by the newly emerging Ottoman press. As the first movement of intellectuals who dared to attempt to oppose government policies and challenge their implementers, the Young Ottomans felt that they had to appeal to the religious feelings of the masses. In doing so they also needed the support of the traditional

religious circles (*ulema*), and sought to activate the mobilising capacities of Muslim theologians and scholars (*alims*). Since those people had an unrivalled influence upon society, in order to enlist their support some of the writings in the *Hürriyet* and *Muhbir* also directly addressed the *ulema*. Of the Young Ottomans, Ali Suavi was especially prominent in this endeavour, using inflammatory language. In one of his writings he asked what the source was of the weakness of the Ottoman government. The answer was quite sharp; the 'atheism of the Porte'. According to him, 'the Porte was a group of tyrants and as far as the religious principles were concerned the nation should immediately eliminate them from political life. From a religious point of view the tyrants had to be ousted and this is incumbent upon all of us.... There is no doubt that the Islamic nation is capable of doing this and that is what our religion orders us' (*Muhbir*, 10 January 1868.).[3]

In the pages of *Hürriyet*, the Young Ottomans presented their actions and opposition as part of their beliefs. This claim was formulated as a motto: *Hubb'ul vatan, min'el îman*, meaning 'Love of the fatherland comes from the faith' (*Hürriyet*, 29 June 1868, 18 January 1869). In the subsequent issues of *Hürriyet*, the Young Ottomans continued to refer to the religious texts to get their answers on how to cure the maladies of the empire (*Hürriyet*, 20 July 1868).[4] Similarly, the matter of freedom of thought or differences of views among the public was explained by a hadith of the Prophet: *İhtilafi ummati rahmatun*, which meant the 'controversies among the ummah are a grace' (*Hürriyet*, 13 July 1868). In the ensuing months *Hürriyet*, like *Muhbir* raised the intensity of this manner of criticism, or form of propaganda, based on Islamic language and rhetoric.

Namık Kemal cited another hadith, from the famous collection of Bukhari, when pointing out the mislim's responsibility for misrule and the resulting situation of the empire: 'All of you are shepherds and each of you is responsible for his flock' (*Hürriyet*, 21 September 1868). Ziya Pasha too put the blame on the Government for the evils in Ottoman society. 'The cause for this evil was ethical erosion and moral decay among the Ottoman statesmen, among whom fashion of atheism became favourable' (Hürriyet, 5 April 1869).

Elsewhere, Ali Suavi asks if, since the Sultan gives more privileges to the non-Muslims against the Muslims, the Muslims should still maintain their conviction that the Sultan is still the Caliph. He then turns to his real target, Minister Ali Pasha; the question continues, 'Does the one who belittles the Caliph by doing so and puts him in the position of worldly king not incur a penalty? Does the nation not punish this man who has destroyed the state, the nation and the religion? This is a responsibility before God.'[5]

In another issue of *Hürriyet* there was cited a *fetwa*, again regarding Ali Pasha 'According to the most reliable Islamic sources the tyrant and those who help the tyrants should be killed. This is an obligation. And the tyrant is Ali Pasha (Hürriyet, 20 December 1869).' Here not only Muslims in general but the Sultan as Caliph was invited to implement this verdict. This column was in fact also the end of the paper, as the Ottoman Government asked Musurus Pasha in London to stop its publication through the British authorities; this was achieved (PRO. H.O. 45/9472/A38025).

Hürriyet and *Muhbir* were the most widely known Young Ottoman newspapers. Apart from these, there were also shorter-lived and less well-known newspapers such as *Inkılab* (La Revolution), which was published in Geneva by Hüseyin Vasfı Pasha and Mehmet Bey on April 28, 1870. Mehmed Bey, also known as Sağır Ahmed Paşazâde, was one of the most active characters in the Young Ottomans movement and was described as an "adventurer" in some sources (Beydilli, 2013). Mehmet Bey's revolution, along with other Young Ottomans publications, used religious references starting from its first issue. Just below the title of the newspaper, the 227th verse of the Surah Ash-Shu'ara is included, referring to the name of the newspaper. The part of this verse seen on the front page of the newspaper generally reads as "The tyrant will soon know what kind of revolution they will be turned into" (Inkılab, 28 April 1870). Mehmet Bey and his friends most likely used this verse to bring the expression "tyrant" to minds, which was often attributed to Ali and Fuad Pashas, and on the other hand, they aimed to give religious legitimacy to the name of their newspaper called *Inkılab*.

The Young Ottomans deliberately and insistently resorted to religious literature in their opposition to the Porte. They thought that since their ideology was based on Islam and their arguments were extracted from Islamic sources, wrapping themselves in the cloak of Islam should serve as a fruitful and useful point of contact with fellow Muslims. As it happened, however, this endeavour proved not to be enough to mobilise the masses, let alone to facilitate them to manifest the Young Ottomans' ideals and bring about the changes they aimed for. It was only after the withdrawal of their bêtes noires, Fuad Pasha and Ali Pasha, from the stage of affairs that they were able to return home and get a reception in ruling circles; but by then they had lost their coherence as a movement, and some of them even opted for integration into the *Tanzimat*'s bureaucratic structure, to which they had once been bitterly opposed. Representatives of the movement like Namık Kemal and Ziya Pasha were included, together with many others with different views, in the commission to draft the first Ottoman constitution in 1876. This constitution fell short of introducing a complete institutional check on the Sultan's authority, which was again a failure on the part of Young Ottoman thinking (Devereux, 1963; Findley, 1982).

Nevertheless, the ideological successors of the Young Ottomans, the Young Turks, must have learned much from the experience of the former group. Although these two movements clearly differed from each other in organisational and operational structure as well as in terms of ideological ingredients, they had one important thing in common: the frequent use of religious language in their activities as political dissidents. The Young Turks' opposition was directed toward the Sultan, Abdulhamid II (r. 1876–1909) himself, a key difference between them and the Young Ottomans. The reason for this change of target is obvious, because by that point Abdulhamid II had established complete control over almost every affair of state. He had taken the throne at a time when the Empire was in real crisis: the country was on the verge of a major war with Russia after the outbreak of long-expected insurrections in the Balkans (İnalcık, 1943). Finally, during the difficult times of the Russian War in 1878 he chose to assume direct control of the country, and firmly asserted his authority by suspending the constitution and abolishing the Parliament. No political activity was to be allowed from then on, let alone opposition. It was only after about ten years there were signs of the first organised opposition group, which emerged among

military medical school students and later developed into the Union and Progress Party—the 'Young Turk' movement.

But before moving on to the Young Turks' opposition to the Ottoman government, a short parenthesis could be useful to consider the different oppositional groups—some of which were also involved with the Young Turk movement. After the decline in Young Ottoman–type thinking, another opposition group emerged, which after a few attempts at civil strikes for the dethronement of Sultan Abdulhamid II fled to self imposed exile to Europe as well. Their aims were to provide an environment fitting for the re-accession of former Sultan Murad V (r. 1876) to the throne, as they believed he was rightful ruler. These activists were known for their involvement in freemasonry, as was Murad V (*The Washington Post*, 14 February 1906). To pursue this goal, they chose the extensive use of publications, and published several newspapers in various Western languages, mostly aimed at Western political circles. Among these publications it was also possible to notice Qur'anic references, but for different purposes than those by the Young Ottomans: In these publications, verses of the Qur'an were cited to strengthen their arguments. However there was ambiguity regarding which verses of the Qur'an the newspapers were referring to.[6] The first instance of such a freemason publication was in *İstikbal* of Ali Şefkati, which appeared in Naples in 1881[7] but which, unlike later mason publications, targeted the Turkish(-speaking) public. *İstikbal* was not overtly masonic, not including any characteristic masonic symbols, for instance; instead, some articles had been written in a very religious (Muslim) tone. In *İstikbal*'s 28th issue, the first article was entitled 'Imam and Imamate'; it reminded people of the duties and rights of the Sultan in relation to the people and of the public in relation to each other with reference to the *Şeria* (*İstikbal*, 10 Temmuz 1895). Almost a year later, Ahmed Rıza, one of the prominent personalities in the Young Turk movement, who was in contact with Ali Şefkati, also published an article reminding readers of the duties of the Caliphate in the positivist journal *La Revue occidentale*. Ahmed Rıza described Abdulhamid II as a bad Caliph and gave various edifying examples from the life of the Prophet Mohammed and first four Caliphs (Ahmed Rıza, 1896).

The Young Turk movement was a political 'big tent', with members of different nationalities and groups with sometimes conflicting interests, set into motion as a reaction to Abdulhamid II's assumption of one-man rule and asking for the restitution of the constitution; this was perhaps the only common ideological ground among its members. They were against all that Abdulhamid II represented, and that naturally included Islam. Thus, the Young Turks never thought of or attempted to reconcile Islam with modern ideas or institutions. For them the effort of the Young Ottomans had been futile and as such useless. Instead, they formulated an ideology that grossly ignored Islamic elements and saw no significant role for religion in the new phrase to which they aimed to transfer the nation. By adopting this standpoint, they also seem to have sought to distinguish themselves from other contemporary movements in the Muslim world.

Not surprisingly, however, while in their private writings they openly disregarded religion, in their public appearances they usually extolled Islam whenever necessary and chose Islamic symbolism for propaganda purposes. Stefano Taglia (2015), while discussing Mehmet Sabahattin and Ahmet Rıza's

intellectual profiles, also argues widely the role of religion in Young Turks propaganda. For example, in the party's anthem the Sultan was branded as an atheist. Even the names of their publications, like *Ezan* (Ezan, 1896)[8], *Hak, İçtihad*, and *Meşveret*, as Hanioğlu has pointed out, were selected to address and influence the Muslim masses, because of their religious connotations (Hanioğlu, 1995). In one of the propaganda pamphlets, Hanioğlu (1995) gives an account of an imaginary trial on the Day of Judgement, where the Prophet, the Four Caliphs, and the Ottoman Sultans sentenced Abdulhamid II to death under Islamic Law. It is worth remembering that prominent members of the Young Turk movement spent their lives before 1908 mostly as exiles or fugitives, and newspapers were their most important links with the general public. Even a popular periodical such as *Mizan* began its publication in Turkey as a mainstream journal with evident religious connotations. According to Islamic eschatology, *Mizan* means 'the scale'—subsequently the balance of good deeds and bad which the Muslim believers' (Mizan, 1896; Qur'an, Sura of Enbiya 47 and Mu-minun 102–103) believed would decide their fate on 'the day of judgement'.[9]

The reason for these differences in the attitudes of the Young Turks compared to other group is obvious. They thought that in order to get public support in their fight against the Sultan and introduce their programmes into a traditional and conservative country, they had to present their arguments couched in Islamic rhetoric, and appeal to the people's religious susceptibilities. All kinds of means and arguments were accommodated to that end, and they sometimes went beyond the bounds of reasonable argument, for example equating Islam and materialism. This attitude searching for shortcuts to reach masses could seen even in their earlier works. As an example, Abdullah Cevdet translated Büchner's book that entitled "*,Natur und Geist*" in 1894 with the name of *Goril* (Gorilla) and presented it by the following hadith: "*Hikmah (wisdom) is the lost property of the Believers*" (Kutluer, 1992).

Even this unique example shows that the generations of political opposition, from the Young Ottomans to the Young Turks, cannot be evaluated within classical political or personal patterns. Coming from different segments of society, these generations were eclectic portraits who had both a strict religious traditional education and a secular education that exposed them to Western literature, philosophy and political thought. Their upbringing and the conditions of their education transformed them into masters of rhetoric and writing who could effectively use religious discourse while at the same time defending the modern political transformations the country needed. Although an external observer of this intellectual and political generation might see this use of Islamic language as a contradiction, it is in fact a natural indication of the impact of the educational and political conditions of the period on these generations. In many sources dealing with the educational policies of this period, it can be observed that students were confronted with both a religious and a political data set (Fortna, 2002; Yıldız, 2019).

They too turned to the *ulema* to get support. In fact, for this aim a branch of the Union and Progress Party was established with the participation of well-known members of the *ulema* such as Musa Kazım Efendi, Manastırlı İsmail Hakkı, and Mustafa Sabri Efendi. Among their audiences, the Young Turks particularly wanted to incite the military officers and soldiers to join them.[10] Circulars, pamphlets, and *fetwas* procured from the *ulema* were issued one after the other, either published in their journals or distributed secretly, declaring the Sultan to be an infidel, atheist, and usurper of the Caliphate. All

Muslims, primarily the *ulema* and soldiers, were called to act by rising against Abdulhamid II. For example, in one of the pamphlets it was claimed that Abdulhamid was neither the Sultan nor the Caliph, in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah. 'He is a tyrant and destroying the religion and the state. He is an *iblis* (devil), …. He does not obey God, nor show respect to his Prophet or practice daily prayers, nor observes fasting. Oh soldiers, are you still going to protect such an infidel Sultan? Oh Muslims, rise and fight against this fake Caliph, turn your weapons towards the tyrants, towards Abdulhamid, kill and be killed.'[11]

Characterizations that were directed to Sultan Abdulhamid II and amounted to insult him were largely intensified after 1898. Since a political amnesty was offered to the Young Turks in Europe previous year in exchange to terminate oppositional publications and activities, some of them accepted this offer and returned to Istanbul. However, within almost a year, it was seen that none of the freedoms and constitutional developments promised by the Sultan through his Serhafiye Ahmet Celaleddin Pasha were realised. The disappointment created by these negotiations and the agreement that took place in Contrexéville in 1897 hardened the political discourse of the Young Turks. The target of the Young Turk movement, which tried to recover after this date, was undoubtedly Sultan Abdulhamid II. The society had to be convinced that he was incompetent to be either a caliph or a sultan. Osmanlı, the leading Young Turk newspaper of this period, published an article under the title "Reddü'l Merdûd", stating that "Sultan Hamid is an atheist, because..." and claimed that he closed the parliament in the country and rejected all the provisions of the Islamic religion that indicate the culture of consultation. According to another paragraph in the continuation of the same article, which begins as "Sultan Hamid is an infidel, because...", Abdulhamid II is a non-religious character who had burned many religious books (kutub-ı diniye), such as Buhâri-i Şerif (Barlak, 2023).

The Young Turk propaganda literature often stressed that they were acting for only one purpose: protecting the people's main religion, the Sultanate and the Caliphate. Abdulhamid II, a great murderer, was selling out the country to the foreigners for his own interests, which were a clear violation of Islamic tenets. Under such circumstances it was a religious duty of all Muslims to rise and protect their religion, state, and nation. Hence, in another declaration, it says 'Oh Muslims rise up and save your religion and belief.... your state and nation. Your religion is left in the hands of Abdulhamid, the tyrant and Satan. Allah helps those who helps him and to help Allah is to obey him. It is the duty of all Muslims to take revenge of what we have lost so far. And revenge is the filthy heart of Abdulhamid (İntikam, 21 Şubat 1901, Göçmen, 1995)'.

Other examples of *fetwas* circulated around, were translated into Arabic and English to influence the outside world, and were published in the papers that would serve our purposes. 'What should the Muslims do if the commander of the faithful Zeyd drinks alcohol, violates the Islamic tenets, uses the public finance for his own pleasures, constrains the freedoms, or because of his suspicions destroys the Muslims naval power (*Donanma*); would it be incumbent upon the Muslims to oust him from the throne?' The answer was obviously yes.[12]

Conclusion

As an anti-absolute monarchy movement in 19th century Europe, the *Jeune Movements* inspired the political movements that began to emerge in the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the century. In this period, when the independent press and political opposition were born and emerged simultaneously, the Ottoman intellectuals adopted an anti-despotism, if not anti-monarchy stance. Although the opposition discourse developed by these intellectuals targeted Sultan Abdulhamid II at the end of the century, these discourses were not aimed at the Ottoman sultanate, but at the sultan himself. Although the political oppositional generations of the Ottoman Empire firstly criticized the grand viziers of Sultan Abdulaziz's reign, Ali and Fuad Pashas, and then Sultan Abdulhamid II for being tyrants or despots, they knew that this criticism was not enough to get rid of these rulers. For this purpose, they needed a harsher means of opposition that could directly influence the masses. This tool could have been to accuse the rulers of apostasy or irreligion, which had been tested to work in many instances during history.

Throughout Islamic history, religion has always been employed as a source of political legitimisation and justification, especially to help rulers to maintain their status and privileges. In modern times, however, religion has instead been presented as a source of political opposition and protest against ruling circles. This is an important and in a way perhaps peculiar aspect of Islam’s political tradition. Another interesting point that should be made is that Islam, perhaps more than any other religion, is ‘fit for opposition’. That is to say, since almost all the idealised values are attributed to Islam and Islamic faith by believers, one can always find room for criticism. This may have been an approach that had integrity when used by the Young Ottomans, since they based their ideology primarily on Islam, but for the Young Turks it seems to have been a mere tool used for practical purposes and pragmatic ends. Having said that, however, it should also be remembered that the notion of separation of politics and religion is a rather late concept among Muslims, and did not really exist during the period covered in this paper. In this sense, some of the attitudes adopted by the Young Ottomans and to some extent also the Young Turks can be interpreted as having in a sense constituted a natural reflection of their traditional approach to life. All in all, what stands out is that in their conflict with the powers that were, each opposition group employed the weapons they thought most effective at the time.

Of course, in this kind of Young Turk literature, the role of other opposition groups should also be emphasised. But the effectiveness this kind of language was effective is beyond question. What is important here is that those who sought changes in the Ottoman Empire have always felt that one way or another they had to use religious arguments or back their stand with religious references. This was of course primarily because of the influence and the mobilising force of Islam, which was deeply rooted in Ottoman society. Religious justification was deemed as the most effective way to gain broad support, materialise structural change, and develop modern institutions. To achieve this, in the estimation of the opposition groups, no other way would be convincing enough to mobilise the Muslim masses.

For the Young Ottomans and Young Turks, placing religious discourse at the center of political propaganda had a two-fold benefit. First, the Young Ottomans and especially Young Turks, who were often accused of being atheists, Freemasons or Christian collaborators, were able to legitimize themselves and their discourse, which was suspected to have been produced in this direction. By appearing in front of the masses, they were saying “we share your spiritual sensitivities” and “we are not irreligious”. Second, after defining their position in this way, they could criticize their political opponents as irreligious. This striking discovery of the political opposition generations of the late Ottoman period was frequently used in the following decades, especially in the experiences of multi-party life in the Constitutional Monarchy II and the Republican periods. Political structures in the center or to the right of the political spectrum presented themselves with a more or less Islamic identity and placed religious references at the center of their discourse. The Young Ottomans and the Young Turks (although the western literature refers to these two distinct generations simply as the Young Turks) skillfully used this weapon of opposition. Moreover, they did not simply emphasize conservatism. They used verses and hadiths, the most unquestionable elements of Islam, to legitimize a new terminology for Ottoman public opinion: constitutionalism, constitution, freedom, and homeland. The use of Islam as a political tool also continued after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. As a matter of fact, elements of religious discourse and religious-political identity continued to be seen in the effects of the new ideologies formulated as political Islam by political parties that made strong use of Islamic references in Turkey's democratization processes.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest Statement

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no competing interests.

Ethical Approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Informed consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Author Contribution

All the authors were involved in the research, analysis and writing process of the article and have contributed equally to the article.S.Y.- Involved in the research, analysis and writing process of the article.A.O.- Involved in the research, analysis and writing process of the article.T.T.- Involved in the research, analysis and writing process of the article.

Data Availability

The dataset analysed during the current study are uploaded to the submission system and also publicly available in the Atatürk Kitaplığı newspaper archive repository. All the researchers need to sign up at the web page https://ataturkkitapligi.ibb.gov.tr/en/Anasayfa, search the newpapers used by date and open pdf files of the newspapers.

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Footnotes

1. For detailed information on the continuity and rupture see. J. Moufawad-Paul, *Continuity and Rupture Philosophy in the Maoist Terrain*, Zero Books: Winchester, UK, 2016; Louis Althusser, "On the materialist dialectic: On the unevenness of origins", in *For Marx*, translated by. Ben Brewster, Verso: London, 2005; Fernand Braudel, "Histoire et Sciences sociales : La longue durée", *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 13 (4), October-December 1958, 725–753.
2. The Young Ottomans were basically a political movement and included many prominent intellectuals, writers, and journalists—Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha, Sinasi and Ali Suavi, and others. Its emergence and the ideas and achievements of its members can be found in a number of well-documented sources, including some from its founders. The most extensive account of the Young Ottoman movement is given by Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, Princeton, 1962. Also see, Ebuzziya Tevfik, *Yeni Osmanlılar Tarihi*, İstanbul 1973.
3. Also see Muhbir, 18 and 27 January 1868, 22 February 1868.
4. See the Qur'an, 3/159. The Young Turks in the 1890s also frequently referred to this verse of the Qur'an. *Meşveret* was one of the first newspapers of the Committee of Union and Progress, and this verse was written under the title of the journal. (In the French edition of the newspaper, 'Ordre et Progress' was chosen instead. *Meşveret*, 1 December 1895.)
5. 'Padişahın memurlarından biri Hristiyanlara ziyade riayet edip Müslümanları tahkir ve zulüm ederse Müslümanların padişah hakkındaki zannını bozmuş olmaz mı? Devleti, dini ve milleti mahveden bir memura kısas gerekmez mi? Millet bu mesuliyetten kurtulmak için hilafetin, dinin ve milletin hukukunu talep etmeyecek mi? Şer'an Pasha'yı kısas etmeyecek mi?'. See *Muhbir*, 14 Mart 1868.
6. The newspaper included some articles that defended the separation of political power from the Caliphate. *Turquie Contemporaine*, 'Incompatibilité du régime théogratique avec les idées modernes', 1 May 1891, 1–2.

7. *İstikbal* was published in various cities, appearing in London in 1895. Şükrü Hanioğlu, Bir Siyasi Örgüt Olarak Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük, İstanbul 1985, 83–84.
8. Among the Young Turk newspapers, Tunalı Hilmi's newspaper, Ezan, which was short-lived and only published two issues, was a publication that preferred religious tones and themes in both its headline and content. The word Ezan literally means a call inviting Muslims to pray and reminding them of prayer times. Like its counterparts, Ezan newspaper chose to place a verse from the Quran as a banner next to its headline. By choosing verse 110 of Surah Al-Imran, which reads, "You are the best community ever brought forth for mankind," the newspaper targeted the Muslim community as its audience. According to the newspaper, Muslims were in a state of spiritual revolution. *Ezan*, Vol: I, Issue: 1, February 3, 1896.
9. For a further description of the balance, see the *Qur'an*, Sura of Enbiya 47 and Mu-minun 102–103. This headline can be seen in Kufic script in all issues of the newspaper. For example: *Mizan*, Vol: 1, Issue: 1, 14 December 1896.
10. The fact that it was the soldiers who finally started the revolution and ousted the sultan from the throne in 1909 seems to justify the Young Turks' eagerness to address them frequently.
11. 'Abdülhamid gibi mühin-i din ü millet bir hükümdar hiç işidilmemiştir.... İşte bunca mezalimi, bu kadar ihaneti bile bile yapan na hak yere halife diye takdis ettiğimiz alçak Abdulhamid'dir... İblis... Ey Askerler, Allah'ı tanımayan, sevgili Peygamberimizi tahkir eden, ... namaz kılmayan, oruç tutmayan böyle dinsiz bir padişahı muhafazada hala sebat edecekmisiniz. Silahınızı zalimlere çeviriniz.' For samples of the pamphlets and other publications, see Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasi Örgüt Olarak Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük*, Istanbul, 1985, 457–460, 553–555, 619–629.
12. See for example Osmanlı, 15 Nisan 1900, no. 75; 15 Nisan 1901. 'Zeyd şurb-ı hamrı ibane etse ve tesettür-i nisvan-ı İslamiyyeyi selb etse ve beytülmal-i müslimini kendi huzuzatı uğrunda itlaf etse ve müsliminin alat-ı gazasından madut olan bir kısm-ı mühimmi ki donanmadır, evhamına taban mahvetse ve hürriyet-i ahrarı esarete kalbetse hilafetten hal'i vacib olur mu? El cevab: Olur. Ketebehü'l-Müftiyyü'l-Müslimin.' Göçmen, *İsvciçre'de Jön Türk Basını*, 206–207.

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