Immediately following the armistice that ended the World War I in the Middle East, a small group of “Young Turk” leaders, who had led the war-time ruling party of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Ottoman Empire, fled into a self-imposed exile in Germany. Although they were wanted internationally as war-criminals and they were practically stateless statesmen without any material resources, they managed to remain all the more relevant for their political exile as rogue revolutionaries. The partition of the Ottoman Empire and the colonial occupation of the Muslim lands caused revolts and protest throughout the Muslim world. After secret meetings in Berlin, they founded in Moscow the Union of Muslim Revolutionary Societies (İslam Öhtilal Cemiyetleri Öttihadı). The aim of this self-proclaimed “Islamic International” was to mobilize and unite Muslim-nationalist insurgencies against European colonialism.

The dissertation tells the story of the rise and fall of the Union of Muslim Revolutionary Societies during the aftermath of World War I, 1918–1922. The dissertation makes three interlinked arguments. First, as a transnational political history, the dissertation argues that this political movement needs to be embedded within the global moments of anticolonialism, internationalism, and revanchism of the immediate postwar years. In a fascinating network, the fugitive Young Turk leaders aligned with German revanchists, Russian Bolsheviks, Turkish Kemalists, the Afghan Emirate, Arab and Egyptian nationalists, and Indian and Irish revolutionaries as well as the League of Oppressed Peoples in Rome. Second, by critically drawing attention to the organizational incapacity of this movement, the dissertation argues that dialectic processes of sense-making, including rumors and conspiracy theories, helped this movement to appear as an elusive force in international politics with more conspiratorial capacities than it actually possessed. Third, in explaining the dynamics of transnational contentious politics in international relations, the dissertation argues that the Young Turk leaders, as revolutionary non-state actors, were increasingly isolated and persecuted by revolutionary state actors. Towards the settlement of international relations in 1922, they had lost their available space of action. Based on a vast collection of published and unpublished private papers of the Young Turk leaders as well as memoirs, diaries, newspapers, and state documents from various German, Swiss, French, British, Russian, and Turkish archives, the dissertation illustrates an important episode of the aftermath of World War I that shows the intricacies of transnational contentious politics and the epistemological ruptures that followed the end of the Ottoman Empire.

Keywords Young Turks, Turkish Republic, Ottoman Empire, Germany, non-state actors

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