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THE INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE MTTB

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THE INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE TURKISH
NATIONAL STUDENT UNION (MTTB), 1965-1980

A Master's Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the intellectual foundations of the ideology of the Turkish National Student Union (MTTB) by analyzing the publications of this organization, once a paragon of Islamic youth activism in Turkey. It aims to scrutinize the place of the ideological orientation of the MTTB in the broader ideological spectrum of Turkish political thought. Through this analysis, this study questions some prevalent assumptions about the right-left wing distinction in Turkish political thought concerning the ideological position of the MTTB. To this end, it analyzes several key political concepts, namely revolution, order, conquest, and civilization, in the magazines published by the union between 1965 and 1980. The study reveals how the MTTB's ideological position against the state, political order and national identity had undergone change over the years. It also discusses the influence of the intellectual context of time on the changing ideological configuration of the union. The analysis demonstrates that in the context of the Cold War, post-colonial visions of Islamist trends, mainstream conservative nationalist political thought in Turkey

and the principles of Naksibendi order had shaped the ideological configuration and strategy of the MTTB in a way that it acquired a distinct Islamic identity with a strong emphasis of the Ottoman past as a righteous model of political order and civilization.

Keywords: Islam, Order, Revolution, Turkey, Turkish National Student Union.



ÖZET

MİLLİ TÜRK TALEBE BİRLİĞİ’NİN (MTTB) ENTELEKTÜEL TEMELLERİ, 1965-1980

Yazıcı, İsmail

Yüksek Lisans, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Alev Çınar

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Bu çalışma Türkiye’de bir dönem İslami gençlik hareketinin önemli bir temsilcisi olan Milli Türk Talebe Birliği’nin (MTTB) siyasi ideolojisinin entelektüel temellerini birliğin yayınlarını analiz ederek incelemektedir. Bu tezde, siyasal kavramların analizi ile MTTB’nin ideolojik yöneliminin Türk siyasal düşüncesinde, özellikle sağ-sol siyaseti çerçevesinde, konumlandığı yerin belirlenmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, bu çalışmada 1965-1980 yılları arasındaki MTTB yayınlarında sıklıkla kullanılan inkılap, nizam, fetih ve medeniyet kavramlarının analizi yapılmıştır. Böylece birliğin devlet, siyasal düzen ve milli kimlik konularına yaklaşımındaki değişimler değerlendirilmiştir. Bu çalışma, ayrıca bahsedilen dönemdeki entelektüel tartışmaların MTTB üzerindeki etkilerini de araştırmaktadır. Bu tezdeki kavramsal analiz MTTB’nin devam eden Soğuk Savaş bağlamında, Türkiye dışındaki İslamcı düşünürlerin sömürgecilik dönemi sonrası fikirleri, Türkiye’deki ana akım muhafazakâr milliyetçi düşünce geleneği ve

geleneksel tarikat öğretilerinden etkilendiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Böylece, birlik Osmanlı tarihini ideal bir siyasal düzen ve medeniyet örneği olarak tanımlayan kendine has bir İslami kimlik inşa etmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnkılap, İslam, Milli Türk Talebe Birliği, Nizam, Türkiye.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP: Justice and Development Party

AP: Justice Party

CHP: Republican People's Party

CMKP: Republican Peasant Nation Party

DP: Democrat Party

IIFSO: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations

İTC: Committee of Union and Progress

MHP: Nationalist Action Party

MNP: National Order Party

MSP: National Salvation Party

MTTB: Turkish National Student Union

TİP: Labor Party of Turkey

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I examine the intellectual foundations of the ideology of the Turkish National Student Union (MTTB) by analyzing the publications of this organization, once a paragon of Islamic youth activism in Turkey. It aims to scrutinize the place of the ideological orientation of the MTTB in the broader ideological spectrum of Turkish political thought. Through this analysis, this study questions some prevalent assumptions about the right-left wing distinction in Turkish political thought concerning the ideological position of the MTTB.

The Turkish National Student Union is one of the most influential youth movements in Republican history in terms of its success to reproduce and disseminate nationalist, Islamist and conservative ideas. It was established in 1916 as a pan-Turkist student union, which advances ethnic, cultural, and ideal unity among Turks (Uzer, 2016). It developed close ties with the Kemalist government during the single-party era and added the wolf to its emblem in 1933. The organization had embodied the pro-Kemalist position until 1965 (Okutan, 2004). By the late 1960s, the MTTB had become the hub of nationalist and Islamic student circles, while many prominent conservative/nationalist thinkers and politicians of the Turkish right had built close contacts with the MTTB. The union served as an alternative academia and platform

of political socialization for many leading conservative and nationalist figures in Turkish politics, including the last two presidents of Turkey and many current high-ranking politicians of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). In that period, the union had also witnessed a gradual ideological transformation from its secular, pro-Kemalist stance. Yet, the MTTB cannot be easily fitted into a wide spectrum of right-left separation in Turkish politics, since it has demonstrated an eclectic ideological orientation. It is for this reason that the study of the MTTB carries merit to illuminate the ideological boundaries between different factions of the Turkish right and intellectual origins of the AKP. In that sense, it is worth pursuing the underlying philosophical and ideological ground of the union. This study aims to scrutinize the MTTB's ideological stance against the revolution, state mechanism and society by situating its political ideology in a broader context of the Islamic/conservative thought in Turkey during the late 1960s and 1970s.

The intellectual origins of modern Turkish political thought include a vast array of philosophical sources for both the Turkish right and left traditions. For Kemalism, there is an extensive literature in Turkish politics studies drawing parallels between the Committee of Union and Progress Party (İTC) *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* and the Kemalist movement's Republican People's Party (CHP) in terms of their ideological orientations, organizational characteristics and social background (Zurcher 1992; see also Küçükömer, 2007; Mardin, 1973 & Özbudun, 1995)¹. In particular, Erik Jan Zurcher (2009) reiterates that the Republican People Party's main ideological formulations about secularism and Turkish nationalism were strongly influenced and shaped by the prominent Young Turk's ideas. Although the MTTB had no military

¹ Mardin's (1973) article points out a continuity between them by locating Young Turk tradition and the Republican People's Party at the center of the political scene in Turkish politics by attributing the elitist and Western-minded characteristics.

characteristics, differentiated from the İTC, a similar inquiry of the ideological lineage could be applied to the Turkish right. In this milieu, it would be beneficial to seek such continuities and parallels between the MTTB and the religiously oriented right-wing parties, especially the AKP, in which the cadres associated with the MTTB tradition has exerted considerable influence on it. Although the MTTB was closed down after the 1980 military takeover, it needed to be scrutinized to what extent this organization had inspired future Turkish politics and conservative/Islamic political thought in Turkey. In 1969, Ahmet Kabaklı, a leading conservative nationalist intellectual, hailed the MTTB as the “hatchery of the political parties” by underlying its extensive contacts with the cadres of the right-wing parties, namely Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and National Salvation Party (MSP), at that time (Bora, 2018). Hasan Celal Güzel, a prominent right-wing politician and intellectual, puts forward that “The MTTB became a source for us to recruit fellow patriots. If it had not existed, we would neither reach politics, nor be involved in bureaucracy, cultural life, and scientific activities” (Çalmuk, 2018: 269). It is also noteworthy that the MTTB had been the battlefield for the nationalist and conservative/Islamic fronts during the mid-1970s while the latter emerged victorious. Tellingly, during the 1970s, the MTTB had been emblematic of a new sort of Islamic youth activism, which avoided violence and promoted the reappraisal of the Turkish nationalism without the racist/ethnic references. They have represented a novel strand of political thought that inspires the future Turkish politics since their ideological makeup opens a new path or a “third way” in Turkish politics, which locates itself beyond the central-right tradition. This set the MTTB apart from other preeminent right-wing institutions of the time, including the Association for Fighting Communism in

Turkey (*Türkiye Komünizmle Mücadele Derneği*) and Intellectuals' Heart (*Aydınlar Ocağı*).

This study puts forward that the MTTB's intellectual background between 1965 and 1980 was heavily inspired by global Islamist thinkers, mainstream conservative-nationalist political thought in Turkey and the teachings of religious brotherhoods. The tension between these strands of thought determined the ideological leaning of the union. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of these intellectual sources gave the MTTB a unique outlook in the Turkish political context. Although it bears the hallmarks of a far-right organization, the MTTB differs in some aspects from that ideological line. During the 1970s, as the Islamic identity of the union became crystallized, it started to question the legitimacy of the state inspired by the revolutionary ideas of the time. On the other side, the growing impact of the Naksibendi order kept the MTTB away from street activism and formed a strong proselytizing zeal, which was a peaceful and bottom-down strategy for the Islamization of society.

1.1 Studying Political Concepts

The concepts are the essential component in the process of idea generation. As Reinhart Koselleck (2004: 57) suggests, "In politics, words and their usage are more important than any other weapon". Political ideologies are also interested in constructing and interpreting the meaning of the concepts. An analysis of political thought inevitably paves the way for concentrating on specific concepts that played a central role in the creation of ideas. The concept of revolution in that regard is one of the key concepts in which conservative political thought has debated its meaning and nature. While conservatism as an ideology defines itself against the idea of

revolution, it does not principally oppose the gradual transformation which genuinely respects the well-established values of the society (Özipek, 2006). The term of revolution, *inkılap* or *devrim* in Turkish, had been widely used in the writings of the MTTB in that period, including different versions with similar and related concepts, namely the conquest, *fetih*, and order, *nizam*. They have utilized a wide-range of political concepts that are not merely associated with the right-wing political tradition in Turkey or conservative thought that make their ideological status ambiguous in terms of the right-left distinction. In that sense, the study of the use of the left-orientated concepts gained prominence. The conceptual analysis of all these terms in the context of the 1970s is crucial to understand the ideological orientation of MTTB and the changes in their understanding of the interpretation of Islamic order, state, democracy and revolution. In that context, this research aims to analyze the place of the essential political concepts in the political thought of MTTB during the period 1965 to 1980.

1.2 The Studies on the MTTB

In the literature, Çağatay Okutan's *Bozkurt'tan Kur'an'a Milli Türk Talebe Birliği* (2004) studied the organization's history since its foundation in 1916 with special regard to its ideological outlook; however, the analysis of the period 1965-1980 remained limited as it gives a short evaluation of their ideological transformation compared to its previous terms. Akyel (2010) investigates the life stories of the old MTTB members and their current position in the society with an introductory remark about the timeline of the union. Öztürk (2016) scrutinizes the influence of anti-communism and changing understanding regarding Turkish nationalism between 1965 and 1971. Zülküf Oruç's book (2005) primarily investigates the organizational

structure of the MTTB as a student movement and its changing position against the Turkish nationalism. Duman and Yorgancılar (2008) have studied the ideological transition of MTTB from conservative nationalism to Islamism, which took place between 1965 and 1980. The works of Oruç (2005), Duman and Yorgancılar (2008) illustrate the boundaries between the Turkish nationalists and Islamists during that period and point out the basic tenets of the new ideological outlook of the union. On the other hand, the Islamic identity of the MTTB during the 1970s also needs further analysis to figure out its intellectual foundations. It should also be noted that the “Islamism” of the union, advocated by previous works, does not demonstrate a homogenous outlook. The analysis of the MTTB’s conceptual world would enrich our perception about the hybrid aspect of the union’s ideology. Hence, this study will focus on the intellectual components of the MTTB’s Islamic identity by giving particular regard to the dominant intellectual debates of the 1970s and related political concepts as the union’s ideological trajectory was a product of a distinctive historical and intellectual context, particularly the Cold War period.

Indeed, the literature regarding the trajectory of Turkish political thought in relation to the Cold War received less scholarly attention. Among the leading studies in that area, Cangül Örnek’s (2015) study investigates the influence of U.S and anti-communism on the Turkish political thought by examining the writings of intellectuals of the time, leading magazines and the trajectory of social science programs in Turkish universities. It should not be neglected that the post-World War II period gave way to the imperative transformations in Islamic political thought with the international politics of the Cold War and decolonization struggles (Aydın & Duran, 2015), particularly in the Middle East and Indian Subcontinent. Thus, the analysis of political thought with regard to the socio-political context of the time

allows us to perceive the eclectic side of the political thought without treating them as sui generis or isolated.

1.3 Methodology

The tradition of Conceptual History (*Begriffsgeschichte* in German) is a method for the study of history, which probes the epochal transformations of political and social concepts within a particular period. It treats concepts as a better unit of analysis and concentrates on the meaning linked with the concepts. This school has criticized traditional ways of approaching the history of ideas that focus on the texts of the “great thinkers” without concerning the socio-political context of the time. Hence, the school of conceptual history does not render understanding the literal meaning of the concepts as adequate. It is interested in the changes and transformations within the conceptualizations, while this method inherently accepts many-layered meanings in the actual usage of concepts (Steinmetz & Freeden, 2017). Expectedly, *Begriffsgeschichte* is not satisfied with interpreting the earliest usage of political concepts in classical texts. Instead, it takes a step further and scrutinizes the alterations and parallels in the meaning of these concepts caused by the interactions with different societies, philosophical traditions, and ideologies. It is, therefore, the task of conceptual history to “recycle past conceptualizations” in order to interpret the “historical uniqueness of speech acts” with the record of how the use of the concepts was changed, maintained, or transformed in related periods (Koselleck, 1996). In essence, the school of conceptual history has examined the theories, ideologies, and mentalities concerning concepts while scrutinizing the concepts in their related social and historical context, on their own terms (Koselleck, 2002; Richter, 1995; Sariyannis, 2018). This school has searched for not only the texts of

great thinkers but also newspapers, popular pamphlets, literary works, journal diaries, and dictionaries in order to trace the socio-linguistic analysis (Koselleck, 2011; Östling, 2016). It provides a ground for the study of the works produced by different authors with regard to the use of specific concepts.

The genesis of conceptual history dates back to the 1930s, albeit its intellectual roots could be found on older German traditions of philosophy and history, when a number of German scholars, including Erich Rothacker and Otto Brunner, worked for integrating social history with the history of concepts approach while it became institutionalized in 1955 with the foundation of the journal *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* which expanded into two monumental projects in 1971 and 1972, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* and *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Vogelsang, 2012). The latter, “Dictionary on Historical Principles of Political and Social Language in Germany” in English title, scrutinizes the trajectory of political and social concepts in German-speaking Europe with specific attention to the *Sattelzeit* period, between 1750 and 1850, which means the “saddle period”, where basic concepts underwent rapid transformations. It includes 120 concepts covered in 7000 pages in eight volumes. It has gone beyond being a mere lexicon of the concepts as it presents the past uses of political and social concepts, characterizes the temporal margins of the relevant context behind language use, and illuminates the relation between political and social language that we employ in present time (Richter, 1997). Thus, it endeavors to relate the conceptual change to political and social changes in a systematic way with particular emphasis on a certain historical period. Accordingly, a central concern for conceptual history is to employ a diachronic analysis of each concept, which means that concepts are freed from their

original context, their layered meanings are investigated through successive periods, and the relationships of these meanings are assigned respectively (Koselleck, 2011).

The school of Conceptual History has been reevaluated by some English scholars known as the Anglo-American school or the Cambridge School. This school of intellectual history, chiefly represented by the historians in the University of Cambridge, including J.G.A Pocock, Quentin Skinner, John Dunn, and James Tully, has presented a similar methodological inquiry for the analysis of past political thoughts. This school mainly proposed that texts needed to be treated as a product of the distinctive historical context while it has placed special emphasis on interpreting the author's intentions (Whatmore, 2015), in Skinner's (2002: 82) words "not only what people are saying but also what they are doing in saying it". It has challenged the widespread assumption of the proponents of the history of ideas that the text itself should be regarded as a "self-sufficient object of inquiry and understanding" by describing it as an inadequate methodology for the study of ideas (Skinner, 1969).

This school had also criticized the Marxist approach to the study of ideas on the grounds that it primarily trivializes the role of the agent by overstating the impact of socio-economic analysis, which treats texts as a true reflection of the material context. Accordingly, the identification of the meaning of the past ideas requires reconstructing the mental world of past authors, concerning the linguistic paradigms of the time and taking into consideration of the conventions governed their utterances, which prevent the history of ideas becoming "a pack of tricks we play on the dead" (James, 2018; Skinner 1969).

There are some points in these strands of conceptual history that set them apart. As noted above, Anglo-American School underlines the priority of synchronic analysis of texts with regard to competing discourses belonging to the same period while

German School prefers a diachronic study of the attached meanings of concepts for analyzing the interrelations of social and political change. Yet, both appreciated the importance of studying concepts concerning their intellectual and historical backgrounds. There is also agreement on the notion that concepts, whether they are analyzed in short-term or long-term processes, have an ambivalent nature as they are invariably debated and interpreted in various ways. In that regard, these two strands cannot be rendered as competing; rather, they needed to be treated as complementary, which opens up a broader horizon for analysis of conceptual change (Richter, 1997).

For Turkish context, Şerif Mardin (2008) points out the benefits of establishing a modern Turkish *Begriffsgeschichte* for the study of Turkish political thought by emphasizing the importance of tracing political concepts in Ottoman-Turkish polity and revealing the multiple layers of meanings in them, generally caused by the transition from an empire to a secular nation-state. In light of this perspective, tracing the conceptual change of essential political concepts with regard to semantic transformation and socio-political change would help us to understand the real content of the political concepts. In Turkish political thought, semantic change also gained unique prominence, particularly since the Turkish Language had undergone radical alterations during the late 19th and 20th centuries. With the rise of political, social, and intellectual contact with European countries in the late Ottoman period, a large number of key concepts were translated from Western political texts and utilized in Ottoman political thought (Topal & Wigen, 2019). Nevertheless, the most radical rupture was the adoption of the Latin alphabet in place of Arabic script in 1928, and the Republican state's wholehearted efforts to remove Arabic and Persian origin words and invent new Turkified versions of them. Therefore, it seems that the

concepts and their associated meanings did not follow a synchronized pace in their historical transformations. Interestingly, this also turned a battle for the preference of particular vocabularies between the conservative groups opposing the radical change of language and the ones who are the proponents of that Language Reform. That requires paying close attention to the conceptual analysis of essential political concepts through a historical perspective.

As previously indicated, there is a group of political concepts that forms a basis for the philosophical background of Turkish conservative thought. This study aims to analyze the use of such concepts, namely, revolution, order, conquest, and civilization, in accordance with the methodological approach put forward by conceptual history. From 1950s onwards, journals and magazines had become a significant ground for conservative/Islamist political thought. Many public intellectuals of this front had written in journals and magazines. Thus, the central axis of emerging conservative/Islamic political thought lies in the writings in these magazines rather than canonical works (Çınar, 2019: 189). The study of concepts in Turkish conservative/Islamic thought provides considerable insights into the continuity and ruptures in Turkish political vocabulary and its positioning against the state, society, democracy, secularism, religion, and nationalism. Under the framework of conceptual history, this thesis follows a diachronic analysis of these concepts while they are also examined by a synchronic analysis for the period we discussed with regard to competing discourses, counter-narratives, and polemics. Furthermore, this framework directs us to concentrate on the study of how concepts change, whether it was caused by merely linguistic dynamics or political and social transformations, or from a combination of both (Koselleck, 2011: 35).

The concept of revolution has been at the center of modern political thought for centuries with its myriad of connotations. Although ancient political thinking elaborated on the essential components of the concept of revolution, it gained its popularity as a significant instrument of political understanding after the French Revolution (Dunn, 1989) in which the term revolution also has been loaded with an ambivalent and ubiquitous semantic potential (Koselleck, 2004). The ambivalent status of this concept could also be seen in the Turkish language. Since the late 19th century, the revolution (*inkılap* or *ihtilal*) and order (*nizam*) have remained at the center of political debates in Ottoman polity. In the Republican era, the transition to a secular, Western-oriented country was regarded as the Turkish Revolution, while a new “Turkified” word, *devrim*, was coined for the meaning of the revolution. Furthermore, there is probably no other word in Ottoman political vocabulary as significant as the concept of conquest (*fetih* in Turkish). It became the driving ideology behind the Ottoman’s territorial expansion strategy with frequent reference to Islamic terminology and the notion of *nizam-ı alem* (world order). Indeed, this concept was ignored by the early Republican government due to its religious tone; however, it always preserves its liveliness in the memory of conservative thought in Turkey either as an element of nostalgia or the premise of a political strategy. Here, each concept interrelates with others in some aspects. In general, the revolution is not a favorite term for Turkish right-wing politics, while conquest and order also have ambiguous connotations utilized in different contexts. Thus, there is a need to examine etymology and the use of these concepts from a historical perspective. This study seeks to analyze how these concepts are debated and conceptualized in the writings of the MTTB. This analysis opens ground for discussing the ideological position of the MTTB with respect to conservative/Islamic thought in Turkey.

In that regard, for the study of the political thought of MTTB, conceptual history framework would be productive. The abovementioned political concepts demonstrate a dynamic character in their context. Tracing the use of these concepts in Islamic/conservative political thought helps us to identify the layered meanings of them, with particular emphasis on the socio-political context where they were produced.

The data collection part of this research mainly focuses on the articles of *Milli Gençlik* and *Çatı* magazines between 1965 and 1980 while the other publications of MTTB such as the books, annual reports, and bulletins are included, respectively. *Milli Gençlik* was the official monthly periodical of the union, which was called “opinion, art and action magazine”, published between 1963 and 1979. It consists of the editorial written on behalf of the MTTB, which mostly evaluates the current political situation and asserts the union’s position, and articles written by the leading intellectuals of the time, the administrators of the MTTB and voluntary authors who sent their works to the magazine. *Çatı* magazine was the other official periodical of the union published as the semi-monthly newspaper between 1975 and 1978. The target audience of it was the high school students. Although this magazine dominantly appeals to younger students, the pronouncements of the MTTB were mostly published there. The administrators of the union also penned articles on different subjects for informing the youth. These two magazines became the main medium for the MTTB to spread its messages to the public and indoctrinate the youth in their ideology.

The period between 1965 and 1980 represents the process of ideological transformation for the union. This era was characterized by the MTTB’s rising organizational capability and political influence as the representative of Islamic

youth in Turkey. Its ideological turn provides rich material for understanding the intellectual climate of the time with regard to the influence of Islamic political thought. In particular, MTTB's ideological orientation in that era could also shed light on Justice and Development Party (AKP)'s intellectual origins since MTTB had very close ties with its cadres and Islamist, nationalist circles influenced the AKP.

In this thesis, I will benefit from the approach of conceptual history as a methodological framework for the analysis of the MTTB's political thought. The study of the journals, newspapers, and periodicals in terms of the socio-linguistic use of political concepts, although perpetuated by different authors, could be conducted in a systematic way in that framework. For that purpose, in that study, I will analyze the concepts of revolution, conquest, order, and civilization in the MTTB publications. These concepts are highly emblematic of examining the ideological position of the MTTB. Along with the frequent use and reference to these terms, they are also crucial concepts for understanding the MTTB's approach to state, Islamic order and democracy. Under the framework of conceptual history, I will follow a diachronic study of these concepts while tracing the changes and parallels in the interpretations of them while benefiting from the synchronic analysis for revealing the competing discourses on these concepts. That requires concentrating on the etymology of these terms and their different usages according to their socio-political context. In that sense, it is necessary to remove concepts from their current meaning and examine the historical trajectory of the attributed meanings to these concepts, and then, the relationship among these assigned meanings has to be revealed (Koselleck, 2011: 17-18).

As both school of conceptual history, Begriffsgeschichte and Cambridge School, come to agree upon the points that political concepts should be treated as contingent

in their use and controversial in their content, thereby interpreted and debated in different ways that necessitate giving special regard to their specific intellectual and historical backgrounds (Wiesner, 2019: 50-51). It is no doubt that a comprehensive analysis of the abovementioned concepts through a historical approach is beyond the objectives of this thesis. Be that as it may, the contribution of the conceptual history approach to this study is twofold. First, analyzing political thought through concepts allows us to analyze the vast array of publications produced by different authors. In addition to that, devoting close attention to socio-political context accompanying the trajectory of the constructed meaning of the political vocabulary opens ground for figuring out the contingent nature of the ideological configurations that are prone to be shaped by socio-political factors.

In the following chapters, for each concept, I will trace back their meaning to past uses of these concepts, then follow the conceptual change with regard to the socio-political context of the time. For that purpose, dictionaries and some leading political texts needed to be covered for examining semantic change. Since our objective is to follow the MTTB's political vocabulary, I will not employ an extensive study on the semantic transformation of them. Instead, I will present a concise explanation of the attributed meanings to these concepts in different historical periods. In what follows, their usage in the MTTB writings will be analyzed while other sources belonging to that period (1965-1980) will be included to reveal competing discourses on these political concepts, if needed. In the following chapters, thus, I will present the related historical and intellectual background of the time while analyzing the interpreted meanings of the political concepts as the approach of conceptual history suggests.

CHAPTER II

INQUIRING INTO THE IDEOLOGY OF THE MTTB

This chapter firstly examines the MTTB's timeline, organization, goals and objectives. Then I will introduce the historical and intellectual background of the period between 1965 and 1980. The MTTB had experienced the domination of different ideologies during that period; thus, this chapter also introduces the basic tenets of the right-left distinction in Turkish politics. It would allow us to evaluate the ideological makeup of the union in terms of that framework.

2.1 The Timeline of the MTTB

In 1916, a group of nationalist students from *Darülfünun* (The House of Sciences), a higher education institute in the Ottoman Empire, founded a student union entitled *Milli Türk Talebe Birliği* (Turkish National Student Union) in order to revive the patriotic sentiments of Turkish people during the World War I era (MTTB, 1975). Due to the hardships of WWI and Turkey's War of Liberation, it had not functioned effectively until 1924. Several separate student unions were united under the name of the Turkish National Student Union in 1924 and represented the newly founded government at an international student conference in Warsaw (Batır, 2017). In 1929, Tevfik İleri became the president of the union and the MTTB began to play a more

active role. Until 1936, the union had followed a pro-Kemalist stance and presented itself as the staunch defenders of Atatürk's revolutions with a strong nationalist and anti-communist tone (Okutan, 2004). They began publishing a weekly newspaper that became widely circulated like the most popular newspapers of the time, according to the annual report² of the union (MTTB, 1973). They harshly criticized the Kadro journal³ for not strictly following Atatürk's revolutionary principles while reiterating that the Turkish youth are capable of understanding the meaning of Atatürk's principles without any guidance (Okutan, 2004). In 1933, the Razgrad Turkish cemetery in Bulgaria was vandalized by the members of *Rodna Zastita*, (the Defense of the Fatherland), a Bulgarian paramilitary organization (Sözer, 2014). This had sparked tremendous anger among the MTTB students, who then wanted to organize a protest meeting for the condemnation of the event, but their demands had been disallowed by the officials (Okutan, 2004). Notwithstanding, they decided to hold a protest meeting before the Bulgarian Consulate in İstanbul and Tevfik İleri delivered a speech that condemned the Bulgarians. The government did not tolerate them and 80 students were taken into custody, 23 of which were arrested. The organization was on the brink of collapse due to the government's repressive measures. However, over the next few months, the government softened its attitude and the students were released by general amnesty on 15 November 1933 (Okutan, 2004). Although the MTTB had perpetuated its admiration for the Kemalist ideals after that event, it became the last straw when they had staged a massive rally in 1936 for protesting the mandatory status of Hatay, a southern Turkish city ruled

² The report does not provide the exact number of circulation. According to American National Archives, in 1931, Cumhuriyet was the most popular newspaper of the time with a circulation of 14.375. Akşam newspaper sold 12.900 copies in a day, Son Posta, Vakit and Milliyet had a circulation of about 6000-9000 per day (Bali, 2002).

³ It was a monthly journal published between 1932 and 1934. It aimed to advance a novel ideologic formulation for the Kemalist revolution. Although the authors of the journal were loyal to Kemalism, the journal was forced to cease its publication due to its socialist/Marxist orientation (Türkeş, 2001).

under French mandatory until 1938, without official permission. This incident brought about the closure of the organization by the Republican government.

The MTTB was re-established in 1946 by a group of university students. Çağatay Okutan (2004) argues that the organization had demonstrated an ambiguous and indeterminate stance against the Turkish nationalism in that period when various interpretations of the nationalism, including pan-Turkist, racist and conservative-religious, were formulated by intellectuals and nationalist organizations founded in that period. Yet, the union retained its admiration to Atatürk as the founder of the Republic, and anti-communist rhetoric while perpetuating its nationalist sentiments in the Cyprus question. Until the mid-1960s, the MTTB maintained a low profile compared to the previous term.

Following years of the 1960 military takeover, the dominant group in the MTTB was the defenders of Kemalist nationalism distanced itself from the Marxist traditions. Their political stance was not so different from the ideology of the Republican People's Party (CHP) (Okutan, 2004). On the other hand, a group of conservative nationalist students began to organize in universities and prepare for the elections to get the representative positions in the student associations of numerous faculties in İstanbul. Rasim Cinisli (2017), the president of the MTTB between 1965 and 1967, relates in his memoirs that the students affiliated to the Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*), a non-governmental nationalist organization, had also organized in Ankara to gain seats in the student associations of the universities. The organizational structure of the MTTB looked like a federation. The MTTB was the central body and student associations in the universities were joining the MTTB to become a member of the union. Cinisli (2017) stated that as early as 1962, the conservative nationalist group reached a number to gain the majority in the elections

thanks to their efforts to organize like-minded university students in Ankara, İstanbul and İzmir. 1965 became a cornerstone in the history of the MTTB. Yüksel Çengel, the head of the union at that time, allowed the Labor Party of Turkey (TİP), the first socialist party in the country, to use the MTTB conference hall for their congress. Despite the Kemalist orientation of the MTTB until that point, they had never been sympathetic to socialist/Marxist traditions; thus, it led to the escalation of a severe crisis in the union. Many students protested this decision and the vice president of the MTTB with a group of high-ranking administrators, who were the head of the sub-branches, demanded the resignation of Yüksel Çengel (MTTB, 1975). This event harmed the respected position of Yüksel Çengel and his followers. Two months later, he lost the presidential elections to Rasim Cinisli, who led a conservative-nationalist group of students.

From 1965 to 1980, the MTTB had evolved into a conservative/Islamic club demonstrating strong nationalist tendencies and established itself as the chief representative of Islamic youth activism in Turkey. Following the 1965 elections, the union began to define itself as “nationalist and respectful to religion” (MTTB, 1971). Until the 1970s, the Turkish political context had been dominated by a two-party system represented by the center-right Justice Party (AP) and Kemalist Republican People’s (CHP) Party. The AP had enjoyed becoming the home for the right-wing electorate as a true heir of the Democrat Party (DP) of the 1950s. Although some Turkish nationalists had organized in the Republican Peasant Nation Party (CKMP), they could not gain serious attention until its transformation into the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) in 1969. In that political context, the MTTB demonstrated a conservative-nationalist characteristic. It had great respect for Islam as a *mukaddes*, which is holy and sacred, without any political use of religion. On the other hand,

Turkish nationalism was praised as an identity by glorifying the Turkish ethnicity and its history, including the pre-Islamic era, while maintaining its strong anti-communist undercurrent. In the 1967 and 1969 elections for the presidency, the candidates supported by the Alparslan Türkeş's CMKP and its youth branch lost the elections against Islamist-oriented figures, İsmail Kahraman and Burhanettin Kayhan; thus, they end their relations with the union. The presidency of İsmail Kahraman between 1967 and 1969 marks the significant implications of the ideological turn of the MTTB. In March 1968, a female university student, Hatice Babacan, was expelled from the Ankara University School of Divinity due to her rejection of removing her headscarf in the university. The MTTB wholeheartedly supported Babacan's rights and held a press conference to criticize the School's decision. A committee of the MTTB, including the President and Vice President, came to Ankara to protest the Faculty Administration. The union was also involved in the boycott and hunger strikes of the students demanding the return of Babacan to the school, which turned into a two-month battle between the School of Divinity and the students (Çalmuk, 2018). Notwithstanding the MTTB's vigorous efforts, the then ruling AP showed indifference to the headscarf issue while the then Prime Minister Demirel said in the parliament "Do you think I support the boycott in the Faculty of Divinity? Which problem of Turkey could the headscarf solve in the 20th century?" (Bianet, 2008). This situation signifies the rising gap between the Islamic demands of the masses and the agenda of the center-right. The AP invested in the rhetoric of economic development while refraining from the connotations of identity politics as soon as possible. During the 1970s, the Islamic identity of the MTTB had become more distinctive while it began challenging the political discourse of right-wing

parties, Turkish nationalism, secularism, and Kemalist tradition. In the aftermath of the 1980 Turkish coup d'état, the union was closed down.

2.2 The MTTB: Organization, Goals, and Objectives

The MTTB had a lengthy history of youth activism that dates back to the last years of the Ottoman Empire. Until the 1960s, it had been enthusiastically supported by the governments. That helped the organization to professionalize in its organizational capability and network building. For the conservative/Islamic era of the MTTB, between 1965 and 1980, some pivotal aspects needed to be emphasized to comprehend the position of the organization in Turkish politics.

First, the MTTB was able to reach almost every corner of Turkey with its country-wide branches in the cities and districts. In 1975, it had 150 sub-branches in the country (MTTB, 1976) which means that it had organized in almost every city center of Turkey, with several exceptions in the eastern part of Turkey, and about 100 districts. This number reached 220 in 1979, according to the official documents (MTTB, 1979). It shows that the MTTB had found a nation-wide audience in Turkey.

Second, the MTTB was seen as a safe place for the university students, who came from rural areas to the metropolitans, so as to socialize in a conservative nationalist platform. The conservative-nationalist outlook of the organization made it attractive for the young people in Anatolian cities, who search for an ideological front. It is a significant sociological fact that the children of nationalist-conservative families in Anatolia felt a sense of alienation⁴ and cultural shock⁵ when they came to study in

⁴ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's verses in his much celebrated poem of *Sakarya Türküsü* "You are a stranger in your own homeland, a pariah in your own fatherland!", which becomes an oft-quoted slogan for Islamic masses, exemplifies this feeling.

metropolitan cities because of the secular, Westernized environment they experienced in academia and public life (Aytürk, 2014). Muslim intellectuals of the Republican era shared the same experience when their Kemalist-oriented educational background confronts the traditional values of the mass and teachings of religious brotherhoods, where they find inspirations for their intellectual works. In that sense, MTTB had offered an alternative ground for political socialization of that generation. The seminars, meetings, reading clubs and other events organized by the MTTB successfully fulfilled that purpose for many young people and gave them a chance to build networks of social mobility.

Third, an analysis of the MTTB's publications shows that the MTTB deliberately prioritizes the indoctrination of the young generation along the lines of Islamic principles as its primary mission, which became more pronounced during the mid-1970s. The ideological training of the MTTB had brought about the formation of a novel Islamic subject, which cannot be easily located in the right-left sphere in the political environment of the 1970s. This strategic preference and the avoidance from the violence⁶ and street clashes, which was very common among the student groups in the 1970s, led to the growing up a "MTTB generation". Here, one needs to note that the extensive network of the MTTB it builds with conservative nationalist intellectuals, politicians, and public figures provides a ground for it to position itself as an alternative university. In 1971, the union had announced the foundation of the Institute of Social Sciences, which aimed to direct youth's interest in social sciences and to grow up intellectuals with national values (MTTB, 1973). Many prominent

⁵ Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti's famous book, *Bir Nesli Nasıl Mahvettiler* (How They Destroy a Generation), written in a provoking style, is an excellent example for tracing the sense of cultural shock conservative-nationalist youth experience in the cities.

⁶ The MTTB's avoidance from violence and street activism became a common strategy for the union during the 1970s. During the late 1960s, the union was politically active on the streets as a significant agent of "anti-communist fight" against the leftist student groups.

academics such as Nevzat Yalçıntaş, Sabahattin Zaim, Ahmet Kabaklı, Cemil Meriç, Ayhan Songar, Osman Turan and Erol Güngör gave courses to the registered students through a semester. The institute offered various kinds of courses, including History, Economy, Social Psychology, Religion and Ethics, Law, Turkish Civilization, and Sociology⁷. The attempt of the MTTB could be evaluated as an effort to challenge the Turkish Left's domination in the intellectual field. For instance, Yusuf Kaplan, a prominent Islamist intellectual who was involved in the MTTB's organizations during the 1970s, describes his experience by stating that "the Anatolia's children find what they lose in the public schools in the MTTB" (Çalmuk, 2018: 307). In particular, Necip Fazıl's seminars and conferences in different cities had a wide appeal among the young generation launched in large conference halls before vast crowds. He was welcomed like a popstar with enthusiastic cheers and applause and delivered passionate speeches about the "glorious" Ottoman past, the revival of the Islamic society, socialism, communism, and critiques of Westernization. His speeches later were being converted into several books formed a substantial bulk of Kısakürek's book collections, including *Sahte Kahramanlar* (False Heroes), *Batı Tefekkürü ve İslam Tasavvufu* (Western Thinking and Islamic Mysticism) and *Dünya Bir İnkılap Bekliyor* (The World Waits for a Revolution). In 1975, the MTTB organized a National Youth Night and Necip Fazıl gave a speech entitled *Gençliğe Hitabe* (Address to the Youth), which is an alternative to Atatürk's famous address to the Turkish youth, to the MTTB members. It demonstrates that Necip Fazıl had considered the MTTB cadres as a model for his idealized youth generation. Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, the MTTB has organized thousands of seminars with the attendance of about one-hundred prominent

⁷ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was among the graduates of 1974-1975 semester of the Institute (MTTB, 1975).

intellectuals and authors on the topics of Islamic teaching, Ottoman History, Islamic Economics and Islamic civilization. Furthermore, although the MTTB aimed to locate itself above the party struggles, the right-wing parties of the time, especially MSP (*National Salvation Party*) and AP (*Justice Party*), tried to keep contact with the grassroots and leaders of the organization. In 1975, the MTTB hosted the 3rd Annual Meeting of International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations (IIFSO), the most prestigious international platform for Muslim youth movements at that time, with the participation of representatives from 25 countries. In that period, the union began to define itself as the “voice of the Islamic youth”. These examples clearly illustrate the respected status of the MTTB.

Fourth, the MTTB had been the initiator of some traditions that are still important for today’s Islamist and nationalist segments. In 1965, it organized a huge meeting for the celebration of the Ottoman conquest of İstanbul with the participation of large crowds and prominent public intellectuals (MTTB, 1966). That was the first serious effort for the celebration of the conquest in Republican history after the celebrations in 1953 for the 500th anniversary of the conquest (Alkan, 2016). Since 1965, the MTTB had marked Conquest Day each year with the participation of massive rallies. Parallel to these celebrations, they began to call for the government to convert Hagia Sophia back into a mosque as it is regarded as the most excellent sign of the defeat against the Western/Christian world by the conquest of Constantinople of Byzantine Empire. The MTTB had also commemorated the death anniversary of Sultan Abdulhamid II, who was regarded as the representative of Ottoman glory, albeit the condemnations of the official historical narratives. These practices were influential for the formation of a novel formulation of Islamic identity. A similar approach to the Ottoman past and Turkish nationalism has been embraced by future political

parties, including the Welfare Party and Justice and Development Party with great enthusiasm, which brought about the crystallization of a distinctive neo-Ottoman outlook in Turkish politics.

Lastly, the MTTB members occupy significant positions in post-1980 Turkish politics. The AKP's founding troika Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç were among the executive team of the union and they always praise the importance of the MTTB for their political career (Özgür, 2012; MacLean, 2014).

Erdoğan was the head of the Directorate of Culture, Gül was the member of the executive council and leader of the İstanbul University Faculty of Economic Student Association, a sub-branch of the MTTB, Arınç was the representative of the Ankara University Law Faculty. İsmail Kahraman, Beşir Atalay, Mehmet Ali Şahin, Sami Güçlü, Numan Kurtulmuş, Cemil Çiçek, and Ömer Dinçer were some leading political figures experienced political socialization under the roof of the MTTB.

In 2006, a group of university students in different universities came together to re-establish the MTTB. With the support of the previous MTTB presidents of the union and the AKP members, it was officially founded under the name "The Federation of Student Union" in 2008. Then, it was renamed as Turkish National Student Union following the permission of the Council of Ministers. During that period, the union has been an ardent supporter of the ruling party and its policies. The second president of the new period, İsmail Emrah Karayel, entered the parliament as a deputy of the Justice and Development Party in 2015. He still assumes the presidency of the union as an elected member of parliament.

2.3 Right-wing Politics in Turkey

Noberto Bobbio (1996) proposes that the distinction between the right and left in political thought arises from their different approaches to the notion of equality. In his framework, the left is identified with its dedication to restore equality in society while the right seeks the legitimization of inequality. Therefore, the advocacy of hierarchy, natural inequalities, tradition and the preservation of established social order characterizes the right. In Turkish context, this framework would allow us to determine the ideological spectrum of post-1960s politics.

Turkey's post-1960s politics symbolizes the extension of the right-left spectrum with the emergence of nationalist and Islam-based political parties. Their ideological leaning set them apart from the center-right Justice Party of the time. It should be appropriate to identify the nationalist and Islam-based political movements as "far-right" for emphasizing their difference since the adjectives like "radical" or "extreme" carry the signs of value judgments. In essence, these movements are the proponents of maintaining inequality and existing hierarchical orders in society on the basis of national identity or religious preferences.

The MTTB's ideological ground between 1965 and 1980 primarily rested upon the right-wing political tradition in Turkey. Above all, it took the supreme status of Sunni Muslim Turkish identity for granted. The emphasis on the Turkish identity played a decisive role in the union with the strong anti-communist undercurrent during the late 1960s. As the 1970s progressed, the MTTB tended to develop a universal language of Islam based on the notion of the ummah instead of ethnic references to Turkishness. Although the union remained as a typical far-right

organization during that period, its approach to the notion of state and Islamic order gave it a unique ideological outlook in right-wing politics.

Turkish conservatism, as a significant tenet of right-wing politics in Turkey, has always developed strong relations with Islam and nationalism in its intellectual formulations. Mainstream Turkish conservatism has shown unique characteristics with its strong emphasis on the philosophy of Islamic Sufi tradition (Çınar, 2019), whilst it defines Islam as an inseparable part of the nation, a defining feature of the identity (Çiğdem, 2003; Mollaer, 2006). It is of paramount importance to examine the intellectual basis of Turkish conservatism in these lines since it maintains its substantial influence on Turkish right-wing politics and intellectual life. As Bora (1998) suggests, nationalism, conservatism, and Islamism seem to be intertwined within the Turkish context. Turkish conservatism during the early republican period, as a product of the foundation of the Republican regime, expresses itself in the cultural realm without directly criticizing the principles of Kemalism (Çiğdem, 2006). In that period, conservative-minded intellectuals were keen on the deradicalization of the Kemalist Revolution on the ground that they demand respect for the well-established cultural codes of the society, thereby contributing to the reproduction of Kemalist ideology (Ayvazoğlu, 2006; Dural, 2005). Their approach to the Ottoman Islamism is also noteworthy. The republican-conservative intellectuals, including Hilmi Ziya Ülken, İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, and Mustafa Şekip Tunç, opined that the Republican citizen's subjective experience of religiosity could produce a moral ground in the modern state instead of the institutional religion (İrem, 2002). Tellingly, it discredits the political use of religion. This new mode of piety prioritizes the national folk tradition and folk Islam that challenges the authority of the traditional Islamic scholars (İrem, 2002). In that context, the post-

1950s witnessed a different trajectory for the course of conservative thought when it encountered with the nationalist and Islamist ideas.

Islamic political thought in Republican Turkey, which burgeoned after the 1950s, drew a unique path by separating itself from the late Ottoman era Islamism in the sense that it located itself in a secular-nation state. While Islamism as an ideology had emerged as a transnational quest for saving the Empire from the dissolution, it was refashioned during the Republican era with different concerns. The secular characteristic of republican reforms inevitably forced Islamic intellectuals to take a revisionist and conservative stance. The transition to multi-party politics in Turkey in 1950 launched a new platform for new Islamic intellectuals to appear in public space after a long period of suppressive environment. It is imperative to note that Islamic thought in that period had come to light as a conservative nationalist view on politics, which separated itself from racist/Turanist/Turkist views and emphasized the place of the religion (Kara, 1994: 6). In that sense, republican Islamist intellectuals could also be labeled as conservative for that period. With time, they were shifted to political opposition in which they propound a novel strand of political thought by using Islamic discourse. Journalism and literature became the primary medium for these intellectuals to spread their political ideas with the publication of journals and contributions to modern Turkish Literature in the different forms of works (Duran & Aydın, 2013), including poetry, novel, and essays. *Büyük Doğu*, *Hareket*, and *Diriliş* were among the most profound Islamic journals of the time which brought wide-range of conservative/Islamic intellectuals together. In that intellectual background, some public intellectuals held sway over the MTTB's ideological contours between 1965 and 1980. Most remarkably, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek appeared as the chief ideologue of the union since the late 1960s.

Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983), a Turkish poet, is one of the leading nationalist conservative intellectuals who advocates an alternative political ideology, called Great East (*Büyük Doğu*), to capitalism and Marxism by presenting Islamic solutions to the political, social and cultural issues of Turkey (Duran & Aydın, 2013). He studied Philosophy at Sorbonne University with the scholarship provided by the government, but he did not complete his education because of his bohemian lifestyle in Paris. While working for different sectors after returning to Turkey, including the state banks and universities, he encountered a Kurdish Naksibendi sheikh, Abdulhakim Arvasi, in 1934 who drastically changed Necip Fazıl's lifestyle and worldviews. With the spiritual guidance of Arvasi, Necip Fazıl embraced a fierce critic of Kemalism after founding the magazine called *Büyük Doğu* (Great East) where he proposed an authoritarian vision of state mechanism *Başyücelik Devleti*, functioned in accordance with Islamic lines, which is governed by *baş yüce* (supreme head) and *Yüceler Kurultayı* (supreme council) that serve as an advisory board composed of the intellectuals (Atasoy, 2009: 98). Whereas his ideological formulations and political vision reflect, to some extent, a utopian vision, he is the leading Republican intellectual who propose Islam as a comprehensive ideology and worldview with strong nationalist connotations (Duran, 2004) Kısakürek gave many speeches in different cities of Turkey, some of them were organized by the MTTB, before huge crowds composed of mainly youth audience. He also endured several prosecutions and imprisonments due to his publishings that vitriolically attacked the Kemalist foundations of the Republican government. Kısakürek's renown did not wane after his death, on the contrary, following the foundation of the AKP, with the party's elite cadres' frequent reference to his activism and ideas, including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül who deliberately call him as the master (*üstad*),

he has been deemed as the master of the Islamic youth and founding father of Islamic cause with great respect.

2.4 Historical Background

The period between 1960 and 1980 in Turkish politics, known as the Second Republic, in the context of the ongoing Cold War, has been rendered as an era of uncertainty in terms of political instability, poor economic performance, and chaotic societal dynamics between different classes (Zürcher, 2004). Turkish Constitution of 1961, drafted after the military takeover, diverged from its predecessor as it aimed to ensure the freedom of thought, expression, association, publication, and other civil liberties while it also promised social and economic rights (Ahmad, 1993). With the emergence of a relatively freer political environment in that period, Turkish Left had been able to generate a “militant and revolutionary kind of socialism” (Belge, 2009: 11) whilst this era had also witnessed an immense ideological transformation in the Turkish nationalist thought with regard to its relation with Kemalism and Islam (Aytürk, 2014). This period represents the transformation of the Turkish Left into a mass movement. In 1961, the Labor Party of Turkey, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi* (TİP) was founded by a group of trade unionist activists which were inspired by the British Labour Party and brought many leftist intellectuals together as a legal platform for participating in party politics (Zurcher, 2004). The foundation of an ideologically oriented left-wing party, outside the Kemalist tradition, had widened the political spectrum. In the 1965 general elections, where a socialist party competed for the first time, the TİP received 2.82 percent of the total vote and won 15 seats in the parliament thanks to the national reminder system implemented in the elections that increased the chance of smaller parties being represented (Doğan, 2010). From the

late 1960s onwards, the Turkish Left had split into numerous factions, including legal political parties and illegal underground organizations, along the lines of Soviet and Chinese experiences of socialism. The emerging success of the socialist left in that era pushed the RPP to identify itself as the “left of center” implying the attachment to the social democrat values without embracing revolutionary claims of the socialist groups.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, the books of prominent Islamist thinkers, including Sayyid Qutb, Abul A’la Mawdudi, Muhammad Hamidullah, Said Hawa, Ali Shariati, and Malik bin Nabi were begun to be translated into Turkish. The works of these authors, which were quite popular in Muslim countries at the time, had revived the intellectual environment in the Islamic camp after a long period of the domination of traditional religious texts. With a strong emphasis on the need for returning to the genuine sources of Islam, they not only provided a more authentic political language for Muslim readers in Turkey but also challenged the well-established premises as regards the Islamic way of life and interpretations of Islam (Öz, 2016). It brought about the formation of a new Muslim identity that did not identify himself/herself with nationalist-conservative Islamic thought. It positioned itself against “colonialist and positivist” Western civilization, mainstream religious movements, and their ideologues (Bulut, 2005: 922). It had sparked an intense discussion on a myriad of topics, including the interpretation of the Islamic state, society, revolution, capitalism, and social justice.

The formation of an Islamic party as a separate entity, the MNP (Party for National Order), and its predecessor the MSP (National Salvation Party) during the early 1970s, had created a more fragmented structure for right-wing politics in Turkey. These parties formulated a novel kind of Islamic nationalism by focusing on “one

thousand years of history” which aims to acquire welfare through development in both material and spiritual fields (Çetinsaya, 1999: 373). The central aim was to re-establish a new industrialized and technologically advanced society that embraced Islamic beliefs and cultural traditions (Toprak, 1993). During the 1970s, the growing anti-communist sentiment in Turkish society made the formation of a series of Nationalist Front governments, which were comprised of center-right, nationalist and Islamist parties, possible. Fighting against the communist threat, thus, not only brought together different factions of the Turkish right under one roof but also set the tone for the ideological formulations of these groups. The Nationalist Action Party (MHP), as the leading champion of Turkish nationalism in that period, tried to reconcile nationalist value and Islam within the framework of Turkish-Islamic synthesis as a political strategy against rising Marxist challenge (Çınar & Arıkan, 2010). For the Islamist front, the “godless communists” were hailed as an internal threat to religious values (Ahmad, 1991). Thus, in the context of the Cold War, the fear of communism had reinvigorated an alliance in the right-wing bloc.

One of the most significant features that characterize the period between 1960 and 1980 was the supremacy of military tutelage over civilian politics. The 1971 military memorandum triggered political chaos in the Turkish political environment, which brought about the lack of political volatility until another military intervention, 1980 coup. Between 1969 and 1980, 13 cabinets were formed as the political and economic instabilities and military tutelage did not allow the proper functioning of the civilian democracy in a highly polarized political party system.

CHAPTER III

STRADDLING BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION AND ISLAMIC REVIVALISM

This chapter investigates the conceptualization of the revolution in the MTTB publications. To this end, I will analyze the usage of this concept with regard to the socio-political and intellectual context of the time. The essential concepts of the Turkish political thought have undergone alterations over time. The contingent nature of these concepts should be emphasized when analyzing the past political thought. Thus, I will provide a brief background about the changing content of this concept throughout recent history in the Turkish context. The analysis of the MTTB's understanding of revolution elucidates the ideological transformation of the union from conservative nationalism to a novel interpretation of Islamism.

3.1 Revolution in Turkish Political Thought

The words *inkılap* and *devrim* in Turkish mean revolution. The term of *inkılap* is of Arabic origin, which originally means change and transformation, belonging to Ottoman Turkish. Indeed, *inkılap* had not corresponded to any political meaning during the 19th century, then it attained some political connotations during the first decades of the 20th century and began referring to legitimate revolutionary change, in place of the word *ihtilal* which was used to mean rebellion (Gürpınar 2013). *Devrim*

is a “Turkified” version of *inkılap*, which was manufactured during the early Republican period by the Turkish Language Association, which conducted a government-inspired Turkish Language Reform in order to remove the Arabic and Persian influence from the Turkish language. The first use of *devrim* dates back to the 1930s. It is derived from the verb of *devirmek*, “to overturn” in Turkish (Eyüboğlu, 1988: 83). In that period, there was no consensus on the usage of the words *inkılap*, *ihtilal*, *devrim* and their corresponding meanings. While a group of intellectuals, including Peyami Safa, Tahsin Banguoğlu and F. Kadri Timurtaş opined that *devrim* could not be equal to the meaning of *inkılap* due its linguistic pattern, Nurullah Ataç and Tahsin Yücel rendered *devrim* as an authentic Turkish origin word and the exact substitute of Arabic *inkılap* (Coşar and Türkmen, 2017). In actual usage, to exemplify, the history of the early Republican Period is generally named as *Türk İnkılap Tarihi* by referring to a series of social, political, and legal changes aiming to transform the country into a secular modern-nation state. *Devrim* is also employed for describing them, e.g., *Dil Devrimi*, *Şapka Devrimi*. Peyami Safa’s renowned book about Atatürk’s Revolutions was named as *Türk İnkılabına Bakışlar* (Reflections on the Turkish Revolution). French Revolution was also called *Fransız İnkılabı* in the writings of the Kemalist intellectuals of the early Republican period, such as Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, Ahmet Ağaoğlu and Saffet Engin (Gülsunar, 2015).

The term *devrim* was used in place of *inkılap* with the concern of avoiding the Arabic origin of the word. For instance, the book by Afet İnan, Atatürk’s adopted daughter and one of the leading Republican intellectuals and history professor, was titled *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ve Türk Devrimi* prefer the term *devrim*. Nevertheless, the term *devrim* has been widely embraced by the Marxist/socialist tradition in Turkey, which

became more pronounced after the Second World War. Since *devrim* was seen as a Marxist/communist jargon by the conservative/Islamic groups, they tended to prefer the word of *inkılap* instead of *devrim*. Furthermore, *inkılapçılık*, Revolutionism or Reformism, which derived from the root *inkılap*, was added to the party program of the Republican People's Party (CHP) in the 1931 Congress with the definition of “to be loyal and to defend the principles derived from *inkılap* undertaken by our people with immense sacrifices” in which it did not refer to any revolutionary implication (Gürpınar, 2013: 217). During the 1960s, *inkılap* was used for calling Turkey's first-ever military coup that took place on 27 May 1960 by the supporters of the military intervention. The putschists launched *27 Mayıs İnkılabını Yayma Komiteleri* (The Committees for Spreading the May 27 Revolution) and *İnkılap Büroları* (The Bureaus of Revolution) in order to legitimize the coup in the eyes of the citizens through spreading the state propaganda (Atılgan, 2019). Hence, the words of *inkılap* and *devrim* were begun to be used interchangeably over time, while *ihtilal* remained as the equivalent of rebellion and revolt loaded with illegal connotations. However, no consensus has been reached on the matter.

3.2 The Concept of Revolution and the MTTB

The ideological turn of the MTTB has been pointed out by previous studies, which show the changing ideological outlook of the union from a conservative nationalism to Islamism (Duman and Yorgancılar 2008; Okutan, 2004; Oruç, 2005). According to these studies, the MTTB had embraced an Islamic identity since the 1970s. During the late 1960s, the MTTB had a heterogeneous character composed of nationalist and

*mukaddesatçı*⁸ student groups that competed with each other to gain dominance over the union.

In the 1965 elections of the MTTB, the victory of Rasim Cinisli against the pro-CHP group headed by Yüksel Çengel brought the long-standing leftist hegemony over the union to an end. Cinisli was not an Islamist and had no affiliation with a particular Islamic community. He was born in the village of Cinis, Erzurum, in 1935. His village had a fresh memory of World War I as it was subjected to a horrible attack of Armenian gangs in which the village was burnt, and most of its inhabitants were murdered (Cinisli, 2017). Cinisli completed his high school education in his hometown, then came to İstanbul to study law at İstanbul University. He became a member of the Association of Turkish Nationalists (*Türk Milliyetçiler Derneği*) in 1962 and helped the foundation of a nationalist publishing house, *Ötüken Neşriyat*, in 1964. During his term, the MTTB displayed a conservative nationalist outlook in which both nationalist and Islamist students were active in the union. In 1967, the MTTB was involved in the organization of the First Assembly of Nationalists (*Birinci Milliyetçiler Kurultayı*) under the chairmanship of İbrahim Kafesoğlu that convened nationalist intellectuals brought together for reorganization and discussing current issues.

During the presidency of İsmail Kahraman (1967-1969), the union was more courageous and willing to show its Muslim identity while the nationalism was admired as an instrument of its strong anti-communist stance and a source of glory and heroism. He won the election against Alaattin Koçak, who was the favorite candidate of Turkish nationalists. Kahraman was also a student of law at İstanbul University. He was raised in a traditional religious family in Rize and Karabük.

⁸ It is a term referring to people who respect and protect sacred religious values.

Then, his family moved to İstanbul to conduct business there. He was deeply influenced by some practices of the early Republican government in his childhood, like the conversion of adhan into Turkish. Karaman also claimed that his brother was not allowed to have an education for memorizing the Quran because of the repressive measures of the state (Tümer, 2016). In his MTTB years, the union demonstrated the initial signs of Islamic activism. The MTTB was involved in the protests of the headscarf issue when Ankara University School of Divinity imposed a headscarf ban in class. The union also demanded the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque. Until the end of Kahraman's term in 1969, the anti-communist agenda kept nationalists and Islamists together in the MTTB. The symbolic events of this period are the anti-communist meetings jointly organized by the MTTB and other nationalist organizations, including The Association for Fighting Communism in Turkey, that revitalized the anti-leftist sentiments in the society. Alparslan Türkeş, the leader of CMKP (Republican Peasants' Nation Party), is said to have supported the presidency of İsmail Kahraman during that period.

The reluctant and tension-prone coalition of nationalists and Islamists collapsed when Burhaneddin Kayhan was elected as the president of the MTTB in 1969. This election was another significant cornerstone of the ideological turn of the union. Burhanettin Kayhan was the candidate of the *mukaddesatçı* group in the MTTB. His rival, Mustafa Ok, known as Commando Mustafa, was a Turkish nationalist student leader affiliated to Türkeş's CMKP. He was one of the leaders of the commando camps, which were founded by the CMPK to train young *ülkücüs* (Idealists), the youth branch of the party, under military discipline, to fight against communism during the last years of the 1960s (Criss, 2002). The election process escalated physical violence between these groups. Following the victory of Kayhan, Mustafa

Ok and his followers left the union and searched for ways to reorganize the nationalist youth under the CMKP. From then on, the Turkish nationalists of the CMKP, renamed MHP in 1969, and the MTTB cadres differentiated from each other.

The Islamic turn of the MTTB during the 1970s allowed it to have a unique path of Islamic activism in Turkey. The crystallization of its Islamic identity distanced the MTTB from right-wing political parties and nationalist organizations. In 1975, the MTTB decided to change its emblem. The figure of the wolf, which had been used since the early years of the organization, was removed, and a book was placed instead of that figure while the background, a Turkish flag, remained the same. The book in the new emblem symbolizes the Quran (MTTB, 1975). The grey wolf is a nationalist symbol originated from the Central Asian Pre-Islamic Turkish mythology, where Turkic tribes were said to be liberated from the imprisonment with the guidance of the Grey Wolf. The symbol of the wolf had been respected greatly during the early Republican era as the symbol of the Turkish nation. The removal of the Grey Wolf demonstrates the ideological transition the MTTB had experienced. Accordingly, they reject secular, ethnic-based nationalism and evince their commitment to religious values, *mukaddesat*. In that context, the gradual Islamization of the MTTB brought the concepts of revolution and order prominence in their texts. It would be beneficial to trace the conceptualizations of them in the MTTB writings so as to understand the ideological leaning of the union.

Necip Fazıl Kısakürek gave a conference talk in 1977 entitled “Word Waits for a Revolution”, *Dünya bir İnkılap Bekliyor*. In the annual reports of the MTTB (1977: 145-146) it was described as:

On 15 January 1977, the crowd in the MTTB conference hall heralds the coming of a revolution of truth. The hall was full to overflowing, and

everyone was in full of action and activity like a silent scream. Each of them was young, and the great architectures of the future and the mujahids for the establishment of Allah's order. Everyone has grown impatient to hear the herald of the awaited revolution.

Milli Gençlik magazine had published the full text of the speech in the 18th issue.

Kısakürek, in his address, categorized the revolutions in history as the absolute revolutions and infidel revolutions. While the latter includes the Renaissance, French Revolution, and communism, the absolute revolutions were undertaken by the prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad against the infidels (Kısakürek, 1977). Then, he moves to the 20th century and evaluates the capitalism, anti-capitalism, materialism, individualism, and totalitarianism as an erroneous end deficit system while Islam promotes the ultimate freedom and truth as a wholesale system. In that formulation, Kısakürek gives Turkey a historical mission to undertake that revolution for the sake of Islam's world-wide domination. This mode of thinking positions itself against the Marxist/socialist aspiration of revolution. Kısakürek explicitly separates *devrim* from *inkılap* while the former is regarded as destruction, the latter means removing the old order and establishing a new one (Kısakürek, 2011). The urge to shape the existing order in line with Islamic principles constitutes the core of this notion. Kısakürek depicts Turkish society as in the state of complete disarray and corruption that justifies the need for a wholesale change. Furthermore, an article in *Milli Gençlik* titled "An Islamist Approach to the Class Conflict in History" reads the history of humanity as a constant struggle between the prophets and their enemies. It argues that the prophets had been assigned to found a new society through a socio-economic and cultural revolution in their communities in place of the established orders of the non-believers (Bulaç, 1975). Accordingly, the revolutionary

interpretation of Islamic history, as in the case of these examples, interpellates a Muslim subject with a primary mission to fight for the Islamization of the society.

Although the concept of revolution is a politically loaded one, it was also used to mean a wholesale change within the inner self of the Muslims by a religious discipline, as in the case of the prophets' efforts to educate people. In that respect, Kısakürek gives the example of Prophet Muhammad's removal of vigorous tribalism in Arabic society and promotion of the idea of egalitarianism among different races as a perfect example of a revolution (Kısakürek, 1977). The emphasis of proselytizing zeal as a legitimate way of revolution signifies that the revolution does not have to be violent or top-down in this mode of thought. The ultimate aim of the revolution, thus, was seen as the Islamic revival of the society.

It is possible to trace the changing understanding of the MTTB against the state mechanism from the onwards of the mid-1970s in which the distinct Islamic identity of the organization had become more apparent in that period. In the 18-19th issue of *Milli Gençlik* magazine, the leading article titled "Which State", questioned the current position of the state in the eyes of the people with a historical perspective. It argues that one thousand years of a civilization is the natural culmination of Muslim Turks' accumulated national lore in Anatolia which gave birth to national states, dubbed as *devlet-i hakime* (the ruling state) and *kerim devlet* (the generous state) by the people (Milli Gençlik, 1977c). It depicts a thoroughly romanticized state-society relation in which both of them had been in perfect harmony, mutual understanding, and solidarity. The Ottoman state mechanism is explained as follows:

The state was above everything else. The laws were not written on the books instead, they were derived from the faiths and hearths of the people... The state is ready to sacrifice its own son for the sake of the felicity and salvation of the people... The protection of the subject (*tebâ*) was regarded as a sacred

duty. The statesman and state were the only genuine assurance for the subjects (Milli Gençlik, 1977c: 5).

Articulated as such, it goes on to argue that the relations between society and the state have deteriorated ever since the Tanzimat era as the 200 years-old effort of the intelligentsia to enact Western-minded laws, which were not only against the historical reality but also ineffective and factitious, detract the authority of the state. In that regard, the article urges for returning to the prior understanding of the state mechanism, not trusting the notions of the rule of law, democratic state, and secular state.

The word of *inkılap* had been utilized for manifesting the organization's approach to the existing societal dynamics. In contrast, the word of *devrim* amounts to undesired devastation of the established order for the understanding of the MTTB. *Devrimbaz* is also a popular term for describing the revolutionists with the intention of insulting them. It is a derived form of *devrim* invented by Peyami Safa against the term of *yobaz*, which means zealot in Turkish used by leftists to criticize conservative-minded persons. He accused leftist intelligentsia as bigoted and narrow-minded by equating their ideological ground to communism, materialism, and debauchery (Bora, 2018). It is possible to see such an approach to the concept of *devrim* in the MTTB's magazines.

An article in *Milli Gençlik* magazine titled *Devrimler (!) Devirenler ve (!)* articulates harsh criticisms of Kemalist Revolutions of the early Republican era. It resembles them as an invasion and plunder to the country and draws an analogy between *devrim* and *devirmek*, the act of destroying or demolishing (Han, 1977). The approach of the MTTB to the Kemalist Revolution does not originate from a mere conservative concern that regards the revolutions as a rupture in the

cultural/traditional codes of society. The article, here, deems the revolution as a systematic, designed attack of Westerners and their “servants” in Turkey to break off its relations with the religious faith while it defines the efforts of Westernization as degeneration (Han, 1977). In that regard, reiterating the claim that one hundred thousand Muslims were hanged in the Independence Tribunal due to not wearing Western hat indicates the sense of hysteria they had against the Kemalist Revolution. In that respect, the negative connotations of the word of *devrim* were repeated. In another article written by the then president of the MTTB titled “The Truths and Our Youth” hold *devrim yobazları*, revolution zealots, responsible for the street clashes of the young generations as they provoke the youth by glossing over the truths (Özmen, 1974). It refers to Marxist-oriented leftist groups being active in the universities. Similar to the Kemalist Revolution, the MTTB endeavored to delegitimize the Marxist revolutionary ideas in its thought.

As the Islamic identity of the MTTB became more crystallized, the commitment to the notion of revolution reached its zenith during the late 1970s. They are now courageous enough to formulate the fundamental principles of the Islamic Revolution, called *İslam İnkılabı*, in their magazine. In that period, Islam had been posited as an ultimate reference point that shapes the political, social, and economic realm along with the individual lifestyles. Such a view leads to the denouncing of other ideologies and systems as superstitious beliefs and orders that do not fit the principles of the Islamic perspectives. By doing so, they did not only uphold a narrative of the Islamic third way other than socialism and capitalism but also opened up for more comprehensive discussions on political issues like democracy, Islamic society, and liberty. The signs of that perspective could be grasped in the article titled *İslam İnkılabının Esasları*, The Principles of the Islamic Revolution, as follows:

Our point of view against Islam as an ideology is tantamount to the systematic representation of Islam's worldview. The core of our insight is the adaptation of believed and accepted ideology to human life by the individuals and society itself. The principles of our belief are evident and apparent. There are two nations called believers and non-believers according to our views and our opinion... In that regard, we can classify ideologies into two categories: Islam, which is the only Truth, and a myriad of human-made doctrines that constitute the sphere of falsehood. It is an obligation for individuals to be involved in either of them. There cannot be any ideologies between them. Above all, Islam never accepts a synthesis with a human-made ideology like Turkish-Islamic Synthesis. Such palavers imply that an absolute ideology is either incomplete or open for a synthesis that leads them to the way of unbelief (*küfür*) (Durgun, 1977: 95-96).

What is noticeable to underscore here is that secular politics with its all components was hailed as unacceptable. Thus, Islam is not just a significant part of identity, rather it is the only legitimate reference for each sphere of life. It signifies a decisive deviation from the hitherto mainstream conservative and nationalist strand of political thought that emerged during the Republican era. In the 1970s, the formulation of Turkish-Islamic synthesis that defines Islam as one of the two main elements of Turkish national culture and propounds the national culturalism was aiming to create a political alliance within the Turkish right (Çetinsaya, 1999). Even though the Islamist elements in that synthesis are salient (Şen, 2010), what motivated the MTTB to refuse that configuration needs further analysis. In the abovementioned article, the current state of the individuals is portrayed as a form of slavery to the falsehood orders, thus the only way for emancipation is seen as the removal of these orders and the establishment of an Islamic state (Durgun, 1977). The point being that such mode of thinking leaves no room for a "human-made" political system. Thus, the only legitimate act in that sphere is a revolutionary struggle, albeit its method and

content are not clear enough. In that respect, the Islamic term of *jihad* was interpreted as a way of undertaking such a revolution by a quote from Mawdudi⁹:

Islam is an ideal and movement of revolution. It demands the demolition of all falsehood orders and the foundation of new universal systems, which are designated according to its principles, in place of the old ones... Jihad means a revolutionary struggle, the war of undertaking that universal revolution (Mawdudi as cited in Durgun, 1977, p. 90).

Pointing the necessity for a worldwide change of existing political systems has strong Islamist overtones that differentiated from the national-local ideological configurations of the time. Here it is likely to find the origins of that concern in the transnational currents of Islamic thought of the 1970s guided by the Islamic movements in Egypt and Pakistan and also the works of Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Mawdudi that propound the universal interpretation of Islam (Yıldız, 2006: 44-45). The first Turkish translations of the works of Qutb and Mawdudi were published during the first half of the 1960s by Hilal Yayınları, and they became highly popular during the 1970s among the Islamic segments in Turkey. The major concern of these translations was presenting Islam as a comprehensive, coherent system in its own dynamics rather than giving it a complementary role for the societal change (Bulut, 2005). Iranian philosopher Ali Shariati's books were also translated into Turkish during that period. His works promoted an Islamic understanding of revolution inspired by socialism (Bora, 2018). For the MTTB, the influence of Islamist writers was noteworthy. In a questionnaire made by the MTTB, Sayyid Qutb was selected as one of the most favorite poets and writers of the members (MTTB, 1975). His tafsir book, *Fi Zilal al-Quran*, was recommended to the followers of the MTTB in a reading list, which was described as "the unique and

⁹ In the text, this part was written between quotation marks and a footnote sign was put at the end of the quote. However, there is no footnote in the article indicating the source of that quote. This part is a famous quotation from Mawdudi's speech titled "Jihad in Islam" given in Pakistan in 1939 (Mawdudi, 1983: 4-5). The source may be forgotten or the mistake was resulted from a printer's error. In other issues of *Milli Gençlik* magazine there is no serious mistake regarding the use of footnotes.

real method for understanding the teachings of the prophet” (MTTB, 1977: 185). In 1977, Muhammad Qutb, younger brother and devotee of Sayyid Qutb, visited the branches of the MTTB in Bursa and İstanbul. Muhammad Qutb was a professor of Islamic studies in Saudi Arabia who worked for the World Muslim League aiming “to establish communications with various Islamic communities and agencies in the wider Islamic world” (Köni, 2012: 106). He gave a seminar in MTTB’s conference hall entitled *İslam Nizamı*, Islamic order, which discussed “Islam’s superiority and excellence over human-made systems” (MTTB, 1977: 150). Moreover, in the first issue of *Milli Gençlik* a translation of Mawdudi’s article, “The Common Source of Western Civilization: Materialism” was published. It asserts that the alienation from divine systems have culminated in the genesis of capitalism in Western civilization, which is similar to communism and fascism in the sense that they are all rejecting the place of God in human life and focusing on the world pleasures only (Mawdudi, 1974). The MTTB had also contacted the International Islamic Federation of Student Organization (IIFSO) which was an initiative of Muslim Brotherhood aiming to broaden the Brotherhood’s network (Baran, 2011), enthusiastically supported by the Saudi-led World Muslim League (WML), known as “Rabıta” in Turkish public with reference to its Arabic name *Râbitatü'l- âlemi'l-İslâmî*. The WML included the MTTB as one of the representatives of the organization in Turkey (Köni, 2012). This organization had also played a vital role in the free distribution of the translated works of Sayyid Qutb, Mawdudi, and Hassan al-Banna throughout Europe and the Middle East.

In the writings of the MTTB, the intellectual influence of the translated Islamist works could be examined, although the specific references to them were rare. In that sense, the *jahiliyya* theory of Sayyid Qutb and the Islamic state understanding of

Mawdudi resonates with the arguments proposed by *Milli Gençlik* magazine. Qutb's remarkable doctrine of *jahiliyya* is about the portraying of the existing political systems in the world. The definition of *jahiliyya* is worth quoting:

Jahiliyya - as God describes it and His Quran defines it - is the rule of humans by humans because it involves making some humans servants of others, rebelling against service to God, rejecting God's divinity (*uluhiyya*) and, in view of this rejection, ascribing divinity to some humans and serving them apart from God (Qutb, as cited in Shepard 2003, p. 524).

The strict dichotomy of this formulation, which had not allowed any place between the state of *jahiliyya* and Islam, describes the present setting of the societies as non-Islamic, even in Muslim countries, akin to the time of the pre-Islamic Arab society unless they are governed by the God's ultimate authority (Euben, 1997; Shepard, 2003). An article in *Milli Gençlik* entitled *İmanı Korumak* (Preserving the Faith) put forwards that Turkish society could be labeled as a society of *jahiliyya* as Islam's social, legal, moral and doctrinal rules are not practiced due to the struggle between the Islamic order and the *jahiliyya* order (Demircan, 1975). In that context, the MTTB's depiction of a need for the Islamic revolution represents the influence of such concerns. Its vehement rejection of contemporary political ideologies as falsehood, *batıl*, and emphasis on the human-made feature of them, which implies the lack of religious formulation, reiterates the same dichotomy as in the case of Qutb's doctrine.

The revolutionary interpretation of Islam is also salient in the political thought of Mawdudi. Parallel to Qutb's perspective, he also formulates Islam as a total system and universal revolutionary movement which rejects any form of nationalism while he defends a universal egalitarian regime, "Islam in one country" (Lerman, 1981: 498-499). The nationalism was deemed as a sign of polytheism because it forms discrimination among people, which conflicts with the idea of world government

proposed by Islam, in Mawdudi's articulation (Lerman, 1981). To these thinkers, the core teaching of Islam dictates the governing society through Islamic principles.

The inspiration of global currents of Islamic thought had exerted its influence on the notion of the state in the writings of the MTTB circle. An article stated that since Muslim societies do not live under the rule of a state in which the beliefs of the Muslim dominate the order and functioning of the state, all Muslims undoubtedly are exploited as slaves by diktat of the proponents of the superstitious ideologies (Durgun, 1977: 37-38). The heavy criticisms against the current situation of the societal dynamics now shift to the nature of the state mechanism. The secular characteristic of the state and the notion of democracy had been vilified, in that respect. In an article in *Milli Gençlik*, it is argued that it is because of the notion of secularism that the institutions of the state cannot be in harmony with the nation's religion, faith, and worldview (Milli Gençlik, 1977a). The distrust against the state originated from its secular characteristic. Democracy was also deemed as the "illness of the West" which had been unconsciously imported by the Greek tradition (Milli Gençlik, 1977a: 6). It goes on to argue that the practice of democracy sees İmam Gazali and Mevlana equal to an ordinary person who has no background in law. For MTTB, democracy is a product of Western civilization that hardly befits an Islamic political system. Moreover, some articles in *Milli Gençlik* and *Çatı* magazines perpetuated the idea of the foundation of a new state based on revelation, *vahiy*. According to the MTTB, every Muslim has to be the proponent of Sharia while they often portray Islam as a totalistic order that regulates all spheres of life (Mengüç, 1976; Çatı, 1977a). For the MTTB's perception, the superiority of an Islamic state over secular ones should be beyond dispute. The revolution, in that respect, was seen

as a way of succeeding that aim, although its usage and content shows an ambivalent nature.

The rhetoric of the Islamic state during the 1970s became widely popular as the Islamist movements in Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Egypt, and Pakistan gain political ground in their countries. In 1977, General Muhammad Zia-ul Haq overthrew Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's regime in Pakistan by a military coup and launched an Islamization program with the support of Mawdudi, thus his Jamaat-e-Islami. An Islamist magazine in Turkey, *Tevhid*, announced Zia-ul Haq's decision of the establishment of an Islamic order on its cover with a head title "Long Live Pakistan Islamic State!" (Türkmen, 2000). Muslim Brotherhood was also active in Egypt and Syria, although they were kept under close monitoring of the governments of these countries. In the Turkish context, probably, the most vocal exponent of the idea of the establishment of an Islamic state was Ercüment Özkan (1938-1995), an Islamist intellectual, the owner and Editor-in-Chief of *İktibas* magazine. He had assumed the leadership of Turkey branch of the Jordanian-based Hizbut-Tahrir movement, which was founded in 1953 as a political party in Jordan and spread to many countries in the Middle East, Europe and Southern Asia aiming the restoration of the Islamic Caliphate and unity of the Muslim communities, until the 1970s (Erkilet, 2017). Then, he broke his ties with the movement but maintained his strong support for the formation of an Islamic regime in Turkey. During the 1970s, Özkan published some of his works about his understanding of Islam and politics, which was primarily inspired by the formulations of Hizbut-Tahrir, Muslim Brotherhood, and Jamaat-el-Islami (Türkmen, 1995). Although Özkan had remained outside the mainstream Islamic political thought in Turkey during that period as he adamantly rejected political participation in the secular system, including the foundation of a political

party, by deeming it as non-Islamic, similar ideas about the Islamic state were begun to be pronounced in Islamist publications. In particular, *Şura*, *Tevhid* and *Hicret* magazines became the voice of the radical overtones of the Islamist writers during the second half of the 1970s. The leitmotif of these magazines was the quest for an Islamic regime in Turkey while they followed the revolutionary Islamic movements in the world as a role model and questioned the relation between the traditional codes of the society and Islam thereby redefining some politico-religious concepts to the Muslim readers including *tağut*, *mustazaf*, *müstekbir*, *dar'ul harb*, *dar'ul İslam*, *biat* (Yeşil, 2012). What distinguishes these magazines from Ercüment Özkan's independent works is that the former ones appreciate the foundation of an Islamic party, the MSP, as an instrument to attain their objectives. With the support of the MSP and Akıncılar, a reciprocal relationship was formed between these magazines and the party cadres. The Akıncı youth and the MSP supporters followed the magazines. On the other side, the MSP was portrayed as the only choice of the Muslim electorate in the existing political system in the articles of the magazines. (Türkmen, 2000) Thanks to this relation, these weekly magazines had enjoyed high numbers of print circulation. It should also be noted that Ali Bulaç and Sedat Yenigün, who had written for the publications of the MTTB until 1976, became the leading figures of the new magazines. Sedat Yenigün had been influential in the MTTB since the late 1960s. He assumed administrative positions in the union and pioneered the publishing of the magazines on behalf of the MTTB. Yenigün is also known for his attempts to introduce the works of Mawdudi, Qutb, Abdulkadir Udeh, and Muhammed Hamidullah to the union (Türkmen, 1993). The prevailing discourse of Islamic state among Islamic circles, during that period, inspired the MTTB too. The union's criticism of the state, thus, bears the stamp of the global Islamist trends.

Compared to the Republican Muslim intellectuals in Turkey, prominent Islamist thinkers from the Indian subcontinent and Egypt had not appreciated the idea of nationalism but rather, they preferred speaking on behalf of a universal Islamic community, the ummah. The advocacy of Salafism, which ardently refuses Sufism and all types of mystical practices, thereby allocating less space for the inner aspect of religious life, was mostly a common theme in the formulations of the prominent global Islamist thinkers (Yılmaz, Barton, & Barry, 2017). Their articulation of a universal, anti-imperialist language of Islam which claim to return the genuine roots of the religion had spawned severe tension when it encounters with local traditions, various cultural codes, and nationalist interpretations of Islam. In the Turkish context, the intellectual influence of global Islamist thinkers had created a long-lasting tension from the onwards of the late 1960s. Due to the strong presence of Sufi tradition and spiritual guidance of Naksibendi sheikhs for Islamist intellectuals in Turkey, the agenda of Islamic thought until the 1970s had been heavily dominated by the teachings of religious brotherhoods, particularly Naksibendi order. Özdalga (2010) advocates that Sufi legacy in Turkey has been successful in formulating meaningful ways for a large number of citizens to confront the changing dynamics in society caused by modernity. Naksibendi order, in that regard, supports the obedience to the existing political power without resorting to rebellion and seems sympathetic to the democratic order (Özdalga, 2010). Hence, reconciliation of global Islamist trends and Sufi-based Islamic political thought in Turkey tended to form new predicaments.

Islamism in the late Ottoman era had emerged as a consequence of the concern of survival of the Ottoman state, similar to the rallying cries of Ottomanism and Turkism (Karpat, 2000). The survival of Islam was directly associated with the

salvation of the state mechanism. Just as the notion of “sacred” state occupies a central place in that period, Turkish Islamism of the republican era had demonstrated the reflections of that concern. The sacredness and respected position of the state remains as a shared concern among both nationalist fronts and religious conservatives (Bora, 1998). According to Şerif Mardin (2005), it is possible to follow a continuity in the perception of the state between Ottomans and modern Turks, whether secular or not, who instinctively accept the legitimacy of the existence of the state mechanism. We could see the traces of a similar type of Ottoman/Turkish exceptionalism that sees Ottoman/Turkish experience of Islamic movement as unique in the sense that Turkey has never been governed by imperial powers (Kara, 1998; Özel, 1989). In that regard, the notion of the state occupied a respected position in Turkish political thought and dominated political discourse. On the other hand, the global Islamist thinkers’ growing disrespect against the state mechanism in their countries due to the state elite’s collaboration with the imperial powers and half-independent status of these states motivated them to formulate Islamic methods to dismantle the existing political structures. The confrontation between these strands paved the way for the widening schism between Islamic sections.

The MTTB had experienced the challenge of the global Islamist trends during the 1970s. The influence of the Naksibendi order, especially Mehmet Zahit Kotku’s İskenderpaşa branch, and Sami Ramazanoğlu’s Erenköy community, on the MTTB’s high-ranking cadres, had been strong until its closure in 1980. For instance, Ömer Öztürk, the president of the MTTB between 1971 and 1973, was among the close disciples of Erenköy community’s sheikh Mahmud Sami Ramazanoğlu. Öztürk (2017) relates in his memoirs that he accepted the invitations to the presidential candidacy after his sheikh suggested that the MTTB presidency would help them to

cultivate an environment for creating an Islamic youth generation. Hasan Celal Güzel stated that the following presidents Rüşti Ecevit (1973-1974) and Abid Özmen (1974-1975) were also members of the same order (Çalmuk, 2018). Özmen, after the end of his term of office in the MTTB, served as sheikh Ramazanoğlu's personal physician in Saudi Arabia. Ramazanoğlu's books were frequently promoted in the advertisement pages of *Milli Gençlik*. Until 1977, the MTTB tolerated different strands of thoughts other than the traditional Naksibendi understanding of Islam. Yet, the growing domination of the Naksibendi interpretation of Islam in the organization paved the way for the splitting of the Islamic student movement during the last years of the 1970s (Altınbaş, 2011). In 1976, Ali Bulaç and a group of his friends left the MTTB and began publishing *Düşünce* magazine. Then, Sedat Yenigün broke his ties with the union following the 1977 elections. He helped the foundation of İstanbul Kültür Ocağı and *İslami Hareket* magazine. It is stated that Yenigün and his friends wanted to transform the MTTB's outlook into a distinct universal Islamist identity, but they failed because of the resistance of old conservative generations of the union (Yenigün, 2016). The most striking division was the foundation of the *Akıncılar Derneği* (Raider's Association), which emerged as the rival youth organization against the MTTB with the firm support of the MSP. According to Ali Bulaç (cited in Duman and Yorgancılar 2008), *Akıncılar* was the representative of a new type of Muslim identity influenced by Seyyid Qutb, Mawdudi and Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi's dynamic, revanchist, anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist understanding of Islam which was remarkably different from the conservative, right-wing and fainthearted Muslim figure in Turkey. Arif Altınbaş (2011), who left the MTTB during the second half of the 1970s and became a vice president of the *Akıncılar*, claims that an İstanbul-based nation-wide community who captured the cadres of the head office of the MTTB

appointed the members of their community to the branches of the MTTB in Anatolian cities which sparked the unrest in the union. He is referring to the Erenköy community under the leadership of M. Sami Ramazanoğlu. It seems that the MTTB's high-ranking administrators' strong affiliation to this religious sect weakened its popularity as they wished to be relatively independent of party politics, unlike Akıncılar, which was a de facto youth branch of the MSP. The MTTB's interest in the Naksibendi tradition could be traced in the issues of *Milli Gençlik* magazine. The articles about the principles of Sufi doctrine and its place in the religion and the biographies of prominent Sufi sheikhs became more prevalent during the late 1970s. In these writings, the general tendency is to portray the Sufi tradition as the real interpretation of Islam dates back to the Prophet's time, which strengthens the Muslim's attachment to the religion while disciplining their lifestyles in accord with Islamic principles. The Islamization of the Anatolia, according to these articles, was succeeded by the great efforts of the Sufi sheikhs and their disciples spread to the Anatolian cities. Even the conquest of İstanbul was associated with Mehmed II's deep attachment to the Sufi teachings. It gives a constitutive role to the Sufi sects in the foundation of "Islamic civilization" through conquests of the countries as a source of moral motivation and discipline (Taysi, 1978: 49). During this period, the MTTB had distanced itself from the street clashes between the rightist and leftist groups and political party cleavages. Because of this preference, the organization had frequently been accused of passivism by the Islamic circles. In the 6-7th issue of *Milli Gençlik*, the editorial states that the MTTB is keen on maintaining its struggle in the realm of thought by Islamic tabligh¹⁰ (Milli Gençlik, 1975c), which refers to the spread of Islamic principles and proclamation of Quranic messages to the people

¹⁰ Tabligh is an Islamic term means "communication of a message or revelation" and "propagation of faith" while the Quranic teachings see it as a mission of Muslims to proclaim the message of Islam without coercion. (Esposito, n.d).

without any coercion and force. In that regard, the MTTB president Kasım Yapıcı's criticism against the *Akıncılar* represents that concern:

The ones who are not applying Islam to their inner self cannot become real mujahedeen. They are hanging banners across the streets until the early hours of the morning, but they do not perform Morning Prayer on the pretext of establishing an Islamic state in the future. Up till today, political parties misled the missions of the youth by empty promises and tried to change the real route of the young people... For the Islamic youth, a new gate was opened. With these opportunities, new movements of conquest will begin, if Allah wills (Akdaş, 1978: 55).

These remarks evidently demonstrate the preferences of the union. Inspired by Sufi tradition, the MTTB tended to dedicate its capacity to educational activities of the youth, which was seen as a requirement of the Islamic principles. It is a bottom-up strategy for the indoctrination of the masses along the lines of religious teachings. In another article by *Milli Gençlik*, it is highlighted that the foundation of a new state of revelation (*vahiy devleti*) requires the creation of a Muslim youth generation that could make possible the implementation of the revolution (Durgun, 1978). Thus, the union seems more sympathetic to the Islamic revivalism in society than it is to the top-down political claims on the existing state structure.

To put in a nutshell, the concept of revolution for the MTTB primarily represents its youthful dynamism while its usage is multipurpose. It provides a competing narrative against socialist groups' aspiration of revolution and criticism of the Kemalist revolution. The Islamic interpretation of revolution is Janus-faced in the MTTB's articulation. It was used to mean overtaking the state power in order to reestablish an Islam-based state in place of the "infidel" one. As another option, the revolution was interpreted as the Islamization of the society through proselytizing activities. While the former is a state-centered discourse inspired by the post-colonial visions of the global Islamist trends that were influential in Turkey during the 1970s via translated

texts, the latter is giving priority to the educational activities in line with the Islamic teachings which has been a well-established method of Naksibendi order. The tension between these ways brought about a schism in the union. Suffice to say that there were no clear-cut lines between these ways, but the MTTB was known for its dedication to the indoctrination of the youth without resorting to violence. While straddling between the quest for Islamic revivalism and revolution, the MTTB had endeavored to position itself above the right-left distinction in politics. Be that as it may, the 1970s for the MTTB signifies the desanctification of the perception of the state.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ORDER

The description of an ideal community has been a popular theme in Islamic political thought. The aspiration to the revival of the Golden Age dates back to the very early centuries of Islam (Black, 2011). For the MTTB, the current social order in Turkey is evolving into a state of total chaos due to a variety of reasons. Thus, the formulations of an ideal social order rise to prominence in the writings of the union. It is possible to trace the influence of traditional Islamic thought that establishes an ideal reference point in the Prophet's time. In that framework, this chapter firstly scrutinizes the conceptualization of order in Ottoman/Turkish political thought, then endeavors to analyze the MTTB's use of order in its writings with regard to previous conceptualizations of the concept.

4.1 The Concept of Order in Turkish Political Thought

The concept of order, *nizam* or *düzen* in Turkish, had been a significant theme in Ottoman political thought. *Nizam* is of Arabic origin, and it had been popularly used in the treatises of the Ottoman political philosophers for the portrayal of the current political mechanism. The most popular use of it was the conceptualization of *nizam-ı âlem*, world order, which comes from Islamic terminology referring to the cosmic order (Kutluer, 2007). The notion of world order in the Ottoman Empire was firstly

employed for the legitimation of the state's existence which is portrayed as the responsible agent for preserving "world order" as a "divine grace" while the unity of the state was also used for the corresponding meaning of that notion (Hagen, 2005: 61; Görgün, 2000: 182). In further usages of the term, it was interpreted as the social order which was formed by the individuals in light of moral principles and prone to distortion unless people conform to these principles (Görgün, 2000). In particular, the term of world order, notwithstanding its various interpretations, mainly presupposes the existence of an order, either Ottoman political system or social order, that needed to be retained (Öz, 1999). Marinos Sariyannis (2019) advocates that the interpretation of *nizam-ı âlem* had undergone a transition into the employment of state organization since the late 17th century in place of the ensuring of cosmic hierarchy, then *nizam* was used for the meaning of military arrangements and aspiration of the establishment of a new system (*nizam-ı cedid*) from the onwards of the 18th century. The reform movement in the 19th century was called *Tanzimat* derived from the root of *nizam*, referring to the reorganization. The concept of *nizam-ı âlem* was also used among the subjects of the Ottoman Empire. One of the most popular catechisms among the Ottoman subjects *Mısraklı İlmihal*, which includes the basic level information about the tenets of Islam, states:

It is a religious obligation for every person to know that there are three imams. For the orders and prohibitions, our imam is the Glorious Holy Quran, the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, is the imam in sharia, and the imam for the order of the world is His Highness the Padişah who is the refuge of the universe (Kara, 2012).

The juxtaposition of the worldly authorities in such a manner not only gives a religious legitimation for the ruling of the Sultan but also charges him with a global-religious mission for ensuring political order in the world in the eyes of the Ottoman subjects. Hence, the ambivalent and rich content of the concept of order throughout

the centuries makes it an essential political vocabulary. In the Republican Period, due to the endeavors to trivialize the Ottoman past, the concept of *nizam* lost its prominence in official use. Yet, it maintains its allure for conservative nationalist thought in Republican Turkey. In 1969, Osman Turan, an eminent nationalist historian, published a book titled *Türk Cihan Mefkuresi Tarihi: Türk Dünyası Nizamının Milli İslami ve İnsani Esasları* (The History of the Turkish Ideal of World Domination: The National Islamic and Humanitarian Principles of the Turkish World Order) which depicts the ideal of world domination as the utmost motivation in Turkish history. Osman Turan had been held in high esteem among the conservative nationalist circles as a former parliament of Democrat party who was trialed in Yassıada court following the 27 May coup d'état, the president of Turkish Hearts (*Türk Ocakları*) and prestigious historian of the Seljuk Empire. His book was a momentous shift as it portrays the establishing of the world order, *nizam-ı âlem*, as the historical mission of Turks, which became quite popular among nationalist youth circles in the political environment of the 1970s (Ayvazoğlu, 2008). It is concluded that the study of Turan has a nationalist agenda, which does not represent the accurate theoretical description on the concept of *nizam-ı âlem* elaborated by Ottoman thinkers (Hagen, 2005) and it lacks concrete explanations about the origin and history of the concept (Görgün, 2000). Some rightist intellectuals have criticized the book's arguments for failing to demonstrate the authentic meaning of *nizam-ı âlem* (Taşkın, 2007). Be that as it may, the fame of the concept of *nizam* was revived during the 1970s. The first Islamist-oriented party in Turkish political history was entitled *Milli Nizam Partisi* (the National Order Party). The National Outlook movement later popularized the notion of "Just Order" as a formulation of a new vision for upholding social justice. Furthermore, the MHP's youth organization *ülkü*

ocakları had published a magazine called *Nizam-ı Âlem* in 1979. They defined their ultimate mission as restoring *nizam-ı âlem*, which should be rooted in the Islamic faith (Erken, 2014). Indeed, the distinctive Islamic references to this concept caused a severe discord among the MHP's elites. In that regard, the conceptualization of order remained ambivalent and attractive as different ideological camps politicized it during the 1970s.

4.2 The Concept of Order and the MTTB

In the articles of *Milli Gençlik* magazine, the concept of order had been frequently referenced in different contexts. Undoubtedly, the MTTB's understanding of revolution had strongly associated with their vision of the socio-political order. The union generally started its narrative with the denouncement of the Tanzimat period, which is deemed as a major milestone for Ottoman/Turkish history. The Westernization efforts during that period allegedly brought about chaos in every aspect of social order. Perceiving the existing social dynamics in a state of chaos motivates them to articulate a vision of a new social order.

An article entitled *İnsanca Yaşama Nizamı* (The Order for Living Humanely) in the magazine, questions the liberal and socialist systems in terms of their contribution to the "salvation of humankind" (Uludağ, 1976). It argues that both of them are no different from each other since wealthy upper classes in liberalism and bureaucratic factions in socialist societies ruthlessly exploit the individuals. Accordingly, the resolution of this conflict rests in the quest for an Islamic order, under the guidance of the Quran that ensures the ultimate equality among human beings as a loyal brother of each other. In that way, Islamic order was portrayed as a

totalistic socio-political system and an alternative to socialism and capitalism. It also presents a universal vision of Islam by addressing to the whole humankind.

In June 1975, Libya Prime Minister Abdessalam Jalloud paid an official visit to Turkey for the establishment of diplomatic relations. He was a well-known public figure in Turkish media thanks to his friendship with Bülent Ecevit and Libya's strong support for Turkey's military operation of Cyprus in 1974. Jalloud gave a conference in the MTTB headquarter in İstanbul at the invitation of the union. He was welcomed with slogans of "Brother Libya, Mujahid Jalloud and Muslim Turkey" enthusiastically chanted by thousands of students (MTTB, 1975: 313-314). The Prime Minister, as the right-hand man of Muammar Gaddafi, aged 31, was representing the young face of the Third World Block, particularly the Islamic world. In his speech, Jalloud maintained that they swore in Libya Revolutionary Assembly for revitalizing Islam against the economic and cultural exploitation of Communism, Zionism, and imperialism (MTTB, 1975). To that end, he further stated that their constitution and source of power is the Quran. The MTTB paid most attention to these phrases and moved them into the cover of next month's *Milli Gençlik* as "Our source is Quran" with a picture of Jalloud holding Quran. It is no doubt that the MTTB's references to the Quran, as in the case of its new emblem and the writings in the magazine, are not just a reflection of cultural concerns. It becomes the validation and justification of their ideological proposals as divine guidance of the Islamic system. In the perception of the union, the ideal form of political order should be based on the teachings of the Quran.

In October 1977, the MTTB prepared and distributed one hundred thousand leaflets nationwide to explain the organization's stance, penned by the then-president Cemaleddin Tayla. It looks like a manifesto of the organization addressing its

remarks to the entire nation. It argues that intelligentsia idolizes the evils of the West while denigrating the “faith of civilization that represents the world order” (MTTB, 1977: 337). According to Tayla, it is because of this reason that the young generations are unintentionally appealing to the West without the knowledge of their past glories. Then, he urges people to present the “divine authority” and “the order of revelation” to humanity and all components of life (MTTB, 1977: 337). The civilization of faith is a reference to the Ottoman Empire. It was seen as the greatest upholder of the mission of restoring the world order. It is also noteworthy that they prefer proposing universal claims by referring to humanity and the entire world. Thus, it is the “order of all humanity” that has to be sovereign over all other systems and lifestyles, according to the union. On the other side, the Ottoman experience was presented as a perfect model of an Islamic order, which followed the principle of *nizam-ı âlem*. With these claims, the MTTB positioned its “cause” above the daily politics, political ideologies, and right-left distinction. Undoubtedly, the “cause” of the union was the quest for an Islamic order. It is believed that this order would end the social and political chaos the country had experienced since the first days of the Westernization attempts.

Furthermore, many articles in the magazine make a comparison of Islam with liberalism and socialism. While Islam is deemed as a universal, divine, and timeless order in its entirety, they disdain other systems by labeling them as human-made. It is evident that the concept of order in the understanding of the MTTB refers to an Islamic way of life and governing in a holistic approach. It is also called the order of revelation, *vahiy nizamı*, by emphasizing its divine characteristics vis-à-vis the “worldly” ideologies and systems that are manufactured by human beings. In that regard, the Ottoman Empire is distinguished by its success in upholding Islamic

order according to *Milli Gençlik* Magazine. Thus, the secular aspect of the new Republic was criticized as an act of alienation from Islam:

Unfortunately, the principle of secularism that subordinates religion to state moves all the meanings brought by Hegira, the leader of these meanings, and the order of the Prophet outside of our country. It imprisoned the religion of this nation that has assumed the leadership of Islam for the centuries into the consciences and between four walls (Subaşı, 1977: 25).

Hence, the Westernization attempts, in more general terms, broke off the centuries-old established order and damaged the alleged Islamic leadership of the Ottomans, according to that thinking. Due to the vehement reaction to the Western-oriented modernization, they assume a 200-years old cultural gap that alienates people from their genuine culture and lifestyles. In particular, Kemalist modernization was seen as the zenith of the “treachery” to the established order. It goes on to recall it as a form of “cultural insurrection”. It is worthy of quoting at length:

Our country had undergone cultural insurrection (*kültür ihtilali*). We begin stamping in a mad rush so as to demolish one-thousand years in an instant. It was mania! It is told to the young generations to remove their memories, forget all about from literature and music to their heroes and artists. Our schools became the official propagator of Westernization. The education system includes Greek Gods and Bach but does not teach Ibn Haldun, Al-Ghazali, or Itri. We lost many things. Before anything else, we lost our people. We become a flock, a society, without demonstrating any enthusiasm, passion, and ideal (Milli Gençlik, 1975b: 9).

Here, the emphasis on the term of *ihtilal* is noteworthy. The meaning of the word of *ihtilal* in Turkish is ambivalent. It means rebellion and insurrection in current use.

Whereas it was used interchangeably with *inkılap* for revolution during the late 19th century, *ihtilal* in time had acquired negative connotations for describing an unwelcome, spontaneous, and illegal change caused bloody, violent, and terrific outcomes (Gürpınar, 2013). In the abovementioned article, the disillusionment with the Kemalist Revolution was demonstrated by calling it “cultural insurrection” for the emphasis of its alleged destructiveness on the established order. Furthermore, the

cover of the 17th issue of *Milli Gençlik* includes an Islamic turban (*sarık*) cut by a sword and Arabic letters in a pool of blood. It signifies the collective memory of the MTTB about the Republican Revolutions. The description of the sword and pool of blood gives the message that the revolutions were undertaken in a top-down manner, even by force, thereby causing devastation. Another article maintains that “Western understanding of nation and state came after the great imperial order has not been embraced by this nation’s child” while claiming that the people of “this land” had been prohibited from living and defending their faiths (Dere, 1975: 11). The new republican order, which was secular and Western-minded, thus, was seen as alien to the ordinary Muslim subject. All these remarks regarding the Kemalist Revolution revealed some aspects of the ideological position of the MTTB. It can be concluded that the MTTB had harbored a strong anti-Western orientation. The true point of reference for a social order could only be found in the Ottoman past, according to them. Yet, the Tanzimat period and long-lived efforts of modernization were proved to be vain without the guidance of Islam. Eventually, the Kemalist Revolution was regarded as a wholly devastating attack on the social order, which creates an overwhelming sense of alienation against the current state of the society and state mechanism. It is because of that reason that they enthusiastically endeavor to formulate the principles of an “Islamic order”. Hence, one could note that the MTTB’s aspiration for a revolution serves as a counter-narrative vis-à-vis the Kemalist Revolution.

On 25 April 1975, the MTTB held a meeting, called National Youth Night, *Milli Gençlik Gecesi*, in order to “bring all young believers together” in İstanbul Sports and Exhibition Hall¹¹. Necmettin Erbakan, Deputy Prime Minister and the leader of

¹¹ Today, it is known as Lütü Kırda Convention and Exhibition Centre.

MSP, Hasan Aksoy, the Minister of State, the governor of İstanbul, some deputies, bureaucrats, and academics had attended the event (MTTB, 1975). Necip Fazıl delivered a speech after the opening remarks and conveyed the messages of his ideals about the youth generation, later was popularized as his *Gençliğe Hitabe*, Address to the Youth. Before his speech, he was introduced by the presenter, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan¹², the then-deputy manager in the facility directorship of the MTTB, as the “architect of a soul which makes us ruler over four continents and seven regions” (Yeni Şafak, 2014). Abdullah Gül, the then-member of the executive council of the MTTB and head of the İstanbul University Faculty of Economic Student Association, a sub-branch of the union, was sitting in the audience (Tosun, 2009). The text of Necip Fazıl’s address was published in the 6-7th issue of *Milli Gençlik*. The address was a sort of manifestation of Kısakürek’s lifelong “cause” of growing up a pious generation. Thus, it is no accident that his speech has been compared with Atatürk’s illustrious Address to the Youth, *Gençliğe Hitabe*, which assigns Turkish youth to protect the Turkish Republic and independence against the internal and external threats. The main arguments of Kısakürek’s address are, to a large extent, equivalent of what the MTTB stands for in its ideological configuration at that time. It contended that the Turkish society has been in a state of crisis for 150 years due to its quest to resemble Western man while through the last half-century, it has been exposed to a murder that even the armies of occupation could not dare (Kısakürek, 1975). It goes on to argue that today’s youth generation is being under attack by almost all components of the society, including university, education system, urban lifestyle, media, and family structure. Thus, the only emancipation from these warlike assaults lies in the eternal principles of Islam. In this milieu, it must be noted

¹² Recep Tayyip Erdoğan read Necip Fazıl’s address in the congress of AKP’s youth branch in May 2018 as the president of Turkey but he skipped the part that states “The sovereignty only belongs to God, not the people”.

that this mode of thinking assumes a stable flow of history that was brutally interrupted by the endeavors of Westernization. While it idealizes the classical age of the Ottoman Empire as the most righteous social order in Turkish history, the modern era ever since the Tanzimat period is thoroughly discredited. Erdoğan's emphasis on the Ottoman's classical age with reference to its domination over four continents exemplifies that admiration. Yet, the Republican Period was not seen just as a continuation of the "assault" of Westernization. Akin to the label of "cultural insurrection", Kısakürek draws a parallel between the Kemalist Revolution and the occupation of the country by foreign powers. The Westernization, read as secularization, of society and state mechanism was perceived as the greatest threat. Necip Fazıl, at the end of his speech, describes his lifelong "cause" as a struggle against the revolutionist moguls, *devrimbaz kodamanlar*¹³. It is apparent that he is referring to the Kemalist elites and their secularization policies by his derogatory remarks. He further admires a youth generation who "believe in God, not the people and miss the ideal of 'The sovereignty only belongs to Al-Haqq!' in the wall of the Assembly" (Kısakürek, 1975: 8). Tellingly, his arguments draw attention to the sense of alienation that religious-conservative masses, particularly Islamic youth, had experienced deeply against the Kemalist establishment. Thus, the resolution of that chaos, according to him, should be the articulation of an Islamic order. The counter-revolutionary rhetoric in Kısakürek's works is a repetitive theme, albeit being implicit. One of his well-known poems entitled *Müjde* (Glad Tidings) has a verse "A mind will come, and all the minds will go mad / And a revolution, will firstly overturn the revolution". His famous book, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, projects a state-led Islamization program for society, including the signs of political elitism and

¹³ It is a rude expression in Turkish.

totalitarianism (Atasoy, 2009). One of his close protégé, Salih Mirzabeyoğlu, devotedly followed Kısakürek's vision of the establishment of a supranational Islamic state and articulated a revolutionary reading of his works, which inspired the foundation of an Islamic militant organization, Great Eastern Islamic Raiders Front (IBDA-C) (Bora, 2008; Steinberg 2013). It is no doubt that Necip Fazıl's political philosophy includes strong counter-revolutionary overtones regarding the secular establishment, and it is prone to be interpreted differently. Under the strong charismatic influence of Necip Fazıl, although it was limited, the MTTB had also embraced these ideals and questioned the legitimacy and endurance of the Kemalist Revolution eloquently. In that regard, one may note that the roots of the revolutionary zeal of the MTTB could be found not only in the global currents of Islamist thinking but also in Necip Fazıl's aggressive articulations of anti-Kemalist critics.

The seek for an Islamic order had become the *raison d'être* of the MTTB during the 1970s. The MTTB defines itself as the "sole representative of Islamic youth" while the members were hailed as the mujahideen. Its anti-establishment rhetoric regarding the Kemalist regime, in time, became more radical and directed to the current governments. Indeed, the union had not been in a position to judge the legitimacy of the state mechanism until the mid-1970s. Since its conservative turn in 1965, the MTTB had endeavored to maintain its relations with the politicians, bureaucrats, and even high-ranking military staff¹⁴. In 1977, for the 62nd anniversary of Çanakkale victory, which marks the Ottoman Empire's defeat of British-led Entente powers in a campaign of the First World War in Çanakkale, the MTTB requested permission to

¹⁴ For instance, Ömer Öztürk (2017) states in his memoirs that, following the 1971 military intervention, it was General Faik Türün, the Commander of the First Army in İstanbul, who prevented the closure of the union.

use the Ministry of Transport's ferryboat for their travel to Çanakkale for attending the official ceremony. It was a routine demand for the MTTB since the ministry had provided free transport for the MTTB members as the representative of the university students since the 1960s. Yet, the Ministry of Transport and Prime Minister's Office refused the demand of the union. The government of the time, known as the First Nationalist Front, was a coalition government formed by four parties, AP, MSP, MHP, and CGP (Republican Reliance Party) under the leadership of Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel. The MTTB reacted angrily to the refusal of its request, and the members of the union laid a black wreath in front of the ministry building to condemn this decision (MTTB, 1977). On 18 March 1977, the MTTB's local branches came from different cities to Çanakkale through their own means were not allowed to enter the area where the official ceremony of the anniversary was held. The growing anger of the MTTB students caused a police clash. The approach of the MTTB to this incident gives some important clues for understanding the changing mindset of the union. In the March issue of *Çatı* magazine, an article written on behalf of the MTTB stated that the underlying reason for these incidents lies in the fact that there is the reign of the order of unbelief (*küfr*) which humiliates the dignity of Muslims in every corner of the globe (Çatı, 1977). The union advocates that since all Muslims throughout the world lived in the state of *Dar al-Harb* (literally means the territory of war, referring to the territories not governed by Islam, in contrast with *Dar al-Islam*) these treatments should be considered as the culmination of the removal of the Islamic order. Here, it is noticeable that the whole world, particularly Turkey, was being imagined as non-Islamic, which needed to be converted to the territory of Islam, *Dar al-Islam*. They are positioning themselves against the unbelief as the defenders of Islam. This Manichean view of political order brings forth the

manifestation of the need for the establishment of an Islamic order so as to seek salvation from the oppressions of the front of “unbelief”. The radical criticism of the union about a right-wing government in which the Islamist-oriented MSP was a key coalition partner was at odds with the traditional Islamic understanding of politics in Turkey. Indeed, many prominent Muslim intellectuals of the time do support the MSP’s way of politics as an Islamic cause while Necip Fazıl joined to the ranks of the MHP in 1977. The portrayal of the whole political system as the infidel, thus, was an idiosyncratic tendency in the Turkish context. Remarkably enough, the global Islamist trends, particularly Qutb and Mawdudi’s ideas, began to make their mark on the Islamic youth in Turkey. Cemalettin Tayla, the president of the MTTB between 1976 and 1977, following the incidents in Çanakkale, stated that this century witnesses the modern form of jahiliya with the prevalence of oppressive, human-made and materialist systems that are dangerous threats to whole humanity (Çatı, 1977). As mentioned above, it was inspired by the jahiliyyah theory of Qutb. Similar remarks were prevalent in the subsequent issues of *Çatı* magazine that strive for the establishment of a new Islamic order. The cover of the 22nd issue of the magazine, in that sense, was meaningful. It announces that the meetings will be held for the memory of the 900th anniversary of the conquest of Anatolia called “the meetings for the re-conquest of Anatolia” (*Anadolu’yu Yeniden Fetih Mitingleri*). The conquest of Anatolia is a reference to the Battle of Manzikert, which marks the decisive defeat of the Seljuk Empire against Byzantine that culminated in the long-lasting Turkish rule in Anatolian lands. The emphasis of re-conquest implies that the MTTB regarded Turkey as a country that was under invasion. The article about these meetings advocates that the Battle of Manzikert was the first step to establish the divine order (*Hâk nizamı*) in Anatolia and then this land became a place for restoring the world

order with countless victories against the armies of unbelief during the reign of Ottoman Empire (Çatı, 1977). However, it is argued that the victories gained in the battlefields disappeared as the internal enemies succeeded in demolishing the religious, cultural, and traditional values of the nation. What is remarkable to underscore here is that the Turkish history was interpreted through the conceptualization of the order. Thus, the driving motivation of the Ottoman/Seljuk Empire, according to that notion, was the quest for an Islamic order, which eventually turned into a universal claim to dominate world politics according to the Islamic principles. Articulating history as the struggle between the front of Islam and unbelief (*küfür*) makes the Turkish nation the guardian of Islam. In that milieu, the concept of *nizam-ı âlem* gained further importance in the MTTB's perception. It represents the global glory and material superiority of the Ottoman Empire, according to the union. The conceptualization of *nizam-ı âlem* positioned Ottoman polity as an ideal Islamic order that has transnational claims on world politics.

The urge for an Islamic order remained a constant theme for the agenda of the MTTB. Yet, the strategy of the MTTB for that mission differentiated the union from its Islamist counterparts during the second half of the 1970s. In 1979, the cover of the 36-37th issue of *Milli Gençlik* had a front-page headline "Do not look at the others, look at your inner self!". Indeed, 1979 was a highly symbolic moment for many Islamists in Turkey as the Iranian Revolution succeeded in the overthrow of the Shah's regime and the establishment of an Islamic Republic under the leadership of Khomeini. For instance, *Tevhid* magazine, which was affiliated to the Akıncılar, published between 1978 and 1980, paid particular attention to Iran in that period. The cover of the first issue of the magazine in December 1978 had a headline "We are praying for the victory in Iran" while in the fourth issue, Khomeini was on the cover.

Following the return of Khomeini to Iran in February 1979, *Tevhid* praised the revolution on its cover again with a headline “O Iranian Muslim! You demanded Islam, and Allah makes it possible. Now it is your duty to protect and defend it eternally”. It is noteworthy that during the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, the MTTB did not spare any comment on that. On the contrary, it strongly recommended turning inwards firstly. Kasım Yapıcı, the then president of the MTTB, put forward that “Islam will establish an order with its own method. Islamic order cannot be brought by guerilla activity. It becomes possible when one follows the Prophet Mohammed’s morality and begins to like what He likes... All other ways are dead-end and futile” (Tutar, 1979: 63). This statement implies that the union does not trust the outcomes of daily politics or violent struggles any longer in their quest for Islamic order. Thus, the foremost mission of the youth, according to the union, should be the self-discipline of the inner self by learning the Islamic teachings from reliable sources (Tutar, 1979). It seems that the MTTB wanted to isolate itself from the action-oriented Islamic movements in Turkey and elsewhere. In that regard, the concept of jihad was redefined. Quoting from the Prophet Mohammed’s sayings, they praised the spiritual struggle against the inner self as the essential way of becoming a mujahid in the articles of the magazine. Interestingly enough, the union paid particular attention to the formation of Islamic cinema and encouraged its base to work on that issue. The cinema club of the union had been active until 1980. The MTTB did not hesitate to define its efforts as “waging jihad through cinema” (Çatı, 1976: 11). Thus, it is not a coincidence that the two leading figures of today’s Islamic cinema in Turkey, Mesut Uçakan¹⁵ and Salih Diriklik, occupied administrative

¹⁵ Mesut Uçakan’s most famous movie is *İskilipli Atıf Hoca/Kelebekler Sonsuza Uçar*. It tells the story of İskilipli Atıf Hoca who was executed in 1926 due to his opposition to the Hat Law. Uçakan was also the producer of a TV series between 2016 and 2017, *Sevda Kuşun Kanadında*, based on the MTTB member’s life stories in the 1970s, broadcast on Turkey’s state-run network TRT 1. The

positions in the MTTB's cinema directorship. In that context, the union tried to broaden the peaceful interpretation of jihad instead of the violent one.

The MTTB's peaceful strategy of missionary activities and emphasis on being self-disciplined Muslims presented a distinct challenge to the Akıncılar and Ülkücüler who had been involved in street activism and violent struggles against the leftist groups. On the other hand, one may argue that the intellectual influence of the global trends of Islamist thoughts was seemingly neutralized by this mode of thinking, which is parallel to the principles of Sufi tradition. Hence, the MTTB depoliticized its arguments and placed emphasis on the spiritual journey of Muslim youths.

To sum up, the MTTB's conceptualization of order indicates its positioning against the notion of state and Islamic society. The Ottoman Empire was portrayed as a flawless Islamic order charged with a global mission of *nizam-ı âlem*. In contrast, the secular Republican state was the symbol of the "treachery" of the Westernization that caused a state of chaos in every sphere of the society according to the MTTB. The formulation of the union as a solution to the chaos advocates the formation of an Islamic order. In that way, it produced a fusion of a universal language of Islam and the narrative of the imperial prowess.

subject of his last film, *Süveyda*, is also interesting. It is the first movie in Turkish cinema about the Turkish alphabet reform.

CHAPTER V

THE OTTOMAN LEGACY IN THE MTTB

The legacy of the Ottoman past in the MTTB was not just an empty nostalgia for a defunct imperial order. The success of the Ottoman Empire's territorial expansion sets an example for the union. By claiming to be the heir of the Ottoman Empire, they reinterpret an old political concept, conquest, for their strategy. More significant is that the union finds an alternative model of civilization by regarding the Ottoman Empire as an integral part of Islamic civilization. It paves the way for the emergence of an antagonistic view towards the putative Western civilization. This chapter, in that regard, investigates the conceptualization of the conquest and civilization in the writings of the MTTB.

5.1 The Views on the Concept of Conquest in the Turkish Context

The concept of conquest in Turkish, *fetih*, has strong religious overtones. It has been acquired from Arabic, literally means “to open” (Eyüpoğlu, 1988). It is the name of a chapter in the Quran, known as Surah Al-Fath, which heralds a clear triumph of Muslims over the non-believers. In different contexts, it is both used as a reference to the success of the Islamic proselytizing and victory on the battlefield in the Quran's verses (Fayda, 1995). In Turkish, the term of conquest is predominantly regarded as a legitimate act of gaining lands, differentiated from invasion, *işgal*. Ottoman

literature produced a specific form of epic poetry, namely *fetihname*, that describes the conquest process of the cities and fortresses in great detail. Over time, the Ottoman Empire's continuous territorial expansion became a significant source of glory for Turkish collective memory. Perhaps the most spectacular one was Mehmed II's conquest of Constantinople in 1453, which caused the collapse of the Byzantine Empire. Brockett (2014) points out that this seminal moment set the stage for an imperial narrative echoed by Ottoman historians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that positioned Ottomans as the preeminent dynasty in the Islamic world and the defender of the religion. Moreover, the nineteenth century and early twentieth century witnessed the attempts of Ottoman elites and statesman to remind the Ottoman public that the events of 1453 show the imperial nation's prestige to world history, which serves a counter-narrative to emerging nationalist claims within the Empire (Brockett, 2014). The secular Republic of Turkey did not show considerable interest in the Conquest of İstanbul during the single-party era (1923-1946). Instead, it commemorated the Liberation Day of İstanbul which marks the end of the British occupation of İstanbul, following the sign of the treaty of Lausanne, on 6 October 1923 (Alkan, 2016) while tacitly regarding Atatürk as the new conqueror (*fatih*) of the city. The Democrat Party was more sympathetic to the commemorations of Conquest Day of İstanbul. Parallel to the rising interest to Ottoman past among the public, the government supported the quasi-official celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the conquest organized by the İstanbul Conquest Association; however, the absence of President Celal Bayar, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and Foreign Minister Mehmet Fuat Köprülü in the ceremonies sparked criticisms from the print media (Tağmat, 2014). In 1965, it was the MTTB that drew the public's attention to the Conquest Day again after a long

period of neglect by the state. Ever since that year, the concept of conquest had gained further importance for the MTTB. The union held mass celebrations each year on the anniversary of the conquest of İstanbul until 1980. During the 1970s, the National Salvation Party (MSP) maintained that tradition by organizing independent celebrations on 29 May. In that framework, it is vital to investigate how the MTTB conceptualizes the conquest in its political thought.

5.2 The Meaning of the Conquest for the MTTB

The MTTB's particular interest in the Ottoman past appears to be an overarching theme for its political discourse. When Rasim Cinisli was elected as the president of the union in March 1965, his first act in power was to organize a rally for the commemoration of the Conquest Day on 29 May 1965 in İstanbul's Sultanahmet Square. During the ceremony, a young student rode a horse in a traditional Ottoman dress to represent Fatih Sultan Mehmet, as the Ottoman military band, *mehter*, played heroic folk songs (MTTB, 1971). In these years, the MTTB also started to voice the conversion of the Hagia Sophia Museum back into a mosque. The Hagia Sophia Mosque was the symbol of the ultimate defeat of the Ottoman Empire against the Christian Western world in the eyes of the followers of the union. From 1950s onwards, Turkish nationalists, including ultra-nationalist Nihal Atsız, had also embraced the ideal of reopening Hagia Sophia as a mosque, which became one of the symbols of non-Kemalist Turkish nationalism (Aytürk, 2014). The MTTB frequently utilized the discourse of Hagia Sophia to condemn the policies of the early Republican period and official history construction.

In 1967, the then president İsmail Kahraman hailed the MTTB as “our great ancestor Fatih's generation” in his commemoration speech (Milli Gençlik, 1968). The title of

“Fatih’s generation” became a popular motto for the MTTB in future years.

Apparently, this commemorative practice provided a ground for the MTTB to produce an alternative founding father, other than Atatürk. While prioritizing the celebration of 29 May, the MTTB’s indifference to the national commemoration days of the Republic serves to incorporate the Ottoman past into the national identity, undermining the Kemalist construction of official history (Çınar, 2005). The union’s alternative reading of Turkish history demonstrates their discontent with secularism and Western-minded Kemalist reforms. During that period, Necip Fazıl, Mustafa Müftüoğlu, and Kadir Mısıroğlu were the leading figures that shaped the MTTB’s perception of Ottoman/Turkish history. They regularly gave the conference talks in the union on the subjects of the late Ottoman and early Republican history titled such as “The Truths of our Recent History”, “Let The History That Lies Be Ashamed”, and “False Heroes”. The works of these authors were always included in the MTTB’s recommended book lists. As a reaction to Kemalist official history, Islamist trend of history writing, constructed by Necip Fazıl Kısakürek’s essays in the *Büyük Doğu* magazine and maintained by Kadir Mısıroğlu, Sadık Albayrak, and Mustafa Müftüoğlu, endeavored to defame the Republican elites and their policies while heroizing the “others” of the official narrative, including Abdülhamid II, Sultan Vahdeddin and İskilipli Atıf Hoca (Kara, 2016). This Manichean view of history resonates with the writings produced by the union. As a result, the MTTB developed a harsh critique against the official history narrative.

For the MTTB, the concept of conquest had been loaded with different interpretations besides its original meaning. The conquest of İstanbul was seen as the zenith of Ottoman civilization. The real motivation behind the Ottoman conquests, according to the MTTB, was restoring the world order (Milli Gençlik, 1975a). Thus,

they differed from the Western power's territorial expansions. Ürper (1974) argues that the aim of the conquests was not simply the bloodshed; instead, they sought to protect the oppressed and secure justice in the territories where Ottomans waged war. Here, it should be noted that the MTTB's perception of Ottoman history before the Tanzimat period presents a romanticized account of the Ottoman rule. Without attaching any negative connotations to it, Ottoman polity was portrayed as a classless, egalitarian society in which the state and society live in perfect harmony. Thus, the conquests as a crucial part of the imperial rule were no exception to that narrative. In that way, the MTTB associates the conquests with the Ottoman's alleged ideal of expanding Muslim territory through jihad. Specifically, for the union, the conquest of İstanbul was the fulfillment of the Prophet Muhammad's prophecy that a great commander with a great army would one day conquer Constantinople. It makes the conquest of İstanbul the achievement of a long-awaited Islamic cause, directly ordered by the Prophet, "the eternal and everlasting commander" (Ürper, 1974). Accordingly, the Ottoman past had been incorporated into Islamic history as a constitutive element.

Apart from historical interpretations, the conquest appears as a spiritual ideal in the writings of the MTTB. With frequent reference to the Sufi teachings, the union regards the conquest as an act of the spread of the Islamic messages to the society. The ideal of conquest represents the real legacy of Fatih Sultan Mehmed, according to the MTTB. Thus, they reinterpreted this ideal in a different form. In light of that, it is emphasized that the conquest of Anatolia was made possible by the endeavors of Sufi dervishes, e.g., Ahmet Yesevi, Yunus Emre, Hacı Bektaş Veli, and Alperens (dervish warriors) with the "dynamism of Turkic blood" (Yurt, 1978; Taysi 1978). The image of Alperen seems emblematic of the MTTB's vision of ideal Muslim

youth. It represents the combination of *Alp* (warrior heroes) and *Eren* (Sufi dervishes). In that regard, they not only took part in the battles for the conquest of Anatolia but also conveys the Islamic messages to the non-believers for the sake of the Islamization of the lands. A similar discourse can be found for the conquest of İstanbul. Fatih Sultan Mehmed was portrayed as a devoted Sufi figure. It is argued that he would not be a real conqueror if he did not have a Sufi background in his actions and thought (Taysi, 1978). Moreover, Akşemseddin, Sufi tutor of Sultan Mehmed, was the spiritual conqueror of the city, who instructed the young Sultan to strive in the path of Allah and undertake jihad for disseminating Allah's word, according to the author. The image of Sufism offered by the MTTB's writings is the fundamental part of Ottoman polity. It not only provides a network of warrior and missionaries for "material and spiritual conquests" but also holds sway on the Ottoman political elite's vision of politics. It could give an idea about the widespread perception regarding the relations between politics and Sufi orders. It treats Sufi orders as the mastermind of political order, although they do not directly get involved in politics.

The spiritual interpretation of the notion of conquest played a fundamental role in the MTTB's position against the violent street clashes among student groups during the 1970s. The editorial of the 30th issue of *Milli Gençlik* (1978) states that the only solution for ending political chaos and anarchy in the country is to find the "conqueror of the hearths", which is the art of dervishes. Maintaining a Sufi tradition of spreading the religious ideals of Islam became the main motivation for the union. In that sense, there is also a tendency to portray the proliferation of the Marxist youth movement in Turkey as the culmination of the secular education system and Westernization policies of the governments. Without directly targeting the Marxist

political thought, the writings in *Milli Gençlik* paid attention to the alleged loss of historical consciousness, national and religious values in the society. Thus, the leftist ideologies filled the lacuna caused by the lack of faith, according to the MTTB (*Milli Gençlik*, 1975b). By drawing attention to the “crisis of faith” (*iman buhranı*) as the source of the political issues of the country, the MTTB found a ground to express its yearnings for an ideal community and legitimize its mission of the Islamization of society through missionary activities and education. In that way, the concept of conquest was seen as tantamount to jihad, the spiritual struggle against the self. In an article titled *Fetih Derken*, the author notes two stages of the conquest. While the first step is to engage in an inner struggle to live as Islam instructs, deemed as “Greater Conquest” and “Greater Jihad”, the following stage of conquest aims at the formation of Islamic society with the efforts of religious tabligh (Korkmaz, 1978). All good Muslims should act as a soldier in that cause of conquest, he argues, as the Islamic history is full of such achievements, especially under the leadership of Sufi sheiks, the great conquerors. This narration identifies religious brotherhoods as the main agent of religious revivalism that would reverse the wrongdoings of the Westernization in Turkey and formulate an Islamic alternative to the ills of capitalism and socialism. The peaceful interpretation of the conquest and jihad provides a ground for the MTTB to keep away from the violence. In that regard, the mission of the Islamic tabligh remains as a primary agenda for the union even when the violent clashes between ideologically motivated groups reached its peak during the second half of the 1970s.

The MTTB’s Head of Education Directorate in Edirne Branch, Erdoğan Tuna, was killed by a group of Turkish nationalists (idealists) on the street, in December 1977. Although this incident drew massive anger from the Islamic camp, the MTTB

maintained a similar discourse of nonviolence. The first *Milli Gençlik* issue following this incident includes an illustration of a young man on its cover dozed off while reading a book. The editorial of the issue covers the death of Erdoğan Tuna. It complains about social problems in the country while blaming the attempts of Westernization and public intellectuals for creating anarchy and chaos (Milli Gençlik, 1978). As a solution to the crisis, the article suggests returning to the library and books by escaping from anarchy and ideological clashes that would enlighten the society. It also adds, “Even if Islam is imprisoned by four walls, it maintains the religious tabligh there” (Milli Gençlik 1978: 5). Articulated as such, this mode of thought prioritizes educational practices and an inward form of mysticism as an Islamic strategy to tackle social problems and ideological clashes. It brought about the growing disillusionment with the political parties of the time, including even the Islamist Welfare Party. The firm adherence to the peaceful interpretation of conquest and jihad represents a divergence from fundamentalist tendencies that prevailed among some Islamist movements.

5.3 Civilization in Turkish Political Thought

The word *medeniyet*, Turkish equivalent of civilization, first came into Turkish in the 1830s as a neologism derived from the Arabic word *medine* (city). The early use of the concept referred to good manners and elegance, while the word gained political connotations during the late 19th century (Gürpınar, 2013). In the Ottoman elites’ perception, civilization, which was deemed as single and monolithic, was the opposite of barbarism and ignorance. According to Gürpınar (2013), Islam was considered as an integral part of the single/monolithic civilization and compatible with science and progress within the Tanzimat period. It was a faction in the Young

Türk generation who challenged this notion of civilization by identifying Western civilization with imperialism, as an eternal Crusader/Christian foe of Islam. On the other hand, a group of the proponent of Westernization, who were later influential on the ideology of the republican regime, advocated that Western civilization should be the single reference point “with its roses and thorns” (Hanioglu, 1997: 145). The Republican elites followed the same path in their perception of civilization. The prevailing notion during that period considers civilization, modernity, and Westernism as identical on the ground that all modernizing countries need to embrace as a universal norm (Çınar, 2005). Not surprisingly, Islamist intellectuals of the Republican period formulated alternative visions of the understanding of civilization. According to Aydın (2006), the post-World War II Islamic critiques of the West had an occidentalist manner, epitomized by Kısasürek’s writings, denouncing Western civilization on all sides without attaching any positive value to it, while its actual target was the views of the Republican elites. At the global level, the intellectuals in Asia and Africa had already used civilizationism as an anticolonial discourse for contesting the alleged supremacy of the West by labeling the Western civilization as decadent, violent, and declining (Aydın, 2017). In particular, the works of Arnold Joseph Toynbee, a venerated British historian, reinvigorated such discussions. By drawing a sharp distinction between the Islamic and Western worlds, Toynbee defines Islamic civilization as one of the few enduring civilizations that have the potential to withstand the West’s materialism and destructiveness (Aydın, 2017). The Western critique of him elicited a great deal of interest among Islamist intellectuals. Within the Turkish context, a more sophisticated understanding of civilization was manifested by a leading Islamist writer, Sezai Karakoç, during the same period. The basis of civilization, in his

thought, should be the divine knowledge that finds its ideal form in Islamic civilization (Aydın, 2016). Unlike Kısakürek's nationalist tone, Karakoç depicts civilization as the ultimate ideal of humankind; thus, the interactions of Islamic civilization with other ones enriched the scope of it (Duran, 2005). He envisions a revival of Islamic civilization by overcoming the crisis the Islamic world has experienced due to the attacks of Western colonialism, inspired by Arnold Toynbee's critical reading of Western civilization (Aydın & Duran, 2015). Karakoç reads human history as the interaction between Islamic and Western civilization since the beginning, which makes him a proponent of Islamic internationalism. The Ottoman past was also celebrated as a superb example of maintaining Islamic civilization, also the last representative of it, on the other hand, Karakoç does not make a reference to a privilege of any race, nation, or particular community in his writings (Gürçan, 2015). It was İsmet Özel who posed a challenge to civilizationist discourse that prevailed among the Islamist intellectuals. In his famous book titled "Three Problems: Technique, Civilization, and Alienation" (*Üç Mesele: Teknik, Medeniyet, Yabancılaşma*), Özel (2013) ardently refuses the distinction between West's technological improvements and culture made by Islamist thinkers. Özel considers technology as a tool of Western imperialism/domination and reflection of West's "brutal" and "selfish" lifestyle which stands in direct contrast to the Islamic way of life; thus, it is not possible to preserve Islamic values while utilizing Western technology (Eligür, 2010). Therefore, he supports the rejection of Western civilization, and its technology and science. The conceptualization of civilization, in that regard, stands in a significant position with regard to Islamic thought's relation with the West. Along these lines, it would be appropriate to scrutinize the MTTB's approach to the notion of civilization.

5.4 The Discourse of Civilization in the MTTB

As the MTTB began to downplay secular nationalism by the late 1960s, the discourse of civilization gained further importance for the union. It does not explicitly evoke ethnic-based nationalist sentiments when it is used as Ottoman civilization or Islamic civilization. Remarkably, the notion of Islamic civilization implies the existence of an alternative project of modernity other than the trajectory of Western civilization.

The admiration for the Ottoman past in the MTTB was highly intense as indicated in previous chapters. In that sense, the notion of Ottoman civilization appears as an ideal form of civilization that stands in stark contrast to the Western one. The editorial of the first two issues of *Milli Gençlik* titled “From a Civilization of Faith to Westernization” discusses the comparison of them. The civilization of faith, according to the article, represents the Islamic civilization which emerged with the foundation of an Islamic state by the Prophet Muhammad (Milli Gençlik, 1974). It goes on to argue that civilization of faith brought an egalitarian, just order, that punishes every act of enmity, hostility, prostitution, interest, and slavery, based on the teachings of the Quran while introducing the foundations of positive sciences to Europe (Milli Gençlik, 1974). On the other hand, Europe produced a slavery-based, clergy-dominated, unjust, and exploitative order with the evolution of Christianity into a pagan-like mindset that leads to the confrontation of science and the idea of religion. Ottoman civilization, the article argues, is the continuation of the civilization of faith that appears as the sole alternative to Europe, which brought justice, mercy, and compassion to the territories it conquered for the sake of spreading Allah’s words. That narrative establishes Ottoman civilization as the only representative of the Islamic world against the allegedly united and monolithic

Western civilization. The MTTB, in that sense, identifies itself as the heir of “one thousand years of civilization”, by including the Seljuk Empire as the predecessor of the Ottomans. It assumes a linear, homogeneous flow of history since the onset of Islamic civilization, thereby allocating a constitutive role to the Ottoman and Seljuk past for the trajectory of that civilization. The cover of the 21st issue of *Çatı* had the title “Ottoman becomes the imam” while announcing the MTTB members’ participation in a seminar organized by the World Assembly of Muslim Youth in Malaysia. It signifies the union’s perception regarding the “exceptional” status of the Ottoman Empire as it is expected to play a leading role on the global stage.

Furthermore, in the preface of the first issue of *Milli Gençlik*, which expresses the aims of the magazine, states that the magazine aims to inform the readers about its mission as the “children of a nation that reached the zenith of the civilization” (Milli Gençlik, 1974). Indeed, this formulation seems to have reinforced Turkish identity and nationalist sentiments. Although this narrative is not exclusionary by its nature due to the emphasis on the notion of civilization in place of the nationhood, it tacitly elevates Turkish identity to a supreme position as the founding agent of the “one thousand years of civilization”. Also noteworthy is that the MTTB’s narration leaves out the pre-Islamic era of Turkish history, which was overly celebrated by secular nationalists. This signifies that the union equates the notion of civilization with the display of affiliation to Islam.

The MTTB’s rhetoric of civilization imagines Western civilization as the exact opposite of Ottoman/Islamic civilization. It is usually described by pejorative words, namely, predatory, exploitative, and deadly materialist. According to the MTTB, it is the place of sodomy and robbery in which the “gods are running after the women like a mad bull” (Milli Gençlik, 1977a: 6). In that way, the putative Western civilization

was demonized entirely. On the other hand, the Ottoman civilization represents the “civilization of hearth” which brings an order befitting human nature (Milli Gençlik, 1975c). The belonging to the Ottoman civilization is an essential feature and natural identity, according to the union. The editorial of the 21st issue includes a quotation from Cemil Meriç (cited in Milli Gençlik, 1977b: 9) “Even if we burn all Qur’ans and demolish all mosques we are still Ottoman in the eyes of Europe” when discussing the nature of the Western world. This mode of thinking positions itself against the West as a representative of a glorious civilization. Here, it should be noted that Cemil Meriç’s intellectual interest in Ottoman-Islamic cultural heritage during the 1970s (Köksal, 1999) makes him a rising intellectual star among the conservative circles as a respected figure. Whereas he had always preferred being critical of ideologies and right-left distinction in Turkey, the leitmotif of his works, the critical reading of Westernization and Republican reforms, find its reflections in the sphere of conservative-Islamic thought. Meriç also reiterates the idealization of Ottoman past as the “zenith of a civilization”; however, he does not endeavor to historicize the cultural and administrative triumph of Ottoman polity, rather, render it as a historical and contextual one (Köksal, 1999: 88-89). His admiration of the notion of Ottoman civilization resonates with the MTTB’s stance. Cemil Meriç, during the 1970s, gave several seminars to the MTTB members while his books were included in the recommendation lists of the union. *Milli Gençlik* also conducted an interview with Meriç about his ideas regarding Westernization and Ottoman civilization. He stated that being a member of a great civilization, constituted by the Ottomans, is a source of honor (Meriç, 1975). Meriç further maintains that the Ottoman Empire was a “community of free people”, where the common faith based on the idea of ummah made people united in a classless society. On the other side, according to Meriç,

European civilization is the civilization of slavery due to the violent class struggles and materialist worldview. In that context, it seems that Meriç's civilization-based reading of history influenced the MTTB's perception of Ottoman past and European civilization. Both of them perpetuated an idealized view of Ottoman civilization in contrast to the European one.

For the MTTB, the Westernization process initiated during the Tanzimat period marks the beginning of 200 years of treachery. This period was seen as a part of a grand project designated by European powers that "make a nation which carries the banner of one thousand years of civilization a servant of the West" and "systematically destroy moral values" (Milli Gençlik, 1975c). During the 1970s, anti-Western critiques of Islamist writers in Turkey were quite prevalent. One of the most influential ones was Mehmet Doğan's (2001) book titled *Batıllaşma İhaneti*, The Betrayal Called Westernization, which depicts the Ottoman/Turkish story of Westernization as an initiative of a group of alienated elites who betrayed the cultural values of society. The MTTB's antagonistic view of the West also followed the same path. Thus, the history of the late Ottoman Empire and the whole Republican era is read as the lost years of established civilization. This perception creates a sense of discontent with the Westernizing reforms and political elites, including the Western-minded Tanzimat Reformers, Young Turks, and most notably, Republican elites.

CONCLUSION

The history of the youth movement in Turkey cannot be written without underscoring the unique role of the Turkish National Student Union. The foundation of the union dates back to the last years of the Ottoman Empire. Since then, the MTTB has witnessed the domination of different ideological configurations in accordance with the changing political dynamics of Turkey. It is no doubt that the MTTB's conservative turn in 1965 was a major milestone in the history of the union. In that period, it had evolved into a leading agent of the Islamic youth movement in the country. The MTTB played a highly influential role in the political socialization of a youth generation. The trained cadres of the union occupy significant positions in academia, bureaucracy, and politics. Perhaps most telling was the Justice and Development Party's emergence as the dominant political power in the 2000s because the last two presidents of the Turkish Republic and many prominent political actors in the AKP have a MTTB background in their political career. In that context, this thesis studied the intellectual origins of the union by analyzing its publications between 1965 and 1980. The MTTB witnessed a loose coalition between conservative-nationalist and Islamist groups until the onset of the 1970s following the ideological turn in 1965. During the 1970s, the union formulated Islam as a coherent, total political system and an alternative to socialism, capitalism, and all "human-made" ideologies and synthesis. As the Islamic identity became more

evident, the MTTB began to question the notion of state, democracy, secularism, and national identity.

This study endeavors to reveal the ideological positioning of the union within the right-left spectrum of Turkish political context. The overall argument is that the MTTB embraced an eclectic ideology during the 1970s with the inspiration of revolutionary Islamist movements, mainstream conservative nationalist thought in Turkey and the principles of İstanbul-based Naksibendi orders. The amalgamation of these strands of thought made the union a typical far-right organization while it demonstrated unique features in terms of its positioning against the legitimacy of the state and the quest for an Islamic order which set the MTTB apart from other right-wing organizations of the time.

The conceptual analysis of revolution reveals that the global Islamist trends and the works of Islamist intellectuals in Turkey shaped the perception of the union concerning the revolution. In that period, the MTTB followed a clear anti-Kemalist stance similar to Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's political ideas. They delegitimized the Kemalist revolution by labeling it as a designated attack to the religious, cultural, and national values of the society orchestrated by a collaboration between the "alienated" local elites and Western-led masterminds, including the Jews and Zionists. This period also represents the desanctification of the perception of the state for the union. With the influence of the post-colonial vision of Islamist writers in Egypt and the Indian Subcontinent, the MTTB's confidence in the state mechanism was shattered dramatically. The state was depicted as an apparatus of non-Islamic order and the primary source of oppression for the Muslims. In that sense, the union developed a counter-revolutionary discourse and began to voice the need for the establishment of an Islamic state. It was a sign of a critical rupture from mainstream Islamic thought

in Turkey that articulated a state-centered political discourse inherited by the late Ottoman Islamism. On the other side, the principles of Sufi tradition hold sway over the MTTB's ideological contours. In particular, the Naksibendi order's religious doctrine inspired many high-ranking members of the union during the 1970s. The juxtaposition of fundamentalist Islamist trends and moderate Naksibendi-inspired political thought, which supports the gradual Islamization of society through missionary activities, was not painless for the MTTB. It brought about a split in the movement when the impact of the Naksibendi tradition prevailed in the union. The ones who left the MTTB during that period joined emerging Islamist movements, which were more sympathetic to the overtaking the state power with revolutionary measures. Yet, the union felt the tension between these strands of thought until it faced closure following the 1980 coup d'état.

Furthermore, the conceptualization of order in the MTTB publications demonstrates that the union considered all elements of Turkish society as in a state of complete disarray and corruption due to the effects of Westernization. They also argued that society suffered a severe crisis of faith. The MTTB proposed the foundation of an Islamic order as a solution to the alleged social crisis and political turmoil in Turkey. This formulation proposes Islam as a totalistic order that able to regulate all spheres of society with its divine principles. To this end, the MTTB frequently referred to the proselytizing activities, *tabligh*, as a genuine method for the Islamization of society. Inspired by the teachings and strategy of the Naksibendi order, it prioritized the missionary activities and offered a society-centered approach, instead of top-down political change on the nature of the state. In that sense, the classical age of the Ottoman Empire was deemed as a righteous political order in the political thought of the union. The MTTB reinterpreted the Ottoman tradition of conquest as a reference

point for its cause. With a spiritual reading of conquest and jihad, the union reaffirms the significance of missionary activities as a strategy for forming an Islamic society.

The conceptual analysis of civilization reveals that the MTTB has a linear and homogeneous understanding of history. It positioned itself as the heir of a thousand years of civilization, constituted by the Ottoman and Seljuk Empires. Turkish identity was constructed as the founding agent of that civilization without the use of ethnic references. The Ottoman Empire's portrayal as the guardian of the Islamic world with a global mission of restoring the world order is a significant part of the national identity construction of the union. It excludes pre-Islamic Turkish history from its narrative and incorporates itself into the broad Islamic history. The MTTB's civilizational discourse establishes Western civilization as the polar opposite of Islamic civilization. Accordingly, the Westernization efforts were seen as the brutal intervention to the linear flow of Ottoman/Islamic history. In that way, the MTTB regards the interaction with the West as a zero-sum game of competition. Lastly, one should note that the MTTB's conceptualization of civilization primarily aimed at the denunciation of the Republican elites, thus it barely reflected the intellectual debates on this concept during that period.

Further studies regarding the MTTB could investigate the union's current ideological orientation with comparison to the period between 1965 and 1980. The MTTB has followed a pro-government stance since its reestablishment in 2008. Indeed, it seems that the union's current agenda is heavily inspired by the period between 1965 and 1980. It should also be noted that the impact of the Cold War on right-wing politics in Turkey during the post-WWII period needs further analysis.

This study concentrates on a specific period for the analysis of essential concepts. In order to broaden our comprehension, we need more diachronic analysis of similar concepts with regard to competitive discourses of the time. For instance, the concepts of justice, hegira and *tevhid* were highly popular in Islamist magazines during the 1970s, similar to the concepts studied in this study. Moreover, tracing the essential political concepts in Ottoman/Turkish political thought with a synchronic analysis would enrich our perception regarding the relation between semantic transformation and socio-political change. In particular, further investigation of concepts like civilization, nation and state may illustrate the continuities and disjunctures in Islamic political thought in Turkey.

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