MEDICAL PROFESSIONALISM AND COMMITTEE OF UNION AND PROGRESS IN THE LATE OTTOMAN EMPIRE[1]

Profesionalismo médico y el Comité de Unión y Progreso en el Imperio otomano tardío

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Abstract

This article addresses the professionalisation of medicine in the Ottoman Empire at a period when the empire was undergoing major political changes. It also examines the impact of medical education on politicisation in the late Ottoman period. Specifically, the study focuses on the influence of the worldwide rise of modern medicine in the 19th century on the modernisation paradigm that dominated the the Military School of Medicine in Istanbul. This article is based on the memoirs of the Unionists, particularly those written by physicians, as well as on sources from the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives. A new generation of medical

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students in the period of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) saw the modern medicine and newly rising modern shools as instruments of social and political mobility in the service of the Ottoman state in crisis. The solution to the crisis was reflected in the concepts of modernization and progress and evolved into a clear demand for a constitutional monarchy among some doctors and medical students during the Hamidian era. The secret organisation set up by medical students to solve the problem of strengthening the empire vis à vis the Western powers and the micro-nationalisms, transformed into the most important opposition force, the Committee of Union and Progress. The committee urged the sultan to reinstate the Constitution and the Parliament, which led to the major change in the Ottoman political history, known as the 1908 (or Young Turk) Revolution. The article focuses on the nationalist aspirations of physicians and how these aspirations interacted and overlapped with their professional identity.

Keywords

History of medicine; medical professionalization; late Ottoman Empire; medical students; Committee of Union and Progress.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda la profesionalización de la medicina en el Imperio otomano tardío durante un período de profundos cambios políticos. Examina el impacto de la educación médica y su politización durante las últimas décadas del imperio. En concreto, el estudio se centra en la influencia que tuvo el auge mundial de la medicina moderna en el siglo XIX sobre el paradigma de modernización que dominaba en la Escuela Militar de Medicina de Estambul. El trabajo se basa en las memorias de los unionistas, especialmente las escritas por médicos, y en fuentes documentales procedentes de los Archivos Otomanos de la Primera Secretaría del Primer Ministro. Una nueva generación de estudiantes de medicina durante el reinado de Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) percibía la medicina moderna y las escuelas modernas emergentes como instrumentos de movilidad social y política al servicio de un Estado otomano en crisis. La solución a esta crisis se reflejaba en los conceptos de modernización y progreso, y evolucionó hacia una clara demanda de monarquía constitucional por parte de algunos médicos y estudiantes de medicina durante la era hamidiana. La organización secreta fundada por estudiantes de medicina con el objetivo de fortalecer el imperio frente a las potencias occidentales y a los micronacionalismos se transformó en la fuerza opositora más importante: el Comité de Unión y Progreso. Este comité presionó al sultán para que restituyera la Constitución y el Parlamento, lo que condujo a un cambio fundamental en la historia política otomana, conocido como la Revolución de 1908 (o de los Jóvenes Turcos). El estudio

se centra en las aspiraciones nacionalistas de los médicos y en cómo estas interactuaban y se superponían con su identidad profesional.

Palabras clave

Historia de la medicina; profesionalización médica; Imperio otomano tardío; estudiantes de medicina; Comité de Unión y Progreso.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire, a new political atmosphere was taking shape due to the changes brought about by the reforms of the Tanzimat Era and the rule of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909). During this period, youth movements in search of freedom and change laid the basis for the birth of the Young Turk movement. The central premise of this revolutionary movement was the perception that the empire faced an existential threat, which could be overcome by fostering unity among its diverse ethnic and religious communities.

The Young Turks consisted of young intellectuals, professionals and officers who opposed Abdulhamid's regime and aimed to modernize the empire. Driven by a vision of modernization and progress as solutions to the empire's challenges, many young medical students during the Hamidian era emerged as advocates for constitutional monarchy. This activism catalyzed the formation of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), originally a clandestine organization founded by medical students to address pressing issues such as the Eastern Question, the intervention of European powers in Ottoman affairs, and the rise of micro-nationalisms. The CUP, which played a pivotal role in pushing for the reinstatement of the Constitution and Parliament, culminating in the transformative 1908 Revolution, a landmark event in the late Ottoman political landscape, was founded in 1889 by students of the Military Medical School and gradually gained widespread support.

This article seeks to demonstrate how medical students and physicians closely intertwined their processes of professionalization with political activism, playing a significant role in advancing societal modernization and contributing to broader movements for liberation. It highlights how the nationalist aspirations of medical students became deeply intertwined with

their professional identities, shaping significant political transformations in Ottoman history.

This article posits that the initial spark of the revolution stemmed from the rise of a new generation, influenced by both intellectual, political, economic developments; medical advancements and the idea of professionalism in the latter half of the 19th century. Crucially, the argument does not suggest that the acquisition of status directly resulting from professionalization itself led to politicization. Rather, it contends that, in the specific context of the Ottoman Empire, it was precisely the problematic development of professionalization, entangled with the country's political and economic challenges, that politicized medical students and physicians.

Additionally, while the study does not assert that the medical school was the sole birthplace of the revolution, it highlights the importance of the school as the institution where the organization first appeared. This study focuses on the period between 1889, the founding year of the Committee of Ottoman Union, and 1902, the year of the First Young Turk Congress, when the movement openly split. In addition to the abundant literature on the CUP, the article relies on the memoirs of the unionists, mainly, physicians among them, and the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives.

Firstly, the article will discuss the idea of youth movements and examine the political atmosphere at the birth of the movement, exploring the rule of Abdulhamid II. Secondly, it will explore the professionalization of physicians and its importance in politicization in the Ottoman context. Thirdly, it will answer the question of who the Young Turks were, detailing the founding and composition of the CUP. Fourthly, it will assess the role and significance of physicians and medical education within the CUP movement.

II. YOUTH MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE AND A NEW GENERATION IN THE HAMIDIAN PERIOD

This article emphasizes the prevailing perception of crisis in the late Ottoman context and contends that, under the Hamidian regime, this crisis was fundamentally understood as an existential struggle for the survival of the empire in its entirety. Félix Krawatzek defines crisis as "situation where certain barriers to political transformation seem to be eliminated". He contends that, within this framework, youth movements emerge as pivotal agents capable of harnessing the prevailing perception of crisis to advocate for forms or degrees of political transformation that may have previously been considered impractical or unattainable. A crisis materializes when actors

interpret international developments as directly relevant to their domestic conditions, fostering a widespread perception of illegitimacy toward the ruling elite among segments of the youth population. In each case, young activists mobilized to pursue significant alterations in the political order against the backdrop of such crises.[2]

Youth movements represent organized and conscious efforts by young individuals to either instigate or resist societal transformations. These movements are a notable aspect of contemporary societies, emerging from tensions and relationships within generations and deeply rooted in specific contexts, and they have coalesced around issues related to citizenship, societal disruptions, and cultural expression. Distinct historical generations or waves of youth movement activity served as an effective means for young people to mobilize around emerging issues affecting their societies.[3] In the 19th century, youth increasingly assumed a prominent role in revolutionary events, exemplified by the 1848 uprisings. In these contexts, securing the allegiance of young people became a critical objective for governing authorities. Over time, as Hobsbawm argues, the concept of youth, as well as young people themselves, became mobilized within nationalist movements across Europe.[4] The Young Turks align with the nationalist movements which drew inspiration from each other, such as Young Italy, young patriots in Poland, Young Germany, the Young Czech Party Mladočeši in 1874, or youth movements in Tsarist Russia around the 1890s.[5]

The rise of the generational question stems from new developments in modern societies, which are primarily defined by the rapid pace of change. This contrasts sharply with traditional societies, characterized by slow, cyclical movements measured in ages or centuries. In the 18th century, marked by increasing life expectancy, people began to mix and form closer bonds with peers of their own age group. Consequently, generational identity became a binding factor, reflecting shared feelings and experiences and fostering a sense of community. Industrial society emphasized the contrast between childhood and adulthood, which generated an intermediate phase which could be dedicated to learning, supported financially by family or society, which ultimately created a cross-class group of students in pioneering schools.[6]

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2 Krawatzek (2018: 52).

3 Braungart and Braungart (2001).

4 Hobsbawm (1996: 132).

5 Krawatzek (2018: 52), Kriegel and Hirsch (1978: 25). The issue of youth movements has already been studied in a comparative perspective in as early as 1926 with the cases of Germany, Italy, United States and the Ottoman Empire (Wilder, 1926).

6 Kriegel and Hirsch (1978).

In the Ottoman case, the rise of these pioneering schools was related to the emergence of nationalisms, which primarily appeared among dissenters in the Balkans and Eastern Europe threatening the existence of multi-national and multi-religious empires, often invoking national or religious identity.[7] Christians and Jews were grouped into *millet*s (religious communities)[8], enabling them to preserve their religious identities while enjoying considerable cultural and social autonomy until they began to criticize the imperial system, develop new identities often characterized as national, and launch movements seeking reform or independence.[9]

In the 20th century, the concept of nationhood gained prominence as a dominant political ideology, largely due to its compelling prescriptive authority.[10] To counter rising nationalisms, the Ottoman central administration sought to create a new patriotic identity, Ottomanism.[11] In January 1869, *Tabiiyet Kanunu*, the Citizenship Law, which eventually failed to transform subjects into citizens, defining as Ottoman subjects all individuals born to an Ottoman father or Ottoman parents. In this atmosphere, the Young Ottoman and Young Turk movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries aimed to preserve the dissolving empire.[12]

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7 Meyer (2014: 12).

8 As the *millet* referred to religious and sectarian communities that were granted a certain level of autonomy by the state, it also denoted the Muslim community specifically. However, in the 19th century, particularly among reformist intellectuals and bureaucrats, the term began to be used to describe the political community of the empire as a whole, that is, a unified Ottoman *millet* encompassing all its subjects. As the empire's territory contracted and Muslims became the demographic majority, Islam took on a more prominent role in shaping the empire's identity and ideology. Consequently, *millet* increasingly became linked with the Muslim community. At the same time, groups that asserted national identities within or beyond the empire were also labeled as *millets*. As a result, the term *millet* in Ottoman Turkish came to signify various types of communities, such as the Muslim or Jewish *millet*, the Ottoman *millet*, or ethnic groups like the Albanian or Arab *millet*. So, at the start of the 20th century, the term *millet* appears to have shed its religious meaning and begun to signify the concept of a *nation* in the modern, secular sense (Kayalı, 2021: 12-13; Daldeniz, 2014: 81).

9 Ahmad (2014: 2).

10 Reynolds (2011: 8-10).

11 Although the concept of Ottomanism was periodically marginalized throughout Ottoman and Turkish history, it has remained a significant factor in the formation and evolution of identity politics to the present day (Gürpınar, 2013; Şeyhun, 2021).

12 Ahmad (2014: 3-4).

As a response, the Ottoman Empire launched reform programs to reinforce its power. One of the most crucial of these efforts was *Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi*, the Education Act of 1869, at the same year that the Citizenship Law was enacted, which established a centralized and compulsory education system. The modernizing elites hoped that the education system would diminish political unrest and foster a harmonious society under a state-centered ideology of Ottomanism. Yet, these efforts were hindered due to the declining financial and institutional resources, vast geographic scope, demographic diversity, and controversies with foreign powers.[13]

These efforts were closely intertwined with the broader economic transformations experienced by the Ottoman Empire over the course of the 19th century. Until the late 16th century, the empire's expansion had largely been predicated on a model of military conquest supported by a land-tenure system designed to sustain a substantial cavalry-based army. For maintaining social order, the Ottoman administration prioritized the uninterrupted provision of essential goods to urban centers, most notably the capital and the military, thereby institutionalizing a system of structured dependence on established merchant networks.[14] As military defeats and territorial losses mounted, the Ottoman central administration faced increasing difficulty in implementing a series of centralizing reforms across the military, administrative, and fiscal domains. These reform efforts began in earnest during the reign of Selim III (1789-1808), a period marked by the central administration's lowest revenue levels, both in terms of silver tonnage and inflation-adjusted value. Selim's successor, Mahmud II (1808-1839), advanced the reform agenda more decisively. Confronted with mounting fiscal pressures during the Crimean War, the Ottoman government initiated external borrowing in European financial markets in 1854. Over the following two decades, borrowing accelerated, with the majority of funds directed toward military expenditures. This pattern of unsustainable debt accumulation ultimately led the government to declare a moratorium on debt repayments in 1876. In 1881, the Ottoman government started to transfer substantial portions of its revenue sources to the Ottoman Public Debt Administration, which operated until the onset of World War I.[15] These economic difficulties resulted in the Ottoman treasury's inability to consistently meet the salary obligations of state officials and in the failure to satisfy the rising living expectations of the younger generations.[16]

13 Evered (2012: 1-2).
14 Pamuk (2004).
15 Karaman and Pamuk (2010: 619-620).
16 Kırmızı (2007); Paz (2017).

III. MEDICAL PROFESSIONALISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY OTTOMAN LANDS

These developments were parallel to the process of professionalization in the 19th century, when new professions emerged and accentuated specialized training, aligning with notions of progress and civilization.[17] In the classical Ottoman Empire, medical practice was characterized by a pluralistic structure. Based on the classification of Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, it was composed of three main subsystems (folk medicine, prophetic medicine, and humoral pathology) that coexisted and often complemented one another. The coexistence of these approaches fostered both mutual and societal acceptance of various types of healers. As a result, markedly diverse healing methods could be observed across different regions of the empire.[18] By the 19th century, however, this medical pluralism gradually gave way to efforts aimed at standardization and homogenization.

In European models, credentialism aimed to grant professional status only to individuals with specific knowledge and skills validated through official qualifications such as diplomas or certificates obtained through official examinations.[19] This trend extended to medicine, where the demand for modern administrative techniques and public hygiene measures led to standardized medical examinations, extensive training, licensing procedures, and rigorous inspections worldwide.[20] The rise of modern medicine marginalized traditional practitioners, earning recognition not only from the medical community but also society at large. Barriers, whether legal, technical, or social, were established to limit the number of individuals deemed capable of performing necessary tasks.[21]

Following European models, the Ottomans adopted a formal path to professionalization and initiated the establishment of technical schools, the medical school being one of the earliest institutions founded. Newly forming bureaucracy required government officials and civil servants, many with military ranks, to enforce the increasing number of laws and regulations introduced with reforms. As these measures became more complex, the state needed skilled elites, leading to the development of a comprehensive education system.[22] Modern education organized grades and classes based on students'

17 Malatesta (2010).
18 Shefer-Mossensohn (2009).
19 Freidson (2001).
20 Weisz (2006).
21 Freidson (2001).
22 Georgeon (1994).

knowledge and age, alongside the evolution of simultaneous teaching. Towards the late 19th century, specific age became a prerequisite for enrollment and annual progression required completing all classes.[23]

In this period, European and non-Muslim experts, along with students sent to European institutions, became central to new professions in the Ottoman Empire. However, during Abdulhamid II's reign, which emphasized Islam to gain support and suppress rising Arab separatism, Europeans and non-Muslims were distrusted, which led authorities to increase the number of Muslim professionals. Despite foreign experts still being present, Muslims began to have a greater impact on scientific and technical knowledge accumulation, particularly in the 1880s and 1890s.[24] Missionaries were also suspected of fueling division and unrest by contributing to local nationalism, particularly among Armenians and Arabs, to which the Ottoman response, especially during the reign of Abdulhamid II, involved establishing modern schools modeled after Christian educational institutions in order to cultivate an educated Muslim middle class.[25]

In this context, in addition to the practice of sending students abroad for further education or specialization; three medical schools are formed in the empire: The Military School of Medicine in 1839, the Civilian School of Medicine in 1867, and the Damascus School of Medicine in 1903. Qualified physicians set themselves apart from empirics through language skills, theoretical education, strong connections to Europe, gaining cultural expertise associated with the West, and proliferation of scientific journals.[26] From the early 19th century on, they emphasized a divide between the learned and the ignorant, categorizing knowledge as either new or old, with language mastery being a key distinction.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that such attempts at standardization and the definition of medical professionalism were not without their challenges and ambiguities. The Ottoman state sought to regulate medical practices across the empire and to suppress unauthorized practitioners. However, the full enforcement of the 1861 medical practice law, *Memâlik-i Mahrûsa-i Şâhâne'de Tabâbet-i Belediyye İcrâsına Dâir Nizamname*, which implemented the requirement of a diploma or an equivalent, was not immediate. In certain provinces, the central administration repeatedly corresponded with local authorities to clarify the provisions of the law. Due to a shortage of qualified

[23] Güvenli (2012).
[24] Yalçınkaya (2016: 276).
[25] Tejirian and Simon (2012: 151-162).
[26] Gouzévitch *et al*. (2017).

personnel, the state had to depend on various authorities to ensure compliance, limiting the law's full implementation. Despite ongoing efforts toward standardization and homogenization, medical practitioners remained a heterogeneous group for long, with a formalized professional hierarchy only emerging toward the end of the century. Likewise, a direct correlation between the advancement of medical knowledge and the elevated social status of physicians cannot be readily established and need to be reconsidered by the formally trained physicians' aspirations to enhance their social standing and, consequently, aligning themselves closely with discourses emphasizing scientific knowledge, civilization and progress.[27]

In the Ottoman context, a central issue external to the internal professional dynamics of medicine was the strategic replacement of traditionally non-Muslim practitioners with Muslim and Turkish men. This transformation unfolded within a broader historical setting marked by the imperial encroachments of the Great Powers and the concurrent rise of nationalist ideologies, especially Turkish-Muslim nationalism. The predominance of non-Muslim or foreign individuals among those accused of malpractice reflects the Ottoman state's deliberate effort to ensure that healthcare responsibilities were allocated to politically trustworthy, loyal, and easily regulated individuals. The porous distinction between certified and uncertified healers throughout the nineteenth century suggests that the latter remained integral to the healthcare landscape, largely due to their availability and the practical overlap in treatments employed by both groups.[28]

IV. THE YOUNG TURKS AND THE "NEW" OPPOSITION MOVEMENT

The shools of medicine, specifically the Military School of Medicine holds a special place in the political history of Ottoman Turkey. Hundred years after the French Revolution, the CUP, initially named *İttihad-ı Osmanî* (The Ottoman Union), was originally formed in this school in 1889 by İshak Sukûtî (Diyarbakır, 1868-1902), İbrahim Temo (Ohri, 1865-1939), Abdullah Cevdet (Arapkir, 1869-1932), and Mehmed Reşid (1873-1919). Their goal was to free the empire from absolutism and foreign intervention through their actions in the empire and in cities such as Geneva, Paris, and Cairo.[29] The

[27] İlikan Rasimoğlu (2021).

[28] *Íd.*

[29] Göçek (2011: 63). Mehmed Reşid also mentions the name of Hikmet Emin from Konya alongside these names (Cevri, 1909: 26).

Young Turk movement successfully instigated a revolution on July 24, 1908, which restored the Constitution suspended by the sultan 30 years earlier and deposed Abdulhamid II in 1909.[30] The members of the Committee then held significant positions in the administration during the Late Ottoman Empire and the Early Republican Turkey, established in 1923.[31]

The society was formed secretly with the aim of *declaring liberty and providing equality and justice for all* and transforming the *despotic* regime into a constitutional government.[32] They were soon joined by other medical students from Gülhane and Haydarpasa hospitals. Ahmed Rıza (an agricultural engineer) became president of the Paris branch in 1895. By 1896, the activities of the society, now called the Committee for Union and Progress, was reported, and its leaders were exiled to Tripoli, leading to a decade of dormancy within the empire.[33] However, the Paris branch survived, attracting new members. Internal divisions plagued the opposition in exile, ending with the 1902 split into Prince Sabahattin's Society of Ottoman Liberals and Ahmed Rıza's CUP. The CUP was revitalized in 1905 with Dr. Bahaettin Şakir's arrival.[34]

The first meeting of the society was held in a pit beneath a fig tree (and named after this tree), with mats and sacks laid out on the ground, giving it a picnic-like appearance. 12 people attended the following meetings, representing the high-ranking officials of the period as well as journalists. Among them were Hersekli Ali Rüşdi, İzmirli Ali Şefik, Asaf Derviş (Paşa), Muharrem Giridî, Dr. Abdullah Cevdet, Dr. İshak Sükûtî, Dr. Şerafeddin Mağmumi, Dr. Çerkez Mehmet Reşid, Dr. İbrahim Temo, and three other individuals whose names are unknown. İbrahim Temo was designated as the founder and given the code 1/1 within the organization. They resolved to convene weekly meetings at rotating locations to deliberate on pertinent issues and to establish a governing committee tasked with drafting detailed internal regulations. News of this initial consultative gathering spread swiftly among the medical students, leading to the participation of the majority of students from the School of Medicine. The aforementioned decisions were implemented with

30 Findley (2010: 160); Göçek (2011: 62-63).

31 Findley (2010:160).

32 Aslan (2008).

33 Students including Ali Osman Onbulak, a future surgeon, and his associates were found to possess seditious publications, subsequently brought before the military tribunal, and then imprisoned (Onbulak, 2011: 17-18). Under Abdulhamid's rule, the intelligence apparatus experienced an unparalleled expansion, with the objective of monitoring events both within and beyond the empire's borders (Gör, 2019).

34 Zürcher (2014: 98).

careful attention to secrecy. In order to maintain operational continuity while preserving confidentiality, the committee agreed to hold its meetings every Friday at varying venues.[35]

The Carbonari Movement influenced the organizational style of the society. According to Akil Muhtar, during a summer trip to Albania, Temo visited a Masonic lodge in Brindisi and learned about the role Carbonari organization played in Italian political movements. Drawing inspiration from this model, the society adopted a cellular structure whereby each of the four founding members was tasked with forming a unit of four members, each assigned a numerical code to designate their cell affiliation and hierarchical position within the group.[36] However, this organizational structure was unsustainable. As the organization quickly spread to higher education institutions like the Military Academy, Veterinary School, Civil Service School, Naval Academy, Artillery School, and Engineering School, this organizational structure gradually weakened.[37]

In one of the earliest memoirs authored by a member of the society, Mehmet Rauf recounts that, over time, as mutual trust and a sense of camaraderie deepened among members from the Medical School and the Civil Service, gatherings of prominent individuals became increasingly frequent. These meetings often centered on discussions concerning the society's expansion and development.[38] According to the memoirs of İshak Sükûtî, Hüseyinzade Ali recalled in his writings on the founding of the CUP that Sükûtî once said to him in a private conversation held in a classroom: "You will contribute some funds to our society; we have also registered you as a member." Sükûtî had previously identified a number of fellow students from different classes whom he considered trustworthy, principled, and deeply committed to the cause of liberty.[39]

İbrahim Temo, when describing the establishment of the society, recounted that he broached the subject to İshak Sükûtî with the following words:

> Come, my friend, let me tell you a bit about what I've been thinking. We are all persuaded that our dear homeland will face collapse because of its existing

[35] Aslan (2008); Hanioğlu (1995: 72).

[36] Akil Muhtar Özden also stated that members of the Committee of Union and Progress did not know each other, and he himself only knew three people: himself, operator Raif, and Avram Salem (Tevfikoğlu, 1996: 6).

[37] Kaya (2021: 187).

[38] Leskovikli Mehmet Rauf (1911: 17).

[39] Dr. Hüseyinzade Ali (1938: 2).

> state and its administration. We continually share our worries with each other whenever we have spare time. However, we cannot find a way out to remove this danger. In my opinion, instead of just complaining with these considerations and discussions, we need to move towards.[40]

When İbrahim Temo and Asaf Derviş initiated protests concerning inadequate institutional provisions, such as laboratory equipment and food services, the Ministry of Education responded by expelling Temo and several other student leaders. Their eventual pardon was secured through the intervention of the principal, Marko Pasha, and an Albanian professor, İbrahim Pasha, who submitted a formal petition on their behalf. Nevertheless, as the protests intensified and gained wider attention, İbrahim Temo was arrested and brought before the Yıldız Palace.[41]

According to Eric Jan Zürcher, the early Young Turk movement, mainly led by medical doctors, had eight out of the fourteen original members trained as military doctors. Despite being Muslims, only a minority were Ottoman Turks considering their religious, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds. The founders of the Ottoman Unity Society included an Albanian, two Kurds, and a Circassian, with no Turks among them. Immigrants from the Russian Empire also played a significant role, with six out of fourteen members born there or in its provinces. Unlike Ottoman nationalism, which embraced non-Muslim subjects, Turkish nationalism embraced by the Young Turk movement excluded non-Muslims but included Muslims who were not Turks. Among the early Young Turks, most were born between 1864 and 1874, with an average age of 27 in 1896, and were highly educated, predominantly as military doctors.[42] This approach, connected to the Ottoman understanding of the Eastern Question, intensified following the interactions with Great Powers after the 1908 revolution, which taught them that instability could lead to foreign intervention. Therefore, after the revolution, the CUP began advocating for Ottoman official nationalism.

There were other opposition organizations besides this society as well. However, the most significant aspect that distinguished the CUP is that it was founded by young people and constituted the nucleus of the first organized opposition movement. Indeed, the Committee aimed to create a strong

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40 Temo (1959: 16).

41 Hanioglu (1995: 71-72). The Ottoman state was reporting about the events that took place in the School of Medicine and in the Military Academy. POA. Y. PRK. ASK. 68/86, H-05-06-1307, 27 January 1890.

42 Zürcher (2014: 98).

movement for the reinstalment of the Constitution abolished in 1878 by gradually incorporating other groups and went beyond being just a "youth movement." According to the interpretation of Asil Kaya, who examines youth movements in Turkey, the fact that the intellectual movement, which first emerged with the Young Ottomans, and the actual institutional organization, the Ottoman Union Society, which marked the beginning of the youth-army-politics relationship that would later dominate Turkish politics, was founded by military medical students can be considered an important milestone. Finally, the question of why such an organization was established in military medical schools should be sought in the reluctance of young people studying in civilian institutions to engage in political activities, their incompetence in organizing, and the necessity of pushing students studying in military schools to take more responsibility.[43]

Most of the Young Turks really were quite young during the 1908 Revolution. Since the 1860s, European intellectuals of the Tanzimat period[44] began to perceive a vision of youthful vigor and innovation in Europe.[45] Age became the common factor creating a sense of unity as schools organized students into age groups. The Young Turks became a blend of Ottoman youth from various ethnic backgrounds and regions within the empire.[46] The majority of them came of age during the 1880s and 1890s, hailing primarily from the Balkans, the Aegean region, and Istanbul.[47] The four founders of the society were from different regions of the Empire: İbrahim Temo, an Albanian; İshak Sukûti, from Diyarbakır; Mehmet Reşid from the Caucasus; and Abdullah Cevdet, a Kurd.[48] All off them were from places where people felt threatened by separatist movements of the non-Muslims.[49]

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43 Kaya (2021: 188).

44 The *Tanzimat* period (1839-1876) represents a significant era of reform within the Ottoman Empire. The central government's principal reform efforts focused on the military, the administrative structures at both central and provincial levels, and societal domains, particularly through changes in education and legal systems. Tanzimat is regarded as an initiative aimed at consolidating central authority by fostering a state conceptualized on the basis of legal principles. This period witnessed the introduction of secular laws, the establishment of administrative councils, and the implementation of a restructured taxation system. Somel (2003: 289-290).

45 Georgeon (2007: 148-154).

46 *Id*.

47 Zürcher (2014: 110).

48 Taglia (2015: 29); Zürcher (2003).

49 Findley (2010: 161).

This generation of students and professionals, who identified as Muslim and hailed from various regions of the Ottoman Empire, perceived their shared experiences as forming a common ground, an understanding shaped in part by the reforms and ideals introduced during the Tanzimat period. They believed that the Tanzimat statesmen's vision of uniting the empire's diverse peoples, known as *ittihad-ı anasır*, had evolved into a policy of enforced Ottomanization targeting minority groups, particularly evident in post-revolution practices. Given the historical context, these actors considered the strengthening of the Ottoman state indispensable, viewing it as the only substantial Turkish-Muslim political entity of the era. Within this framework, the Young Turks maintained this stance until 1918, initially emphasizing Pan-Islamism, which they later replaced with (Pan)Turkism after 1913, following their perception that Islam no longer served as a viable foundation for political loyalty.[50]

V. PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Experiences related to war, trade, and civilization resulted in a stark perception of the East and West as distinctly different and comparably contrasted in the eyes of Ottoman intellectuals. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Europe served as a model, and as Ottoman intellectuals became acquainted with Western world, they discovered great differences between Western civilization and their own. Ottoman intellectuals defined the West by referencing its advancements in science and technology, setting Western progress as a goal they themselves needed to attain. Parallelly, Ottoman student political activism mirrored European trends.[51]

The connection between the Medical School and the founding of the CUP was understood by those involved as rooted in the materialist worldview that accompanied processes of modernization and professionalization within medicine.[52] The Young Turks, who were primarily composed of lower-ranking bureaucrats and students from modern educational institutions, perceived themselves as successors to the reformist movement promoting Western-style institutions. They believed that embracing Westernization, alongside advances in science and technology, was essential for what they considered the empire's

[50] Zürcher (1984: 22-23).
[51] Göçek (2011: 4-8); Hanioğlu (1995: 8-9); Keskinbora (2010).
[52] İlikan Rasimoğlu (2022).

progress.[53] Hence, they believed in the Enlightenment ideals and saw themselves as adapting these to the Ottoman context.[54]

The students were not the only group who, from their perspective, experienced dissatisfaction with Abdulhamid II's rule; their discontent was shaped by political circumstances, living conditions, educational methods, and disciplinary policies within schools.[55] Before the formation of any formal organized opposition, they reportedly engaged in various forms of protest, which included acts of indiscipline, conflicts among themselves, resistance to established rules, challenges directed at professors, and general disobedience.[56] Students reportedly acquired their political attitudes through peer interactions, frequently looking to senior students for guidance rather than to the school director. Each class maintained a student board whose members invited classmates to engage in political discussions. According to contemporary accounts, directors imposed various restrictions, including bans on reading newspapers or non-scientific literature and prohibitions on visiting public venues such as coffeehouses or theaters. Violations of these rules were perceived as grounds for disciplinary measures, including the loss of weekend privileges or other punishments.[57] İbrahim Temo affirms that at the school students were divided into rooms, with 3-5 people in each room. "Partisans" who wanted to see him would secretly come to the room.[58] The emergence of opposition within the schools was marked by students' refusal to recite the weekly loyalty oath. Although school directors recited the oath aloud, concluding with the phrase "Long live my Sultan," students in the Western-style institutions reportedly resisted articulating these words sincerely or properly, thereby signaling their dissent.[59]

As with their contemporaries, the press played a significant role in the emergence and spread of dissenting youth movements in the Ottoman Empire. In the School of Medicine and other modern institutions of the time that fostered opposition; written works produced within the school, those by dissenting intellectuals of the Tanzimat period, alongside books and newspapers written both

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53 Hanioğlu (2013); Kieser (2008).

54 Kaynar (2017).

55 İlikan Rasimoğlu (2022).

56 Georgeon (2007: 158-159).

57 Sağlam (1981: 25-26).

58 Temo (1959: 36-37).

59 Göçek (2011: 74-75); Hanioğlu (1995: 26). Students in different parts of the empire substituted the words with *Turn down the sultan!* (Kuntman, 2009: 8; Yalman, 1970: 34; Başustaoğlu, 2016: 39).

within and outside the school and country, circulated from hand to hand. Despite Abdulhamid's bans and censorship, they were highly esteemed among students. Despite attempts to confiscate them, students either concealed these books or transported them beyond school premises, yet they ingeniously found means to access and circulate the materials.[60] Certain professors went as far as protecting students from the authorities; if they caught students reading prohibited books, they turned a blind eye on it.[61]

In principle, the Ottoman state endorsed scientific reading endeavors. Despite financial constraints, the school library was equipped with the latest books in French and German, and the encouragement of scientific knowledge persisted.[62] Proficiency in French, the language of instruction in modern schools, was a source of pride for Ottoman medical students. Reading textbooks not only aided their studies but also accustomed them to perusing journals and novels in French.[63] In addition to anatomical atlases and corpses, students studied anatomy from textbooks, even reproduced some of them.[64] Consequently, scientific journals, typically viewed as non-political, remained uncensored, allowing materialist ideas to be easily conveyed to the students.[65] As a result, unlike the previous generations of physicians, by the late 19th century the school became the initial breeding ground for biological materialism in the empire and students began to perceive their environment as formed of biological and physiological phenomena.[66]

Handwritten copies of the works by Namık Kemal, a prominent Turkish author whose influence on the Young Turk movement was substantial, circulated clandestinely among the populace in the Ottoman territories. Similarly, notable movement journals such as *Meşveret* and *Şura-yı Ümmet* were also

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60 For a detailed examination of the press in the Hamidian period, see Boyar (2006). Boyar explores how press magnates leveraged their relationships with the palace to secure their survival and obtain desired concessions. Conversely, she argued that the sultan manipulated the press to shape his image and portray the empire and his rule as he wished, both to his subjects and to foreign states beyond the Ottoman borders.

61 *Ibid*.: 29.

62 Bayur (1963: 64).

63 Fredj (2014: 73-74).

64 See, for example, Etker (2023).

65 Hanioğlu (2010: 138).

66 Mardin (1991: 98-99). Poyraz (2010). Abdullah Cevdet's career serves as a significant example of the influence of materialism in Tıbbiye and its contribution to politicization. For the most detailed examination on this subject, see: Hanioğlu (2013: 40); Hanioğlu (1981).

covertly shared among them.[67] Rıfat Osman and his associates were reportedly confined in the school cellar for nearly two months as a disciplinary measure due to their involvement in reproducing and distributing copies of Namık Kemal's works among their classmates. This occurred following an investigation conducted by a council appointed by Zülüflü İsmail Pasha. During the inquiry, Rıfat Osman was questioned about his sketches, copies of Namık Kemal's play, and possession of books concerning the French Revolution and Roman history.[68] During the same period, Namık Kemal was also seen as an important figure and widely read in other schools like the Military Academy.[69]

Ethem Nuri (Balkan), after indicating the Committee's growth within the school in the initial three years since its inception, highlights two notable occurrences from its activities that shed light on the actions of medical students beyond the school premises and the reasons for provoking sultan Abdulhamid's anger. In the first instance, he recounted the covert dissemination of *Mahkeme-i Kübra*[70], authored by Recep Bey, an instructor at the Military Academy, advocating for the trial and execution of Abdulhamid. They clandestinely distributed thousands of lithographically printed copies, circulating them to all mosques one night during Laylat al-Qadr[71], while also evading detection by spies among the congregants. In the second incident, following the conclusion of the Thessaly War (1897) and the arrival of the subsequent holiday, they crafted a declaration regarding the Ottoman-Greek War, asserting that despite prevailing in the conflict, Thessaly was surrendered to the Greeks due to the Sultan's incompetence. They disseminated thousands of copies of this declaration to the populace. This action triggered significant outrage, leading to extensive searches by spies in the vicinity.[72]

The circulation and reading of these materials were perceived as acts carrying the risk of arrest or exile to distant regions such as Fezzan, Yemen, Baghdad, or Damascus. It is reported that Abdulhamid became aware of the

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67 Students displayed the works or portraits of figures like Mithat Pasha or Namık Kemal on the walls (Ünver, 1953: 4; Zürcher, 2014: 112-113).

68 Kazancıgil (1998: 24-25).

69 Duru (1957).

70 The Supreme Tribunal. In Islamic belief, it refers to the Day of Judgment.

71 It is the night when God first revealed the Qurʾan to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel; on this night, angels are believed to descend to earth to carry out numerous divine tasks, making it a time filled with peace, blessings, and spiritual guidance.

72 Balkan (1947: 7-8).

existence and activities of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in 1892, after which members were subjected to close surveillance through informants. As the organization gained traction, especially among students of the Military School of Medicine, Abdulhamid II appointed Mehmet Zeki Pasha to enforce strict disciplinary measures at the school. His rigorous administration reportedly led to the apprehension and trial of several committee members. Following the trial, Şefik Ali, Ahmet Mehdî, Abdullah Cevdet, Mehmet Reşid, Şerafettin Mağmumi, Mikail Useb, and Tekirdağlı Mehmet were expelled and imprisoned, though they were later reportedly pardoned and released after several months.[73]

Dr. Hüseyinzade Ali remembers that the spies had convinced themselves that the students of the military medical school was frequently meeting with suspicious individuals, and they were convinced that he had read various subversive books. As soon as one of Hüseyinzade Ali's friends heard about the raid, he rushed over and tore apart the book titled *Contemporary Turkism*, which mentioned names like Mithat Pasha, Ali Suavi, Namık Kemal, and threw the pieces into the garbage dump behind the teahouse. Nevertheless, Hüseyinzade Ali was also arrested.[74]

During Marshal Zeki Pasha's tenure as the Minister of Military Schools, the institution came under severe scrutiny.[75] Since the Ottoman state was pursuing the students who were caught with indecent letters and publications,[76] prohibited materials were quickly hidden when he intervened following reports of banned papers from France. Abdulhamid II assigned him the responsibility of addressing the matter, stressing the importance of loyalty over academic achievements during his visit. Ismail Pasha, who was investigating anti-government slogans, echoed this sentiment.[77] Zeki Pasha conducted interrogations with nearly 400 students suspected of maintaining connections with Paris-based circles or utilizing the French postal system, although these individuals largely succeeded in avoiding identification. Subsequently, he initiated a raid resulting in the arrest of more than 80 students, including prominent figures such as Abdullah Cevdet, Şerefeddin Mağmumi, and Rıfat Osman.

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73 Cevri (1909: 26-29).

74 Hüseyinzade Ali (1938: 2).

75 *Ibid*., 42-43; Hanioğlu (1995: 73).

76 The archival documents show that the practice was widespread, revealing the central state's attempts to apprehend students at various points in time. Some examples are as follows: POA. ZB. 401/117, R-26-05-1321, 8 January 1905; POA. Y. PRK. EŞA. 37/35, H-11-10-1318, 1 January 1901.

77 Hanioğlu (1995: 26).

Rıfat Osman, who was detained for 171 days, was questioned extensively about his relationship with Abdullah Cevdet and was accused of distributing and selling portraits.[78]

The rigid discipline imposed by Zeki Pasha at the Medical School caused unrest among the students. Due to the strict surveillance at the school, some prominent members of the committee found refuge by fleeing abroad. There were many young men who escaped to Europe or America while being medical students.[79] The sole reason for these escapes was not political; the difficulty of medical education and the desire to practice medicine elsewhere also drove medical students away from Istanbul.[80] It was not uncommon for students to be expelled from school for various reasons.[81] The Ottoman Empire, as with all its subjects who engaged in activities it deemed suspicious or who fled the country, closely monitored doctors and medical students both within the country and abroad.[82] In response to the disciplinary measures at the school,[83] the Committee opted to send students to Europe where they could study in a more supportive environment. This initiative enabled

[78] Kazancıgil (1998: 49-50). Following the relentless pressure from Zeki Pasha and the Hamidian regime, the CUP responded by expanding its activities beyond the confines of the school (Kuran, 1959: 157).

[79] Ethem Nuri Balkan claimed to have initiated the practice of students fleeing abroad, which he described as becoming almost a trend. Balkan (1947: 63).

[80] However, a general overview of the documents suggests that the practices of emigration abroad were believed to have clustered towards the 1908 Revolution. POA. ZB. 345/29, R-2-02-1322, 15 April 1906; POA. ZB. 345/57, R-10-03-1322, 23 May 1906; POA. ZB 590/ 51, R-22-03-1322, 4 June 1906; POA. ZB. 607 /99, R-21-02-1323, 4 May 1907; POA. ZB 478/7, R-7-06-1323, 20 August 1907; POA. ZB. 311/65, R-02-04-1324, 15 June 1908; POA. Y.PRK. DH, 11/43, H-01-02-1319, 20 May 1901; POA. Y. A. RES. 109/79, H-24-07-1318, 17 November 1900; POA. Y. A. RES 113/36, H-06-04-1319, 23 July 1901; POA. Y. MTV. 118/ 63, H-25-10-1312, 21 April 1895; POA. Y. MTV 94/45, H-23-10-1311, 29 April 1894.

[81] POA. Y. PRK. ASK. 229/13, H-10-03-1323, 15 May 1905.

[82] For example, the state was following the escape of Dr. Abdullah Cevdet and İshak Sukuti closely. BOA. HR. SYS. 1790/1, M-09-09-1897; POA. HR. SYS. 1790/2, 27.09.1899.

[83] Several first and second-year students from the School of Medicine opposed their officers, and some of them were arrested. POA. Y. PRK. ASK. 180/36, H-28-12-1319, 7 April 1902. Documents can be found related to the investigation conducted on Abdullah Cevdet and Doctor İbrahim, "who are among the proponents of harmful ideas, along with their supporters including the doctors and other staff of Haydarpaşa Hospital." POA. Y. PRK. BŞK. 61 / 94, H-29-12-1317, 30 April 1900.

numerous gifted students to pursue their education in Europe. These students abroad subsequently established branches of the Committee in their respective locales.[84]

Hamidian elites targeted military schools, especially the medical school, to suppress oppositional ideas, leading to frequent arrests by Zülüflü Ismail Pasha and Ferik Reza Pasha. Consequently, medical students fled abroad to Bulgaria, Greece, Egypt, France, and Switzerland to avoid expulsion or deportation. In 1897, after a coup attempt against Abdulhamid II, 29 medical students faced severe punishments, including exile to the Libyan deserts and some being sentenced to death.[85] Following this incident, where a total of 78 men were exiled, it became known as the *Şeref Vapuru* (Steamship of Glory) incident, named after the ship they were sent on. An extraordinary military tribunal was established, and 78 members of the society were exiled to Tripoli on the *Şeref* ship, among whom 32 were medical students.[86] This event discouraged students, leading to a temporary silence at the school.[87]

Subsequently, following the 1902 and 1907 Young Turk Congresses, there was a reduction in the number of physicians within the Committee; nevertheless, it is evident that numerous medical students and physicians remained affiliated with the society. This article focuses on how modern medical education and the ideology of Ottomanism led to the politicization of a new generation of physicians and the establishment of a society that would alter the course of the country's politics. It specifically examines the early stages of the society without aiming to present a comprehensive history of the society as a whole.

VI. CONCLUSION

The professionalization of medicine in the late Ottoman Empire marked a transition from diverse traditional practices to modern, standardized medical education that emphasized Western knowledge, rigorous training, and licensing. However, this professionalization followed an ambiguous path, marked by challenges in standardizing practices and defining professionalism. Furthermore, the

[84] Aslan (2008). An illustration of such activities is the period of exile endured by Mehmet Reşid Şahingiray, who participated in the committee's activities in Tripoli for 11 years, to which he was sent into exile (Bilgi, 1997: 16).

[85] Bilgi (1997: 11).

[86] Dağdelen *et al.* (1947: 9-10).

[87] Kuran (2009: 61).

direct correlation between the advancement of medical knowledge and the elevated social status of physicians cannot be readily established. This calls for a reconsideration of the aspirations of formally trained physicians, who sought to enhance their social standing by aligning themselves with discourses of scientific knowledge, civilization, and progress.

Particularly under Abdulhamid II's reign (1876-1909), the professionalization of medicine became closely intertwined with political change. Medical education and modernization ideals created a nexus that catalyzed political activism among students. At the same time, efforts to promote Muslim professionals reflected broader concerns about loyalty and the consolidation of scientific expertise within the empire. Positioned as both agents and symbols of modernization in an "Eastern" civilization, promoted by the sultan and elites, modern physicians had close ties to the West through their profession. This elevated status fostered their belief that they could play significant roles in society, situating them within the wider Ottoman modernization process, which encompassed political, economic, and social reforms inspired by Western models.

The modernization reforms of the 19th century, such as the 1869 Education Act aiming to centralize education and promote a state-centered ideology, set the stage for a significant transformation in medical education. This transformation played a crucial role in politicizing medical students, marking a shift from a predominantly medical culture toward one deeply embedded in political engagement. Throughout the 19th century, modernist ideas became integral to medical curricula; students encountered discourses extending beyond medicine, which promoted and reinforced these ideals through diverse student-led activities.

The student group in the Ottoman context was youthful, ethnically diverse, and organized secretly with a structure inspired by other revolutionary movements. Despite their heterogeneity, many students embraced a materialist worldview and Enlightenment ideals. They actively resisted authority through protests and the dissemination of banned materials, utilized the press to spread dissenting views, and faced increasing repression that forced many members into exile abroad.

This study emphasizes the prominent role of youth during periods of crisis in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, highlighting how emerging medical professionals assumed positions as agents of political transformation. These roles were largely inaccessible to earlier youth movements, such as those associated with the Tanzimat dissenters. Ultimately, the evolution of medical education in the 19th century catalyzed a shift from an exclusive focus on medicine to a synthesis with political ideals, thereby shaping a new generation

of medical professionals who significantly contributed to the political transformations of the Ottoman Empire.

In fact, the politicization of medical students and physicians was not determined solely by medical education itself. An important factor influencing this politicization was the failure to meet rising expectations. This situation was not confined to developments within the educational institution but was also closely related to the challenges faced in the professionalization of the medical field. While these actors subjectively believed they had attained the status they sought, they were also aware that objectively achieving this status required a long and arduous struggle. Although the process of professional standardization was ongoing, the benefits typically associated with professionalization had not yet been fully realized.

Despite efforts under Abdulhamid II to suppress the youth movement, including suspicion of foreign influences (favoring German over French influence), relocating the medical school from old Istanbul to Haydarpaşa in 1903, and appointing military administrator, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) successfully overthrew Abdulhamid II and reinstated the Constitution in 1908. The CUP expanded across the empire, attracting educated classes. Its members later held key positions in both the late Ottoman Empire and the early Republic of Turkey, founded in 1923.

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POA: Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives

POA. HR. SYS. Hariciye Siyasi Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives Foreign Political.

POA. Y. A. RES. Yıldız Resmi Maruzat Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives Yıldız Official Reports.

POA. Y. MTV. Yıldız Mütenevvi Maruzat Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives Yıldız Various Reports.

POA. Y. PRK. ASK. Yıldız Perakende Askeri Maruzat Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives Yıldız Retail Military Reports.

POA. Y. PRK. BŞK. Yıldız Perakende Başkitabet Dairesi Maruzatı Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives Yıldız Retail Chief Secretariat Department Reports.

POA. Y. PRK. DH. Yıldız Perakende Dahiliye Nezareti Maruzatı Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives Yıldız Retail Interior Ministry Reports.

POA. Y. PRK. EŞA. Yıldız Perakende Elçilik, Şehbenderlik ve Ataşemiliterlik Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives Yıldız Retail Embassy, Consulate, and Military Attaché.

POA. ZB Zabtiye Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives Police.