USS-1 INKILAB: AN OFFICIAL NARRATIVE OF THE EVOLUTION OF REFORMS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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ABSTRACT

The steady decay and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire forced the Ottoman sultans and statesmen to take some precautions, which usually took the form of attempts at reform. The intellectuals of the period discussed the nature of these reforms and wrote extensively on the successes and failures of the attempts to implement them. Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844-1912) published an extensive examination of these reforms in his quite understudied book Üss-i İnkilab (The Basis of Reform), published in 1294/1877-78. In two volumes, Ahmed Midhat discusses the reforms that the Ottoman Empire had implemented over more than a decade (1861-1877) during the reigns of Abdüllaziz and Murad V and the beginning of Abdülhamid II's reign.

The first volume discusses the events that took place during the period between the Crimean War and the enthronement of Abdülhamid II in 1876. It consists of two prologues, twelve chapters, and documentary appendices. The second volume examines extensively the first year of the rule of Abdülhamid II, giving special emphasis to the debates over the constitution and constitutional government. It consists of a prologue, three chapters and, documentary appendices.

This paper argues that, after a coup against Abdüllaziz was accomplished and Murad V was deposed because of mental problems, Abdülhamid wished to make sure that his rule would not be one of those fragile reigns that lasted only for a short period,
To strengthen his position as a ruler in the eyes of the Ottoman bureaucrats and intellectuals of the period, he sought historical legitimization for his accession to power. To serve his purpose, nothing would be more effective than commissioning a court historian to write the official history of reforms, which "justifies rather than criticizes" his rule. In Üss-i İnkılab, Ahmed Midhat attempts to demonstrate that Abdülaziz could not fully understand the essence of reforms, which is to give more freedom to the people, and failed to answer the demands of the Ottomans. Hence, Abdülaziz proved his incompetence to rule the empire. Ahmed Midhat further argues that Abdülhamid really wanted to implement radical reforms to increase the prosperity of his empire and was willing to offer justice and freedom to his people. Therefore, according to Ahmed Midhat, Abdülhamid, a freedom lover by birth, is a perfect fit for the empire.
Dedicated to my mother, Krîymet Ulutaş
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The steady decay and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire forced the Ottoman sultans and statesmen to take some precautions, which usually took the form of attempts at reform. As early as 1793, Selim III (1761-1808) had initiated a series of reforms intended to modernize the Ottoman military. He established new military schools, staffed with instructors from France, and then attempted to organize a new body of troops to replace the Janissaries. Ultimately, his successor Mahmud II (1784-1839) succeeded in dissolving the Janissaries, who had revolted in opposition to military reform in 1826. Mahmud II's successor, Abdülmecid (1823-1861), advised by his foreign minister Mustafa Resid Paşa, initiated a program of reform that would become known as the Tanzimat (reorganization). He outlined the general nature of these reforms in the Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu (Imperial Edict of Gülhane) in 1839.

In 1853, the Crimean War broke out. The Ottoman Empire allied with Britain and France against Russia. When the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1856, the Danubian principalities (Moldavia and Wallachia, after 1859 called Romania) were recognized as quasi-independent states under Ottoman suzerainty. At the same time, the Ottoman
Empire became a member of the European concert, and its integrity was guaranteed by the great European states; the Ottoman Empire, in turn, promised to improve the status of its Christian subjects with the 1856 Ottoman proclamation of the second reform edict (İslahat Fermanı), which continued the Tanzimat process.

Ali Paşa (1815-1871) and Fuad Paşa (1815-1869) were the leading statesmen in the post-1856 reforms. Both protégés of Mustafa Reşid Paşa, the reformist grand vizier, they attempted among other things to reform the Ottoman educational system, the military, and the bureaucracy. New secular schools were organized at all levels, from elementary school through high school and higher education. The reform in the Ottoman Empire peaked in 1876 with the introduction of the first constitutional period. Abdulhamid also promulgated the first Ottoman constitution (Kanun-u Esasi) in 1876.

The intellectuals of the period discussed the nature of the reforms and wrote extensively on the successes and failures of the attempts to implement them. Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844-1912) published an extensive examination of these reforms in his quite understudied book Üss-i İnkilab² (The Basis of Reform), published in 1294/1877-78. In two volumes, Ahmed Midhat discusses the reforms that the Ottoman Empire had

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¹ Article VII of the treaty states, “Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, His Majesty the Emperor of Austria, His Majesty the Emperor of the French, His Majesty the King of Prussia, His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russia, and His Majesty the King of Sardinia, declare the Sublime Porte admitted to participate in the advantages of the Public Law and System (Concert) of Europe.” J.C. Hinewitz, The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 320.

² Ahmed Midhat, Üss-i İnkilab, (Istanbul: Takvimhane-yi Amire, 1294/1877-78)
implemented over more than a decade (1861-1877) during the reigns of Abdülaziz and Murad V and the beginning of Abdülhamid II’s reign.

The first volume discusses the events that took place during the period between the Crimean War and the enthronement of Abdülhamid II in 1876. It consists of two prologues, twelve chapters, and documentary appendices:

1. General situation of the Ottoman Empire at the time of Abdülaziz’s enthronement.
2. Abdülaziz’s military reforms
3. Public Works during Abdülaziz’s reign
4. Intellectual life
5. Civil wars and uprisings
6. Financial situation of the empire
7. Diplomacy
8. Internal affairs
9. Abdülaziz’s deposition
10. Murad V’s enthronement
11. Uprisings in Serbia and Bulgaria
12. Murad V’s illness and his deposition
The second volume examines extensively the first year of the rule of Abdülhamid II, giving special emphasis to the debates over the constitution and constitutional government. It consists of a prologue, three chapters and, documentary appendices:

1. General situation of the Ottoman Empire at the time of Abdülhamid's enthronement.
2. Civil wars
3. New Regulations

Ahmed Midhat’s documentary appendices include imperial edicts, speeches, letters, and official documents. He adduces some of the documents, such as Ottoman soldier’s complimentary letters to Abdülhamid, to substantiate his arguments. Other documents, such as the Imperial Edict of Gülhane and the first Ottoman constitution, provide essential references for his discussion of major Ottoman reforms. Documentary appendices served a valuable function for readers in a place and time where the publication of official document was still limited by modern standards.

One should note first and foremost that Ahmed Midhat was commissioned by Abdülhamid II to write the history of the reforms. In other words, Üss-i İnkılab presents an official history of reforms: an authorized history sponsored and published by or with the support of an agency of government.³ In his introduction to the book, Ahmed Midhat

remarks “There is no need to recall that the wise person who deemed necessary a history of the reforms is that sovereign mindful of truths and attentive to subtileties, Gazi Sultan Abdülhamid II, may Allah strengthen and preserve him, who observes the manifold necessities of the state and its people in this important period, and who ponders everything from the greatest matters to small details.” He continues, “I don’t know how to celebrate this valuable appointment and I don’t know how to submit my gratitude to the Most Honored Sultan.”

Üss-i İnkılab deserves serious scholarly attention for a number of reasons. The book covers one of the most tempestuous periods of Ottoman history and provides an extensive account of the reforms implemented in this period. It is the intellectual product of a writer who, after writing Üss-i İnkılab, acquired the patronage of Abdülhamid II and was given the directorship of the official gazette and printing press. Thus, examining Üss-i İnkılab will give us a glimpse of the official ideology of the period and the mindset of Abdülhamid II.

This paper argues that, after a coup against Abdülaziz was accomplished and Murad V was deposed because of mental problems, Abdülhamid wished to make sure

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5 “... nasıl sevineceğimi bileremekte hakpaye-i nehasin-ihtıva-yı hazret-i zillullâhiye nasıl bir suret-i nimet-gınașı ile arz-i teşekkârât edeceğimi taşıy edemseyerek...” Ibid. p.5

that his rule would not be one of those fragile reigns that lasted only for a short period. To strengthen his position as a ruler in the eyes of the Ottoman bureaucrats and intellectuals of the period, he sought historical legitimization for his accession to power. To serve his purpose, nothing would be more effective than commissioning a court historian to write the official history of reforms, which "justifies rather than criticizes" his rule. In Üss-i Inkilab, Ahmed Midhat attempts to demonstrate that Abdülaziz could not fully understand the essence of reforms, which is to give more freedom to the people, and failed to answer the demands of the Ottomans. Hence, Abdülaziz proved his incompetence to rule the empire. Ahmed Midhat further argues that Abdülhamid really wanted to implement radical reforms to increase the prosperity of his empire and was willing to offer justice and freedom to his people. Therefore, according to Ahmed Midhat, Abdülhamid, a freedom lover by birth, is a perfect fit for the empire.

While seeking historical legitimization for his accession to power, Abdülhamid was also seeking guidance. During the early years of his reign, he occasionally conversed about political and economic matters with a small number of intellectuals and foreign diplomats. For example, he regularly invited the British ambassador to the Ottoman Porte, Sir Austen Henry Layard, to the palace to consult with him about the reforms necessary for the regeneration and prosperity of the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile,

7 Blumenson, p. 154.
Abdülahmid requested a study of the previous reigns to provide him with guidance for his own reign. Üss-i İnkilab can be seen as a response to this request. In this sense, Üss-i İnkilab is a type of nasihätname (treatise of advice) to Abdülahmid.

However, one should note that Üss-i İnkilab in fact misrepresents the history of the preceding period by making it sound as if the sultans—Abdülmecid, Abdülaçiz, and Murad—were the real policy-makers in the empire. This would be partially true for Abdülaçiz; however, underplaying the role of the Tanzimat bureaucrats mentioned above, it certainly misrepresents the fact that the real center of decision-making between 1839 and 1871 was at the Sublime Porte.

There are three times things that are always in Ahmed Midhat’s mind: The comparison of Abdülaçiz and Abdülahmid, the press and censorship, and the constitution and constitutional government. This paper will show that Ahmed Midhat, even when he writes about another issue, such as the financial situation or the Cretan uprising of 1866-68, shifts the focus of discussion to press and censorship. When he recounts Murad’s reign, he still compares Abdülaçiz and Abdülahmid. When he writes about the 1877-78 rebellion in Bulgaria, he stops narrating the war and comments on the constitution for page after pages, arguing that if the Ottomans had a constitution, there would not be so many rebellions.

In the first part of this study, I will discuss Üss-i İnkilab in detail, addressing issues such as its readership and its contribution to the historiography of the late Ottoman
period. Then I will argue that Ahmed Midhat’s life story is crucial for analyzing Üss-i İnkilab and that writing Üss-i İnkilab was a turning point in his life. Although Ahmed Midhat is best known for his contributions to Ottoman Turkish literature, in this part of the paper, I will principally discuss his role as historian, which can be seen through Üss-i İnkilab.

In the second part of the paper, I will make a comparison between sultans Abdulaziz and Abdulhamid in terms of their personal traits, reform attempts, and diplomatic powers as reflected in Üss-i İnkilab. I will show that Ahmed Midhat, although he appreciated the reform attempts by Abdulaziz, implies that these reforms had not met the expectations of the people and were not aimed at eradicating the empire’s real problems, such as hunger for freedom and education. Meanwhile, he illustrates that the qualities that Abdulaziz lacked in order to be a successful sultan were quite present in Abdulhamid.

After discussing the short reign of Murad V, I will address one of the most controversial issues of the period: the press and censorship. In order to understand and contextualize the censorship that Ahmed Midhat bitterly criticizes, I will make a brief comparison of censorship in the Ottoman Empire and France. In this part we will see that while Ahmed Midhat tried to establish himself as an ardent defender of the free press, he also acted as Abdulhamid’s mouthpiece\(^\text{16}\) in some cases by accusing some journalists,

such as Namık Kemal, of being against the constitution of 1876 that Abdülhamid supported.

In the last part I will deal with the debates on the first Ottoman constitution and constitutional government. I will analyze the arguments that both opponents and defenders of the constitution put forward. This part will also include the theological debate over the compatibility of Islam and constitutional government. I will first show how Islam was used by the constitutionalists to justify their arguments and then give an assessment of these arguments using Islamic sources.

This paper will ultimately demonstrate that Üss-i İnkılab marked the beginning of a close relationship between Abdülhamid and Ahmed Midhat and that both parties benefited greatly from this relationship. While Abdülhamid found guidance and historical legitimization in Üss-i İnkılab and recognized in the author an ardent defender of his rule, Ahmed Midhat became a protégé of Abdülhamid and enjoyed his generous support.
CHAPTER 2

AHMED MIDHAT AND ÜSS-1 İNKILAB

2.1 LIFE OF AHMED MIDHAT

The great Ottoman writer Ahmed Midhat\textsuperscript{11} was born in 1260/1844 in Istanbul to Süleyman Aga, a poor cloth dealer, and a Circassian mother. He lost his father at a very early age, and his half-brother Hafız Aga, who was a sub-governor of Vidin in the Bulgarian principality and a protégé of the reformist future grand vizier Midhat Paşa, took care of Ahmed Midhat and the rest of the family. Since Hafız Aga was appointed to different locations as an official, Ahmed Midhat had the opportunity to live in Vidin and Niş in present-day Bulgaria. He also lived in Istanbul for a brief period during his childhood. In Niş in present-day Bulgaria, he entered a Rüşdiye school (the equivalent of a junior high school) and graduated in 1280/1863. Following Midhat Paşa, who took over the newly constituted Danube province, which extended from the Danube River to the Balkan Mountains, Hafız Aga and his family moved to the capital of the province of Danube, Rusçuk. There, Ahmed Midhat, although he was only a recent graduate of the Rüşdiye school, was appointed as a clerk in the provincial chancery (vilayet mektubi

\textsuperscript{11} As a child he was known only as Ahmed. “Midhat” is his pen name (mahlas), which he acquired later through his association with Midhat Paşa.
During his years in Rusçuk, he won the favor of Midhat Paşa. According to Ahmed Midhat, Midhat Paşa was “one of the first dignitaries from whom the increase of happiness of the fatherland is expected.”\textsuperscript{12} Ahmed Midhat acknowledged his debt to Midhat Paşa, who played a key role in his intellectual development. As a result of his close relationship with Midhat Paşa, Ahmed Midhat soon became editor-in-chief of the provincial newspaper *Tuna* (“Danube”).

In 1285/1868, when Midhat Paşa became the governor of Baghdad, Ahmed Midhat followed him there and worked as the director of the government printing press and editor of the newspaper *Al-Zawrâ*:\textsuperscript{13} However, the sudden death of his brother made him decide to return to Istanbul with his family in 1288/1871. In Istanbul, he refrained from state service and devoted himself to writing and publishing. He established a small printing house, where he published his own books and articles.

During the early 1870’s, he had the opportunity to meet some prominent members of the Young Ottomans. Initially, Ahmed Midhat was excited by the ideology of the Young Ottomans,\textsuperscript{14} especially that of Namık Kemal, who was then known as one of the

\textsuperscript{13} It is the name of a town in Baghdad Province. It is located at the bend of the river Tigris at Baghdad. The name comes from the Arabic root زار and literally means crookedness.
\textsuperscript{14} The Young Ottomans were a political group with an expressed goal to take action against what they believed to be the destructive policies of the Ottoman government. The unofficial establishment of the movement goes back to a picnic held in Istanbul in the summer of 1865. The six men present in that picnic—Mehmed Bey, Namık Kemal, Ayetullah Bey, Reşad Bey, Nuri Bey, Refik Bey—formed the ideological bases of the movement, and they were united by a number of interesting characteristics such as having some knowledge of Europe and working in the official translation bureau of the empire. See Serif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottomans: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), pp. 10-13.
leading liberal figures in the Ottoman Empire. Yet with time, Ahmed Midhat’s ideas changed and he tried to distance himself from the Young Ottomans. Concerning this change, Ahmed Midhat says “…After examining the publications of the Young Ottomans in detail, I could not find what I had long been dreaming about in this association. Their exclusive discussion of Zayd and Amr¹⁵ and their very feeble efforts in publications that would inform the nation about its rights spoiled my dreams. [I reached the conclusion that] they [the Young Ottomans] are acting this way only because they are at odds with Zayd and Amr, and if they would reconcile with the people with whom they are at odds, their current endeavors would come to an end.”¹⁶ He believes that the Young Ottomans were angry at certain people, like the sultan and ministers, and if the Young Ottomans make peace with these certain people, they would be no more willing to reform the empire.

Ahmed Midhat’s ideas about the Young Ottomans changed once again after he read some private letters that the Young Ottomans had sent to their family members, which were disseminated secretly by the reformists.¹⁷ Ahmed Midhat admits that the Young Ottomans were very knowledgeable and diligent; however, their fault was to have begun their endeavor with animosity toward the government. This animosity, Ahmed

¹⁵ These two Arabic names each signify an “indefinite person” in the traditional madrasa jargon, similar to the John, Doe and Jane Doe of English legal tests.
¹⁷ Menfa, p. 48.
Midhat argues, would only make them suffer in exile and they could not serve their purpose well in exile. Ahmed Midhat also advises the Young Ottomans that if they published with a moderate tone, they could avoid punishment by the state and thus better serve their purpose, which was to enlighten the nation and reform the empire.18

Through his printing house in Istanbul, Ahmed Midhat established acquaintances with many people from different backgrounds and with different mindsets. One of the regular visitors, whose name remains unknown, gave wise advice to him and made a bold prediction, which happened to be very well received by Ahmed Midhat during his later life. The wise man said:

You [Ahmed Midhat] came here as someone completely inexperienced about life in Istanbul. At first your name was not even mentioned. Now, your name has begun to be mentioned here and there. Due to the ideas you have put forward in your recent publications, some important personalities believe you follow a philosophical way of thinking. Where this is concerned, there are two indications. First, it is in your favor, so that if you do not seek to profit from it, you should keep this way of thinking. Second, it is to your disadvantage, so that you should seek a way to take care of yourself. In either case, you need to frequent the circles of important personalities and show in person what kind of man you are. One cannot go around Istanbul all alone like the bogeyman. I am not

suggesting that you should... fawn like a dog, as flatterers and hypocrites do. But I am also not suggesting that you live in isolation, either. I would also inform you that the day of reckoning for such action is not far off.19

Instead of establishing contacts with people of high position, Ahmed Midhat chose to contact Namık Kemal, who was carefully watched by the government because of his somewhat revolutionary ideas. During the early 1870’s, although he entertained doubts about the Young Ottomans in general, Ahmed Midhat had a very high opinion of Namık Kemal. Actually, he was quite impressed by Namık Kemal’s eloquence, courage, and sincerity. He was especially fond of Namık Kemal’s liberal ideas. However, Ahmed Midhat’s ideas about Namık Kemal changed dramatically during the public debates over the constitution in 1876-77, and he even accused Namık Kemal of being an anti-constitutionalist.

Ultimately, Ahmed Midhat established himself as a prominent journalist in Istanbul. He published numerous articles in different newspapers and wrote several books. Like many other writers of Abdülaziz’s reign, he was watched carefully by the government and his writings were subjected to the strict censorship of the time. In 1871,

he established two newspapers, namely Devir and Bedir, both of which were shut down by the government because of “violent language.” He then established an encyclopedic magazine called Dağarcık, which he published until his exile. Ahmed Midhat wrote numerous articles in Dağarcık comparing western philosophy and Islamic theology.

One of these articles, Duvardan Bir Sada, which was criticized for containing materialistic arguments, caused problems for Ahmed Midhat. In Menfa, his memoirs composed in exile, Ahmed Midhat defines these days as the saddest of his life. Hoca Ishak Efendi, a journalist from the Basiret newspaper, upon reading this article, accused him of being an infidel. As a result of his dispute with the Basiret newspaper, he was interrogated by the police and accused of publishing “harmful books.” While still trying to prove his innocence on this charge, Ahmed Midhat had to face another problem. His coincidental and informal meetings with Namık Kemal and “his journalistic activities brought him into an apparently fortuitous association with the Young Ottomans,” as a result of which he was arrested and exiled to Rhodes together with one of the other leading journalists of the time, Ebuzziya Tevfik (1848-1913) in 1289/1872. Several other journalists and intellectuals were also arrested and exiled to different locations, such as Namık Kemal, who was exiled to Famagusta on Cyprus. Ahmed Midhat’s anonymous

20 “Şiddetli Lisan,” Menfa, p. 54.
21 Menfa, p. 62.
22 “kütübü muzirra,” Menfa, p. 65.
friend's bold prediction proved to be right, and he lived in Rhodes as an exile until 1293/1876, which marked the date of the deposition of Sultan Abdülaziz.

During his forced residence in Rhodes, Ahmed Midhat continued to write articles, which were published in Istanbul by his brother. In Rhodes, he also wrote a memoir of his early life, including his exile, which he called *Menfa,* or “Exile.” Throughout *Menfa,* he attempts to show that he had no political connection with the Young Ottomans. He declares that he did not approve their solutions for the problems of the Ottoman Empire. He also states that he was just an ordinary intellectual writing for the well-being of his countrymen.

When Ahmed Midhat returned to Istanbul in 1293/1876, he resumed his writing and printing career. His bad experience in exile reminded him of what his anonymous friend had once recommended: “be close to the men of high positions.” In contrast to his practice before exile, he now wrote very cautiously and delicately to win the good will of Sultan Abdülhamid II. After a short time, he was commissioned by Abdülhamid to write the official history of the recent reforms. He wrote *Üss-i Inkilab,* which gave Ahmed Midhat something about which his anonymous friend had not even hinted-- the patronage of the sultan.

*Üss-i Inkilab* marked a turning point in Ahmed Midhat's life in the sense that although it led to a permanent split with the Young Ottomans, it enabled him to become a protégé of Abdülhamid. He benefited greatly from this protection. Ahmed Midhat held
various state offices including the directorship of the official gazette and the imperial printing press. From 1295/1878 onwards, he published his own newspaper, Tercüman-i Hakikat, which received generous financial support from the sultan. In 1889, he went to the International Congress of Orientalists in Stockholm as the official representative of the Ottoman Empire. In sum, Abdülhamid’s appreciation of Uss-i Inkilab transformed Ahmed Midhat from an ordinary journalist whose newspapers were closed down by the government, who was arrested on a number of occasions, who had to live in exile for nearly four years, into a journalist of utmost importance, who had relatively little to fear from the censors and was probably one of the least censored writers, who held various state offices, and who played an important role in educational reform in the Ottoman Empire.

The period of Ahmed Midhat’s prominence ended with the 1908 Young Turk Revolution. After the revolution, which dethroned his protector Abdülhamid, Ahmed Midhat endured harsh attacks. His close relationship with Abdülhamid and his writings legitimizing Abdülhamid’s reign, probably including Uss-i Inkilab, created a hostile environment for him during the Young Turk era. He was forced to retire from his position as the vice president of the Ottoman Health Council (Meclis-i Umur-i Sihhiye) due to the age limit and devoted himself to literary work. With the permission of the

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Ottoman cabinet (Meclis-i Vükelə), he taught at the University (därü'l-fünün), the Women Teachers’ Training College and the School of Preachers until his death in 1331/1912.

2.2 AHMED MIDHAT IN ÜSS-I İNKILAB

Ahmed Midhat, referred to in his time as a “forty-horsepower writing machine,” is well known especially for his contributions to Ottoman literature and education. However, I think that his contributions to Ottoman and global historiography have not yet been fully appreciated. In addition to Üss-i İnkilab, he wrote a history of the Ottoman Empire, Mufassal, in three volumes in 1888; a world history, Kainat, in 1882; and his history of religion, “Tarih-i Edyan,” in 1888. He also wrote books on Russian history, Greek history, and German history and numerous articles related to Ottoman history in various newspapers.

Right after its publication in 1294/1877-78, Üss-i İnkilab received recognition from the intellectuals of the period. Some of the earliest praise, along with awards, came from Sultan Abdulhamid. In this regard, the book fulfilled at least one part of its mission successfully. Some of the book’s arguments drew bitter criticism from intellectuals and statesmen of the period like Namık Kemal and Midhat Paşa. As I will explain in detail in later parts of the paper, Namık Kemal accused Ahmed Midhat on several occasions of
being a slanderer and mouthpiece of Abdülhamid because of what Ahmed Midhat wrote in Üss-i İnkılab against Namık Kemal. Although the book became a source of debate among the contemporaries of Ahmed Midhat, we cannot find much discussion of the book during the Young Turk era. However, it is noteworthy that the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, had a copy of the book in his private library,\(^{26}\) which is now located at his tomb complex, Anıtkabir, in Ankara, and most probably read it.

What is history according to Ahmed Midhat? What are the motives for writing an official history, such as Üss-i İnkılab? What did it mean to write history under the patronage of a ruler like Abdülhamid II? And where is the historian, namely Ahmed Midhat, in Üss-i İnkılab? These are the core questions with which the rest of this section will deal.

Literary theorist M.H. Abrams divides literature into four essential categories: mimetic, didactic, expressive and objective.\(^{27}\) One can also place different kinds of historical writing in these categories. In a very general sense, these categories reflect the intention of the historical text. Derived from Aristotle’s concept of mimēsís, mimetic history attempts to reflect or represent the actuality or reality of human experience, while didactic history seeks to instill specific moral or cultural values. In expressive history, the

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\(^{26}\) An index of Mustafa Kemal’s private library (Atatürk’ün Özel Kitapları) can be found at http://www.tsk.mil.tr/anitkabir/kup/a.html

historian brings the inner being of the self to externality, and focuses on his or her own impressions. The last category, objective history, requires the absence of internal purpose or a personal agenda in a historical text. It also requires writing the historical facts down in a totally unbiased way. One of Ahmed Midhat’s sobriquets is “hace-i evvel,” which literally means “the first teacher.” As this title suggests, Ahmed Midhat always used didactic methods in his literary works and journalistic writings, and Üss-i Inkilab is no exception to that pattern. Although didactic elements are dominant in the book, Ahmed Midhat sometimes uses expressivist methods when describing events, especially those that he had the chance to observe in person.

In the prologue to the book, Ahmed Midhat gives his definition of history in the following words: “History is the ‘interpretation of the situation’ that narrates what mankind has experienced.” The term he uses for “interpretation of the situation” (tercüme-i hal) is the same as that used for the biography of an individual. According to Ahmed Midhat, history has a utilitarian value in that it gives people the ability to predict the future and can also bring meaning, understanding, and insight to the present. Hence, according to Ahmed Midhat, instructing the youth about their past has to be a priority for historians. More specifically, Üss-i Inkilab seeks to familiarize people, especially youth, with the raison d’être of the reforms and their foundations. History should also make the past experiences of nations accessible for future generations. This objective is multi-

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functional for future generations: it gives a jump-start to new generations, it raises the nation's consciousness about the past, and it connects past experiences with the present inclination for innovation.

According to Ahmed Midhat, history is not merely a chronological narration of events of the remote past. His discussion of the meaning of history reflects the influence of the great Muslim historian and philosopher of history Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406). He quotes from Al-Muqaddima several times in Üss-i İnkilab. He believes, like Ibn Khaldun, that giving information about the occurrences of the remote past represents only the surface of history. The inner meaning of history involves the "subtle explanation of causes and origins of existing things." Hence, he does not handle his material in strictly chronological fashion, but places events into coherent categories to facilitate the comprehension of cause-effect relations.

Ibn Khaldun's emphasis on the "explanation of causes and origins of existing things" is reflected in many places in Üss-i İnkilab, including the title. Üss-i İnkilab literally means the "basis of reform". Although Ahmed Midhat does not mention why he chose this particular name for his book, he uses the phrase "basis of reform" as a sort of shorthand sometimes for economizing (tasarruf) and sometimes for greater freedom for Ottoman subjects. He believes that the raison d'être of reform is to feed people what they need, and for the Ottomans that is freedom.

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As previously mentioned, Ahmed Midhat was commissioned by Abdülhamid to record the history of reforms. Due to this commission, Ahmed Midhat faced two basic difficulties. The first is what Hegel would call the difficulty of writing “original history,”\(^\text{31}\) that is, the difficulty of transforming the events, actions, and situations presented to him into a history book. The second is the difficulty of writing under the patronage of the sultan.

For Hegel, Original history consists of an account of events and actions for the most part experienced by the historian.\(^\text{32}\) Some other sources may be used but the main source is the historian’s own observation of the times. Ahmed Midhat’s was the contemporary of all events that are narrated in Üss-i İnkilab. Although he spent most of the reign of Abdülabiz outside of Istanbul in provincial cities, such as Niş, Vidin, and Baghdad, he was still able to observe the effects of Abdülabiz’s reforms. He returned to Istanbul in 1876 and lived there until his death. While still in the future at the time he wrote this book, his most productive years would be passed in Istanbul under the patronage of Abdülhamid II. Therefore, when he wrote this book, he had had the opportunity to observe many of the reforms and developments that he wrote about, especially those that took place between 1870 and 1876.

Although he gives documentary appendices at the end of Üss-i İnkilab, he narrates most of the events from memory without using references and gives the reader


\(^{32}\) Ibid.
the impression that he has actually seen what he describes in Üss-i İnkilab. Here we should ask how dependable his memory could have been. In his seminal work *On Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs aptly argues that our memories are mediated by our social frameworks.\(^{33}\) In other words, we reconstruct the past by using collective filtering. Therefore, individual memory is subservient to the collective memory of one's community and unreliable for many other reasons, including many unconscious factors like forgetting. Memory includes only one point of view. The influence of others is an important process of remembering; this fact indicates that one cannot remember alone.

Another significant question to ask is, where is Ahmed Midhat in Üss-i İnkilab? In other words, does Ahmed Midhat establish himself as a person in his text? From even a cursory reading, the reader can tell that throughout the book the author avoids making any references to himself expect for a few instances. As French social and literary critic Roland Barthes would argue, Ahmed Midhat intends to “absent himself” from his discourse.\(^{34}\) Barthes would further argue that the intention behind this absence is to give the message to the reader that “history seems to tell itself.”\(^{35}\) This kind of approach gives the author two advantages: it leaves the author out of the text, thus making the text seem objective; it also increases the author’s chance of escaping censorship. However, a close reading of Üss-i İnkilab reveals that Ahmed Midhat hides himself in between the lines of the book.


\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 131.
A careful reader of Üss-i İnkılab sees that the book contains traces of Ahmed Midhat’s past experiences—that is to say his bad experiences. In 1872 Abdülaziz sent him into exile with several other journalists and intellectuals. Unlike the Young Ottomans, who criticized the Tanzimat bureaucrats for press censorship and exile, Ahmed Midhat directed his criticism against the sultan. He believed that Abdülaziz was furious at him. “If a great sultan is furious at someone, who can argue against that imperial fury?”36 says Ahmed Midhat while exiled in Rhodes. He returned from exile in 1876. But, this almost-four-year exile had profound effects on Ahmed Midhat’s life. While he liked Abdülmelik II and trusted his rule, he definitely disliked Abdülaziz, who caused him to lose four years in exile. One can see the signs of this aversion in Üss-i İnkılab. These signs also make Ahmed Midhat’s feelings and emotions quite visible in the book. He utilizes an effective strategy of criticizing people: praise them first and then criticize. He first argues that Abdülaziz served his country in many ways but then claims that Abdülaziz’s intolerance for intellectual progress obscured his good deeds.

36 “Bir adama koca bir padişah gazap eder ise gazab-ı şahaneye mukabil kim söz söyleyebilir?” Ibid., p.96.
CHAPTER 3

ABDÜLAZIZ VS. ABDÜLHAMID IN ÜSS-İ İNKİLÂB

While examining the reforms implemented during the reigns of Abdülaziz and Abdülhamid, Ahmed Midhat also characterizes the two sultans. He explicitly favors Abdülhamid, arguing that Abdülhamid had the qualities that Abdülaziz lacked to succeed in eradicating the empire’s immediate problems. Although he writes about the misgovernment of the Ottoman bureaucrats, such as Fuad and Ali Pâşas, he still considers Abdülaziz and Abdülhamid the real policy-makers in the empire.

Ahmed Midhat argues that when Abdülaziz was enthroned in 1277/1861, the internal situation of the empire was conducive to implementation of the required reforms since Abdülaziz’s predecessor, Abdülmecid, had laid the groundwork by initiating key reforms earlier. Ahmed Midhat points out at the very beginning of the first chapter that “when Sultan Abdülaziz, may he reside in heaven, was enthroned, he found the empire in such an advantageous situation that only his very ordinary effort, which could not tire him, was needed for the completion of the material and spiritual progress of the empire.”


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Sultan Abdülaziz came to power there was neither a major internal problem nor any great diplomatic problem that would prevent him from being able to occupy himself as he wished with internal reforms.  

In the passages quoted above, Ahmed Midhat attempts to create an imaginary advantage for Abdülaziz, whom he portrays as being almost slow-witted, and show that he inherited a very promising atmosphere in which to reform his empire. However, the later part of the first chapter contradicts his earlier argument. He mentions the nationalist uprisings that occurred in Crete (1866-68), Montenegro (1861-62) and Bulgaria (1877-78). He also gives a brief account of the conflict in Damascus between Muslims and Christians in 1860. For numerous complicated reasons, such as economic recession among traditional artisanal sectors and Muslim resentment against wealthy Christians who dominated trade with Europe, Muslims in Damascus rioted and killed several hundred Christians. The killings of the Christians made European states, especially France, very angry. But, according to Ahmed Midhat, the foreign minister Fuad Paşa’s intervention in the conflict, as a result of which a number of Muslims who allegedly took part in the riot were arrested and ultimately executed after hasty trials, satisfied France and gave credit to the Ottoman Empire in the international arena.

Ahmed Midhat then deals briefly with the financial hardship that the Ottoman Empire had to endure because of the Crimean War, in which the Ottoman Empire, with France and Britain, fought against Russia from 1853 to 1856. He says that the late Abdüllaziz found the empire in a difficult financial situation and had to pay huge amounts of debts to European banks. Ahmed Midhat never mentions how the financial difficulty of the empire reverberated among the Ottoman subjects. Yet, financial problems and the privileges that the commercial treaties of 1839 gave to European merchants and to Ottoman Christians, so as to appease the European states, triggered considerable discontent among the empire’s subjects.

In 1859, furthermore, the “Kuleli Revolt” broke out in Istanbul. The leaders of the revolt were mostly army officers and the uleren, or Muslims scholar-officials, who believed that the cooperation of Fuad Paşa and the grand vizier Âli Paşa’s with the Great Powers, along with the corruption in the government, would lead the Ottoman Empire to collapse. Although their general dissatisfaction arose from several sources, like the low army pay and Abdülmecid’s excessive spending, “the basic motif of the conspirators was opposition to westernization.” They attacked the reform attempts for being pro-western and aiming to relieve only Christian subjects, while increasing the suffering of the Ottoman Muslims.

Ahmed Midhat considers this revolt a minor incident and notes that it was so unimportant that the conspirators were only exiled rather than being executed. However, as the intense debates about constitutional government would show, the mentality of the conspirators was not that of only a small and unimportant group of people. On the contrary, the vast majority of the empire’s subjects were very suspicious about the pro-western inclinations of some of the Ottoman statesmen, such as Fuad and Ali Paşa. Hence, the supporters of the constitutional government spent a considerable amount of time explaining that constitutional government was compatible with Islam and Ottoman traditions.

Considering Ahmed Midhat’s brief summary of Abdülaziz’s reign, his earlier argument that Abdülaziz benefited from favorable circumstances seems unconvincing. As the above-mentioned internal and external problems of the Ottoman Empire would suggest, he took over a troubled empire in which the people had ever-decreasing trust in their rulers. Nevertheless, Ahmed Midhat says, people welcomed Abdülaziz with the expectation that he would be the reformist for whom they had long been waiting. Immediately after his discussion about the welcoming environment for Abdülaziz, Ahmed Midhat inserts a small remark to the effect that unfortunately Abdülaziz’s end was not the same as his beginning.

Ahmed Midhat notes that when Abdülhamid came to power, he found a ramshackle empire in which the two previous sultans had been dethroned. One of them, Abdülaziz, committed suicide (he was also said to have been murdered); the other, Murad, lost his sanity. The Ottoman Empire was bankrupt; it had defaulted on its foreign debt and the European states were in the process of establishing control over the Ottoman finances. Russia’s pressure on the Ottoman Empire via her ambassador in Istanbul, General Ignatieff, became unbearable. Ignatieff increased his influence over the Porte enormously, especially over the grand vizier, and played a key role, as the protector of the Slavic peoples, in the rebellions that occurred in the Balkans. Most importantly, the Ottoman Empire was in need of immediate administrative, social, economic, and educational reforms. Intellectuals were demanding a relatively liberal environment for their activities; ordinary people were expecting the new sultan to expand their freedom.

Ahmed Midhat argues that Abdülhamid established himself as a sultan of strong will and sincerity, beginning on the day of his enthronement. This gave the people great optimism about the future of the empire. Abdülhamid gave signs of his competency to revive the empire with his very early deeds. Like many other Ottoman sultans, for his first deed, he visited the mantle of the Prophet Muhammad (*Hirka-i Saadet*), which was

44 After the financial crises of 1873 led to the cessation of overseas lending by the European financial markets, the government was forced to declare in 1875–6 a moratorium on its outstanding debt, which stood at more than 200 million pounds sterling. Şevket Pamuk, “The Evolution of Financial Institutions in the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1914,” *Financial History Review* Vol. II, No.1 (2004): pp. 7-32.
kept in a special room in Topkapi Palace, and prayed there for the success of the empire. Interestingly enough, right after his visit to the holy mantle, he received the directors of the leading financial institutions, like Şirket-i Umumiye-i Osmani and Credit Lyonnais, and inspired their confidence. He briefly explained his prospective economic reforms to these financial authorities and took their ideas as a guide for economic reform in the Ottoman Empire.

Knowing that the non-Muslims were an important component of the empire, Abdülhamid received the leaders of five non-Muslim communities, or millets, as they were called by the nineteenth century, in the palace. In his speech, Abdülhamid said that “I do not have any desire other than to increase the prosperity of our empire and the prosperity and happiness of our subjects through the increase in their benefit from our just laws.”  

45 Ahmed Midhat notes that Abdülhamid’s emphasis on equality and justice made the leaders of the millets quite happy. Looking at the general picture of the Ottoman Empire of the period, we can see that his emphasis on equality and justice was indeed quite timely and politically astute.

After dealing with the debts and reassuring the non-Muslims, as the third step of his program, Abdülhamid wanted to achieve unity among his ministers in order to accelerate the reform process in the empire. For this purpose, he talked with his ministers one by one in person, then gathered them together and gave a speech that proposed unity

for the sake of the empire.\textsuperscript{46} Ahmed Midhat believes that with this move Abdülhamid aimed to convey the message that reforms could only be implemented by unity.

As the next step, Abdülhamid tried to establish rapport with the soldiers. Here Ahmed Midhat praises Abdülhamid for his humility, which, Ahmed Midhat says, “had not been observed among the Ottoman sultans for a long time.”\textsuperscript{47} As a sign of his humility, Abdülhamid organized two dinners for the soldiers and ate with them. He also gave a speech to the soldiers and emphasized the importance of military education.

After receiving the support of the financial institutions, non-Muslim millets, and soldiers, Abdülhamid received the ambassadors of foreign countries and obtained their credentials. One exception was Russia. General Ignatieff came to the palace a few days later and delivered a short speech while submitting his credentials. In his speech, Ignatieff emphasized that Russia was always there to protect the Slavic citizens of the Ottoman Empire. In response to Ignatieff’s speech, Abdülhamid said that earlier than the emperor of Russia and more so, his imperial desire had been for the prosperity of his dominion and the happiness of the people.\textsuperscript{48} Abdülhamid’s tranquility and short speech, according to Ahmed Midhat, brought credit to him in the eyes of the European ambassadors and his own ministers.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Uss-i inkilab}, Vol. II, pp. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Uss-i Inkilab}, Vol. II, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{48} “Mülkü manur ve ahaliyi meşed etmek Rusya İmparatoru’ndan evvel ve ondan ziyade kendi emri i hümayunları bulanıgu...”: \textit{Uss-i Inkilab}, Vol. II, p. 17.
Based on what Ahmed Midhat says in *Uss-i İnkilab*, it would be appropriate to conclude that Abdülhamid gained respect and support with his smart moves and well-organized early agenda. That is one of the reasons why Ahmed Midhat writes very positively and optimistically about Abdülhamid’s rule, even though he had observed only eleven months of it. Another reason is the *Hatt-i Hümayun* (imperial edict) establishing a parliament promulgated by Abdülhamid right after his enthronement. After mentioning the immediate problems of the empire — such as education, the justice system, the economy and unsuccessful diplomacy — Abdülhamid pointed out the actual reason for these problems. According to him, the underlying problem was the lack of an authority that would ensure compliance with the newly set rules and regulations in the empire. His solution was to establish a general assembly or parliament (*Meclis-i Umumi*).

Unlike his predecessors Abdülaziz and Murad V, Abdülhamid spelled out the word *meclis*, and defined the meclis as the key to the immediate problems of the empire. Ahmed Midhat thus praises the *Hatt-i Hümayun*, arguing that it was unprecedented. Ahmed Midhat writes in the first volume of *Uss-i İnkilab* that people were disappointed by the decrees that Abdülaziz and Murad had promulgated after their enthronements. People were expecting some reference to a meclis or constitution in the imperial edicts, but neither Abdülaziz nor Murad V had mentioned anything particular about these two concepts.

In dealing with the early reform attempts of Abdülaaziz and Abdülhamid, Ahmed Midhat tries to demonstrate that while Abdülaaziz dealt with the immediate problems of the Ottoman Empire on a mostly superficial basis and failed to fully understand the *raison d'être* of reforms, Abdülhamid aimed to find permanent solutions to the problems of the empire by delving into their origins and focusing on their real causes.

Ahmed Midhat seems to believe that the Ottoman Empire, fatigued by the Crimean War, would surely need to reorganize its army and upgrade its weapons. However, thanks to the Treaty of Paris of 1856, which created a semblance of peace for a time, the Ottoman Empire had the opportunity to implement administrative and social reforms which had already been initiated by Abdülmeclid. Abdülaaziz, however, spent most of his time trying to reform the military by upgrading weaponry, the navy, and the uniforms of the soldiers. Ahmed Midhat aptly notes that although the Ottomans benefited considerably from these upgrades, the empire’s uncontrolled spending for them caused serious deficits to the treasury.

In addition to the military reforms, Abdülaaziz continued the administrative and civil reforms initiated by Abdülmeclid. One of the most effective reforms executed during Abdülaaziz’s reign was the creation of the *vilayet* law in 1864. According to Ahmed Midhat, this law was aimed at correcting the situation of the provincial and communal councils, which up to 1864 were not truly representative and not a true instrument of
progress because of the dominance of provincial magnates,\textsuperscript{51} by making them more representative. Ahmed Midhat admits that this law was very beneficial for the empire. However, he adds that this law could not be executed successfully in many provinces due to incapable officials.

Throughout his examination of Abdülhamid's early reforms, Ahmed Midhat tries to show that the reforms during this period addressed the roots of the Ottoman Empire's problems. Ahmed Midhat begins with a statement which both indicates one of the origins of the current problems of the Ottoman Empire, and also implicitly directs criticism towards the previous rulers. He says, "Those who argue that the basis of reform for the state and nation is economizing can always support their claim."\textsuperscript{52} Hence, one who really wants to implement reforms in the empire should begin by stopping exorbitant spending. Here Ahmed Midhat appropriately points out the source of the excessive spending, which is the palace. He says that although a few statesmen attempted to deal with the problem of excessive spending before, "none of them dared to interfere with the Imperial Palace, the main source of extravagance."\textsuperscript{53}

This extravagance had a double impact on the empire. On the one hand, it weakened the empire against the foreign countries and led to bankruptcy. On the other

\textsuperscript{51} Davison, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{52} "Bir devlet ve milletin ıss-ul-esas-i islahâtı tasarruf kazıyessinden ibaret bulunduğunu dava edenler her zaman isbat-i Müdőaya muktedir olabilirler." Üss-i İnkılab, Vol. II, p. 21.
hand, it led to the unbalanced distribution of wealth and created much discontent among the people. Ahmed Midhat underlines that undoubtedly one-third, perhaps even half, of state revenue was spent by the palace.⁵⁴

One of the first reforms implemented by Abdülhamid introduced budget cuts within the imperial palace. Abdülhamid decreased the number of carriages and horses in the imperial stable (İstahl-i Amire) by donating the extra equipment and horses to the Ottoman army. He appointed a commission chaired by Namık Paşa to determine the personal debts of Abdülaziz and Murad V. The commission found that Abdülaziz had personal debts of 200,000 liras; while Murad V owed 800,000 liras. Moreover, Abdülaziz had deposited some valuable jewelry from the imperial treasury as security for his personal debts with a non-Muslim dealer, Christakis Efendi. Ahmed Midhat finds this affair very humiliating and explicitly attacks Abdülaziz, saying, “People of reason know that one who is incompetent to manage himself is not capable of managing anything else….”⁵⁵

In order to show how Abdülhamid differed greatly from Abdülaziz, Ahmed Midhat explains how Abdülhamid used his own resources, such as his personal income from the crown estates, to pay the debts of the empire. Ahmed Midhat notes that Abdülhanjid used his personal money to pay installments on warships that were built in

London. He transferred the sum of money that was saved by systematic budget cuts to the School of Agriculture (Mekteb-i Ziraat), the School of Civil Administration (Mekteb-i Mülkiye), and also to the Red Crescent to help the new immigrants from the Balkans. Finally, Abdülhamid used his own resources to save the honor of the empire by redeeming the jewelry of the imperial treasury from Christakis Efendi.

In an effort to create a contrast between Abdülhamid and Abdülaziz, Ahmed Midhat examines Abdülhamid’s personal involvement in governmental affairs and the changes that he effected in the decision-making mechanism. With Abdülhamid, Ahmed Midhat believes, the system of consultation (istişare) gained a new definition⁵⁶ in the Ottoman Empire. Abdülhamid started to convene his ministers regularly to consult them concerning important state affairs. This, Ahmed Midhat says, was unprecedented in Ottoman history⁵⁷ and was another sign of Abdülhamid’s humility and his adherence to Islamic tradition.⁵⁸ One should note that although Abdülhamid’s strategy was not a common practice in the Ottoman Empire, it was not unprecedented. For example, Selim III had adopted this strategy almost seventy years ago.

Rather than being occupied with unimportant details, Abdülhamid chose to spend his time on one of the catalysts of reform, education. Ahmed Midhat, who devoted his life to the education of the Ottoman people, appreciated Abdülhamid’s sincere support.

⁵⁸ “Consult them about affairs”: Qur’an, 3:159.
for education. Abdülhamid financially supported the School of Public Administration and the School of Agriculture by donating his own personal properties, such as his land in Maslak near Istanbul.

As a way to economize, Abdülhamid encouraged Ottoman manufactures and promulgated an edict that ordered the use of Ottoman goods by government offices. He aimed to keep the national wealth within the empire by decreasing imports. For example, he reactivated the Hereke Imperial Factory—a textile manufacture industry, opened in 1845, in which velvet and satin were made—which had been neglected for some time during the reign of Abdülaziz, and ordered the imperial palace and government offices to buy their fabrics from this factory.

In order to ensure that officials sent to the provinces were able to accomplish their duties successfully, Abdülhamid emphasized the necessity of fair selection of these officials. In order to do this, he established a commission (Intihab-i Memurin Komisyonu) under the Ministry of Internal Affairs to select competent officials. With this commission, Abdülhamid attempted to abolish arbitrariness and corruption and establish a standard for the selection of officials. Ahmed Midhat notes that during Abdülaziz's reign, a request from the Imperial Harem could make someone who knew nothing about government issues a provincial governor or a district officer.

Ahmed Midhat's writings about the diplomacy of the Ottoman Empire also present a comparison between Abdülaziz and Abdülhamid. The two sultans had similar
diplomatic problems when they took power: uprisings in Montenegro, Crete, and Bulgaria; Russia’s incitement; and diplomatic pressure from the great powers of Europe. According to Ahmed Midhat, one of the causes undermining Abdülaziz’s rule was the failure of Ottoman diplomacy during his reign. The Slavic peoples living in the Ottoman provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina led an uprising against the Ottoman Empire in order to gain their freedom in 1875. The general weakness of the Ottomans led two autonomous, neighboring Slavic principalities, Montenegro and Serbia, to aid the rebellion. Within a year, the rebellion had spread to the Ottoman province of Bulgaria. Russia, especially through General Ignatieff, allied with the rebels and provided substantial assistance to them.  

According to Ahmed Midhat, the Ottoman Empire was relatively successful in its military efforts; however, he repeatedly remarks that Abdülaziz did not dare to fight with the European states, especially with Russia, in the diplomatic arena. Abdülaziz, Ahmed Midhat argues, again showed his intolerance for the press and used censorship to prevent the spread of the news concerning the rebellions in Crete and Bulgaria.  

Abdülmşid found the empire in a war with Serbia. Serbia’s military capacity was extremely limited, and although Russia had promised military aid to the Serbs, the Russian government did not at once provide the expected assistance. The Serbian effort

to invade Bosnia was a failure, and the Ottomans defeated the Serbs' sole ally, Montenegro, in Herzegovina. The Serbs, after losing the Battle of Aleksinac in 1876, were confronted with an Ottoman advance toward Belgrade. As a last resort to help the Serbs, Russia presented an ultimatum to the Ottoman Empire, forcing them to conclude an armistice. International negotiations produced no settlement; the Ottoman Empire and the Serbs signed a peace treaty based on the status quo ante in 1877. When the Ottoman diplomats prepared the draft of the treaty with the Serbs, which imposed very heavy terms on them, Abdülhamid aptly argued that although the Ottoman Empire had defeated the Serbs, these conditions were so harsh that neither Russia nor the European states would accept them. It was better to reduce the terms than to wait for the European states to reduce the terms by themselves. According to Ahmed Midhat, however, the Ottoman ministers insisted on these terms and Abdülhamid, who believed in consultation, accepted them. However, the failure of the peace negotiations and Russia's eventual active participation in the conflict would prove the correctness of Abdülhamid's prediction. Hence, according to Ahmed Midhat, Abdülhamid's diplomatic foresight might have prevented later conflict with Russia. However, considering the efforts of General Ignatieff to push Russia into war with the Ottoman Empire, claiming that the Ottoman

63 Uss-i Inkilab, Vol. II, p. 82.
64 Ibid.
Empire was incapable of serious resistance, it seems that the Russo-Ottoman war was inevitable.

Ahmed Midhat’s intention in writing Üss-i İnkılab becomes clear especially when one takes his portrayals of Abdülaziz and Abdülhamid into account. Ahmed Midhat portrays Abdülaziz as a person of weak character, and asserts that his reign was a failure in terms of diplomacy and reform. Meanwhile, he praises, occasionally flatters, Abdülhamid and depicts him as a charismatic ruler. It is obvious that Ahmed Midhat trusted Abdülhamid, and wanted him to see Abdülaziz’s failures and take lessons from them.

CHAPTER 4

THE SHORT REIGN OF MURAD V IN-BETWEEN THE REIGNS OF ABDÜL AZIZ

AND ABDÜLHAMİD (MAY 30, 1876 – AUGUST 31, 1876)

No sultan had been dethroned in the Ottoman Empire for nearly seventy years, not since Selim III was dethroned in 1807 by the Janissaries, and Mustafa IV was deposed by an army under Bayrakdar Mustafa Paşa, the ayan (local notables) of Rusçuk in 1808. Yet Abdülaziz became subject to increasing popular criticism, especially in Istanbul. The powerful figures of the Porte—such as Hüseyin Avni Paşa, minister of war; Midhat Paşa, minister without portfolio; and Mütercim Mehmed Rüşdî, the grand vizier—arrived at the conclusion that his deposition was necessary. With the support of Hayruşşah Efendi, the şeyhülislâm, or the chief religious official; Süleyman Paşa, director of the military academy; and Kayserili Ahmed Paşa, minister of marine, the leading Ottoman bureaucrats and high-ranking army officers began planning to overthrow Abdülaziz. On May 29, 1876, the palace of Dolmabahçe, where Abdülaziz was staying, was surrounded. Abdülaziz was taken from the palace and sent to confinement in the Topkapi Palace. The following day, the ministers took the oath of loyalty to Murad V.

On June 4, Abdülaziz was found with the veins in his arms cut. Although the physicians who examined his corpse concluded that he had killed himself, soon people
began to believe that he had been murdered, probably by some of the ministers, like Midhat Paşa and Hüseyin Avni Paşa, who had led the coup against Abdülaziz. As a German journalist of the time aptly wrote, "Abdülaziz was suicided."\(^{66}\)

Ahmed Midhat writes very briefly about the rule of Murad V in Üss-i İnkılapt. While public opinion was very positive about the enthronement of Murad, Ahmed Midhat thinks that this positive mood was impaired by the imperial edict that Murad promulgated after his enthronement. Although there were mentions of prospective administrative and economic reforms in the imperial edict, the edict disappointed the people because there was no mention of a constitution or an assembly.\(^{67}\) Ahmed Midhat says that the edict should have promised the expansion of the people's freedom, which would constitute the basis of reform. While people expected more freedom, Murad continued some of his predecessor Abdülaziz's methods of pressure, the most disturbing of which--according to Ahmed Midhat--was censorship. For example, the Vakit newspaper was shut down by the government in 1876 because of articles in favor of the constitution and constitutional government.\(^{68}\)

Considering the fact that the restrictions continued under Murad V and in light of the influence of a French Opera bouffé composed by Charles Lecocq, La fille de Madame Angot,\(^{69}\) some intellectuals began thinking that the overthrow of Abdülaziz had not

\(^{66}\) Davison, Reform in the Ottoman Empire, p. 342, citing Charikles.

\(^{67}\) Üss-i İnkılapt, Vol.I, pp. 229- 234.


\(^{69}\) One of the most noteworthy lyrics of the opera was:
changed the situation very much. These intellectuals, including Ahmed Midhat, thought that Murad, like Abdülaziz, would not give what people really demanded. On the contrary, Murad and his ministers intended to retain Abdülaziz’s despotic rule; and this attitude paved the way for the end of his reign.

Meanwhile, an Ottoman major, Çerkes Hasan, who was also the brother-in-law of deposed Sultan Abdülaziz, raided the meeting of the ministers held at Midhat Paşa’s house on June 15, 1876, and killed Hüseyin Avni Paşa; the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Reşit Paşa; and a soldier. His main target was Hüseyin Avni Paşa, whom he blamed for the deposition of Abdülaziz. “It also appeared to some that Midhat might have planned the murder to rid himself of a dangerous rival.”

While discontent with Murad was ever increasing and starting to destabilize his rule, Murad encountered another problem. Abdülaziz’s deposition and suicide (or murder, as some people believed), and the Çerkes Hasan incident caused incurable mental problems in Murad. Doctors diagnosed that Murad had lost his sanity, perhaps because of excessive fear. Based on the health report given by a

"It was not worth the trouble; it was not worth the trouble; no, it was certainly not the trouble to change the government." ("C'était pas la peine, c'était pas la peine, non pas la peine assurément de changer le gouvernement.") Available from World Wide Web: http://www.mutebots.be/html/reertoire/argot.html

72 Davison, Reform in the Ottoman Empire, p. 346.
commission of both Ottoman and foreign doctors, he was dethroned with a fetva\textsuperscript{74} ninety-three days after his enthronement and replaced by Abdülhamid II.

\textsuperscript{74} "Imamülmüslimin cünun-u mutbik ile meemun olmakta imameten maksud fevt olsa uhdesinden ahd-i imamet münhal olur mu, el cevap beyon buyruğa Allahu a’lem olur." "{Üss-i İnkılab, Vol. 1, p. 437."}
CHAPTER 5

PRESS AND CENSORSHIP

Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire, many newspapers were shut down, numerous books were banned, and many writers and intellectuals were sent into exile by the government. The government viewed these intellectuals as a threat to its strict control of popular thought. Given that Ahmed Midhat was a journalist who had bad experiences with the censorship of the period, his harshest criticisms of the reign of Abdülaziz and the greatest expectations he expressed for Abdülhamid’s reign would come in his writings about the press and censorship. Ahmed Midhat, who saw freedom as the basis of reform, explicitly criticized Abdülaziz for his despotic actions.

According to Ahmed Midhat, the most obvious difference between Abdülaziz and Abdülhamid was their understanding of freedom. Ahmed Midhat argues that while Abdülaziz’s shallow understanding of freedom and civil rights and open animosity toward the press caused his pitiful end, Abdülhamid’s appreciation of freedom and civil rights would make him very successful.

Ahmed Midhat does not demand limitless freedom for the press. He even acknowledges that some restrictions are appropriate. According to him, some of these
restrictions were excusable to a certain degree because some writers with bad intentions had tried to manipulate people by playing on the words “freedom” and “reform.” Although Ahmed Midhat does not mention the names of these writers, based on the last chapter of Üss-i İnkılab and what he had written in Menfa, one can argue that he means the Young Ottomans. It has already been mentioned that Ahmed Midhat accused some Young Ottomans of being hypocritical about the liberal reforms. Although his ideas about the Young Ottomans changed slightly over the course of time, it seems that Ahmed Midhat still had problems with the Young Ottomans’ interpretation of reform. While Ahmed Midhat believed that it was necessary to reform the system from within, the Young Ottomans started out from an oppositional stance and believed in the necessity of revolutionary reforms.

In the nineteenth century, censorship was not only an Ottoman phenomenon. Many European states resorted to censorship or other forms of restriction on political expression of the people. For example, a careful reader of the history of the press in France, which the Ottomans took as an exemplar of the freedoms they wanted, and in the Ottoman Empire would find several parallels. As in the Ottoman Empire, the nineteenth-century struggle over censorship in France also resulted from “a clash between the ever-increasing demands of ever-larger segments of the French population for more political liberty and the determination of almost all French regimes before 1880 to suppress.

76 Menfa, p. 47.
political dissent, which they viewed as a lethal threat to their perceived need to control popular thought.  

In article seven of the 1830 constitutional charter, the French government guaranteed the French people “the right to publish and print their opinions” and declared that “censorship can never be re-established.” In the same period, the Ottoman Empire promulgated the regulations of publication and translation (Telif ve Tercüme Nizamnamesi) to protect writers. However, in both states the laws would fail to serve their primary purposes. In the Ottoman Empire, according to Ahmed Midhat, Abdülaziz’s unnecessary fear of the intellectuals undermined the law. Meanwhile in France, the degree of censorship even increased. While around 300 books and pamphlets were outlawed between 1814 and 1830, around 750 publications were banned between 1831 and 1847.

Unlike Ahmed Midhat, French intellectuals demanded complete freedom for the press. Some of them were even convinced “that complete toleration [in the press] would bring about instant heaven on earth.” For example, French historian Jules Michelet called the press “the Holy Ark’ of modern times, which, fulfilling a ‘sacred mission’

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77 “droit de publier et faire imprimer leurs opinions”
78 “La censure ne peut jamais être rétablie”
80 Goldstein, p. 787.
81 Ibid, p.788.
could, if unfettered, bring about a ‘moral union’ of the ‘national soul.”82 Another difference between Ahmed Midhat (and many Ottoman writers) and French writers was that while French writers attacked censorship by disobeying the laws, Ahmed Midhat practiced self-censorship and recommended that his fellow intellectuals write from a moderate standpoint and avoid controversial issues. Hence, it would be correct to argue that Ahmed Midhat chose to criticize censorship rather than to fight against it as did the French intellectuals.

According to Ahmed Midhat, the underlying reason for Abdülaziz’s attack on the press was his fear that the common people might become aware of the extent of corruption in the empire. Thus, the government had viewed some writers, such as Ahmed Midhat and Namık Kemal, as enemies of the empire and punished them in many ways, such as exile and bans on the circulation of their writings. Ahmed Midhat believed that the government had accomplished nothing through these methods of punishment; on the contrary, the government had strengthened the opposition and also undermined the endeavor of reform. In other words, the government had undermined itself by attacking one of the cornerstones of society—the intellectuals—and restricting people’s freedom. Abdülaziz had prepared the conditions for his deposition and deserved what he would have to face thereafter. Ahmed Midhat says, “If His Majesty had been a freedom-loving sultan, it is very obvious that all of his people would have been ready to spill their blood

82 Ibid.
for his sake. However, it was enough both to astonish people of intelligence and to make them weep that after he suffered that great disaster [his suicide or murder], not even four men could be found spilling four tears; on the contrary, public opinion was very content and satisfied with this incident.” The implication of Ahmed Midhat’s being able to get away with this astonishing statement—he is condoning Abdülaziz’s death—is that Abdülhamid did not have a problem with this harsh criticism of Abdülaziz.

From Ahmed Midhat’s point of view, emperors become unforgettable and honorable through their support for intellectual and scientific progress. Hence, according to him, Louis XIV (1638-1715) had become “Louis le Grand” with his patronage of French intellectuals. Frederick II of Prussia (1712-1786) was known as Friedrich der Große because of his fascination with Enlightenment philosophy and his patronage of such diverse intellectuals of the period as Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778) and radical materialist La Mettrie (1709-1751). Likewise, what deprived Abdülaziz of that honorary title was his dislike and fear of the Ottoman intellectuals.


85 “Abdülaziz Han Hzaretlerinin asr-i cellelerinde olan istidad münasebetiyle Zat-ı Şahaneleve’nin büyüklik şerifi pek kolay gelecek iken sahiyen pek lütansız ve münasebusız bir vehim ve hayal o şerifi
Ahmed Midhat’s argument about Louis XIV and Frederick II can also be seen as a strategy to win the favor and patronage of Abdülhamid, whose reign was only starting when Üss-i İnkılab was published. Mentioning the names of these “enlightened despots.” Ahmed Midhat tries to work his magic on Abdülhamid, so that Abdülhamid would not repeat the kind of censorship that was prevalent during Abdülaziz’s reign.

The greatest expectations Ahmed Midhat expressed for the reign of Abdülhamid concerned the expansion of freedom in all aspects of life. According to Ahmed Midhat, unlike Abdülaziz’s reign, which proved to have been against the basic rights of the people, Abdülhamid’s reign would be for the people and with the people. Ahmed Midhat explains Abdülhamid’s ideas about his rulership: “The glorious sultan is not a separate being from the nation. He is indeed a member, even the most important member, of that nation. He has ascended to the sacred office of the sultanate and caliphate not for his own comfort but for the prosperity and happiness of his people.” Ahmed Midhat also adds that Abdülhamid found the second Caliph ‘Umar’s (r. 634-644) conduct of government


86 Enlightened monarchs are monarchs who distinguish themselves from traditional monarchs in the way they govern. Specifically, enlightened monarchs ruled their subjects using the principles of the Enlightenment. In order to be considered “enlightened,” they had to allow religious tolerance, freedom of speech and press, and the right to hold private property. They must also foster the arts and sciences, and education.

quite successful and took his conduct as a guide.\textsuperscript{88} Ahmed Midhat utilizes the phrase “conduct of Caliph Omar” intentionally; using Omar’s reputation among the Muslims as a just ruler, he emphasizes the just character of Abdülhamid’s rule. He is also making this connection in order to give Abdülhamid Islamic legitimacy. Due to his readings of the Ottoman intellectuals and his observations, Abdülhamid reached the conclusion that the greatness of an empire was conditional upon the power of its people, and the power of individuals was conditional upon good administration (hüsni idare).\textsuperscript{89}

Ahmed Midhat anticipated that Abdülhamid believed in the necessity of giving more freedom to the people and that Abdülhamid’s early agenda, which has been mentioned above, would justify Ahmed Midhat’s expectation. What made Ahmed Midhat an ardent supporter of Abdülhamid was his imperial accession edict (Cülaus Hatt-i Hümayuni). In this edict, Abdülhamid pointed out that in order to prevent arbitrariness in the empire, he would introduce two reforms: a fundamental law (Kamu-i Esasi) and the “principles of consultation” (Usul-i Meyveret). These two reform proposals constituted a giant step toward the first Ottoman constitution and constitutional government in the Ottoman Empire.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, p. 166.
\textsuperscript{89} Uss-i İnkilap, Vol. ll, p. 167.
CHAPTER 6

DEBATES OVER THE CONSTITUTION IN ÜSS-İ İNKİLAB

Ahmed Midhat deals with the debates that revolved around the first Ottoman constitution and constitutional government (Kanun-i Esasi) in the last part of Üss-ı İnkılab. In his discussion of the constitution, he makes it clear that he wrote Üss-ı İnkılab in part to publicize Abdülhamid's ideas about the constitution and argue their rightness.

The last part of Üss-ı İnkılab starts with a theoretical discussion concerning the definition of law, constitution, sultan, and despotism (istıhdad). Defining these four concepts correctly in the Ottoman context was particularly important because they would frame the main characteristics of the first Ottoman constitution. Ahmed Midhat explains that the laws emerged from the "social contract" (akd-i içtimai), an Enlightenment idea articulated most forcefully by Jean-Jacques Rousseau which had been agreed upon by the people in the society. Hence, obedience to the laws would not hurt anybody's personal freedom; on the contrary, laws would provide them with an environment in which they could enjoy their freedom. Ahmed Midhat defined the sultan as the "law personified" (müşahhas kanun). The sultan reminds the people about the social contract and their promise to obey the laws. According to Ahmed Midhat, the sultan represents the whole body of law; thus, obedience to the sultan actually means obedience to the laws. The
relation between the laws and the sultan determines the type of the sultan’s rule. When the sultan restricts the rights of his people by enforcing arbitrary decrees, instead of applying the laws equally to everyone, the resulting form of rule is called despotism.

According to Ahmed Midhat, the most practical way to avoid despotism and ensure that the laws are applied to everybody without any discrimination is a constitution, which determines both the rights of the people and the imperial prerogative, and a general assembly (Meclis-i Unum), which controls the application of the laws. However, these two institutions were quite new to the Ottoman Empire, and both the statesmen and the people needed some time to be able to appreciate their importance. People also needed satisfactory explanations from the supporters of the constitution and the assembly concerning the compatibility of these “European institutions” with Islam.

The debates over the constitution revolved around three major issues: its compatibility with Islam, coasultation with non-Muslims, and the imperial prerogatives. Statesmen and the ulema were divided into two groups-- defenders of the constitution and opponents of the constitution-- and very intense debates took place in intellectual and religious circles.

There were two main arguments articulated by the opponents of the constitution. The first argument stated that the constitution was an innovation in Islam (bid’at); it was not based on the Qur’an or the tradition of the Prophet. Therefore, every Muslim must protest the constitution. According to the second argument, the government could not “grant” a constitution; it could only be “taken” by the people. The second argument was heavily influenced by the French Revolution. The people bringing the second argument against the first Ottoman constitution, such as liberal poet and journalist Theodor Kasap,
believed that the people could not trust the government and the constitution promulgated by this corrupt government.

Ahmed Midhat, as an ardent defender of Abdülhamid and the constitution, deals in detail with every attack that came from the opponents of the constitution. He starts by explaining the compatibility of Islam and constitutional government. Ahmed Midhat keeps his discussion of the constitutional government very simple and understandable. He briefly explains the Islamic understanding of equality, social contract, leadership, and constitutional government. Allah created all people equally, and the worthiness of an individual can only be measured only by *taqwa*, the love and fear that a Muslim feels for Allah. However, Allah commands people who live in societies to choose one individual as their leader. The Prophet Muhammad stated in an authentic hadith\(^9\) that Muslims should appoint a leader even during a short trip, meaning that Muslims need a leader even when they are away from the community for only a short period. This hadith indicates that Muslims living in societies should select a leader from among themselves. This selection of the leader, according to Sunni Islam, requires a psychological contract between the leader and his followers that he will try his best to guide them, to protect them, and to treat them fairly and with justice. Without this contract, no one can make the others obey him. When one becomes a party to such a contract, he can specify certain conditions and make an express demand in accordance with the contract. This contract generally comes into being as a constitution at the state level.

\(^9\) An authentic (*sahih*) hadith is one which has a continuous chain of trustworthy reporters, and which is found to be free from any irregularities in the text or defects in the chain of narration. This type of hadith is regarded as the most reliable legal source for Sunni Muslims after the Qur'an.
Constitutional government (*Meşrutiyet*) is not different from what has been explained above. The Ottoman constitution stipulated that both the sultan and his subjects were bound by a set of laws, and in order to ensure the application of the laws, a general assembly would be established. Moreover, according to Ahmed Midhat, many Islamic governments that had been established in earlier times had had some properties of constitutional government (literally, “limited government,” *hükümet-i meşruta*), including the rule of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*hülefa-yı Raṣidin*)-- the first four caliphs of Islam, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman and ‘Ali-- because in these governments, the people stipulated that the rulers must order the good and forbid the evil (*al-amr bi’l-ma’ruf wa’l-nahy an al-munkar*). Otherwise, people did not have to follow the orders of these governments. It is noteworthy that Ahmed Midhat’s discussion reflects a certain application of Enlightenment principles to early Islamic history.

Another debate was over the legislative power of the general assembly. Some of the *ulema* attacked the assembly, arguing that according to Islam no one other than Allah and his messenger had the power to make laws. Ahmed Midhat rightly criticizes this argument and explains the scope of *ijtihad*, a technical term in Islamic law that describes the process of making a legal decision by independent interpretation of the sources of the law: the Qur’an and the hadith. It is a well-known saying in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that “judgments (and by extension laws) change as the times change.”91 In order for Islamic society to keep up with the times, early Muslim jurists had used the method of *ijtihad* to rule on issues about which there was no mention either in the Qur’an or in the hadith and that could not be decided through logical analogy or use of community

91 “Kad sığhayyar al-dikam bi’il-tabadduli il-zaman.”
consensus. Though conventional wisdom holds that Sunni *ulema* ceased to employ *ijithad* in roughly ninth century C.E., reformists such as Jamal al-Din Al-Afghani (1838-1897) attempted to resurrect it in the nineteenth century. Ahmed Midhat's discussion of *ijithad* is imbued with the spirit of reform espoused by al-Afghani and 'Abduh, who argued that properly used reason did not conflict with religious revelation. Ahmed Midhat explains that all laws that a future general assembly would pass would take Islamic law as the principal point of reference. Hence, the general assembly would be a sort of official institution for *ijithad*.

Since there are authentic hadiths proving that the Prophet Muhammad consulted with the people around him concerning affairs ranging from construction of new buildings to declarations of war and peace, there is no doubt that there is consultation in Islam\(^2\) (*ṣura* and *mūṣavere*). However, consultation with non-Muslims, referring to non-Muslim Ottoman subjects having full parliamentary power, was a topic of dispute between the opponents and defenders of the constitutional government. Briefly, *ṣura* is a procedure of making decision by consultation and deliberation among those who have an interest in the matter on which a decision is to be made, or others who can help them to make such a decision. As its definition suggests, there is nothing in the concept that makes it intrinsically Islamic. Ahmed Midhat, who defended the permissibility of consultation with non-Muslims, attempts to support his argument by describing a few incidents from the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Ahmed Midhat notes that before his conversion to Islam, Abu Sufyan, the leader of Mecca, wanted to attend a war meeting of Muslims. We should note that although both Abu Sufyan and the Prophet were members

\(^2\) See footnote 56.
of the Quraysi tribal confederation, Abu Sufyan was then an enemy of the Muslim community. However, the Muslims did not let him in at first. Abu Sufyan said:

O people of Quraish, I am the one who is the most knowledgeable of you concerning war affairs, why do you not let me join your meeting?

Then the Prophet Muhammad let him in and said:

There is nothing wrong with letting him in; on the contrary we can benefit from him. If what he says is appropriate, we accept it; if not, we reject it.93

Although Islamic scholars consider this hadith a “weak hadith,” the main point of the hadith, the permissibility of consultation with non-Muslims, can be substantiated with other incidents that took place during the Prophet Muhammad’s time. For example, Ahmed Midhat reports another incident that took place before the Battle of the Trench (Khandaq), a major victory for the Muslim community in Medina over the Quraysh of Mecca in 625 C.E. He notes that some Jews, who were already living under Islamic rule, were present at the meeting where the Prophet and his companions started to form a strategy to overcome the large numbers of the enemy before the battle. The Jews suggested to the Prophet Muhammad that they should dig a defensive trench around Medina, he accepted this suggestion,94 and this was what enabled the Muslims of Medina to withstand the Meccan attack on their city. Ahmed Midhat’s account of this hadith is partially correct; however, he was definitely confused about who made the suggestion.

There is a unanimous consensus among scholars⁹⁵ that the person who suggested that the Muslims dig a trench around Medina was actually Salman-i Farisi, an Iranian Christian who had converted to Islam.

Ahmed Midhat also quotes a verse from the Qur'an to substantiate his argument: “If ye know this not, ask of those who possess the Message.”⁹⁶ He argues that this verse proves that Muslims are permitted to consult with “those who possess the Message,” i.e., Christians and Jews, who Muslims believe received messengers from God before the advent of Islam. However, reading this verse in its context would show that this verse has a very weak connection, perhaps even no connection, to the issue of consultation with non-Muslims. The verse is about whether prophets are human beings or not, and according to a majority of scholars, it primarily suggests that the Muslims asked the Jews if Moses was a human being.⁹⁷ Hence, Ahmed Midhat’s understanding of this verse seems to be very shallow. The more important point is that he is trying to marshal hadiths and Quranic verses to justify inclusion of the non-Muslim population in the parliament. Ahmed Midhat felt it was necessary to make such a justification in order to answer the criticism that the vlema directed against the constitutional government.

Although one cannot argue that Ahmed Midhat was totally accurate in his argument for the permissibility of consultation with non-Muslims, i.e., there were errors in his evidence, his main argument about the life of the Prophet seems to be valid. Many incidents, such as the Battle of the Trench, the Prophet Muhammad’s consultation with

⁹⁵ All classical Islamic historians, such as ibn Ishaq and Vaqidi, report that it was Salman-i Farisi’s suggestion, not that of the Jews, that the Muslims dig a trench around Medina.
⁹⁶ Qur’an 21:7
the Jews after the migration to Medina, and the Prophet’s suggestion that positions of responsibility should be given to those who are competent, would suggest that everyone who is competent, regardless of his religion, can participate and take an active role in consultation, and that is also true for the parliament.

People were also divided into two groups regarding imperial prerogatives. One group argued that it was unethical to restrict the imperial prerogatives as the constitution would do. They thought that any kind of set rules meant restriction for the sultan. The other group, which included Ahmed Midhat, asserted that the constitution would not restrict the imperial prerogatives; on the contrary, it would define and protect them.

One of the most interesting stances regarding imperial prerogatives was Namik Kemal’s. His main attack was against the revisions made by Abdülhamid and the ministers, such as Küçük (“Little”) Said Paşa, chief palace secretary, and Mehmed Rüşdi, to convert the constitution into a statement of general principles like the Imperial Edict of Gülhane and strengthen imperial prerogatives. Namik Kemal vehemently opposed Article 113, which he viewed as an article, providing the sultan with the right to banish from the country any person of whom the sultan had doubts. As written, this article called for a police investigation, supported by documents, before sending someone into exile. However, Namik Kemal was not wrong foreseeing that a despot could use this article to exile anyone he did not like.

99 Davison, Reform in the Ottoman Empire, p. 376.
100 *Hükumetin enniyetini ıhbl ederleri idare-i zabstanın tahkikatı mevsukası üzerine sabit olanları memalik-i mahruṣ-i yahana-i ihraç ve teb’id cinek münhasıran zat-i hâzret-i padişahının yed-i ıktidarında*.” Üss-i İnkılab, Vol. 11, p. 381.
While attacking Namık Kemal, Ahmed Midhat does not mention Namık Kemal’s opposition to Article 113. Rather, he argues that Namık Kemal was against the constitution because it would infringe on the imperial prerogatives, and tries to misrepresent Namık Kemal as a defender of imperial prerogatives. Ahmed Midhat writes that “Although one can understand by examining the original Ottoman constitution and the memoranda of Midhat Paşa and Said Paşa that alterations in this fashion would expand, not restrict, the general freedom, it is surprising that a man like Namık Kemal, whom the public knows as the greatest freedom lover, did not like these alterations and argued especially, aside from countless other detriments, that they would infringe on the imperial prerogatives.”\(^{101}\) Actually, most of the alterations proposed by the palace were aimed at strengthening imperial prerogatives. However, Ahmed Midhat either does not see a negative correlation between the expansion of imperial prerogatives, such as right to exile supposedly dangerous persons, and restriction of the general freedom; or he blindly defends the alterations and accuses Namık Kemal by misrepresenting Namık Kemal’s ideas in order to get right with Abdülhamid.

In other words, Ahmed Midhat presents Namık Kemal as a reactionary in order to make him to fall into disfavor of the public and somewhat set the stage for his exile in 1877. It is also noteworthy that Namık Kemal answered Ahmed Midhat’s accusation in a long letter, arguing that Ahmed Midhat misrepresented his ideas to get right with Abdülhamid when Namık Kemal was in exile; however, as Namık Kemal’s writings were

at that time banned, his letter was not published until 1910,\textsuperscript{102} twenty-two years after his death.

Ahmed Midhat's answer to the criticism that "the government cannot grant a constitution; it can only be taken by the people" is very remarkable. He agrees with this criticism; however, he also explains the reason why none of the previous rulers had given a constitution to his people. He says, "Although it is true that the privileges of freedom, which are known as a constitution, were not granted by states, but taken by the nations all over Europe, this was only because of the fact that not only in Europe, but throughout the world, there has been no ruler who appreciates freedom as much as Abdülhamid."\textsuperscript{103} Ahmed Midhat also asserts, "We should add that if a sultan is public spirited enough to find his personal interest in the interest of the nation, as has our freedom-loving Sultan Gazi Abdülhamid II, he himself will want a constitution. But if a sultan excludes himself not only from his nation, but also from the whole world, and finds himself in a state of arrogance like a god, then like Abdülaziz Han, who dwells in paradise, not only does he not grant a constitution; he also regards the word 'freedom' as a swearword and tries to destroy those who even try to utter it with reverence."\textsuperscript{104}


CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Ahmed Midhat wanted to see Abdülhamid’s success, and therefore in Üss-i İnkilab he explains how Abdülhamid can have a successful reign. It would be appropriate to argue that Üss-i İnkilab accomplished some parts of its purpose. While Abdülhamid found guidance and historical legitimization in Üss-i İnkilab and won an ardent defender of his rule, Ahmed Midhat became a protégé of Abdülhamid and enjoyed his generous support.

Throughout Üss-i İnkilab, while covering the reforms implemented during the reigns of Abdülaziz and Abdülhamid, Ahmed Midhat always presents a comparison between Abdülaziz and Abdülhamid. He attempts to show that Abdülhamid was a genuinely competent ruler, as opposed to Abdülaziz; and since he had an appreciation for the basis of reform, expanding people’s freedom — again unlike Abdülaziz—, he would be successful in his reform attempts.

In his discussion of the reigns of Abdülmeclid and Abdülaziz, Ahmed Midhat always skips the fact that the real center of decision making between 1839 and 1871 was at the Sublime Porte. Rather, he considers Abdülmeclid and Abdülaziz the real policy-
maker in the empire. Thus, he implies that both good and evil come from the ruler, and indicates Abdülaziz as the source of evil and Abdülhamid as the source of goodness.

Ahmed Midhat tries to “absent himself” from his discourse and repeatedly says that Üss-i Inkilab is an objective work. However, close reading of Üss-i Inkilab reveals that Ahmed Midhat hides himself in between the lines of the book where the reader explores the main purpose of the book: giving historical legitimization to Abdülhamid and acquiring his favor and patronage.

As part of his strategy of getting right with Abdülhamid, Ahmed Midhat sometimes becomes the mouthpiece of the sultan and attacks the opposition. The most obvious of these attacks was against Namık Kemal. Ahmed Midhat skewers him, even if some of the things Ahmed Midhat said about him would hardly make sense to anybody but the sultan.

Ahmed Midhat summarizes what he tried to explain throughout Üss-i Inkilab and gives the ultimate message of the book with the following quatrain of Persian poet Sadi Şirazi:

The king who approves of oppression for those who are inferior to him.
In the times of hardship will have no friend but mighty enemies.
Make peace with the subjects, and be immune from having to fight the enemy.
It is that for the just king his subjects constitute his army.\(^\text{105}\)
The later years of Abdülhamid's reign would show that Ahmed Midhat's endeavor to condition Abdülhamid not to continue the press censorship and despotism of Abdülaziz failed. Even Ahmed Midhat complains about censorship in his private letters from the 1890s. In the end, Abdülhamid suspended the constitution and closed down the parliament. He ultimately became one of the most despotic of the late Ottoman sultans. The opposition to his rule increased enormously. During these hard times for Abdülhamid, as Sadi Şirazi had predicted, Abdülhamid found no friends but mighty enemies, like the Young Turks, who overthrew him in 1908.

با رعیت صلح کن ونجذک خصم ایمن نشین
زانگه اهانته یاد را راهیت لشکرست
Üss-i İnkilab, Vol. II, p. 188.
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