

# Reforms in the Field of Education During the Period of Sultan Abdulhamid II and Intended Youth/Human Typology to be Trained (The Last Period in the Ottoman Empire)

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The current study focuses on the educational environment which occurred in the period of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), and pioneered and established the background for the Republican period, the desired type of individuals to be raised, and the knowledge-power relations having an effect there upon. This study is based on document review on the basis of the qualitative research method. The period of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) is marked with its unique features in the Ottoman Empire, undergoing a progressive weakening particularly following the expansion of nation-state concept invented by the French Revolution and military failures. The study analyzes the reflections of determinant knowledge-power relations of the period in question over education, and examines the social changes. While performing this, the study also discusses ideas, political developments, youth-led movements, and domestic and international political structure of the state, contributing to the mentioned period and the reflections on social life. The findings of the study reveal that the educational paradigms of the Abdulhamid II period and the human training principle were effected and supported by ideas created nationally and internationally as well as political and social movements. The fact that neo-nationalist/nationalist paradigms marking the period, improved and rooted step by step towards the republic as from the period of the late Ottoman Empire and became the driving force to shape the educational understandings is justified.

*Keywords:* the period of Abdulhamid II, knowledge-power, surveillance (panopticon), late Ottoman savings, paramilitary education

## Introduction

The fact that the period of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), pioneered and established the makings of the Republican period, is of high importance not just for the empire's history, but also for the history of the establishment of the Turkish Republic immediately after the collapse of the empire. The educational environment formed in this period—as well as the desired type of individual, youth to be trained, and knowledge-power relations thereupon—features remarkable implementations and developments. The period of Selim III (1789-1809), with educational paradigms reinforced by state-run renewal attempts, has an important place in the Ottoman Empire, undergoing a progressive deterioration following the expansion of a nation-state concept created by the French Revolution (1789) and particularly military failures. However, featuring the

unique characteristics, the period of Abdulhamid II—together with its social structure, innovative attempts, autocracy and surveillance network, and effective political/intellectual movements of the period—has proved distinctive effects for the new Turkish Republic to be established afterwards as well as for the imperial history. Likewise, the educational understanding of this period, educational movements, the human training principle, and the influence of power over all such perceptions—along with the long-standing innovation attempts in the field of education—are of vital importance in terms of reflecting the late moves of the empire in the presence of developments and dynamism rising both inside and outside of the country. Analyzing this period shall contribute to reviewing the effects of global and national improvements over education and examining the recent power-education relations besides offering an insight into the first years of the Turkish Republic.

### Methodology

This paper aims at conducting “theoretical analytical research”. Theoretical analytical research is a research model which enables the determination and analysis of current situation. Thus, the research is a qualitative study. Document review, which is one of the qualitative data gathering methods, is preferred in accordance with the qualitative research design to achieve the analytical analysis in this paper. The question of what are the results of educational understandings in the period of Abdulhamid II and their reflections upon the Republican period educational system is attempted to be answered as a sub-problem.

### Educational Reforms in Ottomans Before the Period of Abdulhamid II

When the historical process of the Ottoman Empire is examined, it is seen that education was considered as a weapon against the recession of the empire, highly influenced by global developments and experienced modernization and centralization due to the effects of such developments. During this period, in which the conventional structure of Ottoman education began to change, the political power, innovations, and changes had significant influence on the system. However, in this period in the multi-national Ottoman Empire, one can encounter the conflict among substantial movements of thought, both developed by such a multi-national structure inside and influenced by continuously changing political developments around the world. These movements of thought including “Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism, Westernism, and Turkism” have a significant place in Turkish intellectual life today.

The fundamental principles of education in the empire were first discussed in 1838 by the political power under a bill (draft) issued by the Meclis-i Umur’u Nafia (Council of Public Works). The bill describes education as a factor leading humans to higher levels of welfare, helping them reach a content life and contributing to the development of the state. The bill also refers to the fact that, in the past, Ottomans were ahead of their contemporaries in the field of science and technology, however, as time served on, they disregarded such issues and envisaged “each child between the ages of five or six to go to school; teachers to instruct as per classroom method and finally a Ministry of Education to be established” (İbnü-ş-Şeyh Nâfi, 1338). This report, which reveals the fundamental problems of general education, points to a reform period to begin in the Ottoman education system. Thanks to that report laid out by the Council of Public Works, Mekatib-i Rusdiye Nezareti (Ministry of Secondary Schools) was created within the Evkaf-ı Humayun Nezareti (Organization Responsible for the Administration of Foundations) on March 11, 1839, and Esad Efendi was appointed to the ministry (Bilim, 1998, p. 19; Unat, 1964, p. 132). Immediately after those developments, educational measures taken following the *Royal Edict of Reform* (1845 Hatt-ı Humayunu) were found to be

more influential. Furthermore, a council consisting of seven members “having a good grasp of judicial, military, and administrative knowledge” was established under a decree by Sublime Porte (Babiâli) to investigate the available schools and provide the conditions to open new ones on March of the same year (Lewis, 1970, p. 113).

In the essence of all those developments, the main idea and target motivating Ottoman Empire to execute regulations in the education system was “integrating all citizens belonging to different religions and races of the state under the umbrella of Ottomanism and creating an Ottoman unity by training all of them together” (Deringil, 1998). However, Western-educated intellectuals also have some voice in this period, insisting on a secular education isolated from religious effects (Muhammedi, 2006, p. 29; p. 30).

As from the Tanzimat reform period, France and the French system guided Ottomans in many institutions, particularly in terms of educational reforms. Within the framework of reforms initiated in the field of education, Ali and Fuad Pasha—Tanzimat period rulers—invited Jean Victor Duruy, the Minister of Education of France at that time to Istanbul in order to reform the Ottoman education system and learn more about the French education system. In the light of information he gathered as a result of his examinations, Duruy recommended the rulers of that period for the sake of modernization of the educational system to open schools at every level, place special importance to secondary and higher education, and above all ensure that every child keeps going to school. Following his visit, France sent a diplomatic note to the Ottoman Empire on February 22, 1867, to implement the reforms guaranteed under the *Imperial Edict of Reorganization and Royal Edict of Reform* (Tanzimat and Islahat Royal Decree). The educational reforms, of which France urged to be immediately put into effect, were issued by Jean Victor Duruy. The report suggests “the re-organization of Ottoman educational system, opening of new schools, maintenance and encouragement of Christian schools, approval of coeducation and establishment of new libraries for the benefit of every citizen across the country” (Alkan, 2010). France suggested Ottoman Empire to have a non-formal and integrated education system with all these reforms (Fortna, 2002, p. 132). Ali Pasha, Fuat Pasha, and Safvet Pasha—statesmen of that period—also supported the French offer of reorganization of the Ottoman education system (Bilim, 1998, p. 30; p. 31). Hence, based on the project offered by Duruy, *Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi* (Regulation for Public Education) was enacted in 1869, which is an organized and detailed structural change came into existence with the Regulation for Public Education in 1869. Regulation for Public Education also defined the basic rules in education, such as the age of the children who had to be enrolled to schools, the financial management of all levels of schools, the duration of each level of schools, the curricula of all levels of schools, the general responsibilities of teachers, the responsibilities of the departments within the ministry, and so it laid the foundations for modern day educational institutions (Galatasaray High School is also a product of this initiative) (Berkes, 2011, p. 237; Şanal, 2011). As can be seen above, all reforms and education regulation lead to negative effects for Ottoman Empire. It encouraged the non-Muslim population taking part in rebellions affairs, and at the end of the century, this population try to get their rights and seek their freedom by the help of education (Sanal, 2011, pp. 372-403).

Such initiatives of the Ottoman Empire, which faced the reflections of development and innovations beginning as of the 17th century on modernization of education, mostly focused on the recovery of the empire which was undergoing a decline, in the field of military and policy against the West. Thus, educational reforms first started to be employed in military institutions and military engineering schools. However, the main feature of Tanzimat period lasting from 1839 to 1876 was to imitate the West. Most Ottoman intellectuals showed

admiration of the West; compared Europe to their own society; and held the institutions and life style there, superior and in esteem (Kuran, 2007, p. 23).

### **Education in the Period of Abdulhamid II**

Such renewal efforts in the field of education also continued in the period of Abdulhamid II and despite the financial distress, education was perceived as a public service that the state itself had to handle. In the period of Abdulhamid II, imperial surveillance over the education system was partially ensured by laying a strong foundation for the Ottoman education system and putting Regulation for Public Education dated 1869 into effect in all its parts and so by setting up a substructure.

Abdulhamid II, who came to the throne following the deposition of Murat V, who remained on the throne for a very short period of time due to his health problems after Mahmud II died, was supported by Mithat Pasha (one of the frontrunners of 1876 May Revolution conducted with the participation of especially military college students in the period of Sultan Abdulaziz) and his group on condition that a “constitution” would be enacted immediately, recommendations of ministers would be taken into account and the Sultan to ensure not to interfere with the state affairs of his own free will. When Abdulhamid II succeeded to the throne, *Kanun-i Esasi* (Basic Law) was declared on 23rd December, 1876, but since it granted the Sultan the right “to prorogue the parliament indefinitely at any time he desired” (Zurcher, 1993), constitutional monarchy regime started in some ways. The first constitutional period, which was actually short-lived because of the Russo-Turkish War, gave way to an exact monarchy regime since it allowed Sultan Abdulhamid to prorogue the parliament indefinitely. In this period, the Sultan began to have the powers of Babîali again and was able to keep hold of decision-making authority in many issues (Berkes, 2011, pp. 316-333; Akyıldız, 2009, pp. 167-168).

Sultan Abdulhamid II, acting as the caliph of all Muslims around the world, considered ethnic identity (nationality) and patriotism as the major threats towards Islam and the Ottoman Empire and rejected them. Abdulhamid gave the title of “caliph” or “head” of all Muslims special prominence to eliminate the threats aiming at dissolution of Muslims and encouraged the youth “to attach priority to belief and love of caliph and push patriotism into the background” (Karpas, 2010, p. 27). The primary objective here was to fight with separatist movements and reinforce particularly the ideological foundations of the Sultan over the Muslim population. Caliph-Sultan intended to use both his political and religious identity as a uniting factor. Since non-Muslims living on Ottoman territories in the 19th century were influenced by world-embracing nationalist discourse and tended to separate from the empire and establish a nation-state of their own, the Ottoman Empire, coming to the edge of disintegration due to such separatist trends, tried to unite the Muslim population on hand under a sole idea—the dream of Islamic unity. A union for Muslim nations was attempted to be established against the Christian nations dissatisfied with the Tanzimat period, by granting privileged titles to the leaders of Albanian, Kurdish, and Arab peoples (Berkes, 2011, p. 270).

In this period, which witnessed the ever-increasing effects of Western moves over the empire, Sultan Abdulhamid took the first place to struggle most in eliminating those moves. Central authority had to compete with opposition groups within the country and Western-backed foreigners as well as minority groups; and threats coming from outside of the country. Abdulhamid II refused to imitate the Western system and tried to transform modernization attempts into the Ottoman way of understanding by adapting this system to the Islamic heritage of the empire (Fortna, 2002, pp. 117-118). Abdulhamid II considered especially secondary education as the most significant stage and the educational bureaucracy of the empire particularly preferred to

eliminate the deficiencies in this regard. In some ways, Abdulhamid II used every means available against the Western powers and threats. Education stood as the building block of this resistance. Education, as a tool of social reformation and social discipline, has always been the determinant and practice of all reforms and state-run policies.

Likewise, the number of schools built within the imperial boundaries during the reign of Abdulhamid II was estimated to reach up to 10,000 (Fortna, 2002, p. 130). The most spectacular achievement of Abdulhamid II was the considerable increase in the number of both schools and students. A considerable increase in higher education was also achieved in this period (Lewis, 1970, p. 179). Those schools were not only just in Istanbul, but also in the other provinces of the country. High schools were especially launched in towns in this period (Ergin, 1977, p. 3). Abdulhamid II accepted education as a functional tool and perceived the concept of education as “the institution that would ensure the reproduction of his power and create a solid ground for it” (Alkan, 2010, pp. 298-319). Therefore, education had turned out to be a frequently used tool in transferring the official ideology. In this period, an increase of 7% was achieved in the schooling rate. When Abdulhamid II succeeded to the throne, there were four colleges, four teacher’s training schools for boys, 253 secondary schools, 18,490 primary schools, and one private school in the Ottoman Empire; however, at the end of the Abdulhamid II period, the number of schools across the country increased by 619 secondary schools (74 of which were for girls), 109 high schools, 32 teacher’s training schools for boys, and about 5,000 primary schools (Alkan, 1996, p. 172; Oytun, 2002, p. 88). Teacher’s training schools had well-defined statutory rules and orders which contribute to have well-entertained teachers in the Turkish Republic (Altın, 2011, pp. 277-305).

Sultan Abdulhamid II acted in the same line with his aim of creating a systematic and central education network. In this period, we observe a missionary educational understanding that took charge of influencing the way the younger population thought. The idea of expansion of education in every part of the country was adopted. For this purpose, challenging financial devotions were required. In addition to this, a travelling team of scholars was organized. The European influence was seen on facades of newly-built schools, however, religion-oriented education began to strengthen its presence. Each school had its own mosques and imams (priests). There were religious values and practices, defining how to lead a life for students. Scholars were the decision-makers and implementers over education. Besides, the structure of buildings was designed so to reflect, remind, and strengthen the presence of central authority (Fortna, 2002, p. 177; p. 181).

During the first years of Abdulhamid regime, a secular education policy was adapted, but coming years witnessed the increased religionization in education. Initially, the courses mostly included positive sciences, but later on, the curriculum was predominantly led by moral and religious courses. An education model that prioritized the unifying Islamic consideration was implemented at every level of curriculum and course books. Nomadic as for official ideology and ill-educated Arab, Kurdish, and Albanian children whose presence constituted the primary factor to ensure the Islamic unity within the empire, were trained in Aşiret Mektebi (Imperial School for Tribes) which were the symbols of modernization in the period of Abdulhamid II. Islamic principles, obedience to caliph and sultan, were the major topics taught. Religionization and Islamic rituals were of high importance in the educational system of the school. The first proposal for further religious courses in schools in 1882 made way for gradual addition of religious courses in all curricula of Mekatib-i Umumiyye Nezaretî (general education institutions) (Alkan, 1996, p. 145; p. 278).

Especially during the monarchy period (which was also referred as as “the period of Hamidiye Regiments”), a complete pressure and feared environment prevailed. Course books were under custody and

instructors were forbidden to teach nothing but what was in the books they were given. A secret service including inspectors was established solely for this purpose. Instructors who did not imply to these strict rules were punished by either being appointed to remote towns or by dismissal of public office. The strict administration and measurements employed by the Abdulhamid regime adversely affected the instructors. Instructors close to the dissident activities were consistently under custody of governmental agencies (Somel, 2010, p. 118). Thus, many trainers and intellectuals of the period fled abroad and came back home after the 1908 Revolution. In this period, the Ministry of National Education functioned as a tool for imperial censorship and, in addition, a Commission for Supervision and Examination was established in 1880. By the year 1903, agencies employing censorship drew the attention amongst the ministerial bodies. Central administration applied a continuous surveillance network not only on imperial schools but also on non-Muslim schools. The surveillance networks included libraries, printing houses, and all other culture's institutions. Only the ones who were known for their commitment to the Babiâli were appointed to offices within the Ministry of Education. Annual reports were requested by educational boards each year regarding the situation and problems in the educational system of towns. A broad Hafîyye organization (secret service) was created to check the commitment of officers and their superiors to the state. The organization was granted an unlimited freedom to collect information. Even an agency representing this organization was opened in the capital; an official authority called "Chief Hafîyye" was set up; the organization had its own allocated fund and a broad army of volunteers served under this secret service. Moreover, Bab-ı Ali utilized the complaints and requests from citizens regarding the educational administrations in towns as part of the surveillance network and monitored and evaluated such notices. The new schools served as the initial contact point between the state and the people in a way. In this period, "telegram" services across the empire also contributed to Abdulhamid regime. The Office of Censorship controlled and inspected all articles issued, magazines, and newspapers; even daily newspapers were audited by censors before they were published (Berkes, 2011, pp. 344-348; Tekeli & İlkin 1993, p. 77).

The Sultan asked officers employed under the Ministry of Education to pay special attention to all books and articles to be translated by taking imperial and caliphate positions into account and disapprove the harmful publications and declared dismissal of those who refused to obey such rules (Akyıldız, 2009, p. 178). Furthermore, in spite of political pressure, in this period, direct cultural communications with the West were improved; new literary and intellectual movements of Western origin emerged and developed; and more newspapers and magazines became widespread compared to the Tanzimat period. In newspapers and magazines (the total number of which reached up to 116), foreigners and minorities played a major role as well (Kafadar, 1997, p. 115). The curricula of state schools were renewed with the reforms made in 1880, 1891-1892, and 1904. In this period, new thoughts and movements that emerged between 1840 and 1876 could hardly be seen. This period can also be referred as "the period of 'tyranny'" (Binbaşioğlu, 1995, p. 63). High-ranking scholars were accepted for the membership of Ministry of Education. Commissions constantly emphasized the religious matters and concentrated on such implementations. Furthermore, studies on curriculum change were conducted to double the religious and moral courses in all types of schools from the second grade of primary schools to the school of government. And such change was put into force. Translation of immoral books against the Islamic traditions was banned and disobedient teachers were punished. The purpose of education in this period was clearly to gain the idea of loyalty to individuals through training. Any thought not focusing on the national education and even damaging the idea of commitment to the Ottoman

Empire was kept away from education. In this period, everything was under the surveillance and inspection of the state. Teachers were forced not to lecture anything outside the books and curriculum provided by the state. Noncompliance was considered a punishable offense. The training in schools was based on fear and there was a strict discipline network. Those who did not comply to the rules and regulations were harshly punished. Course books were also strictly inspected. New course books were picked by the government and in response to the Western-lead missionary activities; syllabuses actually included non-religious subjects until 1892 when the first religion courses were added. However, at the end of this process, the government obtained the power to monitor the contents of both the religious courses and the course books used to teach Islam. Islamic knowledge was subjected to the purpose and interests of state (Karpas, 2010, p. 28). Course books published in the period of Abdulhamid II referred to the human type that gets on well with the official ideology, pious, loyal to his state and especially to the Sultan and obeys those values unconditionally. Another significant point that draws attention in terms of course books is the presence of rote-learning based writing and comprehension. Those publications adapted an understanding which never led the students to willfully think and above all rejected inquiry-based learning and did not require student participation.

What was generally intended by the education system in the period of Abdulhamid II was to create an educated class at peace with the official ideology, faithful and loyal to the Sultan through training, and undergoing a political indoctrination process. Expansion of education was rendered possible in the reign of Abdulhamid II by laying a solid foundation for the Ottoman education system resulting in setting up a substructure (Somel, 2010, p. 228). Even though social disciplination policy was implemented in the toughest way possible during the reign of Abdulhamid and a loyal and faithful generation was attempted to be raised, it failed. The efforts to eliminate the ethnic nationalistic ideology by which means to maintain the unity of the empire during the reign of Abdulhamid were blocked by the intellectuals who considered those policies as the cause of inequality between the Muslims and non-Muslims. Furthermore, "Islamist" policies which were followed by Abdulhamid II and reinforced with political and military developments caused discomfort among the people (Evered, 2012, pp. 15-16). Young Turks movement that emerged following this period is one of the concrete indicators of this failure. Moreover, the generations trained under the monarchy regime could not avoid the disintegration of the empire but could achieve to establish the Turkish Republic.

### **The Second Constitutional Period and Post Sultan Abdulhamid II Period**

The monarchy period lasted until 1908 when the movement of the young Turks was to occur and at the end of this period, constitutional debates were revived by the pressure of intellectuals. Thus, the second constitutional period began shortly after the Sultan reconvened the parliament. The second constitutional period began on 23rd July, 1908, and ended on 23rd April, 1920. The period witnessed many challenging and exhausting events including the Turco-Italian War, Balkan Wars, and World War I. On the other hand, the period procreated many intellectual movements. Pressures during the previous period paved the way for the rise of Turkism Policy in this period. Moreover, Pan-Islamism continued to exist as one of the most powerful movements.

To sum up, the second constitutional period was a trial period in terms of its purpose. The period allowing educational discussions contributed considerably to the Republican period. During that period, considerations of democratic schools and education in line with the constitutional structure of the state were uttered. Educators

including Tevfik Fikret, Satı Bey, İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, and Halil Fikret Kanad made a major contribution to this period by way of their essays and studies published in educational magazines. Especially following the first half of the period, the people also became conscious and showed interest in educational studies together with the press. However, the intellectuals were so oppressed during the reign of Abdulhamid II period that they were afraid not only of the state but also of each other. Recovering such mental challenges was hard to achieve. Nevertheless, teachers and army officers—two groups of the well-educated—took a leading part in maintaining the idea of a revolution and the revival (Berkes, 2011, pp. 366-367). The revolution of the young Turks was initiated mostly by those trained under the education system prescribed by Abdulhamid II (Evered, 2012, p. 204) and in a similar way; developments which had occurred during the second constitutional period provided the background for the Turkish Republic. The discussions held on educational understanding and philosophy during the second constitutional period shed light to the Republican period. Much of the works performed during the second constitutional period created the team required for the Independence War and ensured the revival of people; and finally the rise of the Turkish Republic on a solid foundation (Ergün, 2009, p. 273).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The period of Abdulhamid II is a period of time when the utmost efforts to save the empire from deterioration were witnessed and hence during the first years “Ottomanism” and later (especially during the monarchy period) “Pan-Islamism” influenced the educational understanding as well as the intended youth model to be trained. The aim of creating a loyal citizen was one of the primary objectives sustained over the youth of that period. That aim of the political power created an oppressive educational environment that was based on a continuous surveillance by the state itself. Interestingly enough, such an environment under the political pressure and control trained the intellectuals who were to execute the Constitutional Revolution, followed by the Republican Revolution. Influential movements of thought adapted by intellectuals and scholars should be examined to further understand the reasons of that, despite the strict surveillance and intelligence system prevailed by the Abdulhamid II period. Military students, doctors, and teachers of that time were continuously influenced by the events around the world and the publications; above all by the activities of separatist minority groups, separated from the main land through continuous losses in territory. Those developments reached its peak with the Balkan Wars and later laid the foundations for “nationalism”, which in actuality is the building block of Turkish Republic.

The youth typology intended to be trained through education during the reign of Abdulhamid II is defined as “a clerisy ever-lasting loyalty to the Sultan, faithful and at peace with the official ideology”, but both the global changes and disintegrated structure of the multi-national Ottoman Empire due to the ever-increasingly territorial losses, the empire experience caused changes in primary paradigms and intellectual movements. The concept of “Ottomanism” which Sultan Abdulhamid offered to the youth during the first years of his reign as an effective value gave its place to “Pan-Islamism” due to the developments occurred inland and abroad, which lead to the “nationalism” in the coming years.

Abdulhamid II reflected his panoptic (surveillance) network on the educational implementations intensely for the first time in the history of Turkish education, which is quite interesting. However, the fact that such an oppressive and surveillance network included its counterpart inside as well and created and trained the leaders of a new state features to be an important detail. The intended youth/individual typology to be trained created its counterparts in itself during that period, which in the end, points to a new social study area evidencing how



global developments and its effects can be influential over the countries. In the midst of all these events, the significance of educational and human training paradigms should be discussed.

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