

DOI Number: 10.30520/tjsosci.650780

**ON THE WAY TO THE INDEPENDENCE: THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION THROUGH THOMAS PAINE’S *COMMON SENSE* AND JAMES CHALMERS’S *PLAIN TRUTH* AND TURKISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE THROUGH ALI KEMAL’S *PEYAM-I SABAH* AND FAIK AHMET BARUTÇU’S *İSTİKBAL* NEWSPAPERS**

Gökçen UZUNKÖPRÜ<sup>1</sup>**ABSTRACT**

America in 1776 and Turkey in 1923 were among those who achieved the impossible declaring independence. Both countries gained independence with a terrific fight against great powers, e.g., People in American colonies resisted the king of their mother country, Britain, and Turkish people struggled severely against the sultan of the Ottoman Empire and the allied powers of World War I which were Britain, France, Russia. In both countries, people went into division: patriots or revolutionaries and loyalists. While revolutionaries were as mad as hell at the authorities, the loyalists were against those opponents and their new system because the patriots would slide their countries into the chaos. Thomas Paine (an American writer) and Faik Ahmet Barutçu (a Turkish journalist) as revolutionaries or patriots and James Chalmers (American pamphleteer) and Ali Kemal Bey<sup>2</sup> (a Turkish journalist) as loyalists tried their best to impress the public by their pens. On the one hand, Thomas Paine and Faik Ahmet Bey aimed to raise people’s awareness against the rulers’ deems, and on the other hand, James Chalmers and Ali Kemal Bey were striving to quiet the spirit, which the patriots had wakened. In spite of the different time and place, their reason for the fight was almost concurrent. Eventually, America and Turkey stepped into a new age in a short time, then the supreme power wasn’t the king or sultan anymore but the people.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Empire, British Empire, Independence, American Revolution, Turkish War of Independence

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Over the years, loads of countries have got on the world scene and were wiped away in due course; however, the feeling of desire and esprit de corps were the magical words to keep nations on their feet or enabled them to be reborn from their ashes. Today’s people of the United States of America once were the colonies of the British Empire, and today’s people of the Turkish Republic used to have no choice but becoming the subjects of the Ottoman Sultans. 1776 was the year when American Independence had a broad repercussion. The people of American Colonies or the thirteen colonies, who had once looked upon Britain as their “mother” country, wanted to sever all ties with her because Great Britain established these thirteen colonies for commercial interests and raw materials. However, a good distance made things difficult for the British Empire because American colonies had already begun to

<sup>1</sup> Öğr. Gör., Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi, e-mail: gokcen.guloren@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Ali Kemal Bey wasn’t able to have a surname because he was dead before “the Surname Act” (1934).

“practice forms of limited self-government long before the Declaration of Independence.”<sup>3</sup> (Hamilton, 2013: 8). When American colonies ran into some financial problems and so on, exchanging letters across the ocean and reaching a solution used to take weeks and months. Furthermore, both Britain didn’t allow the colonies to represent themselves in their parliament and exposed them to heavy taxations (particularly the Stamp Act of 1765, the Townshend Acts of 1767 and the Tea Act of 1773) as a mother country. The colonies, who rose against the king’s oppression, collected in 1775, called themselves the Patriots. However, there was another group named the Loyalists (Tories), and “those Americans remained faithful to the British Empire during the war.”<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1:** The British Soldiers vs. American Revolutionists



**Source:** “American Revolution Battles” (2018) <https://www.thoughtco.com/american-revolution-battles-2360662> (10.10.2019)

Thomas Paine was one of those opponents to the king’s attitude. Heretofore, in January 1776, he wrote a pamphlet called “Common Sense” on the purpose of enlightening people in the colonies and then questioning the king’s legitimacy on behalf of God. That book became very famous and symbol of the American Revolution in a short time. He asserted his statements with Bible references to make them believe. On the contrary, James Chalmers, who was a passionate loyalist, believed that Patriots were only the rebels trying to create chaos in the land. In response to Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* in January 1776, he wrote a pamphlet called *Plain Truth* in March 1776. He emphasized Paine wasn’t honest about his statements in *Common Sense*, and he was a traitor like other so-called *Patriots*. According to him, thanks to the British Government’s guard, New England Colonies’ life was more peaceful till their independence fuss.

When it comes to the Turkish War of Independence (between 1919 and 1922), soon after the loss of World War I, the Ottoman Empire was dominated by the proxies of the Allies (Britain, France, Russia and so forth), which triggered Turkish War of Independence led by

<sup>3</sup> **Declaration of Independence**, issued by the Second Continental Congress on July 4, 1776 publicly proclaimed 13 of Great Britain’s colonial provinces in North America to be independent, sovereign states, and formally styled their union “The United States of America”. (Kazin, Edwards and Rothman, 2011: 142)

<sup>4</sup> *Loyalists*. <http://www.ushistory.org/us/13c.asp> (Retrieved: 10.08.2019)

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1919. The government had the intention that the liberation of the nation was possible with only the mandate and protection. Besides, some intelligentsias also shared the same ideas, such as Ali Kemal Bey in his newspaper *Peyam-ı Sabah* (*Morning News*). His words were declaratory of his hateful opposition against the ones who waged the Independence War. On the other hand, the occupation attempts of the proxies of the allies<sup>5</sup> were subdued by the significant resistance of which the press was capable. Faik Ahmet Bey and his local paper *İstikbal* (*The Future*) began to make considerable contributions to the National Campaign for the Turkish War of Independence by leading up to the resistance and form public opinion in 1918.

**Figure 2.** The Turkish War of Independence



**Source:** “Kurtuluş Savaşı Ne Zaman Başlamıştır?” (2017)

<https://www.sabah.com.tr/egitim/2017/01/23/kurtus-savasi-ne-zaman-baslamistir> (22.10.2019)

Although James Chalmers and Ali Kemal Bey, who were the supporters of the realm, and on the other hand, Thomas Paine and Faik Ahmet Bey, who were opposing pens, lived in a different time and countries, their cause was almost identical. Thomas Paine and Faik Ahmet Bey were writing up to raise awareness of the public against the current governments’ policy. By contrast, James Chalmers and Ali Kemal Bey were on the side of the prevailing authority with the aim of not drifting their countries into a state of chaos.

## 2. Advocates of the Turkish and American Wars of Independence

Thomas Paine and Faik Ahmet Bey aimed at gaining freedom and independence for their country. Faik Ahmet Bey expressed in *İstikbal* how Istanbul government misruled the state as follows: “the Treaty of Sevres<sup>6</sup> was known and cursed by the whole society in

<sup>5</sup> A treaty, part of the Versailles Peace Settlement, signed between the Allies and Turkey, effectively marking the end of the Ottoman empire in 1920. *OxfordReference*.  
<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100457377>. (Retrieved: 5 Oct. 2019)

<sup>6</sup> A treaty, part of the Versailles Peace Settlement, signed between the Allies and Turkey, effectively marking the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1920. *OxfordReference*.

Anatolia” and “Turkish people were in mourning but never abandoned themselves to despair for the future” (Çapa, 1992: 135). By the same token, Thomas Paine explicated the misgovernment of the British Empire over American colonies:

We have been long led away by ancient prejudices and made large sacrifices to superstition. We have boasted the protection of Great Britain, without considering, that her motive was interest not attachment; and that she did not protect us from our enemies on our account; but from her enemies on her own account, from those who had no quarrel with us on any other account, and who will always be our enemies on the same account. Let Britain wave her pretensions to the Continent, or the Continent throw off the dependence, and we should be at peace with France and Spain, were they at war with Britain (Paine, 1894: 86).

Paine also drew the reader’s attention to the validity of kingship by giving references from the Bible. According to him, Israelites chose Satan instead of God by demanding a king to govern them because “it was the most prosperous invention the devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry” (Paine, 1894: 75). For Paine, God never approved the ruling of the king because it was common among idolaters. “The Heathens paid divine honors to their deceased kings, and the Christian World hath improved on the plan by doing the same to their living ones” (Paine, 1894: 76). As for Ottoman society, the sultan, like a king, was noble and the only ruler of his country as a caliphate who was the successor of the Prophet Mohammad. However, Sultan Vahdeddin handed over his authority to the crusaders. This situation took place in *Istikbal* by Faik Ahmet as in the lines:

Istanbul Government (Sultan Vahdeddin) proved his corruption by entering into an agreement with the Allies of the proxies, which split out our beloved country. There was bad blood between Anatolia and Istanbul Government indisputably because Istanbul had betrayed his people’s big case. Our beloved homeland, which was inherited from our ancestors, fell into the hands of our enemies in which Istanbul got involved. Anatolian people weren’t able to sustain their old religious allegiance and devotedness to the Istanbul Government anymore (Çapa, 1992:143-150-151).

Faik Ahmet clearly stated that “Turkish people embraced the democratic government and organization of which the Allies of the proxies had already been cognizant” (Çapa, 1992: 159). In *Common Sense*, Paine made his point about “British monarchy” that “the king is not to be trusted...in other words, that a thirst for absolute power is the natural disease of monarchy” (Paine, 1894: 73). He was aware the new government was ready to take over the reins and change as he pointed out “monarchical governments with the degree of pride and insolence ever attendant on regal authority swells into a rupture with foreign powers in instances, where a republican government by being formed on more principles will negotiate the mistake” (Paine, 1894: 97). Istanbul Government was also condemned to be toppled as it is clearly seen in Faik Ahmet’s lines in *İstikbal* “there is no possibility to run the current sharia and newly established government together. “Establishing the national administration in İstanbul first and foremost leads up to the emergence of a new soul” (Çapa, 1992:157).

### **3. Opponents of the Turkish and American Wars of Independence**

Ali Kemal Bey, with his writings in *Peyam-ı Sabah*, was supporting the ideology of the Istanbul Government. He was struggling to blacken the fighters of Turkish Independence, i.e.,

“today’s government came to power with significant ruling cases,” and he asserted Sultan Vahdeddin gained his rightful authority by “becoming the most benignant and outstanding servant of this domain” (Peyam-ı Sabah: 36). On the other hand, Mustafa Kemal and the fighters of the Independence were reflected with discriminative words such as merely traitors creating trouble:

He and his deputies and Mustafa Kemal and his confederate Turkish Revolutionaries were poles apart concerning the idea, policy, and culture. Since Mustafa Kemal and the others like him are surrounded by superstition, they will most possibly spell the trouble for our land. They don’t serve any useful purposes. Yet, thank God, they are a few in number. To that end, such ones must be cut down, just as a gangrenous limb! (Peyam-ı Sabah: 36).

For him, the expected result shall not be obtained with an army or troops but with “negotiation with the European governments (Peyam-ı Sabah: 37). So then, he stated that as a country, “[they] are in need of the diligent geniuses which only the Sublime Porte of the Ottoman Empire can create such power” (Peyam-ı Sabah: 37). The Sublime Porte both stands for “the caliphate and sultanate and parleys with these governments for peace” (Peyam-ı Sabah: 37). Ali Kemal Bey pointed out the only way to the emancipation was “to implement the articles of the Sevres” and to “earn Europe’s trust again” (Peyam-ı Sabah: 36). Erol Adnan Ferdi Baykal also gave wide publicity to Ali Kemal Bey’s excerpts from Peyam-ı Sabah as follows:

Censored ideas cannot be changed by force. Whatever happens, the truth cannot be suppressed. Right now, it’s an obvious truth that, as had occurred during the World War, this time [exactly] as with the Committee of Union<sup>7</sup> and Progress, the path chosen by the Nationalist Forces too has dragged this country and people into catastrophes all over again. Every [person] with a [clean] consciousness admits this now (Baykal, 2019: 138).

He regarded Mustafa Kemal and his accomplices who started the war of Liberty as “the followers and partisans of the Committee of Union and Progress”<sup>8</sup> (Peyam-ı Sabah: 36). He emphasized, “national forces must be oppressed immediately to prevent such a disaster” (Peyam-ı Sabah: 36).

Likewise, James Chalmers, as a loyalist writer to the British King, wrote the pamphlet as an answer to Paine’s *Common Sense* to prevent a potential turmoil, the war had already started nevertheless. Chalmers thought himself as a “most fervently devoted to British Nation’s Sacred Cause” (Chalmers, 1776: 3) and “glowing with the purest flame of patriotism” (Chalmers, 1776: 3). He stated in *Plain Truth* that “I abhor Independency, and it will inevitably plunge our once pre-eminently envied Country into ruin, Horror, and Desolation” (Chalmers, 1776: 3). The king was like a roof protecting the colonies and providing them with a happy life, but “that from this period (under the British embracement), until the present unhappy hour; no part of humankind, ever experienced perfect felicity” (Chalmers, 1776: 5). Without Great Britain’s aid and protection, they would be corrupted because their “most fertile provinces, filled with unnumbered domestic enemies, slaves, intersected by navigable rivers” (Chalmers, 1776: 6) Paine like a devil tried to seduce people

<sup>7</sup> **The Committee of Union and Progress** its members are referred to as unionists. Its precursor was the Ottoman Union Society, a secret circle of liberal-minded students in the imperial military medical school in Constantinople (now Istanbul) who aspired to overthrow the autocratic regime of Sultan Abdulhamit II. *Encyclopedia.com* <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/committee-union-and-progress>. (Retrieved: 24.10.2019)

with the lies of independence and democracy. He thought that Great Britain did not view them as enemies said in *Plain Truth* that “these unhappy men would be ruined by our unfortunate distractions” (Chalmers, 1776: 9). He gushed over his parent state implying that without Great Britain’s security, people in American colonies cannot survive like the people without God. “But alas! Ever that period, our author will forever be forgotten; impelled, therefore by his villainous ambition, he would rashly precipitate his country into every species of horror, misery, and desolation, rather than forego [Paine’s] fancied protectorship... we called aloud on Great Britain for assistance, nor was she deaf to our cries” (Chalmers, 1776: 6)

## CONCLUSION

Both Turkey and America set sail for independence by leaving autocracy of the British and Ottoman Empires behind. American colonies waged war against the British Empire, and Turkish People took the Ottoman Empire on to fighting to the death, which ended with pyrrhic victories. American colonies were initially New England Colonies, for which they were the continuation of the British Empire in the new land. Then, they had been dependent on their mother country both economically and politically until mother Britain ran off the rails by ignoring and exploiting her children. As a result, Americans learned to stand on their own feet, and they didn't need Britain’s shore. On the other hand, Ottoman Sultan was accepted sacred as a caliphate of the Muslim world. However, he became voiceless following World War I debacle, and the allies of Proxies had a say in the Ottoman domestic affairs authoritatively. Hereby, the organization of the Turkish and American Independence Wars was formed up throughout the Anatolian and American lands. In accordance with this purpose, journalists and pamphleteers in both countries played a big part in the Independence Wars. Despite the different time between American and Turkish Independence Wars, the opponent and advocate writers’ ways and ideas inked on the papers were similar. Much as Thomas Paine for the sake of the American Revolution and Faik Ahmet Bey for the Turkish Revolution put pen to paper, James Chalmers and Ali Kemal Bey were writing up to blow out the fire of these revolutions. Thomas Paine and Faik Ahmet Bey endeavored to demonstrate the misgovernment of the British and Ottoman Sultan by bringing new perspectives to people by their pens. As Faik Ahmet stated that before “Turkish people embraced the democratic government and organization of which the Allies of the proxies had already been cognizant” (Çapa, 1992: 159). In *Common Sense*, Paine made his point about “British monarchy” that “the king is not to be trusted...in other words, that a thirst for absolute power is the natural disease of monarchy” (Paine, 1894: 73). Accordingly, both king and the sultan started to suit ruling the country in their books, such as exploiting the colonies economically or turning over the authority to the different countries so as to secure their position. Paine and Faik Ahmet were already aware of the necessity of a new soul to end up such hypocrisy. Yet, Chalmers and Ali Kemal turned their back to the new system because people like Paine and Faik Ahmet were nothing but looters leading to the dreadful chaos. As Chalmers expressed, “[Paine] would rashly precipitate his country into every species of horror, misery, and desolation, rather than forego fancied protectorship... we called aloud on Great Britain for assistance, nor was she deaf to our cries” (Chalmers, 1776: 6). As for Ali Kemal Bey, prerevolutionary forces “must be oppressed immediately to prevent such a disaster” (Peyam-ı Sabah: 36). Moreover, they tried to prove to the community that Paine and Faik Ahmet bit the hand that fed them. As a result, much as these four writers lived in different times Thomas Paine and Faik Ahmet Bey as opposing pens and James Chalmers and Ali Kemal Bey as proponents of the absolute authority, they reflected the similar views on the Independency movements and the authorities. Then, Turkey and the United States of America became fully independent

countries by leaving the old system of Ottoman and British Empires behind and staying on the course of democracy, which means they rose like a phoenix from the ashes.

## REFERENCES

Baykal, Erol A. F. (2019). *The Ottoman press (1908-1923)*. Leiden: Brill.

Chalmers, James. (1776). *Plain Truth Addressed to the Inhabitants of America; Containing Remarks on a Late Pamphlet, Entitled Common Sense*. Philadelphia: R. Bell.

Çapa, Mesut, Milli Mücadel Döneminde İstikbal Gazetesi. (1992).  
from <http://dergiler.ankara.edu.tr/dergiler/45/813/10325.pdf>., Erişim Tarihi : 26.10. 2019

Earsivsehiredu. *Peyam-ı Sabah*.

<http://earsiv.sehir.edu.tr:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11498/26066/001584865010.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>., Erişim Tarihi: 15.09.2019

*Encyclopedia.com* <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/committee-union-and-progress>., Erişim Tarihi: 24.10.2019

Hamilton, John (2013). *American Revolution: The Road to War*. Minnesota: Abdo Publishing.

Kazin, Michael, (2011). Declaration of Independence. *The Concise Princeton Encyclopedia of American Political History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press

Paine, T., & Conway, M. D. (1894). *The writings of Thomas Paine*. New York: G.P. Putnam.

Treaty of Sèvres. (2017).

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100457377>, Erişim Tarihi: 05.10.2019.

Ushistory. *Loyalists*. <http://www.ushistory.org/us/13c.asp>, Erişim Tarihi: 10.08.2019.