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The intellectual's dilemma: the writings
of Ahmet Rıza and Mehmet Sabahettin on
reform and the future of the Ottoman
Empire.

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in History

2012

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THESIS ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the intellectual development of two leading members of the Young Turk organisation during its early phase – that is, the period before the organisation turned into the militarist nationalist group that carried out the 1908 Revolution and ruled Turkey until the end of WW1. The thesis argues that the two intellectual activists, Ahmet Rıza and Mehmet Sabahettin, have been central figures in the theoretical emergence of an Ottoman synthesis, which responded to the geopolitics of the empire and aspired to provide an intellectual bridge between the Empire and Europe. My main object of analysis are Young Turk journals published mainly in France between 1890s and 1907, of which Rıza and Sabahettin were editors or contributors, as well as the thematic volumes they authored. I contend that an understanding of the arguments put forward by these activists is crucial in constructing a more accurate picture of the historical continuum between nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ottoman/Turkish politics. This new picture enriches the narrative of a Kemalist debate on modernity as rupture with the Empire's past and confronts nationalist frames of looking at the Ottoman past that have been very prevalent in modern Turkish historiography. Throughout this research, I present a fresh reading of an intensely-studied period. I claim that the periodisation of Young Turk history is, besides few exceptions, misrepresented and that the early phase of the organisation has not been given the attention and analytical depth it deserves. I suggest that a comparative interrogation of the varied visions of Ottoman opposition groups, which has not been done before, sheds light on the much-debated transition from Empire to Republic and acknowledges an ideological bridge between the political and social ideas of pre- and post- Republican period.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Names and titles in Ottoman Turkish are rendered in accordance to modern Turkish usage. Arabic and Persian names are transliterated according to a simplified system based on that of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES), unless taken from a source that uses a different method (Encyclopaedia of Islam). Names in languages that use a non-Latin script have been rendered in Latin script.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

The object of enquiry

On the 23rd September 1912, while fighting against the Italians in North Africa, Enver,¹ a young Ottoman officer en route to become one of the most influential statesmen of the Ottoman Empire, wrote to a friend in Europe:

C'est un poison votre civilisation, mais c'est un poison qui éveille et on ne veut, on ne peut plus dormir. On sent que si on refermait les yeux, ce serait pour mourir. Et la grande différence c'est que vous autres avec tout votre 'Erkenntnis' [knowledge] vous prenez la vie légèrement tandis que [sic] nous, quand nous avons la 'Erkenntnis' nous nous rendons la vie plus difficile qu'elle ne l'est en vérité, surtout si nous changeons les principes que nous sommes habitués.²

How did Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals in the late nineteenth century translate their visions of the future into practical strategies for reform? This is what the next few hundred pages will attempt to unravel. The dilemma articulated by Enver Pasha represents what Ottoman reformers had been asking themselves for a very long period, at least since the reign of Sultan Süleyman in the mid sixteenth century.³ Since then, the pressing question 'How can the state be saved?' had been tackled in

¹ Enver (1881-1922) was a Young Turk soldier who went on to become one of the most important statesmen of the Unionist period. He was sent to Berlin as military attaché and became very close to the German government. In 1911, he took command of the Ottoman forces fighting the Italians in Lybia but returned to Istanbul the following year, when the Italians took control of area. He was nonetheless promoted in rank for his efforts in North Africa. At the 1912 Congress of the Committee of Union and Progress he ensured the appointment of his friend Talat. Following the defeat of the Ottoman military during the Balkan Wars in 1912 and the subsequent weakened Ottoman government, in 1913 he took the position of War Minister. During the Second Balkan Wars, he achieved important victories, and, once back in Istanbul, managed to acquire enough power to establish a triumvirate with his two closest associates, Talat (as Minister of Interior Affairs) and Cemal (as Minister of the Navy). By 1914, he had become commander-in-chief and was the mastermind, together with his two associates, behind the Ottoman entry into World War One on the side of Germany. However, his choice and military skills proved insufficient and the Ottoman army in Northeastern Anatolia suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Russians, leading Justin McCarthy to state the following: "Enver was convinced he was a strategic genius, but really he was a cowboy." Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Turks: an introductory history to 1923* (London: Longman, 1997), 359. With the defeat in sight and following clashes with Armenians, on 2nd November 1918, Enver, Talat and Cemal boarded a German vessel and fled the Empire. Enver was killed in battle in August 1922, while Talat was killed in Germany in 1921 by an Armenian activist. Cemal was killed in Tbilisi, in the same year, by another Armenian activist.

² *Kendi Mektuplarında Enver Paşa*, edited by Şükrü Hanioglu (Istanbul: Der Yayınları, 1989), 188.

³ Bernard Lewis, "Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline," *Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (1962): 71-87.

different ways, but never so drastically as during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

When Enver wrote these lines, it was ten years since the first Congress of Ottoman Liberals held in Paris in 1902 and four years after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 that had reinstated the constitution. However, the way to close one's eyes and absorb the influence of Western European civilisation, as Enver framed it, without dying in the process – death here takes the form of cultural annihilation, loss of traditional aspects of society or the collapse of the Empire as political entity – had not yet been decisively defined.

Reform in the Ottoman Empire had started with the first attempts to modernise the military in the late eighteenth century – under Selim III – yet these attempts were neither unitary nor consistent. Much of the difficulty of the endeavour resided in the nature of the Empire itself, which was ethnically, religiously, and culturally so diverse that it proved extremely difficult to formulate coherent ideas and plans for its organisation. In the nineteenth century, the ethos of reform picked up more momentum, as the threat of collapse became more realistic and Western intervention increased. Moreover, some minorities were starting to see the appeal of a nationalistic discourse, as put forth in the West, giving weight to linguistic, ethnic or religious definitions of the self as opposed to what had been the multilayered and pluralistic Ottoman Empire. Additionally, a side-effect of reform had emerged: as the military, the statesmen, and the broader elite started to study scientific subjects, so far marginalised due to their alleged incompatibility with Islam, as well as European languages, a liberal philosophical tradition began to emerge. This tradition

included currents such as positivism, materialism, and social science, and was influenced by events of enormous ideological weight such as the French Revolution. Such ideological influence encouraged the elite to request more representativeness from the government and rights that went well beyond the bare protection of the citizens, who, until recently, were identified as *re`aya*, the flock.

These developments pushed these Ottomans who still believed in the possibility and feasibility of living in an imperial framework to look for their own version of nationalism. This translated into the formulation of a discourse of proto-nationalism, known as Ottomanism, *Osmanlılık*. The first ideologues of this kind of Ottoman nationalism were part of the bureaucracy during the period known as Tanzimat or reorganisation (1839-1876). After them, came the very short-lived First Constitutional Period, when Ottomanism was a central element of an agenda that envisaged more popular involvement in state affairs. In 1878, after the suspension of the Constitution, began the period of absolute rule of Sultan Abdülhamit II. With the advent of the latter to power, attempts to establish a feasible plan of reform and modernisation reached their peak and they came from many sides.⁴ While formerly the impetus to reform had generally come from the state, with the sole exception of the Young Ottomans in the 1860s,⁵ Abdülhamit's rule witnessed a sort of popularisation of the voices of reform – even if this was limited to the members of the elite – resulting in the emergence of competing ideas. These competing voices

⁴ Contrary to what many historians claim, the Hamidian period was not a setback in the reform of the Empire but the moment in which some of these changes reached maturity and fullness. This issue will be analysed in length in the next section of this chapter, the literature review.

⁵ The Young Ottomans, formed in 1865, were a group of civil servants (mostly of the Translation Office) with a religious background. They criticised what they regarded as too broad an adoption of Western systems during the Tanzimat period. The group was significant since it promoted its view that constitutionalism was fully compatible with Islam. The group was composed, among others, by Namık Kemal, Ziya Bey and Ali Suavi.

were opposed to the path that the state, personified in Sultan Abdülhamit, had chosen. While they shared with the Sultan the goals of modernisation and reform, they did not approve of the method and structure of the Sultan's process, which entailed strict obedience to his rule. For example, reformers fundamentally disagreed with Abdülhamit's philosophy that ethnic and religious differences should be demarcated rather than erased, and with putting religion at the service of political expediency.

Because of the multitude and coherence of these voices, the nineteenth century can arguably be seen as the most formative period for the late Ottoman Empire. I argue that the discussions that took place during this period laid the ideological foundations of the Turkish Republic, proclaimed in 1923, which recycled many of the ideas formulated during the previous century. Formative as it had been, the nineteenth century did not produce a unidirectional and tangible path to reform in terms of policy. It produced, nevertheless, the intellectual ferment that laid the political, social and cultural foundations of the near- and long-term future. During this period, approaches to reform were so numerous and dynamic that the usual characterisation of Ottoman society of the time as divided along the lines of Islamists, Modernists and Westernists is, I claim, ultimately unhelpful; such division does not allow historians to understand the syncretic and complex character of the processes that were taking place at the time.

This thesis is concerned with the early history of the movement that began to envisage a different future from the one planned by the reigning Sultan. This movement is widely known as the Young Turk organisation, formed in Istanbul in

1889. The Young Turk organisation acted as an umbrella under which a number of smaller groups operated, and its life span went from 1889 up until 1923. It has traditionally been maintained that the organisation had a unilinear history and development with specific cultural, ideological and social traits that marked it from its inception until its demise. Instead, as I will illustrate, this organisation went through different phases in its trajectory, and, even within the same period, was characterised by a number of different, and sometimes conflicting, voices within. This thesis covers a key period of the history of the Young Turk, from 1895 to 1902. As I will argue, these seven years mark an important and distinctive phase in the broader history of the movement.

My specific object of enquiry is the intellectual development of two of the most formative exponents of this group during the last decade of the nineteenth and the first years of the twentieth century. These two figures are Ahmet Rıza and Mehmet Sabahettin, members of the Ottoman elite and leaders of two groups within the opposition who held different conceptions of reform and modernisation of the Empire. They were among the most charismatic figures of the Young Turk organisation, and ended up heading the two most important factions within the organisation in the period in question. Rıza and Sabahettin were also extremely prolific in their writings and, as I contend throughout this thesis, their respective ideologies exemplified the attempt of a section of the Ottoman intelligentsia to synthesise Western technological and cultural achievements with an Ottoman intellectual and political reality.

Ahmet Rıza left the Empire in 1889, on the pretext of attending the Exposition Universelle to be held in Paris in the same year, but with the real intention of organising an opposition to Sultan Abdülhamit II.⁶ Once there, enjoying the freedom granted by self-imposed exile, he started the publication of a journal, *Mechveret*, in Ottoman Turkish and its supplement *Mechveret Supplément Français*, in French, co-edited with an Ottoman Lebanese, Halil Ganem. Once in Paris, Rıza joined the positivist circle, became acquainted with many positivists from around Europe, and started publishing other projects such as his own monograph, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale en orient*,⁷ as well as reviews, such as the Positivist Review and *La Revue Occidentale*. Rıza's main ideological approach to reform was based on the idea of Ottomanism as the engine for co-operation and consensus between the various ethnic and religious components; consequently, any plan based on the reform of only a given area or ethnic group would have to be rejected. Of equal importance was Rıza's total dismissal of any help, in any form, from European governments.

Prince Mehmet Sabahettin joined the diasporic community of intellectual Young Turk members of Paris in 1899, following his overnight escape from the Empire, together with his father, *Damat*,⁸ Mahmut and his brother Lutfullah. In Paris, Sabahettin joined the school of social science of Edmond Demolins, whom he befriended, and became an admirer of Anglo-Saxon societies; he appreciated especially the latter's emphasis on private initiative and the laissez-faire approach of the state. Drawing on the French social scientist and the Anglo-Saxon system, he

⁶ Ahmet Rıza, *Ahmed Rıza Bey'in Anıları* (Istanbul: Arba, 1988).

⁷ Ahmet Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale en orient* (Paris: Librairie Picart, 1922).

⁸ "Damat, a Persian word meaning son-in-law, used as a title by sons-in-law of the Ottoman Sultans." *Encyclopedia of Islam*, J.H. Mordtmann, s.v. "Dāmād."

produced his own work *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*,⁹ (*How can Turkey be saved?*), inspired by Demolins's book *Anglo-Saxon superiority, to what is it due?*¹⁰ Sabahettin's main conception of reform in the Empire entailed the creation of a federal entity, emphasising the Empire's diversity (in contrast to Rıza's approach), and relying on the practical and ideological help of European countries, especially of Britain. The two ideologues became the leaders of the two most representative factions within the broader movement of the Young Turk and organised the first Congress of Ottoman Liberals in Paris, in 1902. As I will discuss later, the Congress, which was convened with the explicit aim to create a united front against the rule of Abdülhamit II, resulted instead in the clear demarcation of different players within the movement and in the end of a particularly ambitious intellectual and activist phase in the history of the Young Turks.

In this thesis, I argue that Rıza's and Sabahettin's endeavour within the C.U.P. and the composition of the Young Turk movement was instrumental in laying the foundations for the future emergence of civil society in the late Ottoman and Republican periods. A comparative study of the two gives a more nuanced picture of a period (from 1889 to 1923) that is too often analysed as an uninterrupted whole. This thesis suggests that it is crucial to consider the history of the opposition to Sultan Abdülhamit II as a gradual and multi-faceted endeavour. It is also essential to bear in mind that this opposition passed from an intellectually driven phase, more liberal and pluralistic, to a more pragmatist and militarist one. The latter phase did not match the intellectual rigor of the former, but ensured more than its predecessor

⁹ Mehmet Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir* (Istanbul: Elif Yayınları, 1962). From here on, it will be referred to in the English translation.

¹⁰ Edmond Demolins, *Anglo-Saxon superiority, to what is it due?* translated by Lois Bertram Lavigne (London: Leadenhall Press, 1920).

in terms of political gains – such as the re-instatement of the Constitution in 1908 and the shift in despotic rule from the Sultan to the authoritarian Unionist cadres. In brief, I maintain that the Young Turk movement shifted from a more intellectual and open position to a more militarist and rigid stance. This approach is innovative because it is examined through the comparative analysis of Rıza and Sabahattin, whose impact was more important than many other leaders of the Young Turk movement of the time and more instructive for an appreciation of the events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Overview of primary sources

My line of enquiry begins with the premise that exile was essential in providing intellectual development and practical opportunities to the opposition. Without being in exile, in fact, much of the intellectual and activist practices of both Rıza and Sabahattin would not have been feasible. Exile was self-imposed for both figures and emerged as a decisive feature of the Young Turk organisation of the time for a number of interrelated reasons. For one, it gave them the chance to express their ideas through the publication of journals when, back in the Empire, the Hamidian regime worked vigorously to censor critics and to prevent discussions that emerged from reading, contributing to, and circulating reformist publications. Paris stood out as by far the most attractive European destination for Young Turk members in exile: public opinion was predominantly supportive of their reformist activities and sensitive to infringements upon their freedom of expression. Therefore, when the Ottoman government attempted to restrict their actions, Young Turk members found a large number of French intellectuals, politicians, and writers ready to rally behind them. The press itself constituted a central instrument for the development of the

intellectual endeavour of Sabahettin and Rıza; such output is related to the intellectualism and elitism that became pillars of the Young Turk movement in exile. Paris became a *sine qua non* condition for political activism, offering the Young Turk members in question the chance to partake in a global intellectual elite,¹¹ and gave them a sense of belonging and participation to intellectual developments well beyond their own political borders.

As it will be argued further on, the most shared characteristic of Young Turk émigrés during the intellectual phase was the idea that they constituted the enlightened section of Ottoman society, entrusted with the tutelary role of emancipating both Ottoman reformists and the wider population. The proximity to individuals that Rıza and Sabahettin had found instrumental for their own intellectual development and their subsequent exposure to new ideas helped them synthesise what were seen as ‘modern’ with ‘traditional’ aspects of their society. Such proximity advertised the movement abroad and made it appealing to the wider liberal civil society of Europe at the time. Lastly, because of their cooperation with non-Ottoman intellectuals, and because of the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional nature of the organisation – coupled with the relative freedom that Europe granted – these journals became essential forums where editors, journalists, intellectuals, Young Turk militants as well as sympathisers exchanged views, discussed issues, and planned activist meetings. The culmination of these activities, which coincided with the end of the intellectual phase, was the 1902 Congress of Ottoman Liberals. The Congress gathered, for the first and last time, a large and relatively

¹¹ As explained further on, Rıza became an admirer of Comte’s positivism, via the writings of Gustave Le Bon. Sabahettin, instead, was convinced, almost mesmerised, by the ideas of Edmond Demolins’ social science.

representative number of Ottoman ethnic and religious groups and was organised through rigorous advertisement in the press coordinated by Rıza and Sabahettin.

A study of the intellectual phase of Young Turk history requires an examination of this intellectual project's contradictions. For example, what will emerge from the discussion ahead is a number of tensions that inhered in the intellectual and ideological formulations of members of the Young Turk organisation and are exemplified here in the writings of Ahmet Rıza and Mehmet Sabahettin. These tensions, which will be discussed at length in the following chapters, relate to the formulation of a coherent policy of transition, a concept of ethnic and religious pluralism that can keep the Empire together and, relatedly, the role of religion in governance and in the public sphere in the future Ottoman Empire. I will contend that Rıza's and Sabahettin's intellectualism provided the ideological foundations for future discussions but stopped short of the concreteness required to translate ideas into policies.

My analysis of the figures of Rıza and Sabahettin is driven by the conviction that the periodisation of the Young Turk movement has been reductive. I maintain that the period from 1895 to 1902 is separate from the rest of the Young Turk trajectory and that this period is characterised by a very high degree of intellectualism. After the relative failure of the 1902 Paris Congress of Ottoman Liberals, this period gave way to a phase of transition and ethnic and religious crystallisation (1902-1907), followed by the militarism of the Unionist era. The latter period was inaugurated

with the Revolution of 1908 and ended with the beginning of World War One and foreign occupation.¹²

I have consulted a number of primary sources in order to trace and interpret the features of this complex and formative period. The first primary material I examined are the two books that Rıza and Sabahettin published: Ahmet Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale en orient*¹³ and Mehmet Sabahettin, *How can Turkey be saved?*¹⁴ Other central material included Rıza's own memoirs, *Ahmed Rıza Bey'in Anıları*,¹⁵ İbrahim Temo's *İttihad ve Terakki Anıları*,¹⁶ and William Morton Fullerton, *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*.¹⁷ In the Harvey S. Firestone Library of Princeton University, I concentrated on *Mechveret* and *Mechveret Supplément Français*, which are held in full collection, together with memoirs of the time and precious eyewitnesses' accounts in other newspapers and journals. In the British Library in London I encountered another key journal, *Osmanlı*, as well as the important and informative books by two Frenchmen very close to Sabahettin, Joseph Denais,¹⁸ *La Turquie nouvelle et l'ancien regime*,¹⁹ and Paul Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*.²⁰ I analysed the book that changed Sabahettin's

¹² Şükrü Haniöglü, in both his books, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and *Preparation for a Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) puts forth this approach to the period in question. However, no specific figure is analysed at length so as to provide a deeper understanding of the Young Turk ethos of the intellectual phase. Apart from Haniöglü, the period is grossly overlooked by most of the historians of the period, as I discuss further on in this chapter.

¹³ Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*.

¹⁴ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*.

¹⁵ Rıza, *Ahmed Rıza Bey'in Anıları*.

¹⁶ İbrahim Temo, *İbrahim Temo'nun İttihad ve Terakki Anıları* (Istanbul: Arba, 1987).

¹⁷ William Morton Fullerton, *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey* (London: Constable, 1920).

¹⁸ French journalist, friend and colleague of Paul Fesch, born in 1851, died in 1916. He is co-author, with Fesch, of *Bibliographie de la franc-maçonnerie et des sociétés secrètes, imprimés et manuscrits langue française et langue latine*.

¹⁹ Joseph Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle et l'ancien régime* (Paris: Rivière, 1909).

²⁰ Paul Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 2nd ed. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971).

life: Edmond Demolins, *Anglo-Saxon superiority, to what is it due?*²¹ In the Préfecture de Police de Paris, I found precious information not only about Rıza and Sabahettin, but also on the whole Ottoman community living in France. These police archives provide detailed accounts of movements, meetings, and activities of the members of the Young Turk organisation, and of the French government's relations with the opposition and with the Ottoman embassy. Police reports give us clues about how the French state and public opinion, not always in agreement, viewed the struggle of the Young Turk movement. The archives of the IREMAM – Institut de Recherches et d'Études sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman – in Aix-en-Provence proved valuable for both primary and secondary sources on Sufi orders and Freemason organisations that collaborated with the exponents of the Young Turk movement, providing them with safe-houses and with inspiration. Other primary sources from a number of private collections are listed in the bibliography.

Literature Review

In analysing intellectual history, I adopt the approach of Şerif Mardin in his study of the group that came to be known as the Young Ottomans.²² Mardin's work focuses on the background, sources of inspiration, analysis and the dilemmas of the intellectual venture of the Young Ottomans, providing evidence of an intimate link between the ideas and discussions of this group and those taking place in Republican Turkey. Up to this date, there has been no similar work on the ideologues of the early Young Turk movement.

²¹ Demolins, *Anglo-Saxon Superiority*.

²² Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: a study in the modernisation of Turkish political ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

Before dwelling on the subject of Young Turk history proper, it is important to highlight that the group lived and acted during a period of drastic and important changes for the Ottoman Empire, which have been recorded in history in conflicting ways. Since the beginning of the rule of Sultan Selim III, the Empire had entered a period of reform, attempting to revert what most refer to as ‘decline’, the beginnings of which were traced back to the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent. Therefore, the history of the Young Turk coincides with a larger conversation on what decline entailed, its causes, and speculations on how the Sublime State was supposed to emerge out of this impasse. Broadly speaking, the two opposing historiographical views are the following: on the one side, there are a number of older studies, such as Bernard Lewis’s *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*²³ and, to a lesser extent, Ernest E. Ramsaur’s *The Young Turks: Prelude to the Revolution of 1908*,²⁴ which view the relative success of the period of reform as intimately related to the level of Westernisation that Ottoman modernisation was imbued with: the more aspects of Western culture were borrowed, the more successful the plan looked. To put it in another way, as Benjamin C. Fortna has argued, the above works emphasised the “adoption of Western European institutions and attitudes ... [rather] than the process of adaptation.”²⁵ This stance was not only discarded by later historians, but was countered by some Ottoman contemporaries themselves who criticised the choice of outright adoption of Western institutions, that resulted in dandyism and mimicking. This is the case, for example, of Dr. Zifos’ critique of men’s attire in Nora Şeni’s

²³ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

²⁴ Ernest E. Ramsaur, *The Young Turks: Prelude to the Revolution of 1908* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1970).

²⁵ Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9-10.

*Fashion and Women's clothing*²⁶ or the one analysed by François Georgeon of conscious public exposure of one's drinking habits in nineteenth-century Istanbul to show "adherence to the values of the modern world."²⁷ On the other side stands a narrative of a declining entity that was able to stave off collapse because of a number of internal and external forces and influences which, working together, produced a series of able statesmen such as Reşid Pasha and Abdülmecid, or Abdülhamit and the Young Turks as a group. This stance, exemplified by Şükrü Hanioglu's two books, *The Young Turks in Opposition*²⁸ and *Preparation for a Revolution*,²⁹ adopts a wider lens of analysis, considering a number of internal dynamics to be as formative as the external ones. To add to this perspective, I should mention Butrus Abu Manneh and Frederick Anscombe, who have presented the *Hatt-ı Sherif of Gülhane* – which became the symbol of Ottoman reform and which has been, for years, seen as a move orchestrated by the West – under a new light. In his "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript,"³⁰ Abu Manneh challenges the view that almost every incentive for modernisation in the Empire had its roots in the West by looking at the cultural and religious background of the Sultan. Abu Manneh underlines the fact that some of the ideas introduced by the edict, and which gave way to the period of the Tanzimat, should be seen drawing from both Western liberal thought as well as Islamic ideas of social justice. Similarly, Anscombe has written that "Islam pervades the Gülhane text from beginning to end ..."³¹ and that

²⁶ Nora Şeni, "Fashion and Women's Clothing," in *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader* ed. Şirin Tekeli (London: Zed Books, 1995): 25-45.

²⁷ François Georgeon, "Ottomans and Drinkers: the consumption of wine and alcohol in Istanbul in the 19th century," in Eugene Rogan ed. *Outside in: on the margins of the modern Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002): 17-18.

²⁸ Hanioglu, *Young Turk in Opposition*.

²⁹ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*.

³⁰ Butrus Abu Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript," *Die Welt des Islam* 34 (1994): 173-203.

³¹ Frederick F. Anscombe, "Islam in the Age of Reform," *Past and Present* 208, no.1 (2010), 10.

one of the aims of the edict was to pacify the Muslims of provinces such as Albania and Bosnia, who had rebelled, under the previous Sultan, against a state that they regarded as un-Islamic and void of justice.

The academic field of Ottoman history has seen the publication of studies based on quantitative data. These studies do not usually dwell on the historical background of the forces of change, but are more interested in tracking changes within the state apparatus. The most comprehensive of these studies that contribute to an understanding of changes at the state level are the two volumes by Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: the Sublime Porte, 1789-1922*;³² and *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: a social history*.³³ These works provide a great number of statistical data regarding the growth, expansion, and systematisation of the civil apparatus during a period in which the state encouraged increasing representation and institutional connections, through the ministries, with the outside world.

Closer to the focus of the present study, there is a tendency to view the organisation of the Young Turks as an agent of change only during the revolution of 1908, considering its earlier stage as very marginal. This is the case, for instance, in Erik J. Zürcher's *The Unionist Factor*.³⁴ The choice of focus on a later period of Young Turk history is deliberate insofar as the field of late Ottoman studies has been traditionally concerned with finding the immediate precursors of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Therefore, the militarist period is more readily linked with the emergence

³² Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: the Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

³³ Carter V. Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: a social history* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

³⁴ Erik J. Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984).

of Atatürk's regime and seems to make his policies more intelligible, especially in light of the authoritarianism of the Unionist government in the post-Revolution environment. The historical research carried out by Feroz Ahmad in *The Young Turks, the Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish politics, 1908-1914*³⁵ follows the same rationale. In Ahmad's work, the two figures, Rıza and Sabahettin, are mentioned only in terms of their involvement in the developments after 1908 without reference to their paramount formative role in the period 1895 to 1902. Likewise, the monumental work of Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*,³⁶ does not do justice to the Young Turk organisation prior to the revolution; as for Rıza and Sabahettin, the author devotes a few pages surveying their main ideas rather than dwelling on the influential aspects of their ideologies. Erik J. Zürcher has neatly summed up this problem in his most recent book,³⁷ encapsulating well the argument that I develop in this thesis:

... works on the period abound in generalisations. ... Allen says they [the Young Turks] were 'young officers', which is also Geoffrey Lewis's classification, while Bernard Lewis talks about 'Muslim Turks, mostly soldiers' Richard Robinson describes them as '... western-oriented army officers', These obviously are very broad, and in some cases contradictory, generalisations.³⁸

Nevertheless, after recognising that available works have not adequately acknowledged the diversity within the organisation, Zürcher himself limits his discourse to the 1908 and post-1908 period and to the background of those who carried out the Revolution, devoting very few pages to the intellectual members of the 1890s and early 1900s.

³⁵ Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks, the Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish politics, 1908-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

³⁶ Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

³⁷ E. J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and the National Awakening: from the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

Another disputed aspect of Young Turk history deals with the role of religion and the idea of secularism in the conceptualisation of Young Turk policies. The work of Şükrü Hanioglu exemplifies a tendency to characterise the majority of Young Turk members as convinced atheists or unbelievers.³⁹ In the case of his first book, Hanioglu maintains that, when addressing the masses, the leaders of the Young Turk movement saw “Islam ... [as] nothing other than a device.”⁴⁰ I assert that, in order to assess this point, we should consider how extensive the readership of such journals was. In what sense could these ideas be directed to the masses? Given this doubt, we should consider these intellectuals as engaging with the topic of religion because they were seriously concerned with its adjudication in the public sphere and in governance. We should also focus on the ways in which they promoted a type of secularism that developed a relationship between modernity and religion that did not consider the two as incompatible. Similarly drastic statements regarding the religiosity of Young Turks have been addressed about the early founders of the Ottoman Union Society, in 1889,⁴¹ Abdullah Cevdet and his group, *Garbcılar* – the Westernisers. In an article dated 1898, Cevdet is reported to have written that “science is the religion of the elite, whereas religion is the science of the masses.”⁴² Yet, in his memoir, İbrahim Temo, who was one of the founding fathers of the Ottoman Union Society together with Cevdet, insisted on the religiosity of his contemporary. Temo said of the latter, “Abdullah Cevdet ... at the time [1889] was very devout.”⁴³ Evidently, the difference between their assigned atheism by the

³⁹ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*; and Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*.

⁴⁰ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 201.

⁴¹ See Chapter 2 for the emergence of the Ottoman Union Society.

⁴² Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 201.

⁴³ Temo, *İttihad ve Terakki Anıları*, 15.

wider scholarship and the emphasis placed in the writings of Young Turks on the role of religion in the new Empire deserves further critical exploration.

In order to comprehend better the Young Turk movement, it is important to appreciate the world in which its members lived. One of the most widely deployed books on the history of the Empire from the late eighteenth century onwards is that of Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey, a modern history*.⁴⁴ This book provides a balanced overview of the period of reform, from the rule of Sultan Selim III in 1789 up to the Kemalist period. However, more in-depth and illuminating for the Hamidian period (1876-1909), which coincides time-wise with the chronological focus of my research, are the works of Benjamin C. Fortna and Selim Deringil. The two studies constitute new historical perspectives on the much studied but rather misrepresented period from 1878 to 1909. Fortna's *Imperial Classroom*⁴⁵ offers an analysis of Hamidian schools and school curricula with a view to present the state in a double light: its agenda was to highlight the importance of tradition through the inculcation of Islamic morality among children, yet, the same state also pushed for reform and modernisation through the introduction of European teaching methods. This twofold approach challenges the idea that the period was characterised by two clearly distinct forces: tradition, embodied in the Sultan, and innovation epitomised in the Young Turk movement. Deringil's *The Well-protected Domains*⁴⁶ offers a similarly complex image of the period through the argument that the Ottoman state attempted to construct both internal and external images for consumption. One of the most important aspects of this latter work, for the purposes of my thesis, is that it provides

⁴⁴ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey, a modern history* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993).

⁴⁵ Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*.

⁴⁶ Selim Deringil, *The Well-protected domains* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998).

evidence of a political use of religion and, parallel to this, shows the eagerness of the state to provide a modern image of itself. Similarly to these two studies, I attempt to demonstrate that, both in the case of the Young Turks and of Sultan Abdülhamit II, the picture is more complicated than one of a struggle between the forces of modernity and those of tradition.

As mentioned before, another structural basis of this thesis is the role that exile played in the trajectory of Young Turk history and the opportunities this provided to the members of the movement. The literature on the exile of the Young Turk members is scarce, with one of the notable exceptions being the work of Hans-Lukas Kieser's *A Quest for Belonging*.⁴⁷ His project has a much broader time focus and is based on the diaspora of Switzerland rather than that of France. Kieser is interested in the diversity of the various ethnic and religious groups rather than in the common idea of Ottomanism as a proto-national discourse. Exile as a dynamic situation and experience has been seriously tackled in James McDougall's⁴⁸ work on Algeria. McDougall has argued that the space Algerian exiles occupied was instrumental in creating revolutionary-populist groups as well as developing a new idea of Algeria and of Algerian nationalism.⁴⁹ This position is very similar to that occupied by the Young Turk émigrés, such as Rıza and Sabahettin, since they, through the pages of their publications – such as *Mechveret Supplément Français* for instance – were constructing and debating a new idea of Ottomanism as the affiliative discourse for all the communities of the Empire.

⁴⁷ Hans-Lukas Kieser, *A Quest for belonging* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2007).

⁴⁸ James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

An important, if not decisive, aspect of their exile, was that these Ottoman émigrés saw themselves as part of an intellectual elite bestowed with the mission of enlightening the masses. This specific view of the Young Turk movement is more or less commented upon by all the historical works I have cited at the beginning of this section; however, one should add the work of Carter V. Findley, who states that the group’s idea regarding the future was leaning towards “technocratic authoritarianism and toward transmutation of liberal political forms into those of a tutelary regime.”⁵⁰ Also, very important is the argument that the intellectual elite served a social purpose, by filling a space outside the institutionalised powers and serving as a channel for the transmission of synthesised ideas. In the field of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century studies of the Ottoman Empire, this view has been developed by Fatma Müge Göcek in *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire*. In her study, Göcek claims that “[t]he Ottoman epistemological transition from ... Western imitation to interpretation occurred through the agency of the newly emergent group of Ottoman intellectuals.”⁵¹ Her focus, in *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire*, lies on the broader idea of intellectualism and not specifically on Young Turk history. Significantly, research in other societies that attempted to reform and modernise in similar ways was also instructive to my project. Cyrus Schayegh delves into the intellectual and activist endeavours of early twentieth Century Iranian modernists in *Who is knowledgeable is strong*.⁵² There, we see how a political and intellectual opposition, as loosely formed as the Young Turks, went on to fill “a

⁵⁰ Carter V. Findley, “The Advent of Ideology in the Islamic Middle East – Part II,” *Studia Islamica* 56 (1982): 147-180.

⁵¹ Fatma Müge Göcek, *Rise of the bourgeoisie, demise of the Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 123.

⁵² Cyrus Schayegh, *Who is knowledgeable is strong – Science, Class, and the Formation of Modern Iranian Society, 1900-1950* (Berkeley: University of Los Angeles Press, 2009).

nascent social space.”⁵³ A good explanation of what this resulted in, in the case of Turkey, is given by Erdal Kaynar’s “The Almighty Power of the Written Word: Young Turk conception of the Press.”⁵⁴ His study highlights how the elitism and consequent intellectualism of the Young Turk movement found the perfect expression in the publication of journals.

The publication of journals, a central feature of the intellectual and activist agenda of Rıza and Sabahettin, is central to this thesis. I am interested in the Ottoman press abroad both in relation to its commentary on affairs within the Empire and on those of Europe. Within the broader field of the history of the press in the Ottoman Empire, Orhan Koloğlu⁵⁵ has provided a comprehensive study of Ottoman press and the influence of the European one upon the former’s development. Koloğlu presents valuable information on circulation numbers as does Fatma Müge Göcek⁵⁶ in *Rise of the bourgeoisie, demise of the Empire*. Filling gaps in the history of Ottoman modernisation and its links with the press, the work of Ahmet Emin gives us a vivid picture of how the press viewed the ascent of Abdülhamit II to power and his consequent consolidation of power, also carried out through the establishment of a tight censorship system.⁵⁷ As I will develop in the following chapters, Hamidian censorship forced many Young Turk activists into exile and brought many of them to Europe, where they frequented philosophical and intellectual circles that influenced their own intellectual development. This is further evidence of how the

⁵³ Schayegh, *Who is knowledgeable is strong*, 2.

⁵⁴ Erdal Kaynar, “The Almighty Power of the Written Word: Young Turk conception of the Press,” MESA Conference, Washington, November 2008.

⁵⁵ Orhan Koloğlu, “La formation des intellectuels a la culture journalistique dans l’Empire Ottoman et l’influence de la presse étrangère,” *Varia Turcica* XXIII, Presse Turque et presse de Turquie, ed by Clayer, Popovic, Zarcone. Istanbul: Isis, 1992. 123-141.

⁵⁶ Göcek, *Rise of the bourgeoisie*.

⁵⁷ Ahmet Emin, *The Development of Modern Turkey as measured by its Press* (New York: Longmans, 1914),

history of the Ottoman Empire has been intimately intertwined with that of Europe rather than developing in separation from – or in imitation to – it. In relation to this, my thesis attempts to show the close link between these two geographical neighbouring settings. Exile, I maintain, placed Young Turk émigrés in the midst of European historical developments; members of the various Young Turk groups lived and shaped, and were shaped by, events taking place in cities such as Paris, Geneva and Brussels. Another project with the comparable aim to frame Ottoman history within the European historical tradition is that of Huri İslamoğlu. While the present study analyses this interconnection through the lens of intellectual history, in *A personal Agenda for Ottoman history*,⁵⁸ İslamoğlu shows how, already by 1815 (after the Congress of Vienna), the Ottoman Empire became integrated in European dynamics both economically and politically. İslamoğlu's view is shared by both Şükrü Hanioğlu, in *A brief history of the late Ottoman Empire*⁵⁹ and by Suraya Faroqhi, in her *Approaching Ottoman History*.⁶⁰

A domain of activity that illustrates the extent of exchange between the Empire and Europe is the history of Freemasonry. The study of Freemasonry serves two purposes: first, it shows the level of exchange between cultures that are usually portrayed as distant. Second, through the study of ethnic membership in its various organisations, research on Freemasonry clarifies the high regard for science and scientific advancement by a society that has been portrayed as quintessentially Muslim and, as this reductive reasoning goes, not prone to modernisation. Instead,

⁵⁸ Huri İslamoğlu, "A personal agenda for Ottoman history," Huri İslamoğlu ed., *Ottoman History as World History* (Istanbul: The Isis press, 2007).

⁵⁹ Hanioğlu, *Late Ottoman Empire*.

⁶⁰ Suraya Faroqhi, in her *Approaching Ottoman History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

by looking at the history of Freemasonry, one is informed of how some Muslim actors within the Ottoman Empire strived to devise a path for both religion and scientific advancement through participation in Freemason organisations. Instrumental are the works of Eric Anduze, *La Franc-Maçonnerie de la Turquie Ottomane 1908-1924*,⁶¹ and Thierry Zarcone, *Secret et sociétés secrètes en Islam*.⁶² Thierry Zarcone demonstrates that many influential members of the opposition⁶³ were also part of Freemason's organisations; Anduze goes as far as to argue that the Revolution of 1908 had its origin in a lodge of the French Grand Orient.⁶⁴

Beyond their shared passion for intellectual debate and interest in shaping a new political and social system, Rıza and Sabahettin came together to contemplate the feasibility of the idea of Ottomanism in the period up to 1908. In order to understand the socio-political projects that the members of the Young Turk movement were attempting to put forth, we have to assess, I argue, whether Ottomanism was by then a viable option for the Empire or whether other types of nationalistic discourses had by then gotten the upper hand. Niyazi Berkes states:

[b]efore the 1908 Revolution and even for a few years thereafter, no Turk, Young or Old, took Akçura's question seriously [whether the interests of the three components of the Empire, the Turks, the non-Turkish Muslims and the non-Muslims, coincided]. Turkish nationalism was to be enflamed only by further shocks from the West, by nationalisms within the Empire, and by Turkist nationalist developments in Russia.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Eric Anduze, *La Franc-maçonnerie de la Turquie ottomane 1908-1924* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005).

⁶² Thierry Zarcone, *Secret et sociétés secrètes en Islam* (Milan: Archè, 2002).

⁶³ Among others, he cites Namık Kemal and Sultan Murat V. Thierry Zarcone, *Secret et sociétés secrètes en Islam* (Milan: Archè, 2002).

⁶⁴ Anduze, *La Franc-maçonnerie de la Turquie ottomane*, 9.

⁶⁵ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 322.

A similar conclusion regarding the Ottoman Arab section is reached by Hasan Kayalı in *Arabs and Young Turks*.⁶⁶ Kayalı maintains that the Young Turk movement was even more Ottomanist in its composition than the Young Ottomans themselves; he claims this by showing that a large proportion of Ottoman Arabs were interested in the success of the Ottomanist project.⁶⁷ Another author who discusses the feasibility of an Ottomanist plan at this stage in the history of the Ottoman Empire is Renzo Falaschi,⁶⁸ who, through the study of the life of Ismail Kemal,⁶⁹ shows that, among the Balkan minorities, the plan was believed to be realistic provided that it included some kind of administrative autonomy for the various ethnic and religious communities. Similar conclusions are shared by Şerif Mardin⁷⁰ and Çağlar Keyder⁷¹ in their contributions to the edited volume *After Empire*.⁷²

This intellectual debate on Ottomanism that was launched forcefully and passionately by Rıza and Sabahettin constitutes, in my opinion, a significant piece in the puzzle of evaluating the Ottoman legacy in general, and of the Young Turk movement in particular, as part of the later developments of the Empire and the Turkish Republic. In a well-known essay, Roderic Davison has stated that, “[t]he Republic owes much to the Empire; the Empire also owes much to the Republic, for some concepts and institutions that the Empire developed but could not make

⁶⁶ Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks – Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*; especially pages 38-51.

⁶⁸ Renzo Falaschi, *Ismail Kemal Bey Vlora – Il pensiero e l’opera attraverso i documenti italiani* (Roma: Bardi Editore, 1985).

⁶⁹ Refer to Chapter 5 for details on Ismail Kemal.

⁷⁰ Şerif Mardin, “The Ottoman Empire,” in Karen Barkey and Mark Von Hagen ed., *After Empire* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997).

⁷¹ Çağlar Keyder, “The Ottoman Empire,” in Karen Barkey and Mark Von Hagen ed., *After Empire* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997).

⁷² Karen Barkey and Mark Von Hagen ed., *After Empire* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997).

workable, the Republic took over and made workable.”⁷³ Davison does not focus on the Young Turk period, but takes into consideration the larger era of reform; his appreciation of the germane work carried out by many intellectuals of the reform movement is paramount to our assessment of that period. Another more temporally relevant approach is taken by Erik Jan Zürcher in his book, *The Young Turk Legacy and the National Awakening*,⁷⁴ even though the focus is on later Young Turk history. The roots of Kemalism’s forced modernisation are traced back to the approach adopted by the Unionists in the post-1908 environment. However, the pressing question, for which I provide a possible answer, remains un-tackled by Zürcher: where do the ideological roots of the forced modernisation lie if not in the elitist intellectual approach of the early Young Turk movement?

Researchers of modern Turkey are currently interested in some of the questions analysed in this thesis. In *Faces of the State: secularism and public life in Turkey*,⁷⁵ anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin argues that, in the public sphere of today’s Turkey, people are still debating the meaning of concepts such as secularism, religion, and cultural belonging. I maintain that these debates echo the dilemmas discussed by the Young Turks of the late nineteenth century. The author contends that a common depiction of Turkey today as dichotomised between secular and religious interests does not actually represent Turkish reality; this reality is composed, instead, of the very discussions and reframing performed by Turkish political actors, intellectuals, and citizens. Before Navaro-Yashin, Şerif Mardin, in

⁷³ Roderic Davison, “Atatürk’s Reforms: Back to the Roots,” in Davison *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774 – 1923: the impact of the West*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 243.

⁷⁴ Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*.

⁷⁵ Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: secularism and public life in Turkey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

his *Power, Civil Society and Culture*,⁷⁶ presents us a dynamic whereby processes that started in the period under scrutiny here have found renewed interest or resonance around the 1980s – a whole century after the action of Rıza, Sabahettin, and their contemporaries.

Contribution to the field

Late Ottoman history is not lacking in analyses and studies of the Young Turk era; however, there has not been as of yet a comparative study of the key figures of a distinct phase, a phase that I define as the intellectual one and that covers the period between 1895 and 1902. In providing this analysis, I concentrate on the contribution of two individuals who not only shaped the history of the movement, but also remained relevant through their written legacy to Ottoman and Republican history even if they themselves were eventually side-lined. My thesis provides an analysis of an unseen side of a much discussed era. It is an attempt to highlight some aspects of Young Turk history which shed light on the future Republic and which are, as Şerif Mardin described, “latent ... much more elusive [but, simultaneously] more interesting than the explicit political ideas... .”⁷⁷ The available literature has, until now, treated aspects of this period with little nuance. The first aspect is concerned with the paramount importance of exile in the intellectual and physical production of journals. The opportunities that the Young Turk members had at their disposal, precisely because of their exile, were of practical significance, as they were actually able to publish material that would have been censored in the Empire. Exile gave them the chance to mix with worldwide intellectuals and reach a level of synthesis

⁷⁶ Şerif Mardin, “Power, Civil Society and Culture,” in Şerif Mardin *Religion, society and modernity in Turkey* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006): 23-43.

⁷⁷ Şerif Mardin, “Continuity and Change in the Young Turks,” in Şerif Mardin *Religion, society and modernity in Turkey* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006): 164.

that was previously unparalleled. Another obscured feature that I investigate is the trajectory and complexity of the ideologies of Rıza and Sabahettin. While their ideological approaches have been usually dismissed as being too abstract, I highlight their coherent and dynamic nature, as well as explore the frictions and dilemmas that emerge from their ideological development. I claim that their dilemmas, which were essentially dilemmas of implementation of their ideology on the ground, should also be seen as indications of a vibrant intellectual exercise.

Another area that has escaped the attention it deserves is the issue of periodisation of Young Turk history. As I discussed earlier, the history of the movement is usually presented as a continuum from its inception in 1889 to the Revolution of 1908 and even beyond, until World War One and the advent of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In my research, I forward the suggestion that the period in question, 1889 to 1902, forms a stage *per se* and an extremely formative one.⁷⁸ This period will leave a much more lasting legacy than the post-Revolution itself, which did not bring about change on the nature of power – which remained as authoritarian under the Unionists as it was despotic under Abdülhamit II. The activities of Rıza and Sabahettin, in fact, inaugurated discussions on the meaning of modernity, on the cultural roots of the Empire, and on the role of religion in society and the state. All this is done within a framework where the struggle between the Young Turk organisation and the Sublime Porte is not taken to be one between the forces of reform and those of tradition, but between two forces which had a similar stand on some issues: for

⁷⁸ As I have discussed earlier on in the chapter, among the major historians of the period, the only scholar who recognised the existence of different periods (one ideological, the other one activist) within the broader history of the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire is Şükrü Hanioglu. However, Hanioglu does not acknowledge enough the importance of the intellectual phase for future developments and does not provide a detailed study of the Young Turks émigrés who, as in the case of Rıza and Sabahettin, undoubtedly shaped future articulations of reformist thought.

example, the importance of the Empire as a unifying idea as opposed to its demarcation along ethnic and religious differences was shared by both Rıza and the Sultan. My dissertation underscores plurality within the Young Turk organisation itself, and demonstrates that this plurality enriched the intellectual discourses among the various Young Turk members to a level that was unparalleled in the Empire either before them or after.

The sources I have included as core part of my research have either not been used in the available literature yet, or, if included in previous studies, they have not been employed in a comparative manner. For instance, the memoirs of Ahmet Rıza in Paris have not been included in any of the works I have encountered so far in English. In terms of foreign language publications, the monographs of Rıza, as *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale en Orient*,⁷⁹ and of Sabahettin, *How can Turkey be saved?*,⁸⁰ do not feature as the focus of any other study. Lastly, this thesis shows that, far from being immobile, Islam as religion and culture was in on-going evolution in search for its compatibility with scientific modernity and political transformation, such as parliamentarism. Finally, the present study approaches this material from an angle that attempts to frame an Ottoman experience in relation to a wider European and, in a sense, a global context.

⁷⁹ Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*.

⁸⁰ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*.

Chapter Organisation

The thesis is organised into four main chapters framed by an introduction and conclusive remarks. Chapter 2 provides an assessment of the emergence of the Young Turk organisation, its connections with other contemporary organisations – such as the religious establishment and Freemasonry – and some of its sources of inspiration. Further on, the chapter launches into a discussion on the role of exile and of the press in exile; Paris, as the specific centre of exile is looked at in conjunction with the idea of elitism and intellectualism. Together, space and experience constitute central lenses that help us understand the writings and ideas of the two ideologues in question. Chapters 3 and 4 explore the ideologies Rıza and Sabahettin through their own writings – both monographs and journals articles. The two chapters shed light on the sources of inspiration of the two men, positivism and social science respectively. The chapters examine how they envisaged reform and how they perceived previous attempts at reform, including those of the contemporary regime of Abdülhamit II. Moreover, Chapters 3 and 4 discuss Rıza’s and Sabahettin’s understanding of secularism and their suggestions on the role of religion in a reformed state as well as their opinion of what constituted an acceptable degree of external help. This last issue becomes pivotal in light of its link with the thinkers’ respective stance on the fate of ethno-religious communities. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the ambiguities and tensions that emerge in the works of the two intellectuals, and which give us important clues into the level of intellectual enthusiasm that characterised the Young Turks in exile. What will emerge is a picture of two individuals who, even though shared a disdain for the despotic nature of Hamidian rule, adopted distinct angles through which to imagine reform. Influenced by two different philosophical currents, positivism and British liberalism,

through the study of social science, Rıza and Sabahettin shared the feeling of a mission as exponents of enlightened intellectual elites but ended up disagreeing on the future organisation of the Empire: Mehmet Sabahettin emphasised federalism, in which diversity was institutionalised to ensure a balanced distribution of rights. Ahmet Rıza, on the other hand, was convinced that ethnic or religious difference should not feature centrally in organisation for the sake of a supra-ethnic, supra-religious Ottomanist project. These divergent visions resulted in a rupture between the members of the Young Turk movement that I investigate in detail in Chapter 5. This part of the thesis looks at the Congress of Ottoman Liberals that was held in Paris from the 4th to the 9th of February, 1902. I argue that this Congress represents a critical moment in the history of the Young Turk movement as a whole, as it is the moment when the two major groups, headed by Rıza and Sabahettin, were supposed to unite into a coherent and strong opposition faction. Instead, as the divergence between the two leaders became apparent, their two groups clashed and decided to go their own way. In fact, the failure of the Young Turk delegates at the Congress to agree on a united programme marks the end of the intellectual phase of the Young Turk movement. Lastly, as it will be argued in the Conclusion, however unfeasible their plan might look today, the two men and their numerous followers were fully invested in the feasibility of Ottomanism and actively worked towards its attainment. Even though it took very little time to turn their promising visions into a missed opportunity, their intellectual legacy lived on past their time and survives to this day in the heated negotiation of the identity of modern Turkey.

CHAPTER 2 – IDEAS, MEDIA AND NETWORKS OF THE YOUNG TURK MOVEMENT IN EXILE

One of the difficulties of demarcating the trajectory of the Young Turk organisation is that the group was rather loosely organised, hence tracing a unilinear development since its onset as Ottoman Union Society in 1889 is impossible. Şükrü Hanioglu¹ has provided a comprehensive overview of the various sub-groups that made up the organisation of the Young Turks, yet, precisely because of the diversity between the various groups and the different focus of the two volumes Hanioglu authored, his work has not highlighted the link between the movement itself and earlier, as well as other contemporary organisations. So far, the larger literature has not given attention to the importance of exile for either the external branch of the organisation or its internal one, or to the spread of the printed press within the Empire and the unanticipated outcomes of the tight Hamidian censorship on the ideological trajectory of the opposition groups. In this chapter, I focus on precisely these phenomena.

I initially discuss the sources of ideological and practical inspiration for the movement at large, so that the ideas of the Young Turk members are contextualised within a broader discourse of modernisation and renewal of the Empire. Even though they are specific to the present discussion around late Ottoman reform, the ideas presented in this chapter can be compared to similar intellectual endeavours of the nineteenth century around the geographical area that Marshall Hodgson has labelled Islamdom.² I argue that exile in Europe was both practical and formative for

¹ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*; and *Preparation for a Revolution*.

² Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 58-59.

figures such as Rıza and Sabahettin: it provided political links with either Western government or civil society, and, at the same time, contacts with the European intelligentsia, which, as we will see in the next pages, heavily influenced the intellectual development of the members of the organisation. This dynamic is not unique to Ottoman intellectuals but needs to be seen in comparison with the efforts of Muslim intellectuals of the Middle East and North Africa to reconcile technology, science and the idea of modernity with religious and cultural values. In this sense, the efforts of Rıza and Sabahettin can be seen as part of an intellectual exercise carried out by many different actors. In 1826, Rifā`a Badawī Rafī al-Tahtawī went to Paris and came back with a fully articulated argument about the compatibility between science and Islam.³ In 1870, two simultaneous events pointed to the same direction: while Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani was speaking in front of the Darülfünun of the necessity for the Muslim world to follow the example of ‘civilised nations’ on modernisation, Namık Kemal was in London and was stunned by what he considered as impressive infrastructural progress in the city, hoping that the Empire would embark on a similar path of reconstruction. Meanwhile, Abdülhamit II had embarked on his own, somewhat reactionary, project of modernity.⁴ In brief, the development of Rıza and Sabahettin’s ideas were an integral part of a broader process whereby different actors were aspiring to transform the make-up of Muslim societies and, specifically in their case, attempting to answer the haunting question ‘How can the state be saved?’

After setting up the larger framework for the development of Rıza’s and Sabahettin’s ideology, I analyse the context of exile. I need to clarify here that the

³ John Esposito and John Donohue ed., *Islam in transition – Muslim perspectives* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter.

type of exile that Young Turk members faced was the result of an active choice rather than an imposition by the regime. By being abroad, these opponents to the rule of Abdülhamit were free to voice their grievances against what they regarded to be a despotic regime. In this sense, exile needs to be seen in a different light from what it would mean as forced marginalisation in a remote corner of the Empire. The available literature has not tackled the significance of exile for political opponents in the late Ottoman period, although it has dwelled extensively on the use of exile for the inhabitants of the provinces.⁵ The history of Ottoman Syria provides some noteworthy examples, as some influential families were punished after the events of 1860 by being sent into internal exile and by temporarily losing all of their powers. Therefore, internal exile constituted an important punishing tool of the state as it brought shame and serious setbacks to the political and economic aspirations of various activists. In relation to the Young Turk organisation, this was not the case. The prerequisite for internal exile to work is primarily that those who are the target of it have an active interest in status-quo dynamics, while the likes of Rıza and Sabahettin did not. Moreover, while internal exile removed the individual from his basis of power and marginalised him in a remote area, the self-imposed exile of the Young Turk group brought its members right where they needed to be politically: in the heart of Europe, which, they thought, would serve as a moral and intellectual partner to their cause as well as platform where they could advertise their activities and ideas.

⁵ In 1860, a series of revolts broke out in Mount Lebanon and Damascus that led to the massacre of a part of the Christian population of these areas. The Ottoman authorities, under the then governorship of Cemal Pasha, punished those supposedly culpable of inciting the masses by public hanging and forced exile. For a general overview, see Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in *The Modern Middle East: a reader* edited by Albert Hourani, Philip S. Khouri and Mary C. Wilson, (London: I.B.Tauris, 1993), 83-110.

This chapter also discusses how the tight censorship set by the Hamidian regime, instead of proving a successful tool in quelling the opposition, gave more substance to self-imposed exile and more space for the free discussion of issues that would have been banned inside the Empire. Censorship, thus, enabled a conversation with a wider intellectual spectrum than the Ottoman one. I intend to demonstrate that exile in France, and specifically in Paris, was formative and decisive for the organisation's survival.

Intellectual predecessors and contemporary allies

The Young Turk opposition was a conglomerate of small groups tied together through some general ideals: an orientation to rationality and an endorsement of the rule of law, a wish for the reintroduction of a constitutional system, and the extension of rights to all citizens of the Empire. Finally, a driving force for the movement was the modernisation of political institutions and religion: “[s]imultaneously, ... [the group] include[d] a tendency toward technocratic authoritarianism and toward transmutation of liberal political forms into those of a tutelary regime.”⁶ In fact, even though differing greatly in the manner through which the Sultan would be deposed, and while they disagreed on the alternative socio-political system to put in place, the groups under the Young Turk umbrella thought they constituted an enlightened elite entrusted with the defence and tutelage of the rights of the citizens. Understanding the Young Turks' sources of inspiration is vital to the creation of an intellectual and historical link between earlier attempts at modernisation and reform and the period I analyse. I suggest that, drawing on these sources of inspiration, the first ideologues of the Young Turk movement managed to

⁶ Findley, “The Advent of Ideology,” 168.

crystallise and synthesise ideas that had been around before the constitution of the group itself and which would contribute greatly to the development of the Empire towards the twentieth century.

The Young Turk movement was shaped by the cultural exchanges that developed in the Translation Office – the training ground for the Ottoman Muslim diplomatic service – the ideas of the Young Ottoman movement, and, finally, the ideology of the First Constitutional Period. Moreover, all Young Turk parties were largely inspired by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European philosophical and political developments and received logistical help from a number of Ottoman and European organisations, one the most interesting of which is Freemasonry.⁷

One of the first channels of transmission of progressive ideas to the intellectual elite is considered to be the Translation Office. The *Bab-ı Âli Tercüme Odası* was first established within the Foreign Ministry in 1833 under the reign of Sultan Mahmut II. This office, which has been referred to by some as a literary club,⁸ “... became the training ground for Ottoman diplomats, and also for the new intelligentsia who played a major role in ideological developments during the nineteenth century.”⁹ Prior to the establishment of the Translation Office, every diplomatic transaction between the Ottoman state and foreign governments was carried out between the dragomans (translators) of the embassies and the official translator of the Imperial *Divan* (Council). The latter post had been held, until 1821, by members of minorities,

⁷ Şükrü Hanioglu, “Notes on the Young Turks and the Freemasons, 1875 – 1908,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 2 (Apr. 1989): 194.

⁸ Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform*, 204.

⁹ Kemal Karpat, “The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3, n. 3 (1972): 255.

especially from the Phanariote Greek families.¹⁰ But with the onset of the Greek War of Independence (1821-1831), Ottoman statesmen grew wary of appointing Greeks to such important posts; “[t]his left the Ottoman government with a serious communications problem at a time when diplomatic contacts were becoming more and more important to the survival of the Empire. Between 1821 and 1833 the business of translation was conducted through makeshift arrangements.”¹¹ Finally, in 1833, the *Tercüme Odası* was established and became an important locus of intellectual training. As Erik J. Zürcher notes, “[s]ervice in the translation office and in one of the embassies are two elements which we encounter time and again when we scrutinize the curricula vitae of reformist Ottoman bureaucrats of the nineteenth century.”¹² This office was soon to become the training ground for all future reformists: from the Young Ottomans, to the men of the Tanzimat, to the Young Turks.¹³ Among those employed in the office, Namık Kemal represented the Young Ottomans, *Mizançı* Murat the Young Turks, and Ali and Fuad the *Tanzimat* men. The Office gradually increased in prestige and by 1871 it acquired as high an importance as the Chef de Protocole and the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, second only to the actual Foreign Minister within the same Ministry.

Şerif Mardin has written on:

[on] one instance in which the Translation Bureau acted as a funnel for the conveying to the Young Ottomans of the ideas of the

¹⁰The Phanariote Greeks were part of the Istanbul Greeks who, during the 17th and 18th centuries, acquired important positions within the civil bureaucracy and among the Christian Orthodox ruling group. Some of them became official translators, others were influential merchants and bankers, and all had links with the Patriarchate. For this reason, they were looked at with suspicion by the Greeks of Peloponnesus, who eventually inaugurated an organised rebellion against Istanbul.

¹¹ Zürcher, *Turkey, a modern history*, 46.

¹² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³ *Mizançı* Murat wrote an account of his service in the Translation Office, in the form of a parody, in his novel *Turfanda mı yoksa Turfa mı*. See Findley, *Civil Officialdom*, 119.

Enlightenment that had permeated the Balkans at an earlier date ... One of the employees of the Translation Bureau who had acted as Kemal's tutor [Namık Kemal] in French was a certain Mehmed Mansur Efendi ... a Macedonian Christian converted to Islam. He was an amateur historian [and] it is quite possible that it was Mehmed Efendi who first taught Kemal the virtues of national cohesion.¹⁴

Beyond this institution, another important source of inspiration for the Young Turks was the group known as the Young Ottomans as well as the figure of Midhat Pasha,¹⁵ the main character behind the drafting of the Constitution of 1876. The affinity between groups is hard to miss given their name. Carter V. Findley wrote that:

[t]he name 'Jeune Turc' was also used at the time of the Young Ottoman movement, of which even the members applied the term to themselves when writing in French. The application of the term to the activists of the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*) and its various offshoots thus signifies, not the recognition of some difference between the Young Turks and the earlier movement, but rather the opposite.¹⁶

The Young Ottomans were an exquisite example of synthesis, as they tried to harmonise the modernist traits found in Europe – which they had picked up initially at the *Tercüme Odası* – with Muslim and Ottoman realities: “[o]verall the most distinctive contribution of the Young Ottomans lies in their attempt not just to

¹⁴ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 211.

¹⁵ Born in Istanbul in November 1822, Midhat Pasha was one of the most influential figures of the late Ottoman Empire. Called by many “the father of the Constitution” of 1876, he held many high offices. In 1868, Midhat was appointed head of the newly formed Council of State, with the mandate to discuss and draft legislation. In 1872, he was appointed Grand Vizier by Sultan Abdülaziz, yet his office lasted for only 80 days, after which he held the position of Minister of Justice (from 1872 to 1875). Midhat allied himself “with groups and individuals in Istanbul who desired change, including members of the *ulamā*. As public discontent mounted in 1876, Midhat became one of the principal movers of political change.” Roderic Davison, “Midhat Pasha,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Following the deposition of Abdülaziz and that of Sultan Murat V, Midhat backed the appointment of Abdülhamit II, as the latter promised the promulgation of a constitution if enthroned. However, the constitutionalism of Midhat soon clashed with the despotism of Abdülhamit II and the former was dismissed from Grand Vizier and exiled to Brindisi in February 1877. The friction between the two culminated in Midhat's arrest and death sentence in June 1881. Pressured by Ottoman and European pleas for leniency, the Sultan converted the death sentence into life banishment in Taif, where Midhat died in mysterious circumstances in 1884.

¹⁶ Findley, “The Advent of Ideology,” 156.

introduce an enlarged volume of Western ideas, particularly ones drawn from the liberal political philosophy, but to demonstrate the compatibility of those ideas with Islamic tradition.”¹⁷ As we shall see, the Young Turks, and Ahmet Rıza and prince Mehmet Sabahettin among them, were heavily influenced by Western culture but were convinced of the necessity to maintain, even if to different extents, traits of an Eastern/Muslim culture, values, and philosophy. This is very reminiscent of the Young Ottomans. Regarding this, it is interesting to note that Mustafa Fazil Pasha is mentioned as “chef du parti de la Jeune Turquie” in the journal *Mechveret*.¹⁸ Another reference to him can be found in another article in which also Namık Kemal is mentioned in the following manner:

[Mustafa Fazil] ... grand home d’Etat qui, en Turquie, contribua largement à la diffusion de l’instruction, au développement des idées libérales en envoyant à Paris et à Londres, soit des étudiants, soit des administrateurs et des poètes tels que l’illustre Kémal, et en créant le parti de la Jeune-Turquie dont nous sommes aujourd’hui si fiers de porter le nom.¹⁹

Especially important for my discussion, is the last sentence, which creates an uninterrupted continuum between the actions of the Young Ottomans and those of the Young Turks. Another influential figure was that of Midhat Pasha, the drafter of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876. For Ahmet Rıza in particular, but for prince Sabahettin as well, the Constitutional experience fostered and implemented under the guidance of Midhat Pasha represented a pillar for the future development of

¹⁷ For the outcome of the synthesis, consult Findley, “The Advent of Ideology,” 151, or the work of Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*.

¹⁸ Ahmet Rıza, “Une Explication,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 10 (1 May 1896), 1.

¹⁹ “La visite de S.A. la princesse Nazli au Comité,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 20 (1 Octobre 1896), 1. In historical scholarship, this link was highlighted as follows: “It was also during their time in college that most of the Young Turks discovered the existence of a constitutional opposition movement. By word of mouth they were made aware of the banned works of the constitutional movement of the 1860s, the Young ottomans and especially of the fiery calls for reform and patriotism of Namık Kemal.” Erik J. Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*, 113.

political opposition to the rule of Abdülhamit II. *Mechveret*, the journal founded by Ahmet Rıza in Paris, constantly featured articles and eulogies of the life of Midhat²⁰ and held his exile and assassination as evidence of the Sultan's treachery and unwillingness to compromise. Likewise, the English supplement to the journal *Osmanlı* wrote that "[t]he spirit of the noble Midhat Pasha inspires all true Mussulmans, 'the Constitution' is not dead, it sleeps, but it will arise the stronger from [sic] its sleep, to become a living fact in a regenerated empire."²¹

Midhat represents a significant transition in Ottoman political thought. He suggested that a nation can be constructed on the basis of a territorial affiliation rather than on the religious creed, that checks and balances on governments are needed as guarantees for the well-being of the population at large, and that citizens should become more than mere recipients of higher decisions. These ideas constituted not only the basis for Young Turk thought, but also a blueprint for developments in the post-Ottoman period.²²

In every discussion of the late nineteenth century, the crucial and rather controversial issue of the West and its interference in Ottoman affairs was especially prominent. The role of the West was deployed as leverage for advocacy: according to the specific political approach of a given writer or political player, the West represented either the ultimate salvation or the ultimate evil, especially in the post

²⁰ See, for example, the collection of articles praising his person, his work and the importance of his legacy in "Midhat Pacha," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 135 (1 Dec. 1902): 4; "Midhat Pacha," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 136 (1 January 1903): 4; or "The Blot on Turkey," *English Supplement to the Osmanlı* 1 (15 July 1898), 24-31.

²¹ "England and Turkey," *English Supplement to the Osmanlı* 1 (15 July 1898), 17.

²² *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., www.brillonline.nl. Accessed on 5 January 2011. Roderic Davison, s.v. "Midhat Pasha,"

World War One literature and until the late 1980s. Even though it seems that the role of the West has been overstated in most books,²³ it is equally important to acknowledge that a specific set of ideas, discussed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe, made their way into the political formulations of Ottoman thinkers and activists who perceived them as suitable approaches to the social and political life of a modern Empire.²⁴ I do not wish to suggest that without the West the Empire would have never accomplished reform, but, rather, that the existence of some of these concepts, their discussion across the borders, and their dynamic adaptation represented milestones in the development of the Young Turk *modus pensandi*. Moreover, the contact and exchange, but most significantly the common experiences of struggle against repression between the Young Turks and other activists featured on a “world time” scale,²⁵ to which Benjamin Fortna refers. This world time scale, essentially an awareness of contemporaneity between different contexts, was instrumental in shaping the ideologies, dreams and plans of many within the Young Turk organisation. In this light, it would be wrong to underestimate the importance of exile in general and of Paris as a global city in particular.

²³ See for example Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*. Bernard Lewis claims that Ottoman modernisation was attained, and decline averted only through a tight system of Westernisation.

²⁴ Throughout this thesis, the ideals borrowed, copied, or adapted from Western Europe will be referred to as Western. However, this is done for the sake of brevity and should not be taken as a claim to Western originality, superiority or homogeneity. I do not argue that the ideals that manifested themselves in eighteenth and nineteenth century in Western Europe were intrinsically the result of a ‘Western’ thought. They are, rather, the product of the intellectual development of the whole human civilisation (North – South and East – West) that happens to take shape in Europe at a specific point in time because of the political and economic atmosphere of this setting. As I will show in the thesis, Rıza and Sabahattin defined the ‘West’ in different ways and pointed to diverse settings as their inspiration (France and Britain respectively)

²⁵ Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, 12.

Among Western philosophical ideas, those that most attracted the Young Turks were the same that inspired the French Revolution as well as the philosophical movement of positivism; both were liberal in their conceptualisation but could and were reconciled with Islamic traits. These ideas were ‘liberty, equality and nationality’, which appeared centrally in the proto-nationalist ideology of Ottomanism, *Osmanlılık*. The ideal of liberty, which Bernard Lewis refers to as “organised liberty”²⁶ in this case, envisaged a representative government and the rule of law. As for citizenship, the Ottomanism of the Young Turks aspired to equality among all the citizens of the Ottoman state, regardless of religion and ethnicity. The idea of equality would extend to all nations; in this respect, there should be a decrease in foreign encroachment in the affairs of the Empire. However, if the first meaning of equality seemed to be shared by all, the question of foreign intervention was to become one of the main reasons for discord and division within the Young Turk movement.²⁷ Undoubtedly, all the Young Turk exponents opposed a direct takeover of the state by a foreign government, but the degree of foreign presence considered acceptable varied widely from group to group, from a total rejection of foreign presence to an Ottoman state under considerable foreign influence. The concept of nationality, intertwined with equality and citizens rights, was, beyond its idealistic appeal, a necessity in late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire because of the loss of many territories to newly emerging nations especially in the Balkans.

Besides this more strictly intellectual heritage, the Young Turk movement benefited from the patronage, both logistical and ideological, of other contemporary

²⁶ Bernard Lewis, “The Impact of the French Revolution on Turkey,” *Cahiers d’Histoire Mondiale* 1, n. 1 (1953): 106. (105-125)

²⁷ See Chapter 5.

organisations. Various studies have highlighted a tight link between Freemasonry and the Young Turk movement. It has been shown that both the organisational and operational model of the Masonic lodges became, for the first Young Turk members, a blueprint for structuring their own organisations; Freemasonry was also a channel for the transmission of western political ideas and a locus for intellectual and cultural exchange. Masonic lodges became active supporters and allies of the Young Turk movement, at least during the first phase of its development as various organisations.²⁸ Even though the material at my disposal only hints at this connection, it seems that Freemasons also helped Ottoman exiles take part in the intellectual circles of Europe.²⁹ Moreover, it was through some Masonic channels that the idea of Ottomanism as a proto-nationalist ideology was maintained by some of the minorities, especially the Greek one. The underground work of Cleanthi Scalieri, an Istanbul Greek banker who, in 1865, joined the French Masonic lodge *L'Union d'Orient*, was instrumental in the preservation of the Ottomanist ideology. Scalieri was closely involved in anti-Abdülhamit II campaigning, in Freemasonry, and in supporting the Young Turk movement; he was a staunch supporter of the involvement of the Western powers in the affairs of the Empire. He was part of a group that aimed at bringing back the late Sultan Murat as a more suitable, enlightened head of a new Byzantine state. Murat was a liberal and had apparently been initiated, in Scalieri's presence, to the Freemason lodge of Italia Risorta.³⁰

²⁸ See, for instance, Zarcone, *Secret et sociétés secrètes* and Paul Dumont, "Freemasonry in Turkey: a by-product of Western penetration," *European Review* 13, n. 3 (2005): 481-493.

²⁹ See Rıza, *Ahmed Rıza Bey'in Anıları*; Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*; and "Rapports divers sur le sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914," *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169 Mahmoud Pacha (beau-frère du sultan de Constantinople).

³⁰ See Cléanthis Scalieri, *Appel a la justice internationale des grandes puissances par rapport au grand process de Constantinople par suite de la mort du feu Sultan Aziz* (Athens: Imprimerie l'Union, 1881), 17.

The two Masonic lodges, the French *Union d'Orient* and the Greek *I Proodos*³¹ (Progress), of which Scalieri was an influential member, played an instrumental role in the political life of the Empire. These two lodges emerged between 1863 and 1874 under the leadership of a lawyer, Louis Amiable,³² who opened membership rights to the Turkish component of the Empire and translated the lodge's regulations and Masonic rites into Turkish. These gestures increased the appeal of Freemasonry to those who wanted to join but had been alienated by the absence of Turco-Muslim attendance. After this move, between 1865 and 1869 Turkish membership in Masonic organisations rose drastically, going from a low of three to a high of 53 members. New Muslim members were mostly intellectuals from circles close to the Sultan, "Ottoman high officials, army pashas and statesmen"³³ interested in the introduction of liberal laws inside the Empire. Around the same time, in the late 1860s, Istanbul witnessed a boom not only in membership, but also in the number of lodges. According to Dumont, by that time, "there were about 15 lodges in the Imperial capital, all connected to various European orders. Four were dependent on the Great Lodge of England, four others on the *Grand Orient* of France, at least five on the *Grande Oriente* of Italy, one on the German Great Lodge of Hamburg, one on the Great Lodge of Ireland, and one or two on the *Meghali Anatoli* of Greece."³⁴

As mentioned, European Freemasonry served as a model for the establishment of most secret societies, which, under the umbrella of the Young Turk movement, opposed the despotic rule of Abdülhamit and were ideologically dedicated to the cause of scientific advancement. For example, the Italian lodge of *Italia Risorta*

³¹ According to Thierry Zarcone, both Namık Kemal and Sultan Murat V were members of this organisation.

³² (1837 – 1896).

³³ Dumont, "Freemasonry in Turkey," 485.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 482.

diffused to the Ottomans the ideas and organisational framework of Mazzini and Garibaldi. The first organisers of the internal branch of the Young Turk movement adopted the ideas of secrecy, hierarchical structure, and the limited knowledge of other members of the *Carbonaro*-Freemasonry organisations. Even though, with the advent to power of Sultan Abdülhamit II, Freemason organisations came close to disappearing, they still provided help to those Ottomans who had voluntarily gone into exile. Ahmet Rıza himself rejected the possibility of becoming a member of any such organisation on the basis of their ideological clash with his positivist leanings, but in 1892 he apparently recognised that “... la Franc-Maçonnerie a joué un rôle positif dans la lutte contre le cléricalisme et pour la liberté de conscience.”³⁵ In light of this, Hanioglu suggests that the real beginnings of the Young Turk movement are to be found in the Masonic lodge known as the *Envâr-ı Şarkîye* (Lights of the East). This lodge was established in mid-1870s by Cléanthes Scalieri, whose agenda, as briefly mentioned earlier, was to fund a new Byzantine state that would unite both Turks and Greeks under the guidance of an enlightened Sultan. Even though the *Envâr-ı Şarkîye* was short-lived, it gave way to a more active and effective organisation, the *Osmanlı Hürriyetperverân Cemiyeti*, also known as *Le Comité Libéral Ottoman*. In Hanioglu’s words, this committee was “none other than the cover name used by Freemasons in their political endeavours in Turkey.”³⁶ This organisation started publishing journals and other works, both in English and

³⁵ Paul Dumont writes that “[a] number of the Young Turks were Freemasons, notably Ahmet Rıza Bey ...” Dumont, “Freemasonry in Turkey,” 489. However, among the various sources covered by this research, this is the only instance where this positivist Young Turk is said to have been a Freemason. Hanioglu is not convinced of the possibility that Rıza would abandon the positivist circle to join the Freemasonry but he nonetheless maintains that the latter was convinced of the importance of Masonic ideas for the reformist movement (Hanioglu, “Young Turks and Freemasons,” 193). A general but important link between Freemasonry and Young Turk activities is also strongly supported by Paul Fesch in Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d’Abdul-Hamid*.

³⁶ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 36.

French.³⁷ The aims of the *Osmanlı Hürriyetperverân Cemiyeti* were the application of drastic reforms at the political level and an increase in individual freedom for the Ottoman citizens in a multi-religious Empire; all this would be achieved with the help of foreign influential figures.³⁸ This plan, as discussed, was very much in line with the goals set earlier on by the organisation founded by Scalieri. In sum, Hanioglu suggests that the *Osmanlı Hürriyetperverân Cemiyeti* was still heavily influenced and permeated by Freemasonry. Tellingly, the actions of the members of the *Hürriyetperverân Cemiyeti* were referred to by the Western press as those of Young Turks, and “the term *Young Turk* referred to the political wing of the Freemasons.”³⁹

Freemasons also provided Young Turk members with protection (safe houses) and economic help to sustain their publishing endeavours and to fund trips to Europe for advocacy and fundraising purposes. The close relationship between the Young Turks and Freemasons extended well into the twentieth century; as reported by Eric Anduze, the Young Turk revolution was warmly welcomed by members of the Freemasonry, Young Turk actions were described as being highly imbued with Masonic signs, and Freemasons were convinced of a future convergence with the new regime in the Empire, the Unionist one. Speaking about the revolution of 1908, a David Cohen, from the lodge *Veritas* of Salonika and Secretary General of the *Grand Orient de France*, is reported to have said that:

Après l’heureux événement qui vient de se produire en Turquie et auquel, je suis heureux de le dire, la propagande de nos idées, a pris une assez large part, il était de mon devoir de penser à la fondation d’une

³⁷ For example, *La Turquie Libre* in London.

³⁸ See “Abdul’s imprisoned brother,” *The New York Times* (9 April 1901).

³⁹ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 37.

Loge à Constantinople sous la dépendance de notre GRAND ORIENT.⁴⁰

Besides the Freemasons, the Young Turks perceived religious representatives, from the ulema and Sufi orders, as allies in the struggle for reform. What is not too clear, however, is the motive behind the latter's involvement with the movement. It has not been fully researched whether these two groups got involved in opposition to the Sultan for political and social considerations, or for competition and supremacy within their own circles, once the Sultan had been ousted.⁴¹ What is equally ambiguous is the type of relationship between organised religion and the Young Turk movement. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the degree of affinity between the Young Turks and some religious exponents, as this factor has been neglected by the more widespread literature. The most plausible scenario is that members of the religious establishment joined the Young Turk organisation individually and in parallel to their belonging to ulema and Sufi circles.

The ulema had already been active with the Young Ottomans group and involved in the proclamation of the First Ottoman Constitution in 1876. Ali Haydar Midhat, the son of Midhat Pasha, claims that the ulema were convinced upholders of the Constitution and, later on, supporters of the Young Turks:

Chakir Effendi, one of its [the Constitution] warmest partisans, was one of the most learned, distinguished and highly esteemed Ulema at Constantinople; it was he who headed a deputation of Ulemas and doctors of the law, to congratulate Midhat immediately after the ceremony of promulgation was over. The most enthusiastic champions of both Midhat and the Constitution were the Softas, or body of students, numbering several thousands, of all the *medreses* ... in

⁴⁰ Anduze, *La Franc-maçonnerie de la Turquie ottomane*, 9.

⁴¹ Ernest E. Ramsaur, "The Bektashi Dervishes and the Young Turks," *The Moslem World* 1, no. 32 (January 1942): 7-14; Ali Haydar Midhat, *The Life of Midhat Pasha* (London: John Murray, 1903).

Constantinople, the future generation of the educated mind of the nation.⁴²

The above citation may contain a degree of exaggeration on the part of the writer, who was probably concerned primarily with promoting his father's legacy. At the very least, however, we can assume that the students of the *madaress* were actively involved in the liberal organisation of Midhat Pasha. The ulema involvement with the Young Ottomans was made smoother by the fact that the latter's ideology was heavily imbued with religious undertones. Evidence of this can be found in the writings of Murat Bey. In a booklet he published in 1895, he wrote:

Les Softas ... faisaient fonction de boucs emissaires du parti libéral au temps de Midhat-Pacha. Aujourd'hui ils se sont enrôlés dans les cadres mêmes du parti libéral. Ils ont leur place entre l'élite de la nation et les convertis aux idées nouvelles. Ils peuvent être très utilement employés, car ils trouvent auprès des masses plus de crédit que personne.⁴³

As to the relationship between the ulema and the Young Turks, it is suggested that the former organised their own opposition to the Sultan because of the total rejection on the part of Young Turks of religion, seen "...as an obstacle to progress."⁴⁴ This assumption at first seems to be fairly plausible. However, from the writings of some of the more influential Young Turks,⁴⁵ it is possible to understand that opposition to the ulema was upheld on the principle that the Young Turks saw the ulema as perpetrators of a corrupted version of Islam, which had sidelined the true Islamic values of progress and had consolidated a corrupted structure of power with the complicity of Sultan Abdülhamit II. However, some exponents of the ulema did organise opposition parties, "... even before the overt activities of the CUP had

⁴² Midhat, *Life of Midhat*, 119-120.

⁴³ Mourad Bey, *Le Palais de Yildiz et la Sublime Porte – Le Véritable Mal d'Orient* (Paris: Imprimerie Chaix, 1895), 9.

⁴⁴ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 49.

⁴⁵ See, for example, the writings of Halil Ganem and Abdullah Cevdet, apart from those of Ahmet Rıza, in various articles published in *Mechveret Supplément Français*.

begun.”⁴⁶ The most prominent of these ulema were: Ubeydullah Efendi,⁴⁷ Hoca Muhiddin, and Hoca Kadri.⁴⁸ The last figure is of special interest, since, he was “a member of the ulema with even more direct relations with the CUP, [and who] had a profound impact on the absorption of the organised ulema into the CUP.”⁴⁹ Interestingly, he was also the only member of the ulema who was present at the 1902 Paris Congress of Ottoman Liberals. It is equally worth noticing that the attacks that these ulema launched against the Sultan were echoed in the Young Turk discourse.⁵⁰ Their accusations, appearing in leaflets “undoubtedly authored and circulated by the organisation of the ulema”⁵¹ in Istanbul in 1896, claimed that “Abdülhamid is a usurper of the Caliphate”⁵² and that “to call him caliph is tantamount to infidelity.”⁵³ In sums, it appears that the Young Turk movement had close ties with those ulema that had stayed out of the Palace circle because they had not been corrupted by the Sultan’s regime. On their part, the ulema who decided to co-operate with the opposition had done so because they also believed that religion had been co-opted by the status-quo and because they viewed the regime as un-Islamic and obscurantist. In fact, considering the options that the ulema had – between a body of corrupted religious exponents which could have alienated the masses and the ‘privatisation’ of religion as advocated by most Young Turks⁵⁴ – the second one must have looked more appealing, especially if the Young Turk

⁴⁶ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 50.

⁴⁷ (1858 – 1937).

⁴⁸ (- 1918).

⁴⁹ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 52.

⁵⁰ See, for example Chapter 3.

⁵¹ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 51.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid. Similar techniques were used, as I discuss in details in Chapter 3, by that part of the opposition group that is usually identified as anti-religious, such as the *Mecheveret* group. It is interesting to note how all sides of the opposition, from ulema to positivists, connected their political discourse, albeit in differing degrees, to the topic of religion.

⁵⁴ Ahmet Riza, “Une nouvelle tactique,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 13 (15 June 1896): 3.

movement would have succeeded in changing the nature of the regime with the help of those ulema who were close to the population and could have served as vehicles of transmission of the Young Turk ideology.

As far as the Sufi orders are concerned, in the political spectrum of the late 19th century they can be seen as two categories: the heterodox,⁵⁵ who sided with the Young Turk movement, and the more orthodox, which supported the Sultan. Exceptions to this dichotomy were two Naqshbandī sheikhs, Erbilli Sheikh Mehmet Es'ad and Şevki Celâleddin; the latter was the only representative of Sufi orders to attend the 1902 Paris Congress of Ottoman Liberals. The presence of Sufis at the Congress of Paris raises the question of their impact on the Young Turk movement. While this is beyond the focus of this thesis, it seems probable that the Sufi orders found themselves in the middle of a struggle for power and that the two political forces vying for supremacy, the Young Turks and the Sultan, played them against each other in order to diminish their authority and influence among the population, similarly to what has been discussed earlier in the case of the ulema. Ernest Ramsaur claims that the Bektashi order and the Young Turk movement shared similar aims and that the order itself had to some extent tried to use the opposition to the Sultan for its own benefit. Ramsaur suggests that some of the doctrines followed by the Bektashi order were nearing "... a definitely materialistic atheism,"⁵⁶ while some of its most influential exponents were heavily influenced by the writings of Voltaire. Such leanings would have undoubtedly facilitated conversations with the Young

⁵⁵ Among these, the writer identifies the Bektashis and Melâmîs (both of them linked to the Freemasonry), the Mevlevîs, and the order of the Qadiriyyah, arch-enemies of those Rifâ'îyyah whose sheikh Abū al-Hudā al-Sayyādī became a close ally of Sultan Abdülhamit II. Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 53.

⁵⁶ Ramsaur, "Bektashi and Young Turks," 8.

Turks that I am investigating here. Moreover, the Bektashis and Young Turks had mutual contacts due to their respective affiliation with Freemasonry, which appears to have been very active in co-ordinating and mediating between all segments of the opposition to Sultan Abdülhamit II. As for the manipulation of the Young Turks by the Sufi orders, Frederick Hansluk appears convinced that the Bektashis were hoping to become the most influential Sufi order by supporting the winning side of the Young Turk organisation:⁵⁷ “The Bektashi undoubtedly aimed at an ultimate religious supremacy in the countries touched by their propaganda. At the time of the Turkish revolution they had still hopes of a Bektashi state in Albania. Such a religious supremacy could hope to hold its own if supported by a sympathetic civil power.”⁵⁸ Finally, another possible reason for the Bektashi Sufis’ affinity with the Young Turk organisation could be their fear of Abdülhamit’s treatment of Sufism in general after the elimination of the Young Turk component. Sufis feared that the Sultan’s adoption of Pan-Islamism could lead to the abolition of their orders,⁵⁹ while this would not have been the case in the event of a Young Turkish victory. Instead, both the direct membership of some Young Turks into the Bektashi orders⁶⁰ – as well as the collaboration of Sufi orders with Freemasonry⁶¹ – and the parallel alliance between the latter and some Young Turk members, would have ensured the survival of Sufism. Probably thanks to such aspirations, Sufi *tekkes* (lodges) were used as

⁵⁷ About the certainty of his statement regarding the Bektashi plan, Hansluck asserts to know this “... on good Bektashi authority.” Frederick W. Hansluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 438 n, 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 438.

⁵⁹ Octave Depont and Xavier Cappolani, *Les Confréries Religieuses Musulmans* (Algiers: Adolphe Jourdan, 1897), 261-262.

⁶⁰ Ramsaur, “Bektashi and Young Turks,” 11.

⁶¹ George Young, *Constantinople* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1926), 197-198.

safe meeting places of the Young Turks or as centres for the distribution of their publications.⁶²

The necessity for exile, I: the trajectory of the internal and external Young Turk

This section examines the concept of voluntary exile, which some members of the opposition adopted in order to develop an organisation capable of defeating or co-opting Abdülhamit II. It should be clear by the end of this section that the experience of exile was a focal part of the founding, development, and eventually success of the Young Turk movement in re-instating the Constitution in 1908.

The link between voluntary exile and drastic changes in the Ottoman Empire has not been highlighted to the degree it deserves, while scholars of other movements of the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean area have explored the strategy of self-imposed exile and publication abroad. McDougall has argued, for example, that the space that Algerian exiles occupied abroad was instrumental in creating revolutionary-populist groups and in developing a new idea of Algeria and of Algerian nationalism.⁶³ Exile presented a number of advantages: first of all, the proper existence of an outside branch, in exile, of the opposition movement (it will be referred to as the ‘external’ branch of the Young Turk organisation) ensured that, when the internal branch had been silenced by the Sultan, the workings of the opposition did not come to a halt. Moreover, free from the tight censorship that the Hamidian regime had put in place internally, most of the opposition groups in exile were able to publish journals and

⁶² Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 54.

⁶³ McDougall, *History and the Culture*, 34.

newspapers that became the basis for the intellectual development of the Young Turk thought. Linked to this is the fact that, in exile and specifically in cities such as Paris, Geneva and Brussels, members of the opposition were able to engage intellectually with a similarly minded European elite and were able, thanks to the tight co-operation with Freemasonry, to enter into important European philosophical circles. By opting for exile, Young Turk members were able to internationalise the struggle of their umbrella organisation and advertise their commitment to the rest of, what they referred to as, the ‘civilised world’. Exile as state of consciousness became an important frame for the political vision of the Young Turks in question, a vision founded upon the synthesis of various cultures and social systems. However, in order to analyse the necessity for exile for the members of the Young Turk group, it is essential to look briefly at the constitution of the first nucleus of the Young Turks and at what took some of them to Europe.

In 1889, at the Royal Medical Academy, a student movement began and soon spread across to the majority of higher education institutions of the Empire.⁶⁴ The mastermind behind the constitution of the movement was İbrahim Temo, of Albanian origin and former student of the same school. According to a letter that Temo wrote to Karl Süssheim,⁶⁵ the exact date for the establishment of the first nucleus of organised opposition was the 2nd of July 1889. The four founding members were İshak Sükûti, Mehmet Reşid, Abdullah Cevdet and Temo himself.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 71.

⁶⁵ (1878-1947). Karl Süssheim was a German Orientalist. During his various visits to the Ottoman Empire, he befriended exponents of the Young Turk organisation and wrote a number of essays on their struggle against Sultan Abdülhamit II. Colin Heywood, “The diary of Karl Süssheim,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13, no. 2 (2003): 247-248.

⁶⁶ Hanioglu, Ramsaur, and Fesch all agree on the names of the founding members apart from Mehmet Reşid, who is not mentioned in Fesch’s book; the latter states that for ‘security’ reasons the name of

In his own memoirs, Temo provides an account of how he approached İshak Sükûti exhorting him to form the society and mentioning the other members that would be involved. The account is in the form of a conversation between Temo and Sükûti taking place in the school *Gülhane Mektebi*, in Sarayburnu, during recess:

Me – Come friend, let me share with you some thoughts I am having. We all know that under today’s conditions and with the [present] form of rule our noble fatherland will dissolve. We discuss between us this situation all the time and whenever we have free time; but we cannot think of a solution to get rid of this danger. I think that instead of belly-aching [whining] with these dry remarks and observations we need to get into action.

İshak – What type of activity?

Me – By working in the form of a society.

İshak – This is nice but who do you think we can trust to undertake such a dangerous work?

Me – Well firstly you, one; I looked at Mehmet Reşid (scarface who exited from the dormitories heading towards us), that is two, we are now three. This means a society has been formed!

We signalled to Mehmet Reşid to call him over. We told him [about] our thoughts. At that moment, Abdullah Cevdet who at the time was very devout had just completed his afternoon prayer and when he came to us from the school mosque: There you have number four I said ... Four hands touched each other. This initial contractual pact was made on a coincidental day of May 1305 (1889) and the society was established.⁶⁷

The name given to the newly founded society was the Ottoman Union Society, *İttihad-ı Osmani Cemiyeti*. Temo’s memoirs are a precious source in providing more details on the members and the profile of prospective members of the emerging organisation:

This [was] the first meeting of the society and of those present [,] shall be listed: one of the then high court civil servants Hersekli Ali Ruşdi, one of the editors of the newspaper İzmirli Ali Şefik, medical student

the fourth member cannot be disclosed. What is interesting to note is that the four founders were: Sükûti a Jew born in Diyarbakır, Mehmet Reşid from the Caucasus, Abdullah Cevdet who was of Kurdish origin and Temo, an Albanian from Macedonia.

⁶⁷ Temo, *İttihad ve Terakki Anıları*, 13-15.

Asaf Derviş (Paşa) (university professor and *mamoş*), Muharrem Girid (lecturer at Damascus Faculty of Medical Jurisprudence), Dr. Abdullah Cevdet, İshak Sükûti, Şerafeddin Mağmumi, Çerkes Mehmed Reşid (the one who committed suicide), me and three more persons whose names I cannot remember.

[The positions] were distributed [as such] [Hersekli] Ali Ruşdi Effendi [was appointed] chief, because of [his] being the elder of us all and a hodja, Şerafeddin [Mağmumi] secretary of minutes, Asaf Derviş treasurer. However in the rank of numbers that were to be used I [was] 1/1[;] head of this series.

On this first meeting of this national and secret society we knew that some decisions were to be taken and especially [knew] that the course of events [will lead to] discussion about who we were to except into this national [and] secret society ... rather cautiously and [after] going through all sorts of trials, we reached the point of view that every Ottoman who is able and trustworthy could be accepted [into the society].⁶⁸

Following the publication and circulation of a programmatic brochure in 1894, the society expanded and started to permeate other schools, such as the Military Academy of Pangalti, the veterinary school, the *Mülkiye* (civil college), the naval academy and the artillery and engineering schools, reaching some functionaries of the Porte and of the administration.⁶⁹ After its founding, one of the members, Dr. Nâzim, was sent to Paris to establish contact with Ahmet Rıza⁷⁰ who had, by then, moved to France on voluntary exile and had started the publication of *Mechveret*.⁷¹ The two men established the first nucleus of the Young Turk opposition abroad. Rıza accepted the leadership of the society in Paris but had it renamed, in accordance with his positivist beliefs, *Nizam ve Terakki* (a translation of Auguste Comte's motto *Ordre et Progrès*). The other members, those from the internal branch, accepted the second term, Progress, but thought that Union, more than Order,

⁶⁸ Temo, *İttihad ve Terakki Anıları*, 16-17.

⁶⁹ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 341.

⁷⁰ The following chapter will be devoted to an analysis of Rıza's work and ideas.

⁷¹ For details on this publication, see Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.

was to be used. They settled on *Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti* – the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress, a two-branch organisation with internal and external branches, which was united in the pursuit of the same goals, and, at this stage, through the same, peaceful, means. By 1895, the Committee had managed to establish its central branch in Istanbul, composed mainly of students, and two external branches, in Paris and Cairo.

By the beginning of 1896, however, a wave of arrests drastically changed the nature of the internal Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress, resulting in voluntary exile for many members. By then, there was little ideological affinity between the internal and external Young Turk branches. This is because, in Istanbul, the students had been replaced by high-ranking bureaucrats from various ministries, men from the military establishment and some ulema, all of whom were men of action rather than of thought:

“[i]n this manner the CUP in the capital was transformed from a student organisation into a committee of high-ranking bureaucrats and ulema. İbrahim Temo [who by then had fled to Romania] later confessed that he did not even know the new director of the Istanbul branch. This caused problems in relations between the Istanbul organisation and the Paris branch.”⁷²

Moreover, “... there were no similarities between the group surrounding Ahmet Rıza and the leaders of the Istanbul center. Also, the latter, influenced by distinguished ulema, asked the committee not to enrol Christians in the organisation,

⁷² Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 77.

in opposition to Ahmet Rıza's efforts to unite the opponents around the Ottoman Constitution of 1876."⁷³

As for the external branch, the leadership of Ahmet Rıza had been severely criticised, by the end of 1895, as being too ideological and too committed to the Positivist circle.⁷⁴ *Mechveret*, the mouthpiece of the Rıza's faction, which had been until then regarded as the official organ of the Young Turk movement abroad, came to be challenged by the journal published in Cairo by Murat Bey, *Mizan*.⁷⁵ The latter journal was more in line with the activist leanings of the internal Young Turk branch: it proposed a coup d'état to remove Abdülhamit II and advocated considerable outside interference, especially from the British. By contrast, Rıza opposed the idea of a coup d'état on the grounds that, as explained in the programme of the *Mechveret* faction that was published in the journal, the group was in principle opposed to violence. To resolve the friction within the external branch of the organisation, a meeting was organised in mid-November 1896; in line with the new activist and more militaristic nature of the internal branch, echoed by Murat's faction, a committee of inspection and execution to oversee the action of all branches was set up:

This committee was to have a director, an assistant director, and three members. By secret ballot, Murad Bey was elected director ... Çürüksulu Ahmed became the assistant director, and Doctor Nâzim, Şerafeddin Mağmumî, and İshak Sükûti were nominated members ... recognition of the Paris branch's director as the leader of the organisation was denied, and this branch was demoted to a normal one. Çürüksulu Ahmed replaced Ahmed Rıza. Ahmed Rıza, who entered the meeting as leader of the movement, departed as editor of

⁷³ Hanioğlu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 85-86.

⁷⁴ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 338.

⁷⁵ From this, Murat Bey came to be known as *Mizançı* Murat.

Mechveret Supplément Français on the condition that each issue be subject to the review and control of a board ... then it was determined that only *Mizan* would represent the CUP as its central organ ...⁷⁶

At this stage, the official Young Turk task became that of saving the Empire and Caliphate through a coup d'état, made possible by the help of high-ranking bureaucrats who contemplated the assassination of Sultan Abdülhamit II.⁷⁷

The future would prove that both this course of action and Murat Bey's leadership was fragile, since the first attempt of an active and united political opposition against the Sultan was abortive. In fact, under the leadership of *Mizancı* Murat, the external branch of the organisation drove itself into the hands of Abdülhamit. In Ramsaur's words,

[t]he most devastating blow of all fell without warning: the Young Turks of Europe, with one or two notable exceptions, suddenly gave up the struggle against Abdul Hamid. Some of them, led by the idol of the society, Murat Bey, even trooped back to the shores of the Bosphorus to kiss the feet of the man for whom their vocabularies of vilification had only the day before been stretched to the utmost.⁷⁸

The bait consisted in a promise made by the Sultan to grant some reforms and, in assuring full amnesty for all the Young Turks who were either in exile or in prison, in return for the cessation of subversive action and their return to the Empire.⁷⁹ In the Sultan's view, the cessation of action abroad would enhance his position inside the Empire and, simultaneously, alleviate the diplomatic pressures resulting from Young Turks' lobbying with foreign governments and European public opinion. Yet, many of those who returned were soon imprisoned or exiled, while others were received as heroes, were granted good positions and were presented as patriots.

⁷⁶ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 84.

⁷⁷ Şükrü Hanioglu cites a letter, containing proofs of this, dated 1931, addressed to Abdullah Cevdet by Dr. Mekkele Sabri. Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 217 n, 276.

⁷⁸ Ramsaur, *Young Turks*, 46.

⁷⁹ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 344.

After having started publication of a journal, *Mizançı* Murat, İshak Sükûti and Abdullah Cevdet returned to the Empire; some were awarded posts as medical officers at embassies in Europe, as in Rome and Vienna. During this period, a large majority of the Young Turks abroad decided to give in and return to Ottoman lands: notable exceptions were Ahmet Rıza and Halil Ganem.

Seeing the failure of one side of the external branch to hold its ground, the internal branch went ahead with its plans for a coup d'état. This was to be the last move of the internal branch. With most of the external movement now in check, the Sultan could concentrate on discovering internal plots through his strong network of secret police. A huge wave of arrests ensued after the discovery of the plot to assassinate him, after which the Istanbul branch never recovered its organisational and numerical status. From then until the revolution of 1908, the internal branch almost disappeared. According to Fesch, two more committees were established at the Military School of Pangalti, the 'Committee Hussein Avni' and the 'Committee Süleyman Pasha'.⁸⁰ They were eventually discovered and, in June 1897, all of the 81 members or affiliates were condemned to death, exile and imprisonment, and endured torture. According to a letter dated 1899 and sent to the journal *Osmanlı* by Abdullah Cevdet, who had been imprisoned there in 1895, the fortress of Tripoli became the home of a large number of figures accused of siding with the supposed revolutionaries. Cevdet lists the names of 69 people, including students and military personnel, who were periodically tortured and kept in dark cells.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 341.

⁸¹ Abdullah Cevdet, "La Fortresse de Tripoli," *Osmanlı Supplément Français* 2, no. 13 (1 August 1899): 2.

At the same time, the external organisation, having lost most of its members, seemed on the verge of dissolution. The only influential figure abroad was Ahmet Rıza, who was torn between dedicating himself to philosophy and positivism or continuing the struggle “... sur le champ de bataille, à la tête de la lutte.”⁸² During that period, the battle between the opposition and the Sultan seemed to have been won by Istanbul. In 1899, however, a new event bolstered the members and supporters of the Young Turk movement, at least those residing in Europe. This event was the flight of Damat Mahmut Pasha,⁸³ who landed in Marseilles and moved to Paris with his two sons Sabahettin and Lutfullah. His departure from Ottoman lands stirred reactions among the opposition as well as the establishment. For the establishment, it meant that the Sultan would potentially be challenged by someone who was part of his own Palace circle and who knew the Sultan’s secrets and fears. Moreover, Damat Mahmut’s voice of dissent would be regarded highly by the European government and contribute to discrediting the Sultan’s regime. On the other hand, Damat Mahmut was an important ally for the members of the Young Turk movement since he had previously represented the establishment and, thus, was proof that the Young Turk organisations were appealing to and representative of different strata of Ottoman society.

With the arrival of father and sons in Paris, the organisation seemed to come to life again. Between the end of 1899 and 1902, it looked as if the much sought-after unity, based not only on intent but also on a programme, was to become a reality. In this

⁸² Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d’Abdul-Hamid*, 344.

⁸³ Damat Mahmut Pasha was the son of Admiral Halil Pasha and Seniha Sultan, daughter of Sultan Abdülmecid and sister of Abdülhamit II. Before his flight to Paris, Mahmut had been state counsellor and Minister of Justice. For more information on Damat Mahmut Pasha and the flight to Europe, see Chapter 4.

frame, the different organisations that made up the Young Turk movement could present themselves as a coherent and unified front and thus act cohesively against the rule of Sultan Abdülhamit II. The impact of the arrival of Damat Mahmut and his two sons managed to attract influential figures towards the Young Turk camp which, until then, had either remained autonomous or had lost hope of tangible results. Among these were Ali Haydar Midhat, the son of Midhat Pasha, and İsmail Kemal, by then governor of Tripoli in Lebanon.

In some ways, the rupture between the two branches of the organisation – the internal and external ones – was a key event in the intellectual development of those Young Turks who remained in exile after 1896. Their distance from the regime and their quasi-autonomy in the absence of a unified leadership gave some of the opponents the space to associate themselves with both Ottomans and Europeans who were engaged in political and social engineering on a global scale. The previous example of the Young Ottomans using publications for political purposes and the fact that, outside the Empire, journals could actually be published freely, convinced these Young Turks that the press was their primary tool against Hamidian despotism.

The necessity for exile, II: the press, Hamidian censorship and the publication of journals abroad

This section investigates the choice of some Young Turk members to go on exile from another perspective, their freedom to use the press for their advocacy. I will start by contextualising the place of the press in the Ottoman Empire up to the first years of Abdülhamit's rule. I will then narrate how some Ottoman exiles started the publication of journals and reflect on the role of these journals in the intellectual and

activist flourishing of the movement. As I stated before, the mixed nationalities and background of the contributors to the publications, as well as the visibility of some of these journals, turned out to be core elements of the Ottoman opposition especially as it was viewed by the European public opinion and governments.

The role of the invention of the printing press, one of the key instruments in the production of nationalist ideologies in Europe and elsewhere, has been extensively discussed.⁸⁴ In Europe, this development engendered the institutionalisation of vernacular languages and contributed to the cultivation of national affiliation as subjective experience. In the Ottoman Empire, the introduction of the print served a similar, yet not identical, purpose. While the spread of the printing press fostered sentiments of community in contradistinction with the ruling class, in this case seen as despotic and non-representative, these stirrings of nationalist affiliation were inclusive – in opposition to the more essentialist European national identities – and took the shape of a renewed cultural and intellectual Ottomanism, which for the Young Turk groups generally meant “... the notion of one Ottoman nation, consisting of individuals with equal rights [in front of the law and regardless of the ethnic and religious background], sharing the same mother country, and loyal to the state and the sultan... The policy of Ottomanism was developed particularly to prevent the development of nationalism in non-Muslim communities.”⁸⁵ This Ottomanism was in stark contrast with the politics of the Palace, which were more geared to an emphasis on strictly controlled religious polarisation and ethnic fragmentation. In relation to the public and political sphere, the advent of

⁸⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 1991).

⁸⁵ Selçuk Akşin Somel, *Historical Dictionary of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2003), 221.

widespread print led to new opportunities for those opposing power configurations so far unchallenged. Enlarging the audience of such confrontations, voices of dissent were able to turn what the establishment wished to present as individual issues into communal, and in some cases transnational, conversations.

The ruler Mehmet Ali⁸⁶ was the first to publish a newspaper in the Islamic world, in Egypt during the late 1820s. This initiative “encouraged [Sultan] Mahmut to undertake a similar project[,]”⁸⁷ and, therefore, the first official Ottoman journal was issued in French under the name *Le Moniteur*. The journal was intended to describe the reforms taken by the Ottoman State under the modernising sway of the *Bâb-ı Ali*, the Sublime Porte. In 1831, Sultan Mahmut founded the first newspaper in Ottoman Turkish, the *Takvim-i Vekayi* (Calendar of Events), which was mainly a translation of *Le Moniteur*. Already by 1851, with encouragement from the government, a whole series of new journals was being launched. According to Paul Fesch, by the second half of the nineteenth century the number of newspapers and journals in different languages had reached 13: two in Turkish, four in French, four in Italian, and one respectively in Greek, Armenian and Bulgarian.⁸⁸ Up to 1854, the annual circulation of these papers was estimated at around 100,000 to 150,000.⁸⁹ The impetus to publish continued under the reign of Abdülaziz (1861-1876). It was under his rule, in the 1860s, that the “first newspaper of opinion in the real sense”⁹⁰ came out: it was the *Tercüman-i Ahval* of İbrahim Şinasi.

⁸⁶ Mehmet Ali Pasha (1769-1849), appointed by Istanbul as *wali* of Egypt in 1805, then became its *de facto* ruler. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, E.R. Toledano, s.v. “Muhammad Ali Pasha.”

⁸⁷ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 126.

⁸⁸ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 32.

⁸⁹ Koloğlu, “La formation des intellectuels,” 123-141.

⁹⁰ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 197.

From the 1860s onwards, the press increased exponentially: in 1866, there were at least 43 papers published in Istanbul in various languages, of which four were in French, one in German, one in Italian and one in English. In the provinces, journals were published in both Ottoman Turkish and the local languages.⁹¹ During this period, certain newspapers became privately owned and featured more criticism of ideological positions and of practiced governance. By the time Abdülhamit II assumed power in 1876, the number of newspapers published only in Istanbul had reached 47: 13 were in Turkish, one in Arabic, nine in Greek, three in Bulgarian, nine in Armenian, two in Hebrew, two in French and English, and one in German.⁹² Moreover, under the influence of the Midhat Pasha circle, a vigorous ‘Young Turkish’ press – as he himself termed it – had managed to outdo in popularity the more conservative political publications. As we have seen, the figure of Midhat became a key source of inspiration for all those opposing the rule of Abdülhamit. Many Young Turks developed their political ideals out of the experience and intellectual work of Midhat; a running thread in his thought was the conviction that government officials owe their loyalty to the people and not to their ruler. One of the main ideological axes of this Young Turk press was to introduce and discuss with readers the idea that citizens have rights, that these rights cannot be arbitrarily taken away from them and that a constitution would be the panacea of most problems of the Empire. Midhat Pasha found that his support base steadily expanded to encompass the religious circles as “[m]any of the religious dignitaries and the

⁹¹ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 34.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 35-36.

theological students were believers in this panacea, and had become strong supporters of [his]”⁹³

At the time of Abdulhamid II’s accession to the throne, in 1876, the Sultan found a press that felt entitled and empowered enough to articulate a harsh political critique:

The *Vakit* (Time) stated on every occasion that the real sovereignty rested with the people and that they could depose their Sultan whenever they chose to do so. The *Istikbal* (Future) reminded the people again and again that the constitution was not a gift of the sovereign, but was obtained by a group of patriots after a hard struggle.⁹⁴

According to Ahmet Emin, the new Sultan, at the time of his ascension, considered the press to be too open in its treatment of political actors: “[h]e understood perfectly that absolute power could not go hand in hand with a free and vigorously edited press.”⁹⁵ An article from the journal *Osmanlı* confirms that, until the first years of Hamidian rule, the Ottoman press was free and independent. With the closing of parliament and the prorogation of the Constitution, *Osmanlı* states that the environment changed drastically: “... la liberté de la presse a subi une atrophie progressive par suite d’une oppression de plus en plus intense et enfin elle est aujourd’hui réduite presque à zéro.”⁹⁶

The Sultan’s first step was to implement a tough regime of censorship, which was inaugurated with the issuing of a list of regulations.⁹⁷ This list stated that priority in

⁹³ Emin, *Development of Modern Turkey as measured by its Press*, 53. This, among other issues, constituted the reason for his trial and exile (1881, in Taif) and, probably, murder (1884) of Midhat Pasha under direct orders by Abdülhamit II.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ “La Presse en Turquie,” *Osmanlı Supplément Français* 1, no. 6 (10 May 1898), 2.

⁹⁷ The list of banned terms that served as a guide to legitimate press can be found in Ebru Boyar, “The Press and the palace: the two-way relationship between Abdülhamid II and the press, 1876-

the news was to be given to reports on the Sultan's health, the outcome of the harvest and progress in the commercial and industrial sectors. Sure enough, no news could be published without official prior approval. Gradually, the prohibition was extended to cover most domains of public life including the mention of historical, political and geographical names and terms. Among the banned vocabulary featured words such as: constitution, revolution, freedom, anarchy, tyranny, peoples' rights, equality, fraternity, fatherland, youth, dynamo, dynamite, nation, internationalism, hereditary prince, republic, deputies, senators, bombs, reforms, Midhat Pasha and Armenia.⁹⁸ Censorship was not limited to internal news; it extended to foreign affairs such as the mention of assassination attempts on foreign rulers to prevent inspiration and emulation. For instance, regarding the assassination of the President of the French Republic Marie François-Sadie Carnot in 1894 by an Italian anarchist, the Istanbul press reported it as following: "nous avons le vif regret d'annoncer à nos estimables lecteurs que Carnot, l'honorable président de la République française, qui était souffrant depuis quelques jours, vient de mourir hier à minuit."⁹⁹ On a similar occasion, *Osmanlı* wrote that, in the case of Iran, the Ottoman press initially did not even mention the death of the Shah, Nasreddin,¹⁰⁰ while, after a few months, the journal revealed that when news did come out, it was completely distorted: "L'assassinat du Schah de Perse Nasreddin par Moulla-Riza, était, comme on s'en rappelle, transformé par la presse turque en une mort plausible et douce!

1908", *Bulletin of SOAS* 69, no. 3 (October 2006): 417-43; as well as in Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*; and Scalieri, *Appel à la justice internationale*.

⁹⁸ The penalties for mentioning anything connected to Armenia and Armenian affairs were especially harsh. Scalieri writes: "A quoi devons-nous attribuer la mort soudaine de dindessian elias [sic], maître de musique et imprimeur, dans la prison de la police centrale, arrêté, pour avoir imprimé, il y a plusieurs années, une poésie, qui par exemple excite les esprits arméniens?" Scalieri, *Appel à la justice internationale*, 110.

⁹⁹ "La Nullité de la Presse en Turquie," *Osmanlı Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 October 1898), 4.

¹⁰⁰ "La Presse en Turquie," *Osmanlı Supplément Français* 1, no. 6 (10 May 1898): 2.

Charge d'ans et de gloires, le roi des rois avait rejoint ses augustes ancêtres dans la tombe!"¹⁰¹

Press censorship went as far as the banning of words that were remotely connected to the figure of the Sultan. A term such as *burun* – nose – was to be avoided, “because it was perceived as an implied reference to Abdülhamit’s particularly large nose ... [but] ... since *burun* also meant the geographic term cape in Turkish,”¹⁰² writers had to avoid using the term cape or were obliged to substitute it with a paraphrase. In a scientific article, the equation $AH=0$ was not be permitted because it could be taken to mean Abdülhamit (initials AH) equals zero.¹⁰³ At the same time, censorship was to “educate writers to write in the proper way.”¹⁰⁴ This circumscription of the domain of political deliberation led to a race for the publication of semi-scientific articles and treaties which had little or nothing to do with the political situation of the time: “*Travel in Air or Under the Sea*, [and] *The Intelligence of Cats*, [or] *Myopia among Students in Germany*” were the sort of article titles published most frequently at the time. In less than a year, the free, opinionated and vigorous press had been turned in a tool in the hands of the establishment. Censorship was issued by the Ministry of Interior and the publication of both periodicals and books was under the scrutiny of the Ministry of Public Instruction. Everything, down to the smallest detail, was closely overviewed and censored:

Les brochures et les livres à imprimer doivent être présentés en deux exemplaires qui sont revus et scrupuleusement censurés et pour ainsi

¹⁰¹ “La Nullité de la Presse en Turquie,” *Osmanlı Supplément Français*, 1, no. 9 (15 October 1898): 4.

¹⁰² Boyar, “The Press and the palace,” 420.

¹⁰³ See, Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 58.

¹⁰⁴ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 260.

dire, analysés par deux conseils de censure différents; la plupart de ces manuscrits sont refusés et les autres sont grossièrement tronqués. Cette vigueur de censure a pour but de tarir toutes les sources de réforme et de pensées nouvelles,...¹⁰⁵

By the beginning of 1900, things had deteriorated to such an extent that Fesch went as far as declaring that:

[d]epuis trente ans, la presse n'existe plus en Turquie. Il y a bien des journaux, même assez nombreux; mais les ciseaux de la censure les taillent, les mutilent de si émasculante manière qu'ils n'ont plus aucune puissance. Si j'osais, je dirais que le sont des journaux hongres, ou mieux, pour rester dans la couleur locale, des eunuques.¹⁰⁶

The outcome of this set of regulations, which applied to all newspapers, books, and publications of all languages, but especially to those in Ottoman Turkish, had a twofold effect: on the one hand, there was the anticipated outcome of the systematic persecution and disappearance of journals and printing presses. As soon as publications treated subjects that would undermine the position of the Sultan (such as praising works of individuals directly or indirectly related with the First Constitutional Period) they would be closed down, their editors and journalists would be sent to prison or exile and a considerable number of publishing houses would find themselves out of business. A very high stamp tax for newspapers was instituted so that many would either be prevented from opening or forced to close down. Those that managed to remain open were coerced through bribes and honorary titles in order to stop publication. The tough censorship had economic repercussions on a large number of publishers who went almost or entirely bankrupt. In a very short period of time, the free, opinionated and vigorous press turned into a tool in the hands of the state.

¹⁰⁵ "La Presse en Turquie," *Osmanlı Supplément Français* 1, no. 6 (10 May 1898), 3.

¹⁰⁶ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 50.

However, another outcome of this situation, unanticipated by the regime, was the gradual migration, during the 1890s, of the voices of opposition, among whom the Young Turk groups. Aware that Hamidian censorship and control would be too tight inside the Ottoman lands, the only option for opponents who wanted to publish articles on political dissent was to leave the Empire and start publication abroad. This consideration led to an outflow of Young Turk members. They chose countries where the press was freer, such as France and Switzerland, or other places where opposition to the Sultan would be positively viewed, such as Egypt and Greece. Consequently, a large number of Young Turk publications were inaugurated in Paris, Geneva, London, Cairo, and Athens. Among these, especially worthy of notice are: *İctihad*, published in Cairo and Geneva; *Mechveret*, published in Paris, Geneva and Brussels; *Mizan*, published in Cairo and Geneva; *Osmanlı*, published in Geneva, London and Folkestone; and *Vatan*, published in Athens.

Osmanlı commented on the outcome of Hamidian censorship in the following manner:

La réaction de cette oppression fit fonder à la jeune génération pleine d'énergie et d'espoir, des organes indépendants publiés dans les villes libres comme Paris, Genève, Le Caire, Bucarest, Bruxelles, etc. Les publications sont introduites clandestinement en Turquie. Le nombre des journaux paraissant à l'étranger en différentes langues est supérieur à celui qui se publie actuellement à Constantinople.¹⁰⁷

Regardless of the dynamism of their founders, some of these publications were short-lived for various reasons. Many lacked the funds necessary either to buy a printing plant and the required typing characters or, once bought, were unable to pay for their maintenance. Others inaugurated the publication of a specific journal and,

¹⁰⁷ "La Presse en Turquie," *Osmanlı Supplément Français* 1, 6 (10 May 1898): 3.

not long after, would merge with another political group and work on different projects. Among these publications that were short lived were those that:

were merely published to blackmail the Sultan. In 1898 and the following years, it was, in fact, the usual practice for ambitious functionaries without strong palace protection, to make a European trip as Young Turks, to publish, or to make an attempt to publish, mutinous literature, and then to sell their silence for a superior position in the government service.¹⁰⁸

The necessity for exile, III: the city, the environment and the intellectual milieu

This section emphasises how vital some of these centres of exile became for the intellectual development of many Young Turks for both ideological and practical reasons. This section also shows that most of the European cities, and more specifically Paris, were centres of intellectual and cultural ferment during the late nineteenth century. Positivists and followers of social science, just to mention two currents, were extremely active in the French capital and, as we shall see later, Rıza and Sabahettin became regular participants in these and other philosophical circles. Civil society and a more liberal public were to become good partners of Young Turk members, providing economic, moral, and legal help on many occasions.

In the discussion above, I hinted at the various difficulties involved in setting up a publication in exile. An important obstacle that had to be faced in setting up and funding the mouthpiece of the opposition was of economic nature. All of these publications were of a non-profit character; this implied that many of the issues were distributed for free and that any return would be subject to the voluntary contribution of the more affluent and more committed readers. Moreover, these

¹⁰⁸ Emin, *Development of Modern Turkey as measured by its Press*, 69. Şükrü Hanioglu also writes of these attempts at blackmail and states that between 1893 and 1895 Athens served as the base for what he refers to as 'pseudo-opposition'. See Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 69.

journals constituted only one of the many activities of a Young Turk organisation. Thus, the income generated by the distribution of the journals was to be used not only for the mere sustenance of the publication itself, but also served for the organisation of meetings and the funding of trips in which representatives of different Young Turks groups would liaise with each other. By being in exile, many editors were able to tour the whole of Europe trying to broker loans and donations from European governments, political parties, influential interest groups, and some dedicated Ottoman exiles. We know of two instances of this kind that involved Ahmet Rıza and prince Sabahettin, which are indicative of the benefits of living and acting outside Ottoman borders. For the launch of the journal *Mechveret*, Ahmet Rıza had to raise an initial capital that would help with buying a printing press and the necessary typing characters. This was done by organising a meeting of Ottoman students and other exiles residing in Paris. During the meeting, the group raised an initial amount that jumpstarted the publication. The total amount raised during this meeting, according to different sources, ranges from 100, to 400 and even 500 francs.¹⁰⁹

As for prince Sabahettin, once based in Paris, he embarked on trips to both London and Geneva very frequently and that the raising of funds became a very time- and energy-consuming task.¹¹⁰ When the prince arrived in Paris with his father and brother, the three were lodging at the Grand Hotel. From the archives of the *Préfecture de Police de Paris*, it is possible to understand that they were closely

¹⁰⁹ Hanioglu puts this sum at fr.500, Rıza himself states in an article that the total amounted to only 100, Ahmet Rıza, “L’Inaction des Jeunes Turcs,” *La Revue Occidentale* 2, no. 115 (1st Semester 1903): 91. Paul Fesch also provides different figures.

¹¹⁰ “Rapports divers sur le sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914,” *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169 Mahmoud Pacha (beau-frère du sultan de Constantinople).

monitored by the French establishment. The reports that police officers wrote on a daily basis, state that on the 3rd of January 1900 – that is 10 days after their arrival in France – the two brothers, Sabahettin and Lutfullah left the Grand Hotel on their way to London, returning respectively nine and five days later. According to the police, they went to London to try and broker a loan of 629,000 francs, but their request was turned down. Again in March of the same year, they left for Geneva, where, according to the police, they pursued the donation of funds. After being turned down repeatedly, it seems that they managed to get some sponsorship. In fact, towards the end of 1900, and precisely on the 6th of November, the two brothers came back to Paris but, instead of lodging at the usual hotel, they managed to rent an apartment for which they needed to pay an advance sum of 25,000 francs and a fee of 4,500 as *lager annuel*. Yet, funds were never enough for organising a congress and uniting the opposition to the Ottoman regime. Therefore, in 1901, police sources report that Damat Mahmut Pasha, Sabahettin's father, desperately tried to borrow 300,000 francs, probably from a banking institution. This request was once more rejected because his guarantees were his assets in the Empire and these had been recently confiscated by the government.¹¹¹

Another way to raise funds for the editors of opposition journals in exile was the organisation of banquets, where foreigners could make their contribution by subscribing to the journal. Banquets had an added benefit: by organising one, members of the opposition could exchange thoughts, familiarise themselves, and tighten their links with European intellectual circles. A clear example of the

¹¹¹ "Rapports divers sur le sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914." *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169 Mahmoud Pacha (beau-frère du sultan de Constantinople).

opportunities that some of the European cities offered and of the link that was emerging between Young Turk exponents and French intellectuals, is narrated by *Mechveret* in an article titled “Banquet de la Jeune Turquie.”¹¹²

Organised by the *Mechveret* group on December 23rd 1896 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the constitution of 1876, the banquet was attended by some of the most *en-vogue* intellectuals of the time as well as by a number of journalists, many of whom took the floor during the evening. “M. Pierre Laffitte, le chef vénéré des Positivistes et professeur au collège de France, ...”¹¹³ and Pierre Quillard,¹¹⁴ as well as other professors, journalists of *Le Figaro*, of *La Paix*, and members of the foreign press spoke to the ground, praised the work of the opposition to Abdülhamit, and wished the next anniversary of the Constitution to be held on the shores of the Bosphorus. These banquets served as platforms for making acquaintances and for the discussion of the socio-political situation of the Empire. Most importantly, they served as loci of exchanges and for the development of an Ottoman synthesis between the intellectual and political trends of Europe and of the Empire. Meeting an intellectual at a banquet could lead to a friendship, co-operation or, even, to the affiliation to some philosophical circle – as in the case of Ahmet Rıza, who befriended George Clemenceau, became a disciple of Pierre Laffitte, joined the Positivist group in Paris, and contributed to the founding of the International

¹¹² “Banquet de la Jeune Turquie,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 26 (1 Jan 1897): 4-8.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁴ (1864-1912) Pierre Quillard was the founder of the review *Le Pléiade* (1884). He was a poet, a political activist with anarchist leanings, the translator of classical Greek works, a defender of Dreyfus and an opponent of the Hamidian regime, which Quillard held responsible for the massacre of Armenians between 1894 and 1896. Quillard lived in Istanbul between 1893 and 1897 and, in 1900, founded the journal *Pro Armenia*.

Positivist Society.¹¹⁵ Rıza participated in the Positivist Review and *La Revue Occidentale*, of which Laffitte was the founder. Rıza was particularly busy with the latter review, in which he wrote on various occasions and he equally contributed to courses organised by French positivist societies. He also gave a lecture entitled “La politique sociale de la Turquie”¹¹⁶ within a seminar series held at the *College libre des sciences sociales*; spoke at a conference on “Les Institutions sociales en Turquie,”¹¹⁷ which took place on Sunday, 5th of March, 1899; participated at the meeting of the Société Positiviste de Paris held on 18th January 1901 where he spoke on “La Religion islamique;”¹¹⁸ and gave a speech at the “Hommage international à Auguste Comte” organised by *La Revue Occidentale* on 18th May 1902.¹¹⁹ Evidence of Rıza’s membership in the positivist intellectual circles can be found within the pages of *La Revue Occidentale*. In one of the issues dedicated to Comte, relating the proceedings of a conference dedicated to the memory of the founder of positivism, the Revue states: “Quand on fait les honneurs à des hôtes de passage, on néglige les amis de tous les jours, ceux de la plus grande intimité; aussi nous tairons-nous sur le succès qu’ont obtenu M. Simon, parlant au nome des positivistes du Brésil, et M. Ahmet Riza, directeur du *Mechveret*.”¹²⁰

Among the various cities that hosted Ottomans exiles, the most populated by Ottoman émigrés were Athens, Cairo, Folkestone, Geneva, London, and Paris. Paris was particularly important for a number of reasons that have partially been surveyed.

¹¹⁵ Charles Kurzman, *Democracy Denied 1905-1915: intellectuals and the fate of democracy*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 41.

¹¹⁶ *La Revue Occidentale* 2, no. 111 (1st Semester 1899), 84.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 366.

¹¹⁸ *La Revue Occidentale* 2, no. 113 (1st Semester 1901), 43 – extracts of the speech are on 54-57.

¹¹⁹ *La Revue Occidentale* 2, no. 114 (2nd Semester 1902), 124-126.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

However, there were also other motives to choose France and Paris. There, the press had taken up a pivotal role in political dissent earlier in the nineteenth century and had experienced state censorship. It, therefore, presented an environment in which techniques to bypass censorship could be learned and one in which the local civil society would have been sympathetic to the struggle of the Young Turk movement. The role of the political press in France and its possible influence on Ottomans in their choices for exile has been presented by Erdal Kaynar.¹²¹ The French press, and simultaneously, the Ottoman press in Paris, was seen as a central aspect of political engagement. For France, it had been one of the central vehicles for the production of a public opinion favourably inclined towards the ideas of Republicanism and had been a constant player in the struggle for the reinstatement of the Republic in 1870. Moreover, as it was happening in the Empire, French intellectuals and political activists had had to deal with state censorship.¹²²

The Young Turk members also enjoyed the participation and contribution to their journals of members of the European intelligentsia. The masses in the Empire might not have been reached by the content of these publications, but they must have been impressed by the news of an intellectual co-operation between what was perceived

¹²¹ Kaynar, "The Almighty Power of the Written Word."

¹²² During the years 1815 to 1881, "French authorities were even more afraid of the potential impact of visual, as contrasted with written expression of dissent, such as might be offered by caricature and the theatre. This was because a large percentage of the especially-feared 'dark masses' were illiterate and thus 'immune' to the written word, but they were not blind and thus perceived as highly susceptible to subversive imagery, ..." – Robert Justin Goldstein, "Fighting French Censorship, 1815-1881," *The French Review* 71, no. 5 (April 1998), 785. The Young Turk press published caricatures and theatre plays. For example, Mechveret published a political and satirical play in various acts and scenes. The broad genre was called Scènes Hamidiennes, and featured scenes written by foreigners, as in Nicolas Bafouillard, "Scènes Hamidiennes," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 3, no. 62 (1 September 1898), 3 – or most probably, by an Ottoman who wished to remain anonymous, as in "Scènes Hamidiennes – La politique de Karakeuz," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 3, no. 52 (1 February 1898), 2 – in which the Sultan is mocked repeatedly and the problems of the Empire discussed openly.

as the modern intelligentsia of Europe and the Ottoman one, in this case treated as equal by its European partner. Furthermore, the battle that had been fought in France against censorship, the type of individuals who had fought this war, and the outcome of this struggle were encouraging for the members of the Young Turk organisation. They thought that, publishing while in exile, they would have found a plethora of local intellectuals staunchly criticising possible attempts by the Hamidian regime to suppress them. This can be inferred by the following extract: “[Victor] Hugo compared the dramatic censorship to the Inquisition, terming it ‘detestable’ and a ‘prison’ for writers, which ‘like the other Holy Office,’ had its ‘secret judges, its masked executioners, its tortures and mutilations and its death penalty’.”¹²³

Members of the Young Turk organisation were also convinced that the liberal section of the French public that had fought strongly against censorship in their own country would be ready to support the Young Turk struggle in case of need. They were vindicated: when, as we shall see in detail in Chapter 3, the journal *Mechveret* was put on trial after diplomatic pressure from the Ottoman Embassy,¹²⁴ not only did the journal and his editor receive support in the court case proper, but also “Rıza [himself] acknowledged that the trial had promoted the Young Turk cause more than one year of publication of *Mechveret*.”¹²⁵ When the news of impeachment of *Mechveret* and of its two editors, Rıza and Ganem, reached the public, an impressive number of newspapers started a campaign to support the Ottoman journal and condemned the French government for giving in to the pressures of the Ottoman

¹²³ Goldstein, “Fighting French Censorship, 1815-1881,” 788. We know also that the members of the Young Turk movement read and admired Hugo from Hanioglu, *Preparation*, 309.

¹²⁴ This event and the wave of support from the French intellectual circle will be analysed in detail in Chapter 3. For an account of the trial, *Proces contre le Mechveret et La Jeune Turquie* (Paris: Chevalier-Marescq, 1897).

¹²⁵ Kaynar, “The Almighty Power of the Written Word,” November 2008.

Embassy.¹²⁶ Another opportunity presented by France was that, in the minds of most Young Turk members, the press there had worked as the most effective means of dissemination of elite ideas to the masses. The “‘culture of the journal’ represented also the new basis of elite formation. The cultural basis and legitimacy of the Ottoman intelligentsia was the press. ... Contributors to journals were considered the most enlightened men of the Empire, closest to the West and to modernity.”¹²⁷

For the Young Turk movement as a whole, their self-perception was that they constituted an intellectual elite that would spread knowledge to the masses. As the old aristocratic elite had disappeared, the Young Turks thought of themselves as the natural and legitimate heirs to this old aristocracy, capable of assuming specific political roles, as agent of change, on behalf of the population at large.

This view echoes some French intellectuals and, particularly, it came out of proximity to – in Paris – and a very close reading of Gustave Le Bon.¹²⁸ In his book, Le Bon provides the perfect ideological source for the role that many Young Turk members wanted to take up and for the group’s decision for doing this in such specific terms. Talking about the French Revolution, Le Bon claims that it “had as its real object the substitution of the power of the nobility by that of the bourgeoisie; that is, an old elite which had become incapable was to be replaced by a new elite

¹²⁶ Among the journalists who took over the defence of *Mechveret* was George Clémenceau. See various extracts of French journals published in *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 April 1896): 3-8.

¹²⁷ Kaynar, “The Almighty Power of the Written Word.”

¹²⁸ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*; and Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d’Abdul-Hamid*, among others. Le Bon, Gustave (1841-1931). French social psychologist, known for his study of the psychology of crowds. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. “Le Bon, Gustave.” His main work has been “*La psychologie des foules*” (1895), whereby he asserted that collective crowd mind dominates over that of the individual. Moreover, he attributed true progress to the work of an intellectual elite. See Gustave Le Bon, *The Psychology of Revolution*, accessed at <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/448/pg448.html>. Accessed on 30 January, 2010.

which did possess capacity.”¹²⁹ Le Bon also explains why this role cannot be held by the population at large, since “[t]he part of the people has been the same in all revolutions. It is never the people that conceives them nor directs them. Its activity is released by means of leaders. ... new ideas penetrate the people very slowly indeed. Generally, it accepts a revolution without knowing why, and when by chance it does succeed in understanding why, the revolution is over long ago.”¹³⁰ This view undoubtedly captured the imagination of the Young Turk leaders who saw themselves as equals to their French counterparts in bringing modernity and reform, although not necessarily through the same Revolutionary means that the French had employed. However, Le Bon’s approach provided more than a justification for elitism, but it also highlighted the ethical underpinnings of its perspective. Le Bon claims that the new elite needs to be open to dialogue since, to be successful, it needs to be tied both to tradition as well as to change, a stance characterised by both rigidity and malleability. Rigidity provides a historical and cultural justification for change, while malleability provides the readiness to adapt to changes resulting from general progress. Clear proof of the impact of Le Bon’s ideas on the movement is given by Halil Ganem in an article published in *Mechveret*.¹³¹ In the article, Ganem not only explains the importance of elites in processes of change, but also contextualises the specific type of elite the *Mechveret* group was intending to constitute:

Si elle [the elite] se recrute exclusivement dans une aristocratie, c’est le gouvernement monarchique dans toute sa beauté; si elle se recrute exclusivement dans une démocratie, c’est le gouvernement oligarchique. Le mieux serait évidemment qu’elle prît sa source dans

¹²⁹ Le Bon, *The Psychology of Revolution*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/448/pg448.html>, 30. Accessed on 12 January, 2010.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Halil Ganem, “L’Élite,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 3, no. 52 (1 February 1898): 1.

les deux classes, voire dans toutes classes de la société, sans distinction; car l'Élite est partout.¹³²

From Ganem's writing emerges something that is in between a justification for acting as proto-elite and a new definition of aristocratic elite. The writer claims that the strength of an elite is its eclectic background, which both justifies a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional composition. Thanks to the already mixed composition of the Young Turk movement, the opposition had the rightful claim to become the elite that would act as agent of change. The elite that emerged for the organisation itself was primarily an intellectual one, as Ganem explains:

Ce que nous appelons nous l'Élite, c'est l'Élite intelligente et pensante, l'Élite qui demande à la foi ses hautes inspirations, à la raison ses lumières, à la science ses expériences les plus concluantes et ses brillantes découvertes. L'Élite pour nous, c'est la glorieuse phalange des hommes qui ont souffert pour les propres convictions et de ceux qui ont combattu pour la liberté et la justice. L'Élite pour nous, ce sont les hommes qui ont du [sic] et de la fermeté, les courageux, les vaillants, les incorruptibles ceux qui osent penser haut et élever la voix en faveur de la vérité.¹³³

Besides the influence of French thinkers on the Young Turks, France's republican history presented these activists with a variety of models. The French Revolution served as a model for action, possibly too drastic for some within the movement, yet suggestive of how to deal with oppressive systems of government and of the possibilities available in a country that had undergone dramatic social and political changes. An interesting aspect to note, connected to the symbolic load of the French Revolution across the world, is that Rıza attempted to go to Paris, initially under an official capacity, for the *Exposition Universelle* that took place in 1889. This visit had created anxiety among the Ottoman administration as it coincided with the

¹³² Halil Ganem, "L'Élite," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 3, no. 52 (1 February 1898), 1.

¹³³ Ibid.

celebration of the 100th year from the French Revolution. In his memoirs, Ahmet Rıza writes of his desire to go to Paris on that specific occasion in order to voice some concerns he had with the regime:

I had been observing the works of the state closely for a year and a half. I had understood that everything was so appalling that it was impossible to serve either at the ministry or at any other similar place. I decided to go to Paris to voice my concerns from there. After the exams were over [Rıza was at the time the Director of Education in Bursa], I asked permission to leave for holidays. I came to Istanbul. ‘If you allow me to have a month off, I will dedicate my holiday to an exhibition in Paris. There is no obstacle to that.’ I said to Münir Pasha. ‘That is wrong! You are appointed by a ferman, you need permission from the palace. Who else was planning on going there? The Palace is concerned that the exposition coincides with the anniversary of the Revolution. ...’¹³⁴

This refusal on the part of the Ottoman government to send any official representative was due to its apprehension about its international image in relation to politics. According to Deringil:

The occasion of the opening of the 1889 Paris Exposition on the centenary of the French revolution was something of an embarrassment for the powers still ruled by monarchies. The Ottoman ambassador in Paris, Esad Paşa, somewhat anxious as to the appropriate course of action, telegraphed that the British, Austrian, Russian and German ambassadors had made it clear to him that they would absent themselves from Paris on the occasion. This would mean that he would be the ‘only ambassador of a Great Power to attend the ceremony.’ He was instructed by the Porte to absent himself ‘from so insalubrious an event so damaging to the idea of monarchic sovereignty.’¹³⁵

On the part of Rıza and other members of the Young Turk organisation, there are no clear sources explaining the real motives behind visiting the *Exposition Universelle*; yet, we can speculate. First, the writings of previous Ottomans or Muslims who had

¹³⁴ Rıza, *Ahmed Rıza Bey’in Anıları*, 9-10.

¹³⁵ Deringil, *The Well-protected Domains* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 155.

visited Europe, and had remained impressed by its industrial and technological modernity, must have given these figures the idea that, by going to the Expo, members would be inspired and motivated to influence the Ottoman society in similar terms. A second consideration, in the case of Rıza, is that he was planning to go to Paris in order to escape and had already in mind the setting up of an anti-regime publication in exile. In his memoirs, in fact, he wrote: “[a]fter I visited the Industry Exhibition in Paris in 1889, I started to arrange all the necessities to publish a collection, a book and a newspaper.”¹³⁶ In this case, the visit to the *Exposition Universelle* was a pretext. Lastly, going to such an exhibition had the aim of putting forward a new face for the Empire. One of the worries of Ottoman statesmen,¹³⁷ similar to the Egyptian ones,¹³⁸ was that much of the representation of the Orient at these fairs was, as Edward Said would put it, Orientalist – displaying a constructed or outdated picture of the Orient. There is a substantial chance, therefore, that some Young Turk members would be interested in going to such exhibitions in order to project a more realistic image of the lands and, in fact, a different one than that which Abdülhaimd would want to promote. We know that, on many occasions, the Sultan himself intended to send Ottoman representatives to these types of fairs in order to modify the image that Europe had of the Ottoman Empire.¹³⁹

Lastly, Paris could also be seen as offering a uniquely welcoming environment, as many of the Ottomans who had been sent abroad, during the Tanzimat, were sent to

¹³⁶ Rıza, *Ahmed Rıza Bey'in Anıları*, 10.

¹³⁷ Deringil, *The Well-protected Domains*; as well as Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient. Architecture of Islam at nineteenth century World's Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); and Zeynep Çelik and Leila Kinney, “Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Expositions Universelles,” *Assemblage* 13 (Dec. 1990): 34-59.

¹³⁸ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹³⁹ Deringil, *Well-protected Domains*; and Çelik, *Displaying the Orient*.

the French capital. In fact, French was the foreign language most studied by Ottomans of the upper classes. According to Naum Pasha, the Ottoman ambassador to France at the end of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman presence in Paris amounted to around 20,000 people, while the *Service des Etrangers* and the *Ministère du Travail* estimated the number at a maximum of 15,000.¹⁴⁰ According to police sources, the Ottoman diasporic community was founded in the late 1870s and included, ranked according to size, Jews, Armenians, Syrians, Greeks, Lebanese, and a small number of Turks. They resided mainly in and around the *11ème arrondissement* (nearby the Père Lachaise Cemetery, which had a Muslim section), Rue de la Roquette, Rue Sedaine, and St. Ambroise, and in the *8ème arrondissement*, mainly around Boulevard des Malesherbes. As briefly mentioned before, Ahmet Rıza joined the Paris Ottoman community in 1889. Prince Sabahettin, his brother Lutfullah and father Damat Mahmut Pasha, as we shall see in more details in Chapter 4, arrived in December 1899 via the port of Marseilles.

Concluding remarks

This chapter contextualised the struggle of the Young Turks in the wider frame of Ottoman debates on modern governance and modernity more generally and, simultaneously, located it within the space of transnational dynamics – such as a flourishing of Muslim intellectuals, exchanges between European and non-European ideologies, the spread of the press and a larger negotiation with censorship in France and in the Empire. The chapter opened with the acknowledgement that the Young Turk organisation was structurally loose and multi-faceted. Despite such multiplicity,

¹⁴⁰ These figures and the ones below are based on the documents in “Rapports divers sur le sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914,” *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA/1653 – 109.700-2-A.

this chapter highlights some sources of common inspiration and support that the members of the Young Turks received from allies and sympathisers.

I want to highlight the fact that the loose nature of this organisation gave rise to two sub-groups, the internal and external branch. Without this first split, the trajectory of the opposition could well have stopped in 1896-7, when the Sultan managed, through his secret police, to discover the plot to kill him, arrest most members of the opposition and essentially dismantle the internal branch. It is at this juncture that the importance of exile emerges clearly. While the Sultan co-opted part of the external branch, it did not reach all of its members – such as Rıza and the *Mechveret* group. For these figures, apart from ensuring continuity in the life of the Young Turk organisation, exile also provided the ideal ideological and logistical opportunities to publish an opposition journal that would otherwise have perished within Ottoman borders.

The publication of a journal was thought to be the central means through which to oppose the rule in Istanbul for a variety of reasons: it was the perfect forum where intellectuals could exchange views, influence each other, and synthesise the experiences of a wider spectrum of cultures in the interest of envisaging the Empire's future. Given the elitism of most members of the Young Turks, the publication of a journal was seen as the most modern and most clearly intellectual vehicle for political opposition. However, this idea did not appear in a void, but was known already from a direct influence of the French experience, namely the struggle that the French public had endured towards the proclamation of the Third Republic at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This consideration pushed many

members of the Young Turk, and Rıza and Sabahettin more specifically, to France and Paris rather than anywhere else. They were convinced that taking up exile and publishing opposition journals would ensure a degree of freedom for the expression of their visions and, most importantly, would benefit from the help and support of the politicised French left and scholarly circles.

Through their publications, Young Turk members abroad and specifically in Paris, managed to internationalise their struggle, present an alternative to Sultan Abdülhamit II to the European public, and most importantly, participate in intellectual circles such as the positivist and *Science sociale* schools. There, they were accepted as partners as well as active contributors to similarly positioned magazines, of which *La Revue Occidentale* was prime example. It is important to stress that the perception of the political Young Turk organisation among foreigners was paramount to the realisation of these activists' final ends. The elite that these Ottomans were attempting to build was not an isolated one, confined to the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. Rather, for them it represented an international one, where reforms in their own country would be only a step in the constitution of a politically progressive and scientifically and technologically advanced world civilisation. In the following two chapters, I interrogate in details the ideology, the activities, and the networks of Ahmet Rıza and Mehmet Sabahettin, who I consider the most significant Young Turk leaders, while in Paris.

CHAPTER 3 – AHMET RIZA AND THE *MECHVERET* GROUP

In this chapter, I examine the background, political activities and philosophical development of one of the two most influential figures that headed the Young Turk movement between the second part of 1890 and the early 1900s. I intend this and the following chapter as deeper contextualisations of the history of the opposition to the rule of Sultan Abdülhamit II in the late nineteenth century and of the overall struggle for modernisation in the Ottoman Empire. The reality and importance of exile, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a central element in the intellectual and activist endeavours of the figures in question.

In the next pages, I follow the ideas of Ahmet Rıza as these were expressed through the pages of his memoirs, his monograph and, most importantly, the journal he had founded while in exile in Paris, *Mechveret*. I will delve into these ideas in order to appreciate the synthesis that Rıza attempted to reach between what he regarded as traditional Ottoman and Eastern values and beliefs, with the philosophical current of positivism. I claim that what emerges from these writings is the *Mechveret* group's own version of Ottomanism, different from that of Abdülhamit II and, to some extent, from that of other groups within the Young Turk organisation. Exploring Rıza's ideas as well as the geographical and political frame in which they were shaped (that is, Paris) will shed light onto the most formative period of Young Turk history and produce a more nuanced picture of the diversity of visions within the opposition. Nonetheless, what also emerges from this detailed gaze into Rıza's work is a number of tensions and dilemmas within his ideology. These dilemmas have to do mainly with: the role of religion, a rather blurry picture of a political plan, and his remoteness from the population, that is, the actual space where his agenda would

potentially unfold. To these factors, one needs to add a somewhat naive approach, on Rıza's part, towards the feasibility of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Empire without the inclusion of drastic legal changes at the local level which would ensure a real balance between the various groups of the population – which, instead, Sabahettin does provide, as I will show in the next chapter, through the adoption, in his political vision, of a federalist plan. While reading through their work and encountering these dilemmas, I have been aware of the fact that Rıza's, as well as Sabahettin's, intellectual and activist plan was evolving over time and that the less articulated or contradictory aspects of their thought need to be seen as part of an ideology in the making and in a process of constant re-adjusting.

Introducing the figure of Ahmet Rıza

Ahmet Rıza¹ was the son of *İngiliz* Ali Bey, who was nicknamed this way due to his admiration for England, and of a foreign mother – it is not certain whether she was Hungarian or Austrian. After being educated at the Galatasaray High School, he started working at the Translation Office (*Tercüme Odası*) of the *Bab-ı Âli*; this workplace proved to be formative in intellectual terms, instilling in Rıza the will to establish both intellectual and physical contact with the West. In 1884, he went to France and attended the Grignon Agricultural School. Upon his return to the Empire, Rıza was appointed Principal of the Bursa High School and director of the Education Department of the Bursa province, officially known as the Vilayet of Hudavendigâr.

¹ Born in Istanbul in 1858 and died in February 1930.

In 1889, Rıza moved back to France – this time, however, motivated by the idea of establishing a journal of opposition. His formal excuse for leaving the Empire was to attend the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, which, incidentally, coincided with celebrations for the centenary of the French Revolution, “an event which served as an inspiration to many Ottoman students and young civil servants at the time.”² Rıza recalls his background in a concise manner in his memoirs:

My father sent me to Paris for agriculture studies. Three years later, while passing my exams, I received a notification about his death. I was looking for a job as I returned to Istanbul. But I was neither hired, nor was I provided with money to open a farm. Finally, although I did not want this, I had to take a state job. Arab Hakki Paşa was the agriculture minister. He told me that there was no job at the ministry. In France, there is a big agriculture university and three agriculture academies; over 100 students graduate from there each year, and all of them find jobs. Although nothing has been done about agriculture in our country and there are many things to do, a man who studied [abroad] with his own money and came back [to the Empire] is told “there is no job.” I applied to the Education Ministry. I was offered a job as a chemistry teacher and high school manager in Bursa with a 2,400 kuruş salary. I accepted. The Bursa education director was a turbaned man called Veli Efendi. Being satisfied with my efforts, Education Minister Munif Pasa [soon] appointed me as Bursa Education Director with a 3,000 kuruş salary. ... I was observing state works closely for a year and a half. I understood that everything was so messed up that it was impossible to serve either at the ministry or at any other similar place. I decided to go to Paris to express my concerns from there.³

At first, Rıza moved to Paris individually and was not part of any organisation:

After I visited the Industry Exhibition in Paris in 1889, I started to arrange all the necessities to publish a collection, a book and a newspaper. While trying to sustain my life, I was also trying to publish the collection. I was going to the library every morning and attending conferences every evening. Soon after, I presented my first project to the Padishah. The project was taken into consideration and a verdict was issued that as an output of my education, I should not

² Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*, 98.

³ Rıza, *Ahmed Rıza Bey'in Anıları*, 9-10.

present the project to the Padishah's office and not publish anything. They sent me a 2,000 lira award as well. I did not accept it. The reply followed that "the money bestowed [upon you] cannot be denied. It has to be taken." I denied it again.⁴

Once in Paris, Rıza socialised with Halil Ganem. Ganem was a Syrian Maronite Christian born in Beirut in 1846, who began his career in 1862 as member of the commercial court in his native city. Initially appointed as "dragoman of the Beirut *mutasarrifiyya*, and subsequently of the *wilāyet* of Syria,"⁵ he went on to hold the same post at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the Constitutional period, Ganem held the post of Syrian delegate to the first Ottoman parliament, but he fled to Paris once Sultan Abdülhamit II had suspended the Constitution. In Paris, he began an active career as writer and publisher of newspapers and journals; he contributed to the *Journal des Débats* and *Figaro* and was the editor of the Paris based journals *La Jeune Turquie* and *al-Bāsīr* as well as of the *Hilāl* in Geneva. He also published a two-volume book entitled, *Les Sultans Ottomans*.⁶ Ganem represented an ideal partner for Rıza, since he was ready to actively oppose Abdülhamit and was simultaneously well positioned within the French intellectual circles.

The two men forged a long-lasting cooperation and friendship. In 1895, they began the publication of a new journal, *Mechveret* – Consultation – with the help of an initial fund raised, as explained earlier on, during a meeting and fundraising event in Paris.⁷ The journal was comprised of two sections, one in Ottoman Turkish and a supplement, in French. The supplement, which I examine in detail in this chapter, is

⁴ Rıza, *Ahmed Rıza Bey'in Anıları*, 10-11.

⁵ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Elie Kedourie, s.v. "Khalīl Ghānim."

⁶ Halil Ganem, *Les Sultans Ottomans*, vol. 1&2 (Paris: Chevalier-Marescq, 1901).

⁷ For a more precise account of the funds raised, see Chapter 2.

especially interesting because it does not only publicise opposition to the Sultan but also clearly envisages recruiting support from the European public and some specific political actors. Its emphasis on modernism (suitable to an Ottoman reality as much as to a European one) may be the expression of the desire to appeal to this wider intellectual and political community, as well as to the idea of belonging to it. The establishment of *Mechveret* followed the familiar pattern used in the late 19th century by opposition groups outside Ottoman dominions. Unlike many other such publications, however, *Mechveret* was to have a profound impact on the future development of Young Turk history.

Who did *Mechveret* represent?

After its launch, *Mechveret* started attracting a substantially large number of different people. The group was comprised of “prominent men, Christian and Muslim,”⁸ bound together by the will to modernise and reform the Ottoman Empire through a progressive approach.⁹ Contrary to other organisations, both in exile and in the Empire, the *Mechveret* group repudiated any violence in the process of such change. Armed revolution as a means for transformation was not a viable option, a stance that was expressed clearly at various times. Ahmet Rıza wrote that his group had “a horror of concessions obtained by violence,”¹⁰ and Halil Ganem added that “[i]l serait inutile, sinon dangereux, de recourir de nouveau aux révolutions de palais

⁸ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 39.

⁹ ‘Progressive’ here is intended as following the path initiated intellectually by the Young Ottomans, that is one in which great importance is given to the creation of a citizenry, the expansion of rights for the people and the expansion of duties on the part of the government, as well as to the introduction of reforms based on the equality of all Ottomans. All this, opposed to the more centralistic rule of Abdülhamit and his personalistic style of rule.

¹⁰ Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*, 25.

qui n'ont jamais donné à la nation que des résultats négatifs.”¹¹ According to Ahmet Rıza, a revolution would result in the collapse of the Empire and would automatically invite foreign military presence on the pretext that this would be needed to safeguard ethnic and religious minorities. Even before foreign occupation, the chaos resulting from a revolution would put the various ethno-religious components against each other, shattering any hope of an Ottoman pluralistic society. Indeed, this pluralistic society was a focal point of the ideological visions of Ottomanism as imagined by the *Mechveret* group, as it will be discussed further on. As Rıza wrote, the ideological message of history is that “ce ne sont point les massacres qui ont fait la Révolution française, ce sont les grands penseurs du XVIII^e siècle.”¹² Thus, a gradual, intellectually-initiated change from above would transform the status quo and the nature of despotic rule, embodied in Sultan Abdülhamit II, without upsetting the frail but crucial ethno-religious balance that still kept the Empire together and which was central to the group's project.

The figure of Rıza dominated the *Mechveret* faction and therefore the journal provided a venue for his thoughts, while other members dithered between association and dissociation.¹³ The only other stable member of the group was Halil Ganem, as the intellectual affinity between the two was considerable. Decline, for them, was the result of two main aspects, despotism and fanaticism: “voilà les deux principales causes de la décadence de l'empire ottoman et de la dégénérescence, de plus marquée, de la dynastie.”¹⁴ A corrupted Islam, highjacked by the ulema, was now being used by these same figures as a tool to remain in power, while despotism

¹¹ Ganem, *Les Sultans Ottomans*, 298.

¹² Le Comité, “Déclaration,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 19 (15 September 1896), 1.

¹³ This view is also supported by Ramsaur; Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*.

¹⁴ Ganem, *Les Sultans Ottomans*, xi.

was thought to be the manifestation of a dying entity, an *ultima ratio*, to hold on to the Sultanate. In order to stop the course of decline, the elitist Ottoman intellectual circle had to propagate the modern and progressive ideals, as “[I]a prospérité d’une nation dépend de la culture intellectuelle de ses chefs.”¹⁵

It has proven challenging to determine the specific composition of the *Mechveret* group, since both primary sources and the secondary literature are vague and contradictory regarding the issue of membership. Some members were part of the group only for a short period, or were simultaneously part of other factions within the Young Turk organisation or other intellectual circles. Others may have been allied with Ahmet Rıza but decided to formally stay outside the group. What we do know is that the group was not only composed of Ottomans, but also of French intellectuals and positivists with whom Ahmet Rıza co-operated simultaneously on different projects, such as *La Revue Occidentale*,¹⁶ *The Positivist Review*,¹⁷ the newspaper *La Paix*, on which Rıza wrote on Armenian affairs,¹⁸ as well as working together for the founding of the International Positivist Society.¹⁹ These French scholars regularly contributed to the issues of *Mechveret* developing a positivist ideology applicable to the realities of the Ottoman Empire and constantly debating the topics of religion and scientific progress.

¹⁵ Ganem, *Les Sultans Ottomans*, 298.

¹⁶ See, among others, his following articles: “Le positivisme et l’Islamisme,” *La Revue Occidentale* 2, no. 103 (1st Semester 1891): 114-118; “Le calife et ses devoirs,” *La Revue Occidentale* 2, no. 108 (2nd Semester 1896): 93-98; “L’inaction des Jeunes-Turcs,” *La Revue Occidentale* 2, no. 115 (1st Semester 1903): 91-98.

¹⁷ Ahmet Rıza, “Italy and Turkey,” *The Positivist Review* 227 (1 November 1911): 359-360.

¹⁸ Georges Barbezieux, “Odieuse Attitude,” *La Paix* (12 April 1896), as reproduced in *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 April 1896), 3.

¹⁹ Charles Kurzman, *Democracy Denied, 1905-1915 – Intellectuals and the fate of democracy* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 41.

Ahmet Rıza's philosophical and political ideology

As leader of one of the two most influential factions in the Young Turk movement, Ahmet Rıza had an important role in shaping Ottoman history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Yet tenets of his ideology reverberated until much later in the Empire as well as in modern Turkey due to his role in the transmission of modern and reformist ideals that influenced a generation of Turks including Mustafa Kemal.²⁰ He was, without doubt, the most prominent intellectual of the Young Turk movement and has been described by Erik Zürcher as the figure who was “to dominate the opposition movement for nearly twenty years.”²¹

Once in Paris, Rıza became extremely influenced by the positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte,²² of Edmond Demolins²³ and, as briefly hinted at, of Gustave Le Bon,²⁴ allegedly after having bought by chance a Reader on positivism in a Parisian bookshop.²⁵ According to some sources,²⁶ Rıza also enjoyed the friendship of Pierre Laffitte and the company of Demolins and Le Bon by participating in the weekly Wednesday lunches, *les déjeuners du mercredi*. These were organised by Le Bon and were frequented by the most prominent figures of the intellectual circle of the time. At the end of the nineteenth century, the French newspaper *La Dépêche*

²⁰ On the Young Turk legacy in modern Turkey, see Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*.

²¹ Zürcher, *Unionist Factor*, 14.

²² Comte, Auguste (1798-1857). French philosopher and founder of sociology and positivism. Known for his two works: *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-1842, 6 volumes) and *Système de politique positive* (1851-1854, 4 volumes). Comte attempted to substitute the worship of God with a religion of humanity and classified the evolution of science from mathematics, astronomy, physics and chemistry to biology and finally sociology. Throughout his work, he put forward the “theory that theology and metaphysics are earlier imperfect modes of knowledge and that positive knowledge is based on natural phenomena and their properties and their relations are verified by empirical sciences.” *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v “Comte, Auguste.”

²³ Born 1852, died 1907.

²⁴ See Chapter 2 for a short description.

²⁵ Prof. François Georgeon, conversation with author, SOAS, 11 March 2009.

²⁶ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*. Also, see Chapter 2.

described Rıza's 'folder'²⁷ as containing "... de la philosophie, de l'histoire, de la politique, de la métaphysique; [inside it] Confucius et Zoroastre s'y rencontrent avec Luther et Voltaire, les pères de l'Eglise y heurtent l'Encyclopédie, Mahomet y coudoie M.J.B. Say et Michelet. Mais celui qui domine de toute sa grandeur, c'est Auguste Comte."²⁸

It is in the sphere of philosophy that Rıza grounded his political convictions, as well as the view that the achievements of the West in the intellectual and technological fields had been enlightening for the rest of the world – this view was generally shared in the Young Turk organisation. However, marking his own position within the wider organisation of the Young Turk movement as well as his specific blend of Ottomanism, Rıza argued that the West itself had succumbed to vices that had undermined its own achievements and were responsible for an aggressive and colonialist foreign policy. The West, for Rıza, had halted the advancement of civilisation and become immoral in its dealings with other peoples and cultures.²⁹ Hence, while many Young Turks were convinced that the West had to be imitated in its totality, "with its roses and its thorns"³⁰ and others thought that the West could have been an excellent partner in reviving the past glory of the Empire and helping it enter into the modern era, Ahmet Rıza had a different stance. As he expressed it in his book *La Faillite Morale de la Politique Occidentale en Orient*,³¹ the positive, long-term achievements of the West remain in the high plain of immortality, are timeless and belong to humanity as a whole. Any society and civilisation could take

²⁷ Meaning, not the actual folder but his cultural baggage.

²⁸ "Une expulsion sournoise," *La Justice* (13 April 1896), as reproduced in *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 April 1896), 6.

²⁹ Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*.

³⁰ Hanioglu, "Garbcılar: Their Attitudes Toward Religion," 145.

³¹ Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*.

inspiration from them since they had been elevated to the level of an enlightened universalism. This way, other cultures could synthesise and adapt them to their own reality, thus making in turn these achievements an asset for humanity as a whole. On the other hand, the immoral politics of the West – as Rıza continuously referred to the political interventions of the West in the nineteenth century in particular – belong to a set era, representing a particular society at a specific point in time. Therefore, according to Rıza, other cultures, and specifically the Ottoman Empire, had to bear in mind this distinction and be wary of a foreign physical presence in their own country. The essence of his stance is summarised well in one of the passages of his book: “[j]’aime ma Patrie, mais j’aime aussi, et d’un même amour, l’humanité et la vérité. Autant la politique barbare de l’Occident me révolte, autant ses progrès intellectuels, ses découvertes scientifiques et leurs prodigieuses applications m’inspirent d’admiration et de respect.”³² This view, supplemented by other concerns, foreshadows the tough anti-Western intervention position Rıza was to adopt at the Congress of 1902.³³

The positivist ideology was so appealing to Rıza that he took up the motto ‘Order and Progress’ for his group and publication. The same motto would later be taken up by the whole opposition movement. ‘Order and Progress’ was thought to be especially appropriate as the words “...mean, among other things, growth in accordance with law, as contrasted on the one hand with stagnation, on the other with anarchy; they mean evolution, as distinct alike from revolution and from

³² Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*, 14.

³³ See later discussion as well as Chapter 5.

dissolution.”³⁴ In sum, these words exemplified all the features that Rıza thought should be introduced in the Ottoman Empire in order to jumpstart its positivist modernisation. Order and Progress were the intellectual opposites of the prevailing spirit of the Ottoman Empire of the Sultan, a spirit that, according to Rıza, had brought its decay.

Through examining its written production, it emerges that one of the major misconceptions regarding the *Mechveret* group has to do with the issue of religion. As I have showed before, most of the contributors to *Mechveret* had positivist leanings and, for this reason, have been branded by the more widespread historical literature as vehemently rejecting any idea of religion. Şükrü Hanioglu maintains that all the exponents of the Young Turk organisation were committed to “Büchner’s battle against religion [and that this was] a mainstay for the Young Turk ideology at the outset of the movement.”³⁵ However, I contend that while there certainly was a drive to tailor a new role for religion and religious discourse, it is also clear that the Young Turk exponents in general – and Ahmet Rıza in particular – considered religion as an important feature in the development of their version of Ottomanism.

Many historians have highlighted the incongruence of Rıza’s stand as positivism and religion are seen as incompatible. The view that I put forward here is different. In Le Bon’s writings, but equally in those of other positivists, Rıza found an interesting defence of the Oriental civilisation, including Islam; this discourse recalls the arguments used by Arab Muslim defenders of their own past and provided, for the

³⁴ John Henry Bridges, *Illustrations of Positivism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Burt Franklin Reprints, 1974), 157.

³⁵ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 22.

Mechveret group, a link across constructed religious boundaries towards a unifying belief. Moreover, science, as positivism formulated it, is cumulative and trans-cultural, entailing equality among different cultures.³⁶ Hence, the ‘religion of science’ became a discourse that provided Rıza with the ideological tools to combat fanaticism as well as greed and hunger for power that, in his opinion, had led Islam astray.

But, and this is what I want to highlight here, this view of science did not abolish religion as experience altogether. In fact, the Islamic heritage as cultural foundation of the Ottoman state would be important in maintaining unity in the face of its multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition. Whether this was a naïve assumption that underestimated the diverse investments and desires of the Empire’s citizens is another question altogether.

What is evident is that Rıza used a religious discourse in many of his writings addressed to a European and Ottoman or Muslim audience. In many of his articles written in French, Rıza repeatedly stated that the true political spirit of Islam is very close to a republican regime³⁷ and that, even in the early years of Islam, scientific knowledge had always been encouraged.³⁸ He stated, moreover, that Islam as a religion had supported progress, philosophy and reason until Islam itself had become a tool of the despotic regime.

³⁶ Bridges, *Illustrations of Positivism*.

³⁷ “L’islamisme n’est nullement hostile à la République; au contraire, il ne connaît, en principe, comme chef que celui qui est élu par la décision de l’assemblée nationale ... c’est la dictature le mieux organisée et la plus rapprochée de la République. Ahmet Rıza, “Le positivisme et l’Islamisme,” *La Revue Occidentale* 2, no. 103 (1st Semester 1891), 116.

³⁸ Ahmet Rıza, “Le calife et ses devoirs,” *La Revue Occidentale* 2, no. 108 (2nd Semester 1896): 93-98.

This is clearly formulated in the booklet *Tolérance Musulmane*:

Comment une doctrine qui fut un élément si puissant de régénération et de progrès est-elle devenue aujourd'hui entre les mains de quelques fanatiques ignorants, hypocrites et malveillants, un instrument d'intolérable tyrannie? Question redoutable sur laquelle j'appelle l'attention du khalife actuel et dont la solution contribuerait plus que toute autre réforme au relèvement du monde musulman. N'est-ce pas un signe de décadence profonde que de voir des gens mal renseignés ou mal intentionnés qui se disent pourtant musulmans, s'opposer à toute critique des croyances religieuses et interdire de les soumettre aux lumières de la philosophie et de la raison?³⁹

This particular view is reinforced in French journalists' depiction of Rıza. In various articles written in France, the authors refer to Rıza as a Muslim, which indicates, if not an effort on his part to appear as a religious person, at least his willingness not to deny this. Writer and journalist Phillippe Dubois, for example, described Rıza as follows during latter's trial in France: "[Rıza] ... est un des rares musulmans de la Jeune Turquie qui aient conserve intact leur patriotisme et leur religion."⁴⁰ I maintain therefore, that, had Rıza addressed a Muslim audience, his stance could be correctly seen as a political expedient for moving the masses towards his own plan. However, as this was not the case, one needs to include the possibility that religion and science could, effectively, co-exist in Rıza's political vision – whether in practice feasible or not. It is debatable whether this was a first stage in the construction of Rıza's ideology, or whether the religious ethos would, according to an already formed plan, give way in due time to a scientific ideology, but dismissing his evident acknowledgement of the importance of Islam as a political expedient, seems somewhat reductive. Yet a further explanation for the possibility of co-existence between positivism and Islam rests in the fact that, as I have argued, most

³⁹ Ahmet Rıza, *Tolérance Musulmane* (Paris: Clamaron-Graff, 1897), 20.

⁴⁰ Phillippe Dubois, "Expulsion de M. Ahmed-Rıza," *L'Intransigeant* (13 April 1896), as reproduced in *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 April 1896), 5.

of Rıza's disaffection with religion had to do with the corruption and personal interest of most of the Ottoman religious class of the time. As science for the positivists was not a goal in itself but a means to achieve a specific outcome, then Rıza could have intended to use it as the vehicle through which to escape what he regarded as unhealthy links with the past and loyalties to corrupt *loci* of power.

Moreover, Rıza's own work, which should be seen as the result of his synthesis of positivism and his own cultural heritage, stitched this positivist-scientific discourse onto an Islamo-Oriental jacket, proving, first and foremost, that the Eastern/Muslim civilisation was as important as the Western/Christian one. Once that intellectual balancing had been accomplished, he could move on to state that Islam was truly based on scientific discourse in its purest form and, therefore, that there was not much difference between the positivist 'religion of Science' and Islam, as Islam itself was for Rıza a religion that embodied science. One could probe what at first seem to be tensions within his discourse: having established that all cultures have more or less the same weight and that religion really did not work towards progress in the same way as science, how could one uphold the scientific purity of religion first, and the primacy of one religion over another? This ambivalence can be explained by looking at the writings of the founder of positivism, Auguste Comte. The French philosopher explained that, among other things, positivism has no connection to atheism.

As Comte theorised, all metaphysical explanations of reality are to be discarded, and the only way to explain worldly phenomena is through the physical experience, positivism cannot be related to atheism since the latter's tendency is:

to prolong the metaphysical stage indefinitely, by continuing to seek for new solutions of Theological problems, instead of setting aside all inaccessible researches on the ground of their utter inutility. The true Positive spirit consists in substituting the study of the invariable Laws of phenomena for that of their so-called Causes, whether proximate or primary – in a word, in studying the *How* instead of the *Why*.⁴¹

Thus, to some degree, positivism did leave space for a certain amount of theism in its conception of philosophy. Moreover, by stressing the importance of science in the conceptualisation of social philosophy, positivism would tailor a pivotal role for both Islam as religion and Muslim civilisation. This optimism rested on the historical premise that without the transmission of astrological and mathematical studies carried out in the Muslim world during the intellectually dark ages of Western civilisation, it would have been impossible to speculate on science and, consequently, to formulate the tenets of the positivist philosophy itself. Moreover, Comte himself, in his attempt to make positivism a religion, expressed both his admiration for some aspects of the Catholic faith during the Middle-Ages and took inspiration from Thomas à Kempis's fifteenth-century book, *About the Imitation of Christ*.⁴² Comte's own synthesis proves that some aspects of religion can indeed be embodied in the positivist philosophy. However, it is true that Rıza's formulation of how exactly Islam as religion would fit into a reformed pluralistic Ottomanism remains vague and, at best, idealistic (if not utopian). The dilemma, therefore, becomes one of theory versus action and not one of science versus religion.

⁴¹ <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/index.htm>. Accessed on 12 February 2009.

⁴² see <http://www2.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/hop.htm>. Accessed on 20 March 2010.

In the conceptualisation of the reconcilability of science and religion Gustave Le Bon, who, as I have emphasised, was instrumental in influencing Young Turk view of elitism,⁴³ also proved decisive. Reading his work *La Civilisation des Arabes*, Ahmet Rıza came to regard Le Bon's views and approach towards the East as the practical application of Comte's theoretical discourse. Le Bon proved to be both a source of inspiration and what Rıza regarded as a precious ally in spreading new ideas acceptable to eastern culture throughout the Empire and, at the same time, ensuring that changes would be positively accepted by at least part of the intellectual milieu in the West. In his book, Le Bon upheld the importance of the Arab influence in the history of civilisation in Europe, stressing that this influence had been generally neglected and that, in reality, it was through the works of the Arab civilisation that Europe in the Middle Ages stayed in touch with classical antiquity, allowing Christian Europe to escape barbarism.⁴⁴ Le Bon's praise of Arab civilisation did not stop there, but extended to the substantial influence of the Arab civilisation on the West's experience of science, literature and moral teachings: "Nous allons essayer de démontrer maintenant que l'action exercée par les Arabes sur l'Occident fut également considérable, et que c'est à eux qu'est due la civilisation de l'Europe."⁴⁵ The importance of such statement should not be underestimated. It is usually thought that it is only the dominant culture – in political and military terms – that has an impact on the less powerful one – in this case the Ottoman Empire. In this one-way narrative, alternative dynamics are considered to be historical exceptions or divergences, which are frequently omitted. Instead, Le

⁴³ See Chapter 2.

⁴⁴ Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*, 175.

⁴⁵ Gustave Le Bon, *La Civilisation des Arabes*. Book V, 152.

http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/le_bon_gustave/civilisation_des_arabes/civilisation_arabes.html, 152.

Bon suggested that cultures pass from a dominant position to a more marginal one in a rather cyclical way; de-mythologising the idea of cultural superiority. Le Bon put forward here the historical frame of mutual cultural bargaining. This view caught the interest of Rıza, who could present himself, and other Ottoman intellectuals, as equal partners in a list of positivist thinkers that spanned across many countries and continents.

Even though Gustave Le Bon is not openly cited in any of the issues of *Mechveret*, Rıza made continuous references to Le Bon's views in his work *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale en orient*.⁴⁶ It is also known that Young Turks in general considered Le Bon's *La Civilisation des Arabes* as an important source of inspiration.⁴⁷ As mentioned before, what seems to have specifically motivated Rıza was Le Bon's eulogy of the Arab civilisation: "L'ardeur qu'ils [Arabs] apportèrent dans l'étude est véritablement frappante ...".⁴⁸ On the subject of education and intellectual development, Le Bon praised the establishment of universities in Baghdad, Cairo, Toledo and Cordoba – to mention a few – which were equipped with up-to-date laboratories, observatories and libraries. In the discipline of philosophy, the Arab school was presented as the natural heir to the Greek one, developing complex philosophical currents such as skepticism, which went as far as contesting the meaning and role of religion. However, it was in the field of scientific advancement that Le Bon thought the Arab legacy was paramount. Achievements in mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, physics, mechanics and geography were seen not only as a legacy for civilisation as a whole, but also as a pillar for the

⁴⁶ Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*, 35.

⁴⁷ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 214; see also Chapter 2.

⁴⁸ Le Bon, *La Civilisation des Arabes*. Book V, 38.

development of positivism as a philosophical trend.⁴⁹ Le Bon referred to discoveries and advancements in the fields of algebra and geometry;⁵⁰ in chemistry, he mentioned the discovery of alcohol, sulphuric and nitric acid and of distillation; in physics, he discussed the treaty on optics of Alhazen that formed the basis of Kepler's study.⁵¹

Positivism and religion as the basis for the modernisation of the Empire

It is significant that, even if Rıza adamantly opposed the active help and intervention of the Western powers because of their self-interested intentions, he was not equally unyielding in rejecting some sort of external aid, namely that of human solidarity. This sentiment of shared community could potentially help to get rid of prejudices in relationships and at the same time contribute to fighting ignorance and reactionism in the pursuit of progress. Human solidarity, shared among the literate elites, could have brought about a 'positive truth' characterised by fraternity between different religious beliefs. And it was positivism itself that was to provide the framework for harmony, solidarity and mutual dependence across religious, ethnic and nationalistic barriers in order to inaugurate the positivist stage of intellectual development and create a progressive element in science, art, religion and politics in the Ottoman Empire.⁵² In sum, positivism held a very important role in the conceptualisation of the *Mechveret*-promoted Ottomanism.

Gustave Le Bon was convinced that it was possible to create a point of convergence between religion and science; Rıza was trying to construct this synthesis and

⁴⁹ Le Bon, *La Civilisation des Arabes*. Books V and VI, Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Book V, 56-64.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 71-82.

⁵² Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*.

introduce it to the Ottoman lands. According to the French philosopher, Islam and science had, for centuries, walked a similar path.⁵³ This allowed Muslims to believe in Islam and in scientific advancement not as two antagonistic approaches, but, rather, as two compatible experiences. Actually, Le Bon recognised that having built a set of rules that regulate the lives of people based on religious belief constituted the origin of power for the Arabs. They had always profited from the teachings of science and the divergences between religion and science had never worried Muslims as a possible threat to their religion. This approach was extremely important for the feasibility of the philosophical approach of the *Mechveret* group, as it gave Ahmet Rıza the space and hope that his synthesis of Islamic religion and scientific advancement could be accepted and, in time, spread among the various Ottoman communities – specifically within the Muslim one.

In his book *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale en orient*, which consists of a series of attacks on Western politics and ideology, Ahmet Rıza mounts a staunch defence of Islam and its compatibility with science. The type of discourse he uses in defence of Islam, which tellingly follows the conventional approach used by Muslims advocating the superiority of Islam vis-à-vis other religions, is beyond our interest here. Concerning the role of religion in world progress, Rıza praised the achievements of Islam for its role in the advancement of world civilisation by adopting a strictly positivist approach. Islam has helped to safeguard philosophical and scientific treaties for centuries, translating them and passing them on to future civilisations as well as honouring the work of Muslim thinkers and scientists who,

⁵³ Le Bon, *La Civilisation des Arabes*. Book V, 155.

during the dark ages of the West, had contributed to the advancement of world civilisation.

As I have mentioned earlier, Rıza has so far been portrayed in historiographical works as the positivist, irreligious, secular intellectual who had no knowledge of the Muslim calendar.⁵⁴ I argue, instead, that his defence of Islam, through the pages of *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale en orient*, and his parallel belief in the importance of positivism in the construction of a reformed Ottoman Empire can be seen in a rather different manner. His approach is very similar to that of the much better known and studied Ziya Gökalp. What Gökalp formulated as Western civilisation and Turkish culture,⁵⁵ should be intended as positivism and Islam for Rıza. Accordingly, religion would provide a set of values and mores which would discard the necessity to succumb to a process of Westernisation; while positivism would allow the adoption of a scientific approach and provide the basis for a more technological and modern organisation of society which would maintain all cultures as equals. In this way, the emphasis on Islam would be on its tolerant side,⁵⁶ making the Ottomanist plan of multi-ethnicity and multi-confessionalism a feasible option, in the eyes of both Ottomans and Europeans. At this point, the view that Rıza was waging a war against religion and was an atheist should be re-formulated with one according to which religion was to be tailored a new role in society, not erased from it. Therefore, the fact that, in Rıza's works, the religious discourse comes to the surface and fades away in a cyclical manner, as it is obvious in the contents of both

⁵⁴ Ramsaur, *Young Turks*.

⁵⁵ *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilisation – Selected essays of Ziya Gökalp*, translated and edited by Niyazi Berkes (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959), 284-289.

⁵⁶ See by the same author, Rıza, *Tolérance Musulmane* and “Une nouvelle tactique,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 13 (15 June 1896), 3-4.

Mechveret and *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale en orient*, is testimony to an ideology that is constantly being renegotiated. Where a definite incongruence emerges in Rıza's thought, is in the idea of multi-ethnicity as a basic tenet of Ottomansim in an environment in which the Muslim majority grants liberties and rights to the other components from a superior position. I will, however, deal with this issue further on in the chapter.

On the backwardness of the Ottoman Empire

Throughout his works and his political activity, Ahmet Rıza treated the issue of stagnation in the Ottoman Empire as a multi-faceted affair. The following section deals with the way in which he generally viewed the problems affecting the Empire and what he thought were the material and ideological causes for such difficulties.

Comparing what Ahmet Rıza considered the causes of decline of the Empire to what Lutfi Pasha, the Grand Vizier of Sultan Süleyman, and Kochu Bey, advisor of Sultan Murat IV, respective wrote 300 and 250 years earlier,⁵⁷ give us an idea about how Rıza envisaged change. Many of the features that these two statesmen cite are specific to their own times as much as many are peculiar only to Ahmet Rıza's times. However, it is worth noticing that the general features of decline are common to all three; this helps me position the efforts of Rıza within a longer and broader discourse around religious and political reform in the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁸ Their joint accusations were directed at: the increasing favouritism in granting important appointments at high-level, a degeneration of morality among the ruling elites, and a lack of technical competence of the people entrusted with leading and reforming the

⁵⁷ Bernard Lewis, "Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline," 71-87.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of this, see Chapter 2.

Empire. Examining the writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth century with those of Rıza underscores how far the need to reform the Ottoman Empire dates. Their dialogue highlights the importance of ideologues such as Ahmet Rıza in bringing the Empire into the modern era ideologically, and organising a political opposition set on this goal.

Lutfi Pasha wrote that appointments and promotions should be accorded “on the basis of merit, without favouritism and interest,”⁵⁹ and, in a similar tone, Kochu Bey warned that offices should be granted on the basis of “competence and merit.”⁶⁰ Similar, though more developed and elaborated on, are the problems identified by Rıza in the Ottoman Empire of the 19th century. In Rıza’s time, advisory councils, the bureaucracy and the religious establishment were manned by figures appointed to places of influence through nepotism and their allegiance to the Sultan. This created a dynamic of mutual dependency whereby the Sultan could not hold on to power without them, while they would occupy much less important places without his help. In 1896, Rıza wrote about the men around the Sultan that, far from being able to understand the sacred mission bestowed upon them as statesmen, “[ils] n’ont songé qu’à fonder leur fortune personnelle sur les bonnes grâces de leur souverain”.⁶¹

Two years later the same idea was expressed again but in a harsher way:

Les hauts personnages et la plupart des agents de la Préfecture, se recrutent dans les rangs des vulgaires criminels condamnés à

⁵⁹ Lewis, “Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline,” 72.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 75.

⁶¹ Ahmet Rıza, “Sixième Lettre Ouverte,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 24 (1 December 1896), 2.

perpétuité, mais qui sont gracies par décret spécial de leur Auguste collègue, le Sultan, violateur de lois.⁶²

As for the ulema, they had become, according to Rıza, “une corporation de théologiens généralement ignorants, paresseux et réactionnaires ...”,⁶³ who were greedy for power. For this reason, they had decided to side with the despotic establishment in order to maintain their own power, keep the people in ignorance and perpetuate a dictatorial rule. This turned the tolerance of a previously fair ulema into “... une sorte de terreur jésuitique qui épaissit les ténèbres de l’ignorance et fit perdre à l’Islam son perfectionnement moral.”⁶⁴ This perspective reinforces the view that Rıza was convinced that religion had always played a positive constructive role in society and good governance, while the fault resided with those entrusted with its application. Tellingly, the closing of the relevant chapter confirms: “La vérité m’oblige à dire de suite que si le Koran avait contribué en partie à la grandeur, ce n’est pas lui qui a fait la décadence.”⁶⁵

Both Lutfi Pasha and Kochu Bey identified moral corruption as a key culprit for the declining state of the Empire. The former wrote that the Grand Vizier, as much as all government officials, “should be disinterested ... everything he does should be for God and in God and for the sake of God,”⁶⁶ while the latter thought that “[t]he Imperial household had been corrupted and had become a source of contamination to the rest of the apparatus of government.”⁶⁷

⁶² Abdullah Cevdet, “Les prisonniers politiques en Turquie,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 3, no. 56 (15 May 1898), 5.

⁶³ Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*, 138.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶⁶ Lewis, “Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline,” 71.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

The moral decline of the ruling elite preoccupied both Rıza and his predecessors. This degeneration had been the result of socio-political transformation. Drawing inspiration from one of the main pillars of the *Hatt-ı Sherif of Gülhane* – fact that proves an intellectual link between Rıza’s ideas and the ideologies that imbued earlier attempts at the revival of the Empire – he cited the lack of security for the life and property of the Ottoman population.⁶⁸ This was the outcome of a general malfunction of the government, which had resulted, mainly in the nineteenth century, in the dissolution of a class that Rıza identified as the aristocracy. Busy with wars and keeping a tight hold on power, the Ottoman statesmen had neglected education and modernisation, both of which would have been the basis for the constitution and survival of this class. This aristocracy represented the intellectual elite of the Empire, the engine for progress and, above all, the safeguard of critical moral values.

Elle dirigeait le peuple, lui servait d'exemple; elle constituait une autorité intermédiaire entre le souverain et la nation; elle tempérerait, mitigeait l'omnipotence de l'un et les exigences de l'autre; aux heures de crise, elle les relevait et leur donnait l'élan. Leur maison était le refuge des talents, le foyer commun de l'hospitalité, les archives vivantes des traditions et de la constitution morale de la nation.⁶⁹

The above exemplifies both Rıza’s view of the work and aim of the *Mechveret* group, and to an extent, that of the Young Turk organisation in general, both of which aimed at filling the void left by the degeneration and dissolution of the aristocratic class. In the case of the late nineteenth century, as we have seen in

⁶⁸ “Ainsi donc, plein de confiance dans le secours du Très-Haut, appuyé sur l’intercession de notre Prophète, nous jugeons convenable de chercher, par des institutions nouvelles, à procurer aux provinces qui composent l’Empire ottoman, le bienfait d’une bonne administration. Ces institutions doivent principalement porter sur trois points, qui sont: 1° Les garanties qui assurent à nos sujets une parfaite sécurité, quant à leur vie, à leur honneur et à leur fortune; 2° Une mode régulier d’asseoir et de prélever les impôts; 3° Une mode également régulier pour le levée des soldats et la durée de leur service.” Ed Engelhardt, *La Turquie et le Tanzimat*, vol.1 (Paris: A. Cotillon, 1882), Appendices, 17-18.

⁶⁹ Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*, 135.

Chapter 2, the place of the aristocratic class could be filled by the elitist intellectual class of Young Turk members.

In the writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth century statesmen, the main point accentuated is that the state and its administrators were not trained as well as they should have been and, hence, they could not respond to the demands of their role. Translating this into the nineteenth century, Rıza underlined a similar problem, the malfunction of the educational system which, for him, was the foundation for the future modernisation of the Empire. The beginning of an article titled “L’Instruction publique en Turquie”⁷⁰ points to the fact that the reforms in the public education system up to 1896 were mainly cosmetic and resting, in fact, on “l’apparence – brillante assurément – des édifices, des institutions.”⁷¹ However, the *Mechveret* group credited Abdülhamit for having aspired to reform the system, especially at the beginning of his reign. The founding of the School of Civil officials, the School of Law, School of Foreign Languages, and the School and Museum of Fine Arts, anticipated that suitable civil servants and bureaucrats would be trained there. But the problem resided in three factors. The first, more structural, factor had to do with the lack of instructors who had received a modern education and training. The second involved government spies. These managed to deceive the Sultan into believing that a large amount of turbulent students had turned the schools into a venue for the propagation of liberal ideas and revolutionary politics. This had important consequences, leading to the third factor. People were either encouraged to stay away from schools or decided to leave the Empire, which resulted in a brain

⁷⁰ Fuad, “L’Instruction Publique en Turquie,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 3 (15 January 1896), 1.

⁷¹ Ibid.

drain. According to the writer, the Sultan had opted for breeding an uneducated youth, or one moulded at schools according to his specific interpretation of Ottomanism⁷² in order to keep it under the yoke of the state. The Sultan had in fact engaged in strong school censorship, going as far as censoring textbooks that mentioned terms such as ‘fatherland’ or ‘revolution’.⁷³

What I want to emphasise is that neither the problems of the Empire were new to Rıza’s time or raised exclusively by the Young Turk group. Instead, the Young Turk movement in general, and leaders like Ahmet Rıza, fitted into a more general effort of modernisation that dated back to much earlier times, as I point out in Chapter 2, however adding a new component to the agency of reform. While Kochu Bey and Lutfi Pasha were part of the status-quo, in the late 1800s, a group outside the centre had taken up the role of ‘agent of reform’ and had done so in sidestepping forms of traditional power.

The Issues of *Mechveret Supplément Français*

I have thus far surveyed the general ideas of Rıza and the *Mechveret* group; what follows here is an analysis of Rıza’s ideology through the journal that, as explained, became the mouthpiece of the group around him. A deeper appreciation of the value of *Mechveret* in the constitution of a specific Young Turk ideology must be based on the following considerations. First, the journal represented the mouthpiece of a group of political opponents in exile; without the opportunity of exile, *Mechveret* would have lasted very little due to Hamidian censorship. Secondly, precisely because it was published abroad, and specifically in France, it allowed for

⁷² Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*.

⁷³ On the particular issue of censorship and for a comprehensive list of the banned words, refer to Chapter 2.

contributions from a large number of intellectuals, influenced by various philosophical and political currents, and it contributed to the creation of a new, multi-faceted ideology in tune with global ideological waves – but still adaptable to the Ottoman Empire. Lastly, exile and interdisciplinary contributions gave the Young Turk members exactly what they wanted: membership to an enlightened, international elite, ready to conceptualise a different meaning of Ottomanism and to take up the role of an aristocracy and agency of reform.

The journal *Mechveret* and its supplement *Mechveret Supplément Français* started publication in 1895 in Paris. The two are good examples of the Ottoman dissident publications abroad, analysed in the previous chapter, which belonged to an intellectual circle and served as forums where followers of different trends within the Young Turk umbrella movement would exchange views, discuss heated topics such as the ethnic composition of the Empire, the rights of ethnic and religious minorities and, above all, the meaning of Ottomanism. It was through journals such as *Mechveret* and its supplement that a collective imaginary, crucial for the expansion of the idea of Ottomanism, was forged. This imaginary gave many supporters the feeling of belonging to an emergent counter-current that could transform, in a modern and progressive way, the future of the Ottoman Empire.

I will mainly engage with the supplement of the *Mechveret* journal, *Mechveret Supplément Français*. Written in French, the supplement had a wider circulation than the Ottoman version and, due to this, gathered a large pool of Ottomans and Europeans who debated on what seemed like central elements in the formation of a Young Turk policy. In this sense, it would do precisely what Ganem and Rıza had in

mind, namely, achieve a political plan and a philosophical approach to the reform of the Empire by negotiating this with an elitist forum. This forum garnered moral and intellectual support from the West as well as from Ottomans of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Moreover, it is important to remember that the Ottoman contributors to the journal were addressing a European audience with whom common grounds for claims for political reform had to be created. In this light, the supplement is more organically tied with the reality of advocacy in exile than its Ottoman counterpart. Furthermore, through the French supplement, the Ottoman and non-Ottoman contributors and readers were positioning the Empire in the wider framework of world politics and events and, in doing so, attempted to draw parallels between countries such as France and the Empire in their common struggle against despotism and corruption. There is yet another reason why I find *Mechveret Supplément Français* particularly intriguing: as mentioned in the previous chapter, Rıza, as many of his contemporaries, thought of himself as the member of an enlightened elite which belonged to an international milieu, and therefore, the way he positioned himself vis-à-vis the outside becomes vital in an understanding of his political thought.

As mentioned before, *Mechveret Supplément Français* was intended as a journal featuring both Ottoman and foreign writers. Together with the intellectually oriented lines of Ottoman opposition publications as well as positivist reviews of the time, it included a long series of articles and translations dealing with all sorts of issues about learning and science coupled with treatises on the political and social situation of the Empire. The first were intended as general, and more globally oriented scientific, philosophical and literary topics, while those dealing with politics dealt

more directly with the rule of Sultan Abdülhamit II. The initial aim, as set out by Ahmet Rıza through the pages of the journal, was to spread knowledge in modern fields and awaken the dormant Ottoman populace, while at the same time providing for those outside the Ottoman dominions a picture of an intellectually vibrant group of Ottomans working for reform and pacification of the various religious and ethnic components of the Empire. This last aspect was also of paramount importance in the maintenance of sovereignty for the Empire, as in the preceding years, the frictions between the centre and some of the minorities had been used by the West as expedients for intervention in Ottoman internal affairs.

To what extent, however, can historians use *Mechveret* as a document to reconstruct not only the actions and thoughts of the advocates it represented, but also those of other opposition groups and of the regime back in Istanbul? Since the journal served as the organ of a particular political faction, it represents a revelatory historical source insofar as it communicates the way the *Mechveret* group tried to portray and position itself, how it approached the issues of reform, and how it viewed other actors involved. It cannot be considered a representation of actions and thoughts of other factions, beyond Rıza's group. As declared by the *rédaction* in no. 19 of the first year, "tout ce qui émane de notre Comité est intégralement publié dans le *Mechveret*."⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Le Comité, "Déclaration," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 19 (15 September 1896), 1.

Mechveret: layout and content

Rıza was heavily influenced by positivism, so it was no coincidence that he decided to give *Mechveret* a positivist character in its layout. The issues of the French supplement, of which the first appeared on the 1st of December 1895, were dated according to the Comtean positivist calendar. This calendar started with the 1st of January 1789 – the date of the French Revolution – and named the months according to the names of saints and heroes of human history that Comte considered the most important, as among others, Aristotle, Descartes and Shakespeare.

The first issue of *Mechveret* was published with the date 27th Frédéric 107 and its publication was reported in the European press in the following manner:

The Young Turkey party has started a fortnightly paper in French and Arabic, which is to be the organ of the Turco-Syrian committee of reforms presided over by [sic] Hali Ganem Effendi, ... The object of this committee is the restoration of the Constitution and reforms...⁷⁵

For the first 32 issues of the journal Rıza emblazoned the positivist motto *Ordre et Progrès* on the front page under the main heading. Below the header, the journal was branded as an organ of the Young Turk opposition movement, ‘Organ of the Young Turkey’ (*Organe de la Jeune Turquie*), and the editor highlighted that the aim of the supplement was to make “les lecteurs étrangers au courant des tendances et des vœux du parti de le Jeune Turquie.”⁷⁶ *Mechveret* had a wide readership since, even without precise numbers at hand, we know that the journal was sold in numerous cities. By 1899, selling points existed in public spaces in Paris, Christiana, Copenhagen, Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Brussels, Geneva, Athens, and Cairo and it

⁷⁵ The Times, 16 December 1895.

⁷⁶ La Rédaction, “Notre Programme,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 1 (1 December 1895), 1.

was sold in Algeria at the house of an Ahmed Ben Derrah, in the town of Bougie.⁷⁷ As far as the consumption of the journal inside the Empire is concerned, it is very difficult to have a definite figure. What is known for those journals published abroad, is that circulation inside the Empire was estimated by 15,000 to 20,000 by Muge Göcek.⁷⁸

A fair question to ask is why Rıza decided to give the journal such a visual affiliation with a political party, the Young Turk opposition and openly claiming to represent the voice of the Young Turks as a whole? Did he think at the time that there was, or could potentially, be a tight alliance among the numerous factions comprising of the various members of the Young Turk opposition? Or did this choice point to his conviction that his group alone represented the ‘real’ Young Turk movement? A fair evaluation lies somewhere in between. Undoubtedly, he thought that his way was the only viable path to save the Empire from lagging behind and from Western intrusion. At the same time, until at least the Congress of Ottoman Liberals held in Paris in 1902, there was a general feeling of optimism that the various factions within the opposition could actually be brought to work together under one homogeneous organisation. The name of Ahmet Rıza is very visible on the header of the journal, which suggests that he believed to carry a certain weight among the myriad of factions of the Young Turk movement. However, tensions of leadership among Young Turk members eventually became one of the major problems in constituting a unified group against Sultan Abdülhamit II.

⁷⁷ *Mechveret Supplément Français* 4, no. 83 (1 October 1899), 3.

⁷⁸ Göcek, *Rise of Burgeoisie*, 183 n, 42.

In its content, *Mechveret* was not as ideologically based on positivism as its layout seemed to suggest. In its pursuit of followers who were still undecided about which faction of the Young Turk movement to join, and in its wish to present the European public with an image of the Empire that is balanced but still infused with Ottoman values, *Mechveret* merged the religious with the secular. It also praised Western civilisation with the importance of the Ottoman and Islamic tradition. This hybridity is also reflected in the way Rıza was viewed by those outside the Empire. As I have mentioned earlier, in France he was regarded as a liberal,⁷⁹ a lover of his motherland,⁸⁰ and a patriotic Muslim.⁸¹ The French public referred to Rıza, in late 1896, as “un des rares musulmans de la Jeune Turquie qui aient conservé intacts leur patriotisme et leur religion.”⁸² Inside the Empire, on the other hand, many branded him as an atheist and a figure whose actions were to lead to the final dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. This was due to two factors: one was the counter-propaganda mounted by Sultan Abdülhamit II in his attempt to discredit the opposition; the other was a similar technique employed, from 1896 onwards, by other Young Turk exponents who were fighting for leadership inside the organisation.⁸³

There is, also, a third explanation. The alternations of religious and lay discourse, and the importance of both Western intellectual influence and Ottoman tradition, are frequently cited alongside the importance of justice, humanity and fraternity and

⁷⁹ Edouard Conte, “La Jeune Turquie,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 April 1896), 8.

⁸⁰ H. Vernier, “L’Expulsion d’Ahmed-Rıza,” *Le Libre Parole* (13 April 1896), as reproduced in *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 April 1896), 7.

⁸¹ Philippe Dubois, “Expulsion de M. Ahmed-Rıza,” *L’Intransigeant* (13 April 1896), as reproduced in *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 April 1896), 5.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ See Hanoğlu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, as well as Chapter 4.

should be seen as a stage in Rıza's philosophical development. They can be viewed, as I have suggested earlier as well, as the gradual, back and forth, process of the conceptualisation of an ideological Eastern-modern model infused with a synthesis of positivist philosophy and the social achievements of the modern West. I claim that we need to appreciate the efforts of Rıza, to draw the Ottoman Empire culturally and politically closer to Europe.

The Programme of *Mechveret*

As editor of the journal, Ahmet Rıza introduced the programme of '*Le Comité Ottoman d'Union et Progrès*' in the opening article of the first issue of *Mechveret*. The programme was activist in nature, it was to be carried out through peaceful means, was indicative of the major features of the Young Turk opposition as a whole, and highlighted the specificities of the *Mechveret* group within the broader ranks of the opposition:

Nous voulons travailler non pas à renverser la dynastie régnante que nous considérons comme nécessaire au maintien du bon ordre, mais à propager la notion du progrès dont nous désirons le triomphe pacifique. Notre devise étant 'Ordre et Progrès', Nous avons horreur des concessions obtenues par la violence. Nous demandons des réformes, non pas spécialement pour telle ou telle province, mais pour l'Empire tout entier; non pas en faveur d'une seule nationalité, mais en faveur de tous les Ottomans, qu'ils soient Juifs, Chrétiens ou Musulmans. Nous voulons avancer dans la voie de la civilisation mais nous le déclarons hautement, nous ne voulons avancer qu'en fortifiant l'élément ottoman ... Nous tenons à garder l'originalité de notre civilisation orientale et, pour cela, n'emprunter à l'Occident que les résultats généraux de son évolution scientifique, seuls vraiment assimilables et nécessaires pour éclairer un peuple dans sa marche vers la liberté ... Nous nous opposons à la substitution de

l'intervention directe des puissances étrangères à l'autorité ottomane.⁸⁴

Since *Mechveret* has been referred to as a propagandistic tool of one of the opposition groups in the Young Turk organisation, it is important to understand whether the programme – as laid out in the journal – can be considered a stable agenda of its group in the period up to 1902, or whether its ideology changed considerably over time. Two years after the first issue was published, the programme had not changed. In fact, in the preface to the booklet detailing the trial that the *Mechveret* stood in France, on the 4th of August 1897, the '*rédaction du Mechveret*' underlined once more that:

Les principes dont s'inspire le Mechveret sont bien connus: nous ne faisons pas de distinction entre races et religions, nous défendons l'égalité et la justice. Ces principes se retrouvent tous dans la législation religieuse et civile de l'Empire ottoman, et nous qu'y obéir en citoyens respectueux de toute institution établie et équitable.⁸⁵

By 1902, at the Congress of Ottoman Liberals held in Paris, when the split between the two most representative factions – the *Mechveret* group and the one headed by prince Sabahettin – took place, it is clear that the Rıza's agenda has remained distinguishable from that of Sabahettin. The *Mechveret* group clashed with prince Sabahettin on decisions such as: a peaceful course of action versus revolutionary options, the indivisibility of the Empire as opposed to a conception of a federal Empire where the different *vilayets* (districts-provinces) would attain a high degree of autonomy, and, most significantly, on the extent of influence that European countries should exercise on the Ottoman Empire and its population.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ La Rédaction, "Notre Programme," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 1 (1 December 1895), 1.

⁸⁵ *Procès contre le Mechveret et la Jeune Turquie* (Paris: Chevalier-Maresq, 1897), 2.

⁸⁶ See Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Genesis of the opposition according to *Mechveret*

Six months after the publication of the first issue of *Mechveret*, Rıza expanded on his view of the group's programme and placed the ideas of the Young Turk movement in a broader Ottoman historical context. In 1896, the writer traced the first attempts at reform during the reign of Sultan Selim III. Faltering as it had been, this beginning set the tone for the efforts of the following two sultans, Mahmut II and Abdülmecit. According to Rıza, with the latter Sultan there had been a genuine inauguration of reforms put in practice, the *Tanzimat*. Rıza regarded the *Hatt-ı Sherif of Gülhane*, the edict that gave way to the beginning of the reform era, as “le décret de réorganisation de l’empire dans le sens d’un rapprochement entre toutes les confessions.”⁸⁷ The ideals of the *Tanzimat* were brought forward by Midhat Pasha, the man who Rıza identified as the “chef du parti de la Jeune Turquie,”⁸⁸ and translated into a constitutional framework of government (1876-1878). These ideas marked a break between the Palace, which was drifting away from delegating powers, and the Young Turk group, which was made up of “... membres appartenant à toutes les confessions, qui ont pris pour règle de s’unir en leurs communs intérêts pour la sauvegarde et la défense de leurs idées et de leur Patrie.”⁸⁹ Ahmet Rıza viewed the period from the 1840s to 1876 – the date of accession to the throne of Abdülhamit II – as a time of slow but steady progress, marked by moderate and conciliatory domestic and foreign politics coupled with the development of an educational infrastructure and a military apparatus.⁹⁰ This view of the *Tanzimat* became one of the markers of the ideology of the *Mechveret* group; contrary to the

⁸⁷ Ahmet Rıza, “La Russie et la Jeune Turquie,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 10 (1 May 1896), 4.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ahmet Rıza “Appel aux cabinets européens,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 16 (1 August 1896): 1-2.

‘reading’ of such period by the group around Sabahettin as I will show in the next chapter. While for Rıza the Tanzimat represented an important step, for Sabahettin the period amounted to a series of aborted or cosmetic attempts at reform.

In the issue of October 1897,⁹¹ Ahmet Rıza described in detail the nature of the organisation of the Young Turk. The party, he wrote, was a political formation like the *Junges Deutschland* or the *Giovine Italia* but, unlike these two, it was not a secret association. Even though the Ottoman version of a ‘young’ organisation had different aims and a different agenda, it drew its organisational and ideological inspiration from the above German and Italian groups. The *Junges Deutschland*, which existed from around 1830 to the 1850s, was a youth movement born out of the need to reverse the primacy of Romanticism, which the members of the group saw as lacking the activist spirit needed at the time. However, the group was conceived as a literary movement bent on changing the nature of the involvement of writers and other engaged intellectuals. On the other hand, *La Giovine Italia*, founded by Giuseppe Mazzini in 1831, was an activist movement with a tangible political aim, namely the unification of Italy under a republican system. It was equally a movement in arms since its leaders and the people fought, however unsuccessfully, both the Austrians and the Papal States.

Ahmet Rıza was aware of the fact that as a political faction of the opposition, the Young Turk organisation represented nothing new to the Muslim world. The Muslim world, claimed Rıza in his writings, had always allowed criticism, since the

⁹¹ Ahmet Rıza, “Vitalité de la Jeune Turquie,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 45 (15 October 1897): 3-4.

latter was “une des essences de l’islamisme.”⁹² Moreover, the approach of this particular opposition followed the footsteps of the various ideologues and statesmen mentioned in Chapter 2, such as al-Tahtawi and Namık Kemal. Thus, *Mechveret*’s ideals attempted to amalgamate the old and the new, tradition and innovation. It both wished to be acceptable from a traditionally Islamic perspective and to become a movement of the intelligentsia and the elite, which would change the nature of the populace and the state in a progressive and liberal way under a philosophically positivist framework.

The West according to *Mechveret*

The various Young Turk groups had contradictory views about the European powers, their motives for interfering in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire, and the level of engagement that the opposition would allow them to have in a new state-order. On this last issue, the groups’ views ranged from a wish for strictly intellectual involvement to a call for active political influence down to a physical and military intervention by some of the powers. For the *Mechveret* group, as has been touched upon in previous sections, direct foreign encroachment was highly undesirable and should have been kept at bay. The only contribution the group desired, at least until 1896, was ideological support and intellectual cooperation. As explained previously, in fact, Ahmet Rıza was convinced that all the European governments had a vested interest in the involvement in Ottoman affairs.

⁹² Ahmet Rıza, “Vitalité de la Jeune Turquie,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 45 (15 October 1897), 3.

Straight from its first issue, *Mechveret* made clear how its group viewed the West and its interference, even if some thought of it as beneficial to the overall plans of the opposition. It was important to the *Mechveret* group that the reformed Empire incorporated the originality of the Ottoman civilisation and respected its heritage. To this end, progress and advancement were to be attained reinforcing the Ottoman element, which implied that the West was to serve only as scientific inspiration: “n’emprunter à l’Occident que les résultats généraux de son évolution scientifique.”⁹³ Accordingly, Rıza wrote: “nous espérons un appui moral. Nous nous opposons à la substitution de l’intervention directe des puissances étrangères à l’autorité ottomane.”⁹⁴

This position was reinforced over time. In an article that appeared in 1895, Rıza underlined that the motive for active foreign involvement in Ottoman dominions could only emerge from the political and economic interests that European states had in Ottoman lands. Broadly speaking, Rıza noted that all attempts at intervening had been justified as a means to “...sauvegarder les chrétiens contre les Softas qu’on accuse de vouloir l’extermination des infidels,”⁹⁵ while the real goal was to bring more friction within the already fragile social balance within the Ottoman Empire. A demonstration of the self-interested attitude of European involvement was the spread of missionaries throughout Ottoman lands. These missionaries and the governments behind them – which Ahmet Rıza identifies primarily as France and Russia – continuously broke international law, stirred up nationalist feelings among the

⁹³ La Rédaction, “Notre Programme,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 1 (1 December 1895), 1.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ahmet Rıza, “Les Missionnaires en Turquie,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 3 (15 January 1896), 2.

minorities, and placed increasing economic duress on the Ottoman population, Muslim or not. They did the latter by requesting indemnities for those missionaries who, in their views, had experienced material damages. In January 1896, Rıza wrote “[p]uisque la France et la Russie, ces deux puissances chrétiennes par excellence, défendent aux missionnaires protestants de faire de la propagande, ... de quel droit ces missionnaires veulent-ils que nous leur permettions de venir chez nous raviver les haines des âges passés?”⁹⁶ Regarding Russia and France, Rıza’s view was supported by other publications. In the case of Russia, we know from a pamphlet dated 1876 written by a French author, that in relation to the insurrections in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Bulgaria, “... il y a quinze ans que la Russie préparait cette insurrection.”⁹⁷ Similarly, Russia had tried to stir up rebellions in Greece during the temporary occupation of Morea in 1770, while, in 1797, Bonaparte’s France was pushing his generals to foster ideas of independence throughout the Ionian Islands.⁹⁸ Requests to reform in the Ottoman Empire voiced by other main powers of the time were often nothing but a pretext for involvement from the dubious position of guarantor and saviour. In the future imagined by Rıza, a reformed Empire would give no reasons for such foreign pronouncements; this in turn gave substance to the claims of the *Mechveret* group that the Empire urgently needed drastic reform.

In mid-1896, Rıza raised another issue concerning the Russian government, which had convinced him further of the ambiguity of foreign involvement. He stated that

⁹⁶ Ahmet Rıza, “Les Missionnaires en Turquie,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 3 (15 January 1896), 2.

⁹⁷ Louis Antoine Léouzon Le Duc, *La Turquie est-elle incapable de réformes?* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1876), 7 n, 1.

⁹⁸ Ercüment Kuran, “The impact of the Turkish elite in the Nineteenth Century”, in William Polk and Richard Chambers eds., *Beginnings of Modernisation in the Middle East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 109.

Russia had dealt another blow to the Ottoman Empire aiming at its total collapse.⁹⁹ After having ruined the Empire as an outcome of the wars between the two countries,¹⁰⁰ Russia had taken part in what *Mechveret* identified as ‘the Armenian inquiry’ with the purpose of stirring up religious fanaticism within the Ottoman dominions. Following these events, Russia had finally decided to support the Sultan, seen by the Young Turks as the enemy of all reforms, in order to justify – in the eyes of the other European powers – its intervention as conciliatory. With regard to England, Ahmet Rıza viewed the motives behind its encroachment as emerging from a different source. Hegemony, he wrote, had developed a sense of superiority in the English government and had culminated in regarding those who are not “anglais et protestant,”¹⁰¹ as inferior; and this stance theoretically enabled England to act against the Empire at any point in time.

Having recognised the impossibility of uninterested political involvement by the European governments, the *Mechveret* group developed a policy of seeking only ideological support on the part of European civil societies. That would be the only type of rapprochement between Ottomans and Europeans. As far as the French government was concerned, it was initially thought that France could have worked as partner in the opposition to Sultan Abdülhamit II. However, these hopes were soon shattered and relations between the French government and the *Mechveret* group reached a low point in mid-1896. On the 11th of April, following pressures from the Ottoman Ambassador Munir Bey, Antoine Puybaraud, who was branded

⁹⁹ Ahmet Rıza, “Une Explication,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 10 (1 May 1896): 1-2.

¹⁰⁰ Rıza here probably refers to the last of these wars, which culminated in 1878 with the loss of most of the Balkan provinces of the Empire (Romania, Serbia and Montenegro were freed from Turkish rule, Bulgaria fell under Russian protection and Bosnia-Herzegovina was granted autonomous status).

¹⁰¹ Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*, 34.

by many French intellectuals as the “grand eunuque blanc de la police républicaine”¹⁰² from the *Préfecture* of Paris, announced to Ahmet Rıza the decision taken by the Minister of Interior to expel him and ban his journal. French public opinion deplored such act, revealing that Rıza had been falsely accused of receiving a sum of money from England in order to enhance the politics of the Foreign Office in Egypt. As reported a few days later in the press, the exchange between the functionary of the Prefecture and Ahmet Rıza went as follows:

Vous combattez la politique du Sultan, dit M. Puybaraud à Ahmed-Rıza. Or le gouvernement veut être agréable au Sultan. Je suis chargé par M. le ministre de l’intérieur de vous inviter à quitter Paris dans le plus bref délai possible. Partez, on vous paiera les frais du voyage. Mais n’essayez pas de vous soustraire à cette expulsion officielle, sinon le gouvernement se verrait réduit à prendre contre vous une mesure de rigueur.¹⁰³

Rıza understood that the official reasons put forth by the French government were just a pretext. So, he asked Puybaraud: “‘Why do you expel me, does an honest man not have the right to reside in Paris?’ [Puybaraud replied], ‘This is about politics.’”¹⁰⁴

This led to the breakout of what was widely referred to in the French press of the time as *L’affaire Ahmet Rıza*, during which the French press vehemently attacked the decisions of its government. The first contention of the press dealt with the fact that the government had given in to pressures exercised by the despotic Ottoman state. A vivid example of this accusation can be seen in an article by the journalist

¹⁰² Georges Clémenceau, “Pour faire plaisir au Sultan,” *La Dépêche* (14 April 1896), as reproduced in *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 April 1896), 7.

¹⁰³ Philippe Ciais, “L’Expulsion d’Ahmed-Rıza,” *L’Echo de Paris* (12 April 1896), as reproduced in *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 April 1896), 5.

¹⁰⁴ Rıza, *Ahmed Rıza Bey’in Anıları*, 15.

George Clémenceau.¹⁰⁵ The article criticises Ahmet Rıza's expulsion on the basis of two precedents: the refusal of England to expel and hand over the refugees of the *Commune* to France, and the request of the Ottoman authorities to the Khedive Abbas to expel Murat Bey, exponent of the Young Turks in Egypt. Why, the writer asks, does France behave like a vassal to the Sultan? In the eyes of Clémenceau, this submissive stance was even more reprimandable given that the Sultan had been the perpetrator of the killing of 50,000 Christians in the Armenian *vilayets*. The press contested the expulsion of Rıza on other grounds as well: he was believed to be fighting for justice and freedom, the pillars of post-revolutionary French political ideals, as well as for the right to freedom of expression.

This event marked the end of the relations between the *Mechveret* group and the French government, which Rıza and his followers had, prior to this event, enthusiastically invited to play an active role in sustaining the opposition against the Sultan, as the pages of *Mechveret* demonstrate. However, the same incident simultaneously proved that France and Paris had been the right choice for émigrés to settle and publish an opposition journal. French civil society had rallied around the *Mechveret* group and, as reported in the previous chapter, Rıza claimed that the expulsion of the journal and the subsequent events had increased the popularity of the group more than a full year of the journal's publication.¹⁰⁶ After this rupture with the French government, the group established an even tighter alliance with the French press and public. Evidence of this is the fact that a French publisher, Chevalier-Marescq, funded both the booklet *Proces contre le Mechveret et La Jeune*

¹⁰⁵ Georges Clémenceau, "Pour faire plaisir au Sultan," *La Dépêche* (14 April 1896), as reproduced in *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 April 1896), 7-8.

¹⁰⁶ Rıza, *Ahmed Rıza Bey'in Anıları*, 15.

Turquie and the book authored by Halil Ganem *Les Sultans Ottomans*.¹⁰⁷ The day after the notification of Rıza's expulsion, articles appeared across the spectrum of the French press expressing similar indignation:

Pauvre France! Longtemps elle fut le refuge de la pensée libre, qui n'a rien de commun avec ce que de grotesques suppôts de loges ont baptisé libre-pensée; pendant des siècles les révolutionnaires – flétris de l'épithète de révolutionnaires pour les besoins de la cause des jouisseurs – y trouvèrent un véritable asile contre la persécution, toujours odieuse d'où qu'elle vienne et qui qu'elle vise...¹⁰⁸

The press referred to Ahmet Rıza as “nullement un révolutionnaire ... simplement un libéral ...”.¹⁰⁹ *L'Événement*, *Le Jour*, *La Paix*, *La Libre Parole*, *L'Autorité*, *L'Echo de Paris*, *L'Intransigeant*, *La Justice*, and *La Dépêche* formulated similar accusations against their government with titles ranging from “Odieuse Attitude” to “Lamentable Mesure” and “Une Expulsion sournoise.”¹¹⁰

The friction between the *Mechveret* group and the French government was never resolved and in fact reached a definite clash in 1897. The French government, once more under pressure from the Ottoman diplomatic service, decided that the interdiction alone was not enough and therefore opened a court case against the journal. The case resulted in the mild pecuniary conviction of Rıza and Halil Ganem,¹¹¹ and a reprimand about the verbal accusations addressed to the Sultan and

¹⁰⁷ Ganem, *Les Sultans Ottomans*.

¹⁰⁸ Georges Barbezieux, “Odieuse Attitude,” *La Paix* (12 April 1896), as reproduced in *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 April 1896), 3.

¹⁰⁹ Philippe Dubois, “Expulsion de M. Ahmed-Rıza,” *L'Intransigeant* (13 April 1896), as reproduced in *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 9 (15 April 1896), 6.

¹¹⁰ These were the titles of the various French newspapers on the issue. Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*; “Mahmoud Pacha (beau-frère du sultan de Constantinople),” *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169.

¹¹¹ According to Paul Fesch the fine was set at 16 francs. Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 336.

the Ottoman government of the time.¹¹² Another outcome of the ‘Rıza Affair’ was the suspension of the issues of *Mechveret* in Ottoman Turkish from publication on French soil, while the supplement was left unharmed by the accusations. At first, Rıza tried to move to Geneva to continue publication. However, his stay in Switzerland was brief as he was unable to find sources of funding despite gaining residency there. He subsequently moved to Belgium, where he received a modest donation. From Brussels, he remained the editor of the Ottoman *Mechveret* until September 1897 when the Belgian government put a ban on its publication with the accusation that Rıza featured unfit articles and attempted to arrest and exile him. In order to continue his work, Rıza placed this edition under the name of a Belgian MP, a Georges Lorand. Sources on *Mechveret* published in Geneva and Brussels are very scarce and dates are contradictory, thus we cannot be sure of when exactly the Ottoman *Mechveret* was allowed back into Paris.¹¹³

The persecution of *Mechveret* in France and Belgium brought a large part of the French and Belgian public opinion to side again with Ahmet Rıza and critically condemn the action of their respective governments. After all the skirmishes with French, Swiss and Belgian governments, *Mechveret* became even more critical of Western governments and their policies. In the article, “La Constitution Ottomane”, published in *Mechveret* of 15th March 1896, the author explains the expectations of the *Mechveret* group from the European powers at this stage:

¹¹² For a comprehensive and detailed account of the trial, see *Proces contre le Mechveret et La Jeune Turquie*. The verdict reads: “Condamne ... Ahmed-Riza-Bey et Halil-Ganem à 16 fr. d’amende et, à raison des considérations ci-dessus relevées, leur fait application de loi Bérenger.” – *Proces contre le Mechveret et La Jeune Turquie*, 92. This latter law permitted anyone convicted not to undergo his sentence unless he repeated the same crime.

¹¹³ Ahmet Rıza, “Le «Mechveret Turc» en Belgique,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 3, no. 49 (15 April 1896): 5.

... nous ne demandons pas à la France ou aux autres puissances d'intervenir *manu militari* en faveur de la liberté pour soutenir la nation contre la tyrannie exorbitante du sultan et pour rétablir la Constitution. Nous sommes les adversaires décidés de toute intervention matérielle. Mais l'intervention morale et puissante de la presse en faveur de la noble cause de la Constitution, nous l'avons toujours désirée et provoquée.¹¹⁴

In the July 1897 issue, *Mechveret* took up the theme of foreign intervention in the Ottoman Empire in an open letter to the French parliament. At this stage, the *Mechveret* group found it necessary not only to exhort Europe to stay away from internal Ottoman issues, but also to vehemently attack the hypocrisy of European politicians. The latter were said to be criticising the Ottoman population of being inactive in the social and political reform of the Empire while, in the meantime, these same governments supported the reign of Sultan Abdülhamit II: “Le Sultan actuel étant soutenu par le Tzar et par l’empereur d’Allemagne ... c’est elle [referring to Europe] qui a fortifié l’omnipotence du Sultan et l’a rendu indomptable.”¹¹⁵

Besides cooperating with an oppressive regime, European governments were pushing for the protection of minorities and pressing for a selective reform that would only touch these sections of Ottoman society. From Rıza’s point of view, instead of encouraging reform beneficial to the whole Empire led by the goals of “... l’égalité, la sécurité de la vie, de l’honneur et des biens, enfin les garanties et le contrôle auxquels toute agglomération d’êtres humains a droit en ce siècle ...,”¹¹⁶ this attitude would lead to religious conflict and undermine the belief in the Young

¹¹⁴ Fuad, “La Constitution Ottomane,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 7 (15 March 1896), 2.

¹¹⁵ Ahmet Rıza, “Le Sultan Illégitime,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 37 (15 July 1897), 4.

¹¹⁶ Ahmet Rıza, “Lettre au Parlement Français,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 47 (15 November 1897), 1.

Turk versions of Ottomanism. It is especially in this domain that the legacy of the Tanzimat (1839-76) and of the First Constitutional Period (1876-78) emerged as significant for Rıza's vision. Both had proclaimed a reform that would benefit all Ottoman citizens regardless of their religious or ethnic background. Of similar content and tone to the article above, is another one published in *Mechveret* on the 15th July, 1898.¹¹⁷ It appeared in the form of an open letter to the French parliament signed by Halil Ganem. Despite its praise for the positive impact of French literature and the impact of its liberal ideas on the aspirations of the Ottoman population towards progress, Ganem accused the French, as much as Rıza had done, of cooperating and helping Sultan Abdülhamit in his exacting vengeance on his subjects.

Finally, there was also a practical reason that pushed the *Mechveret* group to oppose foreign involvement. It was thought that intervention had been so negative thus far, that its envisagement was now unpopular among the population and therefore counterproductive; the Sultan could publicly oppose any foreign request on the basis that it amounted to infringement of sovereignty, that it protected minorities at the cost of the Muslim population and ultimately envisaged the political collapse of the Ottoman Empire. From this reasoning, it followed that if Western encroachment was kept at the lowest possible level, the Sultan could not use this as an excuse to oppose any kind of reform from being implemented.

¹¹⁷ Halil Ganem, "Notre Requête au Parlement," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 3, no. 57 (15 July 1898): 1-3.

By 1900, *Mechveret* still featured articles taking a definite stance against foreign intervention in the affairs of the Empire, with its wording becoming more and more hostile. At this stage, the *Mechveret* group was

... complètement opposés à toute ingérence des Puissances dans les affaires intérieures de notre pays. Désirant garder à notre civilisation orientale son caractère propre et ses traditions [repeating that] nous n'avons voulu emprunter à l'Occident que 'les résultats généraux de son évolution scientifique, seuls vraiment assimilables et nécessaires pour éclairer un peuple dans sa marche vers la liberté et le progrès'.¹¹⁸

England, which in the past had been an ally in the battle against Mehmet Ali Pasha of Egypt, had lost interest in the modernisation and reform of the Empire once Egypt had been occupied (in 1882). The new player, Germany, had allied with the Sultan and, according to Rıza, had benefited greatly from this alliance while providing little if anything to the Ottoman Empire.

Rıza's book, *La Faillite Morale de la Politique Occidentale en Orient*, hovers the same hostility. The book traces European intervention back to the beginning of the tenth century, when, at the time of the crusades, European politics was moved by higher moral principles than in the subsequent centuries. His narrative culminated, as the title suggests, with the total moral bankruptcy of the West during the nineteenth century. The opening of the book sets the tone of the whole volume:

Le titre que je donne à cet ouvrage n'est pas tout à fait juste, car la politique de l'Europe à l'égard de la Turquie n'a jamais été subordonnée à la morale. Le succès était le seul but, la force seule créait le droit. De tout temps, l'intérêt religieux et l'intérêt matériel ont été les mobiles essentiels de cette politique.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ "L'intervention des étrangers," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 6, no. 107 (1 December 1900), 1.

¹¹⁹ Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*, 5.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the materialist drive had become the leading motive for European intervention¹²⁰ although at times disguised in high religious discourse, since religious tolerance was never common practice in Europe. Even France, which had experienced an anti-Catholic revolution and had produced men of democratic conviction and free thinkers, did not show the same open-mindedness in the field of foreign policy. The Foreign Office, wrote Rıza, the Quai d'Orsay and the Consulta have supplanted the Church, and their excuses for destabilising interventions hardly vary.¹²¹ If Western governments could not find a justifiable pretext to militarily occupy a country and exploit its resources, they would then fabricate their own acceptable reasons, appropriating the role of defending humanity and furthering the 'civilising mission' against an 'inferior race'. And the scientific and technological advancements that had contributed to the growth of civilisation in these countries, which were so envied by the less advanced civilisations, did not really transform the West into a better society devoid of injustice. On the contrary, Rıza was convinced that "[l]a civilisation n'a pas supprimé la barbarie, elle l'a tout simplement raffinée."¹²² By way of redemption, though, Rıza argued that the bankruptcy of Western politics, while upheld by those in power, was not an all-encompassing feature of Western civilisation. In fact, honesty and moral principles were still present in the majority of the population, albeit not in the governments.¹²³

¹²⁰ Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*, 8.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 14-37.

On ethnic and religious pluralism

An important part of the plan of the *Mechveret* group dealt with the ethnic and religious composition of the Empire. The wider ideology of change touched upon a number of issues: the philosophical approach, the role of religion and that of the West in the reform process. An equally central aspect of the plan, one on which the two groups headed by Sabahettin and Rıza were to disagree fundamentally at the Paris Congress of 1902,¹²⁴ had to do with the ethno-religious composition of the Empire. *Mechveret Supplément Français* gives us an insight into the issue of ethnic and religious minorities inside Ottoman lands. Throughout this period, minorities were a concern for Ottomans as well as for European governments; and this issue is crucial for our understanding of what is possibly the major flaw in Rıza's ideology as well as of the friction that led to the failure of the Congress of Ottoman Liberals of 1902. In fact, it is specifically on the role, self-identification and presence of ethno-religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire where Ahmet Rıza and prince Mehmet Sabahettin found themselves at odds.¹²⁵

Through an analysis of the writings of Rıza on the pages of *Mechveret*, one can identify some general trends around the predicament of ethnic and religious minorities. The Young Turk organisation, according to the positivist ideologue, rested upon the belief that it was its mission to represent all Ottoman liberals beyond their ethnic or religious affiliations both in its internal composition and its political agenda. The first issue of *Mechveret*, succinctly stated the multi-confessional vision

¹²⁴ See Chapter 5.

¹²⁵ The three main issues on which the two most influential exponents of the Young Turk opposition movements in the late 19th century could not agree are: ethno-religiously related issues, different views of how to remove Abdülhamit II from power and the extent of foreign help deemed desirable (see Chapter 5 for a full discussion of this).

of the organisation: “Nous demandons des réformes, non pas spécialement pour telle ou telle province, mais pour l’Empire tout entier; non pas en faveur d’une seule nationalité, mais en faveur de tous le Ottomans, qu’ils soient Juifs, Chrétiens ou Musulmans.”¹²⁶ One year later, in 1896, *Mechveret* reasserted the stance of its members: “La Jeune Turquie se compose de membres appartenant à toutes les confessions, qui ont pris pour règle de s’unir en leurs communs intérêts pour la sauvegarde et la défense de leurs idées et de leurs Patrie.”¹²⁷ As stated by Rıza, the victory of the Young Turks against the Sultan would translate into a multi-confessional shaping of the Empire: “la Jeune Turquie, quels que soient les changements qu’elle pourra introduire dans l’état actuel des choses, maintiendra intacts ces privilèges [being, in the context of this article, the right of Christians to maintain their language, schools and church].”¹²⁸ However, victory against the regime of Abdülhamit II depended on two prerequisites: a united activist front, and the realisation on the part of all opposition groups of the danger that any individualistic or regionalist actions would play well in the hands of the Sultan.

During a banquet organised by the Young Turk organisation on the 23rd December 1897 in Paris to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Ottoman Constitution, different members of the group, which represented all the confessional groups of the Empire, came together. On that occasion, Rıza stressed the necessity of cohesiveness:

A ce banquet des Grecs, des Arméniens, des Arabes et des Turcs, tous enfants de la même patrie, se trouvaient réunis. Une seule pensée de paix et de concorde unissait tous les cœurs: c’était une protestation

¹²⁶ La Rédaction, “Notre Programme,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 1 (1 December 1895), 1.

¹²⁷ Ahmet Rıza, “La Russie et la Jeune Turquie,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 10 (1 May 1896), 4.

¹²⁸ Ahmet Rıza, “Chrétien, Musulman et Humanité,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 11 (15 May 1896), 3.

contre le despotisme du Sultan et les scènes d'horreur dont la Turquie a été le théâtre dans ces deux dernières années. Puisse l'union cordiale et sincère qui a caractérisé cette soirée être un gage de fraternité qui règnera un jour dans l'Empire, lorsque, délivré de la tyrannie qui l'opprime, il prendra son essor vers la liberté.¹²⁹

It is, of course, difficult to determine how feasible an alliance of this sort was within the Young Turk movement by 1898.¹³⁰ At least one positive response to Rıza's call for unity came in 1898 from an Armenian exponent of the CUP:

Cette lutte [against the regime of Abdülhamit], pour la continuer, pour la mener à bien, il faut que les Arméniens s'unissent aux Turcs. ... Les Turcs – du moins les Turcs dont nous entendons parler, et ils sont légion – ont les mêmes aspirations que nous, souffrent des mêmes iniquités, visent au but où nous visons. Un rapprochement s'offre de soi-même, la cause commune s'impose. C'est un devoir. C'est plus: c'est une inéluctable nécessité. Inéluctable par la nature de nos mœurs, le genre de notre prime éducation, le caractère de nos rapports. L'identification est là, claire et nette. ... La main dans la main, avec les Turcs libéraux, nous sommes une force. Abandonnés à nous-mêmes nous ne représentons plus qu'un principe qu'aucun effectif n'était. A cette caduque règle machiavélique: «Diviser pour régner», dont le Sultan s'est fait une loi, opposons cette autre vieilleries toujours neuve: «L'union fait la force».¹³¹

Rıza had precise guidelines as to what was needed to withstand the fight against the regime of Sultan Abdülhamit II. This organised resistance would have to:

... isoler les différents partis les uns des autres, diviser les membres d'un même parti, tel est le dernier dessein de la politique du Sultan. Les massacres des Arméniens et la guerre turco-grecque ont malheureusement servi cette politique néfaste en contribuant à accentuer l'antagonisme entre musulmans et chrétiens. ... Nous prions donc nos compatriotes Arméniens, comme nous en avons prié dernièrement les Hellènes, de ne pas se prêter à cette politique astucieuse d'Abdul-Hamid, en se livrant, par quelques-uns de leurs

¹²⁹ Ahmet Rıza, "Banquet de la Jeune Turquie," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 26 (1 January 1897), 3.

¹³⁰ An evaluation of the feasibility of the Ottomanist plan, as intended by the Young Turk movement, is carried out in the conclusion to this thesis.

¹³¹ Ahmet Rıza, "Turcs et Arméniens," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 3, no. 63 (15 September 1898), 2.

organes, à des critiques contre l'islamisme, critique qui ne peuvent qu'éloigner de nous autres, libéraux, les croyants fanatiques, et qui, en somme, servent au Sultan de prétexte pour soulever contre les Arméniens et les Jeunes-Turcs des haines religieuses. La religion doit toujours rester dans le domaine privé; elle ne doit jamais servir de base à un mouvement social et politique.¹³²

Certainly, a total convergence of intent between the various Young Turk organisations could only have been possible through a substantial restructuring of specific areas of governance and politics. As explained earlier, pivotal in this reconfiguration of the multiple components of the Empire would be a new position for religion and a revival of an egalitarian national Ottoman sentiment. According to the *Mechveret* group, the proto-national ideology upon which the Ottoman Empire was to rest, at least until 1902, was the specific version of Ottomanism that is being reconstructed and analysed throughout this chapter. This implied two reforms: first, religion would not be part of the state and of its policies, but would be relegated to the private sphere. In the words of Rıza himself, “[l]a question religieuse étant pour nous affaire d’ordre absolument privé, ... Il n’entre pas dans notre programme de mêler la religion à la politique; nous avons le respect de toutes les croyances.”¹³³ The second reform, dependent on the first, would consist in the full inclusion of ethnic and religious minorities within the state’s representative branches – that would be resuscitated with the revival of the 1876 Constitution – and within its legal system. The *Mechveret* group did not want to change the ethno-religious balance of the Empire but to uphold it. The will for inclusion was confirmed to the journal’s European readers through the pages of *Mechveret*: “La Chambre [referring to the chamber of parliament formed after the re-instatement of the constitution] ne

¹³² Ahmet Rıza, “Aux Arméniens,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 3, no. 57 (15 June 1898), 7.

¹³³ Ahmet Rıza, “Une nouvelle tactique,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 13 (15 June 1896), 3.

touchera ..., ni aux autres privilèges accordés aux sujets israélites et chrétiens de l'Empire.”¹³⁴ In the view of the *Mechveret* group, the application of existing laws and regulations would suffice to create equal citizenship rights and obligations for all components of the Ottoman population.

Sure enough, this attitude entailed the negation of rights, reforms and privileges granted to any single ethno-religious group. This meant that Macedonians, Armenians and Albanians had to regard themselves as Ottoman first and foremost and only assert their particular identity within this framework. Rıza and his group ostracised from the Young Turk umbrella movement any group that worked for the acquisition of independence, or special status of a minority, as individualistic attitudes.¹³⁵ Such factions would not be partners in the struggle against the Sultan but, on the contrary, their actions would result in the destabilisation of governance and end up being of help to the Sultan's oppressive measures.

The constitution of activist groups based on ethnic affiliation, as shown by the Armenians in the previous years, was considered to be counterproductive to the interests of their compatriots, and dangerous because it aimed at constituting a national league (of Albanians in the north and Macedonians) that would harm the idea of the *Mechveret*-style Ottomanism. The specific interests of some of these committees had contributed to the consolidation of sentiments of hostility towards Muslims, and had drawn the Christian population of the Empire closer to Europe,

¹³⁴ Ahmet Rıza, “Pourquoi l'Europe ne réclame pas le Rétablissement de la Constitution en Turquie,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 21 (15 October 1896), 4.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

forging for themselves the appearance of religious martyrs. This had been made clear when, referring to certain revolutionary committee, Rıza wrote:

Avant de parler des comités révolutionnaires je tiens à maudire la détestable administration du Sultan qui leur à donné naissance. Les comités ou ligues politiques sont toujours, dans un Etat, un signe de désordre et de faiblesse. L'Empire ottoman est devenue un champ de rivalités, où chaque parti sème des haines et ne récolte souvent que la mort. ... C'est dans cette anarchie que l'égoïsme d'Abdul-Hamid trouve complète satisfaction. Il est donc de son intérêt de laisser se créer, se développer des parties révolutionnaires, qui, par leur propagande séparatiste, divisent le peuple ottoman et l'empêchent de travailler, de concert avec ces différents comités, contre le tyran commun.¹³⁶

What emerges from the above is that the plan of the *Mechveret* group for the future Ottoman Empire was unconditionally based on a unitary national entity that nonetheless preserved pluralism understood here as the equal status of all ethnicities with their respective particularities and religions being allocated to the private domain. This idea of Ottoman citizenship, if reflected in country-wide institutions, would strengthen the cohesion of a newly-emerging state but would simultaneously relegate ethnicity to a marginal place: the common good, seen by *Mechveret* as the ideology behind Ottomanism, was in no way to be endangered by any type of other sentiment of belonging or affiliation.

In formulating this approach, however, Rıza did not consider a number of aspects. The fact that he regarded the existing laws as sufficient, if properly applied, to uphold a real equality between different ethnic and religious groups does not entail that the minorities were of the same opinion. Moreover, as I will argue in detail in Chapter 5, there were undoubtedly sections of the minorities which believed in the

¹³⁶ Ahmet Rıza, "Les Comités Révolutionnaires," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 4, no. 74 (1 April 1899), 1-2.

Ottomanist plan but they did so either because they thought the alternative would position them in a worse situation, or because they opted for the federalist plan of Sabahettin which, in their eyes, gave them more assurance of the real possibility of equality and self-administration than that of the *Mechveret* group. It seems evident, therefore, that Rıza misread the intention of those members of the minorities within the Young Turk organisation as these would at first work together with the *Mechveret* group in order to get rid of Abdülhamit, only to move on to a more autonomous plan of action in a later stage, unless sufficiently satisfied with further changes. Here, the tension in Rıza's ideology rested in the fact that he did not consider that his plan had been formed from a dominant position and was not wholly appreciative of the 'next' necessary step that the *Mechveret* was to develop if the minorities were to be incorporated in the group he headed.

***Mechveret* and Sultan Abdülhamit II: from cooperation to confrontation**

As the plan of the *Mechveret* group evolved, so did its relationship with Abdülhamit II. With the passing of time this disintegrated, as Rıza's group thought that a plan of reform and the Sultan in power could not be reconciled. This following section traces, through the pages of the journal, the trajectory of the relationship between this faction of the opposition and the Sultan.

Throughout the issues of the *Mechveret Supplément Français*, it is possible to identify three different stages according to which the group headed by Ahmet Rıza viewed the rule of Sultan Abdülhamit II. The three stages vary from a policy of cooperation with the Sultan to a constructive criticism of his rule, and, eventually, to outright opposition and a call for his deposition. On one level, these stages reflect

the particular policies of the *Mechveret* group, but on another level they correspond to the policies of the broader Young Turk movement. These stages of engagement also reflect the *Mechveret* group's relationship with European governments: by 1896, it had become clear that European states could not provide disinterested help and the Sultan had no intention of compromising for the sake of Western concessions. In the years 1896 to 1897, the whole Young Turk opposition had witnessed the near decimation of its external branch, and, between 1897 and 1898, the actual defeat of the internal one. These developments pushed the émigrés in question towards open requests for the removal of Sultan Abdülhamit through even more drastic actions than those advocated by the *Mechveret* group. In this section, I argue that the change of attitude towards the Sultan responded to the growing activism and militarism that Rıza saw as mounting among some organisations within the Young Turk movement. Hence, even if he actually did not share this tendency, he was evidently trying to ally himself with the largest possible number of opponents in order to constitute a united front against Abdülhamit II.

The period in which the policies of the *Mechveret* group were geared towards cooperation with the Sultan corresponds to the period from 1895, the beginning of publication for *Mechveret*, to the middle of 1896. As it will be shown, many articles appearing in *Mechveret Supplément Français* during this period deal with the Sultan in a conciliatory tone. The articles are generally polite, requests are addressed as pleas and accusations point at the administration and at those close to the Sultan who have betrayed his trust and have brought the country to the brink of collapse. The first issue of the supplement featured an open letter addressed to Abdülhamit. The letter highlighted three important aspects exemplifying the stance of the *Mechveret*

group at this stage. First, the tone of the whole article sounded respectful of the person of Abdülhamit: “tout le monde sait que Votre Majesté, depuis qu’Elle dirige les destinées de l’Etat, a toujours été animée des meilleurs sentiments,”¹³⁷ showing that, by then, the group believed that the Sultan’s attempts to reform were moved by good intentions, and its requests called upon the Sultan to lend a benevolent ear.¹³⁸ This tone is indicative that at this stage the Sultan as source of power was not challenged yet and that reform was thought possible within the existing political structure. Secondly, requests put forward the idea of a possible convergence of interests between the opposition and the Sultan. In case of the open letter, the author was exhorting the Sultan to revise the Capitulations – measures that had granted foreign powers the ability to interfere economically and politically in the internal affairs of the Empire. Furthermore, the blame for the state of affairs of the Empire was placed upon the Sultan’s circle of aides. These men were seen as having betrayed the country:

[d]evenus flatteurs en devenant vos serviteurs, au lieu d’être le trait d’union qui rattache un souverain à ses peuples et les interprètes des sujets dans les conseils de Votre Majesté, ils ont élevé entre eux et Vous une barrière afin d’étouffer la voix du peuple qui s’élevait pour les condamner et pour déposer jusqu’aux pieds de Votre Trône les doléances auxquelles votre âme est si sensible.¹³⁹

The middle phase in the relationship between the *Mechveret* group and Sultan Abdülhamit II only lasted a few weeks, and is really a transitory stage that links two longer phases. However short, I mark this period as a separate one as it appears to be a prelude to a definite break between the central power and Rıza’s group. After this definite rupture, Rıza moved to an ideological and territorial redefinition of the

¹³⁷ Un Ami de la Turquie, “Lettre Ouverte,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 1 (1 December 1895), 2.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

meaning of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴⁰ From mid-1896, and for about one month, the tone of the articles in *Mechveret* remained similar to the previous phase and the group still appeared to be willing to work in cooperation with the Sultan, however, the demands started to sound more urgent; and at points, the Sultan's position was presented as the source of many of the problems.

These intermediate-stage demands were concerning the restoration of the Constitution, without which, as Rıza himself wrote, the *Mechveret* group will not cease to oppose the status-quo:

Notre campagne contre le Sultan cessera aussitôt que ce dernier aura mis à exécution la Constitution qu'il a solennellement promulguée et dont il a proclamé lui-même les bienfaits et l'indispensable utilité dans un Hatt demeuré célèbre, et que, du reste, il n'a jamais rapporté. Nous ne lui demandons que d'assurer l'ordre et le progrès ... Que le Sultan se mette à l'œuvre et il trouvera en nous de sincères auxiliaires.¹⁴¹

From the above, it emerges that, once the Constitution had been re-instated, the *Mechveret* group would have been ready to work hand in hand with the Sultan in the pursuit of political and economic reform. On the whole, the *Mechveret* group appears here as a pressure group rather than as an outright opposition movement with the aim of substituting the source of power.

During this phase, the group aimed at introducing its specific reading of Ottomanism within the policies of the Sultan and forging a unifying basis of allegiance with the Palace based on the idea of a country common to all. In other words, it wished to transmit to the ruler the notion of a country that was produced within the Young

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter 6 for more details on this.

¹⁴¹ Ahmet Rıza, "Une Explication," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 10 (1 May 1896), 1.

Ottoman ideology, implemented during the First Constitutional Period and perfected by the influence of positivism. This notion would equate the country with the concept of an Ottomanist motherland. This was made clear throughout the pages of *Mechveret* which reiterated in an on-going way its patriotism: “... ces Jeunes Turcs [sont] ... animés d’un profond amour pour leur pays.”¹⁴²

It is precisely for the love of their country that the members of the *Mechveret* group were working towards a new conception of power and rights. This new picture suggests a country that belongs to all segments and strata of society and goes decisively beyond the structure of ruler and his subjects. The country was an asset, a legacy, a heritage and a right that everyone is entitled to enjoy: a nation. Unfortunately, this view was in complete contrast with the path that Abdülhamit II had chosen to follow. According to the Sultan, there was no space for political decentralisation at a time when the Western powers were attempting to bring down the Empire. Indeed, the palace had long abandoned the idea of equal rights for the ethno-religious components of the Empire, together with the vision of a multi-ethnic entity and had now embarked on a reform programme different from that of the opposition.

A more radical change of tone among the pages of the supplement took place during the second half of 1896, a period which coincided with what Rıza referred to as “déplorables événements ... [referring to] ... les récents massacres d’Arménie.”¹⁴³ In fact, throughout *Mechveret*, the tone became hostile and accusatory; “Ils [the

¹⁴² Fuad, “Deuxième Lettre Ouverte,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 10 (1 May 1896), 2.

¹⁴³ Ahmet Rıza, “Chrétien, Musulman et Humanité,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 11 (15 May 1896), 3.

massacres] sont le résultat propre du gouvernement du Sultan, qui sème dans son empire la division et la discorde et qui est impuissant à en réprimer les terribles conséquences.”¹⁴⁴ In this specific article, one can notice the surfacing of a religious discourse used against the Sultan, whose policies were starting to be branded as anti-Islamic. According to the writer, both the Sultan and the ulema had departed from the Islamic path, a path that the *Mechveret* group regarded as important. It is unclear whether the Islamic path to which Rıza was referring to is used for propaganda, or that, as was suggested earlier, he referred to an Islamo-scientific path within a positivist conception of religion.

This ambivalence gets fairly clarified in an article published one month later, on the 15th of June 1896, titled “Une nouvelle tactique.”¹⁴⁵ Ahmet Rıza wrote that the religious issue was one of private concern, that the *Mechveret* group did not mix religion and politics in its programme, and that the group had respect for all different beliefs. What he was attempting, was the preservation of the sensitive balance between Islam and religious pluralism, which both the Sultan’s despotism and the West’s request for selective reform were threatening severely. As many small, strategically important opposition groups were emerging, especially in the Balkans and among Armenians, this repositioning of the role of religion could have attracted these groups towards Rıza’s camp. Still, any religion, when used moderately and rationally, could contribute to good governance. Namely, if the Sultan and those around him were moved by the pious and peaceful tenets of the traditional

¹⁴⁴ Ahmet Rıza, “Chrétien, Musulman et Humanité,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 11 (15 May 1896), 3.

¹⁴⁵ Ahmet Rıza, “Une nouvelle tactique,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 13 (15 June 1896), 3.

enlightened Islam of which Rıza referred to, those in power would have been on the right path to shaping an Ottoman nationalism.

Two weeks later, an editorial in *Mechveret* put things more boldly. Under the title “Soumission ou Déposition,”¹⁴⁶ the article shows how the *Mechveret* group had by then shifted from cooperation with the Sultan or constructive criticism to actually envisioning his deposition. The general view was that “... une pacification durable à l’intérieur de notre pays est impossible avec le régime gouvernemental actuel.”¹⁴⁷

Twenty years of Abdülhamit’s rule had created moral and material chaos; a chaos that was directly attributed the Sultan himself:

... le souverain qui viole toutes les lois de son pays et toutes les traditions de sa maison, qui a été cause de catastrophes sans précédent, qui a alimenté les passions religieuses, énervé l’armée, détruit la marine, ruiné les finances, perdu le quart de l’Empire, humilié la dignité nationale, fomenté les plus terribles représailles, oblitéré les sens moral des fonctionnaires, créé partout le chaos et l’anarchie – un tel souverain est un danger public et un usurpateur.¹⁴⁸

The message shifted swiftly from a call for deposition to more drastic measures: by then, the concept, boldly put, was that if the state was in decay, the fault resided with its head. The only contention was around whether the revolutionary option would be violent or non-violent. As stated in the article “Révolution & Réformes,”¹⁴⁹ the *Mechveret* group was willing to work for a legal and non-violent revolution, aimed at the reinstatement of the Constitution prorogued by the Sultan in 1878. The peaceful option could only be viable with the establishment of a parliament that would effectively overview the workings of the administration. Whatever the response of

¹⁴⁶ “Soumission ou Déposition,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 14 (1 July 1896): 1.

¹⁴⁷ Ahmet Rıza, “Mémoire,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 4, no. 79 (15 July 1897), 1.

¹⁴⁸ “Soumission ou Déposition,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 14 (1 July 1896), 1.

¹⁴⁹ Halil Ganem, “Révolution & Réformes,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 23 (15 November 1896): 1-2.

the Sultan, by now the *Mechveret* group had a clear idea: “Que le Sultan suive les conseils qui lui sont donnés par l’Europe ou qu’il les néglige, le despotisme a vécu, il a fait son temps et l’ère de liberté ne tardera pas à se lever sur notre malheureuse patrie.”¹⁵⁰ It is also clear that the *Mechveret* group had dropped the option of peaceful cooperation between Yıldız and the opposition. As Ahmet Rıza wrote in 1897: “[l]orsque, il y a cinq ans, nous avons pour la première fois, soumis au Sultan notre rapport sur la nécessité des réformes, nous avons usé à son égard de toutes les formes de la prière.”¹⁵¹ However, things had not changed and, therefore, the approach of the opposition had to evolve.

From the end of 1896 onward, *Mechveret* featured a series of direct attacks against Sultan Abdülhamit II, using both political arguments and religious ones. Politically, the *Mechveret* group viewed the rule of the Sultan as having brought the country to the state it found itself in. The claims varied from territorial¹⁵² (the loss of half of the Empire’ domains and the loss of sovereignty over the Balkan states, Tunisia and to a certain extent Egypt) to economic¹⁵³ (a ruined agricultural, industrial and commercial system). There were social grievances¹⁵⁴ (postal and telegraphic services had been either shut down or were tightly controlled and most of the more capable individuals of the Empire had been exiled or left of their own choice, or even killed) and geopolitical complaints¹⁵⁵ (the Empire had lost its authoritative

¹⁵⁰ Halil Ganem, “Révolution & Réformes,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 23 (15 November 1896), 2.

¹⁵¹ Ahmet Rıza, “Mechveret & Sultan,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 36 (1 June 1897), 5.

¹⁵² G. Umid, “Au feu!,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 29 (15 February 1897), 2.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ahmet Rıza, “Banquet de la Jeune Turquie,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 26 (1 January 1897), 4.

¹⁵⁵ G. Umid, “La Situation en Orient,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 37 (15 June 1897), 1.

weight in Europe).¹⁵⁶ The *Mechveret* group intelligently deployed religious arguments to discredit the Sultan's legitimacy among the Muslim community. In the article "Mechveret & Sultan,"¹⁵⁷ Rıza reminded the readers that, according to Islamic precepts, the Sultan is an individual chosen by his co-religionists to safeguard society and ensure its wellbeing. Abdülhamit, however, had put himself above law and justice and had shown no respect for both civil and religious institutions.

In line with the above, a remarkable piece was written in the following issue of the *Supplément Français*, under the self-explanatory title of "Le Sultan Illégitime."¹⁵⁸ It consisted of a religiously-based attack on the Sultan, who was illegitimate, a usurper, and who, on the basis of this, needed to be replaced according to Islamic rule. What followed was that every Muslim was therefore exhorted and called upon to take the drastic step of being actively involved in the Sultan's deposition, also from a legal point of view:

L'autorité du Sultan est donc légitime tant qu'elle procure le bien-être. L'islamisme défend d'obéir à un chef dont les actes ne sont pas conformes aux principes de l'Islam; il oblige même la nation de déposer ou de punir de mort, le souverain qui, par ses crimes et sa tyrannie, rend son peuple malheureux.¹⁵⁹

Thus, Rıza was exhorting people to rise against the Sultan and provided the religious legal basis for such an action, by citing how similar situations had been dealt with legally, through *fetvas*, in the past. In order to increase the religious appeal, the

¹⁵⁶ Ahmet Rıza, "Mechveret & Sultan," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 36 (1 June 1897), 5.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁵⁸ Ahmet Rıza, "Le Sultan Illégitime," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 37 (15 July 1897), 3-4.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

writing of Rıza replicated the technique of question and answer format that is a feature of *fetvas* themselves.

The first instance, which we are told held its emphasis since the election of the first of the *Rashidun* Caliphs Abu-Bakr (Caliph from 632 to 634), reads as follows:

Demande – Lorsque la présence d’un chef de croyants au siège du Khalifat cesse d’avoir l’approbation des Musulmans ou seulement d’une grande partie d’entre eux, le chef des croyants peut-il continuer à se maintenir à son poste contre le gré de ses coreligionnaires?

Réponse – Non, il doit se rendre à leurs désires et abandonner sa fonction.

(On sait qu’Abou-Beker, après la cérémonie de la soumission monta sur l’estrade en criant: “S’il y a une partie mécontent de mon élection, je suis prêt à me retirer”).¹⁶⁰

Since this example referred to the distant past, Ahmet Rıza provided another legal basis for his argument, dating back to the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz. This was an attempt to show that these legal decisions were solidly based within Ottoman culture, and thus, it would not have been unthinkable to apply the same methods on Sultan Abdülhamit himself.

Demande – Si le commandeur des croyants tient une conduite insensée et s’il n’a pas les connaissances politiques exigées pour gouverner, s’il fait des dépenses personnelles que l’Empire ne peut supporter, si son maintien sur le trône doit avoir des conséquences funestes, faut-il, oui ou non, le déposer?

Réponse – La loi du Chéri dit: Oui.

Si l’on compare le règne d’Abdul Aziz à celui d’Abdul Hamid, on n’hésiterait pas à reconnaître, que ce dernier a mérité cent fois plus que son prédécesseur d’être frappé par un des fetwas ci-dessus.¹⁶¹

From 1897 onwards, the *Mechveret* group did not change its attitude and strategy towards the Sultan in the relevant articles in *Mechveret*. Subsequent articles feature

¹⁶⁰ Ahmet Rıza, “Le Sultan Illégitime,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 37 (15 July 1897), 4. I would explain and translate the term *soumission* used by Ahmet Rıza, as the *bay’a* of the Caliph, “... the act by which one person is proclaimed and recognised as head of the Muslim State.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, E. Tyan, s.v. “Bay’a.”

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

ever harsher accusations launched on both political and religious grounds, which severely deplored and contested the rule of Abdülhamit II. The above examples are written during the period 1895-97, which was a formative one for the *Mechveret* group and for all the groups that made up the Young Turk organisation. Other similar articles fill the pages of following issues but they were mostly repetitions or do not add new elements to the argument. These repetitive accusations maintained that: the Sultan had destroyed the country and brought poverty,¹⁶² while the modernisation of the Empire appeared even more unattainable;¹⁶³ the Sultan was illegitimate because politically-speaking he was seen as a despot and religiously-speaking his rule was un-Islamic.¹⁶⁴ These ideas were repeated constantly every single year, up to 1902, the year in which the Ottoman liberals meet in Paris to discuss a common strategy, a programme, and the ethno-religious composition of the Young Turk organisation. After 1902, the *Mechveret* group, as well as the other factions comprising the opposition to Sultan Abdülhamit, concentrated less on the conceptualisation of an heterogeneous, strong and united Young Turk organisation and more on the crystallisation of drastic measures that would lead the way to military action and signal the end of ideological politics.

¹⁶² See, among others, Fuad & Rechid, "Responsabilité du Sultan," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 1, no. 19 (1 January 1898): 2-4. Halil Ganem, "Causerie Politique," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 3, no. 50 (15 December 1896): 1-2.

¹⁶³ G. Umid, "Anarchie morale & matérielle," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 25 (15 December 1896), 2. Ahmet Rıza, "Mechveret & Sultan," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 2, no. 36 (1 June 1897), 5.

¹⁶⁴ Ahmet Rıza, "Anniversaire d'Abdul-Hamid," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 3, no. 62 (1 September 1898): 3-4.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have surveyed the actions and intellectual development of one of the most important and influential exponents of the Young Turks and highlighted the key features of his philosophical and political thought. Elements of Rıza's life and action illuminate the potential of exile for some Young Turk groups in opposition. First, the role of the Translation Office, *Tercüme Odası*, in shaping intellectually the modernisation of the Ottoman Empire becomes clear. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the office became the channel through which Ottomans could deepen their knowledge of Europe through contacts but also become aware of some of the misconceptions regarding the West: since part of the training entailed being posted abroad, they could witness *prima facie* the dichotomy between the theory of government and philosophical currents and the actual regimes and their actions, especially in foreign policy. Secondly, the establishment and activities of *Mechveret* and *Mechveret Supplément Français* were made possible exclusively through exile; at times of harsh controversies with both the Palace and the French government, Rıza and his group could benefit from the political and ideological help of liberals and positivists in Paris. Exile was also directly responsible for allowing the group's, and especially Rıza's, participation in European intellectual circles and become part of a positivist aristocratic elite which would, in the ideas of the *Mechveret* group, take up the role of active agent of reform in the Ottoman Empire. This emerged clearly from his tight association with many French journalists and intellectuals who take an important stance in defence of Rıza when the latter is threatened with expulsion from France.

The work of synthesis between positivism and Islam carried out by Rıza proved that the Empire could retain its Eastern heritage and Muslim background and fuse this with ideas, inspired by the Western experience, of a society organised and functioning according to the demands of modernity. In Rıza's scheme, religion was to be tailored a new role but, nonetheless, an important one from the perspective of the individual. In this scheme, positivism was to serve as the vehicle through which all this could actually be attained: it was a philosophical approach that did not oppose religions, it gave the Ottomans a sense of equality both in the internal composition of society as well as on the international scene, and provided a framework that encapsulated the greatness of the Muslim civilisation of the past. The work of Rıza and of the *Mechveret* group, therefore, must be seen as instrumental and formative for further important developments to come.

Another important aspect of the *Mechveret* group has to do with the trajectory of reforming ideals in the recent history of the Empire. Rıza and other contributors to the journal were convinced that the Tanzimat represented the real beginning of the Ottoman reform process. Without the period inaugurated with the *Hatt-ı Sherif of Gülhane* in 1839, the activities of the Young Ottomans, of Midhat Pasha, and of those behind the establishment of the Constitution in 1876 would not have opened up the stage for the Young Turk movement, contrary to what other exponents of the Young Turk movement believed.

This chapter also shed light on other ideas specific to the *Mechveret* group within the whole Young Turk movement. Rıza totally rejected the concept of violent revolution. This came out of the idea that such a process would strain the already

difficult relationship among ethnic and religious groups and would invite Europe to interfere and possibly occupy the Empire. Armed revolution was also counter to the peaceful attitude of positivism. Tightly connected to this non-violent vision is the role that the West would be expected to play in the process of reform. According to the *Mechveret* group, no European government would provide disinterested help to the cause of reform, and, consequently, the only constructive support was the ideological cooperation of the European liberal civil society.

The idea of moral help becomes central when considering the importance of Rıza's plan to build a national sentiment based on multi-confessionalism and ethnic plurality as the basis of the future Empire. This plan envisaged a particular blend of Ottomanism both in contrast with the policies of the West, with the Ottomanism envisaged by the Sultan, as well as with the one advocated by other factions within the Young Turk organisation – as I shall explain in the next two chapters. The pluralism of the *Mechveret* group is of major importance, as it was taking place simultaneously and, in some cases after, the development of nationalist sentiments elsewhere that were based on ethnicity and were fostered by Europe. Even if this was an approach shared by the various factions, what is unique to the *Mechveret* group is the utmost importance it gives to the indivisibility of the Empire without a consideration of other alternatives, such as the federalist option of the group headed by Sabahettin. The different exchanges with Armenian exponents and the extracts on what the *Mechveret* refers to as 'bands', makes clear the importance given to a unitary plan: whoever would push for reform or achievements that would benefit only one ethnic or religious part of Ottoman society could consider himself as an enemy of the reform and type of Ottomanism the *Mechveret* group supported. This

stance, apart from being peculiar to the *Mechveret* group, as I have stressed, also brings to the surface the intellectual nature of Rıza's plan which lacked, in this realm, applicability as a political programme.

There are, however, a number of other dilemmas that emerge from the view that the group held of religion and its role in society. The first has to do with the fact that the plan of the group seemed to have only a short-term plan, but lacked a long-term vision. The immediate need of dealing with the Sultan is not coupled with a social organisation of the Empire in its post-Hamidian era, as, for example, Sabahettin did. Also, ambiguity emerges from some aspects of the political plan. The *Mechveret*, as we read, was opposed to violent measures, but through the pages of the journal the reader finds no mention of what would happen after the deposition of the Sultan, especially in relation to who would take his role. Lastly, Rıza does not tell us how the elite to which he belongs and in which he was to play a leading role, was supposed to practically go about enlightening the masses: no plan on education and social reform is devised by the *Mechveret* group.

CHAPTER 4 – PRINCE MEHMET SABAHETTIN AND *LA SCIENCE SOCIALE*

The following pages analyse the second figure that emerged as decisive in the ideological development of the Young Turks in exile during their intellectual phase. I will argue that, as was the case with Rıza, Sabahettin equally influenced the debates that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century, some of which are still relevant in today's Turkey. As in the case of Ahmet Rıza, exile in Paris as well as the proximity to, and mixing with, the intellectual elite of the time proved to be of paramount importance for the cultural and ideological formation of Sabahettin's thought. Moreover, Sabahettin, like Rıza, exemplifies the figure of Young Turk émigré, in terms of his elitism and his self-perception as a cosmopolitan intellectual.

The first issue I will raise regarding Sabahettin's ideology is his strong affiliation to the West, and especially to England. This was the case for two reasons: first, England was considered ready to work in a partnership with the Young Turks in bringing about the Empire's reform.¹ In Sabahettin's view, England's interest in safeguarding the minorities was genuine, since the final goal of the country was to help re-instate an Ottoman Empire able to stave off external attacks, especially from Russia. Second, Sabahettin, as I will emphasise, was convinced of an Anglo-Saxon superiority in the realm of social organisation. In Sabahettin's thought, such model was the basis for the construction of a functioning and forward-looking system, in which minorities would play an influential role. As we shall see in a few pages, France had provided Sabahettin with the ideologues and the tools – in this case

¹ See, for example, the call to revive the 'old friendship' that *Osmanlı*, the journal close to Sabahettin, featured in its first issue. *English supplement to the Osmanlı* – The Organ of the Young Turkish Party – Edited by the Ottoman Committee for Union and Progress, 1 (15 July 1898), 5.

Edmond Demolins² and social science – to examine human behaviour, but England, and the Anglo-Saxon world in general, had applied these intellectual tools to become the best organised society as well as having a stable and coherent plan for the future.

Among the various writings of Demolins, the book that caught the admiration of Sabahettin was his *Anglo-Saxon Superiority, to What is it Due?* This book provided Sabahettin with ideas upon which to build his reform plan. As I will discuss, according to this approach, all societies fall within two broad categories: individualist and communitarian. What Sabahettin started to work on, as the first task that the elite he would constitute had to take up, was to shift the Empire from its predicament as a communitarian society to an individualist one. This shift is important as it illustrates some more features of Sabahettin's plan: a total reform of the educational system and a much more limited role of the state in the lives of individuals. These two changes would lead to the emergence of what Sabahettin held to be central to the success of the Anglo-Saxons and to his scheme of reform for the Ottoman Empire: the creation of a sense of private initiative, especially among the younger generation. In turn, this private initiative would contribute to the recovery and development of three key areas: industry, agriculture and commerce. But how did Sabahettin envisage such a huge shift in many domains of Ottoman society? The key lay in the importance given to minorities. In fact, the prince had imagined a future Empire organised on a federal system, emphasising the importance and richness of locality. A political, administrative and judicial

² Edmond Demolins (1852-1907), French sociologist, became the editor in chief of the review *La Science sociale* and founder of *l'École des Roches* (1898).

decentralisation would render all the approaches to reform viable. How all these changes were argued and presented will be the topic of the coming sections of this chapter.

Another major feature of Sabahettin's ideology was his tight affiliation with and his support of the Empire's minorities. In this, we encounter a striking difference with Rıza's approach to reform in general and to the role of non-Muslim communities in this process. The predicament of the minorities was a central component of Sabahettin's plan, which anticipated the constitution of a federal Empire. While for Rıza the value of an Ottomanist ideology had to take precedence over any ethnic or religious belonging, for Sabahettin the reality of ethnic and religious differentiation, and its legitimation through legal, administrative and political measures, would lead the way to the Empire's future. As I have highlighted in Chapter 2, the role of an enlightened elite was a shared feature among the whole of the Young Turk organisation, and Sabahettin and Rıza were no different in that sense. But while, as I discussed in the previous chapter, Rıza constituted the middle ground between aristocracy and what Halil Ganem referred to as 'democracy',³ Sabahettin's palace court background placed him in a different realm of exclusivity. His background represented an obstacle to the constitution of a new elite/aristocracy that would act as agent of reform, since he was already in close proximity to the current status-quo.

Before turning to an analysis of Sabahettin's background, I want to consider the following: the success that the prince enjoyed abroad, gathering a large following of

³ Halil Ganem, "L'Élite," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 3, no. 52 (1 February 1898), 1.

Young Turks, was very much connected to his own person. He was surely charismatic, but one also needs to consider the specific moment in which he took up the public role of an opposition leader. He landed in France, with his father and brother, at a particular temporal juncture in the trajectory of the Young Turk organisation. It is important to appreciate that the three left the Empire at a time when the internal branch of the organisation had been silenced while the external one was experiencing a substantial loss of legitimacy.⁴ Sabahettin's arrival, in short, provided an important boost and reinvigorated the organisation as a whole. As with Ahmet Rıza, exile gave Sabahettin the chance to discuss and debate with non-Ottoman intellectuals, study in depth and evaluate the merits of social science as well as liaise with foreign governments. Additionally, and particularly in his case, exile gave Sabahettin the space to negotiate his ideas and plans with the representatives of Ottoman minorities in exile, who were also investing in the possibility of the multi-confessional plan.

As it will emerge from the following sections, Sabahettin's ideology and the plan that he put forward in the book analysed here, *How can Turkey be saved?*, had some inherent tensions. His political and social ideas clearly recall English conservative liberalism, leading to the adoption of a secular approach to the state, in which politics and religion would be divided. However, if on the one hand, Sabahettin clearly states that the federal option would relegate religious values to the community, on the other, he does not make clear his evaluation of Islam and its place in the future Empire. Finally, Sabahettin's plan also reflects a misunderstanding of Ottoman realities. In fact, the adoption of federalism and the

⁴ See Chapter 2 for details on this issue.

upholding of the institutionalisation of ethnic and religious difference, coupled with a long term solution, did not match the ideas of the Young Turks inside the Empire, who opted for quick and pragmatic solutions.

Introducing Sabahettin

Mehmet Sabahettin was born in 1879 into a very influential family of Istanbul known for its reformist background. His father was Damat Mehmet Celalettin Pasha, son of the late Minister of the Navy, Bahriye Gürcü Halil Rifat Pasha. His mother, Seniha Sultan, was the daughter of Sultan Abdülmecid. The significance of Sabahettin's family background lies in its legacy as innovative and progressive in political terms, a legacy that had a great impact on the ideas of the prince himself. Sabahettin's background shaped his subsequent opposition to the policies of Sultan Abdülhamit II, which he viewed as too traditionalist. His maternal grandfather, Sultan Abdülmecid, had been a reformer. It was during his reign, in fact, that the *Tanzimat* period was officially inaugurated with the *Hatt-ı Sherif of Gülhane* on November 1839 and then reinforced with the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* on February 1856. In line with the *Tanzimat* ideals, Sultan Abdülmecid shifted the locus of power from the Palace to the Porte, the bureaucratic administration. Sabahettin's mother, Seniha Sultan, apart from having a wide knowledge of Western culture, ardently followed political issues and developments inside and outside the Ottoman Empire.⁵

Sabahettin's father, who served at the Sublime Porte and acted briefly as Minister of Justice, was appointed to the Ottoman Embassy in Paris, where he came into contact with French culture and political thought. In line with the family background and

⁵ Ege, *Prens Sabahaddin*, 4.

with the spirit of the time, Sabahettin received a modern and eclectic education. Another important influence on the development of Sabahettin's political and philosophical leanings came from one of his personal tutors, Şemseddin Sami Bey, who worked at the Translation Office.⁶ According to both Hamit Bozarslan and Nezahet Ege,⁷ the prince was greatly influenced by two other private tutors, the Swissmen Barchille Bertradot and a M. Charlier. The latter apparently also assisted the prince, his brother Lutfullah, and his father Mahmut with their planned escape to Paris in 1899.⁸

Initially, Sabahettin's father, Mahmut, had been a close confidant and aide to the Sultan. When, however, he started criticising some of the Sultan's policies and exhorted him to do more, especially in the realm of civil liberties,⁹ he fell out of the royal grace. As the policies of the Palace began to resemble those of a despot, and because of the family's conviction that liberal reform was the only method to modernise and revitalise the Ottoman Empire, Sabahettin, Lutfullah and Damat Mahmut decided to go into self-imposed exile in France. They hoped that, by joining forces with the exponents of the CUP abroad, a united, powerful and ethnically and religiously varied opposition could pressure Abdülhamit to either abandon his policies or step down and be substituted by a more enlightened ruler. As

⁶ See Chapter 2, for a discussion of the importance of the Translation Office in the transmission of liberal ideas onto the organisation of the Young Turk. In more specific terms, Şemseddin Sami Bey was born in June 1850 in Albania. He was from an old Muslim family that had been granted a fief in the area under Sultan Mehmet II. He attended the Greek lycée in Yoannina and studied Turkish, Persian and Arabic. He was the editor of various newspapers, among which *Vilayet* and *Sabah*. In his writings, Sami Bey stressed the importance of a return to the Turkish language, purified of Arabic and Persian words. He was a close affiliate of both İbrahim Şinasi and Namık Kemal. Moreover, “[h]e was among the leaders of the group which produced a Latin-based alphabet for Albanian in the 1880s. His best-known work is his Turkish dictionary, the *āmūs-i türkī*.” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Çiğdem Balim, s.v. “Sāmī, Shems ül-Dīn Frāsherī.”

⁷ Hamit Bozarslan, *Le Prince Sabahaddin* (unpublished paper); Ege, *Prens Sabahaddin*.

⁸ Bozarslan, *Le Prince Sabahaddin*, 1.

⁹ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 350.

we saw in Chapter 2, the majority of the Young Turk movement believed this ruler to be the former Sultan, Murat V.¹⁰

It seems that it was Sabahettin who convinced his father and brother to leave the Empire. Sabahettin announced to his father and brother:

We must carry our fight into the open, my father. We must join those Ottomans who in France, in Switzerland, in Belgium are trying to help our people realize the possibility of rising and demanding a better government. My uncle maintains that these men abroad are adventurers, vilifying his beneficent rule in order to induce him to buy them off. When the people of Turkey hear that the Sultan's brother-in-law and the Sultan's sister's two sons are joining these men, they will give less credence to this calumny. Therefore, my father, since whatever usefulness you had in this country you have no longer, we must leave.¹¹

Once Sabahettin had convinced them, the next step was to organise their flight. The three had to sell their assets in order to afford traveling costs and life in Europe; sure enough, this needed to be done discreetly so as not to arouse the suspicion of the Sultan and his circle. They approached an English Jew – one of the family's business advisors – to act as their middle-man. As Sabahettin reminisced some twenty years later, he "... advised us to make over our property to a friend of his who would sell it, deposit the money in a foreign bank in his own name and, when we reached Paris, transfer the money to us."¹² At first, Sabahettin trusted this middle man until the latter started asking repeatedly for large sums of money, supposedly to

¹⁰ Murat V reigned as Sultan for about three months, from 30th May to 31st August, 1976. Initially chosen because he was very close to the constitutionalism of Midhat Pasha and the Young Ottomans (especially Namık Kemal), he then changed his mind and tried to reform much more cautiously. Because of this, he was made to abdicate on the excuse that he was mentally ill. He was followed on the throne by his brother Abdülhamit II. Murat V was respected by many Ottomans of different backgrounds (one of his closest associate was the Greek Freemason Cleanthi Scalieri) because he was seen as an enlightened liberal. He became the champion of the Young Turk opposition and claimed, among other things, that Abdülhamit II had repeatedly attempted to kill him. He died while in captivity in the Çırağan Palace on 29th August, 1904.

¹¹ Vaka, "An Imperial Enemy of Turkish Despotism," 36.

¹² Ibid., 72.

arrange their journey. These continuous requests aroused the prince's suspicion; he approached a Swiss of his own household, probably the Monsieur Charlier mentioned earlier, who was also Sabahettin and Lutfullah's tutor, asking him to discover and expose the motivations of this suspicious individual. The prince's fear was vindicated, as the English Jew was discovered to be a spy of Abdülhamit. In order not to raise suspicion of a change of plans, and also because the prince was "... enjoying the pitting of ... [his] wits against those of the spy,"¹³ Sabahettin did not cut off ties with the English Jew but, at the same time, entrusted his Swiss tutor to organise his departure for the day before the one organised by the spy. On the newly scheduled day, the three men boarded another steamer disguised as stokers and pretended to work on it until the boat passed the Dardanelles. The steamship was the French boat *Géorgie*, bound for Marseille; they boarded on it either the 14th or 16th December 1899¹⁴ during the night, after having left a letter to Seniha Sultan.¹⁵ Having heard about Damat Mahmut's flight, and wrongly suspecting the three were on another boat, the *Congo*, Abdülhamit's forces stopped and searched the latter from 3 a.m. to 7 p.m. leaving the *Géorgie* to pass undisturbed.¹⁶ Abdülhamit initiated a search for them all over the Empire: a regiment was sent to Adrianople to inspect the trains bound for Europe; a plea was sent to the prince of Bulgaria asking that everyone passing through his domains be searched; and all boats leaving for Europe were thoroughly combed. Moreover, all Ottoman

¹³ Vaka, "An Imperial Enemy of Turkish Despotism," 73.

¹⁴ Date set at 16 December according to a telegram transcript held by the French Police, bearing no date. Another document, a report, dated January 1902, put their departure on the 14. "Rapports divers sur le sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914, Mahmoud Pacha (beau-frère du sultan de Constantinople)," *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169. Joseph Denais puts the date at 14th; Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle*, 44.

¹⁵ This letter was, in reality, addressed to the Sultan, as it explained the reasons for the three's departure. Seniha Sultan and Sabahettin's pregnant wife had been aware of the plan since the beginning and had participated in the decision. See Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*.

¹⁶ Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle*, 44.

embassies in Europe were instructed to inform their host governments that the son-in-law of the Sultan had left the Empire after having abducted his two sons and killed a servant of the harem. Both were fabricated accusations aimed at harming Mahmut's credentials and would make it easier for Istanbul to obtain his extradition back to the Empire. Demetra Vaka gives us a similar but more detailed account of how the news of the flight was received in Istanbul.¹⁷ Apart from the murder of the harem servant, described as a "young and handsome slave girl,"¹⁸ and the abduction of Sabahettin and Lutfullah, Damat Mahmut had, according to this false news, stolen his wife's jewellery. The dispatch sent from Istanbul to all the embassies and representatives of the Ottoman Empire abroad read as follows:

Mahmud Pasha, who of late has shown signs of insanity, has left Turkey without authorisation, kidnapping the two minor sons of Her Highness Seniheh Sultan, his wife. Since, according to our laws, sons of the imperial household are under immediate and absolute direction of our august master and since, moreover, Her Highness, the Princess, [is] insisting upon regaining her minor sons, I beg you to take whatever measures you consider efficacious and to search for them minutely. In case Mahmud Pasha should be in the country to which you are accredited, immediately call upon the authorities and demand that the insane man, as well as the two children he has stolen, be extradited and returned to Constantinople under surveillance. By imperial order you are to telegraph the result of your efforts at once.¹⁹

The propaganda against Mahmut did not stop there. The Porte issued a report probably to pit the French government against the three, according to which, Mahmut was planning to "sell his services" to Great Britain.²⁰ Another rumour

¹⁷ Demetra Vaka was an Ottoman Greek, born in 1877 on the island of Büyükada, in the Sea of Marmara. At her mother's death, when she was 11, she was left with no support and decided to leave for New York. She married the American writer Kenneth Brown and with his help, started publishing books on Turkey. Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism – Women Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

¹⁸ Vaka, "An Imperial Enemy of Turkish Despotism," 120.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle*, 44.

aiming at delegitimising the three within the Empire was that they had converted to Christianity.²¹ Once their ship reached Marseilles, the Ottoman Consul General boarded it and found Damat Mahmut, Sabahettin and Lutfullah waiting for him. The Consul General pleaded with the French police officers not to let the three disembark. However, the French authorities questioned the fugitives and established that the father had no mental illness, that the two sons had left the Empire on their own will, and officially welcomed them on French soil.

This must have happened between the 19th and 20th of December; their arrival was reported by *Le Figaro* of 20th December as the following extract shows:

Le paquebot *Géorgie* de la Compagnie Paquet ... est arrivé ce soir [depending on whether the article was written the day the paper came out or the night before] à Marseille, .., ayant à son bord Mahmoud-pacha,... et ses deux fils Sabaheddin, âge de vingt-trois ans, et Lout Falah [Lutfullah], âge de ... [vingt²²]-deux ans.²³

As soon as they landed on French soil, they moved to Paris; on the 22nd of December, according to French police records, they occupied a room at the Grand Hotel on boulevard des Capucines.²⁴ In Paris, they immediately met with Ahmet Rıza, who welcomed them and enlisted them in the organisation of the external CUP. On the 25th of December, *Mechveret* published a letter by Mahmut Pasha addressed to Ahmet Rıza. The letter strongly praised the work carried out by the latter and anticipated the beginning of fruitful cooperation.²⁵ In the same issue of *Mechveret*, Rıza replied praising Mahmut's decision to move to France with his two sons.

²¹ Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle*, 38.

²² We know that Lutfullah was one year younger than Sabahettin and thus making him twenty-two years old at the time. *Mecheroutiette*, instead, sets their age at 26 and 22, "Les états de service du Comité Union et Progrès," *Mecheroutiette* 5, no. 43 (June 1913), 31.

²³ *Le Figaro*, 20 December 1899; "Rapports divers sur le sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914, Mahmoud Pacha (beau-frère du sultan de Constantinople)," *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169.

²⁴ "Rapports divers sur le sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914, Mahmoud Pacha (beau-frère du sultan de Constantinople)," *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169.

²⁵ "Lettre de Mahmoud Pacha," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 5, no. 89 (1 January 1900), 1.

Describing Mahmut Pasha, “... un des plus éminent personnages de mon pays,”²⁶ Rıza expressed the conviction that these new exiled activists would serve as symbols, both within and outside the exile, of the passions that underpinned an opposition to the current regime: “[d]es plus bas échelons de la société jusqu’aux rangs les plus élevés, tout le monde le [Abdülhamit II] déteste et le flétrit.”²⁷

A month later, *Mechveret* featured an open letter from Damat Mahmut to Sultan Abdülhamit II.²⁸ The same letter appeared in *L’Aurore* of the 25th of December 1899, in *L’Eclair* on the 21st of January 1900, in *Le Libre Parole* (claiming the letter was sent by a Comité Révolutionnaire Turc) on the 3rd of February.²⁹ In the letter, Damat Mahmut explains their reasons for leaving the Empire:

... certain que je ne saurais plus vous faire entendre la vérité tant que je serais à Constantinople, j’ai pensé: puisque le Sultan est incapable et se refuse à écouter et à comprendre, il faut que j’éclaire la nation, que je lui expose les dangers de régime actuel et la nécessité de le transformer. C’est afin de remplir ce devoir et de dégager ma conscience de toute responsabilité que je suis venu en Europe. Je suis Musulman et Turc; je désire servir ma patrie sans distinction de race et de religion: mes deux fils ont les mêmes intentions; ils sont venus ici uniquement pour m’aider à remplir ce devoir sacré.³⁰

The echoing of such a clear discourse of dissent in both the Ottoman and European press demonstrates how important their addition to the Young Turk movement in exile proved to be. Once in Paris, the three started engaging in anti-Abdülhamit and pro-Young Turk propaganda and recruited new members into the organisation.

²⁶ “Le Princes Sabaheddine et Loutfoullah,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 5, no. 89 (1 January 1900), 2.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Lettre au Sultan Abdul-Hamid II,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 5, no. 91 (1 February 1900), 1-2.

²⁹ Newspaper cuttings. “Rapports divers sur les sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914,” *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169.

³⁰ “Lettre au Sultan Abdul-Hamid II,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 5, no. 91 (1 February 1900), 1-2.

Initially, Mahmut, Sabahettin and Lutfullah were active in raising funds in and outside France: they met with M. Kaiserlian, director of the French company *L'Union*, in order to receive a loan of 629,000 francs, they were turned down on a loan of 300,000 francs, and, between March 1900 and April 1901, went on numerous trips to Geneva and London with the same intent.³¹ London was, for example, the address of a letter in which Damat Mahmut promised to give back a substantial amount if granted a loan of 12,000 pounds.³² Funding expeditions were also conducted in Cairo, Corfu, and Brussels.

Travelling and networking across Europe gave the three men visibility and boosted their position both within the organisation and among influential European groups and governments. It also attracted the attention of the press, especially in France, England and Switzerland. Sabahettin was starting to emerge as the rising leader of the opposition, attracting substantial attention. Knowledge of governmental circles, coupled with their influential background, enabled Sabahettin and his father Mahmut to address several pleas for the reformists' cause to the French Prime Minister and President of the Republic, to the Russian and German Emperors and to the King of Belgium. As far as the press is concerned, we know that in Paris they were repeatedly visited by M. Guillard and M. Vaughan, editor and director of the newspaper *L'Aurore* respectively, M. Nadaud of *La Paix*, and a M. Verlez editor of a financial paper. They were close to Countess Mathilda Colonna de Cesari, director of *La Revue d'Europe*.³³ At the same time, French newspapers constantly featured

³¹ "Rapports divers sur le sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914, Mahmoud Pacha (beau-frère du sultan de Constantinople)," *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169.

³² Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 143.

³³ "Rapports divers sur le sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914, Mahmoud Pacha (beau-frère du sultan de Constantinople)," *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169.

articles on and interviews with Damat Mahmut Pasha, Sabahettin and Lutfullah. Pierre Quillard, the famous French poet, publicist and historian interviewed Mahmut for the newspaper *L'Aurore*;³⁴ similar interviews were featured in *Le Matin*,³⁵ and *Le Libre Parole*.³⁶

Because of their background as part of the Sultan's entourage, Sabahettin, his brother and Damat Mahmut were convinced that their move into exile was going to have a heavily symbolic impact. They thought that their arrival would considerably boost the morale of the Young Turk and other opposition organisations. They could not have been more right. In the words of Ahmet Rıza,

Notre parti se sent déjà trop heureux de voir un membre, le plus en vue, de la famille impériale lui tender sa main puissante pour travailler avec lui à la délivrance de la patrie. Ce qui fait le plus de plaisir à mes compagnons de lutte et à moi, c'est que ce témoignage de sympathie vient d'une personne instruite, d'un ancien ministre aux idées larges et libérales ... Si un personnage aussi haut placé que le beau frère du monarque ne se trouve plus en sécurité dans son pays, quel est donc le sort réservé aux simple citoyens?³⁷

Their flight showed the European public opinion and governments that the opposition to the Sultan was not composed of individuals of inferior social status who simply vied for stronger economic and political gains. Their predicament reflected badly on the Sultan, who had lost part of his own family to the opposition; the particular danger of this 'apostasy' was that these men possessed inside knowledge of the Sultan's weaknesses and fears. It was for this reason that the three men were constantly visited by the Ottoman Ambassador to France, Münir Bey. He

³⁴ *L'Aurore*, 25 December 1899.

³⁵ *Le Matin*, 20 January 1900.

³⁶ *Le Libre Parole*, 3 February 1900.

³⁷ "Lettre de Mahmoud Pacha," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 5, no. 89 (1 January 1900), 1.

offered them, on behalf of the Sultan, every kind of pardon in order to bring them back to Istanbul; but the offer was rejected every single time. According to Hanioglu, at some point they were even offered the sum of 50,000 Turkish lira had they agreed to move back.³⁸ As Joseph Denais reports, offers were made, together with threats, almost everywhere the three went:

Pour le faire fléchir, tout fut employé; tout échoua. Plus de vingt émissaires que je pourrais nommer – des officiers, des ministres, des ambassadeurs étrangers, le Khédive lui-même – lui [Damat Mahmut] furent envoyés à lui et à son fils, le prince Sabaheddine, la bouche pleine de promesses ou de menaces, en France, en Suisse, en Égypte, à Corfou, en Belgique ...³⁹

Bribery was widespread among the Ottoman embassies and the three had been warned by Ahmet Rıza himself:

Place entre un passé noble et honnête, et un nom illustre à se créer dans l'avenir, Mahmoud pacha voudra certainement rester fidèle à la tâche qu'il vient de s'imposer; il ne se laissera pas tromper par les promesses fallacieuses d'Abdul-Hamid, il ne rentrera pas en Turquie avant d'avoir obtenu quelques réformes sérieuses et palpables au profit d'un peuple qui a tant de respect et d'estime pour lui.⁴⁰

At the same time, the three repeatedly complained to the French authorities that they were being followed. They were right, as there is ample evidence that they were being followed by the French police, presumably due to pressure placed on the police force by the Ottoman government. From the archives of the French police, it is possible to understand how the Ministère de L'Intérieur et des Cultes (the Ministry of Home Affairs and Religion), the Direction de la Sûreté Générale (Directorate of General Security) and the Paris Préfet de Police (Police Prefect) were keeping each other updated on the movements of the three: documents from the

³⁸ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 143.

³⁹ Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle*, 47.

⁴⁰ "Les états de service du Comité Union et Progrès," *Mecheroutiette* 5, no. 43 (June 1913), 31.

Préfecture's archives contain large numbers of small handwritten notes where every single movement was noted down by officers stationed outside the hotel and who followed them around. Sabahettin and Damat Mahmut also complained they were being followed by Ottoman spies.⁴¹ Sabahettin sent a letter to the Président du Conseil, the French Prime Minister – Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau, deploring the visible presence of Ottoman spies. An extract of the letter reads:

Vous n'ignorez pas Monsieur le Président du Conseil que par un abus inconcevable, qui a été justement dénoncé à la tribune de la Chambre des députés, par la droite comme par la gauche, l'espionnage du Sultan Abdul Hamid II aurait organisé à Paris, une police pour traquer comme des criminels des Ottomans coupables de vouloir, pour leur patrie, des réformes que l'Europe entière a souvent projeté d'imposer au gouvernement actuel.

Si nous ne nous trompons, Monsieur le Président du Conseil, vous avez solennellement promis que le scandale dénoncé ne se reproduirait plus. Vous ignorez donc, certainement, que, sans tenir aucun compte de votre déclaration à la tribune et, au mépris des manifestations unanimes de l'opinion, l'espionnage du Sultan s'est réorganisé en France, à Paris, comme naguère; son audace semblerait, si c'était possible, avoir encore grandi. Et pas plus tard qu'hier, deux agents de l'ambassadeur du Sultan sont venus faire subir à notre concierge un interrogatoire minutieux sur nos personnes, les visites que nous recevons, etc.⁴²

Soon, Sabahettin emerged as the central figure of this family. Damat Mahmut fell ill at various points and was thus unable to be as active as he had been when he first fled the Empire. He died on the 18th of January 1903, aged 48. Lutfullah appeared not to have a true penchant for politics. Hanioglu cites a document in which an observer wrote that “Prince Lutfullah, ..., likes to make merry and is always short of

⁴¹ Dispatch of February 1902. “Rapports divers sur les sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914, Mahmoud Pacha (beau-frère du sultan de Constantinople),” *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169.

⁴² Sabahettin to the Président du Conseil, Paris, January 13, 1902. “Rapports divers sur les sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914,” *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169.

money... .”⁴³ According to a brochure written by one of the confidants and friends of Sabahettin, Joseph Denais, Lutfullah was back in Istanbul by 1906. Sabahettin, on the other hand, decided to carry on what his father had started and followed to the letter what his father had repeatedly stated when invited to return to his country: “Je ne veux rien, ni pour mes fils, ni pour moi. Je veux que le Sultan gouverne honnêtement. ... Qu’il change, qu’il donne à son peuple les garanties que celui-ci est en droit d’attendre et nous ne mettrons pas d’autres conditions à notre retour.”⁴⁴ Therefore, while studying physics at the medical faculty of the Sorbonne, Sabahettin became engaged in Western philosophical and political thought and established himself as a pivotal figure in the development of the Young Turk movement. His activism culminated with him representing one of the two major currents within the opposition at the Paris Conference of Ottoman Liberals in 1902.⁴⁵ At the time, he was regarded by many as the true leader of the movement; in fact, his group became the largest of the various factions and even more popular than the *Mechveret* one; so much so that it was referred to as the ‘majority’ at the Congress of Ottoman Liberals of 1902.⁴⁶ Due to his studies in a European Institution, Sabahettin became influenced by the *École de science sociale*, and the philosophy of Frédéric Le Play,⁴⁷ Henri De Tourville⁴⁸ and, above all, Edmond Demolins.⁴⁹

⁴³ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 27.

⁴⁴ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d’Abdul-Hamid*, 359-360.

⁴⁵ The other one being Ahmet Rıza. See Chapter 5 for the analysis of the Congress.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 5.

⁴⁷ Pierre-Guillaume-Frédéric Le Play (1806-1882), “French sociologist, ... best remembered for his development of a method of research and data presentation known as the monographic method and for his classification of families into patriarchal, stem, and unstable types. ... [in social philosophy, he underlined] the need for rootedness ... in the locality of one’s birth – a rootedness consecrated by the ownership of private property. *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, s.v. “Frédéric Le Play.”

⁴⁸ Henri de Tourville (1842-1903), French sociologist. In 1873, he became vicar at St. Augustine’s church in Paris and continued in his ecclesiastical career for eight years. The year 1873 also marked de Tourville’s first encounter with Le Play, and he soon joined the circle of disciples that frequented Le Play’s home. Beginning in 1876, de Tourville played a leading role in organizing a series of semi-public lectures designed to propagate Le Play’s doctrines.

Sabahettin distanced himself theoretically from the currents of positivism and Darwinism that influenced so many Young Turk exponents, and came to consider the ‘individual’ as the decisive component of social life. This stance was so peculiar for an ideologue of an activist group in exile that Bozarslan attributed to the prince the paradoxical label of a “révolutionnaire de droite.”⁵⁰ The turning point in his life came with an unexpected event which would mark his future intellectual and political existence forever:⁵¹ his physical encounter with Edmond Demolins, an encounter that pushed him towards the *École de science sociale*. According to those who met Sabahettin personally,⁵² his first-hand contact with such French institutions was to be of paramount importance in directing him towards the ideas of Demolins.

Demolins inspired him to think that it was social instead of political, and long-rather than short-term reform that was pivotal for the Ottoman Empire’s future. In Sabahettin’s view, all those political reforms that had been carried out in previous periods, from the *Tanzimat* to the promulgation of the Constitution, could not have changed the fate of the Empire as they were cosmetic and temporary. In brief, political change could only work if applied to a reformed societal organisation. It is at this juncture that a first appreciation of the dilemmas in Sabahettin’s plan starts emerging clearly. His approach was too long-term and could not be translated into action, especially because it did not envisage a clear policy of how to rid the Empire

De Tourville became the leading theoretician and organizer of a dissenting cluster of Le Play’s disciples, who, in 1885, broke with the more traditional group associated with the *Reforme sociale*, the official Le Playist journal. The dissenters not only founded a journal of their own, the *Science sociale*, but also organised field trips and courses of instruction in theory and method. *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, s.v. “Tourville, Henri de.”

⁴⁹ Born in 1852, died in 1907. Follower of Frédéric LePlay, founder of l’École des Roches, where he wanted to apply educational models tailored on Anglo-Saxon methods.

⁵⁰ Bozarslan, *Le Prince Sabahaddin*, 3.

⁵¹ According to Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*; Vaka, “An Imperial Enemy of Turkish Despotism,” and Bozarslan, *Prince Sabahaddin*, among others.

⁵² Here I mean Paul Fesch and Demetra Vaka.

of Abdülhamit. In this, Sabahettin's formulations manifest themselves as the stance of an intellectual rather than those of a political activist.

During the nine years he spent in voluntary exile, Sabahettin's efforts concentrated on creating a nucleus of resistance to the rule of Abdülhamit. He attempted to unite Muslims, Christians and Jews into a multi-ethnic and multi-religious elite that would represent and jointly guide the Empire; and gaining the 'help' of what in his writings he refers to as the "civilised world."⁵³ This last point, as we shall see in Chapter 5, fuelled the debate that ultimately led to the rupture within the CUP and the failure of the 1902 Congress of Ottoman Liberals.

Sabahettin's philosophical and political ideological roots: Edmond Demolins

In this section, I explain how Sabahettin constructed his theoretical plan by looking at which currents of thought he adhered to, and in particular, which specific individual he followed and why.

In general, it was the whole field of social science, as it had recently emerged, that caught Sabahettin's interest. Especially stimulating was the evolutionary theory, which placed the history of the Ottoman Empire on a linear scale from decline to development. At the same time, evolutionary theory could not be fully embraced as it relegated the Turks to a lower place in the developmental scale. This last consideration explains, for instance, the interest and joy aroused among the Young Turks by Japan's victory over Russia and the subsequent peace treaty in 1905. Young Turks and other reformers alike saw in Japan an example of a late

⁵³ Ege, *Prens Sabahaddin*, 159; as well as Bozarslan, *Le Prince Sabahaddin*, 1.

moderniser that had managed to defeat not only a superpower, but also the superpower that had been the nightmare of the Ottomans. Japan had reformed, in the eyes of many Ottomans, precisely by synthesising Western technological advancement with traditional aspects, creating a hope for the Empire, to become the “Japan of the Near East.”⁵⁴

In a similar vein, Sabahettin needed to find a source of inspiration that explained the reform in terms of inevitable transformation in the social sphere, rather than as a reductive hierarchical scale based on race. As mentioned before, among the various thinkers the prince admired was the French philosopher, sociologist, and director of the review *La Science sociale*, Edmond Demolins. The book that greatly inspired Sabahettin was Demolins’ *A quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons*. Sabahettin’s almost magical encounter with the text and its repercussion on the prince’s thought has been described by Bozarslan in the following manner: “[u]n jour j’ai lu un livre, et ma vie a changé’. Cette toute première phrase du roman *La vie nouvelle* d’Orhan Pamuk résume parfaitement la trajectoire du Prince Sabahaddin ... A quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons de Demolins changea en effet son itinéraire intellectuelle, ou mieux, lui en offrit un.”⁵⁵ From the words of Sabahettin himself, as quoted by Ege, the degree of interest and admiration that the figure of Demolins and his writings spurred in the prince was undeniable and his accidental encounter with the French writer was overwhelming:

One day, both materially and mentally exhausted, sadly wandering through a famous street in Paris, Edmond Demolins’ renowned work ...

⁵⁴ Renée Worringer, “‘Sick Man of Europe’ or ‘Japan of the Near East’?: Constructing Ottoman Modernity in the Hamidian and Young Turk Eras,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36, no. 2 (May 2004), 213.

⁵⁵ Bozarslan, *Le Prince Sabahaddin*, 3.

caught my eye in a shop window. I immediately went in and acquired the book. That night, I tackled the book and read it from beginning to end. Until that time, I had never come across answers in any other sociological publication like that of the author to what are the reasons for the superiority of the Anglo-Saxons. ... The next day I went to the same bookshop and purchased all of Edmond Demolins works. ... At this time, I was honoured with the great thinker's friendship [and had] adhered to the organisation of La Science Sociale and further became honoured by the opportunity to befriend other honourable members of the organisation and work with them. I read the works of the founders [of the school], Frédéric Le Play, Henri De Tourville and all works by the thinkers that became a part of that trend with such eternal passion and gratitude. I thought that with these methods an analysis of the social structure of the Ottoman Empire could be possible and that the opportunity to prepare a necessary reform program had made itself available.⁵⁶

The above quotation contains a number of interesting ideas. In a few lines, apart from an explanation that social science seemed to Sabahettin to be the most effective method of analysis, we are told how important it was for him, as much as for all other Young Turk émigrés, to be part of an intellectual elite that would overcome ethnic, religious, and political borders. In terms of content, what Sabahettin found in *Science sociale* was that, because of its particular method of analysis, it “is the only [form of science] that has shown success in finding solutions for social issues.”⁵⁷ Here, we start understanding that *Science sociale* had convinced Sabahettin that any type of political reform was dependent on drastic social change.

Because Sabahettin's work was so heavily influenced by Demolins, it would not be possible to understand the prince's agenda without a brief survey of the ideas of Demolins as he expressed them in his book *A quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-*

⁵⁶ Ege, *Prens Sabahaddin*, 36.

⁵⁷ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 33.

Saxons.⁵⁸ First appearing in 1897, the book was written after Demolins's trip throughout England. The writer was invited to visit various schools and assess the syllabi employed there. Throughout his journey, he was able to discuss with university professors and schoolteachers, sociologists, and people of various professions the various aspects of the Anglo-Saxon social system, and then to compare his findings to the French reality. Demolins studied the Anglo-Saxon socio-cultural system through the qualitative method of observation in order to shed light on what he thought was the political and economic superiority of the Anglo-Saxon system over the French one. The emphasis on personal initiative that the Anglo-Saxons developed since their first years of schooling accounted, in his view, for their eventual political and economic successes. Therefore, Demolins stressed both the importance of private initiative in already-formed individuals and, at the same time, highlighted the necessity to structure the education system around the principle of fostering this attitude within the forthcoming generations. Coming before the school, however, was another structure with a pivotal role in shaping the individual: the family. Similarly to that which he observed and admired of the Anglo-Saxon education system, Demolins appreciated the Anglo-Saxon family environment, where, contrary to the French habit, children were pushed to rely on their own capacity and impulse instead of relying on the family for the provision of sustenance and work opportunity.

According to Demolins, societies and their different manifestations can be divided in three types. Every type depends on the role of the family in the rearing of children,

⁵⁸ Edmond Demolins, *Anglo-Saxon Superiority – to what it is due*, translated by Lois Bertram Lavigne (London: Leadenhall Press, 1920).

and of the role of the state as provider of employment and of the framework for more individualist development:

1. Societies of a *communistic*⁵⁹ *family formation* are characterised by the grouping of several couples into one household ... the children do not rely on themselves for their establishment, but on the family community ...
2. In societies of a *communistic state formation*, the large public community takes the place of the dissolved family community; here, the young people rely principally on the State for their establishment in life, through the many appointments that the State distributes in the army or the different civil services ...
3. ... [in] *societies of an individualistic formation*⁶⁰ ... the individual relies for his establishment neither on the family nor on the state, which disposes few appointments, because public powers are not much centralised and do not employ a very large number of officials. Here, the individual relies principally on his own energy and resources to succeed in an independent career.⁶¹

Based on the above, the French and Anglo-Saxon social realities stood on two antipodes. Demolins viewed France as a society of communitarian formation, "... characterized by a tendency to rely, not on the self, but on the community, on the group, family, tribe, clan, public powers, etc."⁶² Instead, according to him, "*societies of an individualistic formation* [of which England was one of the best expressions] are characterised by a tendency to rely, not on the community, not on the group, but on the self. Amongst them, the private man (le '*partuculier*') triumphs over the public man ..."⁶³

⁵⁹ The translation in the text is 'communistic'. I, however, will use communitarian, as it renders a better idea of what Edmond Demolins really meant: not a communist society (to which one could be led to think due to the translation) but one ordered around the community (either intended as family or the state) and thus communitarian.

⁶⁰ I will refer to the societies of individualistic formation as individualist societies.

⁶¹ Edmond Demolins, *Anglo-Saxon Superiority*, 42-43.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

The nature of society is then mostly reflected in, or born out of, the education system, which prepares the new generations to lead their respective countries into the future. According to Demolins, the English education system continuously adapts to new realities and challenges, and, because it prepares individuals for practical work, it possesses "... a really social character."⁶⁴ Parallel to the more conventional didactical and theoretical teachings, schools in England emphasised practical and physical work that prepared pupils for life outside schools. This latter aspect would help them develop their interests in business according to an entrepreneurial mind-set and strengthen their capacity to adapt to the challenges of life. The end result would be a general sense of fulfilment for the individual, who, by producing for himself, would in turn contribute to the improvement and growth of his or her country. In this way, Demolins explained England's overwhelming commercial power. In France, on the contrary, Demolins thought that the system formed men for a society that was stagnant: "... the actual necessity is that men should be adapted to the new conditions of the world – which call on individuals to take care of their own welfare. The old social framework, on which men formerly depended, is either broken or insufficient."⁶⁵ Additionally, because the French system was still based on old requirements and necessities and did not adapt to the more modern challenges, it had fallen behind the Anglo-Saxon one.

However, as mentioned, the school was not the only place where the new generations were moulded. The family constituted a pivotal training ground for adult life and had to be seen as the first foundational step before modern schooling.

⁶⁴ Demolins, *Anglo-Saxon Superiority*, 35.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

According to Demolins, in this field too the difference between the two countries was striking. In individualist societies, the family is centred on parental bonds that are geared towards the development of an independent individual, as children's emancipation is the major task of parents. This way, children are made aware that their parents will not be responsible for their situation in life, and they will also have to develop their own entrepreneurial spirit and initiative. On the other hand, in societies of communitarian formation, the family tends to create the reality that the schools replicate and, more generally, of the education system. The new generations feel secure that the state will employ them as civil servants (a profession that occupies most of the working force in communitarian societies), suffocating, in this way, any prospect for the emergence of private initiative. The children are made to enjoy the fruits of their parents' achievements and are reassured that the family or tribe nucleus will be an asset for the future. Relying on these expectations, no appeal for private endeavours is likely to emerge. This tendency will lead towards decadence, according to Demolins, because it pushes the individual to abandon independent enterprise such as agriculture, industry, and commerce. This type of family attitude will also result in a passive generation, more geared towards accepting its status, especially at the national level, rather than actively seeking avenues to progress.

After family and school, it is around the three sectors of agriculture, industry and commerce that the Anglo-Saxon, as an individualist society, has built its superiority vis-à-vis the communitarian counterpart. It is precisely around these three sectors that societies must focus on their attention in order to adapt and benefit from new realities.

Demolins provides, in a nutshell, his point of view on the nature of the two systems, communitarian and individualist, and their application on the ground:

[a]nd if one single example can give an idea, ... of the difference between men formed by the new methods and men formed by the old ..., look at what *they* have made of Northern America, and then look at what the other race has made of Southern America ... On the one side, a forward motion of Society, and the greatest known development of agriculture, commerce and industry; on the other, Society thrown backwards, and plunged to grovel in a morass of idle, unproductive town life, and given up to officialism and political revolutions. In the North, we have the rising of the future; in the South, the crumbling and decaying past.⁶⁶

All this must have sounded very familiar to Sabahettin, who was impressed by Demolins' explanation of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon system above the French, and found that a communitarian society fitted perfectly with the reality of the Ottoman Empire. As the pillars of Demolins ideal society were family, education and private initiative, these became not only the basis of Sabahettin's thought but, to some extent, also his obsession. What, Sabahettin found specifically instructive in explaining the state of the Empire as a society of communitarian formation can be summed up in two main aspects that characterised the last forty years of the Empire. One aspect was the exponential expansion of the bureaucracy that had hampered the entry of the younger generations into fields such as commerce, industry and agriculture, which needed development if the Empire wanted to prosper. The second factor was the promise of a state that would absorb the entire workforce that had rendered the population passive and reluctant to ask for changes, fearing they would upset a status-quo that safeguarded their economic well-being and that of their offspring.

⁶⁶ Demolins, *Anglo-Saxon Superiority*, 50.

How can Turkey be saved?

Sabahettin decided to group together his ideas and plan of action by writing his own book, on the blueprint of Demolins' *A quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons*. This work is significant, as it articulates Sabahettin's vision of reform during his more openly activist years along the side of Rıza and the other Young Turk émigrés. The positions formulated in this work seem in agreement with his views when he debated with other factions of the opposition about a course of action. In these later years, his intellectual aim remains what it was, namely, to provide an intellectual guide for saving the Empire from backwardness and dismemberment and project it into a flourishing future. Here, it is important to appreciate both the level of elitism typical of Young Turk émigrés and the almost messianic mission Sabahettin appeared to assume. The book was to serve as a set of guidelines for statesmen and the larger public who, by reading the text, would enjoy the same metaphysical inspiration that the prince had undergone in the streets of Paris. The work, entitled *How can Turkey be saved?*, was published in Istanbul in 1913.⁶⁷

Because the book appeared after the 1908 revolution, which brought about the rule of the CUP, the reader has to bear in mind that much of the criticism found throughout its pages refers to both the rule of Sultan Abdülhamit and that of the CUP. The book, in fact, covers the communitarian nature of Ottoman society, not the period of a specific rule. However, the book *How can Turkey be saved?* is an extremely valuable source in understanding what Sabahettin identified as the problems of the Empire under the rule of Abdülhamit for two reasons. First, it is clear when Sabahettin is referring to the despotism of Sultan Abdülhamit II and not

⁶⁷ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*.

to the CUP. At the same time, the author specifies at various points that the nature of the state, the problems and dynamics involved and the intentions of those in power did not change substantially from the pre- to post-1908 environment. In Sabahettin's view, the social structure, the underlying philosophical ideals and the policies remained very much untouched between the two periods, as did the authoritarian rule of both the Sultan and the CUP.

So, how did Sabahettin envisage reform in practical terms and how realistic was this project as part of a regime-changing initiative? As I explained earlier, the final aim of Mehmet Sabahettin was to switch from a communitarian to an individualist society in the Ottoman Empire. The prerequisites for such a switch, were the following:

In the creation and regulation of this movement a few important principles [need] to [be] take[n] into consideration: 1. By being inspired by Science Sociale's investigation on individualist education, the English public schools and educational circumstances of new schools, set up separate educational institutions for girls and boys, and from those [new] schools bring educator families that are masters of their work; 2. In order to create an individualist character in our youth, [they] should benefit from an Anglo-Saxon education environment; 3. Young people brought up in this way need to be provided with conditions that allow them to settle in the land with rigour and to be made to obtain their independence through their own labour.⁶⁸

The last paragraph of the book is an exhortation to change drastically the Ottoman mindset and build the future through new pedagogical approaches:

The issue of the continuity of our entity, for which we have not been able to achieve a solution through military and political roads for centuries, and that nowadays we face as a tragedy which it seems will

⁶⁸ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 63-64.

end with a definite collapse, will be solved [through Sabahettin's social plan] for the benefit of our people and humanity.⁶⁹

It is with the above considerations in mind that the book *How can Turkey be saved?* has to be analysed. Sabahettin's aim was to communicate his experiences and convictions, gathered after long months of retreat and study, both to the governing elite and the intellectuals of the Empire. This, however, seems to be simultaneously the strength of Sabahettin, as well as the greatest shortcoming of his political vision. It seems unlikely that a book on philosophy and sociology could have reached out to the members of the Young Turk organisation after 1908, bent on acquiring as much power as possible in their own hands, let alone to the masses. It appears that Sabahettin, probably due to his background, his exclusive education, and his role in the organisation of the Young Turks of Europe, could not understand how to bridge the intellectual and organisational gap that divided him from most of the realities of the Empire. Sabahettin was not able to provide a short-term plan but only a set of changes of a long-term character. However, the problem of representation extends to the whole Young Turk opposition especially during its intellectual phase (1895 to 1902). As discussed at length in other sections of this dissertation, the elitist nature of the intellectuals who led the movement was undoubtedly a source of ideological eclecticism and richness, but equally one of the most fundamental reasons for the failure of the project.

Mehmet Sabahettin shared not only the conclusions drawn by Demolins in his book, but also the method through which these considerations had been reached. What Sabahettin found both most fascinating and useful was the attempt to analyse a

⁶⁹ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 64.

specific society from a new perspective, that of comparative sociology. In fact, the book's early section emphasises the fact that economics, law and ethics alone cannot be used to understand the social realities of a given country, as it had been done until the emergence of the *Science sociale*, conceived by Frédéric Le Play, Henri de Tourville, and Edmond Demolins. These disciplinary fields, according to the prince, could not wholly explain society precisely because they were directly the results of a given social structure. *Science sociale*, instead, deals directly with social issues, upholds observation as its primary tool, and merges the features of what today would be called the fields of social science, with a positivistic approach:

“[t]hrough the agent of this great and increasingly maturing social union, humanity, within private and public life, can only command itself and in this way shall completely collect other sciences into its central scientific environment, and will reach the most necessary and the most valuable support base.”⁷⁰

As we have seen, the family and the creation of an entrepreneurial mind are extremely important for Demolins and for Sabahettin. For the latter, these need to be coupled with decentralisation, and private initiative, which become the prerequisite for any other consequent change.

On the question of backwardness

Sabahettin maintained that the Hamidian regime perpetrated all the aspects of a communitarian society in which despotism, nepotism, favouritism and a lack of dynamism were central features. The conviction that only social change, both in the public and private sphere, could ensure the regeneration of the Empire and its elevation to a status parallel to that of England, left Sabahettin deploring most

⁷⁰ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 35.

attempts at reform carried out in previous years, even those of the Tanzimat. According to him, these reforms at state level had failed to produce the desired outcomes, while they had tolerated stagnation in fundamental domains such as education and the government's tutelary role:

It is true that the largest number of reformists since the Tanzimat period has nurtured a deep hope for change, but they have not discovered the form that this change should take. As conditions for change, they have only pushed forward freedom, the Constitution, education, morality and westernisation; [the reformists] are still pushing these ideas through. But none of these contentions has taken either the community, or the concepts that it tries to correct, an inch forward.⁷¹

More specifically, the agent of change in the Tanzimat frame was an enlarged bureaucracy, which Sabahettin regarded as one of these state apparatus that had perpetrated the communitarian nature of society. Another sign of ineffectiveness of the Tanzimat period, or, to be more precise, one of its outcomes, was the reliance on the Constitution as one of the primary sources of reform. Recalling Demolins' discourse, Sabahettin explained that it is not the actual regime in place that contributes to the superiority of a country or the modernisation of a system and its people; what pushes change is the transition from communitarian to individualist cultures and societies:

“... the constitutional government is present in Spain and England. North, Central and South America are all republics but the differences between these countries are so great that a comparison cannot be made. These differences are so demarcated that it is obvious that it is not due to the different forms of government but to the different types of social structures. The methods of governing in communitarian formations are ‘autocratic’, ‘constitutionalist’ and ‘republican’. Whichever one of these is adopted, the results will always be the same: political bullying and social poverty. It is because of this [fact] that,

⁷¹ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 37.

by changing the form of government and laws [only], we cannot reach true independence, [however,] this was obvious years before the constitution was declared.”⁷²

Explaining his rationale further, Sabahettin wrote that, since the Constitution is the supervision of government by the masses, these masses have to be organised according to an individualist system, whereby the people are capable of caring for themselves and consequently supervise the workings of government.⁷³

“A real development of public life is born of neither ‘constitution’, ‘parliamentary system’ nor the ‘republic’. Possibly, [it comes] from the private initiative which gives private life capability and order.”⁷⁴ Therefore, any reform undertaken without a deeply rooted shift to an individualist society would only remain a cosmetic change and have no impact on the people themselves. It is at this point that it becomes clear why, according to him, the period of the *Tanzimat* did not amount to the starting point of the wider reform movement that culminated with the 1908 Revolution and of which the Young Turk opposition was part. Instead, Sabahettin saw the men of the *Tanzimat* as the perpetrators of a societal system that had harmed the Ottomans and had hampered any chance for authentic change in the two most important domains of Ottoman life that the men of the *Tanzimat* had intervened: the civil service and education.

As far as the civil service is concerned, Sabahettin argued that bureaucratisation as a prerequisite to a better-controlled Empire had actually failed as it had not achieved any amelioration of the social dynamics. “The core of the *Tanzimat*, as it will be

⁷² Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 37.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 56.

shown later, [was based] on collecting income into ... [the] centre, a large public life congregation, that is to say it is nothing more than a community of civil servants framed within the central government organism.”⁷⁵

In short, the Tanzimat had only managed to shift the locus of the problem without actually removing it or providing a reliable plan for reform:

... among us, there is the belief that the undertakings since the *Gülhane Hatt* have improved our development as a nation. But when analysed, it can be seen that the principle set by the *Tanzimat* till that time was to remove the income that nourished the Monarch and collect it into a general treasury. Employers of the administration would receive their wages from this treasury and so would require [them] to bow down to the whims of those who control the treasury ... We know that public life in developed and steady individualist communities is not arranged in this way. Maybe it is the absolute opposite, the administrative faculty is never at the mercy of the civil servant class. That is to say that the *Tanzimat* could not bring about an evolution of public life towards an individualist direction. ... because the formation that the *Tanzimat* wanted to give to public life was not a conclusion brought about by the developments of private life. Private life remains [as it were] in its old state. Thus, the characteristic of the *Tanzimat* is nothing more than tying the statesman to the centre.⁷⁶

Sabahettin was even more critical of the attempted reforms of the educational system:

The formation of our gigantic school system started with the Tanzimat; meanwhile, there is [still] a need for people who can operate the newly set up institutions and at the same time repair these incomplete machines [structures] with their [own] thought. In institutions that come about under these conditions, education will necessarily resemble [life in the barracks] barrack's life and teaching will depend on books and concepts.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 49.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Here, the idea that Sabahettin is trying to construct is that of a proper Anglo-Saxon-style school, in which theory – acquired from books and concepts – is coupled with practical life – which resembles life in the barracks.

To prove his point further, Sabahettin resorted to Demolins' study and stated that, even though England had a qualitatively lower educational system than France, English students possessed much greater practical knowledge. In his own words, the prince stated that: "English youths, in comparison with the French, leave school with roughly half of the knowledge [of the French]. Whereas, when they enter the domain of practical life the former brings about a great display of strength compared to the latter."⁷⁸ The comparison made is that the education system in communitarian societies is an aim in itself, while in individualist formations it is a means to further knowledge:

It can be seen that, in Turkey, higher education, like primary education, takes an administrative and political form [character] ... [This translates in the fact that], the administration provides teachers [seen as having] a higher status, one that places them [even] above the patriarch. The intention is to take up the great task of not just educating the children, but making the family head [as] a political and intellectual intermediary. [The result is that t]he children, who by and large stay amid their families, earn their living by depending on their family congregation and not their own enterprise. Thus, they are completely deprived of the contributing factor that forces individualist youths to widen their knowledge.⁷⁹

Closely linked to the evaluation made by Sabahettin in relation to the state of public education, he claimed that the situation in which the Empire found itself was, only on the surface, the making of Abdülhamit II. The Sultan represented only the tip of the iceberg as the political and economic state of the Empire mirrored its social decadence. I have already explored how the education system was to be modernised and changed in order to produce the men and women of the future, as Sabahettin had been inspired by reading Demolins. Tightly linked to this vision, according to Sabahettin, is a systematic change at the level of agriculture, commerce and industry.

⁷⁸ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 39.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

These were all the domains of the lower class, which, in turn, completely lacked both the knowledge and the capital to benefit from and promote them. This had resulted in their stagnation. Sabahettin argued that while the three sectors should in reality be the domains of the middle class, this class was predominantly concerned with employment at the state level either as functionaries or in the military. The expectation of these civil positions has turned the middle class into both a victim and perpetrator of the despotic regime. It is only with a switch to an individualist society, in which private initiative becomes part of primary socialisation, that the Empire would fare better: more youth would be schooled, including those of the lower class; the development of private initiative would be at the centre of the new educational system; and the three sectors of agriculture, commerce and industry would grow stronger:

It is work, especially agriculture [Sabahettin was still saying in 1924] that is going to save us. Asia Minor is as big as France and richer than France in natural resources. Work, instead of warfare, will put us on [a] par with the other progressive nations. My program is to send thousands of our young men and women to the different Anglo-Saxon countries, to those regions where the climate corresponds to ours, to receive practical agricultural education but also live in the homes of your [Anglo-Saxon] better middle class in order to bring back your spirit as well as your technical knowledge.⁸⁰

Sabahettin attached such paramount importance to a rise in employment in these three professions for their potential to enhance private initiative but equally out of his conviction that those employed in any one of the three areas would be more aware of the needs of his or her own country and would therefore be inclined to assume a more vigorous political role. Once again mirroring what Demolins had written after his tour of England and the publication of his study, Sabahettin was

⁸⁰ Vaka, "An Imperial Enemy of Turkish Despotism," 32.

convinced of the necessity to fill the parliament, once reopened, with delegates employed in these three professions. Comparing the composition of the French and English parliaments, the prince highlighted a striking aspect. He observed that the English parliament in 1895 had the following composition: out of 583 delegates, 17% were merchants, 22% artisans, and 23% from agriculture, with a total of 62% from areas of employment where private initiative is obviously a prerequisite. Civil servants, instead, amounted to 47 delegates, a low 8% of the total. In the same year, the French parliament featured a marked difference in composition: with a total of 633 members, only a 21,5% belongs to the category to which Sabahettin attaches great importance, with 11,5% agriculturalists, 6,5% artisans and industrialists and a low 3,5% for businessmen. On the other hand, the presence of civil servants in the French parliament was almost double that of the English one, amounting to 15%; to them, one has to add 7% of delegates without a profession.⁸¹ Unsurprisingly, the two tables used by Sabahettin feature three professions – artisans, farmers and merchants – as the pillars of the whole society, as expressed in the composition of parliament.

What emerges from this is that in countries with an individualist formation the parliament reflects the value of society both in its layout and composition: the farmers, merchants and artisans who cover the three most vital sectors of society are well represented and occupy a place from where they can direct the actions and policies of the government. In France, example of a communitarian society, the situation is reversed, and the same applies to the Ottoman Empire.

In conclusion, Sabahettin wanted to implement a plan of social reform emanating from the family unit and the school as the prerequisite for political change, while

⁸¹ Ege, *Prens Sabahaddin*, 39.

none of the men of the Tanzimat had managed to understand the real need for such a change. This explained the backwardness of the Empire, which could not be blamed solely on Abdülhamit, but also on those who, having the power to change society, had not done so.

Decentralisation and private initiative as political and social developments of the future

It is clear that the flaws Sabahettin had identified in the social structure of the Ottoman Empire, when compared to the economic, political and social success of the Anglo-Saxon model, are similar to those found by Demolins in the case of France. According to Sabahettin, the Empire belonged to those countries with a communitarian state formation. His diagnosis adapted Demolins theory to the reality at hand and suggested a tangible yet long-term path to transformation. It is important, first of all, as Sabahettin had learned from *Science sociale*, to analyse any given society from the particular to the general. Thus, it was clear how the Empire had evolved from the communitarian family formation, resting heavily on kinship and clan affiliation, to a communitarian state formation. There, the government acts as a guardian-kin, while the administration provides secure jobs for life to the upper classes and, in doing so, hampers any possible development, among the younger generations, of one of the pillars of a modern society, the private initiative of its citizens.

In terms of this private initiative, Sabahettin had convinced himself that one of the most decisive aspects in explaining the success of Anglo-Saxon societies was the tendency to be constantly trying to move forward, without any sign of appeasement:

The individualists have reached social wellbeing and freedom through private initiative and pursuits suitable to changing necessities. This way of life and this education have been brought about by the vigorous organisations that have endorsed such training everywhere. Individualists learn the required skills of their profession through trial and observation and, therefore, at the start of their careers they are deprived in terms of broad knowledge[. H]owever, through close trial and observation they develop and reach the practical and true knowledge leading to success. Therefore, trial and observation and the scientific directive to understand universal truth are today a by-product of individualism.⁸²

However, it is not enough for societies to spur a sense of private initiative in their citizens. In fact, the political environment needs to be one in which this private initiative can be put to work, and this, for Sabahettin, was synonymous with political and administrative decentralisation. In order to explain the benefits of following this specific trajectory, Sabahettin traced parallels between England and France as two manifestations of decetralisation and centralisation, respectively individualist and communitarian. Centralisation in France had given the individual great responsibility towards the centre, but the centre had taken away from the individual the authority over his life and his sense of responsibility. It is for this reason that monarchy in England had a much sounder basis than the French republic. And in this light, Sabahettin criticised the Ottoman Empire because of its choice, following the Tanzimat period, to uphold France as the model. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire would only manage to become an individualist society based on private initiative if it decentralised sources of power and decision-making bodies. This explains why, as far as the program of decentralisation goes, Sabahettin emphasised that social change has be adjusted to local needs. As Paul Fesch reported it, the plan was outlined as follows:

⁸² Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 40.

C'est dans ce but que nous venons de former une Ligue de décentralisation pour éclairer la masse turque sur le fond et la nature des réformes qui nous paraissent indispensables. Bien entendu, cette transformation politique doit être accompagnée immédiatement de l'amélioration des conditions économiques de l'Empire, afin qu'on puisse mettre en valeur ses ressources inépuisables, qui restent aujourd'hui encore inexploitées.⁸³

One of the features that need to be appreciated in Sabahettin's reform plan is the intense interdependence among its different aspects. As we have seen in the last section, the creation by the families of private initiative in their children, as well as a specific type of education at school would, by itself, improve the well-being of all the citizens of a given country in a domino effect. Similarly, it is only by shifting the emphasis from the importance of a centralised state towards the self administration of the various areas, that peace and growth were to be achieved. In other words, the introduction of a system of decentralisation, more understandable today as federalism, would work on different levels. It would enable a thorough understanding of the specific needs of each individual area of the Empire; empower local authorities, in coordination with the centre, to concentrate on these needs; as well as result in a better management of the resources. Simultaneously, a federally organised Empire would contribute to the pacification of ethnic, religious and therefore political tensions. Finally, the acquired internal peace would, automatically, spur economic prosperity, as foreign powers would not have any pretext to limit the rights of any of the minorities and halt the dual economic development that the Empire had witnessed until then.

⁸³ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 398.

Sabahettin supported decentralisation as the chance to build local governments and reform councils within the Empire.⁸⁴ He thought that the Christians within the Empire had fared better than the Muslims because the latter had preferred centralisation, while the former had opted, willingly or not, for decentralisation. Greeks, Armenians, and Bulgarians were freer than their Muslim counterparts because they could choose their patriarchs. The Christians had developed private initiative whose absence had paralysed the Muslims. For example, the Muslim component would work towards the attainment of a stable pay as state functionary, while the Christian would foster his or her personal entrepreneurial interests. Sabahettin's stance did not translate into suggestions for the dismemberment of the Empire; on the contrary, he opposed any secessionist tendency on the part of the minorities. His model as a response to this tendency was Switzerland, where coexistence within a same country had been rendered possible.

Local government, decentralisation and federalism: these were the themes of Sabahettin's thought, which anticipates a Swiss or North American federalism *à la turca*. Accordingly, the affairs of each and every area would need to be administratively dealt within the same area and not according to a general law applied to the whole Empire: "local government organisations, in order to regulate according to the necessities arising from the capacity and operations of existing provinces, need to be divided into regions and regulated according to natural and social conditions. (In this wisdom, several provinces can be enclosed in one region). For each region, a regulatory committee should be brought forth."⁸⁵ In the same

⁸⁴ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 62.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

paragraph, Sabahettin also underlines how constructive an outside presence and source of assistance could actually be, marking one of the main differences between him and Ahmet Rıza: “In places like India and Egypt, [this type of] good consideration has brought about a degree of utility; a few English individuals should [therefore] be employed in government functions and retain a place as chairman of these committees, so [that] we can benefit from their regulatory capability.”⁸⁶

Throughout the pages of this work, Sabahettin is committed to the idea of federalism, translating into an emphasis on locality. To this end, he provides a sociological description of the actual changes needed at the level of local administration, which should be organised “in a way to create a clearly identified [individual] responsible for each task and bound together in a chain”⁸⁷

The habit of employing those whom he refers to as “migratory civil servants”⁸⁸ had only proved counterproductive, since it meant entrusting with the management of an area people who know very little of local realities and needs. In line with the idea of a federal Empire, Sabahettin is convinced that all disciplinary affairs that involved the public administration should be dealt with locally. This would result in officials being more careful and acting justly. In fact, if the local population felt their officials to be accountable for their behaviour they would be inclined to trust the state and feel part of it.

Connected to the above is judiciary reform, which Sabahettin considered to be especially strategic. The idea of an independent judiciary was directly related to the

⁸⁶ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 63.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 59.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

right to a fair trial regardless of ethnic or religious background, a right on which the *Hatt-ı Sherif of Gülhane* had insisted. It is only in this domain that Sabahettin reserves some praise for the workings of the Tanzimat statesmen:

Being a judge is a profession that requires the highest sense of responsibility. The sense of responsibility is a consequence of personal independence ... in terms of the judiciary, we are faced with trend problems [of societal formation]: the judicial organisation that [should] uphold legal immunity in the most decisive manner, [should] rely on local people who in their private life possess the moral high ground through providing unbiased [judgment and] and inspiring trust and tranquility.⁸⁹

What surfaces here is the underlying need to ‘go local’ and, in doing so, to reform other aspects of society and life accordingly. In the following quotation, Sabahettin refers to legal matters, but he gestures to the wider benefits of the localisation of the competence:

Even today, in some districts of our nation, there are [those] who can draw on the respect and trust of individuals in their environment through the existent social capacity, and it is only natural that a certain number of individuals take up the role of referees for those locals. We can describe these individuals ... as federal ‘justices of the peace’. By doing this, justice can be easily and quickly distributed ...⁹⁰ Also, as locally known individuals, judges would find themselves closer to the population.⁹¹

Sabahettin raises another issue within the broader aspect of decentralisation that has to do with the distribution of public and private property. This is one of the areas for which the prince clearly shows himself as a conservative liberal, as I have mentioned, and for this reason he has been labelled by Bozarıslan ‘a revolutionary of the right’.

⁸⁹ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 60.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 62.

Because of the nature of ownership in the Ottoman Empire, Sabahettin claims that the revenues and ways to generate wealth are not used to their full potential:

The social solution for the property problem lies with an efficient endeavour to switch from common ownership to private ownership. Under today's conditions, when it comes to providing for property through the administration: 1. The administration of the main registries (land registers) should increase in number and be dispersed so as to provide land and property owners with the most convenient means 2. A general census should be carried out, that will provide for the preparation of records and fitting documents that will be the basis for legal dispositions and land charges. 3. The administrative organs of the state should decide on the type of forms and organisations that are to execute these operations and to the drafting [of laws].⁹²

On religion and ethnicity

In 1906, following a speech by Sir Edward Grey, then British Minister for Foreign Affairs, in which he spoke of the revival of Pan-Islamism, Sabahettin sent a written reply that gives us clues on how he positioned himself on the issue of religion.

The first point, which highlights a common ground with the ideas of Ahmet Rıza, is that, for Sabahettin, Islam and fundamentalism are not synonymous. Actually, Sabahettin placed much of the blame around the misunderstanding of Islam on the public claims of people in influential positions in the West such as that of Edward Grey. Further on, Sabahettin explained that Pan-Islamism, as much as Islam, was not a fundamentalist manifestation and that its (re)emergence was a reaction to the aggressive and sometimes brutal policy of the West towards the East.⁹³ Through this policy, he argues, people across boundaries, which are often imposed, enjoy elements of affiliation and mutual help; these common experiences contribute to the desire for conservation of one's own culture and political entity, all elements that are

⁹² Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 61.

⁹³ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 401.

thought to be in danger due to the actions of Europe and Russia. Therefore, what Sabahettin maintains is that religion could actually play a positive role in sustaining feelings of community and dignity. However, he also recognised that religion can become a political tool of oppression. What distances Rıza and Sabahettin, though, is the way this dynamic can be changed. As I argued in the previous chapter, Rıza blamed the decay of religion on the corruption of the Sultan and the religious dignitaries and, hence, their removal could lead to a more positive role of religion. Rıza also saw in Islam one of the vehicles through which changes at the top could be pursued. For Sabahettin, instead, the communitarian or individualist character of society is what changes the role of religion. Using the examples of Demolins, Sabahettin stated that Protestantism is as oppressive as Catholicism in a communitarian milieu while it would be more liberal in the individualist one.⁹⁴ Moreover, within a communitarian formation, religion usually decays, becoming an instrument of oppression.⁹⁵

Furthermore, Sabahettin was sensitive to the fact that some of the policies attached to what was claimed to be Pan-Islamism at that stage, were misleadingly inclusive. Abdülhamit II used a Pan-Islamic discourse as a political tool internally in order to rally support around his feeble position: “Mais nous savons qu’Abdul-Hamid II n’a jamais envisagé son Khalifat à la manière des vrais adeptes du panislamisme.”⁹⁶ In reality, the Sultan deployed this discourse to counteract the section of Ottoman-Muslim society that was demanding some type of Western-style secularism; this would threaten the Sultan’s theocratic status. Sabahettin equally underlined how the

⁹⁴ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 41.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d’Abdul-Hamid*, 402.

emerging intellectual Ottoman youth, because of its geographical proximity with Europe, had reached a level of synthesis between Ottoman and European thinking that turned them into products of modernity. If this class would, in the near future, lead the Empire, then a proper idea of Islam and Pan-Islamism would actually work towards reconciliation with the West. However, this will only work if the West itself changed its policy towards the Ottoman Empire. These assertions support my overall claim that the members of the Young Turk movement should not be considered to be non-believers but secularists. As in most communitarian societies, as Sabahettin would phrase it, religion has become the oppressive tool in the hands of the regime. This was, according to him, the case in the Ottoman Empire under Abdülhamit II first and the Unionist government after 1908. Suffice is to recall that Sabahettin wrote that “people who believe that the religion of Islam is a hindrance to development are completely mistaken. It is not our religion that is a hindrance, but our social structure.”⁹⁷

The perception of religion is intimately connected with the view of the ethnic minorities. Only by tailoring a new, more private role for religion, in fact, it would have been possible to include the religious and ethnic minorities in a reform plan that would appear feasible to them. The first step, similarly to what Rıza had formulated, was that any reform was to be applied to the whole population of the Empire regardless of religious affiliation. For instance, in the case of the Armenians, Sabahettin recognised the oppression that they had undergone since the late 1890s and, his father first and himself later, had publicly declared this.⁹⁸ He denounced the

⁹⁷ Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 41.

⁹⁸ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdülhamid*, 383-388.

brutality and harshness that they had been submitted to. However, he directly blamed Abdülhamit for them, while at the same time discarded what others had called Turkish fanaticism. But Sabahettin also added that the situation did not constitute a separate issue but fell within the broader matter of the Eastern Question, involving other segments, such as the Kurds, the Albanians and the Arabs. According to Sabahettin, the Eastern Question could and should have only been solved by the efforts of the Ottoman Empire. In the quest for a solution, because the Armenians were numerically not sufficient to constitute a nation per se, they should set aside their weapons and use ideas and ideals in their place.⁹⁹ In conclusion, the solution was to create a common federal homeland where Armenians would hold the same rights as the Turks. Even though, after 1908, the viability of a multi-ethnic Empire was becoming faint, Sabahettin insisted that it was the best option even for those few non-Muslim components left; in the case of the Armenians, Sabahettin repeatedly called on the Young Turk movement to discuss instead of oppose their demands.

One of the major faults Sabahettin identifies in the organisations of the Young Turk was precisely that none of them could find a viable option to offer to the religious and ethnic minorities. In his view, the minorities were caught between two evils: on the one side, the absolutism and politically charged Islamism of the Sultan, on the other, the uncertainty and a lack of practical vision for their future on the part of the opposition. This explains, for example, how Sabahettin went from an ideology imbued with elitism and conservatism to one of revolution. However, revolution was

⁹⁹ In an open letter published in the revue *La Presse associée* in February 1905, Sabahettin even compared the Armenian bombing of the Ottoman Bank in 1903 to the brutal policies of Abdülhamit. Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdülhamid*, 385-387.

not, for him, a technique to acquire power, as he accused the CUP of doing. Rather, revolution was, in his view, part of progress understood here as a gradual evolution. “Le passage à l’action révolutionnaire de Sabahaddin, synonyme de la mobilisation des populations urbaines, s’expliquait par l’urgence d’agir pour mettre fin à l’exile et à la passivité, marquer ‘l’an zéro’ de ‘la réforme des hommes et des femmes’, mais pas pour un changement d’ordre eschatologique.”¹⁰⁰

Sabahettin and the West

Sabahettin’s stance on foreign intervention and the extent to which the Empire was supposed to accept European help oscillated greatly over time. In order to understand Sabahettin’s general approach to the subject, it is interesting to refer to an article he authored in the French journal *La Revue*, on December 15th 1906. In the article, Sabahettin claims that the Turks, as race, have undergone three stages. It is their third phase, which started around the 1850s, that concerns us here and informs us of Sabahettin’s stance towards Western Europe:

[b]efore this period [the 1850s], they [the Turks] had preserved an Asiatic character; in the present day, they look to Europe for inspiration. Today they have established an army after European fashion and have endeavoured to improve their civil and political institutions. The Liberal movement under Murad V, however, was suffocated by the hostility of Russia, and the destruction of Constitutional Turkey has greatly facilitated the advance of the absolutism of Abdul Hamid II. The monarch who bears this name is not, strictly speaking, a national product; he is the product of Russian absolutist reaction ... and that is the explanation of Turkey’s apparent slowness in adopting the European civilisation.¹⁰¹

It is, therefore, the absolutism of the Sultan that, according to Sabahettin, is hampering the possibility of a transition from a communitarian system to an

¹⁰⁰ Bozarslan, *Le Prince Sabahaddin*, 8.

¹⁰¹ Sabahettin, “The Turks and Progress,” *The Review of Reviews* 32 (1906), 48.

individualist one. However, as I have highlighted before, this transition could not be achieved only by adopting Western institutions, but had to be implemented through a drastic process of change in the nature of society. This explains why calling for the westernisation of society and politics in the Ottoman Empire would amount to yet another cosmetic change that, in the long run, would not benefit the Empire and its population. In fact, Sabahettin is clear about what he thinks a process of westernisation would lead to:

... by attempts to impersonate a nation, we cannot become that nation ... By embracing nationalism, we cannot possess more than what we already know. ... in our intellectual circles, the mentality of westernisation takes the meaning that we equip our country with the western 'material' and 'spiritual' tools and we believe that, as in the most developed countries, if we manage to bring about structures such as paved roads, railway lines, ports, sewers, battleships, schools, libraries, banks and so on, we can elevate Turkey to the same civilised standards as the West.¹⁰²

The passages above reveal a similar approach to that of Ahmet Rıza in terms of the importance that the West has in the realm of intellectual and political influence in the Ottoman Empire. However, Sabahettin's stance was more complicated than that of Rıza in that the former differentiated between different actors, while by 1897 Rıza considered any external assistance to be negative, whatever its source. For Sabahettin, instead, England and France represented two viable and actually foreseeable partners in a military intervention within the domains of the Empire. A more detailed description and analysis of Sabahettin's stance, as it surfaced during the Congress of Ottoman Liberals of 1902, can be found in the next chapter. However, what is clear is that Sabahettin thought of Russia as aggressive and an unlikely partner in the implementation of reform. Instead, as far as England and

¹⁰² Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, 42.

France were concerned, Sabahettin hoped to convince these governments that the movement of the Young Turk represented a progressive force, capable of bringing down the despotic regime of Abdülhamit and reforming the Empire in a framework of respect for the representativeness of the minorities. His personal admiration for French intellectuals and Anglo-Saxon social organisation made Sabahettin positively predisposed towards these two countries. It is also a fact that both Sabahettin and his brother Lutfullah had, at different intervals, travelled to England; aspiring to establish funding and political backing for possible concerted actions.¹⁰³ There are two other considerations that need to be discussed at this juncture. Immediately following the Congress of Ottoman Liberals held in Paris, Sabahettin and Ismail Kemal Bey – who was to become, at a later stage, a central figure in Albanian nationalism – became allied and took over the publication of the journal *Osmanlı*.¹⁰⁴ A constant feature of *Osmanlı* was its unconditional support for English intervention; even in earlier years, the journal had repeatedly featured opinion pieces and even a pamphlet with the aim of “... reviving the traditional friendship between the two countries [sic] [England and the Ottoman Empire] ...”¹⁰⁵ and attempting to convince both government and public opinion that a vibrant section of Turks were fighting against despotism and needed the support of England. Lastly, not long after landing in Paris, Sabahettin, his father and brother sent a letter to the British, which was intercepted by the Ottoman Ambassador to Paris; they were promising, in exchange for material help for the constitution of a united opposition front, special favourable

¹⁰³ “Rapports divers sur le sujets ottomans pendant la guerre de 1914, Mahmoud Pacha (beau-frère du sultan de Constantinople),” *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1.169.

¹⁰⁴ Hanioglu, “Young Turks and Freemasons,” 191.

¹⁰⁵ *English supplement to the Osmanlı* – The Organ of the Young Turkish Party – Edited by the Ottoman Committee for Union and Progress, 1 (15 July 1898), 5.

economic terms for England over all other countries should the reform movement be victorious.¹⁰⁶

Sabahettin, activism and the Unionists

As I argue in this section, Mehmet Sabahettin was a highly controversial figure, in both historical and political terms. He was either admired as an unparalleled ideologue and innovator, or regarded as an idealist who had lost touch with reality and who could not grasp the materialist needs of a state. Equally, he would be accused of not being able to adjust theories to the practice of government policies. This, however, represented the limit of the ideological phase of Young Turk history as a whole, not only of Sabahettin. Yet, the prince was, possibly, more detached from the practical needs of the population than the rest of the Young Turks, yet he continuously thought he had a public role to play.¹⁰⁷ In fact, even after the 1908 revolution when the CUP managed to get to power, he became a critical participant in public debates and for this clashed repeatedly with the Unionists in power.

As I have shown through the pages of this chapter, Sabahettin's sociological analysis was complex and could not be fully translated into a feasible political programme. It needed to be rendered intelligible for his contemporaries, which was problematic since he had been away from the Empire and thus unable to observe the nationalist social realities as they had unravelled within. But, in some ways, this was not so different from other Young Turk members. What did distinguish him was his grand plan for creating a decentralised Empire, where provinces and their

¹⁰⁶ See Chapter 6 in Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*.

¹⁰⁷ This was especially the case with the cadres of the CUP, after 1908. See the exchange of letters between Sabahettin and various exponents and supports of the rule of the CUP in Ege, *Prens Sabahaddin*.

administration would have had more or less an almost autonomous status from Istanbul. This policy was in stark contrast with the nationalistic and autocratic tendencies of the CUP as they developed in the post-1908 environment and, for this reason, such a plan would have been relatively short lived. This is because representatives and followers of the CUP saw in the decentralisation the beginning of a political regionalisation that would lead to the total collapse and disintegration of the Empire. It is true that, once back in the Empire and through the newspaper *Terakki*, the prince was allowed to initiate an exchange of views with CUP leaders and sympathisers, but his criticism of the system installed by the CUP was never officially taken into consideration.¹⁰⁸ Sabahettin tried to become an active participant in shaping Unionists policies, only to be marginalised under the suspicion that his ideas could be harmful to the Empire: “Il entreprit alors un vaste travail pédagogique pour expliquer ses idées et se défendre contre les accusations dont il était la cible (anglophile, collaboration avec les anarchistes, encouragement au séparatisme arménien, ascendance géorgienne ...).”¹⁰⁹ Overall, the inapplicability of Sabahettin’s ideas lay in the fact that their prerequisite was to shake the foundations of the community and apply a drastic and all-encompassing plan of private initiative and individualisation. This was supposed to be done through a radical revolution in the conceptualisation of what the Empire had to be territorially, culturally and socially; this was an idea that many were not ready to see materialise. Moreover, the book, *How can Turkey be saved?* is extremely complicated, not only in that it treats a difficult topic but also in its articulation of the subject. As much as the ideas of Ahmet Rıza were going through different stages as he proceeded, so also

¹⁰⁸ See Ege, *Prins Sabahaddin*.

¹⁰⁹ Bozarslan, *Le Prince Sabahaddin*, 1.

was the approach of Sabahettin towards the reforming path of the Ottoman Empire, substantially a work-in-progress. But the difference seems to be that, while Rıza was ready to share the burden of creating an ideology, using *Mechveret* as a forum, Sabahettin saw himself as the sole repository of a truth. He formulated this truth, which he had inherited from another written absolute truth, that of Edmond Demolins, in a book. Moreover, the striking difference between the writings of the two intellectuals is one of focus: whereas Rıza is more populist in his formulations, directly exhorting people, his thought lacks the structure of a pragmatic and applicable plan. Instead, Sabahettin does provide a structure, yet amid a much more complicated framework, as well as an extremely detailed plan. So detailed and, in a way innovative, was this plan, that it was grossly misunderstood by the same people he had attempted to inspire, the Unionists. To the latter, in fact, Sabahettin's plan would necessarily lead to the fragmentation and subsequent break-up of their Empire.

Another setback for Sabahettin's ideology was that it represented a long-term and idealistic vision of socio-cultural engineering that did not agree with the urgency to overturn the Sultan. Not much is debated on the short-term needs of the Empire. How was Sabahettin to convince minorities and the majority that the various components could work together and trust each other? An answer lies in the outcome of the Congress of Ottoman Liberals held in Paris, in 1902, which is surveyed and analysed in the next chapter. Something to consider, which explains to a certain extent why Sabahettin became the leader of the majority within the organisation, is the fact that he represented an impressive and weighty figure, also due to his access to influential government officials, especially in France. Testimony to this is the letter addressed to the French Prime Minister as well as the tight

surveillance, both French and Ottoman, under which he and his family were under while in France. A further issue that needs consideration, which he shared with Rıza in this case, was that his membership in the intellectual milieu allowed him to overcome, in many instances, shortages of funds, needed in this case to organise the congress, by receiving the practical help of French intellectuals and activists, such as the use of the house in which the Congress was held at first.¹¹⁰

Surely worth considering among the various ideas put forth by Sabahettin is his view of the history of reform of the Empire, which gives the reader a clear image of the differences with Ahmet Rıza. As I have explained before, in his book *How can Turkey be saved?*, Sabahettin claims that the *Tanzimat* reforms have achieved close to nothing, and that reform would only work following a change in the social structure. This change should be carried out through the development of private initiative on the part of the government as well as the people and on the plan of a federal Empire. The *Tanzimat*, in his view, had changed very little of the societal dynamics and, together with the adoption of the Constitution amounted to cosmetic changes easily reversible. However, aside from the readings of Demolins, the idea of decentralisation and private initiative that Sabahettin learned and developed from texts and exchanges with the French intelligentsia, there are sources of inspiration that came directly from his own Ottoman past. Surely, in fact, even though we know that Sabahettin thought that the Constitution as well as any other political framework was not enough to reform without deep social change, the memory of the 1876 parliament must have impressed him and must have fostered in him the idea that his grand plan was, after all, feasible. The outcome of the opening of parliament was,

¹¹⁰ See Chapter 5.

among other things, the emergence of an elite made up of Albanians, Greeks, Armenians, Arabs and Macedonians: “[f]or the first time in its history, the Empire appeared to be genuinely multiethnic.”¹¹¹

After all, Sabahettin’s efforts did not meet with much success and Sabahettin was sentenced to death in absentia, without any actual proofs, for the assassination of Mahmut Şevket Pasha.¹¹² Simultaneously, the party that almost fully upheld his views, *Hürriyet ve Itilaf Partisi*, was excluded from politics the same year his book came out. Contributing to the misunderstanding of his program and ideals was also the prince’s character. Undoubtedly moved by love for his motherland, Sabahettin was, however, uncompromising and substantially polemical in his dealings with whoever opposed his views.¹¹³ Such attitude was very ill received by the establishment, by now totally Unionist, that made total compliance a prerogative for active political life. On the side of the public, Sabahettin was difficult to understand and, because of his hermit-like lifestyle, his figure easily portrayed in very negative light.

¹¹¹ Çağlar Keyder, “The Ottoman Empire,” 35.

¹¹² Mahmut Şevket Pasha, then Grand Vizier and Minister of War, was shot dead on the 11th June 1913 on Bayezid square in Istanbul. Zürcher, *Turkey, a modern history*, 115. The police linked the killing to a group that, supposedly, was also plotting to kill Talat, Cemal and Azmi Beys. The police linked Sabahettin to this group, and actually claimed he was among the masterminds, although without any hard evidence. Sabahettin tried to oppose the accusations by, among other things, writing a letter addressed to the accusers. In his usual arrogant tone, Sabahettin wrote that he never exhorted people to use assassination as a political tool, much to the contrary to Unionists’ habits, and that the misfortune of the dead Pasha was used by the CUP to get rid of their political and intellectual adversaries, of which the Prince was one. For a fuller report of this incident, see “Sentence de la Cour Martiale,” *Mecheroutiette* 5, no. 45 (August 1913): 35-64; and “Déclaration du Prince Sabaheddine,” *Mecheroutiette* 5, no. 45 (August 1913): 10-13.

¹¹³ See his exchanges with Unionist members through the pages of *Terakki*, as reported in Ege, *Prens Sabahaddin*.

Concluding remarks

Writing the concluding remarks to the previous chapter, I emphasised that the importance of Ahmet Rıza rested upon his attempt to find for himself and, hopefully, for his followers a secular philosophical platform that did not oppose the belief in Islam. This came to be his version of positivism. The other major achievement of Rıza was to create a forum, through the establishment of the journal *Mechveret*, where Ottomans and non-Ottomans could discuss the political situation of the Empire and debate its future political shape. Sabahettin, on the other hand, did not need to discuss a future plan, he had it well in mind. This took the shape of a federal Empire, within which society would have to be drastically altered to resemble the organisation of the impressive and successful Anglo-Saxon society. This was the outcome of his encounter and adherence to the school of *Science sociale*, which gave Sabahettin an altogether different character from all the other Young Turks. As argued by Bozarlan: “La tradition de Le Play (1806-1822) et de Demolins (1852-1907) permit en effet au Prince de se situer en dehors du positivisme en vogue et du darwinisme social qui influençait la majorité des opposants Jeunes Turcs, pour considérer l’individu comme l’élément décisif de la vie sociale.”¹¹⁴

A very crucial aspect of Rıza’s plan was his approach to religion within a positivist framework; for Sabahettin’s writings, this aspect was at best marginal. His position vis-à-vis religion does not feature prominently in the writings analysed here. We do, however, have a telling and somewhat poetic encounter with religion in Sabahettin’s memoirs. The way Sabahettin recalls his encounter with the ideas of Demolins is very similar to a religious enlightenment. It is precisely the complex relationship of

¹¹⁴ Bozarlan, *Le Prince Sabahaddin*, 3.

these two words that gives us a clue to Sabahettin in particular but also to the Young Turk *Weltanschauung* in general: religion and the Enlightenment as it had taken root in Western Europe. It is in fact the merging, or synthesis, of the two that all those working abroad under the umbrella organisation of the Young Turk movement were attempting to work out. In the passage referred to above,¹¹⁵ Sabahettin's encounter with Demolins' ideas resembles closely the experience of religious revelation. Moreover, the choice of finding all the answers in a book can be connected to the textual importance in Islam. We can only speculate about this choice of narrative: it could be an attempt to portray his own ideology as very close to Islam, or approximate a familiar discourse that would make his work more intelligible and acceptable to others. This seems to me to be the more plausible explanation, as the majority of the exponents of the opposition were confronted precisely with this task: their main obstacle was popularisation, the enlargement of their ideology. However, other possibilities need to be considered. Another equally probable explanation is tightly linked with the elitism and self-projection that most of the Young Turks had. In some ways, Sabahettin finds himself so enlightened that he has a direct connection with knowledge (the pages of the book) and compares himself to the Prophet: once the truth had been revealed to him the world would have drastically changed.

The way in which the prince's memories are told¹¹⁶ gives us an additional idea of the background and self-image that many among the Young Turk organisation shared but which was, undoubtedly, a central feature of Sabahettin's character: the

¹¹⁵ Ege, *Prens Sabahaddin*, 36.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

idea of a mission. After all, the narrated encounter that changed his life hints at some sort of predestination: as if another Jibril had come down to illuminate the masses through a modern, progressive and universalistic prophet. Many of the opponents of the rule of Abdülhamit II were convinced elitists, the products of a specific educational background which highlighted their intellectual and educational superiority in comparison to the rest of the population. Moreover, they also saw themselves as possessing the tools and thus being assigned the mission to reform and save the Empire. However, in Sabahettin, the level of elitism borders some sort of predestination, which, for example in the case of Rıza, does not surface in the same manner.

In the end, what emerges most from the ideas of the prince is a very eccentric relationship with culture and religion. Although difficult to explain, it seems that the most plausible explanation for this relationship remains the one I have put forth for Ahmet Rıza's dilemmas: the natural outcome of an ideology in the making. However, it is also fair to note that Sabahettin defended Islam by stating that its fanatic aspects, to which the West repeatedly referred, should be seen as an outcome of what he refers to as the brutal policies of the West on the East.¹¹⁷ What can be inferred from the material analysed throughout this chapter is that religion was to have a very individual role, as Sabahettin's plan evolved around the idea of multiculturalism and secularism, in an Empire where localities were to be maintained but not allowed to interfere in other localities. To sum up in a few lines the ideology of Sabahettin, I argue that he was a thinker ahead of his time and, due to the sense of mission and intellectualism, both difficult to grasp and unable to turn

¹¹⁷ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 401.

ideas into actions. He was also out of touch with life in the Ottoman Empire, not understanding that those who opposed the rule of Abdülhamit II wanted tangible results and that, once the revolution had been carried out, ideas of constitutional rule were soon to be submitted to the decisions of the Unionists who had taken up the tutelary role the intellectual Young Turks, such as Sabahettin, had thought should have been theirs.

CHAPTER 5 – THE END OF AN IDEA: THE 1902 CONGRESS OF OTTOMAN LIBERALS IN PARIS

In the two previous chapters, I surveyed the main traits of the ideologies of Ahmet Rıza and Mehmet Sabahettin with a view to address 4 issues. The first deals with what I have referred to in Chapter 2 as the ‘necessity for exile’. It is at the Congress of 1902 that this necessity, or opportunity, is highlighted once more and actually reaches its potential: inside the Ottoman borders such a congress could have never been convened. Moreover, if the Congress had somehow been convened inside the Empire, its character would be different: it would have meant that the internal branch of the organisation had not been silenced and, therefore, the Congress would have had to negotiate this branch’s more military outlook with the émigrés’ intellectualism. As I highlight in Chapter 2, from 1896 onwards, an ideological split had taken place between the internal and external branches of the organisation – before the latter was actually disbanded in 1897 – whereby the internal organisation became dominated by bureaucrats and army personnel who were bent on a more violent course of action. On the contrary, the external branch was made up of students and intellectuals less inclined to abrupt changes and more committed to dialogue. The organisation of the Congress inside the Empire would have resulted, as I shall argue further on, in two possible scenarios: one possible outcome could have been the development of concerted action rather than the end of the intellectual phase, as, instead, happened in Paris. The other possible outcome could have been that, with the help of spies and the police, Sultan Abdülhamit would have discovered and persecuted the members of the movement. Whichever of the two outcomes we consider as more likely, it would have had a major impact on the conceptualisation of social and political policies in the near and long term future. In sum, exile, once

again, provided a specific course for the development not only of the immediate history of the Young Turk organisation but also its ideological future development. A second issues that I treat in the following pages is how the members of the Young Turk organisations, and in particular Rıza and Sabahettin, perceived the question of reform in collaboration with each other. Connected to this is the question of the shape that reform was supposed to take and the desired course of action to achieve this. The last two critical aspects that I address in the next pages concern foreign intervention and the role religious and ethnic affiliation would play in the new envisaged Empire. I will argue that at the core of these issues are the meaning, nature and feasibility of the affiliative, proto-nationalist idea embodied in Ottomanism. The scope of my analysis goes as far as 1902, the year of the Paris Congress whose failure marked the end of the period 1895 – 1902, which I have labelled the ‘intellectual phase’ of the Young Turk era. An assessment of failure does not imply any teleology, but I do contend that the irreconcilability between intellectual endeavour and practical necessities, that became flagrant during the Congress, was in fact inherent in the trajectory and ideas of both figures and leaders of the opposition, Rıza and Sabahettin.

The end of this intellectual phase, marked by the loss of belief in Ottomanism and essentially in the belief that the Empire could still be held together peacefully regardless of religious and ethnic divisions, coincided with the end of an idea. This idea was possibly outdated and idealistic at the turn of the century but it was nonetheless appealing and convincing for a large group of Ottomans who had embarked on a journey abroad and had devoted a substantial part of their life to

intellectual activism marked by hardship and constant confrontations with Ottoman diplomatic pressure and ambivalent European governments.

In the following pages, I will draw the curtain on what I have repeatedly called the intellectual phase of the Young Turk history and will describe how the two most important factions, those of Rıza and the *Mechveret* group – referred to as the minority group during and after the Congress – and of Sabahettin – referred to as the majority – diverged over the way to approach the four critical issues mentioned above.

This chapter will highlight the diversity of ideas among the various factions that made up the opposition, and give the reader an insight into the drastic change that the opposition would undergo after the split of 1902. At the same time, I will emphasise the fact that the failure to create a united, homogeneous front is instructive for an understanding of how the same dynamics of negotiation are still very much the topic of inquiry today.¹ In this light, therefore, the solutions put forth by Rıza and Sabahettin could not provide answers to the questions and challenges of the time as they were too idealistic, as I maintain throughout this thesis, and provided little in terms of actions. However, the formulations that emerged from the experiences of the two intellectuals become extremely important, not only for the short-term, but also for the long-term ideological developments of the Ottoman Empire first, and the Turkish Republic later, as it will be discussed further on.

However, hopes among the opposition were very high. As reported by a close friend of Sabahettin who was active in helping the organisation of the Congress, the events

¹ See, among others, Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*.

of 1902 featured a high level of excitement and expectation that imbued those who took part in it: “Et c’est de ce jour-là surtout, on peut le dire, que la Turquie put entrevoir, prochaine, l’aurore de la liberté.”² The analysis carried out in this chapter reveals such level of commitment that each member of the opposition was prepared to demonstrate, which is paradoxical given the Congress’ eventual condemnation of the Ottomanist plan.

I examine the Congress using primary sources such as the books of Paul Fesch³ and Joseph Denais,⁴ and the memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey.⁵ Throughout this chapter, the figure of Ismail Kemal becomes extremely important, hence it is important to introduce him briefly. Ismail Kemal had worked as a civil servant in the first years of Abdülhamit’s reign and acted as Governor General of Tripoli in the late 1890s. From 1892 on, Ismail Kemal embraced the reformist plans of Midhat Pasha and joined the Young Turk movement in exile. While in Europe, Ismail Kemal was charged with the fabricated accusation of having offered the throne of Albania to Mehmet Ali, and for this he was tried for high treason and condemned to death in absentia, with loss of civil rights, rank, dignities, decorations and property. After the Revolution of 1908, Ismail Kemal went briefly back to Istanbul but had to leave soon and ended up joining the Albanian nationalist project. Apart from playing an active role during the Congress as one of the closest associates of Sabahettin, Ismail Kemal’s trajectory exemplifies well that of Ottomans from a non-Turkish background: a believer in Ottomanism with a strong background in state service,

² Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle*, 40.

³ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d’Abdul-Hamid*.

⁴ Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle*.

⁵ 1844-1919, Ismail Kemal was born in Valona (Vlora), in today’s Albania. Fullerton, *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*. For his initial works exhorting the Sultan to implement drastic changes, see Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*.

who, at the end of the intellectual phase and the consequent crystallisation of internal differences, abandons the Ottomanist project for a nationalist one. The above sources enhance the somewhat limited secondary sources on the Congress, such as the article of Şükrü Hanioglu, “Der Jungtürkenkongress von Paris (1902) und seine Ergebnisse,”⁶ and Ramsaur’s book, *The Young Turks*.⁷ The above sources are corroborated with primary material I gathered by reading material produced by the two factions or surveillance reports on their actions, i.e., the articles that featured in *Mechveret* and *Osmanlı*, as well as the documents kept at the Paris Police Prefecture.

Organisation and attendance

The convening of a congress of all the opposition parties who viewed themselves as Ottoman Liberals had been in the minds of the Young Turks for some time. Prior to 1902, the group under Tunalı Hilmi Bey, the *Osmanlı İhtilâl Fırkası*,⁸ had attempted the organisation of such congress – under the aegis of the Khedive of Egypt – in an effort to unite all Ottoman opposition groups, including the Armenian and Greek ones. However, plans for this congress to be held either in Brindisi, southern Italy, or on the island of Corfu, ran into difficulties: Ahmet Rıza and the *Mechveret* group refused to participate and the Ottoman diplomatic service admitted that it had co-opted the Italian government into blocking all possible contacts between Young Turk members on Italian soil. There were two further problems: as we know from a

⁶ Şükrü Hanioglu, “Der Jungenturkenkongress von Paris (1902) und seine Ergebnisse,” *Die Welt des Islam* 33, no. 1 (April 1993): 23-65.

⁷ Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*.

⁸ This party (Party of Revolutionary Ottomans) was formed in 1897 within the CUP but was short-lived and was dissolved as soon as it became clear that a revolutionary option would not be a viable course of action, yet. Hanioglu, “Der Jungenturkenkongress von Paris,” 25.

variety of sources, Freemasonry had expanded in Egypt⁹ and the group around the Khedive was heavily influenced by Masonic ideas.¹⁰ This might have been risky for the coalition that would find itself too close to Freemasons had the organisation been in the hands of Masons. The other consideration is that the Khedive was very close to the British; therefore a congress organised under his influence would have forced the Ottoman Liberals to identify themselves mainly with Britain. Rıza and other Young Turk activists were reluctant to pursue such close association with Britain as they either leaned towards an alliance with France, or the maintenance of a balance of power among Western European countries that would benefit the opposition to the Sultan.

Eventually, Damat Mahmut, Sabahettin and Lutfullah took on the organisation of the Congress. However, the Ottoman government had managed to convince the Swiss, German, English and Italian governments to expel the three if caught on their soil. Finally, it was decided that Paris represented the best venue for a congress, both for its large concentration of Young Turk members and for the tolerance of the

⁹ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition* and Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*.

¹⁰ Ismail, the former Khedive who had been deposed by Abdülhamit II in 1879 and lived for a time in Naples, was a renowned Mason. He had been travelling and living extensively in Europe, in Paris and Vienna, and was a convinced reformist. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, P.J. Vatikiotis, s.v. "Ismail Pasha." The prince Mehmet Ali, "who during the 1906 'reorganisation' of the Young Turks was given important duties ..." Hanioglu, "Young Turks and Freemasons," 193 – was also a member of some lodge – Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 40. Finally, the regent khedive, Abbas Hilmi, was willing to host or help with the organisation of the Congress and is likely to have followed in his predecessors' footsteps becoming an active Mason. For other sources on Ottoman Egypt during the nineteenth century and its links to Freemasonry, see Paul Fesch, Joseph Denais, René Lay, *Bibliographie de la Franc-maçonnerie et des sociétés secrètes* (Paris: Société Bibliographique, 1912). Another proof of the existence of Masonry in Egypt is given by Eric Anduze; he states that, by 1909, Freemasonry was already well-established in Egypt. Anduze, *La Franc-maçonnerie de la Turquie ottomane*, 77.

French government, which was sensitive to public opinion and which, in turn, had sided with the Young Turks.¹¹

As plans for the organisation of the Congress went ahead, the Ottoman government reached the conclusion that it was going to “... be held between the 17th and 20th of January 1902, with the participation of 30 Turkish and Armenian revolutionaries, whereby plans for assassination of the Sultan would be discussed.”¹² The level of alertness by the Ottoman police to the movements of Sabahettin and the organisation of the Congress is testimony to the fact that the Sultan not only feared the opposition, but also believed that unity between the various factions was, at that point, a real possibility. The records of the French police¹³ show that the Ottoman authorities had labelled those attempting to unite as ‘revolutionaries’ and ‘anarchists,’ and that the French authorities intended to prevent the meeting scheduled for the night of the 17th or 20th of January from taking place in the house of Sabahettin.¹⁴ The French police kept the house of the two brothers Lutfullah and Sabahettin, located on Boulevard Malesherbes, under surveillance but confirmed that no congress had been held on the 17th, though a man had visited them and stayed at their place for about ten hours.¹⁵ I suspect this man to be either Paul Fesch or Joseph Denais, who were both very close to Sabahettin and Lutfullah and were involved in the organisation of the Congress. After having ensured that no congress had already taken place, the General Prefect of the Paris police, M. Lepine, summoned Sabahettin and Lutfullah

¹¹ See for example Chapter 3.

¹² Hanioglu, “Der Jungenturkenkongress von Paris,” 34.

¹³ These are in agreement with what reported by Hanioglu in “Der Jungenturkenkongress von Paris.”

¹⁴ “Sabaheddine – Loutfoulah / Comité Liberal Ottoman,” *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1653-17154.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

on the 24th of January,¹⁶ informing them that the French police would not grant authorisation for such a congress.

Nevertheless, appeals to public opinion on the ground of freedom of expression and continuous protests and complaints to the police about the two brothers being constantly watched over by individuals, who were discovered to be from the French political police, turned them from conspirators to victims. This public rhetoric forced the police to change their stance. Another important factor in the decision to allow the Congress to take place must have been the French desire to prevent English sponsorship.¹⁷ The French authorities secretly hoped that holding the Congress in France would draw the Young Turk movement closer to them and away from Britain; they believed that once the factions meeting in Paris had taken power in Istanbul, they would reward the French government and businesses with preferential political and economic treatments.¹⁸

Mechveret, gives a different account of how the members of the opposition were finally allowed to get together. Apparently, five French deputies, close to the *Mechveret* group and belonging to different political factions in parliament, approached the French authorities defending the aims of the Congress as peaceful.¹⁹

Not long afterwards, the cabinet director of the President of the Council summoned

¹⁶ “Sabaheddine – Loutfoulah / Comité Liberal Ottoman,” *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1653-17154.

¹⁷ Suggested in both Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle*, and Hanioglu “Der Jungenturkenkongress von Paris.”

¹⁸ Suggested in Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle*. Here, it is also interesting to note how the Young Turks exploited the diplomatic race for influence in the Ottoman Empire on the part of the British and French governments. If not willing to help, these governments were at least trying to have leverage on the Young Turk movement in the hope that this would result in economic and political favours, had the opposition movement taken over power. Compare this with footnote 108 in Chapter 4.

¹⁹ “Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 2.

Rıza and some other members of the *Mechveret* group and informed them that the French government had lifted its ban on the meeting provided the attendees would neither discuss any revolutionary option nor use phrases that would harm the public image of the Sultan. The French government was reassured:

Nous avons expliqué au distingué chef du cabinet que nous sommes ni anarchistes ni révolutionnaires, et cela non pas par crainte d'aucune sorte, mais par conviction ferme que les changements brusques, obtenus par des moyens violents, nous paraissent dangereux pour le salut de la Partie. Nous remercions ici le Gouvernement français d'avoir tenu compte de notre déclaration et d'avoir dissipé ainsi le nuage d'incriminations et de calomnies.²⁰

Hence, the organisation of the Congress became a matter of public knowledge even before the actual Congress had taken place. The French independent journal *L'Eclair* wrote on the 26th January that around fifty Ottomans, from Turkey, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Romania, Rumelia, Albania as well as from London, Rome, Geneva and Athens were to arrive in Paris for the Congress organised by Sabahettin and Lutfullah. The newspaper even featured the preliminary programme, which included:

1. Dévouement et loyalisme envers la dynastie;
2. Honorer le religion musulmane ainsi que la civilisation moderne. Protéger toutes les autres religions ou cultes;
3. Faire de la Constitution ottomane promulguée en 1876 la base du gouvernement et le pivot de l'entente et de l'union entre tous les Ottomans sans distinction de religion ni de race;
4. Proclamer l'égalité politique entre musulmans et non musulmans et les faire bénéficier également des avantages matériels et moraux du gouvernement du pays.²¹

The following day, the French journal *Le Temps* spoke of a proposition to hold the meeting in London, only if Paris was to be officially ruled out at the last minute, which meant that the two brothers did not regard the prohibition of Monsieur Lepine

²⁰ "Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 2.

²¹ *L'Eclair* 26th January, 1902. "Sabaheddine – Loutfoulah / Comité Liberal Ottoman," *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1653-17154.

as the definite stance of the French government. The same article featured an interview with Sabahettin and Lutfullah, in which they claimed to be working towards the unity of all ethnicities under an enlightened Ottoman sultanic banner and mentioned that the aim of the Congress was: “étudier un projet de constitution nouvelle à donner à leur pays.”²²

In the end, the Congress took place in Paris between the 4th and the 9th of February 1902. Because no official permit had yet been issued, holding the gathering at Sabahettin’s residence was deemed risky. Therefore, the first day the Congress was held at the house of a Frenchman, a member of the *Institut de France*, Monsieur Lefèvre-Pontalis, on avenue du Trocadéro. The house of Lefèvre-Pontalis had been made available after Joseph Denais had convinced the latter to offer his premises for the opening day.²³ After the first day of meetings, the French authorities finally issued a permit and for the following three days the delegates met at Sabahettin’s house on Boulevard Malesherbes. The Congress was presided over by prince Sabahettin, then 26 years old, with the honorary presidency awarded to his father Mahmut Pasha. At the Congress gathered 47 delegates from all the various ethno-religious components of the Empire: Arabs, Greeks, Kurds, Albanians, Circassians, Jews, Armenians, and Turks, all of them political refugees coming from Egypt, Bulgaria, Switzerland, England, and France, made up the ethnic composition of the meeting.

²² Le Temps 27th January, 1902. “Sabaheddine – Loutfoulah / Comité Liberal Ottoman,” *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1653-17154.

²³ Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle*, 40.

The Congress was convened through a letter that contained a written appeal signed by Sabahettin and Lutfullah; Paul Fesch provides us with a summary.²⁴ The appeal stated that the only way to save the country was to gather the moral and material forces of all Ottomans, regardless of their race, religion and sex. To accomplish this, it would be necessary to uphold freedom and justice, to establish a solid and modern system of education for the future generations, and to reinstate the constitutional regime. However, because all classes of Ottomans inside the Empire suffered the despotic and oppressive rule of Abdülhamit, it fell upon those Ottomans, representative of all the various ethno-religious components outside the Empire, to spearhead the changes. The primary purpose of the Congress, the two brothers explained, was to create a shared political and ideological platform upon which to build a tight alliance between all Ottoman opposition forces. This joint opposition would work to identify those culpable for the backward and dire economic, social and political situation of the Empire and would decide on the best course of action for the eradication of those culprits before setting up a viable plan for the future.²⁵

The first day: great expectations

The opening evening of the Congress started full of positive expectations, as *Osmanlı*, the journal close to the group of Sabahettin, reported:

... this evening's meeting is a valuable and colourful chapter of our nation's history. That night, close to fifty invited attendees on a mission, with the insignia of the proud crown of Ottomanism on their heads [fez] and on their faces manifesting sincere cheerfulness, were received one by one in the hall[.] From the wall was hanging, together with the French flag – worthy to mention the three colours of humanity – the Ottoman flag, consisting of a star taking shelter in the

²⁴ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 365-7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 365-6.

crescent [symbol] of justice of the nation, [which] was filling with the light of joy the eyes of the Ottomans present there, who were longing to embrace independence [from Hamidian despotism].²⁶

The Congress was inaugurated by Lutfullah, who, at 9 o'clock, gave a short speech thanking all the attendees. Sabahettin opened the proceedings with a speech along the lines of the appeal circulated to convene the Congress.²⁷ The speech focussed on fostering a sense of unity among the various factions and highlighted the pursuit of the common goal of defending the value of life, the equality of law, and the freedom of religious opinion.²⁸ He insisted that the idea of Ottomanism was alive, feasible and actually the only viable course to pursue. As reported by *Osmanlı*, the speech featured the following passage: "...the reforms that we shall try to apply and implement today in our fatherland are not in the name of something related to religion or a party, but in the name of the common [idea of] Ottomanism."²⁹

Sabahettin's speech ended with the hope that all the aims could be achieved:

Until yesterday, the different elements that make up the noble Ottoman nation [were] working separately and have not been able to unite at [any] one place[.] While all these things are a sign of regret and reflect a painful image to friends and foes alike, today these divided communities of people, with mutual brotherhood and respecting and honouring their law which they had acquired, [are] coming together as members of the same family gathering ready for united action, in order to strive for an immediate cure against these unbearable injustices that since 25 years have been plundering the Ottoman nation through whirlwind[. This] fact is a source of gratitude ...³⁰

²⁶ "Congress of the Ottoman Freedom Loving Peoples in Paris," *Osmanlı* 5, no. 104 (16 April 1902),

1.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 3.

After the positive inauguration, the Congress was paused to be re-convened on the following day. The resolutions taken after this first day were the following:

- 1) forcefully reject any kind of affiliation between the Ottoman nation and the current despotic administration, which is opposed by the entire world, is corrupt and evil, and under whose lowest authority the nation has lived for twenty-five years;
- 2) establish between the various peoples and races of the Empire an understanding which would ensure to all, without distinction, the full upholding of their rights – as mentioned in the Imperial edicts (*Gülhane* and *Hümayun*) – and confirmed by the international treaties;
- 3) provide the means to fully satisfy the legitimate aspirations of all to be part of the municipal and provincial administration;
- 4) ensure the equality of all citizens in terms of rights and duties and instil in them a feeling of faithfulness and loyalty towards the throne and the Ottoman dynasty, which is the only agent that can unite all;
- 5) strive in all possible ways to direct all the different Ottomans and their voices towards the accomplishment of a threefold aim: maintain the integrity and indissolubility of the Ottoman Empire; re-establish internal order and peace, which is a prerequisite for progress; and respect the fundamental laws of the Empire, in particular the upholding of the 1876 Constitution, which was undeniably the most important, the most precious, and the most protective instrument of reforms in general as well as of the rights and political liberties of the Ottoman peoples against arbitrary rule;

- 6) respect the international treaties and in particular the Treaty of Berlin, whose regulation concerning the internal order of Turkey needs to be extended to all the provinces.³¹

How did it happen that, after such a promising start, the delegates disagreed so profoundly and were to split into two distinct opposing groups? As illustrated by *Osmanlı*, it is at this point that things started to fall apart and unity of intent became a utopian vision:

The resolution consisting of the above mentioned four articles only, which were put down in the discussion, ultimately occupied the present people for three-four nights in agitation. The arguments, debates, rejections, answers and defences started coming from all sides. Sometimes over the etymology of a word, or composition ... the time was spent, for hours, exactly like negotiating an agreement with the great powers ... Within this powerful agitation and tidal conflicts, two parties were organised, which had one sacred intention but different methods to reach their aim.³²

The first incident took place at the conclusion to the general resolutions, when the delegates of *Droshak* and *Henchak*,³³ as well as two independent Armenian delegates, decided not to take part in the vote that would confirm the four points of the resolution. According to Ismail Kemal, a rift appeared between the *Mechveret* group and the Armenian delegates on the issue of power and its distribution among the various factions of the organisation. The *Mechveret* group pursued a centralising policy, with the role of Istanbul revived and reaffirmed, while the Armenians pushed for the establishment of local councils and local administration. In his memoirs,

³¹ The resolutions, which I replicate here paraphrased, are reported in the same manner by Fesch, *Constantinople*, Hanioglu, "Der Jungenturkenkongress von Paris," "Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), and "Congress of the Ottoman Freedom Loving Peoples in Paris," *Osmanlı* 5, no. 104 (16 April 1902).

³² "Congress of the Ottoman Freedom Loving Peoples in Paris," *Osmanlı* 5, no. 104 (16 April 1902), 4

³³ *Henchak*, the Bell, was a radical Armenian nationalist organisation, formed in 1887 by émigré students in Paris. Zürcher, *Turkey, a modern history*, 87. *Droshak*, the *Flag*, was one of the Armenian revolutionary movements.

Ismail Kemal claims that the majority of those present, including Sabahettin, sided with the Armenian delegates. Ismail Kemal argues that the minority group around *Mechveret* opposed to the idea of federalism was the same group that would later carry out the Revolution and the group whose policies were reflected in the actions of the Committee of Union and Progress after 1908. However, Ismail Kemal's interpretation presents some factual mistakes and contradicts himself in his memoirs, which were written, of course, retrospectively. First, it is strange that the *Mechveret* group, which is the group that advocated non-violent measures and opposed revolutionary options, would soon completely change its stance and accept, plan, and carry out the Revolution. We shall see further on in this chapter how Rıza jumped on the winners' bandwagon, though only after the reinstatement of the Constitution and his realisation that Ottomanism as idea had lost its credibility. Moreover, the groups that carried out the 1908 Revolution had little to do, from an ideological as well as a social point of view, with the groups present in Paris in 1902. A few lines after linking the *Mechveret* group with the actions of 1908 and the Unionist rule, Ismail Kemal acknowledges that:

I myself was in favour of actions that would have the effect of giving the alarm and attracting the attention of Europe, by which means the Sultan would be forced to come to terms without the country being too much upset. For this it was only necessary to take possession of a dominant position, like Salonica, for example, or Bolayir, which is the key to the Dardanelles, with an armed force, and from there impose conditions on the Sultan.³⁴

Possibly hoping to convince the Armenians to join in the vote and sign the resolutions, Sabahettin came out with the proposition of an additional paragraph that would establish a permanent committee of the opposition groups and demand the

³⁴ Fullerton, *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, 309.

intervention in Ottoman domestic affairs of those foreign powers that had been signatories of the Treaty of Paris of 1856 and that of Berlin in 1878.³⁵ As reported in *Mechveret*, part of the proposed addition was as follows:

... le Comité permanent qui sera constitué aura pour mission de se livrer aux démarches nécessaires auprès des Puissances signataires du traité de Paris, de l'année 1856, et du traité de Berlin, de l'année 1878, afin d'obtenir leur action bienveillante pour faire prévaloir les susdits principes et pour mettre en exécution les traités internationaux concernant l'ordre intérieur de la Turquie, ainsi que tous les actes internationaux découlant des susdits traités, et pour les faire appliquer à tous les vilayets de l'Empire ...³⁶

This proposition turned out to be the most contradictory aspect of the Congress: its controversy divided the opposition and marked the point of no return in Sabahettin's relationship with Rıza. What is to be noted is that Sabahettin must have been well aware of the consequences of his stance. After all, Ahmet Rıza was convinced that disinterested help on the part of Europe was but a fiction and had repeatedly expressed this through the pages of *Mechveret*. In addition, in 1922, he published the monograph *La Faillite Morale de la Politique Occidentale en Orient*³⁷ on the issue of European political intervention, criticising, as I mention elsewhere in this thesis, the imperialist approach and vested interests of the West in modern times. For Rıza, the signatory powers of the Treaty of Berlin were the same powers that had agreed

³⁵ The Congress of Paris, which gave way to the Treaty signed in March 1856 following the Crimean War, was attended by the Ottomans, Russia, England, Austria and France. Its outcome was the demilitarisation of the Black Sea, end of Russian influence on Moldavia and Wallachia and a promise by all those present to uphold the integrity and independence of the Ottoman Empire, Zürcher, *Turkey, a modern history*, 56. It is worth remembering that the Hatt-i Hümayun was then issued by the Ottomans as an internal response to what had been set in Paris. The Treaty of Berlin, which came into being as a ratification of the Treaty of San Stefano, settled, among other things, the independence of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, while Bulgaria came into existence as an autonomous entity and Austria occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina while Britain occupied Cyprus. As Zürcher points out, it was a disastrous but unavoidable treaty. Zürcher, *Turkey, a modern history*, 79.

³⁶ "Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 3.

³⁷ Rıza, *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale*. See Chapter 3 for more detailed information of this book.

to the cutting off of Balkan areas from the Empire and had carved out spheres of control for themselves. One therefore wonders whether Sabahettin genuinely wanted to try and convince Rıza or was merely attempting to overshadow him and take over the leadership of a united opposition movement.

It is likely that Sabahettin genuinely thought this to be a fair point to yield to the Armenians but he must have been convinced to do this by Ismail Kemal and by his own personal admiration for the British.³⁸ The relationship between Sabahettin and Ismail Kemal must have been a very close one. Apart from their view on the Tanzimat in general, which, according to Ismail Kemal “inaugurated the era of equality and justice for all the people in the Empire, [and which he described as] of great and far reaching importance[,]”³⁹ but was not shared by Sabahettin, the two converged on a number of issues. One of the reasons for their common stance at the Congress on the issue of foreign intervention and their antagonism with the *Mechveret* group could be the common conviction that basing the inspiration for reform from the West solely on France had been a mistake. The other reason could be that they both agreed that political and administrative centralisation had been counterproductive as it had encouraged tensions between ethnic and religious minorities and had contributed to more Ottomans from these minorities falling for the nationalist and separatist discourse opposed to Ottomanism.⁴⁰

³⁸ The friendship between Sabahettin and Ismail Kemal is well documented in Haniolğlu, *Young Turks in Opposition* and Falaschi, *Ismail Kemal*. We also know that the presidency of the Congress had been given to Sabahettin upon a proposal from Ismail Kemal himself, “Congress of the Ottoman Freedom Loving Peoples in Paris,” *Osmanlı* 5, no. 104 (16 April 1902), 3. As for Sabahettin’s admiration for Britain, refer to Chapter 4.

³⁹ Fullerton, *Ismail Kemal Bey*, 1-2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

Sabahettin, according to Ismail Kemal's memoirs, thought the latter's attendance to the Congress so instrumental that he went to Brussels to convince him to come. Ismail Kemal accepted on two conditions:⁴¹ the first condition was that all ethnic groups should be represented at the Congress as, he wrote in his memoirs himself: "[i]t was essential, in my opinion, to show that those who were against Abd-ul-Hamid were acting simply and solely with a view to creating a national Government that should be equally impartial and beneficent to all the peoples of the Empire."⁴² The second condition was that, since the countries signatory to the Paris and Berlin Congresses of 1856 and 1878 had stated that they were actively involved in pressuring the Ottoman government to adopt far-reaching reforms, one of the aims of the Congress was to discuss the active participation of Europe. According to Kemal's own memoirs, Sabahettin and Lutfullah both agreed with him. Beyond Kemal's views, it is also important to consider that Sisyan Efendi,⁴³ an Ottoman Armenian delegate, was equally convinced that unity between the Young Turk and the Armenian groups could only have taken place following a prior agreement on foreign intervention.⁴⁴ This was the fateful end of the first day of work.⁴⁵ The promise of the delegates was to sleep on this proposition and hold a constructive debate on the following day. Yet, the conclusion of the first day seems to have marked the collapse of unity among the opposition factions.

⁴¹ Fullerton, *Ismail Kemal Bey*, 306.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 306.

⁴³ At the Congress, Sisyan Efendi had advocated the participation of members of the Macedonian committees. Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 184.

⁴⁴ Hanioglu, "Der Jungenturkenkongress von Paris," 53.

⁴⁵ "Congress of the Ottoman Freedom Loving Peoples in Paris," *Osmanlı* 5, no. 104 (16 April 1902), 4.

As is to be expected, during subsequent discussion on this issue, the Armenian and Albanian factions, represented there by Sisyan Efendi and Ismail Kemal Bey,⁴⁶ accepted the new proposition warmly and were backed up by Sabahettin, Lutfullah and a large number of the Greeks and Albanians present at the Congress. On the opposite side, stood the group that emerged as the minority group. According to *Mechveret* – the only source providing delegates’ names – the minority group was composed of “Halil Ganem, Hodja Kadri,⁴⁷ Férid Nazim, Hamdi, capitaine d’état-major et Ahmet Rıza,”⁴⁸ The group condemned the idea of foreign intervention and issued the following statement:

The Constitution is the guarantor of the felicity and salvation of all the different Ottoman subjects, we have no need for the acts of assistance of the great powers and asking for such assistance is impossible. Even if it could be envisaged, it could act not in favour, but rather against us. Such help would damage our national feeling. Let us work on our own, let us trust and rely on our powers...⁴⁹

So fundamental was the disagreement between the two factions, that Rıza, as late as 1906, accused Sabahettin and those in his camp of betraying the Ottoman cause for the benefit of the minorities and Europe: “... ils cherchent à se conformer servilement aux desiderata des Européens.”⁵⁰ The stance of *Mechveret* was not limited to a theoretical premise or the commemoration of past European intervention. What especially enraged Rıza and his associates was the current European involvement in the Armenian cause, which represented yet another intrusion

⁴⁶ “Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 3.

⁴⁷ “[A] member of the ulama with ... direct relations to the CUP, [who] had a profound impact on the absorption of the organised ulema into the CUP.” Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 52.

⁴⁸ “Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 3.

⁴⁹ “Congress of the Ottoman Freedom Loving Peoples in Paris,” *Osmanlı* 5, no. 104 (16 April 1902), 4.

⁵⁰ “Réponse à quelques critiques,” *Mechveret* 11, no. 172 (1 February 1906), 7.

disguised under the appeal to the rights of peoples. As I have explained in Chapter 3, such intervention was totally against the course of action envisaged by the *Mechveret* group. Two years after the Congress, in 1904, *Mechveret* translated an article published by the journal *Şura-yı Ümmet*, in which England and France were accused of being hypocritical in their request of reform for specific sections of Ottoman society only. Both *Mechveret* and *Şura-yı Ümmet* upheld not only the rights, but also the duties of peoples, in this case the Armenians of the Empire, to ask for equality, justice, and freedom. Therefore, according to Rıza, the Young Turk movement as a whole recognised the importance of these claims and considered them a given. What could not be overlooked, though, were the pressures exercised upon the Empire by the two European countries: “... ce droit et ce devoir que nous reconnaissons aux Arméniens, l’Angleterre ne les admet pas en totalité dans les Indes et en Irlande, non plus que la France en Tunisie et en l’Algérie.”⁵¹

Back in the Congress, in response to the *Mechveret* group, the majority issued a fairly long declaration in defence of foreign intervention, of which the most salient aspects were:

The European intervention will happen sooner or later. ... We will request help from Europe together with all the Ottoman peoples in harmony; this way, the intervention would not be against us, we want to turn it to our favour. Yesterday, the interventions were made for Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Eastern Rumelia and Crete;⁵² [if we do not act], tomorrow they will be carried out in the heart of Anatolia, in front of our capital’s door.⁵³

⁵¹ “Pour les Arméniens,” *Mechveret* 9, no. 158 (1 December 1904), 2.

⁵² This is in reference of the outcome of the Russo-Turkish War that had started in April 1877. As a result of the war, which was disastrous for the Empire, two consecutive peace treaties were signed. The first one, of March 3rd 1878 was ratified in Berlin. Even though the terms of the second agreement might have seemed better for the Ottomans, the clauses that were inserted provided for more intense foreign intrusion into Ottoman domains, with Cyprus being given to Great Britain and Austria occupying Bosnia-Herzegovina.

⁵³ “Congress of the Ottoman Freedom Loving Peoples in Paris,” *Osmanlı* 5, no. 104 (16 April 1902), 4.

The minority group maintained that foreign intervention was always motivated by the interest of the intervening countries and that the Ottomans themselves were supposed to deal with their own problems. They argued that finding a solution to this fundamental issue would constitute a first step towards reform and modernisation and would signal the initial stage of a process of maturation of the Empire, its emancipation from foreign tutelage, and its rightful appeal to belonging to the club of modern countries. On the other side, the stance of Sabahettin and those around him was based on the premise that an intervention was forthcoming, whether invited or not and, therefore, it would have been in the interest of all Ottomans of the opposition spectrum to actively negotiate its form and direction. In an attempt to bring the minority within the understanding of a shared decision, Sabahettin added that “[w]e will request help from Europe together with all the Ottoman peoples in harmony, in this way the intervention is not against us, we want to turn it to our favour.”⁵⁴

As much as the Mechveret group remained adamant in its refusal of European involvement, so did Sabahettin and those around him, who maintained their stance. In 1905, three years later, on the pages of the *Courier Européen*, Sabahettin reiterated his point of view on the matter. This time, he added that if specific steps were to be taken by the Ottoman population, then intervention could possibly be avoided. As reported by Paul Fesch, Sabahettin stated:

L’intervention étrangère, incompatible, il est vrai, avec la souveraineté nationale et peu désirable quand on peut l’éviter, n’a rien de bien alarmant quand elle se produit dans un but restreint, déterminé et utile au pays. Assurément, s’il y a entente préalable sincèrement,

⁵⁴ “Congress of the Ottoman Freedom Loving Peoples in Paris,” *Osmanlı* 5, no. 104 (16 April 1902), 4.

solidement établie entre les principaux éléments de l'empire, l'ingérence politique limitée de l'Europe, telle qu'elle se trouve spécifiée dans l'article 61 du traité de Berlin, par exemple, ne pourrait rien avoir d'alarmant, par cette raison très suffisante que les habitants de l'Empire, appliquant eux-mêmes les réformes, rendraient cette intervention absolument inutile. Au contraire, une intervention militaire provoquée par une situation tout à fait chaotique pourrait produire des effets désastreux pour tous. Qu'il me soit permis d'ajouter que, si nos compatriotes Arméniens avaient fait seulement une partie des efforts qu'ils ont déployés à l'étranger, en vue de s'associer au mouvement libéral turc, le régime actuel aurait disparu depuis longtemps.⁵⁵

However, by the time Sabahettin expressed these thoughts, it was too late; the break within the movement had reached such proportions that efforts at reviving it could not bear fruit. But what can be inferred from the above extract is that Sabahettin displayed some flexibility in comparison to Rıza on their respective plans for the future. Whereas Rıza hardly changed his take on European intervention as well as on the issue of the Armenian contribution to a united plan, Sabahettin seems to have been, on this issue, more in tune with the reality of the Empire and its needs at different points in time. Therefore, the issue of foreign intervention was a crucial one in making or breaking the unity within the Young Turk movement. It started as a preliminary discussion, or at least so it was hoped, and instead ended up being the issue on which this much sought-after entente foundered.

The second day and after: things fall apart

Both *Mechveret* and *Osmanlı* reported that the second day of the Congress started with the two sides already distant in their aims and prepared to raise more issues rather than work together. Immediately, the group around Rıza asked Sabahettin, in

⁵⁵ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 395.

his capacity as president, to clarify on what grounds certain people within the majority were representative of a current; by this, they questioned the choice of candidates that had been made by the two princes when they sent out the invitations. The accusatory stance towards the Armenian delegates, who constituted partly those groups whose representativeness was being doubted, is mirrored in the pages of *Mechveret*.⁵⁶ The Armenian delegation's refusal to sign the agreement on the programmatic four points gave the *Mechveret* group the conviction that, by this stage, the Armenians were working solely for their own benefit and boycotting all that had been done in the way of unity.⁵⁷

Les patriotes ottomans [wrote *Mechveret*] ne manqueront pas de juger sévèrement l'acte qui consiste à ne point adhérer à un programme qui proclame si largement l'égalité politique entre musulmans et chrétiens. ... Ils [Armenians] ne veulent s'entendre, y disent-ils, avec les Jeunes-Turcs que pour renverser le régime actuel. C'est donc un mouvement révolutionnaire seul auquel ils sont prêts à concourir, et rien de plus.⁵⁸

After the initial rupture on the issue of foreign intervention, the Congress did not move forward. Instead, each position became even more crystallised, with personal antipathies and the groups' individualistic aims becoming as important as political and ideological debates. The Armenians were labelled revolutionaries by the *Mechveret* group, an aggressive gesture given that *Mechveret* had always placed substantial emphasis on the non-violent, non revolutionary intentions of its members. The majority group, upon the suggestion of Halil Ganem, made an attempt to reconcile the parties by altering the initial document, characterising possible foreign

⁵⁶ "Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 3.

⁵⁷ It is important to stress the stance of *Mechveret* on the danger of diversity, posed by those groups, within the Young Turk movement, which aimed to work for the benefit of their particular minority; such opinion was expressed through the pages of their mouthpiece, analysed in Chapter 3.

⁵⁸ "Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 3.

involvement as “*action bienveillante*” and adding to it the specific type of involvement, by qualifying it as “*concoure moral*.”⁵⁹ It was hoped that this would ease the differences between the two groups and move forth with the Congress. Instead, the minority group did not feel satisfied with the addition and thought it would not modify the general sense of the phrase. Therefore, the impasse remained and the rest of the Congress was to be substantially unfruitful, with statements and resolutions either not agreed upon by the whole opposition or extremely general in their aims. The ultimate blow to the Congress was actually provided by the minority group, which issued a harsh and uncompromising statement:

En adhérent au Congrès, nous avons espéré la fusion entre tous les éléments ottomans et nous comptions profiter de cette force créée par notre union. Nous exprimons ici notre vif regret d’être déçus dans légitimes espérances. ... nous ne sommes pas, comme on le prétend, hostiles à l’Europe; au contraire, un de nos principaux désirs consiste à voir la civilisation européenne répandue dans notre pays, notamment ses progrès scientifique et ses institutions utiles.⁶⁰

Yet, the worst was yet to come. The divisions within the opposition started to highlight religious and ethnic differences; and Ottomanism began to slowly lose its feasibility as a meaningful movement. Before dwelling on the issue of Armenians’ participation in the opposition, it is instrumental to clarify that no group, however antagonistic, had turned against the Armenian component but, as I will mention further on, the minority group’s stance against their actions stemmed from an ideological position. It is clear that the *Mechveret* group was in no way opposed to the Armenians from a passage contained in Joseph Denais’ book; his evaluation can be considered reliable since he was close to Sabahettin and therefore in no way

⁵⁹ “Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

predisposed to defend the *Mechveret* group. Following the clashes between the forces of the Sultan and the Armenians in 1894 and 1896, groups of Muslims came out to defend them. A wave of arrests followed with, according to Denais, ninety people arrested, including a Mufti. As a response to these events, the Ottoman émigrés issued a letter. The following passage is taken from *La Turquie Nouvelle*, which features part of this letter and revealing of the spirit of the whole of the opposition towards minorities in general and the Armenians in particular:

... les deux Comités libéraux ottomans, à Paris, le Comité d'initiative privée, 'Constitution et décentralisation' (fonde par le prince Sabaheddine) et le comité 'Union et Progrès' communiquèrent ensemble à la presse la note suivante: 'les partis Turcs d'opposition protestant avec indignation contre les atrocités commises dans les diverses provinces de l'empire ottoman, notamment à Van, et contre les tortures infligées dans les prisons d'Erzeroum aux Turcs et aux Arméniens qui réclament le régime représentatif'⁶¹

However, the post-scriptum of the issue of *Mechveret* following the Congress heavily accused both the permanent committee and the Armenian delegates. The former was blamed for having allied with the latter, with the author of the article wondering whether secret concessions had been agreed between the two parties. The article, "Congrès," reminded the readers that the Armenians had left the Congress persisting in their unwillingness to vote for any of the clauses put forward. *Mechveret* accused the Armenians of following the pan-Slavic project and of having allied with the Macedonian-Bulgarian Committees. The article closes with the following statement:

Les Arméniens, qui se déclarent hautement eux-mêmes être un comité révolutionnaire et réclament l'intervention active des Puissances étrangères, tendront la main droite au Comité révolutionnaire bulgare,

⁶¹ Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle*, 22.

et la main gauche au nouveau Comité ottoman que nous attendons a l'oeuvre et que nous jugerons d'après ses actes.⁶²

The delegates of the Armenian organisations *Droshak* and *Henchak* responded that although the Armenian Committees intended to work with all other organisations in the pursuit of the aims set out in the resolution, they would also continue pursuing their own particular goals.⁶³ These goals were against the regime and not against the existence of the Ottoman Empire, yet they clashed with the ideology of the minority group. What provoked reaction was the secondary outcome of the particularistic aim of the Armenian section: as mentioned, they held a foreign physical presence to be an important factor in the overall reform of the Empire. Following the resolutions that opened the Congress, a document containing the common declarations of all the participants was drawn up. In this, all the delegates stated that they agreed to engage in a common struggle to:

- 1) transform the present regime into one of freedom and justice, reinstating the 1876 Constitution;
- 2) remind the European powers that it is both their duty and in the general interest of humanity to ensure the respect of the international treaties signed between them and the Ottoman Empire, so that all parties in the Empire can benefit from it.⁶⁴

⁶² "Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 4.

⁶³ Here, they were referring to the execution of Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty. Article LXI states: "The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and Kurds. It will periodically make known the steps taken to this effect to the Powers, who will superintend their application." Jacob C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, 2ed. (Princeton: Van Nostrand Company, 1958), 190.

⁶⁴ "Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 4.

- 3) work to reform the Empire, having in mind the needs outlined by the Armenian delegates, which included the tight observance of the workings of the local administration in those areas inhabited by Armenians;
- 4) work for the active inclusion of the European powers, even though a minority of the delegates refused any interference in the internal affairs of the Empire.⁶⁵

As one can gather from the above, the resolutions which came out of the Congress were vague and generic. This was the outcome of a conscious policy, so that something even so general could actually be agreed upon. But it was also something that would hopefully serve as a starting point, as well as a natural reflection of the profound differences among participants. The only tangible result of the Congress was that, once the minority group had basically ruled itself out, the majority group was able to form the Central Committee of the Ottoman Community of Freedom Loving Peoples, *Osmanlı Hürriyetperveran Fırkasının Merkez Komitesi*. This political group led by Sabahettin was to remain in Ottoman political life for a long time and would serve as one of the few voices of dissent during the Unionist regime after 1908. So, the last session of the Congress ended with the establishment of the opposition's permanent committee and the elections of its members. The committee was composed of seven members, who were chosen almost entirely from among those who had backed the idea of foreign intervention. It included three Muslim members: Ismail Kemal Bey, Ismail Hakkı Bey⁶⁶ and Ali Haydar Midhat.⁶⁷ The

⁶⁵ I have put together these last two clauses from the various discussions in "Congress of the Ottoman Freedom Loving Peoples in Paris," *Osmanlı* 5, no. 104 (16 April 1902); "Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902); and Fech, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*.

⁶⁶ Former Lieutenant-Colonel of the Ottoman Army. Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 9.

three Christian members were: Vasileos Musurus Ghikis Bey,⁶⁸ Fardi Effendi,⁶⁹ and a third whose name has been purposely omitted by *Mechveret*⁷⁰ for security reasons and who instead has been named by *Osmanlı*, as a certain Sinet Bey.⁷¹ Prince Sabahettin was nominated president and immediately promised to donate a large sum, apparently 25,000 francs,⁷² to the newly formed committee. The minority group decided to unite and fund a new publication – with the organisational guidance of *Mechveret* – that would primarily address the Turkish section of the Ottoman population.

The members of the Committee also worked out and established the articles and regulations for the newly formed organisation. The most important parts of the regulations were those stating that unity of intent and common goals were shared by all those who became members, that the headquarters of the Committee were to be in Paris, and that other branches in France were to be soon opened. The aims were, once again, so broad and the membership so loose that the Committee could not have become, and did not become, a pivotal player in the fight against Abdülhamit II and in the promotion of reform throughout the Empire. As we know, after 1902, and

⁶⁷ Ali Haydar Midhat, the son of Midhat Pasha.

⁶⁸ An Ottoman Greek, Ghikis Bey, was “the son-in-law of Musurus Paşa, former Ottoman ambassador to London, [Ghikis] had once been a members of the State Council and had fled to Europe on the heels of Damat Mahmut Pasha and his sons.” Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 183. He was to become, together with Ismail Kemal, one of the closest associates of Sabahettin. Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*.

⁶⁹ Georges Fardis, an Ottoman Greek.

⁷⁰ It is interesting to note that *Mechveret*, omitting the name of this third member, also specifies that this person, who himself asked *Mechveret* not to be named, had received a strong majoritarian vote. This indicates that he was the most favoured of all those elected. According to the journal, this member was also a staunch opponent of foreign intervention and probably the only one with these ideas within the newly formed committee. “Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 4.

⁷¹ “Congress of the Ottoman Freedom Loving Peoples in Paris,” *Osmanlı* 5, no. 104 (16 April 1902), 7. I have not been able to establish who Sinet Bey was. None of the primary and secondary sources I have consulted give any more in-depth information.

⁷² “Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 4.

even more so after 1907, the power of the opposition groups rested with the military and activist groups present in the Balkan provinces, and in particular in Monastir, Salonika, and Üsküb.

Consequences of the Congress

In his memoirs, İsmail Kemal summed up the outcome of the 1902 Paris Congress of Ottoman Liberals: “the lack of agreement among the Turkish reformers which became manifest during the Paris Congress prevented any possibility of united political action likely to give reason to hope for a change in Turkish affairs.”⁷³ Similarly, the Congress of Ottoman Liberals was branded as a failure by all the three: Paul Fesch, Ernest Ramsaur and Şükrü Hanioglu.⁷⁴ The only real immediate and tangible success of the Congress was that the organisers managed, for the first and last time, to achieve a gathering of all the opposition movements mirroring the ethno-religious components of the Empire. In fact, as it will be explained further, the other Congress, held in 1907, was much more limited in its ethnic representation,⁷⁵ so that the failure of the 1902 Congress seems to have hampered a dynamic of inclusion. This fact led to another indirect but decisive outcome: positions within the opposition groups crystallised so much that the surge of power soon to take place from the intellectuals into the hands of the military constituted a turning point. Without the rupture within the movement, both the actual organisation of such drastic measures as those of 1908, by which I mean the military confrontation against the forces of Abdülhamit, and the passing of power to the military wing, the Unionists, may have never materialised. Because of the rupture, the different wings

⁷³ Fullerton, *Ismail Kemal Bey*, 314.

⁷⁴ Hanioglu, “Der Jungenturkenkongress von Paris.”

⁷⁵ Denais, *La Turquie nouvelle*, 41.

became more extreme in their respective views and less willing to collaborate with others who, from allies, turned into enemies.

An articulation of the argument that the failure of 1902 marked the end of a peaceful course of action – the intellectual phase of the Young Turk movement – and the end of Ottomanism as a valid answer to European ideological intrusion can be found in Ismail Kemal's memoirs:

... the troubles in Macedonia increased, and the directors of Turkish policy at Constantinople, instead of arriving at an understanding with the Powers which would have been interested in maintaining Turkish integrity, adopted a mischievous policy which drove the people to acts of desperation. Having lost all hope of doing anything salutary for Turkey, all my efforts, as well as those of Redjeb Pasha and other Albanian patriots, were devoted to the task of trying to save Albania from the disaster which we now realised was inevitable.⁷⁶

Overall, the failure of 1902 and the political developments after that year and before 1908 appeared to reiterate the unfeasibility of a peaceful Ottomanist plan. As a consequence of the fact that the two currents had fundamentally disagreed, whether for ideological or practical reasons, the various groups started leaning towards a more activist and less ideological agendas in order to actually bring about the changes that each group deemed necessary.

Evaluating the outcomes of the second Congress of Ottoman Liberals, held in Paris in December 1907, it is clear how activism was becoming the central feature of the discussion. As I have mentioned earlier, the attendance at the 1907 Congress was drastically limited compared to what it had been in 1902 – only Sabahettin's and Rıza's groups and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation took part. The aim of the

⁷⁶ Fullerton, *Ismail Kemal Bey*, 314-15.

gathering was limited to reaching a theoretical compromise between perspectives, without a discussion of political action and legislative projects. This explains the marked difference between the two congresses, and, according to *Mechveret*, this was because “... l’expérience ayant montré que toute entente a été jusqu’ici rendue impossible par ce fait que chaque groupement s’acharnait à soutenir son programme politique ...”⁷⁷

It can be noticed that the above is the beginning of a plan of action proving that, by 1907, and surely by the following year, the intellectual phase had given in to a more pragmatist, belligerent one. The same issue of *Mechveret* contains more details of the new approaches to opposition. The new programme envisaged a revolutionary option, which in 1902 had been clearly refused by all parties, as much as the organisation of an armed resistance. Especially interesting is one of the measures that the three organisations set as part of their action: “La propagande dans l’armée: c’est-à-dire, prendre les mesures nécessaires pour gagner l’armée à notre cause d’opposition antigouvernementale”⁷⁸

A passage from the same article is particularly telling:

Nous nous unissons pour une lutte commune, tout en respectant l’autonomie de chaque organisation; nous nous unissons sincèrement, fraternellement, et avant de commencer la bataille, nous nous engageons à ne pas faiblir et nous déclarons au Sultan que nous ne déposerons pas les armes avant d’avoir amené pour la Turquie l’avènement d’une ère nouvelle. ... Le Congrès est donc unanime pour reconnaître que tous les groupes d’opposition doivent désormais recourir aux moyens révolutionnaires qui ont donné des résultats

⁷⁷ “Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

encourageants, ainsi que le prouve l'action révolutionnaire en général et l'action récente des groupes mixtes, turcs et arméniens. Dans plusieurs villes des provinces asiatiques, les moyens révolutionnaires sont d'ailleurs imposés et justifiés par les violences mêmes du pouvoir; c'est le régime actuel qui, pas ses crimes, nous a poussés à la révolution.⁷⁹

What is surprising about the paragraph above is that it is reported in the journal that represented, up until and including the 1902 Congress, the group that opposed violence and revolutionary means more than all the others, therefore indicating more dramatically the end of an intellectually driven phase and the opening of a drastically activist one in which real unity among the factions is not even sought after. It is only the removal by force of Sultan Abdülhamit II that interests all the parties involved. The fact that every group within the broader movement worked, ultimately, for its own gain was considered to be one of the main problems of the movement by Rıza, through the pages of *Mechveret*:

Les groupes politiques qui se trouvent hors de la Turquie pouvaient seuls prêcher librement la solidarité, et c'était, à vrai dire, leur premier devoir. Ont-ils bien rempli ce devoir? Hélas! pas tout à fait. On trouve sans doute, dans les journaux appartenant aux divers groupes, des appels à la solidarité plus ou moins pompeusement présentés. Oui, chacun de ces groupes invite les différentes nationalités à s'unir, mais à s'unir sous son propre drapeau! Il ne faut pas oublier que les divers partis d'opposition ont dans leur poche un remède spécial à l'aide duquel ils prétendent guérir les maux. La malheur est que chaque parti, croyant son remède le meilleur et supérieur à ceux des autres, n'avait pas pensé à soigner le mal après une commune consultation. Une dissidence régnait donc également entre eux.⁸⁰

To sum up, the Congress that had been convened to establish a unified front against the rule of the Sultan ended in rupture between Armenians and the rest, and in a split between the two major factions of Sabahettin and Rıza. On the one extreme stood

⁷⁹ "Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

the Armenians and other Christians who pushed for substantial European involvement and envisaged an Ottoman Empire divided very much on the national lines of the various components. In the middle stood Sabahettin, with the plan of “an Ottoman Confederation in which the various nationalities of the Empire would have a great measure of autonomy and in which the main bond would be the dynasty.”⁸¹ On the other extreme was the Ahmet Rıza–Halil Ganem axis, which represented a milder approach to reforming the political entity and, possibly, a bloodless transition to another Sultan. However, the *Mechveret* group represented the section of the Ottoman opposition, grouped under the loose umbrella of the Young Turk movement, which was quicker to abandon plans and hopes for a multi-confessional Ottomanist project. We know that Rıza, after the Congress of 1902, slowly moved towards the idea of Turkism. Proof of this is a document dated 1908 in which an official of the French government reports that the day after setting foot back into the Empire, Ahmet Rıza allegedly proclaimed: “[l]a Turquie aux Turcs’ et à manifester sa mefiance et son aversion envers tous les partis, notamment envers le parti de décentralisation du Prince SABAHEDDINE.”⁸²

Further proof of the fact that the Rıza group was moving towards the Unionist ethos of the post 1908 Revolution political scene is given by another French intelligence report. Written on the 16th of July 1908, shortly after the Young Turk Revolution, the intelligence report claims that the group around Rıza was active in what is described as Eastern Rumelia, placing it geographically close to the section of the

⁸¹ Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*, 73.

⁸² “Sabaheddine – Loutfoulah / Comité Liberal Ottoman,” *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1653-17154.

army and the organisation that was to become the backbone of the Unionist Turkist policy.⁸³

Shortcomings of the Congress

The Congress was a debacle for different reasons that are not limited to the time of the Congress itself but instead have long term repercussions for the history of the Empire and the Republic of Turkey

The first setback does not concern issues discussed at the Congress and that highlighted a marked difference between the two groups, the majority of Sabahettin and the minority of Rıza. Rather, it has to do with an aspect which was wholly left out of the discussions, namely religion. Both Sabahettin and Rıza dwelled extensively on the future of religion in their writings, yet did not manage to broach the issue at the Congress. However, Rıza and Sabahettin, while disagreeing on the issue of foreign intervention and on the possibility of a peaceful course of action, had demonstrated until that moment a common ground on religion through their writings. Being secularists, they both considered religion to be a private issue and explained that, what in Europe had been denounced as religious fanaticism, was in fact a natural development and the answer to an aggressive policy of Europe that was attempting to break Ottoman society along religious lines.⁸⁴ But they had not reached any more common formulation on the issue of religion than an argumentative defence against yet another European accusation.

⁸³ “Sabaheddine – Loutfoulah / Comité Liberal Ottoman,” *Préfecture de Police de Paris* – BA1653-17154.

⁸⁴ See, among other things, the response of Sabahettin to Sir Edward Grey, British minister of foreign affairs, in relation to the latter’s claim of a Pan-Islamic and fundamentalist revival. Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d’Abdul-Hamid*, 401-405.

Indirectly, however, the Congress itself did somehow clarify further the stance of the two groups on this issue and, mainly, highlights even more that, with the failure of the 1902 attempt, the possibility of an inclusive Ottoman proto-nationalism was no longer an option. In fact, I suggest that only through a highly intellectual and ideological approach could a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Empire have stood the challenges of nationalism in the nineteenth century. The moment that unity among these groups failed to materialise, the religious issue, as embodied in the idea of Ottomanism, collapsed. It is fair to wonder, therefore, that had they discussed this as the first and most important issue, the Congress could have produced a consolidated group, aware of some differences, but set on preserving secularism and religious plurality and, as a consequence, the recognition of equal rights of all citizens, regardless of creed. However, the fate of the Congress, in respect to issues related to religion, could have been either one that confirmed the intellectual nature of the opposition group, and in doing so tailored a role for religion but remained in the face of practical action very vague; or one that would lose the intellectuality, as it started to do, together with a constructive discussion on religion, for the benefit of political pragmatism and action.

Practical limitations affected the Congress's composition. Many of those coming from abroad had difficulties reaching Paris, since police forces in many countries worked in conjunction with the Ottoman embassies to prevent delegates from travelling. Ethnically and religiously, only the Armenians were invited as representatives of their own community, while the Greeks, Jews and other Balkan

nationalities were invited on account of their occupational positions.⁸⁵ This excluded the Albanians as their opinions were obviously represented, in terms of group, by İsmail Kemal himself, who, as mentioned earlier, was close to Sabahettin and could exercise substantial leverage over the decisions taken.

This representational inequality is reflected in the final establishment and composition of the Committee of Freedom Loving Peoples. As I mentioned earlier, the president of the Committee sanctioned by the Congress was Sabahettin, with Sathas and Sisyan Effendis, who were both from the ethnic minorities, acting as joint vice-presidents. Ali Fahri Bey⁸⁶ and Adossidis Efendi,⁸⁷ also from the minorities, were the recording secretaries.⁸⁸ Since the staunchest supporters of foreign intervention, apart from Sabahettin, were among the exponents of the minorities, the very composition of the committee was biased in favour of this issue as part of the final decisions of the Congress – and this, as I argued earlier, was central to the failure of the Congress itself.

What became clear during the Congress was that the only point all the delegates agreed upon was their hatred for the regime of Sultan Abdülhamit II. This affinity proved to be too abstract to consolidate action. In this light, I suggest that the Congress was an intellectual effort, which crumbled in the face of pragmatic demands for activism and political organisation.

⁸⁵ For example, Albert Fua had been invited as editor of *Mechveret Supplément Français* and not as representative of the Jewish community, as much as Halil Ganem had been invited for his involvement with *Mechveret* and not as a Maronite.

⁸⁶ Ali Fahri had been a central figure of the CUP branch in Egypt. Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*.

⁸⁷ Konstantinos Sathas and Anastase Adossidis, two Ottoman Greeks.

⁸⁸ Hanioglu, "Der Jungenturkenkongress von Paris," 50.

The conclusion of the Congress, the composition of the committee, and the way the minority group was treated, must have been a serious blow for Rıza and his group. The closing of the preface to the minutes of the Congress, as it appeared on *Mechveret*, presented a picture of total separation with the Armenians, Macedonians, Albanians and with Sabahettin himself:

C'est avec le plus vif regret, nous le répétons, que nous nous séparons momentanément de nos compatriotes. Ils ne tarderont pas à nous revenir dès qu'ils auront goûté à l'herbe amère des pâturages diplomatiques, mais ils verront alors qu'ils auront fait le jeu des comités révolutionnaires arménien, macédonien et albanais. La tactique de ces comités, qui est percée à jour, est, à vrai dire, des plus habiles; elle consiste à se présenter devant l'Europe avec un comité ottoman ayant à sa tête un membre apparenté à la dynastie et sollicitant l'intervention de l'Europe pour le même objet. Toutefois les Puissances ne se laisseront pas éblouir, croyons-nous, par cette coalition éphémère qui aura contre elle l'opinion publique en Turquie.⁸⁹

The *Mechveret* group underlined the fact that the meeting, convened through personal invitations by Sabahettin and Lutfullah, was not adequately prepared in advance. Through the pages of its journal, the *Mechveret* group claimed that the organisers had not fixed a programme in advance with only a few delegates (those around *Mechveret*) having organised a preparatory meeting to discuss the resolutions they would work during the Congress. The passage in question, although relatively short, is quite revelatory. First, it communicates that Rıza and his group thought the remaining delegates came without any preparation, either due to bad organisation, or because they were not expecting the Congress actually to bear fruits. Secondly, the points adopted by those present at the preparatory meeting, which was organised by *Mechveret* and held at the home of Halil Ganem, were vague: loyalty to the dynasty

⁸⁹ "Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans," *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902), 2.

of Osman, the importance of Islam as reconcilable with the progress of modern civilisation, the safeguarding of all the other religious beliefs, the establishment of harmony between all the Ottomans entitled to the same rights and, above all, adopting the Constitution of 1876 as instrument of unification among peoples.⁹⁰ This obviously raises the possibility that it was the *Mechveret* group itself that did not have any positive expectations from the Congress.

Thus, the Congress resulted mainly in “the accentuation of the difference of views of Sabahettin and Ahmet Rıza into a rift ...”⁹¹ This divergence seems to have produced an ideological impasse for the exponents of the Young Turk movement: it impeded on the vision of unity among the opposition groups, it frustrated the ambitions that Ottomans alone could remodel their country upon modern lines and, most significantly, it challenged the belief that, somehow, *Osmanlılık* – Ottomanism – was still a viable option for the coexistence of the various ethno-religious realities of the Ottoman Empire. This multi-layered breakdown led the various exponents of the different currents, and especially the ethnic and religious minorities, to realise that nationalism, as it had been intended in Western Europe, constituted a direct threat to the survival of the Ottoman Empire and, at the same time, the almost inevitable future of its political development.

⁹⁰ “Le Congrès des libéraux ottomans,” *Mechveret Supplément Français* 8, no. 126 (15 February 1902).

⁹¹ Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*, 75.

Transition from intellectualism to activism

Soon after the Congress, Ahmet Rıza was drawn towards the idea of the Turkification of the Empire while Sabahettin remained attached to the religious minorities and, for this, acquired more followers outside the Empire than inside it. It can be argued that if the delegates had had the time to get into more nuanced discussions during the days spent at the Congress, they would have dwelled more on the issue of religion within the Empire. Instead, as a result of the failed attempt to unite the opposition in 1902 and of the marked differences among the groups that the Congress made manifest, both Turkish and non-Turkish Ottomans opted for an ethnically, religiously or linguistically founded nationalism – I will discuss this further in the next chapter. This, in turn, inaugurated the period culminating with the 1908 revolution that was, in the eyes of many, doomed to fail precisely because of these factors. In the end, the loss of feasibility of a project based on Ottomanism and the crystallisation of nationalist tendencies made the chances for the existence of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Empire extremely slim. By the time of the Second Congress of Ottoman Liberals, held, as I mentioned earlier, from 27 to 29 of December 1907, participation was extremely limited, hinting clearly at a diminished chance of feasibility of the idea of Ottomanism.

The conclusion of this second Congress signalled the dismemberment of an already disjointed opposition. The second attempt should in fact be seen as the formal acknowledgement of divisions that had ended the intellectual phase of the Young Turk movement five years earlier. Moreover, some of the most emblematic figures within the organisation decided to withdraw their membership from the Young Turk

organisation even prior to this second Congress.⁹² At the same time, the composition of the 1907 Congress depicted accurately the composition of those who still believed in the idea of an Empire but not in the ideology of Ottomanism. Of the ten men who made up the core group that led the Revolution, seven had not been prominent in the ‘intellectual’ phase.⁹³ The remaining members formed a society, in Salonika in 1906, with the name of *Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti*. The society had strong military affiliations and clearly diverged from the intellectualism of earlier years. The *Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti* sought, right from the start, a new type of membership and alliance, with military elements and a provincial base in the Monastir and Edirne area. Furthermore, as Erik Zürcher has pointed out, “[a]t the time of the revolution, the CUP had about 2,000 members, of whom about two thirds or more seem to have been military men.”⁹⁴ The fact that the environment in the post-1902 Young Turk organisation was drastically different from before and that the activist current was about to have the upper hand is clearly shown by the emergence of a Revolutionary Committee.⁹⁵ This was not the first occurrence of the revolutionary option during the existence of the Young Turk movement, but the timing, the influence that its members had and the group’s agenda did show some unusual traits. As argued by Fesch, these members had spent more time outside the Empire than inside, “... ces Jeunes Turcs révolutionnaires, ... me semblent avoir poussé plutôt sur les hauteurs de Belleville que sur les bords du Bosphore”⁹⁶ Until then, the activist wings of the organisation had emerged inside Ottoman lands (the internal Young Turk

⁹² Among these, Ali Aydar Midhat, the son of Midhat Pasha, who, in a letter addressed to the director of the *Mémorial Diplomatique* on March 8th 1907, stated: “Je vous serais très obligé de vouloir bien informer vos lecteurs que je me suis retiré depuis le 1er février du Comité ‘Union et Progrès’, dont fait partie Ahmed Riza Bey.” Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d’Abdul-Hamid*, 396 n, 2.

⁹³ The other three were Mehmet Talat, Mithat Şükrü and Evranoszade Rahmi. Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*.

⁹⁴ Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*, 101.

⁹⁵ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d’Abdul-Hamid*, 408.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

branch), rather than in exile (the external Young Turk branch). Similarly, Fesch considers them close to French Freemasonry in Paris, which had usually served as a place of peaceful exchanges rather than drastic actions.

I suggest that the development of such committees as the *Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti*, is yet another sign of a transition from the intellectual phase of the opposition to the activism of the revolutionary option. The names of some of these organisations, in fact, were themselves distinct from those of the earlier phase, when references were made to science, philosophy and intellectual movements. The Revolutionary Society (*Cemiyet-i İnkılâbiye*),⁹⁷ to which both Fesch and Hanioglu refer, chose to establish a ‘watchdog’ under the name of *Comité de Salut publique* in Istanbul;⁹⁸ this gesture links this phase of the Ottoman struggle to the drastic one of the Reign of Terror in the French experience.

Another noteworthy as well as striking difference between the two phases was the type and the source of help envisaged to bring about political transformation. Up until 1902, The Young Turk organisation had debated the extent of Western moral, physical and financial help desired or needed. But when the organisation transitioned onto a new phase, potential links to Britain were abandoned in favour of Germany – especially during the preparation for World War One. This shift coincided with an internal move towards Turkism within the Empire, and the drastic change in the environment was clearly felt by contemporaries. In the Introduction to the *Vetluga*

⁹⁷ This organisation, for which sources are extremely scant, has been labelled by Hanioglu as a student group which, after merging with another secret society, and being based at the Military Academy, attempted between 1905 and 1907 to align itself with one or the other factions within the CUP. Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 91.

⁹⁸ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d’Abdul-Hamid*, 409.

Memoirs, for example, Ali Necat Ölçen claims that “[t]hat day [17th of December 1908, the day parliament reopened] marked the beginning of a period that dramatically affected the fate of the Ottoman Empire and, in fact, was the beginning of the end. There was no doubt the Empire would one day collapse, but perhaps it would not have collapsed so soon.”⁹⁹

After intellectualism: the trajectory of Ahmet Rıza and Mehmet Sabahettin after the congress

The Congress of 1902 was a turning point, not only in the history of the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey, but also more directly in the lives of Sabahettin and Rıza. After the Congress – and the brief attempt at reaching some agreement between the various groups in 1907 – Sabahettin retired from active politics for three years, which he spent in solitary confinement. During this time, he convinced himself even more so that the Ottoman Empire needed social reform as opposed to political solutions.¹⁰⁰ It seemed for a while that he would not be willing to go back to politics and that he had abandoned any plan to constitute or influence an intellectual elite that would lay out a path to modernity. This has also been argued by Şükrü Hanioglu, who writes that:

[a]s we have seen, Edhem Ruhi and Abdullah Cevdet [two influential members of the umbrella organisations, and the second, incidentally, one of the four founders of the Ottoman Union Society] could not induce Sabahaddin Bey to work with them. Apparently the prince had no desire to work with members of the old CUP organisation and thus

⁹⁹ Mehmet Arif Ölçen, *Vetluga Memoir*, ed. Gary Leiser (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 10.

¹⁰⁰ It is, in fact, after the end of the Congress that Sabahettin retired from an active participation in politics and wrote his monograph, Sabahettin, *Türkiye nasıl kurtarılabilir*, first published, as I mention in Chapter 4, in 1913.

adopted a wait-and-see policy before launching a new campaign against both the Ottoman government and the coalition.¹⁰¹

Ahmet Rıza, on the other hand, embittered as much as the prince, was drawn away from active involvement in Ottoman politics and dedicated himself, at least for some time, to reading and contributing to positivist philosophy as well as being part of this circle.¹⁰²

Neither of the two, however, would remain outside of politics for long. On the one hand, the path taken by Sabahettin is not so surprising: he remained in the opposition to the CUP, maintaining a resistant attitude. This was due to his political stance as well as his desire to represent an enlightened elite, who could understand better what the population at large actually needed. The most surprising move was that of Rıza. In 1904 Halil Ganem died, severing the link that tied Rıza with non-Turkish groups in the Empire. From then on, the *Mechveret* group, or what was left of it, gradually moved closer and closer to the idea of centralisation of power within a Turkish-oriented Empire. In relying on the Turkish component, Rıza saw an opportunity to promote secularism among the whole population and push forth the positivist plan that he had in mind once the revolution had taken place. This agenda had been entrusted to him by the Positivist Society in Europe.¹⁰³ After the Revolution, he went back to the Ottoman Empire and became the Unionist President of the Chamber of Deputies. Once in Istanbul, he was seen as fiercely opposed to religion and one of the most radical elements within the CUP, to the extent that the

¹⁰¹ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 82.

¹⁰² See, for example, his dedicated contribution to *The Positivist Review*.

¹⁰³ Şerif Mardin, "The Mind of the Turkish Reformer, 1700-1900," in *Arab Socialism: a documentary survey* eds. Sami A. Hanna and George H. Gardner (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 43.

counter-revolutionaries of the 1909 coup demanded his removal from office among that of various others.

It seems that after 1902 Sabahettin distanced himself from organised politics of that scale, except for a few instances. For example, he remained close to the Balkan minorities and, together with Ismail Kemal, travelled to Britain to follow up on institutional help that had been promised by some within the British government in order to push his own plan ahead. However, as Ismail Kemal himself recalls,

[a]fter the Congress, without interrupting my residence at Brussels, I kept a *pied-à-terre* in Paris, where, in association with the two Princes and other political friends, I continued to push plans for reforms, which I must say were based on and supported by nothing but our own hopes.¹⁰⁴

It is after the failure of the Congress that Sabahettin's idea of forming a proper committee really picked up some momentum. In 1905, in fact, Sabahettin's group, which until then had no 'official' name, took the name of *Teşebbüs-i Şahsi ve Ademi-i Merkeziyet Cemiyeti*, the Committee/League for Decentralisation and Private Initiative. The organisation had a central branch in Paris and carried out some activities in Eastern Anatolia and the Black Sea coast. The main aim of the League inside Ottoman lands was to use the Turkish component of the population as the vehicle through which ethnic and religious differences would be overcome.¹⁰⁵ Even though some links have been highlighted between the events leading up to the Revolution of 1908 and the activities of the League, as Hanioglu reports, its

¹⁰⁴ Fullerton, *Ismail Kemal Bey*, 308.

¹⁰⁵ Fesch, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, 398.

members prepared a report in which they underscored the role of their organisation in these events.¹⁰⁶

The following extract informs us of how programmatically Sabahettin was to envisage the future after the Congress; this later extract recalls aspects that made up his earlier ideological approach to reform treated in Chapter 4. Sabahettin claimed that most of the problems of the Empire resided in the fact that the Sultan could act freely and impose anything upon a population that would not be ready to oppose him due to acute social paralysis. This paralysis was attributed to lack of education and private initiative, which undermined the emergence of an entrepreneurial class, engaged in agriculture, commerce, and industry. This situation was also fostered by the unwillingness of most people within the Turco-Muslim component to change a status-quo in which the larger part of their productive population was absorbed by the state through employment in the public sector. In the words of Sabahettin:

[p]our conjurer le péril que menace la nation, notre jeunesse intellectuelle doit se tourner vers les carrières indépendantes et productives. Nous devons unir nos forces pour remplacer l'autocratie absolue par une monarchie constitutionnelle et viser à la décentralisation qui satisfaira [sic] à la fois les éléments chrétiens et musulmans de l'Empire.¹⁰⁷

According to Eric Anduze, Sabahettin quit his exile and went back to the Empire in July 1908, after the Revolution. What he would not abandon was his devoted opposition to the constituted powers, which were now represented by the Unionist government. It is in this government that Sabahettin saw, in many instances, a repetition of the repressive regime that the government's members themselves had

¹⁰⁶ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 93.

¹⁰⁷ Gilles Roy, *Abdul-Hamid: le Sultan Rouge* (Paris: Payot, 1936), 210.

supposedly combated for years. It was for this reason, in fact, that he was constantly harassed with accusations of plotting to overthrow the Second Constitutional regime. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Sabahettin was, in fact, even accused of having taken part in the 1909 counter-coup. Through the pages of *Terakki*, he constantly debated with newspaper editors such as *Tanin*, and Unionist members¹⁰⁸ and challenged the regime through the foreign press.¹⁰⁹

An emblematic passage, from *Terakki*, is the following:

Although a long time has passed since the deposition of Sultan Abdülhamid and the ruler of the former era, the new government finds itself needing to apply a very harsh rule. This shows that Turkey has not walked on a very sound and developing path.¹¹⁰

This obviously set him against the CUP and in very good light with liberals both in the Empire and in the rest of Europe, which explains his hermit-like lifestyle back in Istanbul.¹¹¹

Concluding Remarks

The two aspects, which have been discussed throughout, relating to the outcomes of the Congress are the reasons for failing to unite the various groups under one banner, and the feasibility of the project, i.e., the Young Turk version of Ottomanism. While the concluding chapter will deal with the feasibility of such project, the following paragraphs sum up the direct reasons for the relative failure of the Congress.

The major impediment to the success of the Congress was the very nature of the opposition groups before and after 1902. It is precisely the existence of what I refer

¹⁰⁸ See Ege, *Prens Sabahaddin*, 193-201.

¹⁰⁹ Vaka, "Imperial Enemy."

¹¹⁰ Ege, *Prens Sabahaddin*, 193-201.

¹¹¹ This emerges clearly from Demetra Vaka's article. Vaka, "Imperial Enemy."

to as the intellectual phase and the lack of intellectualism after this time that tells much about the immediate outcome of the Congress. In this, it is instrumental to recall the earlier discussion on religion as an example of the predicament in which the Ottoman opposition groups found themselves. Both Sabahettin and Rıza had broadly similar approaches on the issue of religion and this in some respect united the two intellectuals. However, as the aims of the Congress were more pragmatic than ideological – the quest for unity, the reaching of a shared plan of action, and the establishment of a practical plan for the future in order to change the social and political make-up of the Empire – this intellectual approach to programming became irrelevant precisely in the urgency of political action.

This last consideration also points to the fact that the failure of the intellectual phase is testament to a discrepancy between the content of the intellectual work of the Young Turk émigrés and the actual process of political and social transition. As I have argued before, the intellectual exercise carried out was instrumental for the emergence of later dilemmas and discussion but was equally ill-equipped to respond to the specific demands of the moment. The spirit of the time, unfortunately for the likes of Sabahettin and Rıza, was one in which positions were crystallising so much that the various components of the Empire needed an active practical approach, not a forum for intellectual debates.

However, I argue that even if the Congress failed to meet the aims for which it had been organised, it nevertheless resulted in a more long-term success, namely, the benefits resulting from having, within the broader organisation of the Young Turks, an external branch that relied heavily for success and conceptualisation on being in exile.

It is clear that exile gave the chance to gather, for the first and last time in the history of the Young Turk organisation, the most representative pool of Ottomans of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. As I have shown in this chapter, the Congress did not manage to create a united front of opposition. However, the repercussions on an ideological plane shaped the legacy and success of this period. As much as the short-lived First Constitutional Period (1876-1878) served as a source of inspiration for many Young Turks, so did the intellectual and ideological work of the organisation carried out abroad between 1895 and 1902, impacted on the future statesmen of the Empire and early Republic.¹¹² The dilemmas that are still being discussed nowadays in Turkey on issues such as the role of religion in the public sphere, the appreciation of the Ottoman past, and the place of Turkey in the geopolitical space, are frequently connected to this period, which was a vital part of both the ‘longest century’ of the Ottoman Empire and, I contend, the most formative era of the Turkish Republic. In conclusion, what this chapter has highlighted is that the story of the intellectual phase of the Young Turk organisation is somewhat ironic and decisively poignant: it was doomed to fail in order to allow for tangible outcomes but was crucial to the formation of the future ideological, practical and social developments of the Empire and the Republic.

¹¹² This argument will be developed further in the next chapter, however, for a discussion of the Ottoman legacy in Republican Turkey see Davison, “Atatürk’s reforms: back to the roots,” 243-264.

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION

This dissertation explored the writings of Ahmet Rıza and Mehmet Sabahettin, leaders of the Young Turk movement abroad, with a view to examine a strand of ideology and a specific type of activism that have been so far overlooked in the historical literature. It argued that, by providing the opportunity to publish journals more or less uninhibited by censorship, exile became central to the development of this strand of the movement. Escaping the censorship regime put in place by the Sultan inside the Empire's borders, Young Turk activists published the journals they wanted, using the political language they thought was most effective to garner support within the Empire and the international community. Apart from one legal suit initiated by the French government, which ended well for *Mechveret*, the opposition abroad managed to express their political and social grievances and create a forum around their journals and activist groups.

Yet, I maintained that exile was not solely an escape; figures such as Rıza and Sabahettin aspired to penetrate and gain the recognition of a European and, to an extent, global intellectual elite. This affiliation gave them more than visibility; it offered them a feeling of spiritual and social belonging and the opportunity to reach a level of theoretical synthesis that matched the dynamism and richness of the Parisian intellectual life. As discussed, Rıza enjoyed the company of many philosophers, and specifically of Gustave Le Bon, during *les déjeuners du mercredi*, while Sabahettin met with Edmond Demolins, among many others. As I have presented earlier, the meeting with the group of La Science sociale and the reading of Demolins's book, changed his life forever. Beyond their personal encounters, the

two figures had the opportunity to contribute to transnational intellectual projects by writing for journals such as *La Revue Occidentale* and *The Positivist Review*.

The combination of exile and their participation in the philosophical circles of the time influenced Rıza and Sabahettin into thinking that their mission was to save the Empire from collapse through daring, ambitious, and somewhat unrealistic, approaches to social and political reform. As we saw, Sabahettin recalls his initiation into social science as a mystical experience in a bookshop, whereby he felt to be the ‘chosen one’, a quasi-messianic figure.¹ Ahmet Rıza’s adoption of Le Bon’s approach as his inspiration is equally revelatory of a romantic elitist approach. Le Bon’s elitist awareness, clearly evident in the work of Rıza is summarised below:

Civilisations as yet have only been created and directed by a small intellectual aristocracy, never by crowds. Crowds are only powerful for destruction. Their rule is always tantamount to a barbarian phase. A civilisation involves fixed rules, discipline, a passing from the instinctive to the rational state, forethought for the future, an elevated degree of culture — all of them conditions that crowds, left to themselves, have invariably shown themselves incapable of realising.²

However, this top-down approach and their affinity with elite circles was a double-edged sword for both Rıza and Sabahettin; on the one hand, they reached a level of consistency and abstractness that lay the foundations for future ideological developments both in the short term and the long run.³ On the other hand, their project lacked a method of mass-distribution, a fact that hindered the translation of their ideas into action.

¹ See Sabahettin’s encounter with the book of Demolins, on display in a shop window, as reported in Chapter 4. Ege, *Prens Sabahaddin*, 36.

² Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd, a study in the popular mind*, 19th ed. (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1947), 18.

³ I discuss this implication further on in the chapter.

Regardless of their inability to turn this exiled opposition into a united front, these two activists were key figures during a specific formative period of Ottoman history; what has clearly emerged from this study is that the period surveyed, 1895 to 1902, constitutes a specific phase in the history of the Young Turk movement, which I labelled the ‘intellectual phase’. Before the total defeat of the organisation inside the Empire in 1896, the Young Turk émigrés constituted only a branch of the organisation, the external one. Because the internal branch was supposed to be the central one, and because it was mainly composed of military officers and bureaucrats who leaned towards pragmatism, the external members were not free to pursue their own intellectual venture as they pleased but were tied to the decisions of the internal organisation. However, with the dismemberment of the latter in 1896, the Young Turks in Europe were empowered to pursue their own visions; since no longer accountable to the political planning of the internal branch, these figures were able to develop their intellectualism.

Their independence from the internal branch made Rıza and Sabahettin’s powerful enough to formulate their own ideological approach towards reform, which, as we have seen in Chapter 5, stopped short of organised action at the Congress of Ottoman Liberals in Paris in 1902. In fact, the Congress held in February 1902 was the first and last instance in which Ottomans representatives of the various ethnic and religious communities gathered together with the aim of cooperation. It was there that the intellectualism of Rıza and Sabahettin crumbled before the pressing concerns of organisation and action. Sabahettin’s idea of a total restructuring of society, from a communitarian to an individualistic (British liberal) one, and Rıza’s rather unrealistic conceptualisation of Ottomanism as a frame of belonging that

would supersede any ethnic and religious division sanctioned only by the upholding of existing laws, were difficult approaches to materialise. The two ideologues did not take into consideration the pressing needs and realities of the moment, such as the physical removal of Sultan Abdülhamit II. Likewise, some of the tensions within their respective ideological visions were not addressed sufficiently: their version of political secularism was not clearly articulated in relation to a religious experience (Muslim and non-Muslim) within the Empire and, as a result of this ambiguity, their appeal to a supra-national discourse such as Ottomanism became problematic both to minorities and to elites wishing to preserve their cultural prestige.

The idea of Ottomanism, as I argued in the thesis, needs to be scrutinised in order to adjudicate whether the different plans put forth by Rıza and Sabahettin were viable at that stage. I established that both ideologues based their plans on the idea of Ottomanism, albeit with noticeable differences (Sabahettin's federalism was not identical to Rıza's proto-national ideology). I also narrated that the ethnic and religious components of the Empire were well represented at the 1902 Congress where the concept was debated most seriously. It is worth, therefore, assessing how the various communities that made up the Empire looked at Ottomanism as their possible political and social future. In sum, was Ottomanism an entirely utopian vision born and bred in exile, or did it encapsulate the hopes and agendas of some of the Empire's components?

Renzo Falaschi presents an account of the events of this period through two documents he collected.⁴ Even though the author shows the actions of the Albanian committees as ultimately geared towards the formation of an Albanian state, the situation at the beginning of 1900 is one in which the different ethnicities still seem to operate under the banner of Ottoman unity. When Ismail Kemal toured the whole of Europe looking for allies both within the Young Turk movement and among European circles, his intention was to promote the cause of the minorities and, possibly, work towards a federal re-organisation of the administration in Istanbul. This was surely the case until 1912:⁵

[t]he deep rooted habit of respect towards the Empire, the persuasion that none of the national communities – which like a mosaic constituted the Empire itself – would not yet be ready to acquire by itself economic independence, the understanding that the time was not yet ripe for the division of the Empire – whose survival, for similar or different reasons, was at the heart of all the European powers – all these considerations induced people [Albanians and other minorities] not to rush events and limit aspirations to what was realistic and actually achievable.⁶

This quote reveals an apprehension that cultural and religious pluralism, central to the activism of the minorities, would not be a central part of the Young Turk agenda. Nonetheless, the minorities (Albanians and others) still considered themselves part of the Young Turk opposition, even if only due to practical considerations.

As for the Arab provinces, Kayalı⁷ and Zeine Zeine⁸ demonstrate that certain secret societies that emerged from the 1980s onwards were in fact opposed to the Istanbul-

⁴ Falaschi, *Ismail Kemal*.

⁵ For the first time on 29th January 1912, Ismail Kemal writes to the citizens of Valona that “for the Albanian cause ‘it is necessary to pursue a different course of actions’ [independence].” *Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷ Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*.

based Young Turk movement, though, “these initiatives remained restricted to a small group and did not constitute the basis of an Arab movement.”⁹ During the period surveyed throughout this thesis, Arab participation inside the Young Turks as in the case of Halil Ganem – was strong; and this is a testimony that Ottomanism was considered a possibility by both the Turkish component and by the Ottoman Arab community. To add to this, Kayalı provides clear evidence of a substantially large number of Ottoman Arabs within the Young Turk movement:

One of the principal envoys Abdülhamid sent to Europe to contact the Young Turks and win them over was Najib Malhama, his Lebanese Christian security chief. The choice of Malhama undoubtedly had to do with the large number of Arabs, mostly Christian, among the Young Turks in Europe.¹⁰

Another instance of Arab support is the case of al-Antaki, who had supposedly accepted the Sultan’s offers to come back to the Empire and leave the opposition. Instead of siding with the Sultan, al-Antaki started gathering information on behalf of the Young Turks of Paris.¹¹ A certain Ahmed Wardani became the spokesperson of the internal branch in contact with Ahmet Rıza in order to negotiate and organise the unification of the two branches.¹² The picture that Kayalı gives us of the relationship between the Young Turks and Arabs is an intimate one, in which the Arab provinces constituted not only the birthplace of some of the activists in Paris, but they also served as hiding place for some others. These provinces were also the debating grounds for the ideas of the key exponents, like Rıza and Sabahettin. In sum, Kayalı does not suggest any real antagonism towards the concept of

⁸ Zeine N. Zeine, *Arab-Turkish relations and the emergence of Arab nationalism* (Beirut: Khayat’s, 1958).

⁹ Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 33-34.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹² *Ibid.*

Ottomanism. However, from the time of the 1908 Revolution, and immediately afterwards, Kayalı states that the Ottomanist project would have been extremely difficult to implement: “[w]hile it would take longer for Arabism and Turkism to find political expression, a meaningful synthesis of the two under a redefined Ottomanism (such as the Young Turks would attempt) was prejudiced by the modes of expression of the two trends [Arabism and Turkism].”¹³ Hence, while Kayalı reports a degree of cohesiveness between the two components, Arab and Turkish, he alludes to signs of ethnic, linguistic and cultural affiliation that were starting to become more evident in this discussion.¹⁴

The appeal that Ottomanism had is equally evident in the life of Shlomo Yellin investigated by Campos. A convinced Ottomanist, whose brother, David, was a staunch supporter of Zionism, Shlomo, also known as Süleyman, spent a substantial part of his life after the 1908 Revolution alerting people to the dangers of Zionism that would undermine the idea of Ottomanism in the eyes of the Jewish community.¹⁵ A similar instance from the side of the Greek minority was that of Pavlos Carolidis, explored by Kechriotis. Carolidis was born in a village near Kayseri in 1848, studied history at the universities of Athens and Tübingen and was elected deputy of Izmir to the Ottoman Parliament in 1908. He took this appointment seriously and invested in the possibility of working within an Ottomanist framework. He had a “strong belief that the new regime would open the ground for a sincere understanding between the Greek and the Turkish

¹³ Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Michelle Campos, “‘Jews, be Ottoman!’ The struggle between civic Ottomanism and Hebraism in the Yellin brothers of Jerusalem and Beirut,” WOCMES Conference, Barcelona, July, 2010.

element”¹⁶ Whether Carolidis was mistaken in his hopes or not is not our concern here. What I want to highlight, rather, is that if in 1908 there were still adherents to an Ottomanist vision, we can assume that support was even stronger during the period 1895 to 1902 when this ideological discourse was at the forefront of the opposition movement.

Of Ottomanism’s various sides, the one that concerned political organisation on a federalist scale emerged as the most viable path thanks to its appeal to minorities. Çağlar Keyder claims that “a constitution providing universal and equal citizenship combined with ethnic and territorial autonomy might just have saved the Empire and avoided the excesses of nationalism and of the nation-state.”¹⁷ In this, he gives much credit to Mehmet Sabahettin’s propositions, which, in hindsight, appear as more applicable than those of Rıza. This federalism would maintain the much-sought unity without requiring an unrealistic degree of affiliation among the various components, who would enjoy self-government. If pushed by a united front, such plan could have satisfied the majority and ensured the survival of the house of Osman.

Despite the fact that no such plan was put forward after the failure of the 1902 Congress, the idea of Ottomanism did not completely disappear after 1908; its survival reinforces my claim that Ottomanism, as developed by Rıza and Sabahettin, would continue to be an influence on political discourse for many years to come. In 1908, a French observer reported on the matter as follows:

¹⁶ Vangelis Kechriotis, “Greek-Orthodox, Ottoman Greeks or just Greeks? Theories of co-existence in the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution,” *Études Balkaniques* 1 (2005): 56.

¹⁷ Çağlar Keyder, “The Ottoman Empire,” in Karen Barkey and Mark Von Hagen ed., *After Empire* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), 30.

Les Arméniens ne le revendiquaient pas au lendemain des massacres d'Anatolie. Les Grecs seront loyalistes, si les Turcs les traitent avec justice et leur attribuent la –part à laquelle ils ont droit. Le patriotisme de chacun dépendra de la manière dont la nouvelle patrie ottomane se comportera avec tous les enfants.¹⁸

After the Revolution, more and more CUP members, who had at different times and to varying degrees been members of the Young Turk movement, turned from Ottomanism to Turkish nationalism, leaving those who did not very little room for manoeuvre. As this shift to Turkish nationalism became more pervasive, not only the ideology but also the political and social environment around the Turkish and Arab components made a federal option more unlikely.¹⁹ However, sources also point to the fact that, in spite of the rigged elections in 1912, the federal plan was still popular:

In the Arab provinces of Syria, Beirut, and Aleppo, and the sanjak of Jerusalem, twenty-four of the thirty deputies had already switched to the Entente [Sabahettin's party], and, before the CUP began to use state resources to manipulate the campaign, the urban vote seemed poised to bring in the Liberals as the majority party.²⁰

It is worth signalling that the idea of decentralisation within a framework of Ottomanism was coherently formulated by Sabahettin but was not limited to him. Ismail Kemal²¹ was a proponent of the same vision; according to Falaschi:

[u]pon his experience as careful and devoted administrator and from his liberal and modern background, Ismail Kemal became convinced that it would have been necessary to abolish the absolute centralisation as a sole administration could not have satisfied the needs of peoples so different among each other in culture, religion, customs and climatic and geographical realities. In brief, the concept that Ismail Kemal would have accepted as a first step would have

¹⁸ Alfred Berl, "Jeune Turquie," *La Revue de Paris* 4, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 1908), 600.

¹⁹ An example is the Balkan War of 1912 which ended much of the Ottoman presence in the Balkans.

²⁰ Keyder, "The Ottoman Empire," 39.

²¹ Ismail Kemal was the leader of the Albanian faction at the 1902 Congress of Ottoman Liberals in Paris and an ally of Sabahettin, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

been that of the transformation of the Empire in a federation, maybe vaguely resembling the Swiss system, in which each different community would administer itself autonomously within the same economic and political community.²²

Having established that Ottomanism represented an option for socio-political engineering well into 1908 – and therefore surely in 1902 – it is important to address the failure of the intellectual phase of the Young Turk component. Among the multitude of explanations that could address this question, the one most closely related to this thesis is that intellectualism was the movement's motivating force and equally its ultimate flaw. Such emphasis on intellectualism prevented the Young Turk figures in question from conceptualising a mechanism of implementation of their ideology on a bigger scale and in the short run. Instead, the pragmatism and authoritarianism of the Unionists first and of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk later created a momentum for drastic changes that could actually take place. However, it was the robust intellectualism of Rıza and Sabahettin that allowed Young Turk ideology to leave an important legacy and inaugurate pivotal discussions that have been debated in the post-1908 imperial environment, in the Republican era, and in the present. Such discussions revolve around: the meaning of modernity; the idea of cultural belonging in relation to an 'East' or a 'West'; and the role and status of religion in society. Such issues were debated by Ziya Gökalp in 1923²³ and, equally, by the wider population in modern Turkey during the 1990s, as Yael Navaro-Yashin illustrates.²⁴ In fact, she argues²⁵ that contemporary Turkey is defined through these on-going debates about culture, religion and the state; these debates prove that the

²² Falaschi, *Ismail Kemal*, 22.

²³ Ziya Gökalp, *The Principles of Turkism* translated by Robert Devereux (Leiden: Brill, 1968).

²⁴ Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

dilemmas tackled by Rıza and Sabahettin are relevant to our understanding of present day dynamics in citizenship and in governance.

Specifically, these debates have found increased resonance in the 1980s and onward, with the emergence of the Turkish Islamic Synthesis, which responded to the specific type of nationalism promoted by Kemalism during its fifty years in power. The ideologues of the Turkish Islamic Synthesis, the members of the *Aydınlar Ocağı*, and the upholders of Republicanism, lately grouped as *Ulusalçılar* and attempting to distance themselves from both the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and from the Turkish Islamic Synthesis, dispute issues that must have sounded very familiar to the intellectual Young Turks: the degree of foreign cultural influences considered beneficial, the choice between adoption or adaptation vis-à-vis the West, and the role of the state “as an active agent in engineering cultural and intellectual life.”²⁶ Equally, they negotiate the role of religion in the public sphere and in governance, the meaning of national culture, and the role of the family in society.²⁷ To some extent, it is ironic to see that the social class that promoted the Turkish Islamic Synthesis were the entrepreneurs, precisely the section of society that Sabahettin thought pivotal for the development of his liberal-secular ideas. He would have repudiated the patronising relationship between state and citizen as well as the family metaphor altogether, but he would certainly agree with the idea of Turkey as composed of multiple realities and affinities that have been its territorial and cultural legacy since the establishment of the Ottoman Empire in 1299. What we witness therefore today, is a continuation of debates set up in the previous century and

²⁶ Binnaz Toprak, “Religion as State Ideology in a Secular Setting: The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis,” in *Aspects of Religion in Secular Turkey*, Malcolm Wagstaff ed. Occasional Paper Series 40 (1990), 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

consolidated during the particular phase of the Young Turk movement I examined in this thesis

To conclude, the intellectualism of Rıza and Sabahettin may have impeded on the actualisation of plan for a reformed Ottoman Empire by the end of the nineteenth century, but their debates and conversations are still pertinent. Their relevance today proves my central claim that these two figures, influential ideologues and passionate though less effective activists, have been critical agents of Ottoman modernisation and, by consequence, that their trajectories should be part of the study of modern Turkish history.

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