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ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

RELIGION AND EMPIRE: ISLAM AS A STRUCTURAL FORCE IN THE UMAYYAD AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRES

Murat ÜLGÜL*

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Abstract

What is the relationship between religion and empire, and what role do religious ideas play in the empire-formation process? This paper focuses on these questions by analysing the role of Islam in the formation of the Umayyad and the Ottoman Empires. Although the literature about these Islamic empires is extensive enough, they generally provide a rich historical narrative without theorization. To fill this gap, I use constructivist theory in the analysis and point out that religion as a structural force helps states to turn into empires over time. Nevertheless, following the agent-structure debate, I also argue that the individual characteristics of these states are essential to understand how religion affected their policies and how they interpreted the religion. The findings show that as the Umayyad Empire was not recognized as legitimate by various sects in religious terms in the seventh and eighth centuries, religion played less of a regulatory role in imperial policies and its rulers did not hesitate to adopt ruthless stratagems and a divide-and-conquer strategy. On the other hand, the Ottoman Empire benefited from religion in its conquests and its policies were primarily restricted by religious norms and values. As a result of this dependence, ruthless stratagems were adopted less often, and Ottoman policies were heavily shaped by religious norms and values.

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Keywords: Constructivism, Religion, Ruthless Stratagems, Ottoman Empire, Umayyad Empire

Din ve İmparatorluk: Emevi ve Osmanlı İmparatorluklarında Yapısal Bir Güç Olarak İslam

Öz

Din ile imparatorluk arasındaki ilişki nedir ve imparatorluk oluşumu sürecinde dini fikirler ne tür roller oynar? Bu makale Emevi ve Osmanlı İmparatorluklarının oluşum sürecinde İslam'ın rolünü analiz ederek bu sorulara odaklanmaktadır. İslam imparatorlukları hakkında literatürün yeteri kadar geniş olmasına rağmen söz konusu literatür büyük ölçüde teorileştirme olmadan zengin bir tarihsel anlatı sunmaktadır. Bu boşluğu doldurmak için analizde inşacı teoriyi kullanıyor ve dinin yapısal bir güç olarak zaman içinde devletlerin imparatorluğu dönüşmesinde yardım ettiğini gösteriyorum. Bununla bilirlikte, aktör-yapı tartışmasıyla uyumlu olarak, devletlerin bireysel özelliklerinin dinin politikalara etkisi ve dinin yorumlanmasını anlamada önemli olduğunu iddia ediyorum. Bulgular Emevi İmparatorluğu'nun yedinci ve sekizinci yüzyıllarda birçok mezhep tarafından dini anlamda meşru olarak görülmediğini, dinin emperyal politikalarda daha az düzenleyici rol oynadığını ve yöneticilerinin acımasız manevralar ve böl-ve-yönet stratejisi takip etmekten çekinmediğini göstermektedir. Öte yandan, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu fetihlerinde dinden faydalanmış, karşılığında politikaları büyük oranda dini norm ve değerlerle sınırlanmıştır. Bu bağımlılıktan ötürü acımasız manevralar daha seyrek takip edilmiş ve Osmanlı politikaları büyük oranda dini norm ve değerler tarafından şekillendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnşacılık, Din, Acımasız Manevralar, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Emevi Hanedanlığı

Introduction

What is the relationship between religion, and empire and what role do religious ideas play in the empire-formation process? This paper focuses on these questions by analysing the role of Islam in the formation of early Islamic states and the Ottoman Empire. Although the concept of "Islamic Empire" is primarily used in the literature to refer to the Umayyad Empire, Abbasid Caliphate and the Ottoman Empire, a quick glance of these resources shows a lack of a theoretical explanation for the relationship between empire and religion. One could see a relatively more affluent explanation of how religion affects imperial policies or empire-formation in Britain, Russia, the United States, and France.[1] However, it is difficult to find similar work on the Islamic empires as the existing literature

provides a rich historical narrative without theorization. This paper aims to fill in this gap.

I will use constructivist theory to analyse the relationship between religion and Islamic empires and there are two reasons behind this choice. First, as will be explained in detail, religion provides multiple normative values that are beneficial in forming an imperial state and shaping imperial policies. Indeed, every religion is a kind of normative structure as they shape how a society should interact with other people, especially with the ones who do not share the same religious values. Although religious rules in the Quran are mainly about individual life under the divine regulations and there is no political structure offered in it, imperial policies in the early Islamic states and the Ottoman Empire were based mainly on religious texts. Therefore, it is possible to state that although religion is not about politics, politics has always been about religion in these states.

Second, it is also possible to see an agent-structure relationship in the theoretical explanation of this paper. Here my argument is analogous to Schroeder's constructivism in explaining the European transformation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Schroeder, 1994). Similar to Schroeder, I adopt a structural approach over unit-level explanations and argue that religion as a structural force helps states to turn into empires over time. Nevertheless, I also argue that the individual characteristics of these states are essential to understand how religion affected their policies and how they interpreted the religion. Therefore, although it may sound confusing, I do not see faith as given. As will be shown later, religious rules are open to interpretation and individual rulers may combine their pre-Islamic characteristics with Islamic rules and norms. Within the decision-making process in a religious state, the actions and policies of individual actors are affected by Islamic tradition and norms; and, in turn, decisions, actions, policies, and characteristics of individual actors affect the religious system within the empire.

In this paper, I will compare Umayyad and Ottoman policies and how they are affected by religion. The most important difference between these Islamic states is their application of ruthless stratagems in their policies. I argue that the justification of rule through religion plays an essential role in this difference. While the Umayyad Empire was not recognized as legitimate by various sects in religious terms in the seventh and eighth centuries, religion played less of a regulatory role in imperial policies and its rulers did not hesitate to adopt ruthless stratagems and a divide-and-conquer

strategy. On the other hand, the Ottoman Empire benefited from religion in its conquests and in return, religious norms and values primarily restricted its policies. As a result of this dependence, ruthless stratagems were adopted less often, and Ottoman policies were heavily shaped by religious norms and values.

It is necessary to point out that this paper is about the rise of empires. Therefore, it is not a full account of the relationship between empire and religion. The argument of this paper is constructed as follows: In the next section, I will extend the constructivist statement I summarized above. Following this, I will use this theory to explain how religion affected policies and actions in the Umayyad and the Ottoman Empires. Throughout this explanation, I will show the interaction between the idea of this paper and other theories on empire formation. In conclusion, I will summarize the findings of this analysis.

1) Religion as a Structural Force

Islam, just like Christianity and Judaism, is formed by normative rules largely about individual life and in some cases about group life. A close look at the Islamic texts, Quran and hadiths, which are sayings and acts of the Prophet Muhammad, leads a researcher to establish connections between Islamic rules and several normative values discussed in the literature today, such as democracy, human rights, just society, etcetera. There is even a normative argument on international cooperation in the sacred book. As El Fadl points out, the Quran states that God created people from different nations so that they can come to know one another and according to Muslim jurists this is an expression for "social cooperation and mutual assistance in order to achieve justice".[2] Although sometimes interpretations of these rules may clash with each other as we see in the clash between radical and moderate Islam in contemporary politics, the important point here is that religion provides constitutive and regulatory rules for individual and group life.

As a source of constitutive and regulatory norms, Islamic texts shape the life of an individual. The Quran bans murder, torture, rape, adultery, thievery, etc. and a person seeking God's mercy and approval avoids those banned acts and worships as directed in the religious texts. A religious community also expects the same values to dominate group life if this religion and its values are shared by a group of people. In these cases, they demand leaders create rules in accordance with religious texts, and they insist on punishment from the authority if these

values and rules are violated by others. In sum, people expect the religion to be a structural form over group life and even want other groups to adopt them since they believe how they act is true, good, and sacred.

A couple of conclusions can be drawn from this brief explanation. First, religious norms and values are important sources for a ruler to gain legitimacy from the public. A ruler in a religious community should establish links between his demands to rule the community and the religious values in which that community believes. Material force is an important component in establishing empires, but a legitimate king/emperor/sultan can control the population without the need of force if the community believes that the ruler is legitimate in terms of religion. On the other hand, if the ruler is seen as corrupt and not sharing the same religious values as the community, it may be difficult for him to rule over the people. As can be seen in the case studies of this paper, the end of the Umayyad Empire and the rise of the Abbasid Caliphate came after this kind of de-legitimization process. Since Islamic values involve normatively good directions to govern, such as respecting human rights and respecting the "People of the Book" – Christians and Jews, a legitimate Muslim ruler can govern even non-Muslim communities as seen in the Prophet Muhammad and Ottoman periods. Therefore, the first function of religion in empire-building is its being a source of legitimacy.

Second, religious texts can shape the policies of an imperial state and some action may be avoided as a result of this. At this point, it may be helpful to compare this explanation with another theory of imperial policies. According to Hui, one of the important pillars of the logic of domination is ruthless stratagems, since ruthless tactics reduce the costs of war for dominance-seekers and if it is not adopted, conquest will be less likely (Hui, 2005: 34). Although this may be a good point from a realist perspective which focuses mainly on material forces, it completely ignores the role of ideas, values, and norms in imperial strategies. I argue that religious norms and values may play a regulatory and sometimes limiting role in the strategies a state can follow because if a ruler contradicts those values, he may lose his legitimacy with the community. In the Quran, Jews and Christians are called "The People of the Book" and the members of these religions are seen as people abiding by the Divine Books sent by God. There are several verses in the Quran showing how a Muslim should behave towards "People of the Book" and since their books were revealed by God, believers of these religions must be treated respectfully. As a result of this tolerance, if a ruler ruthlessly terminates a Christian and/or a

Jewish group, it means that he behaves against the order of the Quran and that ruler may seem as corrupt in the eyes of the Muslim community. Therefore, if one wants to research imperial strategies, s/he should not avoid the cultural factors restricting the implementation of some policies over others. Rulers are not free to choose whatever policies are needed to increase their power.

Third, in addition to being a normative source for an empire, religion is also important in identity issues. On the one hand, religion may play a unifying role within the empire. Islamic identity in this sense was important in the past both in the formation of Islamic states and when these states turned into empires through conquering territories. During the state-formation processes, religion is important to transform different pre-state identities into a common one shared by individuals. Especially in the period of the Prophet Muhammad, Islam played this role by transforming tribal identities into an Islamic one. In addition, according to Imamdar, the Prophet Muhammad and the revelations he received from Allah played an integral role by meeting the basic needs of a community, such as safety, security and trust (Imamdar, 2001: 236). Likewise, when the empire extends its territory, Islam may ease some conquests because of the shared group identity. This is an important fact for imperial studies given that when a small power meets the threat of a growing empire, the former may choose to bandwagon rather than balancing the power of the latter as a result of a shared common identity.

On the other hand, religion may be divisive in an Islamic state. If different sects emerge within a territory and each justifies its right to rule through religious justification, this may lead to a clash of sectarian identities. In the beginning, religion may play an important role during the formation of a state since rulers quote religious norms and values to show their right to rule, but during the transformation of the state into the empire it may not benefit from religious values and norms since the opposition to this state may also base its resistance on different kinds of religious norms and values. As a result, this state may adopt different strategies to extend the territory rather than justifying its extension through religious texts, norms and values.

Shared religious identity is also important in sociological terms. As a religion, Islam provides different social interactions between people from different tribes and ethnicities. Charles Davis argues that although religion has sometimes triggered a revolution, it has "more often been a factor of social integration" (Davis, 1993: 21-22). Muslims meet in the mosque five times a

day for daily prayer or they interact with each other during the *hadj* (pilgrimage), interactions which increase the understanding of common values among Muslims. This interaction, according to Voll, provides a "special type of community of discourse" which creates an idea of a world without boundaries (Voll, 1994: 219). As a result, a Muslim in India can find the same values and beliefs when he travels to Egypt, Mecca, or Central Asia. It is possible to claim that this idea of a "world without boundaries" may be a factor that eases empire formation around a common religious identity. An imperial state may benefit from this shared common identity in the empire-building process and conquests. On the other hand, if shared religious identity is overwhelmed by sectarian identities, the argument of a "world without boundaries" loses its effectiveness in binding the Islamic society within the empire.

I analyse these arguments about the role of Islam in imperial policies by comparing the religious system as a structural force in the Umayyad and the Ottoman Empires. I argue that although the Umayyad Empire tried to justify its rule through religious terms, this attempt met resistance from other sects and Islam lost its regulatory role in the imperial policies and unifying role within the society. As a result, Umayyad rulers followed policies that contradicted Islamic values and norms. The rise of the Ottoman Empire was based on the religious justification for territorial expansion and the religion played both a regulatory role in the imperial policies and a unifying role within the Muslim society. Therefore, it is possible to claim that the structural force of religion is dependent on the individual characteristics of the state and vice versa.

2) The period of the Prophet Muhammad and the Umayyad Empire

Before analysing the relationship between Islam and the Umayyad Empire, it is necessary to look at how Islam unified the decentralized and diversified tribal identities under a shared common ideology and how the Umayyad came to power. This historical information is important in order to see why the Umayyad rulers failed to legitimate their governance through religious principles.

The rise of Islam cannot be explained with ideological factors alone. The weakening power of the Byzantine and Sassanid Empires after successive wars against each other, their relations with the communities in the Arabic lands, as well as the political structure among the tribal communities, are equally important in explaining the success of the Prophet to

unite the people under the banner of Islam. The Prophet, and following him, the Umayyad Empire and the Abbasid Caliphate benefited from these characteristics first to establish an Islamic state and then to turn it into an empire. Nevertheless, what led to the rise of these states within the diversified structure of the Arabian Peninsula were the benefits Islam brought to them.

Before Islam was revealed in the Arabian Peninsula, the principal sociological organization was tribal, and tribal identity was based on kinship relations. As a result, political structures were small in number and since the Byzantium and Sassanid Empires did not extend their political control into the Arabian Peninsula, the region was lacking a central power. Yet, in the regions where the Byzantines established political control, such as Egypt, Iran and Mesopotamia, state-society relations were problematic since local Monophysite churches were rejected by the Byzantine Orthodox Church (Gordon, 2005: 2-5). This lack of control in the Arabian Peninsula and the problematic state-society relations in the periphery eased the spread of Islam over the next five centuries.

In this diversified and decentralized political and sociological system, Islam played a regulatory and unitary role in the Arabian Peninsula. Islam overcame the diversity of this region by providing essential characteristics for a community, such as identity, leadership, and a legal structure. First of all, the religion the Prophet Muhammad revealed created a common identity among believers and described them as a distinct community. Although tribal identity was still carried by the believers, Islamic identity was superior to tribal ones and rather than the hierarchical power relations among tribes; the religion assumed equality between all believers. Furthermore, what united the believers was their dedication to God rather than kinship, and this opened up the possibility of a larger community among the people. In addition to this, the spread of Islam in the early period was led by a strong and respected leader, a factor which eased the unitary role of the religion (Gordon, 2005: 20-21). Although leadership was important, even in the pre-Islamic tribal relationships, Islam addressed a far larger community which increased the role of leadership among the community.

However, the most important role of religion in the transformation of the Arabian Peninsula can be seen in sociological life. Islam provided a legal structure based on the Quran. In the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula, the legal structure was loose, decentralized and largely was controlled by influential tribal leaders in an unjust way. In the legal structure, Arabs were favoured over non-Arabs, and different standards

were applied to different people in accordance with their status and wealth. With the acceptance of Islam, the Quran explicitly banned some actions such as murder, theft, adultery, etc. and the Prophet changed the loose structure and favoured justice and fair dealing in his actions. Not only in daily life, according to Mahmud Ahmad, but even during wartime against the Meccans, the Prophet prioritized justice and respected war rules and conventions between parties. On one occasion, the Prophet even paid blood money after his scouting expedition killed an enemy on the sacred month, Rajab, although the Meccans occasionally violated the sanctity of sacred months (Mirza and Ahmad, 2005: 334). The legal structure and the leader's respecting it with his actions hastened the unification of Islam in the Arabic lands.

As a structural force, Islam also transformed the pre-Islamic practices of the Arabian Peninsula in favour of Islamic objectives. One of the most important developments Islam led in this era was the transformation of the tribal raids into a religious war. In the pre-Islamic period, raiding was a well-established practice. Raids were carried out against opposing tribes and in some instances, nomadic groups were applying the same practices against villages and towns as a result of economic interests (Gordon, 2005: 4-5). After Islam was accepted, this practice did not stop, but it was organized in favour of the economic interests of the Islamic community and religious purposes. For instance, while in the pre-Islamic period tribes were raiding against other tribes, after the acceptance of Islam this practice was applied against non-believers and when the members of the raided tribe accepted Islam, they were exempted from further raiding (Imamdar, 2001: 149). This transformation turned a pre-Islamic activity into a religious mission and Muslims used raiding as a way to convert people from paganism into Islam. This revolution is important because it shows that religious activity is not completely independent of the former practices, which shows that existing traditions may play a decisive role in religious norms and values. In sum, by providing group identity, leadership, legal structure and a higher objective, the period of the Prophet Muhammad led Islam to be a unifying ideology in the diversified and decentralized region.

As Celik states, during the period of the Prophet, politics and religion did not come up against each other; contrary to this, they complimented each other since both political and religious leadership were gathered under one person, Prophet Muhammad (Celik, 2000: 30). Although the Prophet did not propose any successor when he passed away, the leadership of

Abu Bakr and Umar did not result in any leadership rivalry and the spread of Islam continued. However, during the Uthman period, political rivalry between different sects emerged. Uthman was from the Umayyad clan of Mecca and during his period of rule, the Umayyads occupied all government posts and rebellions started because of the poor governance and repression of Umayyad officials. After Uthman ignored public complaints, rebellions reached into Medina and he was killed by a small group of rebels in the year 656. Following him, Ali was chosen as leader because of his being the Prophet's son-in-law and his religious charisma. Nonetheless, because of Uthman's murder before Ali came to power, Muslims in Medina were divided into four groups: supporters of Ali, Medinans who were involved in the murder, Medinans who are neutral, and supporters of Uthman (Umayyads under the leadership of Mu'awiya) (Celik, 2000: 36).

This division led to a civil war which is known as the *Great Fitna* (trial, temptation) within Muslim society. The lion's share of the government posts during the Uthman period belonged to the Umayyads and Mua'wiya was demanding justice for his murder. Since Mua'wiya thought that Ali was hiding the murderers, he refused to give his loyalty to Ali. Nevertheless, Mua'wiya did not rush to get involved in a fight with Ali since he was not the only leader opposing Ali. Under the leadership of Aisha, who was the Prophet's widow, Talha and al-Zubayr, the Prophet's former companion and well-regarded member of the Muslim community, an opposition group gathered in Mecca to demand Uthman's revenge and protest the manner in which Ali had become Caliph. They demanded consultation and debate (shura) to choose Uthman's successor and when this did not happen, they fought against Ali in the Battle of the Camel in 656 (Gordon, 2005: 33-34). During this war, Mua'wiya followed a buck-passing policy.

After the Meccan opposition was defeated, Mua'wiya gathered his forces and war between Ali's and Mua'wiya's forces started at Siffin in July 657. In a short while, Ali gained victory on the battlefield and Mua'wiya followed a strategy similar to divide-and-conquer. His adviser, `Amr ibn al-`As, asked him to attach Quranic pages to the spearheads and to demand an arbiter to solve any problems. This strategy, which was followed when Ali's victory was close, worked and a group in Ali's army, known as Kharijites, refused to attack although Ali knew that Mua'wiya's strategy was no more than deceit (Celik, 2000: 42-44). In the later period, the disagreement among these three groups – Ali, Mua'wiya, and the Kharijites – grew and the Kharijites planned an assassination to kill both leaders. While

they were successful in murdering Ali in 661, their attempt against Mua'wiya failed and Mua'wiya emerged as the only leader within the Muslim community. He put pressure on al-Hasan, Ali's son, and ended the Kharijite rebellions. As can be seen, religion in this period was mainly used for political objectives and its unifying role largely diminished because it did not help to legitimate the right to rule of various leaders. As a result, leaders had to follow several strategies that contradicted religious values and rules; this will be a serious problem for the Umayyad Empire.

Because of the legitimation problem, the Umayyad Empire felt less constrained by religious norms and values and adopted strategies that contradicted these norms and values. For instance, Mua'wiya cancelled the consultation and debate system for the selection of Caliph and he brought a dynastic system into the Islamic Empire by nominating his son Yazid as successor. However, when he persuaded al-Hasan, son of Ali, to support his leadership Mua'wiye promised to keep the consultation and debate system for the selection of the new Caliphs (Aycan, 1999: 156-157). Although the dynastic system would be an efficient way to end the war of thrones between different sects in the Umayyad state, it also helped the Umayyads to keep the right to rule in their hands; therefore, this decision increased the disagreement with Ali's supporters. Although the consultation and debate system was problematic in Ali's rise to power, his being one of the first Muslims and the Prophet's son-in-law partly legitimized his selection in accordance with religious values. However, the dynastic system had less religious grounds and sometimes rulers who favoured pleasure and entertainment came to power. For instance, Yazid II, who came to power in 720, set up parties that included music, poems, and alcohol, and this kind of governance was protested by Muslims within the state because this lifestyle was completely opposite to the religious values and norms the Muslim community adopted (Aycan, 1999: 168).

Umayyad rulers also did not take religious norms and values into consideration in their strategies. In order to keep their rule intact, they did not hesitate in targeting important religious figures and sanctuaries. One of the infamous events in Umayyad history was the murder of Hussein, Ali's younger son. After Yazid succeeded Mua'wiya, Hussein decided to challenge Yazid; however, before becoming a threat, Umayyad forces brutally massacred him, his family and his friends in Karbala. As Bennison states, this act "blackened the name of the Umayyads forever," among the Alids (Bennison, 2009: 19). In the end, Hussein was *ahl al Bayt* (people of the Prophet's

house) and unlike Ali, who was killed by rebels, he was massacred by Umayyad forces when he was far from being a threat. This event was a rational act by the Umayyad government to end the power rivalry between the Umayyads and Alids; nevertheless, it had no religious justification. Ironically, when Abbasids came to power in 750, they brutally massacred the Umayyads and legitimized their action with religious terms by claiming that they were taking revenge for Hussein (Kennedy, 1981: 48-49).

Another event proving that religious norms and values were unimportant in the Yazid period was the devastation of the Kaaba. The event in Karbala led to rebellions in the state and one of the most important among them was started by Abdullah ibn Zubayr. After Yazid sent twelve thousand troops to end this rebellion, Abdullah had to take shelter in the Kabaa. This strategy did not stop Yazid's forces and the troops attacked the Kabaa with huge rocks and fiery spears. This attack on the most important religious sanctuary within Islam also damaged the unifying effect of shared religious identity among the Muslim population. The point here is that since Yazid could not legitimate his right to rule among the Muslim population through religious norms and values, he did not hesitate to violate the very same rules and norms in order to strengthen his power. His policies were so irritating to the Muslim population that even his son Mua'wiya b. Yazid did not accept the role of ruler. After the death of Yazid, Mua'wiya said, "What a terrible place where he must be right now. Because he massacred the grandson of the Prophet, turned *haram* (forbidden) into *mubah* (permissible) and destructed Kabaa" (Aycan, 1999: 161).

The history of the Umayyad Empire also shows that if a ruler behaves in accordance with religious norms and values, he does not need to resort to ruthless stratagems as Yazid did. The most remarkable example of this argument is the policies of Omar b. Abdulaziz who came to power in 717. During his short rule, Omar left the tradition of criticizing Alids during sermons, gave Christians and Jews their places of worship back, ruled non-Muslims with tolerance and in his time non-Arabs were not treated as second-class citizens (Aycan, 1999: 167). As a result, a peaceful atmosphere dominated for three years; however, in 720 Yazid III came to power and repression became the dominant policy within the empire.

In sum, religion can play both a unifying and divisive role when a state turns into an empire. My argument is that if a ruler cannot legitimate its right to rule through religious norms and values, it is more likely that ruthless stratagems may be followed. Ruthless stratagems may be used even by a legitimate

ruler, but the violent act must be explained through religious principles, as the Abbasids did when they overthrew the Umayyad rule. The difference between the strategies followed by early Islamic leaders and the Umayyad Empire can be explained by the role of religion in justifying the right to rule.

3) The Ottoman Empire

Unlike the Umayyad Empire, the Ottoman rulers effectively benefited from religion in extending their empire and legitimating their strategies through religious principles. This justification played an important role in the long-life of the Ottoman Empire, contrary to the Umayyad Empire. Undoubtedly, additional factors such as geography and a homogenous population contributed to the successful governance of the Ottoman rule; nevertheless, as can be seen below, religion had a significant place in Ottoman decision-making.

Before accepting Islam as a religion, Turks were known by two characteristics. First, they were nomadic people and although their origin is found in Central Asia, they moved westward over time and with the Battle of Malazgirt in 1071, they stepped into Anatolia. Second, they were a warring nation. Since the beginning, Turks dreamed of world hegemony where "the sky is the tent and the sun is the flag", in the words of Oguz Khan, a legendary figure in Turkish pre-Islamic history. With the recognition of Islam, the objective of world hegemony was not abandoned but transformed and mixed with Islamic objectives. Turkish soldiers played a key role in the military structure of the Abbasid Caliphate and carried the flag of Islam to non-Muslim lands. Now the objective of world hegemony was not based on heroism but on religious principles and Turks benefited from their nomadic and warring characteristics in spreading the religion. With this mindset, there was no end to conquering new territories. The imperial policies of the Ottoman State must be evaluated, keeping this transformation in mind.

In the Ottoman Empire, there was religion-state unity since the early years of the empire and religion played a key role both in the legitimacy of the rulers and their strategies. Even before the foundation of the state, the ancestors of the Ottoman rulers made their decisions in parallel to religious values. For instance, when Ertugrul Bey, father of Osman I, who was the founder of the Ottoman Emirate, learned that the Seljuks and Mongols were fighting each other, some of his advisers recommended for him to bandwagon with the Mongols; however, he rejected this advice by stating that the most

appropriate behaviour is to assist the helpless in a difficult time, as the Prophet Khidr would do (Bas, 2011: 57). This strategic choice shows the importance of religious values in the decisions of Turkish rulers. It also points out how a ruler's choice of balancing or bandwagoning may be affected by religion even if the decision at first seems not to be rational.

As a result of his help, the Seljuks prized Ertugrul with the lands next to the Byzantium Empire, although the Mongol invasion left Anatolia divided among the different Turkish Emirates. While the Ottoman Emirate was not the strongest one among several emirates – the Eretnids and especially Karamanids were far stronger than Ottomans – it had an important advantage unlike the others: it had borders with the Byzantium Empire. Therefore, Ottomans had more reason to benefit from religion in their conquests. Consequently, from the beginning, Ottoman rulers embraced *ghaza*[3] ideology to spread Islam in the Byzantium territories and the Ottoman rulers were called by the title of ghazi – for example, Osman Ghazi – which means Islamic warrior. Indeed, the religion and the objective of spreading it pushed the Turks to extend their territories in the direction of the West rather than the East and to establish permanent hegemony in those territories (Gunay, 2003: 26-27). Occupying non-Muslims lands became the main objective of the Ottoman rulers and this objective shaped their strategies in conquering new territories since the foundation of the state in 1299.

Although the spread of Islam into non-Muslim lands was the superior objective in Ottoman strategies, there was one exception to this policy. When a Muslim community was under pressure and repression from another Muslim community in the Eastern lands, Ottoman rulers changed the direction of their military operations. For instance, during the period of Murad Ghazi (1359-1389), Ottoman rulers gave up their intention to attack Byzantium lands in Rumelia – the European part of modern Turkey, after they heard the news that there was a conflict between Muslims in the Ankara region and directed their forces towards this area. This change of direction in the military was legitimized in religious terms. Ottoman decision-makers believed that the end of the repression in Muslim communities was *fard ʿain* (compulsory duty of every single Muslim) while the war against non-Muslims was *fard kifayah* (a duty that can be performed by others, so obligation falls on the rest). As a result of the religious evaluation, Murad Ghazi postponed *ghaza* in favour of protecting Muslims in Ankara (Bas, 2011: 60). This event shows the role of religion in the strategic decisions of the Ottoman rulers and how they

benefited from it to legitimize some decisions over others. This choice also had strategic logic. By providing order at home, the Ottoman rulers could easily lead the conquests in European lands. Nevertheless, it is important that Ottoman rulers needed to quote the religious values and norms even when they took rational decisions in shaping the direction of military policy.

Nevertheless, Ottoman rulers did not need to fight against other Muslim states even when their power started becoming a hegemonic threat to the latter. This was the result of a common shared identity around the rules and norms of Islam. As mentioned before, the primary objective of the Ottoman state was to extend its territories against the Byzantium Empire and this kind of policy led them to be known among Muslims as *ghazis* who spread the name of Allah and His religion and who protect the Islamic lands against non-believers. This belief started a wave of immigration from Arabic and Turkish lands to the Ottoman state (Unan, 2003: 20). As a result, the reputation of being a representative of Islam in its war against non-believers provided the Ottoman state an army whose soldiers were willing to die in the name of Islam. While other Turkish emirates rejected immigration from the East to their lands, Ottomans gladly accepted and used them as fighters. When a new territory was conquered, these immigrants settled there and eased the Islamization of Europe. Similarly, immigrants and their settlements in Europe were important to control the trade routes and key strategic regions. In sum, Ottomans successfully used their religious identity in sociologically, politically and economically beneficial ways when they built their empires.

Here it is important to note that one should not exaggerate the importance of shared religious identity among Muslims. It is evident that in some cases, religious identity eased the bandwagoning behaviour of the other Turkish emirates. For instance, the Karasids accepted the Ottoman hegemony without a conflict and Ottoman rulers also extended their territory through family relations – as happened with the Germianids – or through purchase – as happened with the Hamidids. As explained before, the Ottomans were against bloodshed of the Muslim community and they avoided strict hegemonic policies on Turkish emirates. This situation eased the acceptance of Ottoman hegemony. However, not all emirates easily accepted this hegemony. The Karamanids especially proved themselves to be a hard nut to crack and when they had a chance they fought against the Ottoman Empire; after each defeat, they disobeyed the conditions of the peace agreements and they even sought an alliance with Western

states, especially with the Byzantium Empire (Ciftcioglu, 2009: 195-196). Therefore, it would be so simple to argue that common religious identity leads to bandwagoning behaviour in inter-state relations. Nevertheless, the bandwagoning behaviour of other emirates, Ottoman position of avoiding Muslim bloodshed, and its tolerance towards the Karamanids even after several betrayals proves the importance of religious norms and values in the Ottoman imperial policies.

Ottoman attitudes towards non-Muslims are also important to analyse in looking at how Islam shaped imperial policies. Similar to early Islamic periods, the Ottoman rulers avoided using ruthless stratagems in their conquests. Although ruthless strategies may reduce the costs of war for dominance-seekers, as Hui argues, when we look at the Ottoman case, we see that non-adoption of ruthless tactics eased the conquest of the Muslim states, especially in the European lands. The reason for this situation was that when the Ottoman rulers invaded Europe, the people living in those lands were suffering from poor administration by the local rulers. If the Ottoman rulers had followed ruthless tactics and more importantly had tried to convert Christians by force, Christianity might have brought unification among these local communities. Contrary to this, Ottoman rulers followed a policy of tolerance. For instance, after the occupation of Constantinople in 1453, Mehmed II allowed non-Muslims to freely worship in accordance with their religion, to choose their religious leaders and provided security for their lives and assets (Pekak, 2009: 172). The Ottoman Empire did not need to use divide-and-conquer strategies, another pillar in the logic of domination in Hui's formula, since the Europeans were already divided and ruthless tactics would have damaged this available situation for conquest.

In addition, the Ottoman Empire needed non-Muslims among the population because the Muslims in the Empire were excused from many taxes and the rulers needed the taxes paid by non-Muslims and non-believers. Therefore, a policy of total-conversion-by-force would not be a desirable one since the Empire needed revenue for new conquests. Although its stated mission was to convert non-Muslims into Islam, Ottoman rulers favoured conversion mainly in the European lands, but in the East, especially in Syria and Iraq where the majority was Muslim, they were more eager to tax non-Muslims than to convert them (Fisher, 1941: 454). Rather than following a zealot policy and creating a possible unification among a divided European Christian population as a reaction against it, the Ottoman Empire benefitted strategically from religion. Ottoman rulers both avoided using force for conversion and followed this

aim by addressing financial benefits for the people. Non-Muslims were free to follow their religious practices, but as a cost, they had to pay tax and they had a chance to avoid paying taxes through converting to Islam.

In sum, these events and practices show how Islam as a structure shaped the strategies of an empire. When Turks accepted Islam, similar to early Muslims, they did not give up their own practices; however, they transformed these practices and started using them in favour of religion. Ottoman Turks kept the warring practices of pre-Islamic Turkish communities and followed the objective of world hegemony though spreading Islam. Islamic identity overwhelmed the tribal Turkish identity, and although the sultanate remained in the hands of Turks since the Ottoman state was ruled by dynasty, the position of vizier was open to anyone who was a Muslim, even if he was a convert. Turks benefited from the Islamic norms and values to realize their pre-Islamic objective of being a world hegemon through adopting *ghaza* ideology.

Second, Islam played a key role in following certain strategies over others. To legitimize their actions, Ottoman rulers were bound to Islamic norms and rules and this situation influenced their freedom in choosing strategies. As mentioned, in some cases Turkish rulers regarded the bandwagoning behaviour as against the principles of Islam when two Muslim communities clashed with each other, and in some, they avoided spilling Muslim, Christian and Jewish blood. Ottomans benefited from this limitation practically and their tolerance gave them the loyalty of even non-Muslim groups.

And third, shared religious identity gave practical advantages to Ottoman sultans in their conquests in the non-Muslim lands and in their relations with other Turkish emirates. Especially in the direction of the east, the state extended its territories by applying limited force and the Ottoman rulers concentrated the majority of its forces in the West. Therefore, the state did not need to split its forces among different borders and this factor eased the transformation of the Ottoman Emirate into the Ottoman Empire.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to identify the effects of religion as a structural force on the rise of an empire and its policies. In parallel with the constructivist argument, I found that religious norms and values are decisive in shaping the policies of imperial rulers. Religious rules and norms based on the Quran and hadiths can be counted as regulative – rules that

"prescribe and proscribe behaviour in defined circumstances" – and constitutive rules – rules that "create or define new forms of behaviour" (Dessler, 1989: 454-456). During both the Prophet's period and early years of the Ottoman period, rulers applied religious rules in their policies and their right to rule was legitimated by the very same norms. Although the military force of the Muslim governance in these periods was an important variable, in some cases, the use of force was not prioritized by Muslim rulers thanks to shared religious identity. In addition, both states benefitted from the unifying role of religion when their rulers extended the territory of Muslim states. In sum, these cases prove that ideas are important in the empire-building process and focusing on power alone cannot explain the various policies followed by Muslim rulers.

The second point parallel to the constructivist argument is the importance of the agent-structure relationship. In this analysis, I found that the importance of religion as a structural force is to some extent related to the actions of the individual state. As can be seen in the Umayyad case, the actions of the individual state may diminish the unifying role of religion; contrary to that, religion may be a divisive force within the empire. Since the Umayyad rulers could not legitimate their right to rule through religious principles, their actions were less influenced by religious norms and values. As a result, they relied on force to legitimate their rule within the empire, and sometimes they even contradicted the norms and values adopted by the Muslim population. It is possible to claim that if religion had played a regulative role for the Umayyad rulers, they would not have brutally massacred the Prophet's grandson, they would not have damaged the Kaaba even in order to end a rebellion, and its rulers would have lived their daily lives by taking religious principles into consideration.

This should not be understood as a claim that religion leads to a peaceful atmosphere within an empire. When the Abbasids came to power by overthrowing the Umayyad family, they brutally massacred the latter. This was a rational policy, similar to the Umayyads' massacres since the Abbasids did not want the Umayyad family to challenge its rule in the future. However, the difference between the Umayyad and Abbasid policies was that the Abbasid rulers were able to legitimate the massacre of the Umayyads through religion. They claimed that the massacre was revenge for the death of Hussein at Karbala. The point here is that if religion constitutes the structure within the system, even power politics have to be legitimized through religious values and norms. This is the regulative and constitutive power of religion. It shapes the boundaries of the

policy options. Therefore, any study of Islamic Empires should take religion into consideration in explaining the policies of an Islamic state.

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[1] For example, see Olmstead, C. E. (1961). Religion in America: Past and Present. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.; Bushkovitch, P. (1992). Religion and Society in Russia: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. New York: Oxford University Press.; Miller, P. N. (1994). Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion, and Philosophy in the Eighteenth-Century Britain. New York: Cambridge University Press.; Daughton, J.P. (2006). An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914. New York: Oxford University Press.

[2] For the normative value of Islamic texts, El Fadl, K. A. (2004). Islam and the Challenge of Democracy. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[3] The meaning of ghaza is “raiding”. After the transformation of the objective of raiding into a way to spread religion, it is used as the same meaning with jihad.