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**“WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE 1908 YOUNG TURK REVOLUTION?
A CRITICAL HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT IN 2008”**

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Abstract

What is the meaning and legacy of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution in 2008? I argue that even though the starting point of the revolution is clear, its meaning and legacy are historically ambiguous because of the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the Turkish nation-state. The violence inherent in Young Turk reign during 1908-1918 also makes its meaning and legacy problematic. Nevertheless, the emergence of the military as a political actor associated with modernity and rights as well as the normalization of violence and the abrogation of accountability and transparency in the name of patriotism all seem to be practices that can initially be traced to the 1908 Young Turk Revolution.

Keywords: Political Legitimacy, Modernity, French Revolution, Meiji Restoration, Normalization Of Violence, Political Legacy

1908 Jön Türk Devriminin Anlamı Nedir? 2008’de Eleştirel Tarih Açısından Bir Değerlendirme

Özet

1908 Jön Türk Devriminin 2008 yılında anlamı ve izdüşümü nedir? Bu makalede, devrimin başlangıç noktası net olduğu halde Osmanlı İmparatorluğundan Türk ulus-devlete geçişten dolayı gerek anlamının gerekse de izdüşümünün tarihsel olarak muğlak olduğu tezini savunmaktayım. Jön Türk yönetiminin 1908-1918 arasındaki şiddeti de anlam ve izdüşümünü sorunlu kılmaktadır. Her şeye rağmen, ordunun ilk defa modernite ve haklarla ilişkili bir siyasi aktör olarak sahneye çıkmasının ve aynı zamanda vatanseverlik adına şiddetin normalleşmesi ve izlenebilirlik ve şeffaflığın kaldırılmasının 1908 Jön Türk Devrimine kadar uzandığı görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siyasi Meşruiyet, Modernite, Fransız Devrimi, Meiji Restorasyonu, Şiddetin Normalleşmesi, Siyasi İzdüşümü

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A century has passed since the Ottoman sultan Abdülhamid II was forced by the Young Turks to permit the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies to re-convene on 24 July 1908¹ and re-establish the Constitution. The Chamber had last assembled thirty-two years ago in 1876 when the reformist administrators had brought the then young prince to the throne upon his promises to modernize the empire only to watch him eventually shut the Chamber down and rescind the Constitution. Sultan Abdülhamid II then fully regained his divinely-ordained power and reorganized the empire in accordance with his own wishes. Even though the sultan tightly controlled the reformists during this process, especially the new Western-style educational institutions he founded in the empire in escalating numbers to produce loyal administrators kept producing instead new cohorts of reformists that challenged his rule through the secret organizations they founded. As a consequence, in 1908, not only was an Ottoman sultan finally forced to share power with his subjects but, when analyzed from the vantage point of a century later, the Ottoman dynasty was never to fully regain its political power ever again. Hence, in retrospect, 24 July 1908 indeed became a politically significant turning point in that it marked the end of one political era, namely the autocratic rule of the Ottoman sultan, and the beginning of another, that of Second Constitutional² rule.

The preceding First Constitutional Period (23 December 1876 – 14 February 1878) had been very brief, commencing with the pressures the reformist grand vizier Mithat Pasha and his cadre of administrators only to terminate after approximately a year at the end of a disastrous war with the Russians. Even though the Second Constitutional Period (24 July 1908 – 5 April 1920) officially commenced with the Young Turk revolution and lasted a much longer period of twelve years, not only did many more inauspicious events transpire in the interim, but its end point also signaled the end of the Ottoman Empire. Hence, when the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies met on March 15th 1920, the British troops that had occupied the capital after the defeat of the Ottoman state in World War I came in to arrest five parliament members. The Ottoman Chamber officially met only once again on 18 March 1920 as a black cloth covered the pulpit of the Parliament reminding them of their absent members. As the sultan Mehmed Vahideddin V officially declared the Chamber closed on April 5th, many members arrested by the British were exiled to the island of Malta while those who escaped arrest joined the National Independence Struggle led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Ankara, a movement that was to lead to the establishment of the Turkish Republic on 29 October 1923.

¹ The date is 10 July 1324 according to the lunar calendar.

² See for instance Nader Sohrabi "Historicizing Revolutions: Constitutional Revolutions in the Ottoman Empire, Iran and Russia, 1905-1908." *American Journal of Sociology* 100/6 (1995): 1383-1447, Said Amir Arjomand "Constitutions and the Struggle for Political Order: A Study in the Modernization of Political Traditions." *Archives Europeennes de Sociologie* 33/1 (1992): 39-82, and Robert Devereux *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period: A Study of the Mithat Constitution and Parliament* Baltimore 1963.

Though the 1908 Young Turk Revolution does indeed clearly mark the beginning of an era, interpretations of its actual reign and legacy become much more historically ambiguous. The Young Turks gained their epithet through their opposition to the sultan and established the secret organization of the Union and Progress at the capital in a medical military school in 1889, at the centennial of the French Revolution. Their aim was to bring together and liberate all the elements of the empire from the sultan's yoke through the acquisition of political rights by the declaration of a constitution. They gradually developed as an organization in exile³ predominantly in Paris, Geneva and Cairo; only after 1905⁴ when they decided to consider the possibility of engaging in violence as well as undertaking a revolution from above⁵ and as a consequence started recruiting military officers in Macedonia did they start to attain success. After 24 July 1908, even though many exiled Young Turks returned to the capital, the Committee of Union and Progress [hereafter CUP] did not immediately form a party but established a committee headquarters and invited all interested parties to join. They also started to actively engage in politics by influencing government appointments, swearing in all military students as CUP members, and establishing a strong network of CUP clubs throughout the empire. After the counterrevolution of 14 April 1909 known as the 'March 31st Incident',⁶ the CUP organized the Third Army in Salonica along with volunteers to come to the capital to quell the rebellion against the revolution and removed sultan Abdülhamid II from power. This move also corresponded to an escalation in violence, curbing of freedoms, and increase in the influence of the military officers within the CUP at the expense of the civilians. When the CUP finally established a party, not only did it require its own elected deputies to work exactly along party lines and overlooked the politicization of the military corps, but it also maintained a secret organization that engaged in intimidation and repression through violence. As public support for the CUP waned and the political opposition ousted the CUP from power, the latter turned violent staging, with the help of the special secret fighters (*silahşör*) of the organization, a government coup on 23 January 1913 known as the *Bab-ı Ali* Raid. As the CUP reign thus became fully dictatorial, opponents were assassinated, and war conditions exploited to create a Turkish national bourgeoisie and a

³ See M. Şükrü Hanoğlu *The Young Turks in Opposition*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995 and *Preparing for a Revolution. The Young Turks, 1902-1908*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001 for a detailed discussion of the composition as well as activities of the Young Turks in exile.

⁴ Erik Jan Zürcher "The Young Turks – Children of the Borderlands?" *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 9/1-2 (2003), p. 277.

⁵ Nader Sohrabi "Global Wars, Local Actors: What the Young Turks Knew About Other Revolutions and Why It Mattered." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44/1 (2002), p. 72.

⁶ The date corresponded to March 31st 1325 according to the lunar calendar.

Turkish homeland in Anatolia at the expense of the Greek and Armenian minorities of the waning empire.⁷

Hence the Young Turk Revolution that commenced in 1908 has officially been marked as terminating a decade later in November 1918, when the major Young Turk leaders of the CUP, fearing reprisals from the Allied Forces for the violence they committed during the war, escaped to Germany at the end of World War I. Yet, it was only a number of the top CUP leaders who escaped then while the rest of the Unionists both at the capital as well as at the provinces actively participated in organizing a resistance movement that not only generated an Independence Struggle, but eventually led to the foundation of the Turkish Republic.⁸ Indeed, the plans for such a resistance were made much earlier by the Young Turks during World War I while the Dardanelles was under Allied siege in 1915 on the possibility that the Allies might have been able to break through.⁹ In addition, once the Turkish Republic was established, not only were many of the members of its First National Assembly former members of the CUP, but so were the members of the Turkish military as well as its central and provincial administrative bureaucracy. Even though the top level leaders had escaped and the CUP had been formally abolished, the influence of the Young Turks thus persisted into the Turkish Republic through the middle and low level members. Likewise the political purge in 1926 of some former Unionists after the assassination attempt on Mustafa Kemal Atatürk eliminated the possibility of a CUP political comeback during the Republican period and turned their discussion thereafter into a taboo topic, but their influence within the Turkish military persisted. What exactly was the nature of this continuing influence?

I argue in this article that the most significant meaning and legacy of the Young Turk Revolution can be captured through tracing the evolution of the two issues that the Young Turks, like all the revolutionaries before them, struggled with, namely Western European modernity and political rights. While still in opposition to the Ottoman sultan as well as after assuming political power, the Young Turks had attempted to permanently bring to their empire the Western European modernity they had either learned about or observed in exile by introducing into the Ottoman political system a constitution guaranteeing equal rights to all the disparate ethnic and religious elements of the empire. As everyone united to defend and guard these rights equally, they surmised, peace would undoubtedly ensue. Yet the Young Turk Revolution instead led to violence and war, and among the cadres of Young Turks comprising of civilians, administrative bureaucrats and military officers, it was the military officers who gradually monopolized the negotiation of the relationship between modernity and political rights. The military

⁷ Fatma Müge Göçek *Rise of the Bourgeoisie Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Social Change* New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

⁸ Erik Jan Zürcher "How Europeans adopted Anatolia and created Turkey." *European Review* 13/3 (2005), p. 385.

⁹ Erik Jan Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement 1905-1926*. Leiden: Brill, 1984, pp. 104-5.

thus became the vanguard of modernity and democracy in Turkey because of the Young Turk legacy, explaining the origins of the current paradox whereby the army time and again intervenes in the Turkish democratic process with the intent to preserve it. In short, the meaning of the Young Turk Revolution entails the negotiation of modernity and political rights by the military, and the legacy comprises the continuing monopolization of that negotiation to the present. The rest of the article documents this argument in the context of the French and Young Turk Revolutions.

Negotiation of Political Rights in the French Revolution

The 1789 French Revolution was an attempt to put into practice the vision of the Enlightenment, namely the emancipation of humans from fear and nature through reason thereby enabling them to establish control over the earth and its resources. Indeed, even the definition of the term revolution transformed with the Enlightenment; whereas it previously meant "a return to a previous condition," it then strated to "signify a process of development or acceleration toward new and therefore unpredictable state of affairs."¹⁰ In this new state of affairs, it highlighted the significance of Man and his natural rights. It did so in two fundamental ways, through declarations ascertaining the primacy of the rights¹¹ of all humans, and through a social contract whereby political rule had to be legitimated by the will and consent of the governed people, the populace.¹² Hence the French Declarations of 1789 and 1793 affirmed that the failure to acknowledge and ensure human rights that had led to the fall of the ancient regime, and the 1789 and 1793 Constituent Assemblies pointed out that it was "ignorance, forgetfulness and disrespect for the rights of man" that had been "the sole causes of public misfortunes and the corruption of governments."¹³

Establishing the rule of law and respect for human rights as the cornerstones of the new social order was the starting point toward a new era of freedom, equality and fraternity. And to oversee this process, the sovereignty was entrusted not to the ruler, but to the people. Eric Hobsbawm argues¹⁴ that the French Revolution created a new group of self-conscious people who did not have birth or privilege, but individual worth and intelligence with the ambition to shape society, people of the middle rank who

¹⁰ See Steven Smith "Hegel and the French Revolution: An Epitaph for Republicanism." *Social Research* 56/1, pp. 236-7.

¹¹ It is with the French Revolution that the modern conception of "human rights" – "Rights of Man" – is generally held to begin. For a more detailed discussion, see Anthony Pagden "Human Rights, Natural Rights, and Europe's Imperial Legacy." *Political Theory* 31/2 (2003), p. 189.

¹² Until the French Revolution, the rule of international legitimacy was dynastic, "connected to the status and claims of the rulers;" from then on, a popular principle "based on the claims and consent of the governed" superseded. For a more detailed discussion, see Martin Wright 1972 "International Legitimacy." *International Relations* 4/1, p. 2.

¹³ Stephen P. Marks "From the 'Single Confused Page' to the 'Decalogue for Six Billion Persons': The Roots of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the French Revolution." *Human Rights Quarterly* 20/3 (1998), p. 467.

¹⁴ E.J. Hobsbawm "The Making of a 'Bourgeois' Revolution." *Social Research* 56/1 (1989), p. 24.

comprised the Third Estate, the indigenous urban adults. Their essential mode of action was the association of individuals freely joining together. It was in the town that the institutions of publicity and sociability such as cafes, salons, academies, clubs, Masonic lodges publicity developed and the public emerged;¹⁵ it was in these new social public spaces, people learned to associate with one another as equals regardless of their status. In 1824, Mignet summarized the achievements of the French Revolution as having "replaced arbitrary power by law, privilege by equality; it freed men from class distinctions, the land from provincial barriers, industry from the handicaps of corporations and guilds, agriculture from feudal servitude and the oppression of tithes, property from the constraints of entail; and it brought everything together under a single state, a single law, a single people."¹⁶

It is interesting that Hegel noted the significance of necessary historical conditions one needed in order to achieve freedom and democracy at the end of a revolution. He argued, for instance, that "freedom [would] always [be] realized within a particular institutional framework which at a minimum must contain such things as the rule of law, a market economy and an impartial bureaucracy."¹⁷ Rights also did not appear naturally but were often embedded in historical circumstances.¹⁸ For Hegel, the French Revolution was an attempt of the postclassical to create the conditions for social and political harmony by reconciling the rational with the real that once ideally existed in the ancient polis.¹⁹ What is noteworthy, however, is that even though many scholars thought the French Revolution could be easily ideologically transported and translated throughout the world, Hegel seems to underscore the significance of the historical conditions in attaining its ideals, a precondition that has often been overlooked by many revolutionaries.

Negotiation of Violence in the French Revolution

Yet the French Revolution produced different and mutually incompatible consequences such as the representative ideals of the Constituent Assembly on the one side and the violence and terror of the Jacobin Republic on the other.²⁰ The Terror of 1793-94 in particular and the violence in the French Revolution in general have often been avoided or underscored in historical analysis because these were so much against the ideal of rationality and triumph of reason that the Revolution aspired to. Indeed, even a contemporaneous eyewitness account by that of Edmund Burke often dismissed the revolutionary crowds as "bands of cruel ruffians and assassins reeking with ... blood."²¹ George Rude²² who systematically analyzed the French Revolution in terms of

¹⁵ Dena Goodman 1992 "Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime." *History and Theory* 31/1, p. 6.

¹⁶ F.A. Mignet *Histoire de la Revolution Française* 18th edition Paris 1898, p. 2 in Hobsbawm, *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁷ Smith, *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹⁸ G.W.F. Hegel *Philosophy of Right* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, p. 233.

¹⁹ Smith, *Ibid.* p. 247.

²⁰ E.J. Hobsbawm "The Making of a 'Bourgeois' Revolution." *Social Research* 56/1 (1989), p. 8.

²¹ Edmund Burke *Reflections on the Revolution in France* London 1791, p. 2.

who committed the violence, with what intentions and how violence provided the instrument to achieve such intentions revealed that the revolutionary crowds were largely comprised of the *sans-culottes*, that is of people such as workshop masters, craftsmen, shopkeepers and petty traders who actually engaged in such violence not truly due to bribery or corruption, the quest for loot or irrational instincts as Gustave Le Bon²³ claimed, but rather "to reclaim traditional rights and to uphold standards which they believed to be imperiled by the innovations of minister, capitalists, speculators, agricultural 'improvers', or city authorities."²⁴ It was indeed a defensive reaction of what could be termed the *petit-bourgeoisie* whose ability to act was severely curtailed by the Jacobin state.

Brian Singer analyzed²⁵ the 1792 September massacres in Paris not studied by George Rude when a total of 1,400 people were executed when the capital was under the threat of foreign invasion. Yet the massacres were premeditated and executed in relative calm. The rumors of a conspiracy among the prisoners against the revolution led to the invasion of the prisons by revolutionary crowds. Not only were the largest numbers of the victims not counterrevolutionaries -- at least seventy percent were common-law prisoners --, but there was no evidence at all of a conspiracy or a threat to the revolution. The September massacres was seen as the last important outbreak of what was termed the Popular Terror that was soon to be replaced by the official Terror of the revolutionary government when the established tribunals took over the delivery of justice from the hands of the people who had until then enacted popular justice.²⁶ Singer argues that whereas popular violence prior to the September massacres had made a public spectacle of the victim and his mutilation with all parts of his body separated and exhibited throughout the city, popular tribunals were established during the September massacres so that justice was improvised, juries formed, judges named, a prosecutor established, prison records obtained and sentences delivered after a short interrogation at the end of which, if declared guilty, one would be "bludgeoned or hacked to death with whatever instruments available."²⁷ Hence what one witnessed was a transformation of 'popular violence' into 'popular justice' as people were executed under the authority of the law they took upon themselves to execute, "leading those radicals who sought to justify or at least excuse the events of September [to argue] that because the people had organized themselves into tribunals...these events were not to be represented as 'massacres,' but as acts of justice, of people's justice, the just punishment for the revolution's opponents."²⁸

²² George Rude *The Crowd and the French Revolution* London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

²³ Gustave Le Bon *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* New York: Viking, 1960.

²⁴ See Rude, *Ibid.* pp. 191-6, 199, 219-21, and 225.

²⁵ Brian Singer 1989 "Violence in the French Revolution: Forms of Ingestion/Forms of Expulsion." *Social Research* 56/1, p. 274-5.

²⁶ Singer, *Ibid.*, p. 277.

²⁷ Singer, *Ibid.*, pp. 279-80.

²⁸ Singer, *Ibid.*, p. 281 and fn. 28.

Hegel also looked into the Reign of Terror and located the causes of violence in the French Revolution's particular conceptions of common good and virtue. Not only were these hallowed, but "the only standard that the man of virtue can provide of his virtue turned out ultimately to be his own self-certainty and sincerity."²⁹ When people started to be evaluated by such subjective standards, then what became unleashed in everyone was a relentless search for those who lacked that public spirit but pretended to have it. Hence Hegel argued that during the Reign of Terror "suspicion is in the ascendant; but virtue, as soon as it becomes liable to suspicion, is already condemned... Virtue and Terror are the order of the day; for subjective virtue, whose sway is based on disposition only, brings with it the most fearful tyranny. It exercises its power without legal formalities, and the punishment it inflicts is equally simple – death."³⁰ Indeed the desire to root out hypocrisy, decadence and corruption intensified through a combination of violence and fanaticism.

Hannah Arendt located the origin of violence in the search for authenticity that revolutions engaged in; such a search, she conjectured, was bound to be destructive especially due to 'the fallacy of misplaced compassion.'³¹ Even though Rousseau's original interpretation of compassion as the basis of all morality had been sound, Robespierre had started to regard virtue as the ability to identify with the suffering of the French populace. In so doing, what gradually occurred was that in practice compassion and virtue translated into a more diffuse and abstract sense of pity and subjective capacity to sympathize: they became alienated from their feelings. In the end, the leaders of the Revolution "could be sorry without being touched in the flesh... what had perhaps been genuine passion turned into the boundlessness of an emotion that seemed to respond only too well to the boundless suffering of the multitude in their sheer overwhelming numbers."³² Hence Robespierre's 'republic of virtue' turned into 'pious cruelty.' Indeed, in the end, the ones that caused most havoc to humans were the most passionate and devoted; "the greatest cruelties in history have been committed out of an excessive idealism and devotion to causes... [whereby during the French Revolution] a Reign of Terror was established to purge the nation of all those 'enemies of the people' suspected of harboring impure thoughts."³³ Revolution started to reclaim its own when even those entrusted with the common good started to suspect their own motives.

The transformation of the law during the Revolution reveals that law applied no longer vertically, but rather horizontally to everyone equally with equal force. This was a significant change in that one could no longer invert the societal order that the law had established, but instead had to overthrow it entirely because the law now in effect defined and thereby encompassed the entire societal order. It is only when the law is

²⁹ Smith, *Ibid.*, pp. 250-1. It is interesting to note that in spite of all this violence, Hegel still regarded the French Revolution as a progressive force in history.

³⁰ G.W.F. Hegel *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. 450-1.

³¹ Hannah Arendt *On Revolution* New York: Viking, 1965, pp. 80, 85, and 99-104.

³² Arendt, *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 85.

³³ Smith, *Ibid.*, pp. 252-3.

supposed to be an expression of the general will that the frequency of recourse to legalized violence indicates that there is no correspondence between the law and the people. Hence one could argue that ever since the French Revolution, states have attempted to obfuscate the extent of the violence they practiced in order to cover up the implied discrepancy between their legal system and their populace.³⁴

The Jacobin clubs in the provinces provided the grounds for the public discussion of the interests of the nation and the revolution that sometimes contradicted that of the representative assemblies in Paris; after 1792 when France went to war these clubs transformed into socially heterogeneous political action groups and went after to threaten the enemies at home and abroad.³⁵ It was only through such large-scale mass mobilization that France was able to defeat the united continental armies raised against her. Counterrevolutionary activity started in France's south and west while federalist movements started in the spring of 1793 when the Jacobin expansion of the foreign war including the declaration of war on Spain led to resistance to taxation and conscription that in turn increased revolutionary surveillance and discipline.³⁶ At a larger scale, the imperialism of the French Revolutionaries and Napoleon also generated nationalism and the rights of men quickly gave way to the rights of nations: methods of plebiscite and self-determination as well as territorial integrity and majority rule became significant. Hence, even though the French Revolution proclaimed the nation as the fundamental source of political sovereignty and legitimacy, its darker side was revealed through internal oppression and external domination.³⁷

The issue in assessing the legacy of the French Revolution is to assess not only the ideal of equal rights for all citizens, but also their actualization. In this context, the experiences of the minorities in France during the French Revolution in general, and of the French Jews in particular become pertinent. Not only were leading Jews at the time determined to acquire full political rights thereby ending their separate existence from the gentiles and equally determined to maintain their religious identity in spite of the attempts to secularize or Christianize them, but French revolutionary leaders also insisted upon the principles of equality before the law and religious freedom even at the risk of offending local constituencies.³⁸ Yet when one evaluates this positive start within the context of the aftermath of what happened to the Jews in France in general and in Europe in particular, namely the trajectory of events from the Dreyfus Affair to the Holocaust, one has to admit that the theme has not been that of liberation, as promised by the Enlightenment, but rather of destruction. In the case of the French Revolution, even though the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen was passed in August 1789, French Jews had to wait for another two years and they were also expected to

³⁴ Singer, *Ibid.*, p. 292.

³⁵ Skocpol, *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³⁶ Charles Tilly "State and Counterrevolution in France." *Social Research* 56/1 (1989), pp. 86-7.

³⁷ Chimene Keitner 2000 "National Self-Determination in Historical Perspective: The Legacy of the French Revolution for Today's Debates." *International Studies Review* 2/3, p. 7.

³⁸ Gary Kates "Jews into Frenchmen: Nationality and Representation in Revolutionary France." *Social Research* 56/1 (1989): 213-32.

dissolve their communal institutions.³⁹ The bill nearly failed, however, to secure the rights of active citizenship for Jews because of a fear of Jewish financial power and usury.⁴⁰ Even though the bill passed, these undercurrents of violence and reservation and their analysis provide insights into the study of the subsequent 1908 Young Turk Revolution.

On the Origins of 1908

A closer examination of the days just before 23 July 1908 reveal that the rebellion against the Ottoman sultan was not an empire-wide movement, but only took place in the western part of the empire in Macedonia, specifically in the cities of Salonica, Manastir and Uskup. Probably the most significant factor leading sultan Abdülhamid II to accede to the pressure of the Young Turks was the report his commander of the Third Army İbrahim Pasha⁴¹ submitted humbly stating that in Macedonia the two types of political solutions Ottoman rulers often resorted to, namely either advice and admonition, or force and compulsion, were no longer viable options. The sultan also had to take into account that the Ottoman military units stationed there had the organizational network and therefore the potential loyalty of many officers and their units beyond Macedonia. Even though the military rebels appeared to have some 'public' support, it was hard to determine what this actually comprised more than noting that 'some villagers, Muslim and non-Muslim [were] moving to city centers'⁴² since not only were the reports sent to the imperial capital mostly penned by the political actors themselves, namely the Young Turkish officers, but in the Ottoman Empire there had not yet been until then any articulation of a politicized 'public' -- the populace comprised of the socially undifferentiated totality of the sultan's subjects.

The political act of convening the Ottoman Chamber initially rested not with the Young Turks, but with the Ottoman sultan who still held onto his throne and also received accolades from his subjects for his declaration. The official news that Abdülhamid II had permitted the Chamber to reconvene and reinstated the Constitution was initially buried inside the official newspaper *Tanin* as if it were an insignificant item. As there had been general clandestine opposition to the sultan's rule and absence of a single publicly recognized Young Turk leadership, it took a while for political actors to emerge at the capital celebration to claim victory and lead the celebration of the newly acquired 'liberty and freedom.'

Modernity and Political Rights in the 1908 Young Turk Revolution

A review of the contemporaneous memoirs reveal that very few, if any were cognizant of the significance of the acquisition of the rights. The impressions about the celebrations reveal that people celebrated without an awareness of what it was that they

³⁹ Kates, *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁴⁰ Kates, *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁴¹ Başbakanlık Arşivi Yıldız Esas Evrakı 71-69, 23 July 1908/10 July 1324 in Nader Sohrabi "Global Wars, Local Actors: What the Young Turks Knew About Other Revolutions and Why It Mattered." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2002: 45-79, fn. 79.

⁴² See Sohrabi 2002, pp. 68-69.

were celebrating. Galip Söylemezoğlu who was at the capital the day the 1908 Constitution was declared probably provides⁴³ the most dramatic description:

I could not believe my eyes! Everyone had a newspaper! No one moves their head! I would not be exaggerating if I say they almost do not breathe! ...Oh my God! Is this a dream or reality? Or a new trick to hurt the populace? Was there a trap set for those who would trust this news item and go public? ...The truth was that until the streetcar came to the bridge, let alone chat with the person sitting next to them, no one had the courage to even steal a look... I got off the streetcar in Galata and crossed the bridge...I ran into [a friend] in Eminönü... 'You see we finally tore down despotism! Down with despotism! Long live Freedom!' he started to shout. The people around us stared at us in horror and amazement. I grabbed him by the arm saying 'Come on, do not act so hastily, let us walk!'... and we started to go up the Babiali hill. Flags were starting to be mounted to the banks and the libraries...İstanbul shook that day with an excitement from one end to the other. The crowds on the streets were impenetrable...For about a week to ten days the country went through a huge nervous breakdown. The populace attaching themselves to this or that person went to the houses of the ministers, high officials, beys and pashas whose evil affairs were known to everyone, insulted them in many ways, and took them to the prisons of either the gendarmerie or the War Ministry.

Fazıl Ahmet (Aykaç) , who at the time, was a clerk at the Mint, recounts⁴⁴ how no one had any idea what had happened except to observe everyone around them wearing red and white freedom ties:

Someone got up and said 'We are saved, Long Live the Constitution!'... As citizens belonging to various groups had hugged one another on the streets and became brothers, we thought that all states were going to hug Turkey and kiss the cheeks of the Babiali government! Yes, I assure you we were that naïve, ignorant, and in one word, pitiful!

Likewise Yusuf Kemal (Tengirşenk) who had just started practicing as a lawyer had left for İskeçe for business and upon his return found the Sirkeci station in Istanbul all decorated up relays⁴⁵ the following conversation:

I asked the reason for this from my friends: 'Freedom was established' they replied. 'What does that mean?' I asked; 'We don't know,' they

⁴³ Galip Kemali Söylemezoğlu *Hariciye Hizmetinde Otuz Sene, 1892-1922 (Thirty Years in the Service of the Foreign Ministry, 1892-1922)*. İstanbul: Maarif, 1949, pp. 170-1.

⁴⁴ Fazıl Ahmet (Aykaç) 1924 *Kırpıntı (Clippings)*. İstanbul: Arba, 1991 edition, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Yusuf Kemal (Tengirşenk) *Vatan Hizmetinde (In the Service of the Homeland)*. İstanbul: Bahar, 1967, p. 106.

answered. Then I went elsewhere and found out that Abdülhamid had invited the Ottoman Parliament to convene.

A slightly different version is narrated by Çerkes Hasan Amça who notes that⁴⁶ on the day the notice of the proclamation of the constitution appeared in the newspapers,

...in front of the Ministry of Education, one policeman decided to take us to the Police Headquarters for violating the public order. Our group comprised of two Turks and three four Greek and Armenian citizens. 'You never know,' we said and got rid of the Christian subjects. My friend Ahmet and I got going.

This recollection is interesting in that not only do they get taken into custody for a while, but they make sure the non-Muslim subjects among them are not subject to the same treatment which demonstrates that all are aware of the differential treatment the Muslim subjects receive.

The last remembrance by Falih Rıfka Atay captures⁴⁷ how as young boys those days they could not stop thinking about

the streets and demonstrations, the names of the Freedom Heroes Enver, Niyazi and Fethi, the sacred society (*cemiyet-i mukaddese*), and the thought that the heroes went up to the mountains to save us...[the first year of the Constitution went by as] we kept shouting whatever slogan that was given to us that day by either the newspaper or the public speech...Now when we look...the revolution has neither a leader nor a direction nor a program; [it is believed that] when the Constitution is promulgated all will be resolved.

It was this belief that all will naturally take care of itself that was to be the greatest disappointment since the Young Turks who had been in opposition to the sultan lacked the necessary administrative experience to know how to work things out.

Another proof of this naive Young Turk belief that things would have worked themselves out naturally after the Constituion was declared is given by Çerkes Hasan Amça who refers⁴⁸ to an interview prominent CUP leader Rahmi Bey gave on 8 August 1909 to *Le Temps* where he stated:

You ask about our political program! We do not have such a thing. Until today we struggled to tear down [the autocracy]. Now we try to protect the Constitution to the letter. Hereafter we will work for the future and progress of the country. The Committee [of Union and Progress] will not disappear. It will continue to operate alongside the government, and if the government does not perform things correctly, it will guide it in that direction.

⁴⁶ Çerkes Hasan (Amça) *Doğmayan Hürriyet: Bir Devrin İçyüzü 1908-1918 (The Unborn Freedom: Inside Story of an Era 1908-1918)*. İstanbul: Arba, 1958, 1989 edition, pp. 19-20.

⁴⁷ Falih Rıfka (Atay) *Batış Yılları (The Years of Decline)*. İstanbul: Bates, 1963, 1999 edition, p. 32.

⁴⁸ Amça *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

It is indeed this naivete combined with the catastrophic events of the time as well as the insurmountable problems the Young Turks inherited that made it extremely difficult for them to actualize their vision of political rights for all the subjects of the empire within the framework of constitutional law.

Fazıl Ahmet (Aykaç) also describes⁴⁹ how the populace also expected the impossible from the newcomers, the Young Turks of the Constitutional period, the expectations that were bound to failure:

We truly ran to the ground and overturned the leaders of the Abdülhamid era with the axes and greased nooses of the revolution. And waited that everything will change once the new idols we had kept like trinkets in the shelves of our hearts and imaginations were placed on the empty pedestals of the statues! Yet the inexperienced trust we bestowed upon these men and the importance we advanced them without any security was too much and unnecessary; it was also absurd to appear in front of them and shout about why they had not done, what they of course did not have the power to do. We started to be like those people who turn against their idols for not actualizing their desires and [who then] give up their beliefs. We forgot that those we idolized were pieces of wood and what they could do was very limited. Yet when they saw that the places they once could not even reach suddenly come up under their feet, they [too] lost their commonsense. And the disaster broadened...The Union and Progress assumed the outfit of a repressive, ignorant, arrogant and aggressive clique.⁵⁰

When the CUP had first assumed power right after the Constitutional Revolution in 1908, they had wanted to accomplish 'the union of all elements,' namely '*ittihad-ı anasır*' for they believed the strength of the different peoples of the empire in their political rights would lead them to invest in the empire and therefore in the Constitution, uniting into one totality. While this appeared to have worked in theory, the practice was to prove differently. Cemal Kutay recounts⁵⁰ how the prominent CUP members Cavid Bey and Dr. Bahaeddin Shakir visited the then Prime Minister Kamil Pasha and described their vision and Cavid Bey explained how they were going to accomplish this difficult task,

Kamil Pasha listened, listened and then asked his famous question: 'Are you done, effendis?' When answered in the affirmative, he...said: 'It is not possible, effendis, it cannot be done. Because this country has its own particular dynamics⁵¹. So are the people who live

⁴⁹ Aykaç, *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁰ Cemal Kutay *Tarih Sohbetleri (Conversations on History)*. İstanbul: Halk, Volume II, pp. 143-

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⁵¹ The exact words in Turkish are '*nev'i şahısma münhasır bir diyardır.*'

on it. You groundlessly imagine these conditions in your mind's eye by likening us to others or others to us, then you get yourselves to believe in what you have created, and then you reject the real truth.

Indeed, even though constitutionalism was supposed to unite people under the French Revolution's famous banners of freedom, equality and brotherhood, the meanings of these banners soon became subverted in the Ottoman context. Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil recounts⁵² that

it was soon observed that freedom was for each race to freely embrace its own desires, equality meant the struggle to achieve the same rights with the same forces, and as for brotherhood, it meant that brothers born of step parents could openly express their vengeance against one another.

Hence, the ideals of the French Revolution were becoming increasingly polarized and swerving away from the imagined ideal of unity.

Ahmed Rıza Bey, who had been the CUP leader in Paris and certainly one of the most introspective of the Young Turks, highlights the difficulties the Young Turks faced at the onset of the Constitutional Period in undertaking reforms. He notes⁵³ that

When the CUP was established, the populace expected everything from them. The CUP was going to set everything straight, make rain fall and turn the country prosperous. When all these did not happen, the populace started to cool off toward the CUP. The CUP had brought freedom to the people; this was a great difference between the old and new eras. It was cruel not to see this difference, but the populace had forgotten the old era because it was not seriously in love with freedom: it could not appreciate the value of freedom and did not know how to make use of it. In order to improve the conditions of the people, to educate them politically, it was necessary not to forget the old era. Yet after the proclamation of the constitution, vast and serious reforms could not be undertaken for there was no money and security had not been achieved...Reform meant innovation; the public opinion seemed against it...As I had been living abroad for twenty years, I did not know the mental state of the populace. It turns out my friends did not either; we thought the populace was delicate like a respectable woman and tried not to hurt and sadden her. We decided to execute the reforms slowly [since] we were afraid to offend her. Yet these caused the reforms to get delayed.

⁵² Halid Ziya (Uşaklıgil) *Kırk Yıl: Anılar (Forty Years: Memories)*. İstanbul: İnkılap, 1969, 1987 edition, p. 685.

⁵³ Ahmed Rıza Bey *Meclis-i Mebusan ve Ayan Reisi Ahmed Rıza Bey'in Anıları (Memoirs of Ahmed Rıza Bey, the Head of the Ottoman Parliament and Senate)*. İstanbul: Arba, 1950, 1988 edition, pp. 41-3.

Hence, not only was the populace unable to appreciate what they had procured for them, but the Young Turks themselves had neither the means nor the skills and experience to communicate and deliver what was necessary.

Yet, the sheik-ul-islam Cemaleddin Efendi, who had been an experienced Ottoman administrator and therefore grasped the procedures that the Young Turks would have needed to follow criticized their performance in ways that was quite different from that of Ahmet Rıza Bey's. He stated⁵⁴ that one had to first blame the CUP because

Guaranteeing the continuance of the exalted [Ottoman] state, of the various ethnic communities comprising the universe of Ottomanism would have only been possible if all had benefited from the freedom and justice offered by the constitutional law turning them into one [solid] mass...And the state [could have done so] by spreading education...by building medreses and schools for the populace...providing public works, roads, shelter and sustenance for them. This was the most important political duty that the leaders of the constitutional government had to undertake. Yet the influential people of the CUP neglected and abandoned this fundamental duty. [Instead] they turned toward completing the organization of the CUP by establishing clubs in the provinces. They adopted a violent centralization policy in order to increase their influence. They also accepted a broad administrative style like parliamentarism that was rather difficult to implement given the [existing] societal organization and civilizational ability.

In addition to the the lack of knowledge and experience by the populace as well as most of the Young Turks about what it was that had taken place, it was also the amorphous, ever growing group of Young Turks that was making the articulation of the ideals of the Young Turk Revolution increasingly difficult. Since the Young Turks had been a secret organization and most of the members organized in cells and therefore few did not know one another, everyone claimed to be a Young Turk and the Committee of Union and Progress, upon its triumphant return to the capital, did not attempt to prevent this mass mobilization. Even though such a move did indeed enable the CUP to penetrate into most of Ottoman society, it also reduced the ability of CUP to control its constituency.

Many contemporaneous accounts reveal how everyone indiscriminately flooded the ranks of the CUP. Abidin Nesimi states,⁵⁵ for instance, that

During the Abdülhamid period, whoever opposed his regime was assumed to be a Unionist and exiled. So when the Constitutional Revolution was declared, all who had been exiled or were in prison, be they political or common criminals, claimed to be CUP members.

⁵⁴ Şeyhülislam Cemaleddin Efendi *Siyasi Hatıralarım (My Political Memoirs)*. İstanbul: Nehir, 1920, 1990 edition, p. 37, 41.

⁵⁵ Abidin Nesimi *Yılların İçinden (From Within the Years)*. İstanbul: Gözlem, 1977, pp. 245-7.

This was also to be the experience of Ahmed Rıza Bey upon his arrival at the capital some months after the declaration of the Constitution. He recounted⁵⁶ his first visit and reception at the CUP headquarters as follows:

I encountered some strange men I did not know and whose names I had not even heard. Each and every one of them swaggered with pride and dictated matters as if they had all worked and sacrificed for the Constitution more than I had. My stay in Paris for an additional two months had led these upstarts to emerge and take charge... The main crime of the CUP was to open its doors and admit to the organization second-rate and tyrannical people. Not to realize how morally corrupt the people were in İstanbul, to think that a few public spirited people who had arrived from Salonica but were unknowns in İstanbul could rule a country, to intervene in government affairs, to have officers struggle with politics...

While people kept descending all the time, all those who had opposed the sultan felt entitled to belong to the Young Turks and membership in the CUP. While Ahmed Rıza Bey was against admitting all who wanted to join, the political community of the Young Turks seem to be growing continuously.

Yet, joining the CUP did not necessarily translate into acquiring a political consciousness, for Mevlanzade Rifat noted⁵⁷ how many of these recruits were much more interested in the material benefits that would accrue than the ideological vision:

as for those who joined these associations, organizations in droves, a large segment had neither studied nor felt the need to think through the administrative system to which they now belonged. And this condition emanated from the old sickness of the East known as the habit of 'joining a household.' Actually the reason in our case of joining such households of the great ones, pasha effendis is more the abundance of favors rather than the need felt for wisdom and insight.

Indeed, just drawing upon the former household model, the CUP politically mobilized and spread to establish CUP clubs that would penetrate the entire empire. This depth and breadth enabled the CUP to establish the first political organizational network in the empire outside of religious orders.

While this provincial networking worked because it was predicated on an earlier model, the introduction of new practices of modernity that required adjustments in time and space did not meet with similar success. Ahmed Rıza who had lived most of his life abroad summed up⁵⁸ his irritation at these practices he deemed inadequate as follows:

⁵⁶ Ahmed Rıza *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 43.

⁵⁷ Mevlanzade Rifat *Mevlanzade Rifat'ın Anıları (Memoirs of Mevlanzade Rifat)*. İstanbul: Arma, 1992, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Ahmed Rıza *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.

There is no order in the social life of our country. Boats, streetcars do not arrive on time; no one comes to a meeting in a timely manner. To achieve majority in the parliament had become a problem, a scandal. The deputies would sit around downstairs in the recess room, reading newspapers and chatting away. They would not budge regardless of however many times the personnel invite them upstairs or ring bells. There is no sense of duty; it is impossible for us to conduct business in accordance to a program. We make good programs but demonstrate weakness when it comes to execution...It is torment for an irritable man to live in such an environment.

Centralization of Power at the CUP

Not only was there not an equitable distribution of political rights in the Ottoman Empire, but the CUP that had come to power with such an agenda quickly abandoned it in favor of Turkish nationalism. In the context of the French Revolution, it had been the bourgeoisie who would have been able to counter and sustain the power of the new Constitution. Yet in the Ottoman case, the bourgeoisie comprised of minorities who were structurally separated from the Muslims excelling as the state administrative and bureaucratic elites.⁵⁹ As the CUP started to pursue a proto-nationalist agenda, it began to concentrate almost exclusively on the concerns of the Turks at the expense of all other groups.

The crucial decade of CUP political presence (1908-1918) was marked by three significant political activities by the CUP which indicated both the penetration and centralization of political power: the deputies elected to the Chamber with CUP backing became entirely dependent on the central committee in all their actions; all levels of Ottoman bureaucratic administration were penetrated by the CUP through the appointment of loyal officials and purges of opponents; and the ranks of the military were also politicized as most joined the CUP and remained members in spite of notices to stay out of politics. A crucial CUP leader overseeing the centralization of power into the CUP was Talat Pasha, a member of the Salonica branch of the CUP who had quickly become a deputy from Edirne and then in July 1909 rose to the post of the Minister of the Interior at the age of thirty-five after only one year of bureaucratic experience: he systematically oversaw the reorganization of the Ottoman bureaucratic administration since one of the first agenda items of the Ottoman Chamber was a law purging all those in the military and civil administration who had been loyal to the sultan replacing them with CUP loyalists. It was this legal move that enabled the CUP to penetrate into the Ottoman bureaucratic administration; once coupled with the establishment of CUP clubs throughout the empire, this gave the CUP an efficient political control and mobilization throughout the empire.

When the Ottoman time the Chamber of Deputies began its operations on 17 December 1908, the CUP made sure that not only were most of the deputies from among

⁵⁹ For a discussion of this process, see Fatma Müge Göçek *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

its members, but that they voted strictly along party lines. Indeed, the inability of the deputies to act independently of the CUP was noted by many contemporaneous observers. Çerkes Hasan (Amça) stated⁶⁰

Assembly of Deputies! That serves as the small coffee kitchen for this group [of CUP members within the central committee] from darkness... They were only like rubber stamps to complete the formalities!... [and] the CUP's degree of tolerance to consultation and accountability was only as much as Abdülhamid II.

Likewise Ahmed Refik (Altınay) observed⁶¹ that the Ottoman Chamber which could have prevented abuses and corruption from taking place and thereby restored the faith of the populace was so corrupt and vile itself that the populace referred to it the not as the 'Meclis-i Mebusan,' namely 'the Assembly of Deputies,' but rather, employing a play on words, as 'Meclis-i Mensuban,' that is, 'the Assembly of the Connected Ones,' those connected to power, influence and corruption, or as 'Meclis-i Menhusan,' namely, 'the Assembly of the Inauspicious.'

In spite of the Ottoman Chamber and the government that was supposed to represent the people and the Constitution that provided the framework for their political rights, many observed that the CUP proceeded to gain so much influence that the authority of the government was almost nonexistent. Damar Arıkoğlu, a member of the CUP in the provinces, specifically in Adana, remarked⁶² that "[e]ven the petitions were submitted not to the government but the committee." Burhan Felek noted⁶³ in his memoirs that "even though the Ottoman Parliament had gathered in its bosom the select politicians of the country, it was not the political center of the country. This center was rather the headquarters of the CUP."

Yet the inordinate power of the CUP was most noticeable in the provinces where the members of the CUP clubs often took it upon themselves to visit the local Ottoman administrators to notify them that the club would now oversee and control all affairs. Such an incident is narrated⁶⁴ by Hüseyin Kazım Kadri, who himself was, unbeknownst to the local CUP members, a prominent CUP member appointed the *mutasarrıf* of Siroz personally by Talat Pasha to fight the bandits in the area, who was observing this exercise of local political control with deep anxiety. Not only Kadri find total anarchy upon arrival, but two delegates from the CUP visited his office to tell him:

⁶⁰ Amça *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 176.

⁶¹ Ahmed Refik (Altınay) *İki Komite İki Kıtıl (Two Committees, Two Massacres)*. İstanbul: Temel, 1919, 1998 edition, p. 197.

⁶² Damar Arıkoğlu *Hatıralarım (My Memories)*. İstanbul: Korkut Arıkoğlu yayını, 1961, pp. 42-3.

⁶³ Burhan Felek *Yaşadığımız Günler (The Days We Lived Through)*. İstanbul: Milliyet, 1974, p. 57.

⁶⁴ Hüseyin Kazım Kadri *Meşrutiyet'ten Cumhuriyete Hatıralarım (My Memoirs from the Constitutional Period to the Republic)*. İstanbul: İletişim, 1991, pp. 69, 71-2.

On all matters, I had to work jointly with the CUP center there... It seems I was to work there not as a government official, as a *mutasarrıf*, but as a functionary of the CUP headquarters... Of course any man who was a government official and therefore knew his duties and had control of his carnal inclinations, could not have accepted such a preposition. I strongly rejected the offer and explained that I was there not as an official of the CUP, but of the government and told them bitterly that I intended to always act in this capacity. Then I thought: if these men find the courage to make such a preposition to someone like me who had a prominent position in the CUP, what sorts of pressures did they bring upon government officials who did not have such connections and how could those poor officials respond to them? In such a situation, where would the government, its integrity, the responsibility of one's duty, the laws... end up? I thought about all these and was scared of what the future holds. The government had been transferred to hidden hands... The ones who directed matters were men without any [official] responsibility.

Distressed by this state of affairs, Kadri of course did not give in and pursued an independent course of action, but he noted that these two delegates tried very hard to make life difficult for him, but to no avail, thanks to the strength of his own connections within the CUP. It was nevertheless very telling that Ottoman administration had become politicized at a level that had never been previously experienced and the person responsible for this organization was mainly Talat Pasha. Talat Pasha was credited by many contemporaneous accounts for both keeping the CUP as well as the government together; in his persona, the Pasha seems to capture all the contradictions of the CUP members, namely the fervent patriotism as well as the lack of education, experience, and short-sightedness that wreaked havoc and eventually brought down an empire.

It is extremely telling is that even though he is such a prominent CUP leader, Talat Pasha, just like the other two leaders of the CUP triumvirate, namely Enver and Cemal Pashas, do not at all seem concerned or discuss in depth the concepts of political rights, representation or agonize about their lack during their political reign. On the contrary, unlike Ahmed Rıza, for instance, they are peculiarly devoid of such concerns. This is especially noteworthy in the case of Talat Pasha because he was, unlike the Enver and Cemal Pashas who were soldiers, also a civilian in origin.

Their contemporary Rauf Orbay and also a CUP member claims⁶⁵ in his memoirs that he heard with his own ears Talat Pasha "who had once been on the forefront of the struggle for freedom to say, upon becoming the grand vizier, "the nation is not yet ready for constitutional rule. It is imperative for the safety of the country and the security of the nation [to instead have] an enlightened despotic rule." Galip

⁶⁵ Hüseyin Rauf (Orbay) *Yüzyulumuzda bir İnsanımız: Hüseyin Rauf Orbay (One of Our People in Our Century: Rauf Orbay)*. Cemal Kutay, ed. İstanbul: Kazancı, 1992, p. 184. The actual Turkish wording is 'münevver bir istibdat idaresi.'

Söylemezoğlu's recollection of a meeting he had along with the Ottoman ambassador to France Salih Münir Pasha in 1913 with the then Minister of the Interior Talat Pasha dates from approximately the same time. Söylemezoğlu recalls how Talat Pasha hit the two sides of the armchair he was sitting on with his hands and said: "I swear to God, Pasha! No one can get us out of here from now on! And we have no interest whatsoever in budging anywhere ever again!" Even though Talat Pasha could have been joking, it is nevertheless interesting to note that there is a sense of possession, of taking control that does seem to be observed by many. What is significant here is the use of the pronoun 'we' for the act of assuming the position is being done on behalf of the CUP in particular and of course the populace in general. Whether the Pasha does truly represent the populace at this point and how he reaches and justifies this contention are what needs to be considered next.

It is in this context that the empowerment the CUP members draw upon themselves from Turkish nationalism becomes significant. Indeed, two astute, experienced Ottoman administrators, Mehmet Tevfik Biren and Lütfi Simavi provide descriptions of Talat Pasha that capture this nationalistic dimension and the liberties it gave him very well. Mehmet Tevfik Biren dryly notes⁶⁶

Most of these men and all of their leaders were in principle patriotic and self-sacrificing people. All the mistakes they committed were partially due to their having acquired this conceit that 'it was we who brought the constitution.' There were also among them who could not understand the drawbacks of governing a state with the methods of a *komitadji* (secret revolutionary committee).

Indeed, Biren's thinly veiled criticism of resorting to guerilla tactics in conducting government business, that is, having no accountability or transparency seems to have wrought havoc and brought the empire to a standstill. This complaint is echoed almost verbatim by Simavi who also states⁶⁷

Talat Pasha lacked knowledge and culture. He had risen to the position of the grandvezir —via being a deputy and then a minister — from that of a postal clerk solely due to his patriotism, courage and audacity. He was a *komitadji* and a Unionist who was a true believer. It was not possible to criticize the fierce love he had toward his honor, homeland and nation. Yet he had blindly included in his cabinet totally ignorant people who had no single merit other than their loyalty to the CUP. However good-intentioned they may have been, it would not have been possible for these people to be useful to the country. Then there were such upstarts among those who were truly party

⁶⁶ Biren, Mehmet Tevfik *II. Abdülhamid, Meşrutiyet ve Mütareke Devri Hatıraları (Memoirs of the Abdülhamid II, Constitutional and Armistice Periods)*. İstanbul: Arma, 1993, pp. 63-4.

⁶⁷ Başmabeynci Lütfi Simavi 1970 *Osmanlı Sarayının Son Günleri (The Last Days of the Ottoman Palace)*. İstanbul: Hürriyet, pp. 428-9. The Turkish words are 'namusuna, yurduna ve ulusuna olan içten sevgisi.'

members or who pretended to be so that these either committed countless mistakes or wreaked havoc with the country through engaging in blackmarketeering or influence peddling. Talat Pasha who alone was a symbol of honor did not impede them.

Once again, it is through fierce patriotism that Talat Pasha not only rises to the posts he occupies but also justifies all his actions and, more importantly, his actions are justified in the eyes of those around him however ignorant and ill-informed they might have been. In this latter portrayal, the Pasha thus appears to be a believer and an idealist surrounded by many opportunists.

The last depiction of Talat Pasha by Rıza Nur, a deputy at the Ottoman Chamber, who used to be a CUP sympathizer but then became an opponent points out how the Pasha's patriotism and fierce belief in the correctness and righteousness of his position could very easily lead to violence. Indeed, Nur described⁶⁸ the situation at the Ottoman Chamber as follows:

[N]o one had any votes or power. A few people like Cavit, Talat, Karaso, Cahit give orders and hands are raised...I wrote an article criticizing them and...all hell broke loose because they had never been so openly criticized before. Everyone had been led to believe the committee to be a sacred body and organization...Talat saw me in the corridor; his face was like mud. This is what [his face] turned into when he was angry...He changed his course to pass by me and bent into my ear and said 'get your funeral shroud ready!' This was an amazing threat; they might do it too. The sacred committee keeps murdering men. It was not that I was not frightened, I was...but I [nevertheless] kept on criticizing them.

It was the inability to handle criticism due to the lack of participation in a public sphere that was so crucial to the emergence and sustenance of democracies that became problematic in the Ottoman context as the CUP failed to tolerate opposition and often suppressed it with violence.

The Emergence of the Military as Political Actors in the Late Ottoman Period

The discussion of the CUP in general and the exercise of violence within the CUP especially by the secret para-military Special Organization (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*) in particular brings forth the larger issue of the interpretation of role of the military and their legacy. Military officers or related professions such as army physicians and veterinarians had not only been associated with modernity but often advocated it because they often attended Western-style educational institutions of the empire or were educated abroad in the West. Yet, like their civilian bureaucratic counterparts educated at similar Western-style educational institutions, some were also loyal to the sultan and therefore did not engage in such action. Even though especially the Turkish military has currently institutionalized its claim on upholding modernity and democracy in Turkey and

⁶⁸ Rıza Nur *Hayat ve Hatıratım (My Life and Memories)*. İstanbul: İşaret. Two volumes, 1965, 1992 edition, volume 1, pp. 285-6.

grounded this claim in history, a closer analysis⁶⁹ reveals that the Ottoman military officers were initially more skillful in not generating and sustaining political power, but rather monopolizing it once it was generated. Nader Sohrabi has analyzed the main political journal of the CUP, *Şuray-ı Ümmet* published in Cairo and Paris between 1902-1908 to map out the Young Turk search "for the best political system and a viable strategy for revolution."⁷⁰ In drawing the repertoire for action, it appears that the Young Turks initially in 1902 "held a highly conservative view toward political action [that was] elitist and evolutionist rather than revolutionary."⁷¹ Hence, they did not aspire to the model of the French Revolution⁷² since they were convinced "a mass uprising against the state would invite foreign intervention in support of autonomy seeking ethnic groups, leading to the collapse of the Empire." What was of course unsaid here was that the non-Muslim minorities comprised the bourgeoisie of the Ottoman Empire and were therefore best situated to both participate and aid in this political transformation. By not considering this option, the Young Turks not only signaled that they did not envision the minorities as a part of their future composition of the Ottoman state, but also excluded their revolutionary potential from the outset.

The Young Turks also condemned⁷³ the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution and wanted to avoid such violence through excluding the masses from participation and employing instead a constitutionalist military take-over from the top. Indeed, not only was there the precedent of the initial success of the Young Ottoman movement in 1876, but the Meiji Restoration in Japan in 1868⁷⁴ also demonstrated what an enlightened nationalist leader was capable of. In addition, the Russian Revolution of 1905 demonstrated⁷⁵ the significance of sustaining a dedicated cadre of extra-legal organizations "where a skilled martyr-assassin (*fedai*) was more effective than 10,000 revolutionaries;" intelligentsia for inciting the masses; protest strategies such as withholding taxes. Sohrabi conjectures⁷⁶ that it was from the Russians that the Young Turks might have thought about recruiting and organizing a cadre of secret military revolutionaries; "if we strive like Russians, it won't be long before we see even the Sultan's aides-de-camp among our supporters." The Young Turks were also heartened by the tax rebellions that occurred in Anatolia between 1906 and 1907 among the Turkish population.⁷⁷

⁶⁹ See Nader Sohrabi "Global Wars, Local Actors: What the Young Turks Knew About Other Revolutions and Why It Mattered." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44/1 (2002): 45-79.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

It was as a consequence of this trajectory that the Young Turks editorship in general and Ahmed Rıza in particular finally issued⁷⁸ an uncharacteristic appeal to the military officers on 15 October 1907 concerning the necessity to organize villagers into rebellious units of ten to fifteen members. This model had been suggested by the Greek and Albanian bands that had been so successful against the Ottomans: if every province had eight to ten such bands under a commanding officer, then they could mobilize and resist the government. Hence for the first time the Young Turks advocated mass mobilization and military action. This method was then officially sanctioned at the second December 1907 second congress of the Ottoman opposition parties where "a variety of violent and passive methods were recommended: armed resistance, inviting the public to a general uprising, propagandizing within the army, strikes, and refusing to pay taxes."⁷⁹ Hence what had happened was that the CUP had provided an organizational umbrella for the military officers. What they had not counted on, however, was the consequence: the military assumed both the leadership and eventually ownership of the entire movement. When the CUP was dissolved, the only institution that was to transform intact into the Turkish nation-state intact was the military. What was lost in this political transformation was the lack of any transparency or accountability over the actions of the military as the latter not only defined Turkish modernity and political rights, but claimed ownership over it.

From the onstart, there was tension between the military and civilian wings of the CUP; even though the account above highlights the ideological significance of the CUP branch headed by Ahmed Rıza, the Salonica branch that mostly contained the military officers of the Third Army including Enver and Cemal Pashas as well as the civilians Talat Pasha and Cavid Bey were to become much more prominent in the ensuing CUP reign. There was also a lot of tension among the CUP members about the use of para-military organizations as well as violence in conducting governmental affairs. It was evident that Ahmed Rıza was totally opposed to such practices whereas others had much more flexible stands on the issue.

Upon the declaration of the Constitution, one of the rituals the Young Turk officers engaged in was to have all the military school students take collective oaths of loyalty to the CUP.⁸⁰ Likewise, when CUP member Kazım Nami Duru travels to Edirne he notes⁸¹ that "the officials, teachers and most of the soldiers were members of the CUP. Even though orders were given for soldiers to sever their ties with political organizations, to not engage in politics, the officers still did not stop from being active in

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-6.

⁸⁰ See for instance, the complaints in Ahmet Bedevi Kuran *Harbiye Mektebinde Hürriyet Mücadelesi (Freedom Fight at the War Academy)*. İstanbul: Çeltüt, 1976 and Çerkes Hasan (Amça) *Doğmayan Hürriyet: Bir Devrin İçyüzü 1908-1918 (The Unborn Freedom: Inside Story of an Era 1908-1918)*. İstanbul: Arba, 1958, 1989 edition.

⁸¹ Kazım Nami Duru *İttihat ve Terakki Hatıralarım (My Memoirs of the Union and Progress)*. İstanbul: Sucuoğlu, 1957, p. 50.

such organizations." Duru points out at another point in his memoir⁸² that the CUP realized the problem with the engagement of soldiers in politics and tried to legally prevent it to no avail:

[A]s soon as the Chamber of Deputies convened, we wanted them to promulgate a law about soldiers resigning from the army. In reality [however], some of our friends retained their ranks and were being appointed as governors, mutasarrifs and kaymakams. And as if that was not sufficient, there were some who as if it were a privilege to be a member of the CUP [and therefore] tried and received posts by becoming affiliated.

Two other contemporaneous accounts confirm this observation. Çerkes Hasan (Amça) relates⁸³ the utter chaos that set in upon the declaration of the constitution among the ranks of the military which he observed firsthand as a military cadet as follows:

[D]iscipline was in total bankruptcy in the army. Committees comprising of young officers were making pashas they could not have reached ... swear oaths of allegiance ... oath of loyalty to the constitution and honorable service to the state... it was certain that we had lost the axis of our movement... Neither the judiciary nor the administrative apparatus worked decently... and the notices of the CUP had not yet acquired the necessary authority... these notices were more like requests... on low-ranked officers who had played the most significant role of the revolution.

Indeed, it was quite common for conflicts over the control of authority between the military and the civilians to emerge such as in the instance⁸⁴ when a first lieutenant who became a member of the CUP in Langaza near Salonica cautioned the public prosecutor to leave the small town. When the latter, falsely thinking that he actually represented the law and the state in the small town on behalf of the government refused to do so, he was physically thrown out by the soldier. As with the case noted above, the *sheik-ul-islam* Cemalettin Efendi also complained in his memoir⁸⁵ that not only that the entire Ottoman army "all the way to the general staff" was under the political influence of the CUP, but the CUP would not even permit the investigation into who was responsible for the Balkan defeats. In addition, the CUP retired all middle and lower level military officials and replaced them with those who had total allegiance to the CUP. What is very significant here is the setting of the precedent of the lack of accountability: by preventing the investigation into the reasons for the failure of the

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁸³ (Amça) *Ibid.*, pp. 42-3.

⁸⁴ (Amça) *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸⁵ Cemalettin Efendi, *Ibid.*, pp. 117, 120, 129.

Ottoman military, the CUP was setting a precedent to obfuscate both the transparency as well as the accountability of the military.

Indeed, the expansive boundaries of political action that the Ottoman military was able to draw for itself in not only determining the course of events for the present and the future not only for its own institution, but also for the Ottoman state becomes most evident in the *Bab-ı Ali* Raid of 10 January 1913 under the command of Enver Pasha and his group of para-military fighters. A close reading of this incident reveals how the military symbolically monopolizes the right to speak on behalf of the populace from then on. Rauf Orbay recounts⁸⁶ the incident of how Enver Pasha stormed the Chamber of Deputies right after the Balkan wars and had the CUP thus assume full dictatorial power through a government coup setting a precedent by pointing out that the Minister of War Nazım Pasha [who was ultimately shot and killed by the para-military fighter and Special Organization member Yakup Cemil] was extremely upset

[B]ecause Enver and Talat Beys had promised [Nazım Pasha] that they would not actively interfere in politics during the [Balkan] war and he in turn had opposed the Interior Minister Reşit Bey [when the latter] had decided to pursue a tough policy against the Unionists stating he had gotten their personal guarantee and there should be no worries. [Thus when the Pasha yelled at them and Yakup Cemil shot him from his temple, Enver shouted at him: 'We did not come here to kill anyone, how could you do such a thing!']... Enver then went to the Grand Vezir Kamil Pasha and stated: 'The nation does not want you, resign'⁸⁷. Kamil Pasha wrote a note stating that he was resigning upon the request of 'some members of the military' to which Enver had the word 'populace' added on.⁸⁸

What is very significant here is that Enver Pasha took it upon himself so easily to speak and act on behalf of the nation: even though he was indeed acting together with a group of military officers, he nevertheless legitimated his actions by claiming that they were on behalf of the 'populace.' Rauf Orbay too noted that⁸⁹ "the era of the direct control of the CUP over the administration of the country started [from then on]. It was preferred that the country was administered not through the laws issued by the Chamber Assembly of Deputies, but through governmental decrees issued by the authority of the Committee of Ministers." What had been sacrificed by the military was transparency of action and accountability on the eve of World War I. This probably has been and still is the hidden meaning and unstated historical legacy of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution.

Violence in the 1908 Young Turk Revolution

Even though the Young Turk publications had initially stated that they opposed the mob violence of the French Revolution and mass participation, the 1908 Young Turk

⁸⁶ Orbay, *Ibid.*, pp. 292-3.

⁸⁷ The actual Turkish words are '*Millet sizi istemiyor, istifa ediniz.*'

⁸⁸ The actual Turkish words here are '*bir kısım ordu mensupları*' and '*ahali*'.

⁸⁹ Orbay, *Ibid.*, p. 297.

did nevertheless eventually encourage mass participation and certainly ended up not only condoning, but also administering violence yet never in public. And this is a very significant difference in the employment of violence by sultan Abdülhamid II as opposed to the Young Turks. During the era of the sultans, violence, for instance violence against the minorities, was publicly visible to all and at least engaged the whole social body as people took to the streets and victims were punished either by the security forces of the sultan or the people took justice to their own hands. Nevertheless, these acts of violence still occurred within the body politic of the empire in that the Ottoman state still owned and contained it. When one turns to the Young Turk era, however, the same violence starts to become hidden away as it is performed in secret by para-military organizations or outside of towns and cities: hence it becomes extremely difficult for the critics of the Young Turks to pinpoint and challenge them on what they are doing as they start conducting all their violence in secret: as it is no longer officially, publicly owned and recognized, it cannot be challenged and countered. People have argued that this pattern was predicated on the secret nature of the CUP which had been used to acting in secret and therefore kept on conducting government affairs in the same pattern. Yet, such behavior destroys the moral and ethical fabric of society and that is exactly what has happened and there have been no standards that the state could claim to uphold: it is therefore no accident that the Turkish secular state project is currently in crisis.

The justification provided by the CUP members for the employment of violence was either predicated on nationalism or they were dismissed as acts taken upon individual initiative. A case in point is Kazım Nami Duru who has no qualms⁹⁰ in pointing out that right after the proclamation of the Constitution, "there were indeed many assassinations that did take place." Yet, Duru however justifies and thus normalizes such violence by pointing out, in a very matter-of-fact manner, that these murders "had not been ordered by [CUP], but were undertaken by the members upon their own initiative [and therefore, it seems, there ought to be no guilt to be attached to anyone.] Duru cannot resist commenting on the dispensibility of the victims by stating "but I would lie if I said anyone was saddened by any of these deaths."⁹¹ Duru does not seem to at all realize that by permitting its members to take justice into their own hands, CUP has actually enabled, made it acceptable, legitimized and normalized murder. In addition, his comment demeaning and dismissing the value and worth of the victim then further condones the individual acts of murder and destruction committed by the CUP members. This reasoning and this method is a Unionist legacy that still persists today. Yet, the memoirs of Unionists are filled with such accounts which they narrate with great glee as the murdered all somehow seem justified for 'their cause.' Here, for instance, is the narration⁹² of Başkatıpzade Ragıp Bey, a member of the Special

⁹⁰ Duru, *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁹¹ The actual Turkish words are "*Fakat bunlara acıyan bulundu desem yalan söylemiş olurum.*"

⁹² Başkatıpzade Ragıp Bey, *Tarih-i Hayatım: Kayserili Başkatıpzade Mülazım Ragıp Bey'in Tahsil, Harp, Esaret, Kurtuluş Anıları (The History of My Life: the Memoirs of Lieutenant*

Organization, who proudly announces that there was within the CUP a tradition established of holding secret meetings where the prominent members of the central committee decided on many issues concerning both the government and the state; these issues including such ones as taking down the current government... He continues⁹³ to describe the role of such groups within the CUP:

[A]s these youth had been among the first to enroll in CUP before Constitutional rule, they had played a great role in the declaration of the 1908 Constitutional Revolution and [therefore] carried out very difficult duties that required a lot of responsibility. Even though many were very young, they put their lives into danger to partake in adventures for the CUP, for the revolution and, after the revolution, even though they did not become very visible and did not have their names much uttered in public, had made many sacrifices on behalf of the CUP. Some of these youth had assumed various duties in Arabia, Yemen, Albania, and established party organizations in the toughest places where the populace had been most alienated from such ideas. They had succeeded in getting the influence and strength of CUP recognized; some had become martyr-assassins of the CUP, entered into fire and revolution at the most dangerous moments, formed armed bands, and did not shun from sacrificing their lives, themselves!

Indeed, it is the oath of loyalty that the CUP members take exclusively to the organization itself before all else that ultimately destroys the moral and ethical fabric of society and the state. This oath of loyalty is predicated on the belief that the CUP can determine and act upon the interests of the nation better than anyone else. Yet, as Hegel and Arendt have demonstrated, as there is no way to prove who is more patriotic and virtuous, this hallow ideology can identify enemies, organize, turn violent and in the name of patriotism extremely quickly.

The CUP leader Ahmed Rıza was able to observe how the CUP started to turn violent; he noted⁹⁴ that "the CUP lost its rudder and began to change colors [like a chameleon]. I started to reproach the leaders of the CUP and advised them, but it did not produce an effect. Autocracy and weakness for self-interest were too sweet. They started to threaten me instead." The second series of incidents after the random murders taken by CUP members "upon their own private initiative" that Duru discussed above – for which they were not caught and tried – were those of political opponents, especially journalists who criticized them. Indeed, as they could not tolerate criticism, they decided to quell these through assassinations executed by members of their para-military organization. Journalist Burhan Felek, upon remembering those days, notes⁹⁵ that:

Başkatıpzade Ragıp Bey of Kayseri comprising Education, War, Captivity and Liberation), Ankara: Kebikeç, 1996, pp. 315, 317.

⁹³ Ragıp Bey, *Ibid.*, pp. 168-9.

⁹⁴ Rıza, *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁹⁵ Felek, *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 55.

[My one memory] is that of 'the assassination of the owner of the *Serbesti* newspaper Hasan Fehmi Bey on top of the same bridge...there was no doubt that the murder was political and the murderers were Unionists...[i]n those days demonstrations were called meetings; they rarely involved walking. Mostly people gathered somewhere and shouted about...we called marches demonstrations as well...A meeting occurred every day at every place. The CUP was at first was liked for bringing freedom to the country and also feared, mixed with respect, as its members [being secret] were not public knowledge; yet when it started killing its opponents, matters turned upside down and there started almost a general hatred toward the CUP...Whoever wanted wrote and spoke against the Unionists. They too had strong pens like Hüseyin Cahid Bey (Yalçın), but found it more practical to kill their opponents.

Refik Halid Karay also confirms⁹⁶ that the three journalists, Hasan Fehmi, Ahmet Samim and Zeki Bey were assassinated by the CUP. Ahmet Emin Yalman describes⁹⁷ in his memoirs how he assassination of the journalist Hasan Fehmi on 5 April 1909 caused an uproar at the capital as a hundred thousand people attended his funeral and condemned the CUP which was behind the assassination. Likewise, the journalist Ahmet Samim Bey was assassinated by the CUP on 9-10 June 1910, and the third journalist so shot was Zeki Bey murdered on 11 July 1911. Not only were none of the murderers caught, but there was ample evidence that the police and guards in the vicinity were sent elsewhere right before the attacks.

Also significant, in addition to the murder of the Was Minister Nazım Pasha during the *Bab-ı Ali* Raid, was the assassination of Mahmud Shevket Pasha. Even though this murder was not conducted directly by the CUP, they had nevertheless known about the plot and had purposefully not taken the necessary precautions to prevent it. Mahmud Shevket Pasha's diary contains many entries revealing⁹⁸ his extremely low esteem of the CUP leaders and his impatience with their corrupt ways. On 4 June 1913, for instance, Cafer Pasha and Talat Bey come to visit him (Mahmud Shevket 1988: 184-5) and ask him to dismiss someone they are having followed merely for being a brother of one of sultan Abdülhamid's grand vezirs. Shevket Pasha says to Talat Pasha: "you cannot have people illegally followed in such a manner" and refuses the request. In

⁹⁶ Refik Halid (Karay) *Bir Ömür Boyunca (During a Lifetime)*. İstanbul: İletişim, 1964, 1996 edition, p. 58.

⁹⁷ Ahmet Emin Yalman *Yakın Tarihte Gördüklerim ve Geçirdiklerim (What I Saw and Experienced in Recent History)*. İstanbul: Pera. Two volumes, 1970, 1997 edition, pp. 100, 124, and 197.

⁹⁸ Mahmud Şevket Pasha *Sadrazam ve Harbiye Nazırı Mahmud Şevket Paşa'nın Günlüğü (The Diary of the Grand Vezier and Minister of War Mahmud Shevket Pasha)*. İstanbul: Arba, 1987, pp. 184-5.

relation to the assassination of Mahmud Shevket Pasha, Burhan Felek notes⁹⁹ that he had then been in prison and even though "who had killed the Pasha emerged very quickly, I learned during the few days I was at the Bekirağa prison that the Unionists had knowingly turned a blind eye to the Pasha's assassination."

Yet it was with the advent of World War I that the violence the CUP and the Special Organization practiced became more systematic and the massacres now committed on behalf of radical ideals were proudly narrated in memoir after memoir. In all instances, all murder, all acts of taking justice into one's own hands and destroying humans' lives was justified in the name of nationalism. One such memoir belongs to Fuat Balkan who states¹⁰⁰

Being a *komitadji* is not, as some think, committing acts of robbery and plunder. Just the opposite, [it] is the most extreme form of patriotism! And the *komitadji* is a person who sacrifices everything, even his life, for the cause of the fatherland, who does not forsake anything, and who has renounced his whole being from head to toe. When it is necessary for the interests of his country and nation, he abandons compassion, if it is necessary to burn something, he burns, if there is a need to destroy, he destroys it all! He does not leave standing a stone on top of another one or a head on top of a torso!!

It is indeed first the justification and legitimation, and then the pride derived from murder that enables Balkan not only normalize and condone violence, but to valorize it. This has become the other clandestine Young Turk legacy to the Turkish Republic where such acts of destruction in the name of self-proclaimed patriotism still persist.

As the CUP starts to undertake assassinations to establish control, Çerkes Hasan Amça, who was once such a CUP assassin recounts¹⁰¹ how he chanced upon one assassination where he observed a young child screaming after his now dead father and then reflected on the mentality of assassins:

Those days, we carried the groundless fear that we could stop or change the course of history with a single bullet; the assassin executed this murder thinking that with this action of his, he hoped he could save his fatherland from a grave danger and his country from a suffocating oppression...[When I wanted to debate if this indeed was the case] none of my friends from the CUP wanted to do so, they literally treated such a request as insolence and effrontery, as an attack on the rights of the central committee of the CUP that was incapable of making mistakes, literally as insolence and effrontery...Only one friend...Hasan Ali Çerkes...agreed with the debates and objections I

⁹⁹ Felek, *Ibid.*, pp. 234-5.

¹⁰⁰ Fuat Balkan İlk Türk Komitacısı Fuat Balkan'ın Hatıraları (The Memoirs of the First Turkish Komitadji [Underground Revolutionary Activist] Fuat Balkan). İstanbul: Arma, 1998, p. 10.

¹⁰¹ Amça, *Ibid.*, pp. 66-7.

raised for days... only to lose his life in the end with a single shot to his head. The majority... like Yakup Cemil for instance... thought the moral responsibility of such a job belonged [not to those who executed the decision] but to those who made it. [If] the sin went to the decision makers, what was it to them?... They did nothing [other than] eliminate someone who presented a danger to the country and the fatherland.

This description captures the frame of mind of the CUP assassins who had no compunction to execute the orders even when it could have possibly meant massacring innocent people. They did so because they decided the moral responsibility laid with the decision makers and not with them, the executors, and they also fundamentally believed that what they did was for the good of the country. This description captures at the most fundamental level the banality of evil as it became practiced in the Ottoman Empire by CUP members.

When such violence was applied by the Young Turks against the Ottoman Armenians, for instance, the rhetoric of some of the Young Turks leaders who were physicians employed medical metaphors based on a language of exclusion, of purge, specifically of getting rid of tumors and scorpions. As a consequence of this focus on excision, the ensuing violence against them was also covered, veiled and hidden as it occurred not within the cities, but outside by members of bands the activities of which were purposefully unacknowledged by the state.

Former Turkish President, CUP as well as a Special Organization member Celal Bayar recounts¹⁰² in his memoirs, for instance, how the head of the Special Organization, Eşref Kuşçubaşı, did indeed refer to elements to be removed as 'tumors.'

From the moment our entry to the war became unavoidable, the first business was the cause of *cleaning the internal tumors* [emphasis mine]. The precautions concentrated in three areas, military, political, and administrative-economic. In addition to the standard military precautions, political ones were predicated on appointing the right responsible [CUP] officials to achieve unity and harmony in the politics of administration, prevent the provocation, achieve the *destruction of the negative and harmful elements* [emphasis mine] on the administrative mechanism, and accomplish political stability.

Hence humans are quickly dehumanized and transformed into elements to be controlled, pacified and eliminated. A similar portrayal is presented by Ahmet Refik¹⁰³ in relation to a CUP Istanbul deputy who depicts minorities as 'snakes and scorpions.'

[At the advent of 1915]...the Istanbul deputy [of the CUP] who was in Eskişehir even though the Dardanelles threat had now passed,

¹⁰² Mahmut Celal Bayar 1967 *Ben de Yazdım (I Too Wrote)*. İstanbul: Baha, 1967, Volume 5, p. 1578.

¹⁰³ Ahmet Refik, *Ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

delivered a conference where he likened the Christian elements among the Turks [of the empire] to snakes and scorpions. The Christians who had paid money to attend the conference that night left cursing him. The following morning everyone pronounced his politics shameful.

It is no accident that so many of the Young Turk leaders involved in the Armenian massacres were physicians in that their sanitized hygienic vocabulary derived from the Enlightenment whereby "all that was dark was to be brought under scrutiny," "all deviances removed" and, as a consequence, in a Foucauldian move, all society would "form a single, smooth surface with everyone visible and all in conformity to law under constant surveillance."¹⁰⁴

In discussing who participated in the massacres from among the populace, Ahmet Refik noted¹⁰⁵ that in Eskişehir

[t]he populace did not participate in the atrocities of the deportation; it was 'some officials, the gendarmerie and the police' that exercised the most cruelty to Armenians. In many places, the officers of the regular army had not gotten their hands stained by this bloody execution. The populace was very saddened. Especially the massacres in the villages of the Anatolian provinces varied depending on the abilities and murderous inclinations of the governors at particular locations. The ones who died in Eskişehir were victims of the cruelty Talat inflicted through the deportations; no one here from among the populace, gendarmerie or even the police had killed anyone. It was said that the gravest calamities had occurred in Bursa and Ankara. The ones who had arrived from Ankara narrate sorrowfully how the houses had been blockaded and hundreds of Armenian families were loaded onto carriages and dumped in streams. Many women witnessing these atrocities had lost their mind. The houses of the wealthy Armenians were purchased and, as soon as the official document for the transference of property was issued, the monies were forcefully and cruelly taken back.

Popular violence also inverted the law by turning the hierarchical order upside down so that equality before the law turned into equality behind the law whereby letting everyone participate equally in the formulation and execution of the law. Of course, this equal participation in violence also spread the guilt so that many then had to share the silence of their crimes.

Another similar description again by Ahmet Refik captures¹⁰⁶ the bravado by which one such CUP martyr-assassin Çerkes Ahmet narrates how he unlawfully committed massacres and murdered two members of the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies:

¹⁰⁴ Singer, *Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹⁰⁵ Ahmet Refik, *Ibid.*, pp. 178-9.

¹⁰⁶ Ahmet Refik, *Ibid.*, pp. 174-6.

Çerkes Ahmet appeared together with lieutenant Halil, both [were] leaders of armed bands within the Special Organization; the latter's infamy was better known for he had routed the Armenians in Artvin when the armed band of the deputy Sudi Bey had entered Ardahan. I had heard this tragedy when I was still in Ulukışla...[I wanted him to recount these bloody events personally and asked him what he did in the Eastern provinces] He crossed his high-topped boots and, blowing his cigarette smoke yonder, said: 'Hey brother, this situation hurts my honor. I served this fatherland. Go see for yourself, I turned Van and its vicinity into soil [as pure as that] of Kabah [in Mecca which is considered Muslim holy land].¹⁰⁷ Today, you will not come across a single Armenian there...[When asked about the Ottoman deputies Zohrap and others that he murdered, he replies] Come on, haven't you heard? I bumped all of them off¹⁰⁸. He blew away the smoke of his cigarette and continued while straightening out his moustache with his left hand: 'They had left Aleppo; we came across them on the road. I immediately surrounded their carriage. They realized they were about to be bumped off.' Varteks said: 'All right, Ahmet Bey, you are doing this to us, but what will you do to the Arabs? They are not content with you either.' 'That is none of your business, you son of a gun,'¹⁰⁹ I replied, and blew his brains out with a Mauser bullet. Then I caught Zohrap, took him under my feet and crushed his head.'

This account not only captures the patronizing and demeaning demeanor of the CUP assassin brigand toward the Ottoman deputies he murders, but also his total lack of feeling and compassion of the hundreds he has likewise previously massacred. And he has the compunction to proudly announce that he did all in the service of the fatherland even though there was no such explicit public order ever issued.

This section has indicated how the analysis of violence in the French Revolution has provided additional insights into the analysis of violence ensuing from the 1908 Young Turk Revolution. The most significant meaning as well as legacy of the Young Turk violence has been its normalization and even valorization into Turkish society; this translation has continued to corrode the society's moral and ethical fabric.

From the Young Turks and the CUP toward the Present

Even though there is indeed a beginning point for the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, the historical ambiguity of the end point still persists. Yet, either the CUP leaders themselves or at least their descendants who are still wit us certainly wanted both the meaning and the legacy of their Revolution to persist in 2008. After all, Arif Cemil

¹⁰⁷ The Turkish term is 'Kabe toprağına çevirdim.'

¹⁰⁸ The Turkish term he uses is 'gebertmek.'

¹⁰⁹ The Turkish term employed is 'kerata.'

Denker notes¹¹⁰ that at the end of World War I, CUP in general and the CUP leader Enver Pasha in particular believed that there was no need to sign an armistice and that "we would be forced to continue the war... where it would be possible to set up defenses by going to Anatolia, and especially to the eastern provinces" which is exactly what happened.

Likewise in the interview Denker conducted¹¹¹ with Talat Pasha's wife in Germany after the Pasha's assassination reveal that his happiest day was finding out about the Dardanelles victory when he told her:

Hayriye, we have such plans... If you only knew what is going to happen on the day we win this war... We will see the establishment of a vast world conqueror Turkish state and the Turkish nation will reach the full freedom it so deserves... The reforms will continue, all the way to the Republic...

Even though this of course may have been wished, Talat Pasha's wife nevertheless, also states that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had stated¹¹² when they met that "had it not been for the laudable services of Talat Pasha, we could not have actualized this revolution."

The legacy of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution today should perhaps be pondered in the context of this final concluding quotation by Kazım Nami Duru:¹¹³

If the Unionists had been bad people and traitors, would Great Atatürk befriend our teacher Naki who was among the founders of the Ottoman Freedom Society that joined the Union and Progress in Salonica, Mithat Şükrü Bleda, Edip Servet Tör, the İzmir responsible clerk Celal Bayar, Eyüp Sabri of Ohri and finally myself to the Turkish Grand National Assembly and befriended us?

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¹¹⁰ Arif Cemil (Denker) *Sürgün Hayatlar: Arif Cemil Bey'in Hatıraları (Exiled Lives: Memoirs of Arif Cemil Bey)*. İstanbul: Emre, 2005, pp. 27-8.

¹¹¹ Denker, *Ibid.*, pp. 201.

¹¹² Denker, *Ibid.*, pp. 203-4.

¹¹³ Duru, *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

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