ANXIETY OF BACKWARDNESS: CIVILIZATIONAL CRISIS AND DISCOURSE OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN THE LATE OTTOMAN PERIOD

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YUNUS EMRE ŞEBİN

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submitted by **YUNUS EMRE ŞEBİN** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Arts in History, the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University** by,

Prof. Dr. Sadettin KİRAZCI
Dean
Graduate School of Social Sciences _____

Prof. Dr. Nesim ŞEKER
Head of Department
Department of History _____

Prof. Dr. Nesim ŞEKER
Supervisor
Department of History _____

Examining Committee Members:

Assist. Prof. Dr. Selçuk DURSUN (Head of the Examining Committee)
Middle East Technical University
Department of History _____

Prof. Dr. Nesim ŞEKER (Supervisor)
Middle East Technical University
Department of History _____

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yaşar Tolga CORA
Boğaziçi University
Department of History _____

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Name, Last Name: Yunus Emre ŞEBİN

Signature:

ABSTRACT

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ŞEBİN, Yunus Emre

M.A., The Department of History

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Nesim ŞEKER

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This thesis examines the political and intellectual responses that took shape in the late Ottoman period around a condition termed the anxiety of backwardness. The term denotes the conviction that the empire had been displaced to the periphery of a civilizational hierarchy established by European modernity, and that its survival depended on demonstrating its belonging within that hierarchy. Three currents that opposed one another in almost every respect, the Hamidian regime, the Young Turk opposition, and the Islamist intellectuals, each produced a distinct diagnosis of this perceived backwardness and a distinct prescription for its cure. The regime staged a meticulous performance of modernity before European audiences. The Young Turks defined the empire as a diseased organism and appointed themselves its physicians. For the Islamists, the cause of perceived backwardness lay in a departure from the true essence of Islam. Through an analysis of their periodicals, treatises, poetry, and archival correspondence, this thesis argues that beneath these conflicts the three currents shared a common epistemic ground. Each had accepted, often without noticing the acceptance, the categories through which European modernity classified their own civilization from outside. Also, each current held an elitist conception of salvation that reduced the population to an object to be administered, treated, or

guided. These two features, Eurocentrism and elitism, constitute one of the most consequential intellectual legacies of the late Ottoman period.

Keywords: Underdevelopment, Ottoman Intellectual History, Eurocentrism, Orientalism, Elitism

ÖZ

GERİ KALMIŞLIK KAYGISI: GEÇ OSMANLI DÖNEMİNDE
MEDENİYET KRİZİ VE GELİŞMEMİŞLİK SÖYLEMİ

ŞEBİN, Yunus Emre
Yüksek Lisans, Tarih Bölümü
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Bu tez, geç Osmanlı döneminde geri kalmışlık kaygısı olarak adlandırılan bir durum etrafında şekillenen siyasi ve entelektüel tepkileri incelemektedir. Bu terim, imparatorluğun Avrupa modernitesi tarafından kurulan medeniyet hiyerarşisinin çeperine itildiği ve hayatta kalmasının bu hiyerarşiye ait olduğunu kanıtlamasına bağlı olduğu yönündeki inancı ifade eder. Neredeyse her konuda birbirine muhalif olan üç akım, Hamidiye rejimi, Jön Türk muhalefeti ve İslamcı aydınlar, bu algılanan geri kalmışlığa dair farklı birer teşhis ve bunun tedavisi için farklı birer reçete üretmiştir. Rejim, Avrupa kamuoyu önünde titiz bir modernlik gösterisi sergilemiştir. Jön Türkler, imparatorluğu hastalıklı bir organizma olarak tanımlamış ve kendilerini onun hekimleri olarak atamışlardır. İslamcılara göre ise bu geri kalmışlık algısının nedeni, İslam'ın gerçek özünden uzaklaşılmasında yatmaktadır. Bu tez; süreli yayınların, risalelerin, şiirlerin ve arşiv yazışmalarının analizi yoluyla, söz konusu çatışmaların altında bu üç akımın ortak bir epistemik zemini paylaştığını savunmaktadır. Her biri, genellikle bunun farkına dahi varmadan, Avrupa modernitesinin kendi medeniyetlerini dışarıdan sınıflandırdığı kategorileri benimsemiştir. Ayrıca her akım, halkı yönetilecek, tedavi edilecek veya yönlendirilecek bir nesneye indirgeyen elitist bir

kurtuluş anlayışına sahipti. Avrupa merkezcilik ve elitizmden oluşan bu iki özellik, geç Osmanlı döneminin en önemli entelektüel miraslarından birini teşkil etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gelişmemişlik, Osmanlı Entelektüel Tarihi, Avrupa Merkezcilik, Şarkiyatçılık, Elitizm

To the unnamed and unmourned 'numbers'

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The events surrounding the appointment of Yirmisekiz Mehmet Çelebi as the Ottoman ambassador to Paris in 1720 offer details that are both striking and revealing. The French, who had heard of these men from the Orient for years through travelers' accounts and literary fantasies, welcomed the Ottoman delegation with intense curiosity and excitement. Judging by Çelebi's own account, Parisians were fascinated by the most ordinary routines of the delegation's daily life, their manner of eating, their way of prayer, and asked for permission to observe them at dinner and during worship. The Ottoman delegation, though apparently uncomfortable, had little choice but to comply.[1] What stands out in the account, however, is the composure of the Ottomans. Çelebi's writing reveals a statesman who noticed differences, recorded them with care, and at times expressed admiration, for the beauty of Parisian gardens as an example, yet never conveyed a sense of inferiority.

Nearly one hundred eighty years later, Paris once again became a stage for an Ottoman encounter with Europe: Exposition Universelle of 1900.[2] Meanwhile, much had changed. The balance of global power had shifted decisively, and the confident statesmen of 1720 had been replaced by anxious strategists on the Ottoman side. Inside the Ottoman pavilion, visitors found little to satisfy any appetite for the "exotic." What their ancestors had sought, the experience of a culture perceived as timeless, static, fundamentally different, was nowhere on display. Instead, the pavilion presented silk

[1] Yirmisekiz Mehmed Çelebi, *Paris'te Bir Osmanlı Sefiri: Yirmisekiz Mehmet Çelebi'nin Fransa Seyahatnamesi*, ed. Şevket Rado (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2022), 32.

[2] For a detailed account of the Ottoman participation in the world fairs; see Selim Deringil, "Ottoman 'Self Portrait,'" in *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 150-65. For Ottoman participation to the Exposition Universelle in 1900, see Nurdan Gür, "1900 yılı Uluslararası Paris Sergisinde Osmanlı Devleti" (Master's thesis, Marmara Üniversitesi, Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2014), 51.

fabrics woven on modern looms at the Hereke factory[3] and statistical tables documenting the empire's recent administrative and economic achievements,[4] in short, cold and rational figures amounting to an attempt to convey progress to Western counterparts in the language of "civilization" and "development." As Selim Deringil has demonstrated, these international events presented the Ottoman Empire with a profound test of self-representation. In these events, the Ottomans found themselves in a position to try to present the empire as a modern and sovereign state rather than "Europe's sick man."[5]

The shift between Çelebi's understanding of the Western world in 1720 and the defensive self-representation obsession in 1900 marks the emergence of a condition that would consume the intellectual and political energy of the late Ottoman era. In this study, I call it "the anxiety of backwardness." By this I mean the existential awareness, permeating the Ottoman intellectual and political world, that the empire had been displaced from the center to the periphery of a global civilizational hierarchy established by European modernity, and that its survival depended on its capacity to demonstrate belonging within that hierarchy. Although both were constant realities, the anxiety was more than a fear of military defeat or territorial loss. I argue that it was epistemic, in the way of seeing the world and the empire's place within it, that structured how every political actor of the period defined problems, imagined solutions, and measured worth. The Hamidian regime's efforts to stage a portrait of modernity on the international stage encapsulate the preoccupation behind Abdülhamid II's thirty-three-year reign. The struggle to keep an empire branded as the "sick man" afloat became the very essence of the anxiety that consumed the period's intellectual and political energy.

The main argument of this thesis is as follows: In the late Ottoman period, three major political and intellectual currents; the Hamidian regime, the Young Turk opposition, and Islamic thinkers, represented opposed positions on the diagnosis and treatment of

[3] BOA, ML.EEM., 327/16.

[4] BOA, HR.TH., 239/84.

[5] This theme of demonstrating to the world that the Ottoman Empire belonged among the civilized nations is discussed by Deringil in a related chapter. Selim Deringil, "Ottoman Image Management and Damage Control," in *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire*, 135-149. Also see ibid, 154.

a perceived backwardness. The regime sought European approval to safeguard its legitimacy through a carefully staged performance of modernity. The Young Turks aimed to rebuild the state and society on the basis of European scientific models, writing prescriptions for the empire's salvation from a diaspora politics shaped in Europe itself. The Islamists, for their part, defined their own projects with constant reference to the West, determining what to adopt and what to reject from its civilization. Despite all the conflicts between these three currents, they nevertheless shared a mental matrix that operated by taking Europe as the center of their worldview. Another commonality between these three currents was their elitist approach. The people, in each formulation, were objects to be administered, treated, or guided. These two shared features of the late Ottoman intellectual world, Eurocentrism and elitism, arguably shaped the intellectual legacy inherited later by the Republic.

Modern historiographical approaches have criticized, with good reason, the narratives of Ottoman "decline" for their teleological character, for reading history backward from the known endpoint of 1922 and interpreting every preceding event as a step toward inevitable dissolution.[6] There is no doubt that taking a known outcome as a starting point risks turning history into a predetermined process moving towards a foretold end. For people living in the twenty-first century, it is a well-known encyclopedic fact that the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist in 1922. However, for those living during the period this thesis examines, it was an unknown future. It creates a tension in this study as almost all actors of the period constantly mention a possible collapse of the empire from their perspective. Regardless of whether the dissolution of the empire was inevitable or not, my argument here is that this fear itself is a field worthy of investigation and cannot be ignored. Indeed, from the Sultan to an ordinary intellectual, from an exiled Young Turk to an Islamist poet, there is a profound issue of survival embedded in the thought processes and discourse of almost every actor. Their deep and widespread conviction that collapse was a real possibility functioned almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy, shaped the political currents and became the main intellectual motivation of the era. We cannot know, as people living in the

[6] For the foundational discussions on the topic of Ottoman "decline;" see Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Cemal Kafadar, "The Question of Ottoman Decline," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4, no. 1-2 (1997-1998): 30-75.

twenty-first century, whether the collapse was actually inevitable, but what we know is that the anxiety was real. To understand the dynamics and where this anxiety came from, it is necessary to examine the global epistemological order that produced it.

1.1. Theoretical Framework: Global Production of Backwardness

Before starting to analyze the currents, it is important to define what backwardness is in the minds of the actors in question. First of all, by definition, one needs a reference point to compare itself against in order to be able to talk about a state of backwardness. The consciousness of being behind something is a direct product of a hierarchical perspective that took shape during the formation of modernity. The "modern world-system" is built on structurally unequal development.[7] With the rise of colonialism and industrialization, Europe started to control the global market, and thus, concentrated a great amount of wealth in itself and transformed other regions into its periphery. This material structure came with its philosophical justification as a result. The system depended on a powerful epistemological framework that presents the European historical experience as the universal model of human progress, classifying the world into centers and peripheries, pioneers and followers, the developed and the underdeveloped. In doing so, it reinforces its unidirectional conception of time, which defines human history as a linear path from primitive to modern, from religion to science, from empire to nation-state. Within this framework, modernity becomes a normative standard with universal claims and being modern attains a meaning to signify being on the "right side of history." Therefore, from the perspective of the center, Western world in this case, a backward society is a society that lives wrongly, thinks wrongly, upholds values distant from rationality, and in the more extreme formulations, from humanity itself.

Such a hierarchy requires a strong justification and a discursive foundation to sustain itself. The newly emerging "world-system" of the modern age could survive only if accompanied by a comprehensive regime of representation that naturalized the superiority of the center and the inferiority of the periphery. At this point, it is

[7] For the foundational theoretical framework about modern-world system; see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

necessary to employ a very familiar term here: *Orientalism*. As Edward Said's foundational analyses demonstrate, *Orientalism* is not a field that only studies the East, it studies a reconstructed version of it. Although it was considered to be a field of study, according to Said, the fundamental power relation between the one who studies and the one who is studied constantly works in favor of the former. Hence, in Said's sharp formulation, this positioning itself served as an "instrument of conquest."[8] Within this framework, the East is reconstructed as timeless, static, and incapable of self-directed development in a geography of tradition and stagnation set against a West defined by reason, science, and forward movement. Eastern societies, therefore, are stripped of their historicity and positioned not merely as geographically distant but as chronologically prior. They are understood to occupy an earlier stage of a single universal timeline that Western civilization has already passed through. A result of this conceptualization is that peripheral societies internalize the perception of their own belatedness, and what begins as an external characterization gradually becomes a source of genuine self-doubt. They reproduce the definitions assigned to them by the center and internalize an external verdict as their own self-description. This thesis chooses to describe that process as self-*Orientalism*.[9] Once a society begins to measure itself against a civilizational hierarchy it had no part in constructing, to be like the Western counterparts in one way or another becomes an overriding imperative for the self-*Orientalist* thinkers. Wael Hallaq argues that this internalization leads many in the Islamic world to regard Western modernity as inevitable, transhistorical, permanent, and ultimately beneficial, a perception that is itself the clearest sign that the epistemic conquest has already been completed.[10] After this epistemological conquest, each generation inherits the conviction that its predecessors' efforts fell short, that the distance from the center has grown rather than narrowed. As François Leger observed,

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[8] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 309.

[9] The term "self-Orientalism" was coined in 1927 by Antonio Cuffat Latour in *Apunte Historico de las Chinas en Cuba* and later acquired wider attention in studies of East Asian and other non-Western modernizations. It names the process by which the modern elites of a non-Western society internalize Orientalist categories and turn them inward as the framework through which their own society is to be modernized. In Turkish intellectual and political life, the term carries additional, often pejorative weight, deployed as a critical instrument against the cultural orientation of modernization projects. Its use in this study is analytical rather than evaluative. For a detailed treatment of the concept and its application to the Turkish case, see Sacide Nur Akkaya, "Türk Romanında Self-Oryantalizm (1870-1980)" (PhD thesis, İstanbul Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2014), 50-65.

[10] Wael B. Hallaq, *Reforming Modernity: Ethics and the New Human in the Philosophy of Abdurrahman Taha* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 77.

the absorption of elements from a dynamic Western civilization into an Eastern society paradoxically reinforces that society's sense of backwardness.[11] Borrowed instruments, removed from the conditions that gave rise to them, tend to produce distortions, and each distortion is read, both at home and abroad, as further confirmation of the original diagnosis.

What turns the encounter with a dynamic outside into a deepening of one's own stagnation is a particular temporal architecture that modernity brought with it, and the postcolonial theoretical tradition has given this architecture several names worth keeping in view from the outset. Dipesh Chakrabarty has described the condition as a "waiting room of history," the place where nineteenth-century historicism confined societies it considered not-yet-ready for modern political life.[12] The Ottoman Empire, though never formally colonized, was placed in this antechamber through the diplomatic language of the great powers, through the civilizational benchmarks that accompanied nineteenth-century international law, and through the self-understanding that Ottoman statesmen themselves gradually adopted. The trouble with the waiting room is that its temporal logic is seductive even for those who refuse its verdict. Reinhart Koselleck's distinction between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation captures what happens when this axis becomes the dominant one. The gap between what a society has lived and what it expects to become widens, and the future ceases to be continuous with the past.[13] Every reform project examined in this thesis operates inside that widening gap.

Johannes Fabian has given this temporal operation its most precise name. In his analysis of the way anthropology constructs its object, he described what he called the denial of coevalness, the systematic refusal to grant that the observer and the observed inhabit the same historical present, and the consequent placement of contemporaneous

[11] François Leger, as cited in İsmail Cem, *Türkiye'de Geri Kalmışlığın Tarihi* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), 265.

[12] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8.

[13] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255-275.

societies at different points along a single line of development.[14] The denial is what allows a society encountered in the present to be described as belonging to the past, and it is the operation that converts a difference of custom into a difference of epoch. It will recur throughout this study, and it will do so most sharply at the moments when Ottoman intellectuals perform it upon themselves.

Chakrabarty offers another concept equally useful here. The Europe that serves as the reference point in such discussions is rarely the historical Europe of strikes, anticlerical riots, imperial rivalries, and the Dreyfus affair. It is what he calls a "hyperreal Europe," a figure distilled from certain nineteenth-century social-scientific traditions and elevated into a normative standard more coherent, more consistent, and more ideal than any actual European society ever was.[15] The Ottoman intellectuals this thesis follows were negotiating with a hyperreal Europe of this kind. Abdullah Cevdet's European civilization was not the France of the Paris Commune but the France of Büchner translations and Comte's ethical calendar. Said Halim Paşa's Western civilization was a composite derived from political philosophy and sociological theory rather than any lived encounter with industrial Birmingham or the slums of Berlin. In both cases, Europe is defined as a stable monolithic ideal from which they could take lessons, partially or totally.

Perceived stability has a long history of thought, on the other hand, within European philosophy itself. Stephen Toulmin has read the Cartesian project, often taken as the founding steps of modern European rationality, as a response to the religious bloodshed of the Thirty Years War as a search for certainty produced by political and confessional catastrophe rather than by any serene confidence in the powers of reason.[16] Reinhart Koselleck described the Enlightenment as a process whose own critical instruments would eventually turn upon the institutions and assumptions that had produced them.[17] The forward movement that Ottoman reformers took as the

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[14] See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

[15] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 27-28, 40.

[16] Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 45-87.

[17] See Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

defining feature of Western civilization had, in its own intellectual life, been an object of suspicion by European thinkers themselves. By the early twentieth century, the same decades in which Abdullah Cevdet and Said Halim Paşa were writing, this suspicion had reached the level of open philosophical debate. Edmund Husserl argued that the mathematization of nature, the very achievement Europe had taken as the foundation of its global advantage, had detached scientific knowledge from the lived experience that had given it meaning, naming it as a crisis.[18] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno would in the following decades read the Enlightenment itself as a dialectic that produced its own mythologies and its own forms of unfreedom.[19] None of these thoughts, however, entered the "hyperreal Europe" of the late Ottoman imagination. What Ottoman intellectuals had before them was a Europe with its doubts about itself and its own internal contradictions and crises mostly ignored.

Partha Chatterjee has supplied a third term that will recur throughout this study. In his analysis of Indian nationalist thought, he showed how anti-colonial movements that defined themselves by opposition to Europe nonetheless drew their conceptual vocabulary from post-Enlightenment European thought itself, producing what he called a "derivative discourse."[20] The word "derivative" should not be read as dismissive since a discourse can be derivative in its framework and still be original in its specific content and creative in its local adaptations. What Chatterjee's term names is a structural condition, which is the impossibility of mounting a critique of a civilizational order from outside the categories that order itself has established. The selective modernization formula that will appear in almost every chapter of this thesis is sort of a derivative formula in precisely this sense.

One more qualification is necessary before these concepts are allowed to do their work in later chapters. Ussama Makdisi's works has shown that the waiting room was not something applied to the Ottoman Empire only from outside, it was also reproduced

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[18] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 23-59.

[19] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1-34.

[20] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 36-53.

within the empire, by Ottoman elites, against the Arab, Kurdish, and other peripheries they came to classify as not-yet-Ottomanized.[21] Its significance for the present study is that the epistemic trap being described here was a framework that, once adopted, generated its own inner hierarchies and its own peripheries.[22]

1.2. The Ottoman Encounter with the Modern World

The Ottoman Empire's encounter with the modern "world-system" illuminates the above-explained dynamic with particular clarity, owing to the empire's specific position. For centuries, the empire had positioned itself as the center of a universal political and moral order. With the emergence of the European-centered modern world, it found itself rapidly displaced to the periphery. What made this displacement distinctive was that the Ottomans were never officially colonized. They retained formal sovereignty throughout, maintained their own armies, conducted their own diplomacy, administered most of their own territories. However, the empire preserved these forms of independence while also experiencing the substance of subordination. It manifested as economic dependence, diplomatic humiliation, and the constant threat of territorial dismemberment at the hands of European powers.[23] The Ottoman Empire began to be perceived, by Europeans and, gradually by its own elites, as "backward" within the global hierarchy.

The material structure described above deserves closer attention, since the discourse this thesis examines would be unintelligible without it. The period separating Yirmisekiz Mehmet Çelebi's embassy from the Paris Exposition of 1900 is the period in which the productive capacity of a small number of European economies pulled away from the rest of the world at a speed that had no precedent. Around 1750, the regions that would later be classified as underdeveloped produced roughly three quarters of the world's manufactured goods, and they still produced more than half of them as late as 1830. By the eve of the First World War their share had fallen below a

[21] Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 768-796.

[22] Selim Deringil, "'Hal-i Vahşet ve Bedeviyette Yaşarlar': Geç Dönem Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Post-Kolonyalizm Tartışması" in *Simgeden Millete: II. Abdülhamid'den Mustafa Kemal'e Devlet ve Toplum* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007), 165-218.

[23] Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 135.

tenth.[24] What figures of this kind record, however, is not simply that Europe had learned to make more things. Industrialization was inseparable from two other processes, and the three are better understood as a single transformation than as a cause followed by its consequences.

The first of these was the making of a world market. Karl Polanyi described the nineteenth century as the age in which the economy was lifted out of the social relations that had previously contained it, and the market, until then one institution among many, was reorganized as a self-regulating mechanism to which society itself was expected to adjust.[25] The second was colonial expansion. The cotton that fed the mills of Lancashire was grown by enslaved labor in the American South and by coerced cultivators in India and Egypt, and Sven Beckert's global history of that single commodity shows how completely the industrial economy of the metropole rested on coercion at its edges.[26] What Wallerstein's world-system names is the arrangement these processes produced in combination.[27] It is not a collection of national economies moving at different speeds along the same road, but a single division of labor in which the wealth of the center and the specialization of the periphery are two aspects of one structure.

Two features of this structure matter for the argument that follows. The first is that it was made rather than inherited. Kenneth Pomeranz has shown that as late as the middle of the eighteenth century the most advanced regions of China and Europe stood far closer to one another in living standards, commercialization, and market development than the later story of European exceptionalism permits, and that the divergence which opened afterwards owed a great deal to coal that happened to lie near English industrial centers and to colonies that supplied land-intensive goods Europe could not have produced for itself.[28] The hierarchy that late Ottoman intellectuals encountered as a

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[24] Paul Bairoch, "International Industrialization Levels from 1750 to 1980," *Journal of European Economic History* 11, no. 2 (1982): 269-333.

[25] See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

[26] See Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

[27] See Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I*; also see Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis*.

[28] Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

fact of nature therefore had a history, and a recent one. The second feature is that the structure did not stand still. Eric Hobsbawm's account of the decades after 1875 describes an intensification rather than a continuation, capital exported on a scale not previously seen, the partition of Africa, and the extension of formal and informal empire until scarcely any part of the globe remained outside the system.[29] The decades in which the Ottoman experience of backwardness became most acute coincide precisely these decades.

This self-perception of backwardness can be traced back at least to the reign of Mahmud II and Tanzimat reforms.[30] The Gülhane Edict of 1839, also known as Tanzimat Edict, represents a significant reorientation from the reform logic that had governed earlier Ottoman responses to European pressure. Previous efforts had been oriented primarily toward military and administrative modernization, driven by the practical recognition that Ottoman forces were losing ground to European armies in battlefield capability and organizational efficiency. The Tanzimat, on the other hand, prescribed structural changes in Ottoman governance.

The edict is worth examining closely in this regard. The text identifies the cause of the empire's "decline" as one hundred fifty years of distancing from religious law, stating "it has been established among evident truths that realms not governed under the laws of the sharia cannot endure."[31] From the wording here, it is understood that the writers of the edict were dating the "decline" of the empire at least to the late seventeenth century. Yet the reforms it prescribed include restructuring of taxation, introduction of regular conscription, and guarantee of life and property for all subjects regardless of religion. The diagnosis, in other words, speaks in the vocabulary of Islamic tradition while its prescription speaks in the vocabulary of administrative modernity. Ottoman

[29] See Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987).

[30] Tanzimat (literally "reorganization") refers to the period of Ottoman administrative, legal, and fiscal reforms inaugurated by the Gülhane Edict of 1839. Its institutional roots, however, reach back to the central administrative reorganizations of Mahmud II in the 1830s. The reforms encompassed the restructuring of the central bureaucracy, the abolition of tax-farming, the regularization of conscription, the formal extension of legal equality to non-Muslim subjects, and the gradual reception of European legal codes. For an overview, see Ali Akyıldız, "Tanzimat," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2011), accessed 21 May 2026, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/tanzimat.

[31] [*…hâlbuki kavânîn-i şerʿiyye tahtında idâre olunmayan memâlikin pâyidâr olamayacağı vâzıhâttan bulunmuş olup…*] "Gülhanede Kıraat Olunan Hatt-ı Hümayun'un Suretidir," in *Düstur*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Amire, 1289/1874), 4-7.

administration and intellectuals engaged in a complex process of recoding fundamental modern concepts within the empire's own intellectual world. Western concepts were refashioned through engagement with Ottoman historical experience, Islamic legal tradition, and the accumulated conventions of imperial administrative culture.

The legacy that the Hamidian regime would inherit was not exhausted by this administrative reorganization. It included, decisively, the first Ottoman intellectual movement to convert the perception of backwardness into a political program. The Young Ottomans, gathered from the mid-1860s and writing from European exile were, as Şerif Mardin established, the first to attempt a systematic synthesis of Islamic political concepts and European constitutional ideas.[32] Namık Kemal reworked *vatan* and *hürriyet* into a vocabulary in which European constitutional forms could be presented not as imports but as the recovery of an authentic Islamic-Ottoman inheritance, grounding representative government in the Quranic principle of *meşveret*.[33]

The Young Ottomans matter to the argument of this thesis for a reason that goes beyond chronology. All three features that the following chapters are already present in their writing. They articulated an anxiety about the empire's position relative to Europe, they conceived reform as the work of a lettered vanguard awakening a passive population, and they operated with a logic of selective borrowing that took European political technique while claiming to preserve an Islamic-Ottoman moral core. The three currents examined in this study inherited this legacy, each interpreted its elements differently.

By the reign of Abdülhamid II, this tension had crystallized around a single, humiliating label. Europe's characterization of the Ottoman Empire as the "Sick Man" was the political translation of the *Orientalist* framework described above.[34] What was

[32] Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 4.

[33] Ibid, 309.

[34] The term "sick man of Europe" was reportedly used for the first time by Tsar Nicholas I in 1853 in St. Petersburg in a conversation with Sir Hamilton Seymour. See Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 79.

implied by this term was a civilization fundamentally unable to sustain itself, left behind by the forward movement of history and destined, on that account, for dissolution. European powers drew on precisely this framing to justify their interventions in Ottoman internal affairs.

The "sick man" label, however, was neither invented for the Ottoman Empire alone nor applied to it in isolation. As early as 1895, Yan Fu had asked in the Tianjin-based newspaper *Zhibao* whether the China of his day was not itself a "sick man" in need of cure, a self-diagnosis that would crystallize into the familiar *Dōngyà bìngfū*, the "sick man of East Asia," within late Qing reformist vocabulary.[35] Placed alongside the Ottoman case, it reveals the anxiety of backwardness as a condition generated by the Western modernity wherever it encountered polities with their own civilizational traditions and their own claims to historical significance. Qing China in its last decades offered one of the most ambitious parallels to the Hamidian effort of modernization. The Self-Strengthening Movement from the 1860s onward built modern arsenals, shipyards, and translation bureaus while insisting that the Confucian moral and political order remain intact.[36] Zhang Zhidong's 1898 formula, "Chinese learning as essence, Western learning as function," was a formulation whose echoes are visible throughout Asia is worth mentioning here. The formula's limits became visible in the humiliating defeat of 1895 against Japan exposed the perceived insufficiency of a reform program that had aimed primarily at enhancing technological and industrial capacity while leaving the underlying socio-political order untouched. The defeat forced Chinese reformers to read their own crisis through comparative lenses, and the Ottoman Empire became one of the principal reference points. Liang Qichao's

[35] [*Jīn zhī Zhōngguó, fēi yóu shì bìngfū yě yé?*] Yán Fù, "Yuán qiáng," *Zhíbào* (Tiānjīn), March 1895; full text consulted in Wǎn Qīng Wénxuǎn, Chinese Text Project, https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=275847&remap=gb (accessed 22 April 2026). The compound *Dōngyà bìngfū*, literally translated as "sick man of East Asia," carries a medical idiom into civilizational understandings. Liáng Qǐchāo would soon draw a trans-Asian parallel by diagnosing the Ottoman Empire as a "fellow sick man of the East." See Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 39. The parallel medical idiom that would animate Young Turk political thought is examined in Chapter 3.

[36] See Mary Clabaugh Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), esp. chapter 9. For the later Self-Strengthening phase, see Daniel H. Bays, *China Enters the Twentieth Century: Chang Chih-tung and the Issues of a New Age, 1895-1909* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1978).

mentioning the Ottoman Empire as a "fellow sick man of the East," shows a shared perceived structural backwardness despite the differences in cultures.[37]

Khedival Egypt offers the case closest to the Ottoman center. The reforming governor's army that was built on the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* model with French advisers, his student missions to Paris from 1826 onward, and above all his cotton-based industrial program, ran a half-century in advance of the Hamidian repertoire that would be staged from Yıldız.[38] Rifaa Rafi el-Tahtawi's *Takhlīs al-ibrīz fī talkhīs Bārīz*, which in English published under the title *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826-1831)*, written after his years in Paris, shifted the discourse in which Arab Muslim writers approached Europe. Tahtawi proposed European institutions as a program to be studied and selectively adopted.[39]

Qajar Iran entered the same field of force from a different direction. The Constitutional Revolution of 1906 came only twenty-two months before the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, and both belong to a broader constitutional-revolutionary wave that swept through Russia in 1905, Portugal in 1910, and China in 1911. Persian reformist networks in İstanbul, Tbilisi, London, and Paris overlapped with Ottoman opposition circles in ways that will matter in Chapter 3. Mirza Malkum Khan, whose journal *Qanun* is commonly regarded as the intellectual precursor of the Iranian constitutional movement, articulated a position on the problem of selective Westernization that almost no major Ottoman reformist of his generation was prepared to state as bluntly. For Malkum Han, the distinction between the material and the non-material aspects of European civilization was itself incoherent. Europe was a single organism, evolved

[37] Liang Qichao first identified the Ottoman Empire as a fellow "sick man of the East" in a preface written in early 1898 for a translated volume on the Russo-Turkish War of 1877, arguing that despite the religio-cultural differences between the two empires, China and Turkey had become "of the same kind," by virtue of their shared structural position. Kang Youwei developed the parallel more fully in *Jìn chéng Tū jué xiāo ruò jì xù* (On Demise and Weakening of Turks), where Ottoman experience was explicitly presented as a warning for the Qing dynasty. For the texts and their reception, see Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, 39-40; also see Karl, "Creating Asia: China in the World at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," *American Historical Review* 103, no. 4 (1998): 1096-1118.

[38] On Mehmed Ali Paşa's state-building program and its European advisors, see Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army, and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-37 and 76-111.

[39] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 1798-1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 67-83.

over centuries, whose political institutions could not be separated from the technical achievements that accompanied them.[40] The selective formula the Hamidian regime, the Meiji oligarchy, and the late Qing Self-Strengthening Movement had all labored to defend was in his view a wasted effort. European principles of government were to be followed en bloc. What makes the position important for the argument of this thesis is that its clearest Ottoman echo would arrive in Abdullah Cevdet's treatises as will be discussed in the coming chapters.

Further east, in Japan, Fukuzawa Yukichi's 1885 essay "*Datsu-A Ron*," translated as "Good-bye Asia," calling on Japan to leave Asia and join the civilized nations of the West, set a standard of civilizational monism that is worth comparing with other cases discussed here.[41] The selective formula *wakon yōsai*, "Japanese spirit, Western technique," codified in the 1860s, structured the Meiji modernization project along lines that bore an uncanny similarity to the Ottoman Islamist formula of taking Western science while retaining native morality.[42]

These parallels are not only visible retrospectively. The actors of the period themselves registered these commonalities, sometimes with great enthusiasm. When the Japanese fleet destroyed the Russian Baltic squadron at Tsushima in May 1905, Abdullah Cevdet received the news in terms that perhaps more vividly than most of the Ottoman reformists of the period:

> Japan is becoming ever more conscious of its high civilizing mission in Asia. It knows not only how to seize fortresses and conquer territories but also how to open new horizons, radiant horizons, for the spirits of Asiatics bruised by infamous despots and their execrable obscurantism. [...] To confront one another on the battlefield, today, means precisely to confront one another on the fields of science, of industry, and in every intellectual domain. [...] Japan is therefore the bearer of the sword and the torch: the sword for oppressors, for

[40] Mirza Malkum Han, "Kitābcha-yi Ghaybī yā Daftar-i Tanzīmāt," in *Majmūʿa-yi Āthār*, 13, as quoted in Hamid Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan: A Biographical Study in Iranian Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 17. On Malkum Han's rejection of selective Westernization and his insistence on the indivisibility of European civilization, also see Algar, 94.

[41] Fukuzawa Yukichi, "Datsu-A Ron," *Jiji Shinpō*, 16 March 1885; English translation in David J. Lu, Japan: A Documentary History, vol. 2, (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 351.

[42] Kawamura Nozomu, "The Historical Background of Arguments Emphasizing the Uniqueness of Japanese Society," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology*, no. 5/6 (December 1980): 44.

> insolent invaders; the torch for the oppressed, for those who wither and perish for want of light and liberty. An admirable example to be followed![43]

The lines between admiration and warning were not always sharp, however, and contemporary observers followed the subsequent traffic with interest. In the years after Tsushima, the number of Chinese students sent to Japan skyrocketed from two to two thousand six hundred forty-one.[44] The figures examined in the chapters that follow were, in other words, not inhabiting an anxiety that a retrospective interpretation would identify on their behalf.

The argument here, to be clear, is not that the experiences across Asia were the same or that their differences did not matter. What I want to emphasize is that despite different cultural codes, comparable experiences were observable across several civilizations whenever they encountered another civilization, European in these cases, on unequal terms. These similarities, I argue, are the results of a shared anxiety of backwardness. The parallels I have sketched here show that this anxiety was a structural feature of the late nineteenth-century international order, one that generated recognizably similar intellectual responses across otherwise distant contexts. The Ottoman case examined in what follows is one node in this wider pattern.

My focus in this thesis will be the Ottoman Empire, and I bring in comparative material only where it helps us see the Ottoman case more clearly. A fuller comparative study of the anxiety of backwardness across late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Asia would require its own research, and I offer the interconnected and parallel experiences sketched here as an invitation to that work rather than as its substitute.

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[43] [*Le Japon devient de plus en plus conscient de sa haute mission civilisatrice en Asie. Il ne sait pas seulement prendre des forteresses et conquérir des contrées il sait aussi ouvrir des horizons nouveaux, horizon radieux pour les esprits des asiatiques meurtris par d'infamants despotes et par leur exécrable obscurantisme. [...] Aujourd'hui, se mesurer sur les champs de bataille, c'est exactement, se mesurer sur les champs de la science, de l'industrie et dans tous les domaines intellectuels. [...] Le Japon est donc porteur d'épée et de flambeau: l'épée, pour les oppresseurs, pour les insolents envahisseurs; le flambeau pour les opprimés pour ceux qui s'étiolent et se meurent faute de lumière et de liberté. Admirable exemple à suivre!*] A[bdullah] D[jevdet], "Le Japon Porteur de Flambeau," *İçtihad*, no. 5, Nisan 1905, 77. First found in M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (İstanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1981), 188. Translated from the French original.

[44] M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 190.

1.3. Methodological Framework and Discourse Analysis

The methodological backbone of this study is a discourse analysis conducted on representative texts produced by the key political currents of the late Ottoman intellectual sphere. What I mean by this is a mode of close reading indebted to Foucault's analysis of discursive formations.[45] I read these texts not as only carriers of ideas or neutral records of intellectual positions, but as documents that reveal how the anxiety of backwardness was constructed in the given period and its conditions. What the shared vocabulary and shared assumptions operating across opposed political positions reveal, I argue, is a common discursive formation more decisive than the visible disagreements between these currents.

Some of the primary sources I examine in this study are contemporary periodicals. These are texts written for a public audience. A published text is, by definition, written to be read by others, and this quality makes periodical literature especially revealing for an analysis of this kind.

My selection in archival documents is representative. I reached these documents either through direct keyword searches in the archives and periodical collections, or through references I encountered in the existing secondary literature. In either case, no primary source enters this thesis without having examined it directly, and the paths of discovery are indicated in the footnotes where relevant.

The archival material, drawn from the Ottoman state archives (BOA), provides access to the internal mechanics of the regime's image management and the calculations and anxieties that the public-facing performance was designed to conceal. The documents examined were identified through a combination of catalog searches using thematic keywords and targeted verification of references drawn from the existing secondary literature.

A further methodological question arises with regard to the Hamidian regime itself, and it is worth stating explicitly. The Young Turks and the Islamist intellectuals offer relatively direct access to their thought processes. They wrote, signed, and published

[45] See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972).

many of their writings, so it is methodologically easier to follow their sentences. However, when it comes to the Hamidian regime, since it is not a person and not a movement but an apparatus of government, the question of what it thought requires a measure of attribution, sometimes on Abdülhamid II himself, sometimes a civil servant in one of the ministries, or an ambassador to the United States. What makes such attribution possible in the Hamidian case is the intensity of centralization under Abdülhamid II. The Sultan's micromanagerial style of rule, in which nearly every significant diplomatic communication, press clipping, and institutional decision passed through Yıldız, turned what would otherwise be a methodological obstacle into a methodological resource.[46] Correspondence among Ottoman state organs, therefore, can be read as an indicator of what the regime as a whole was registering and responding to. Without this centralizing impulse, no such inference would be available. The Hamidian state apparatus made itself legible in its own archive, and the second chapter works through these correspondences in detail to reconstruct the regime's self-understanding from the records of its daily operation.

Two further specifications are required here, since the method applied to the Hamidian archive differs from the method applied to the published writings of the Young Turks and the Islamists. The first concerns what it means to read a state apparatus for its mentality. I take the horizon of the thinkable in a given period to be a historical object that can be reconstructed from the documents that period leaves behind. What I claim for the Hamidian material is accordingly reading its *mentalité* through its collective consciousness. I claim a shared vocabulary, a shared set of assumptions about what counts as evidence of civilization, and a shared conviction about what the empire had to prove and before whom.

A word is required about the selection of figures, since the choice of a small number of intellectuals to stand for a current carries an argumentative burden that should be discharged openly. Ahmed Rıza, Prince Sabahaddin, and Abdullah Cevdet are

[46] On the reduction of ministers to clerical functionaries of the palace, Abdülhamid II's personal involvement in decisions of every order of significance, and the regime's orientation toward information-gathering that produced the scale of the Yıldız archive; see Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 308; Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 129; Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire*, 1876-1909, 12.

examined here not because they exhaust the Young Turk movement but because the scholarship, above all that of Şükrü Hanioğlu, treats them as the exemplary poles of the Young Turk field: the positivist centralist, the decentralist liberal, and the biological materialist.[47] The three positions bound the space within which the movement conducted its internal argument, and the fracture of the Congress of 1902, examined in the third chapter, ran precisely along the lines they mark. For Ottoman Islamism I take Said Halim Paşa and Mehmed Âkif as the systematic theorist and the principal voices of the current. The selection is representative in the sense that these figures occupy the positions the literature has identified as constitutive of their currents.

The scope of this study is concentrated on the late Ottoman period, when the anxiety of backwardness reached its most acute and articulate form. The three intellectual currents I examine, the Hamidian regime, the Young Turk opposition, and the Islamist movement, represent the major ideological positions of this era. The Republican period falls outside the scope of this thesis. That said, the continuity between the late Ottoman currents examined here and the founding cadres of the Republic is not incidental. As Erik Jan Zürcher has shown, a substantial portion of the Kemalist elite was shaped in the Unionist milieu that this thesis treats as part of the Young Turk formation.[48] The intellectual legacies examined here are visible continuously in the history of the Republic, and their anxieties about backwardness continue to structure Turkish political life in the present. This continuity is to be addressed again in the concluding chapter.

1.4. Contribution to the Field

The argument pursued in the following chapters is historical, grounded in Ottoman sources and focused on a particular half-century. Its effects, however, extend further. Three lines of contribution deserve to be named at the outset.

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[47] M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[48] Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 95-109.

The first is a matter of Ottoman intellectual history itself. The Hamidian regime, the Young Turks, and the Islamists have often been studied mostly as separate currents, each with its own scholarly literature, its own canonical figures, its own interpretive debates. What I propose here is that these currents shared a structural condition and mental framework that none of them would probably be willing to acknowledge.

The second line is methodological. I extend postcolonial categories developed primarily in South Asian contexts to the late Ottoman material, and in doing so ask whether those categories hold, fracture, or need reformulation when the object of analysis is an imperial polity that was never formally colonized yet whose elites nonetheless internalized a civilizational hierarchy not of their making. The conceptual vocabulary I work with, Chakrabarty's waiting room and hyperreal Europe, Chatterjee's derivative discourse, Fabian's denial of coevalness, belongs to scholarly traditions that emerged primarily in English-language academic institutions and took shape within postcolonial debates shaped by other regional experiences, chiefly South Asian. For the broader epistemic decolonization debate, including voices that address West Asian material more directly, Hamid Dabashi and Walter Mignolo deserve mention alongside the South Asian canon.[49]

The third line is placing the Ottoman experience into a comparative framework. I treat the Ottoman case as one instance of a wider pattern rather than as a singular story, and the parallels sketched in the previous sections are offered as invitations to think across contexts that Ottoman historiography has sometimes treated as self-contained. Egyptian Nahda, Iranian constitutionalism, Meiji Japan, and late Qing reformism are not equivalent to the Ottoman experience, and the differences matter. A comparative study that followed this pattern across the several contexts would extend the framework developed here into a broader account of how modernity was experienced at its receiving end. The present study, however, does not undertake that larger project. What it does is to treat the Ottoman component of it carefully enough that the Ottoman

[49] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*; Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. For epistemic decolonization in contexts more directly pertinent to Western Asian context, see Hamid Dabashi, see *Can Non-Europeans Think?* (London: Zed Books, 2015); Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

case can be placed in conversation with the others when those comparative studies are undertaken.

1.5. Structure of the Thesis

The analytical focus of the thesis is structured around three main axes, each representing a different ideological and political variant of the anxiety of backwardness.

The second chapter reconstructs the defensive modernization strategy of Abdülhamid II's administration. At the center of the analysis stands the regime's meticulous performance of modernity, staged at world expositions and in diplomatic arenas. I ask how the Hamidian regime's self-representational strategy revealed the depth of the consciousness of perceived backwardness and how a regime that saw Europe as a hostile imperialist rival nonetheless adopted its standards as the criteria of its own worth.

Chapter three follows the Young Turk opposition into the positivist and scientific worldview that shaped it, working through the writings and political positions of three key figures: Ahmed Rıza, Prince Sabahaddin, and Abdullah Cevdet. Here the focus falls on how the Young Turks defined backwardness as a pathological disease, conceived of themselves as "social physicians" authorized to diagnose and treat the empire's afflictions, and proposed prescriptions that ranged across a spectrum. The conflicting methods that surfaced at the First Ottoman Liberals Congress of 1902 in Paris provide the narrative frame. At stake is how the Young Turks' positivist diagnosis of the empire as a sick organism, and their sanctification of science as something to replace religion reproduced the epistemological assumptions of the very civilization they claimed to be catching up with.

The fourth chapter reads the Islamist response to the problem of perceived backwardness through the writings of Said Halim Paşa and Mehmed Âkif. Rejecting both the regime's autocratic pragmatism and the Westernization projects associated with Young Turks, these intellectuals proposed a "third way" that located the cause of decline in Muslims' departure from the true essence of Islam and prescribed a return to that essence as the path to salvation. I analyze the ontological tensions underlying

what has come to be known as the selective Westernization formula, adopting the West's science while rejecting its morality, and the paradoxes that emerged from the attempt to construct identity outside of Western modernity while using modernity's own tools to do so. The question animating the chapter is whether the Islamists' selective engagement with Western civilization paradoxically presupposed the very Eurocentric reference point they sought to escape.

The concluding chapter synthesizes the common epistemic ground shared by these three currents beneath their conflicting solutions, and reinterprets the anxiety of backwardness in light of the evidence presented across the preceding chapters. It draws together the two fundamental commonalities, Eurocentrism and elitism, returns to the theoretical apparatus introduced in this chapter, and considers the intellectual legacy that this shared mental framework transmitted to the Republic and to the political life that has followed.

This study reads Ottoman modernization not as a chronology of progress or failure but as the history of a civilization's struggle to redefine its own worth within a hierarchical order that was created out of their control. The actors examined here accepted the terms of that order, enacted them, and sought refuge from the anxiety it produced in the very categories that had produced it. The anxiety of backwardness, in my view, is both the driving force and the dead end of this history.

CHAPTER 2

HAMIDIAN REGIME

The reign of Abdülhamid II was built upon the complex legacy of Tanzimat. The period Abdülhamid II ascended the throne, the need for a fast modernization to deal with Western powers was already a mainstream idea. The opening years of his period reinforced this idea since the 1877-1878 Ottoman Russian War and the diplomatic humiliation it brought with it, in addition to the bankrupted treasury and massive territorial losses, produced a very strong legitimacy crisis.[50] Its subjects, Christian and Muslim alike, had reasons to doubt that the state would survive the decade. For Abdülhamid II, therefore, it is arguable that the problem of "backwardness" was not simply a technical gap between the Western world and his country, it was an existential threat pressing from within and without simultaneously.

Abdülhamid II, controlling the empire's destiny behind the walls of Yıldız Palace, pragmatically separated Westernization into two parts, that are the technology and administrative systems he saw as essential for strengthening the state, and the liberal political ideas he viewed as a threat.[51] In this very situation, the phrase "sick man of Europe" was one of the regime's worst nightmares, for this term had become the fundamental means of legitimizing the project to dismantle the empire. The term "sick man" referred, sometimes directly while sometimes indirectly, to the Ottoman Empire's inability to govern itself and its lack of capacity for reform. Therefore, it is arguable that in the mind of Abdülhamid II, refuting this diagnosis with every means possible was the number one problem for the survival of the state. His thirty-three-

[50] Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909*, 9.

[51] Feroz Ahmad, *From Empire to Republic: Essays on the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2008), 3.

year reign can thus be seen as a long and multi-layered struggle against this diagnosis in general. The catastrophe of 1878 and accompanying military and diplomatic humiliation were the reference points that shaped his subsequent governing logic. Understood by his governing style, for Abdülhamid II, it was obvious that what needed to be adopted were not the political institutions and ideas of the West, such as parliaments and political parties, but rather the fundamental aspects that had advanced and strengthened the West. To this end, he pursued a pragmatic and selective modernization project like some contemporaries did in the same period as mentioned earlier, that adopted Western weaponry, technology, administrative management systems, and central propaganda tools to strengthen the Ottoman central administration.[52] This project was anti-Western in spirit and purpose but Western in its means.

2.1. The Paradox of Defensive Modernization

This grand strategy aimed to protect the empire's borders militarily while also shielding it from both "destructive" ideas within and the imperialist ambitions of Europeans. Such a policy required a performance for three different audiences: internal public, external counterparts, and global Muslim audience. One of the most fundamental sources of internal legitimacy was the transformation of the title of the Caliph of Muslims from a symbolic honorific to a status with real meaning.[53] The fundamental source of legitimacy vis-à-vis the outside world, on the other hand, was the effort to prove that the Ottoman Empire was not as sick as it was believed to be, and this is where the arenas such as world expositions became a critical tool. These performances were based on proving that the Ottoman Empire was not an underdeveloped and barbaric despotism, but a sovereign, progressive state that complied with modern standards of civilization.

Yet, at the very heart of this defensive modernization project lay a seemingly insoluble paradox. On the one hand, the regime, seeking solutions to resist the political and

[52] Hanioğlu, "Twilight of Tanzimat, Hamidian Regime," in *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 109-149.

[53] For Abdülhamid II's policies on the title of Caliph as a tool to empower the legitimacy of the Ottoman Empire within and among the Muslims of the world and monopolizing the official sanctity, see Deringil, "The Ottomanization of the Şeriat," in *The Well-Protected Domains*, 44-67.

military influence of the West, found the remedy in using the very tools produced by the West itself. Modern schools, tools such as telegraph and railroads, and a strengthened bureaucracy, though often portrayed as neutral instruments, were far from being neutral in their essence. Schools such as the Tıbbiye[54] and the Mülkiye,[55] established as part of a project to cultivate a loyal elite, gave rise to a generation that questioned the autocratic practices precisely because of the methods of this modern education, becoming the incubators of the Young Turk movement that would eventually end the regime of Abdülhamid II in 1908.[56] Many of the policies that this self-perceived "enlightened reformer" implemented to consolidate his empire thus backfired.[57]

The image of the West in Abdülhamid II's mind requires closer examination if we are to understand this dynamic fully. The Sultan apparently did not view the West as a monolithic ideal of civilization to be either admired or rejected outright. Viewed through an extremely pragmatic and skeptical lens, the West presented a source of power whose secrets of development they had to learn and imitate, while also being an imperialist rival that threatened the empire's existence at every moment. The international arena where the empire's fate was debated was, in his view, a hostile court whose jury, prosecutor, and even executioner were one and the same, whose intentions were clear from the outset. Convincing this biased jury did not, for Abdülhamid II, require sincerely believing in their moral superiority. Still, it required playing by their own rules and disarming them diplomatically and legally by seemingly satisfying their expectations. To this end, the regime's strategy can be read as a calculated performance of legitimacy. It aimed systematically presenting evidence that would cause the case to be dismissed on procedural grounds. For the Ottoman state, if the jury was judging the Ottoman Empire for being incapable of reform, unable

[54] *Mekteb-i Tıbbiye*, founded in 1827, was the first institution of modern medical education in the Ottoman Empire. See Nil Sarı, "Mekteb-i Tıbbiyye," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2004), accessed January 12, 2026, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/mekteb-i-tibbiyye.

[55] *Mekteb-i Mülkiye*, officially founded in 1858, was an imperial civil service school established to train high-level administrative officials for the Ottoman government during the Tanzimat era. See See Ali Akyıldız, "Mekteb-i Mülkiyye," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2019), accessed January 12, 2026, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/mekteb-i-mulkiyye.

[56] Feroz Ahmad, *Turkey: The Quest for Identity* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 47.

[57] Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 128.

to govern its subjects, and barbaric, then it should be presented with the image of a state that was constantly reforming, establishing modern institutions, keeping statistics, and building telegraph and railway networks.

At this point, the Sultan's understanding of "backwardness" fundamentally differed from that of both the Young Turks and the Islamists, as will be discussed in the coming chapters. For the Young Turks, backwardness was an internal, pathological issue that needed to be cured. On the other hand, underdeveloped societies in the Muslim world represented a moral and spiritual decline for the Islamists, one that occurred due to deviation from the true nature of Islam. However, according to Abdülhamid II, "backwardness" was neither a disease nor a moral issue; it was the enemy's most powerful weapon. For instance, if the use of the terms like "sick man" supplied both the moral justification and the legal framework to intervene in the internal affairs of the empire, this tool should have been neutralized. Therefore, Abdülhamid II's modernization efforts should be seen as countermeasures aimed at taking this weapon out of the enemy's hands. Each new school built, each new railroad track laid down, each new regulation issued was evidence offered to European public opinion like a petition presented to an international court of great powers.

The courtroom metaphor is worth pausing on, because it makes the argument of this thesis easier to understand about the regime's position. A defendant who prepares evidence, hires advocates, and mounts a defense, at the most fundamental level, should have accepted the authority of the court. He may despise the jury and think that the verdict would be rigged, but the very act of defense acknowledges that the authority is acknowledged. I think the regime's defensive modernization project operated squarely within this logic.

2.2. The Exposition Fronts

This defense, however, was not confined to Ottoman borders and it also had to be marketed to the international public. The regime understood that escaping the diagnosis of being a sick man required skillful perception management. One of the most important fronts in this battle was the world expositions.[58] World expositions

[58] Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, 153.

were competitive arenas in which states displayed their civilizations, their progress, their ambitions in the buildings assigned to them, and in doing so constructed a story about how they wished to appear before the rest of the world. For the Ottomans, despite all the financial burdens, it was vital not to lag behind, to show that their country was undergoing respectable growth on the global stage. The jury and audience for this performance were again the Western audiences.

The Ottoman engagement with this arena did not begin in 1900, and the anxiety examined below is better understood as the culmination of a practice than as a sudden onset. Zeynep Çelik's study of the architecture of Islam at nineteenth-century world's fairs traces Ottoman participation from the Exposition Universelle of 1867, the occasion of Abdülaziz's journey to Paris, through the pavilions and reconstructed Islamic quarters that European organizers assembled for their publics and that Ottoman commissioners sought, with increasing determination, to control.[59] Ece Özçeri's study of Ottoman self-representation across the international exhibitions of the century establishes the pattern with particular clarity: the Ottoman state came to recognize that these events were not only commercial arenas but arenas of self-representation, and it adjusted its participation accordingly across the exhibitions of 1873, 1878, 1889, 1893, and 1900.[60]

Selim Deringil provides a strong basis for understanding how the Ottoman Empire represented itself in these international arenas. Deringil's following statement is an extremely important starting point for understanding this representation: "From the above it would appear that the Ottomans had internalized much of the West's perception of the 'Orient', even as they were striving for equality."[61]

Deringil elaborates on this especially through the example of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, and presents an excellent analysis of the Ottoman self-representation on the international stage. The Ottoman pavilion in Chicago was a space

[59] Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[60] Özçeri, "Displaying the Empire: A Search for Self Representation of the Ottoman Empire in the International Exhibitions of the Nineteenth Century" (MS thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2014).

[61] Ibid, 157.

designed to demonstrate the prestige and dignity of the state. The design of the pavilion and the artifacts on display aimed to strengthen the image of the Ottoman Empire as a modern and civilized state. The Ottomans were careful about avoiding exotic and *Orientalist* depictions at the event. For instance, the Bedouin riders who would take part in the shows planned for the fair were trained by modern cavalry officers in order to prevent a barbaric scene. The fact that items such as whirling dervishes or traditional dancers were not allowed to be exhibited against the widespread discourse of exoticism of the period is also a reflection of the Ottoman awareness and desire to present its culture to the Western world, in their view, in a more respectable and equal way.

Another example of the empire's representation policies on the world stage occurred at the 1900 Paris Universal Exposition. The first act of this performance of self-affirmation was staged even before the fair opened its doors, at the location where the Ottoman pavilion was positioned. The fact that the Ottoman pavilion was placed right among the great powers such as Britain, Germany, and France, made the regime extremely happy both internally and publicly, and it was eagerly explained how fitting this was for the Ottoman Empire's honor and prestige. For the Ottomans, it was a spatial declaration of the regime's claim to take its place among the great powers on a seemingly equal footing with them.

The success of the Ottoman branch in the fair became a source of pride and joy for the Ottoman administration. However, from the letter of Monsieur Schienel, who was the commissioner of the Ottoman branch, it is understood that the Ottomans received some depreciatory criticisms about its branch:

> …Yesterday evening, which coincided with the twenty-fifth anniversary of His Majesty the Sultan's accession to the throne, I presented and submitted the program of the banquet, which was inaugurated at the Ottoman section and concluded with great success. Over two thousand people attended, including the directors of the special offices of the Ministries of Navy, Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Agriculture, as well as General Brojer, the mayor, and the general commissioners of Germany, England, Russia, Austria, Spain, America, Belgium, and Japan, along with the notable figures of Paris. […] Despite the efforts of those who wish to undermine the importance of the Ottoman section, the Ottoman section achieved five grand awards, ten gold medals, and fifty-

> four awards. My mission has concluded, and I hope that I have presented my service to His Majesty the Sultan in an appropriate manner.[62]

I believe Schienel's language is worth examining. The medals and awards are presented as evidence of a mission accomplished, proof that the commissioner has served his sovereign well. The phrase "despite the efforts of those who wish to undermine the importance of the Ottoman section" shows how much of a siege mentality existed throughout the whole undertaking.[63]

The regime then converted this assumed success into a tool of internal propaganda. News of medals arriving from Paris dominated the columns of İstanbul newspapers for weeks. To be more specific, mentions of the fair appeared on one hundred thirty seven different days in the *Sabah* newspaper and on one hundred twenty one different days in the *İkdam* newspaper throughout 1900. Each news report in *Sabah* and *İkdam* showed the public how the Ottoman Empire was appreciated and approved by the West, presenting it as proof of the regime's legitimacy within the country.

> Today, the Ottoman branch's inauguration ceremony was conducted in a highly splendid and grand manner. Every corner of the pavilion was adorned in an eye-catching way, and the banners of Ottoman victory were waving in every direction. The large and exceptionally elegant halls were filled with esteemed guests, comprising the most renowned and distinguished figures of Paris. The reception held was extraordinarily befitting to the illustrious glory of the Ottoman Empire. During the reception, eloquent speeches were made, praising the virtues and noble qualities of His Majesty the Sultan. Additionally, the Hamidian Imperial March was performed by the orchestra. Following this, all the guests were served with Ottoman confections, cigars, and various delicacies and beverages from the meticulously prepared buffet, which had

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[62] BOA, Y..PRK.TKM., 44/3. [*Cülûs-u hümâyûn-u hazret-i pâdişâhînin yirmi beşinci sene-yi devriyesine müsâdif olan dünki gece ʿOsmanlı şuʿbesinde küşâd olunan ve pek ziyâde muvaffakiyetle hitâm bulan ziyâfetin programını leffen arz ve takdîm etdim Bahriye ve Hâriciye ve Ticâret ve Zirâʿat nezâretleri kalem-i mahsûs müdirleri ile ceneral Brojer ve şehremîni ile Almanya ve İngiltere ve Rusya ve Avusturya ve İspanya ve Amerika ve Belçika ve Japonya komiser-i ʿumûmîleri ile Parisin muʿteberânından iki bin kişiye mütecâviz zevât hâzır idi [...] ʿOsmanlı şuʿbesinin ehemmiyetini nazarlardan ıskât etmek isteyenlerin mesâʿîsine rağmen ʿOsmanlı şuʿbesi beş büyük mükâfât on ʿaded altun madalya ve elli dört mükâfâta nâʾil olmuşdur meʾmûriyetim hitâm buldu cenâb-ı pâdişâhîye muvâfık suretde ʿarz-ı hizmet eylemiş olduğumu ümîd eylerim…*]

[63] For the broader analytical literature on this siege mentality, see Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909*. Deringil reads the late Ottoman elite as keenly aware that "their world was exposed to mortal danger from within as from without." Also see M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Zihniyet, Siyaset ve Tarih* (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2006). Hanioğlu traces the same disposition as a structural reflex inherited by the Republic, arguing that the late Ottoman political mind tended to read every event through the paired paradigms of "external enemy encirclement, internal traitor betrayal" and a self-understanding of *mazlumiyet*, of being a wronged and abused party.

> been announced in advance. As the orchestra performed delightful pieces, the attendees explored every aspect of the exhibition, greatly appreciating its order and perfection. Indeed, the appearance of the Ottoman branch is astonishing to an extraordinary degree. Especially, the opening ceremony was conducted with such grandeur that it defies description.[64]

When the language of this report is read carefully, it is seen that the emphasis falls entirely on how the exhibition was received by Western dignitaries, their attendance, their appreciation, their praise.

The Ottoman pavilion was not operating in a vacuum. Eleven years earlier, at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle, Egypt had been present in a form that, as Timothy Mitchell calls *Colonising Egypt*, treats as the inaugural scene of a specific representational logic.[65] The Egyptian exhibit in 1889 took the form of the *Rue du Caire*, a reconstructed Cairo street complete with whitewashed houses, donkey boys, and a mosque façade, staffed by Egyptians who lived and worked inside the reconstruction for the duration of the fair. Mitchell's central observation is that the pavilion was not a neutral display of Egyptian life. It was a staging of Europe's idea of Egypt, built to European specifications for European visitors, and the Egyptians who populated it performed themselves according to a script that had been composed outside of Cairo.[66]

The Ottoman approach at Paris 1900 can be read alongside this precedent as a more carefully staged representational strategy. Where Egypt had submitted to being framed, arriving in Paris as the exhibit that European audiences expected, the Ottoman pavilion pursued something different this time. However, no matter how differently

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[64] "Paris Muhâbir-i Mahsûsumuzdan," *Sabah*, no. 3772, 3 Mayıs 1316/16 May 1900. [*Bugün Osmanlı şuʿbesinin gâyet müdebdeb ve mutantan sûretde resm-i küşâdı icrâ olundu. Dâʾirenin her tarafı nazar-ribâ bir sûretde tezyîn kılınmış ve râyât-ı zafer âyât-ı ʿOsmâni her cihetde temevvic etmekde bulunmuşdu. Cesîm ve bî-nazîr derecede latîf salonlar Parisin en meşhûr ve nâmdâr zevâtını teşkîl eden medʿuvvîn ile mâlî idi. İcrâ kılınan resm-i kabûl fevkʾel-ʿâde şân-ı celîl-i ʿOsmânîye muvâfık idi. Esnâ-yı resm-i kabûlde esniye ve mehâmid-i celîle-yi hazret-i şehriyâr-i aʿzamî ile tezyîn-i lisân edildiği gibi musıka tarafından marş-ı ʿâlʾel-ʿâl-i Hamîdî terennüm olundu. Bunu müteʿakib biʾl-cümle medʿuvvîne evvelce tenbîh edilen gâyet mükemmel büfelerden ʿOsmanlı şekerlemeleriyle sigaralar ve envâʿ-ı meʾkûlât ve meşrûbât ikrâm edildi. Musıka tarafından latîfe terennüm olunduğu hâlde huzzâr serginin her cihetini görerek intizâm ve mükemmeliyetini pek ziyâde takdîr etdiler. Fîʾl-hakîka ʿOsmanlı şuʿbesinin manzarası hayret-efzâ bir derecededir. Husûsiyle resm-i küşâd tasvîre sığmayacak bir derecede mutantan olmuşdur.*]

[65] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1-33.

[66] Ibid, 34-62.

staged, the frame was still European. The difference between the Egyptian and Ottoman cases should not be drawn too sharply. By 1900 Egypt had been under British occupation for eighteen years, the financial administration established by the *Caisse de la Dette Publique* in 1876 had already passed to the hands of European creditors.[67] The Ottoman *Düyûn-ı Umûmiye*, established in 1881, operated on a similar principle of European creditor supervision over imperial finances, though the Ottoman regime retained a degree of political sovereignty that Khedival Egypt had lost.[68] Khedive Ismail's reported declaration that Egypt was no longer part of Africa but belonged to Europe, was the more openly avowed form of a stance the Hamidian regime pursued with a degree of rhetorical caution.[69]

What Mitchell's analysis adds to the reading of the Paris Exposition of 1900 is a name for the trap. Enframing operates not only on the framed object but on the framing subject. The pavilion that frames itself for European recognition accepts that recognition by Europe is the currency in which civilizational worth is denominated. The more skillfully the framing is executed, the more thoroughly the regime enters into the economy of recognition whose rules it did not set and whose outcomes it cannot ultimately control. Schienel's report from Paris, with its five grand awards and ten gold medals presented as evidence of service rendered to the Sultan, was a document of this economy at work. The awards were actual materials, the performance was genuinely successful by the criteria that mattered to the regime, and the coverage in *Sabah* and *İkdam* converted the success into domestic legitimacy. However, we can easily observe how all this success is achieved within the boundaries of Western framework.

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[67] On the *Caisse de la Dette Publique* and Egyptian financial tutelage, see David S. Landes, *Bankers and Pashas: International Finance and Economic Imperialism in Egypt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).

[68] See Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 75-76. Also see Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909*, 58-59.

[69] Robert Solé, *L'Égypte, Passion française* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), 159. Solé notes that while it remains uncertain whether Khedive Ismail actually said these words, the phrase was widely attributed to him by his contemporaries and accurately reflects his governing philosophy.

2.3. The Pan-Islamic Dimension

Running alongside the regime's long campaign of self-representation before Western observers was a second, parallel effort addressed to a different public. The audience of this second front were the Muslim populations of the empire, and beyond them the Muslims of Egypt, Algeria, Central Asia, the Russian Volga basin, the Indian subcontinent, and Malaysia. In a strategic environment where European powers claimed protection over Ottoman Christian subjects, where Russian expansion pressed on Muslim communities from the Caucasus to Turkistan, and where the British, the French, and the Dutch governed vast Muslim populations through colonial administrations, the figure of the Caliph in İstanbul acquired a new kind of significance.[70]

Abdülhamid II's cultivation of the caliphal title, in this context, followed a logic that paralleled his exposition strategy. The Sultan's image was circulated through formal portraits sent to Muslim rulers and notables across Asia and Africa and his accession anniversaries became celebrations for prayers in distant mosques.[71] The Hijaz Railway, constructed between 1900 and 1908 and reaching Medina served several functions simultaneously. It was a strategic military and administrative instrument for projecting Ottoman authority into the Arabian peninsula, a logistical aid to pilgrims, a demonstration that the empire could command the tools of modern infrastructure, and also an unambiguous assertion that the steward of the Two Holy Sites[72] took his stewardship seriously enough to finance it through donations collected from Muslims across the world.[73] Each of these functions operated on a different register, and the railway's value to the regime lay precisely in the convergence of so many purposes in a single project.

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[70] Selim Deringil, "The Ottomanization of the Şeriat," in *The Well-Protected Domains*, 44-67.

[71] Ibid.

[72] The Two Holy Sites (*Haremeyn-i Şerifeyn*) are Mecca and Medina, the holiest cities in Islam, whose custodianship constituted one of the principal sources of the Sultan-Caliph's religious legitimacy across the Muslim world.

[73] For the construction and political significance of the Hijaz Railway, see William Ochsenwald, *The Hijaz Railroad* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1980); Murat Özyüksel, *The Hejaz Railway and the Ottoman Empire: Modernity, Industrialisation and Ottoman Decline* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

What gave pan-Islamic discourse its wider resonance was a transformation that Cemil Aydın has traced in detail; namely, the emergence, in the second half of the nineteenth century, of an idea of the "Muslim world" as a singular political-civilizational entity.[74] Building on Aydın's argument, this idea was in fact an innovation of the period under study. While the belief system of Islam contains elements emphasizing brotherhood of Muslims, before the second half of the nineteenth century, Muslims of different regions thought of themselves as belonging to different polities, different schools of jurisprudence, different linguistic and cultural communities, making them Muslims of the world while not creating a single "Muslim world" in the modern sense.[75] What produced the new conception was the pressure of European imperial discourse, which classified the globe into civilizations arranged in hierarchy and placed Muslims as a group at one of the lower ones as Samuel Huntington observes.[76] Pan-Islamism in its modern form was less the survival of a premodern unity than the construction of a modern one. Therefore, I argue that the pan-Islamic discourse was not a return to a pre-European framework; rather, it was a recreation and response to European categories.

The significance of the pan-Islamic dimension for the argument of this chapter lies in its relation to what has been examined in the preceding sections. The exposition pavilions at Chicago and Paris, the press front waged against hostile Western editorials which will be discussed below, and the cultivation of the caliphal image across the Muslim world were three audiences addressed through three distinct vocabularies, by a regime that had recognized, with considerable clarity, that legitimacy in the late nineteenth century could not be secured through any single channel. Each audience received a version of the regime tailored to its expectations.

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[74] Cemil Aydın, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 3-5 and 65-132.

[75] Ibid.

[76] See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). Huntington's framework has been the subject of sustained criticism for its Eurocentric assumptions, its essentialist treatment of civilizational identity, and its predictive ambitions, and I do not endorse it as an analytical account of world politics. What Huntington's work does register accurately is the persistence of a Western political imagination that continues to classify the world in civilizational-hierarchical terms. The reference here treats his thesis as evidence of that classificatory habit, not as a description of the world it claims to describe.

2.4. The Press Front

World Expositions were the largest, most public stage for this contest of representation. However, they were episodic events. The "Sick Man" label, however, was present every day. In newspaper editorials, in magazines of opinion, in diplomatic correspondence, it was constantly repeated, altered and magnified by a Western press that the Ottoman regime had no ability to control or ignore. As such, the Ottoman government's battle to rid itself of the "Sick Man" label would also require a second front in addition to the world expositions front. This second front would consist of a prolonged engagement with foreign press. The Ottoman governments' diplomatic agencies continually monitored "hostile" media coverage across Europe and America. They also used third parties to stop or alter adverse media pieces. Additionally, they actively encouraged sympathetic journalists, and finally, they saw any favorable media attention as further proof of their legitimacy.

It is vital to understand the tone in which the Western media covered the Ottoman Empire, so that we can see the scale of what the regime was defending against. Without understanding this, the regime's defense mechanisms may appear unreasonable and paranoid. As an example, in November 1889, the New York newspaper *The Sun* published a piece describing the Sultan as being "in phenomenally gay spirits"[77] after the Kaiser's visit, noting with contempt that "although the Turkish potentate lives from hand to mouth, he could not well make a European tour in the modest guise of a Cook's tourist."[78] Two weeks later, the same newspaper published a far more critical editorial under the title "The Situation in Turkey." The article described the empire in the language of terminal agony:

> Every effort, indeed, compatible with national bankruptcy was made to throw dust in the eyes of the Sultan's guests. The old-fashioned ironclads were patched up, the troops selected for review were freshly uniformed, the front walls of houses were whitewashed, the streets were cleaned, and some of them were carpeted. Nevertheless, the truth could not be hidden that Turkey has never been more helpless against foreign aggression or more exposed to internal revolution than she is today.[79]

[77] *The Sun* (New York), November 17, 1889.

[78] Ibid.

[79] "The Situation in Turkey," *The Sun* (New York), December 2, 1889.

The article went on to describe the army as "disorganized and disaffected," the civil officials as unpaid and exasperated, and the Sultan himself as exhibiting "unmistakable symptoms of inherited insanity."[80] It speculated that Abdülhamid's predecessor Murad V, deposed on grounds of mental illness, had in fact recovered his faculties, which meant that Abdülhamid II was "no longer Sultan *de jure*, but a mere Vekil, or substitute, temporarily exercising the supreme executive functions."[81] The conclusion was that "any change would be welcome to the Turks, and for that reason we need not be surprised to hear of their recurring to revolutionary measures."[82] Every element of Ottoman governance was presented as fraudulent and the ruler as a paranoid tyrant clinging to a throne he no longer legitimately held.

The Sun was no obscure publication. It was one of the most widely read newspapers in New York, and what appeared in the New York press circulated far beyond the city. The Ottoman legation in Washington D.C. understood this clearly. Ottoman ambassador to the U.S. Aleksandr Mavroyeni Bey, in his report to Constantinople, described the newspapers of New York as "the best in the United States, those that are read everywhere in America, far superior in influence to those of the capital."[83]

Newspapers, however, were only part of the problem. Journals of opinion carried the same diagnosis, sometimes, in a more sophisticated form. Thomas Davidson, writing in the American monthly *Forum* in October 1896,[84] pushed the argument to its logical extreme. Davidson demanded that the Sultan be dethroned and all political power withdrawn from Muslims until they ceased to be, in his words, fanatics. He went further, proposing that "the civilized nations" form an association for the prevention of cruelty to non-Muslims, and declared that there could be no solution to the Eastern Question so long as the civilized peoples did not put an end to the last vestige of Muslim authority. The *Forum* article represents a particular strain of Western

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[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] BOA, HR.SYS., 60-17, document 4. [...*Et d'abord, les meilleurs journaux des Etats-Unis, ceux qui se lisent partout en Amérique, sont ceux qui se publient à New-York. Ceux de Washington sont très inférieurs et ne se lisent nulle part en dehors de la Capitale…*]

[84] Thomas Davidson, "The Creed of the Sultan: Its Future," *Forum*, October 1896. The article was forwarded to Constantinople by the Ottoman legation in Washington D.C., found at BOA, HR.SYS., 66-19.

discourse about the Ottoman Empire that went beyond the political "sick man" diagnosis. According to the article, the problem was not merely that the Ottoman state was dysfunctional but that Muslim authority as such was incompatible with civilization. It casts the entire Muslim world as a site of inherent cruelty requiring external supervision, borrowing the language of humanitarian reform to justify what amounts to a call for the abolition of Muslim political sovereignty. This was the intellectual environment from which each defensive action taken by the regime felt that they had to address. Therefore, it is also noteworthy that the Ottoman legation in Washington D.C. sent Davidson's article to Constantinople because they found it worthy of attention. As seen from these examples, the diplomatic network served as the eyes and ears of the regime throughout the Western press arena, surveying publications for threats and sending those threats back to the center for a response.

The regime did not receive these publications passively. In addition to a formal reaction to such writings, the Ottoman diplomatic apparatus developed an informal system for reacting to critical comments in foreign newspapers. A detailed analysis of how this process occurred can be seen in the correspondence of Ambassador Mavroyeni in the United States of America. Mavroyeni Bey reacted promptly upon publication of the abovecited editorial by *The Sun* newspaper in December 1889. On December 9th, 1889, he submitted a lengthy report to İstanbul. At the beginning of his report, he provides a broader overview of the American press with respect to matters related to the East. While providing an assessment of the American press, he describes it as primarily uninformed regarding Eastern issues, sensationalistic, and focused on profit over accuracy. He notes that there are several large newspapers located in New York City, while newspapers based in Washington D.C. are generally inferior and read only in Washington D.C. However, he does note that newspapers are "daily bread" for virtually all members of society, read "from one end of the United States to another"[85] and although educated classes read them "with contempt and rather with indifference."[86] The report might as well be viewed as an intelligence assessment made

[85] BOA, HR.SYS., 60-17, document 4. [*...Mais c'est pour ainsi dire le gagne-pain de tous, car tout le monde lit son journal ici d'un bout à l'autre des Etats-Unis…*]

[86] BOA, HR.SYS., 60-17, document 4. [*...les hautes classes, au contraire, les classes instruites et intelligentes lisent avec mépris et plutôt avec indifférence les élucubrations quotidiennes des journaux de ce pays-ci…*]

by a diplomat who is attempting to understand the media environment in which he operates so as to identify opportunities and methods for intervening in the media.

Mavroyeni's operational method is also worth mentioning. He would not engage in direct polemic, which he considered not compatible with the dignity of the Imperial Legation. Instead, he worked through intermediaries, men whose opinions the press would take seriously. His report explains:

> Without losing a moment, I put myself in contact with him [Oscar Straus],[87] and asked him to kindly respond by letter to the article in *The Sun*. Mr. Straus, who has always retained the best memory of his stay in Turkey and who witnessed the justice and kindness of our Auguste Maître, was good enough to accede to my request.[88]

He had simultaneously contacted Abram Hewitt, the former mayor of New York City, who wrote back:

> Articles of this sort are not even read in New York. As for myself, I read it with disgust. I will do everything in my power to give Mr. Dana [the editor of *The Sun*] a more correct idea of the situation in Turkey.[89]

Mavroyeni's preferred method, as he himself articulated it, was not "engaging in polemics with the newspapers, which would be contrary to the dignity of this Imperial Legation, but by indirect means and by making use of the influence of honest and reliable men.[90] He concluded his report with confidence that *The Sun* would not repeat

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[87] Oscar Solomon Straus, a German-Jewish businessman and diplomat from New York, served as United States Minister to the Ottoman Empire in 1887-89 and again in 1898-1900 and 1909-10. He later became the first Jew to serve in an American cabinet, as Secretary of Commerce and Labor under Theodore Roosevelt. Straus's sympathetic view of Abdülhamid II should be situated within a specific political context rather than read as self-interest. Rhetorical contrast between "Muslim tolerance" and "Christian European antisemitism" carried considerable weight for American Jewish public figures of Straus's generation.

[88] BOA, HR.SYS., 60-17, document 4. [...*Sans perdre un instant, je me suis mis en rapport avec lui, et je l'ai prié de vouloir bien répondre par une lettre à l'article du Sun. Mr. Straus qui a toujours conservé le meilleur souvenir de son séjour en Turquie et qui a été témoin de la justice et de la bonté de notre Auguste Maître a bien voulu accéder à ma demande.…*]

[89] BOA, HR.SYS., 60-17, document 4. [...*Les articles de cette espèce ne sont pas même lus à New-York. Quant à moi, je l'ai lu avec dégoût. Je ferai tout mon possible pour donner à Monsieur Dana une idée plus correcte de la situation en Turquie…*]

[90] BOA, HR.SYS., 60-17, document 4. [...*Quoiqu'il en soit, du moment qu'elles se produisent, il faut, je le répète, les combattre, et cela non pas en entamant des polémiques avec les journaux, ce qui serait contraire à la dignité de cette Légation Impériale, mais par des moyens détournés et en se servant de l'influence d'hommes honnêtes et sûrs. C'est cette dernière ligne de conduite que j'ai de tout temps suivie et c'est celle à laquelle je me suis tout dernièrement encore conformé…*]

its hostile coverage, that *The Sun* had been "enlightened, once and for all, by persons in whom he must have confidence."[91] He also speculated that the original hostile article had been inspired from London, connected to Armenian committees and publications, and he was investigating this lead.[92]

The entire operation, from the identification of the hostile article to the mobilization of counter voices to the analysis of the article's likely source, was completed within days. What this episode reveals is that the ambassador's role extended well beyond diplomatic representation.

The voice the regime valued most in this episode was Oscar Straus, the former American ambassador to Constantinople. Straus's letter to *The Sun*, published on December 6, 1889, is a remarkable document for this matter. He opened by warning the American public not to "fall into the net of the intriguers against the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, or into the error of the opposition press in England that is accustomed to paint the Sultan as a cruel tyrant and to exaggerate stories of the sufferings of the Ryah or non-Mussulman population in Turkey."[93] He then directly contested the newspaper's characterization of Abdülhamid II:

> The Sultan, above all, is a humane sovereign, and since his accession capital punishment has practically been abolished. […] The present Sultan is a serious man, whose entire energy and ability are devoted to affairs of government. He is a most painstaking executive. […] The Sultan is personally benevolent and kind-hearted, and scarcely a month passes but that he contributes from his private purse to alleviate sufferings, irrespective of race or religion, among his subjects.[94]

Straus went further by citing the expansion of the school system, the extension of the railway network, and "a more enlightened financial policy"[95] as evidence of progress.

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[91] BOA, HR.SYS., 60-17, document 4. [*...c'est à cause de cela que j'ai eu devoir l'éclairer, une fois pour toutes, par des personnes auxquelles il doit avoir confiance...*]

[92] BOA, HR.SYS., 60-17, document 4. [*...Je suis moralement convaincu que l'inspirateur de l'article du 'Sun' vient de Londres, car cet article ne contient après tout que les calomnies grossières propagées habituellement par les Comités de Londres et par un journal tel que le 'Daily News.' Je ne serais pas étonné d'apprendre, et je suis en train de faire tout mon possible pour m'en assurer, que celui qui a communiqué au 'Sun' les calomnies dont il s'agit est lié avec ceux qui soutiennent et qui inspirent le journal Arménien qui se publie aux Etats-Unis et que j'envoie régulièrement à Votre Excellence...*]

[93] *The Sun* (New York), December 6, 1889. Original in English.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

He closed with the sweeping claim that "whatever may be the sins of Turkey, her present sovereign, Abdul Hamid II., is a kind, benevolent ruler, whose every aspiration is for the good and welfare of his subjects."[96] His letter reads almost exactly like an attorney's statement for the defense in the courtroom that Abdülhamid II might have imagined himself standing before. Straus was performing, perhaps without fully realizing it, the same function that the Ottoman pavilion in Paris would perform four years later.

The regime recognized the value of this statement and managed the relationship accordingly. Straus's favorable statements were brought to the Sultan's personal attention. Said Paşa, Minister of Foreign Affairs, wrote to Straus expressing the Sultan's "high satisfaction" with his public declarations, noting:

> The benevolent words you used to explain the progress achieved among us particularly touched us, and I made it my eager duty to place before the eyes of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan, My Auguste Maître, the extract in question. His Imperial Majesty took note of it with very great interest and deigned to charge me with conveying to you the expression of his high satisfaction.[97]

The correspondence passed through the Grand Vizier's office, where a note recommended that Straus be rewarded for his favorable public statements about Ottoman progress in industry, justice, and education, and that letters of gratitude be sent both to the former ambassador and to the mayor of New York.[98] In a subsequent letter from New York, Straus himself confirmed his ongoing efforts: "In lectures, articles and interviews with the press since my return, I have endeavored to disseminate the truth about His Imperial Majesty, His devotion to the high duties of his responsible position, His qualities of mind and generous disposition."[99] He described Ottomans as "the most tolerant, law-abiding, and best people of the Orient,

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[96] Ibid.

[97] BOA, HR.SYS., 60-17, document 2. [...*Les paroles bienveillantes dont vous vous êtes servis pour expliquer les progrès réalisés chez nous nous ont particulièrement touchés et je me suis fait un devoir empressé de placer sous les yeux de S. M. I. le Sultan Mon Auguste Souverain, l'entrefilet en question. S. M. I. en a pris connaissance avec un très grand intérêt et a daigné me charger de vous faire parvenir l'expression de sa haute satisfaction…*]

[98] BOA, HR.SYS., 60-17, document 3. Original in English.

[99] BOA, HR.SYS., 60-17, document 1. Original in English.

far superior in many of the cardinal elements of civilization to their Christian neighbors."[100]

The regime's ambitions in the domain of press management reached to a degree that it sought to institutionalize its control of information flows through a renewal of the old agreement with new emphasis with the Havas-Reuter agency. A proposal prepared for the Ottoman government lays out the rationale with clarity:

> It is now recognized that public opinion exercises a considerable and almost preponderant influence on the peaceful settlement of great political questions. To have public opinion on one's side is almost a certainty of success. Against it, and even without it, it has become difficult and even impossible to carry out in Europe any serious and lasting work.[101]

Havas's plan for covering the press in France included all the publications across the country including many regional newspapers such as *Le Figaro* and *Le Temps*, as well as smaller dailies which circulated anywhere from fifty thousand to one hundred fifty thousand copies. Their reach was further extended through their agency partners in other European capitals, and thus they claimed they could deliver news to each major paper in Europe. According to them, the voice of İstanbul would be "reverberated throughout the entire world by a sort of universal keyboard."[102] They described themselves openly regarding the problems they intended to resolve. The Ottoman Empire's affairs were "very poorly known in France and in Europe," "the most contradictory news circulates freely, too often at the discretion of the enemies of the Ottoman Government," and the time had come to "oppose tendentious publicity gradually misleading opinion with publicity more in keeping with the true state of things."[103]

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[100] BOA, HR.SYS., 60-17, document 1.

[101] BOA, HR.SYS., 1841-36, document 1. [...*Il est maintenant reconnu que l'opinion publique exerce une influence considérable et est à peu près prépondérante dans le règlement pacifique des grandes questions politiques. Avoir l'opinion publique avec soi est presque une certitude de succès. Contre elle, et même sans elle, il est devenu difficile et même impossible de faire en Europe une œuvre sérieuse et durable…*]

[102] BOA, HR.SYS., 1841-36, document 1. [...*se trouve répercuté au bout de quelques heures dans le monde entier par une sorte de clavier universel…*]

[103] BOA, HR.SYS., 1841-36, document 1. [...*Actuellement, les affaires de Turquie sont fort mal connues en France et en Europe. Les nouvelles les plus contradictoires se donnent libre carrière trop souvent au gré des ennemis du Gouvernement ottoman dont les intérêts sont si ennemis avec ceux du*

The proposal went further still, noting that Havas maintained accredited representatives in every European capital who enjoyed semi-official relations with their respective governments. Through these representatives, confidential information could be conveyed to prime ministers and foreign ministers without the "inconveniences of direct intervention." The proposal closed by arguing that an agreement with Havas would also serve to strengthen Franco-Ottoman relations, turning what was already an informational instrument into a diplomatic one as well.

Havas-Reuter agency's director in Constantinople, Monsieur Châtenay, pressed the case in a separate letter to the Foreign Minister, offering "the immense publicity" of the Havas-Reuter network to the Ottoman government and insisting that "it is especially at this moment that the Havas-Reuter Agency can be useful to the [Ottoman] Government."[104] By this, it is obvious that Châtenay means the Armenian Question and its echoes in Europe.

The extent to which the regime felt compelled to build an information infrastructure across the entire Europe is reflective of the strength of the regime's commitment to fight "the sick man" diagnosis on every front. That commitment was based on a belief about the nature of the political situation, namely, that a regime whose ability to survive depended on Western perceptions of it would expend considerable resources to manage those perceptions. The Ottoman Embassy in Paris, as noted in the Havas-Reuter proposal, had long been engaged in providing "notes, denials and rectification" to the agency along with all of the other foreign embassies. What was new was the ambition to move from reactive corrections to a systematic, proactive shaping of the information flow in order to successfully manage the perception of the Ottoman Empire in the Western world.

The mechanism occasionally bore fruit. In July 1898, the Vienna-based military newspaper *Reichswehr*, described by the Ottoman ambassador as normally hostile to

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Gouvernement français. Il serait temps d'opposer à une publicité tendancieuse égarant peu à peu l'opinion, une publicité mieux en rapport avec le véritable état des choses.…]

[104] BOA, HR.İD., 1699-22, document 1. [...*Je crois que c'est surtout en ce moment que l'Agence Havas-Reuter peut être utile au Gouvernement, et c'est pour cela que je me permets d'insister auprès de Votre Excellence pour l'adoption de ce projet…*]

the empire,[105] published a favorable article arguing that the armament efforts underway in Turkey proved that "the politically 'sick man' is not lacking in vitality."[106] The article continued:

> A state which, in order to increase its military strength, makes efforts relatively greater than those which Austria-Hungary deploys for the same purpose, such a state cannot be considered as approaching its ruin, as some are pleased to believe. On the contrary, it is permissible to suppose that the 'dying' Turkey may perhaps hold in store for us, in a more or less near future, surprises greater than those she caused us during the recent wars she sustained.[107]

The Ottoman ambassador in Vienna forwarded the article to Constantinople with evident satisfaction. One favorable article in a Viennese military journal was, in itself, a small thing. However, within the logic of the regime's representational war and siege mentality, it counted as a victory.

The press front as described so far was directed outward. What these operations reveal is a regime acutely conscious of the power of print and determined to intervene in the informational environment wherever its resources permit.

2.5. The Shared Ground

Paris, where carefully constructed representation was staged in the Exposition Universelle, was also one of the headquarters of the opposition movements that would bring about the end of the regime. At the very moment the regime was celebrating the anniversary of the Sultan's accession with lavish banquets and waving the Ottoman flag among the Great Powers, an opposition working to reject this narrative was also active in different corners of the same city: The Young Turks. They could clearly be called the ghost of this official narrative. Two opposing visions of the Ottoman Empire existed quietly in conflict in Paris. On one hand, the official version of an empire

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[105] BOA, HR.SYS., 194-10, document 1. [...*Le langage que cette feuille emploie aujourd'hui à notre égard est d'autant plus caractéristique qu'elle passe pour un organe qui nous est hostile…*]

[106] BOA, HR.SYS., 194-10, document 2. [*daß es dem politisch-'kranken Mann' noch nicht an Lebenskraft fehlt*]

[107] BOA, HR.SYS., 194-10, document 2. [*Ein Staat, der für seine Militärmacht Aufwendungen und Anstrengungen macht, welche relativ die übertreffen, die beispielsweise Oesterreich-Ungarn seiner Wehrmacht widmet, kann noch nicht als so morsch angesehen werden, wie es Manche lieben, die Türkei darzustellen. Im Gegentheil ist anzunehmen, daß die 'sterbende' Türkei vielleicht noch größere Ueberraschungen in der Zukunft bieten kann, als es ihre letzten Kriege waren.*]

prospering due to its ruler; on the other hand, a vision of a country disintegrating as a result of that ruler.

At this point it becomes clear that the regime and the Young Turks' opposition were fighting against the same labels although they disagreed on their diagnoses and treatments. To understand this ghost that haunted the official narrative from across the continent, we must leave the gilded halls of Yıldız Palace and the carefully staged pavilions of Paris and set foot in the world of exile, into the cafés and printing houses where the Sultan's diagnosis was rejected, his methods despised, and a radically different and far more invasive surgery was being prepared for the "sick man."

CHAPTER 3

THE YOUNG TURKS

The pioneers of the Young Turk movement were largely a product of the state's own project to create a "loyal elite" through modern education, but precisely because of these modern education methods, as mentioned in the previous chapter, they became the regime's most fiery opposition. The intellectual climate that drove them into action must be understood on its own terms. For this new generation of intellectuals, educated in modern schools such as the Tıbbiye, the Mülkiye, and the Harbiye,[108] scientism and positivism were more than philosophical movements imported from nineteenth-century Europe.[109] As Şükrü Hanioğlu has shown in his analysis of the mindset behind this movement, science for the Young Turks was an absolute source of truth, almost replacing religion.[110] A popular motto among them captured this perfectly: "Science is the religion of the elite, whereas religion is the science of the commons."[111]

What this thesis defends is that the thing that drove the adoption of this extreme scientism was a concrete panic and anxiety. A passage from *Şura-yı Ümmet*, one of the principal organs of the Young Turk movement, captures the existential anxiety underlying the turn to science:

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[108] *Mekteb-i Harbiye*, officially founded in 1835, was an imperial military academy established to train military officers with scientific methods in the Tanzimat era. See Abdülkadir Özcan, "Harbiye," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1997), accessed January 12, 2026, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/harbiye.

[109] Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri: 1895-1908* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1983), 51.

[110] Hanioğlu, "Ideological Roots of the Young Turks," in *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 7-32. Also see Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Örgüt Olarak Osmanlı İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük*, 21.

[111] [*ʿİlim havâsın dînidir, dîn ʿavâmın ʿilmidir.*] Doktor Abdullah Cevdet, *Hadd-ı Teʾdib* (İstanbul: Matbaa-i İçtihad, 1912), 66. Excerpt first found in Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 201; translation by Hanioğlu.

> Europeans first cite our ignorance as a pretext. They declare that we have remained closed to the truths that the world has learned and accepted. They go so far as to deny our very right to live.[112]

According to this new religion, society, like the universe, was subject to immutable and discoverable laws. Ahmed Rıza says:

> Society is a composite body subject to natural laws. This body has certain periodic diseases. To diagnose the illness, the patient must be made to speak, the condition and temperament, the pain and needs of the people must be known to the physicians of the nation. For unless the poison is known, the antidote cannot be found.[113]

As understood already, the society was a social organism and protecting the health of this organism and treating it when it fell ill was a sacred duty that fell to those who knew these laws, namely the enlightened elite. For them, the crisis that the empire was experiencing was not the result of divine providence, but the consequence of an organism subject to certain scientific laws becoming ill. If society was an organism, diagnosing and treating its illnesses was a scientific duty that fell to the "social physicians," that is, to themselves. With this medical perspective, the Young Turks set out to identify the fundamental "pathogens" behind this deadly disease called "backwardness." Their diagnosis represented a radical departure from the defensive analyses of the regime and sought the source of the problem directly within the system itself.

What Hanioğlu has identified as a broader pattern within Young Turk thought is also relevant here. The new intellectual orientation emerging in this generation moved away from solutions framed within specifically "Ottoman" or "Islamic" categories and gravitated instead toward universal theories.[114] Over time, a conviction took hold that

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[112] [*Avrupalılar evvel babda cehaletimizi bahane eylerler. Âlemin öğrenib kabul etdiği hakayık itibarıyla kapalı kaldığımızı beyan eylerler. Yaşamak hakkımızı inkâr etmeye kadar varırlar.*] As quoted in M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (İstanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1981), 144.

[113] [*Cemʿiyyet kavânîn-i tabʿiyeye tâbiʿ bir vücûd-u mürekkebdir. Bu vücûdun bir tâkım devrî hastalıkları vardır. Teşhîs-i maraz içün hastayı söyletmeli ahâlînin hâl ve mizâcı, derd ve ihtiyâcı etibbâ-yı millete maʿlûm olmalıdır. Zehir bilinmedikçe panzehiri bulunamaz.*] Ahmed Rıza, *Birinci Lâyiha*, London, 1312/1896-7, 23. This excerpt was first found by myself in Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Örgüt Olarak Osmanlı İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük (1889-1902)*, 604. As Hanioğlu underlines in his footnote, the page numbers vary across different editions. The original source cited here appears not to follow the same pagination with the one Hanioğlu examined.

[114] Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Örgüt Olarak Osmanlı İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük*, 56.

internal cultural characteristics mattered less than the universal laws governing social progress. This understanding is the point where Young Turks crossed a threshold that the Hamidian regime never chose to cross. The regime had played the court's game while despising the court, performing compliance with European standards it never accepted as its own. The Young Turks, on the other hand, believed the court was fundamentally right. European science had discovered the universal laws governing all human societies and these laws applied to the Ottoman Empire as they applied everywhere else. The task of the Ottoman intellectual, therefore, was to apply them correctly, not to contest them.

3.1. The Diagnosis

The fundamental diagnosis on which nearly all Young Turks agreed was the absolutist rule of Abdülhamid II, whom they saw as an anomaly against the laws of nature.[115] Despotism, in their view, was more than a regime of political oppression. It was a cancer that clogged the veins of the social organism, preventing the brain, that is, the intellectuals, from commanding the body, that is, the people, and slowly dragging it toward death.

For them, despotism did not act alone. It drew its power from ignorance and bigotry deeply rooted in society. The regime, too, regarded ignorance as one of the biggest threats, so the concern was not unique to the Young Turks. However, what the Young Turks meant by ignorance was the absence of scientific thought. They often saw the traditional ulema class and the rigid mentality they represented as the greatest embodiment of this ignorance.

> It was easier to dominate an ignorant people than to rule over a learned and enlightened one; therefore, the tyrants deemed it necessary to disable the Muslims' faculty of thought.[116]

[115] Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 208.

[116] [*Câhil bir halka tahakküm, ʿâlim ve münevver bir halka hükümdârlık etmekden daha kolay idi, onun içün cebâbire Müslümânların kuvve-yi müfekkirelerini taʿtîl etmeyi iltizâm etdiler*] Abdullah Cevdet, *Cihân-ı İslâma Dair Bir Nazar-ı Târîhî ve Felsefî* (İstanbul: Necm-i İstikbal Matbaası, 1922), 14. Originally published in *İçtihad*, no. 26, 14 July 1911.

Abdullah Cevdet pushed this diagnosis further, turning it from a political critique into a civilizational self-indictment. In a passage that captures the full force of the Young Turks' internalized *Orientalism*, he wrote:

> It was not the Bulgarians, our yesterday's subjects of merely two provinces, who drove us out of Europe. Alas! What drove us out of Europe was our Asiatic mind. Our decadent traditions, our decadent institutions, our organization…[117]

The passage belongs to a specific moment and to a specific quarrel, and it loses much of its force when it is read outside them. It was written in the aftermath of the Balkan defeats of 1912 and 1913, when the loss of the empire's European provinces forced the Westernist circle around *İçtihad* into an open reckoning, and it belongs to the polemic in which Abdullah Cevdet defended the wholesale adoption of European civilization against Celal Nuri's insistence that an indigenous moral core be preserved.[118] The enemy, according to Abdullah Cevdet, is no longer the Great Powers or the Bulgarians. The enemy is internal. He had adopted the *Orientalist* vocabulary to describe his own civilization's perceived failure. The adjective "Asiatic," with all its connotations of stagnation, irrationality, and historical backwardness, was being applied from within, by an Ottoman intellectual, to his own people. This is, in my opinion, the self-*Orientalist* diagnostic at its most naked form.

In a similar vein, Abdullah Cevdet declared elsewhere:

> Our greatest and most permanent enemy is in our own blood, in our own heads. The relationship between us and foreigners is the relationship between the strong and the weak, the learned and the ignorant, the rich and the poor.[119]

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[117] [*Bizi Avrupa'dan çıkaran bizim dünkü, iki vilâyet ahalimiz Bulgarlar mı idi? Heyhat! Bizi Avrupa'dan çıkartan bizim Asyaî kafamızdı. Bizim müstereddi an'anelerimiz, bizim müstereddi tesisatımızdı, teşkilâtımızdı…*] Quoted in footnotes in Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 361.

[118] Ibid, 362.

[119] [*...En büyük ve en daimî hasmımız bizim kendi kanımızdadır, kendi kafamızdır. Bizim ile ecanib arasındaki münasebât kavi ile zaif, âlim ile cahil, zengin ile fakir arasındaki münasebâtdır...*] Abdullah Cevdet, "Şime-i Muhabbet: Celâl Nuri Bey'in Geçen Nüshadaki 'Şime-i Husumet' Makalesine Cevab", *İçtihad*, no. 89, 16 Kânûn-i Sânî 1329. Found at Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 359.

The Ottoman Empire's relationship with Europe is presented as a natural hierarchy between fundamentally different categories of being. Underdevelopment was, at its core, a mindset disease, and this mindset had to be cured.

The more sociological wing of the Young Turk movement, however, sought the origins of the disease not only in the regime or mentality, but in the very structure of Ottoman society.

> That a great nation has for so many years been held captive by a handful of traitors proves not the strength of those few traitors but the weakness of that great nation! The cause of this weakness is always attributed to our ignorance! To be sure, ignorance too is a cause; but the real cause is our mode of livelihood, which engenders despotism and at the same time perpetuates ignorance. While the principal nations have come to be enlightened apart from their governments, or in spite of their governments, we have remained ignorant in obedience to ours.[120]

Prince Sabahaddin was deeply influenced by the French sociologist Frédéric Le Play and his followers, especially Edmond Demolins. Demolins' work, *A quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons?,* which was translated in English one year after its first publication under the title of "*Anglo-Saxon Superiority: To What It Is Due* was an important and life-changing source for him.[121] According to this school of sociology, societies were fundamentally divided into two types: competitive and dynamic "particularist" societies, such as Britain and America, where individual initiative and private property had developed; and centralised, static "communitarian" societies, such as Russia and the Ottoman Empire, where the individual was absorbed into the community.

> The greatest and most valuable work that the science of society has produced up to now is its social classification, which crowns its seventy-five years of scientific analyses. This classification divides civilized society into two

[120] [*Koca bir milletin bunca senedir birkaç haine esir oluşu o bir kaç hainin kuvvetini değil, fakat o koca milletin zaafını ispat ediyor! Bu zaafın sebebi hep cehaletimize atfedilmede! Vakıa cehalet de bir sebep; fakat asıl sebep; istibdadı tevlid eden tarzı maişetimizdir ki aynı zamanda cehli idame ediyor. Başlıca milletler hükumetleri haricinde veya hükumetlerine rağmen tenevvür edegeldikleri halde, biz hükumetimize itbaen cahil kaldık.*] Prens Sabahaddin, *Gönüllü Sürgünden Zorunlu Sürgüne: Bütün Eserleri*, ed. Mehmet Ö. Alkan (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2007), 252.

[121] Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908*, 82.

> fundamental categories under the names "communal formation" (*formation communautaire*) and "individualistic formation" (*formation particulariste*).[122]

Viewing things from this perspective, Prince Sabahaddin believed that the main reason for the Ottoman Empire's perceived backwardness was, beyond despotism, this communitarian social structure. This structure produced a bureaucratic mentality that expected everything from the state, avoided risk, and eliminated personal initiative. Individuals were not actors standing on their own feet, producing, and competing, but passive elements sheltering under the protection of the state. Therefore, merely overthrowing the sultan, who was also Sabahaddin's maternal uncle, and replacing him with another elite group would not cure this fundamental structural disease. That would be a symptomatic treatment, what was truly needed was a radical social reform that would change the very body of society.

Prince Sabahaddin articulated this point with particular sharpness in his open letters to the Committee of Union and Progress:

> It never occurs to us that, while we have always been deprived of these things, the West has produced them out of nothing and continues to produce them. Just as our causes of stagnation and decline are in no way explained by simply saying that the regression of the East arises from a lack of roads, ignorance, or misgovernment, so too the causes of the West's superiority are in no way explained by saying that its present progress arises from its roads, its schools, the perfection of its scientific institutions, or the good administration of its governments. [...] Indeed, why is the East so ignorant while the West is so enlightened?.. Why is the East so badly governed while the West enjoys such good administration!.. Why has the East, after a brief moment of splendor, remained so poor and so decayed, while the West has become so wealthy and so advanced?.. The true answers to these questions are furnished by sociology alone. 'Because,' it says, 'the East lies entirely under the influence of communitarian formation; the West, by contrast, under that of particularist formation.'[123]

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[122] [*...İlm-i ictimâın şimdiye kadar vücuda getirdiği en büyük, en kıymetli eser, yetmiş beş senelik tahlilat-ı fenniyesini tetvic eden tasnif-i ictimâisidir. Bu tasnif, cemiyat-ı medeniyeyi "teşekkül-i tecemmüi" (formaation communautaire), "teşekkül-i infiradi" (formation particulariste) namlarıyla iki esaslı kısma ayrılıyor...*] Prens Sabahaddin, *Gönüllü Sürgünden Zorunlu Sürgüne*, 341.

[123] [*Hiç düşünmüyoruz ki biz bunlardan daima mahrum olagelmişken Garb bunları yoktan çıkarmış ve çıkarmakta devam ediyor. Şarkın tedennisi yolsuzluk, cehil yahut idaresizlikten neşet ediyor deyivermekle nasıl esbabı-ı tevakkuf ve tedennimiz izah edilmiş olmuyorsa, Garbın terakkiyat-ı hazırası yolları, mektepleri, müessesat-ı ilmiyesinin mükemmeliyetinden yahut hükumetlerinin hüsn-i idaresinden doğuyor demekte de oranın esbab-ı tefevvuku izah edilmiş olmuyor! Çünkü cehil ile irfanı, yolsuzlukla yolları, iyi veya fena idareleri hasılı tedenni ile terakkiyi halk eden esbab-ı asliye var. [...] Filhakika neden dolayı Şark bu kadar cahil iken Garb o kadar münevver?.. Neden dolayı Şark bu kadar fena idare olunurken Garb o kadar iyi bir idareye mazhar!.. Neden dolayı Şark muvakkat bir şa'şa'adan*

The problem, according to Prince Sabahaddin, is not the symptoms, not the absence of roads or schools or efficient administration. Those are consequences. The problem is the very social structure that produces those symptoms. Sabahaddin's entire analytical framework, the distinction between communitarian and particularist societies, the identification of Anglo-Saxon individualism as the engine of progress, the diagnosis of Ottoman society as structurally "communatarian," was appropriated from French sociological thought.

> For some time we have been hearing of Sultan Hamid's illness, and we are expecting our salvation from his death! We say, 'Let Abdülhamid die, and let those who come after him save us.' Can you hope that a nation which thinks in this way can be saved?[124]

The Young Turks' answers to the question of backwardness varied, but they converged on a common point. The problem was not, as the Hamidian regime claimed, the work of a few traitors or external enemies. It was the system itself with the elements like the autocratic regime, the anti-scientific mindset, the communalist social structure. The diagnoses differed in emphasis, but they were always structural and met in the common point of taking Europe as the universal reference point.

The medical metaphor that runs through all of these diagnoses was not a simple rhetorical choice. It reveals the hierarchical positioning in the minds of the actors in question. A doctor does not consult the patient about the diagnosis. He does not ask permission before operating if the patient is about to die or does not submit his prescription to a vote. The medical metaphor placed the Young Turk intellectual in the position of the physician, the one who knows the laws governing the body's health, and the people in the position of the patient, the body that must submit to treatment whether it understands the treatment or not.

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sonra bu kadar fakir ve mütedenni kalmış iken Garb o kadar zengin ve müterakki? .. İşte bu suallerin hakiki cevaplarını yalnız ilm-i ictima veriyor. Çünkü, diyor, Şark kamilen teşekkül-i tecemmüinin; Garb ise bilhassa teşekkül-i infirâdînin tesiri altında.] Prens Sabahaddin, *Gönüllü Sürgünden Zorunlu Sürgüne*, 393-4.

[124] [*Bir zamandan beri Sultan Hamit'in hastalığını işitiyor, hayatımızı ölümünden bekliyoruz! Abdülhamid ölsün, yerine gelecekler bizi kurtarsın diyoruz. Böyle düşünen bir milletin kurtulabileceğini ümit edebilir misiniz?*] Prens Sabahaddin, *Gönüllü Sürgünden Zorunlu Sürgüne*, 215.

3.2. The Prescriptions

These profound diagnoses pushed the Young Turks to seek equally radical, and deeply conflicting, treatment methods. If the problem lay in the system itself, the solution had to be a fundamental change in the system. This shared conviction gave rise to the desire to bring together the scattered and diverse elements of the movement. The First Ottoman Liberals Congress, also known as the First Young Turks Congress, held in February 1902 in Paris at the home of French intellectual Gustave de Malleville, was the product of this quest for unity.[125]

The delegates, drawn from a diaspora scattered across European cities, had absorbed the intellectual atmosphere of their host countries. They read French sociology and attended European universities. They published their newspapers in the European presses and debated Ottoman affairs in European cafés. The very space in which the opposition organized itself was European, and the political culture of the diaspora was shaped by European norms of political debate, organizational structure, and ideological classification. The congress was, in a literal sense, an Ottoman political event conducted on European soil, in a European language, within a European intellectual framework.

The aim of the congress was to unite all opposition groups fighting against Abdülhamid II's administration, Turks, Arabs, Armenians, Albanians, Greeks, and others, under a single revolutionary umbrella and to formulate a common plan of action. Rather than achieving unity, however, the congress became the platform where fundamental philosophical and strategic differences within the movement surfaced and ideological fault lines turned into open fractures. The delegates largely agreed on the diagnosis of the disease. When it came to prescribing, a fierce battle broke out between two schools of thought: the centralists led by Ahmed Rıza Bey and the decentralists led by Prince Sabahaddin. This split would shape the political landscape of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in the years to come.

[125] For a detailed analysis of this congress, see Hanioğlu, "The First Congress of Ottoman Opposition in Paris and Its Consequences," in *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 173-199.

Ahmed Rıza was one of the most senior and uncompromising figures of the Young Turk movement. During his education in France, he deeply embraced Auguste Comte's positivism, making Comte's slogan "*Ordre et Progrès*" the motto of his own political philosophy and later of the society he would establish. As Şerif Mardin noted, Comte's philosophy provided Ahmed Rıza with "the scientific principles necessary for the reorganization of society."[126] Social progress, in this view, was only possible within a rigid order, guided by an elite ruling class acting in accordance with scientific laws. Chaos and anarchy were the greatest enemies of progress. The health of the social organism depended on the absolute control of the brain, namely the elite, over the body, namely the people. The resemblance to Abdülhamid II's own approach is most visible in Ahmed Rıza's thought, it was just the despot and outdated monarch was simply replaced by an enlightened monarch.

Ahmed Rıza and his supporters' prescription for perceived backwardness followed directly from this philosophy. Given the empire's multi-ethnic structure and the external threats it faced, any notion of decentralization or autonomy was, in their view, tantamount to treason, a path leading to division and fragmentation, a point on which they agreed, ironically, with the very Sultan they sought to overthrow. Salvation was possible only through a strong, uncompromising central authority that would govern all elements of the empire from a single center, İstanbul, with strict discipline and order. The state was the brain of the social organism, and this brain had to exercise complete control over every cell of the body. Any privilege granted to different ethnic groups would be equivalent to allowing the disease to spread. The people, worn down by a long period of despotism and ignorance, lacked the ability to govern themselves. It would not be the people who carried out the revolution and subsequently governed the country, but rather a handful of enlightened elites, educated in Western science and equipped with positivist thought, namely the Young Turks themselves.

The paradox of Ahmed Rıza's position is worth drawing attention. His prescription mirrors the Hamidian regime's structure more closely than he would have probably been willing to acknowledge. Both placed absolute authority in a centralized command, whether the Sultan or the positivist elite. What Ahmed Rıza envisioned was

[126] Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri: 1895-1908*, 184-191.

not a transformation of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, but a change of cadres at the top.

One of the biggest topics of debate at the congress was whether foreign intervention should be sought to overthrow Abdülhamid II. Prince Sabahaddin and the Armenian delegates were more receptive to this idea, but Ahmed Rıza vehemently opposed it as a matter of honor and sovereignty.[127] For him and his supporters, foreign intervention meant compromising the honor of the empire. He had stated his position on this issue clearly in *Meşveret*:

> Let alone foreigners exercising government in our domain, we would regard even their intervention in our affairs from the outside as a disgrace to our national honor and dignity.[128]

Ahmed Rıza's prescription was, in sum, an authoritarian modernization project that aimed to lift the "sick man" to his feet through order, discipline, centralization, and an elitist administration. It did not aim to change the social structure or cultural fabric but to perfect the administrative machinery that would manage the existing structure much more efficiently and scientifically.

Prince Sabahaddin, who brought the most radical sociological critiques of the movement, came to the congress with a completely different philosophical background. His prescription was almost the opposite of Ahmed Rıza's, seeing the solution to the problem not in strengthening the state, but rather in reducing the role of the state and empowering the individual. According to Sabahaddin, the only way to hold together the empire's different ethnic and religious elements and increase their loyalty to the state was to grant them the right to manage their own local affairs. This was not a political division, but a transfer of administrative authority. A system in which governors and local administrators were elected by the local people rather than appointed by the center, and in which they could determine their own budgets and

[127] Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 89.

[128] [*Ecnebîlerin mülkümüzde icrâ-yı hükûmet değil işimize hariçten müdâhale ve riyâset etmelerini bile nâmûs ve haysiyet-i milliyeye bir ʿâr sayarız.*] Ahmed Rıza, "Mısır," *Meşveret*, no. 9, 18 Şevval 1313. Excerpt first found in Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri*, 199.

priorities, would both increase the local loyalty to the state and eliminate bureaucratic inefficiency.

> In a constitutional regime based on decentralization, however, the supervision of the country is carried out in such a way that it begins from the subdistricts and gradually expands, growing step by step, until it reaches the center. It is natural that the councils of the subdistrict, district, and province elect their officials from among honorable and capable persons, as required by their most elementary interests, if satisfied with them, they retain them, and if dissatisfied, they replace them. Knowing this, the officials will try as much as they can to please the people, and therefore diligence and uprightness will be continually encouraged. Surely these men, who live in that locality all day long, know and comprehend the needs of the place far better than an official who has never in his life gone there or seen it and who one day turns up with his bag under his arm, following the whim of some superior whose identity we do not even know.[129]

For Sabahaddin, the real cure for backwardness lay not in reforms imposed from above but in cultivating a spirit of individual entrepreneurship from below. The secret to the success of Anglo-Saxon societies was that they raised individuals who did not rely on the state, who started their own businesses, took risks, and competed. The societal outlook of the Ottomans was severely crippled due to the "paternalist" ideology. Everyone wanted to be a civil servant and rely on the government. It would take complete overhauling of the education system with the intent to allow people to have freedom in both the economy and society in order to break away from this type of thinking. In contrast to Ahmed Rıza, Prince Sabahaddin viewed military, or at least diplomatic, intervention by the European powers as an option to topple the autocratic regime. To him, this was not a question of honor, but rather one of practicality. If the patient cannot recover on their own and if there are no medical professionals capable of providing assistance, then it is perfectly acceptable for Prince Sabahaddin to call a doctor who has greater authority and power to conduct the operation.

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[129] [*Adem-i merkeziyete isnat eden meşrutiyette ise teftiş-i memleketin icrasından, nahiyelerden başlayarak tedricen büyüye büyüye merkeze müntehi olur. Tabiidir ki nahiye, kaza ve vilayet mecalisi, memurlarını en basit menfaatleri muktezası namuslu ve muktedir zevattan intihab eyler, memnuniyetleri halinde ibka, adem-i memnuniyetleri halinde tebdil ederler bunu bilen memurlar da ellerinden geldiği kadar ahaliyi hoşnut etmeğe çalışacaklarından gayret ve istikamet mütemadiyen mazhar-ı teşvik olur. Elbette bu adamlar bütün gün içinde yaşadıkları mevkiin ihtiyacatını ömründe oraya gitmemiş, görmemiş ve günün birinde bilmem hangi amirin keyfine ittibaen çantası koltuğunda çıkagelen bir memurdan daha iyi bilir daha iyi idrak ederler.*] Prens Sabahaddin, *Gönüllü Sürgünden Zorunlu Sürgüne*, 141.

The Congress of 1902 ended with a conflict between these two opposite prescriptions and no reconciliation could be achieved. The deep conflict which especially surfaced on the matter of foreign interventions became the most significant fault line that divided the Young Turk movement into two. This divide was fundamentally a conflict of two foundational philosophies that could not easily come together.[130]

3.3. The Radical Endpoint: Abdullah Cevdet

In the Congress of 1902, the methodological differences between the centralism of Ahmed Rıza and liberalism of Prince Sabahaddin surfaced, but this discussion was primarily about how to reform the political and administrative structure of the empire. Within the movement, however, there was another and more radical vein which took the debate beyond being a discussion about the methods of administration and whether or not to accept foreign intervention. Abdullah Cevdet Bey, a doctor, poet, and translator, was one of the most radical representatives of the Young Turk movement.[131]

Positivism, materialism, and especially Darwin's theory of evolution deeply affected the intellectual world of Abdullah Cevdet. Abdullah Cevdet believed that the problems facing Ottoman society could be diagnosed and solved through rational and scientific methods, and he regarded Ottoman culture, dominated by religious and traditional values, as the single biggest obstacle to progress.[132] His intellectual formation owed much to his translations of European materialist thinkers, above all Ludwig Büchner, whose *Kraft und Stoff* became a foundational text for an entire generation of Ottoman materialists.[133] Within this philosophical framework, concepts such as spirit, morality, and religion were understood as products of matter and biological processes. There was no soul independent of the body, no moral law independent of natural law, no truth independent of science.[134] The implications of this approach for social reform were radical. If the way to change a society was to change its material and biological

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[130] Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks (1902-1908)*, 316.

[131] Mardin, "Abdullah Cevdet ve İçtihad," in *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri: 1895-1908*, 225-254.

[132] M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (İstanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1981), 129.

[133] M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 48-49.

[134] Hanioğlu, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Zihniyet, Siyaset ve Tarih* (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2006), 36.

foundations rather than to offer spiritual guidance or moral exhortation, then proposals that would have seemed outrageous to most of Abdullah Cevdet's contemporaries became, in his eyes, matters of scientific necessity. The prescriptions included the education of women, the adoption of Western dress, and the perfecting of the population of Ottoman society by supporting migration from outside.[135]

Abdullah Cevdet, who was also particularly obsessed with the skull sizes as a measurement for the progress of societies, attempted to explain social transformation using the concepts of biological evolution, arguing that societies, like living organisms, must undergo processes of change and adaptation.[136]

The reasoning is not an idiosyncrasy, and its provenance can be located with some precision. Cevdet had been trained at the Mekteb-i Tıbbiye, where a biological materialism drawn from European medical science had become the intellectual common sense of a generation, and he was the principal Ottoman translator and popularizer of Gustave Le Bon, whose crowd psychology and racial anthropology supplied the very categories in which the passage below is composed.[137]

> In general, very large skulls belong to people whose brains have developed beyond the average level, in other words, to those who have advanced greatly in intelligence. It may be said that even if the general average capacity of their skulls is small, a race in which 10 out of every 100 individuals possess exceptionally large skulls is superior to another race whose overall average

[135] Abdullah Cevdet has long been popularly remembered as the intellectual who proposed importing "breeding stock males" from Europe to improve the Ottoman population, but the documentary basis for this charge is considerably thinner than its currency in Turkish public memory suggests. His genuine preoccupation with what he called "the improvement of the race" was real and traceable to his student-era enthusiasm for biological materialism and to Gustave Le Bon's ideas on hybridization and elite formation, and the rhetorical seed of the later controversy can already be found in a 1913 article in which he complained that Ottomans were willing to discuss the breeding and improvement of horses but treated the same subject applied to humans as obscene. The "breeding-stock" label itself, however, crystallized only after a 1920 interview with a French periodical and gained traction in the Turkish press following his 1925 summons to Ankara by Mustafa Kemal, at which point hostile coverage reframed his proposals under sensational headlines. The "breeding" reading was nonetheless repeated, without citation, by several authors, and from them became the standard narrative. Şükrü Hanioğlu, by contrast, has argued that no such statement exists in Abdullah Cevdet's writings and that the charge functioned as an Islamist polemical device. See Mustafa Gündüz, ed., *İçtihad'ın İçtihadı: Abdullah Cevdet'ten Seçme Yazılar* (Ankara: Lotus Yayınevi, 2008), 46-52.

[136] Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 23.

[137] Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 17.

> skull capacity is greater but in which the number of individuals with exceptionally large skulls is only in the proportion of 3-4 out of every 100.[138]

The passage deserves attention because it reveals the categories through which an Ottoman intellectual understood human difference. Abdullah Cevdet was using a European race based model, that people can be categorized as being above others through their physical differences, and he applied this to his own world. It is therefore the biology of the skull that accounts for the lack of development. Therefore, since the problem is biological the solutions would also have to be biological.

Cevdet's translational practice, the movement through which Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff* and Le Bon's *Psychologie des foules* entered Ottoman Turkish, had a structural counterpart in late Qing China that deserves notice. The scholar-translator Yan Fu, working in the same years, produced Chinese versions of Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* in 1898, Spencer's *Study of Sociology* in 1903, and Mill's *On Liberty* in the same year.[139] What Benjamin Schwartz's classic study established is that Yan Fu's translations were not neutral conduits. In rendering Huxley into Chinese, Yan Fu systematically dissolved Huxley's ethical dualism between natural evolution and moral purpose into Spencer's evolutionary monism, which he considered more useful for the project of Chinese national survival. The source text argued, in effect, that ethics must resist the logic of evolution; the translation argued the opposite, that ethics was evolution's continuation, that the competition of peoples was natural, and that China's salvation lay in adapting to that competition rather than seeking moral refuge from it.[140] Yan Fu's translation was a strategic one instead of being a mistake, re-engineering Western texts to carry the freight of Chinese reformist urgency.

Cevdet's operations on his European sources followed a comparable logic. The biological materialism he extracted from Büchner was not the materialism Büchner had actually written. Büchner's polemic against German idealism presumed a

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[138] [*...Denilebilir ki, kıhıflarının umumî mikdar-ı istiab-ı vasatileri az olsa bile gayet büyük kıhıflı olarak içlerinde 100 de 10 kişi bulunan bir ırk, umumî mikdar-ı istiab-ı kıhıfları ziyade fakat kıhıfı ziyadesiyle büyük olan efradı 100 de 3:4 nisbetinde bulunan bir ırk-ı diğere faik bulunur...*] Doktor Abdullah Cevdet, *Fizyolociya ve Hıfzı's-sıhha-yı Dimâğ* (Dersaadet: Mahmud Bey Matbaası, 1312), 19-20. Excerpt found in Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 17.

[139] Benjamin I. Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 91, 96, and 131.

[140] Ibid, 100-101.

European intellectual environment in which the targets of critique were Hegelian philosophy and Protestant theology, transposed into Ottoman Turkish and directed at an audience whose presumed obstacles were Islamic tradition and Ottoman bureaucratic inertia, the materialist argument acquired different enemies and different stakes. What the two figures shared, beyond any direct influence, was a structural position, meaning both were writing from within polities that had been classified as backward by a civilizational hierarchy whose terms they accepted, both saw translation as a principal instrument of catching up, both found, in the act of translation, that fidelity to the source was a luxury the local predicament did not permit. The liberal content of the originals, the ethical cautions in Huxley, the individualist implications in Mill, the anti-authoritarian tendencies in Büchner, were systematically subordinated to a state-centered, organicist framework in which national survival took precedence over any principle that might constrain it.

Liang Qichao, writing in Japanese exile during the same years, extended the parallel in a direction that returns the analysis to Ottoman ground. His 1901 essay "*Mieguo Xinfa Lun*," meaning New Methods of Destroying Countries, listed the Ottoman Empire alongside Egypt, Poland, India, the Philippines, and the Boer Republics as exemplars of what he called formless dismemberment, the slow, indirect absorption of polities by imperial powers without formal annexation.[141] The anxiety of backwardness, in other words, was not only an intellectual condition that Ottoman reformers shared with Chinese reformers; it was a condition in which Chinese reformers explicitly took the Ottoman case as a cautionary example, and in which the Ottoman trajectory figured as a shared intellectual property of the late nineteenth-century reformist imagination across Asia.

Abdullah Cevdet's views, expressed particularly in his early publications such as *Meşveret* and *Osmanlı*, reveal his concerns about the intellectual and cultural crisis facing his society. Cevdet used quite striking expressions when defining the Ottoman mindset, advancing his views on the extent of this social inertia with a polemical

[141] Liáng Qǐchāo, "Miè guó xīn fǎ lùn," *Qīngyì Bào*, 1901. For the text's reception and its placement within a broader Chinese discourse about Ottoman decline, see Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, 151-176; Karl, "Creating Asia: China in the World at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," 1096-1118.

language rich in metaphors. For example, the following statement he used to describe Ottoman society clearly reveals the depth of his critical stance and his pessimism towards Ottoman style of life:

> One of the traditions that the Turks, more generally and comprehensively, the Ottomans, have regarded as most deserving of pride is 'hospitality.' Hospitality, without any doubt, was among the necessary virtues of the age of nomadism. […] Hospitality consisted merely of offering a sheepskin or goatskin thrown to one side of the tent, together with a bowl of ayran and a piece of bread. On the roads there were no caravanserais, no shops, no hotels. It is very clearly seen, and understood, and must be understood, that the root of this virtue, which we still put forward as a subject of moral superiority against civilized Europe, lies in nomadism.[142]

The passage is a small masterpiece of self-*Orientalist* reasoning. Cevdet takes a tradition that Ottomans regarded as a source of moral pride, hospitality, and strips it of its dignity by tracing it back to nomadic primitivism. If one's proudest virtue is actually a symptom of his backwardness, then his capacity for self-knowledge is itself deficient. The patient does not even know he is sick. This is perhaps the most revealing feature of the self-*Orientalist* condition. He has become, in effect, like a European ethnographer of his own people, cataloging their customs as curiosities and deficiencies rather than as living practices with their own internal logic.

One of the most extreme and radical points reached by Abdullah Cevdet's thinking lies in the following famous statement:

> Europe has smacked us not once but a thousand times; if we do not wake up, is the shame Europe's, or is it our pumpkin-heads? […] There is no second civilization. Civilization is European civilization. We are obliged to acquaint ourselves with its rose and its thorn alike.[143]

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[142] [*Türklerin daha ʿumûmî ve muhît bir taʿbîrle ʿOsmânlının en ziyâde mûcib ve mevzûʿ-u iftihâr ʿaddetdiği ʿanʿanelerden biri de "misâfirperverlik"dir. Misafirperverlik hiç şübhe yok bedeviyyet devrinin fezâʿil-i zarûriyesinden idi. [...] Misâfirperverlik ise çadırın bir tarafına atılmış bir koyun veya keçi postu ile bir tas ayran ve bir parça ekmek takdîm etmekden ʿibâretdi. Yollarda, hân yokdu, bakkâl yokdu, otel yokdu. Mütemeddin Avrupa'ya karşı bir tefevvuk-u ahlâkî mevzûʿu olarak hâlâ ileri sürdüğümüz bu fazîletin kökü, pek aʿlâ görülüyor ve anlaşılıyor ve anlaşılmak lâzım geliyor ki bedeviyyetdedir.*] Doktor Abdullah Cevdet, "Dilimle İkrâr, Kalbimle Tasdîk Ederim,," *İçtihad*, no. 82, 28 Teşrin-i Sani 1329. A more shortened version of this excerpt was first read in Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 361.

[143] [*Avrupa bize bir değil bin tokat vurdu; biz uyanmıyorsak kabâhat Avrupanın mı yoksa bizim balkabağı kafalarımızın mı? […] Bir ikinci medeniyet yokdur; medeniyet Avrupa medeniyetidir. Bunu gülüyle dikeniyle isticnâs etmeye mecbûruz.*] Abdullah Cevdet, "Şime-i Muhabbet: Celâl Nuri Bey'in

This argument, firstly, is a rejection. It challenges cultural relativism, the equality of civilizations, or the idea that every civilization is valuable in its own right. Concepts such as the "Ottoman identity" that the regime tried to exhibit at the expositions or the superiority of Islamic civilization defended by Islamists are nothing more than illusions in Abdullah Cevdet's positivist and materialist mindset. According to him, history and science reveal a single truth that humanity is progressing along a single line of civilization, and Europe happened to be the locomotive of this line. It also carries a positive and definitive judgment that follows this rejection. Civilization is not an abstract, universal ideal, but a concrete phenomenon with a geographical and cultural address, which is Europe. I argue that this is the most honest and unfiltered confession of the Eurocentric perspective that underlies all intellectual debates of the period. The problem, for Abdullah Cevdet, is not how the Ottoman Empire can become a better Ottoman Empire, but how it can become European.

The most radical and controversial part of the formulation lies in the last sentence, which is the obligation to import it with its roses and thorns. This part of Abdullah Cevdet's prescription is the fundamental point that distinguishes him from many other Young Turks and especially from Islamic thinkers. The metaphor emphasizes the idea of wholeness and inseparability. Civilization, for him, is not made up of pieces that can be selected from a menu. It is not possible to take Europe's science, technology, and industry, namely, its "roses," while leaving out its social structure, understanding of family, gender relations, secular morality, and materialist worldview, namely, its "thorns." The selective modernization projects proposed separately by the regime and by Islamist thinkers are, in Abdullah Cevdet's view, a fantasy, because, according to him, the thorns are an inseparable part of the soil and roots from which the roses grow. Scientific progress can only survive if imported together with the social and mental climate that gave birth to it. The Ottoman Empire is, according to him, on the brink of its extinction. The only way to salvation is to embrace all the characteristics of European civilization, no matter how painful and alien to its own traditions. This is a painful but necessary operation that the social physician must impose on society, much like a doctor amputating a gangrenous limb without seeking the patient's consent.

Geçen Nüshadaki 'Şime-i Husumet' Makalesine Cevab", *İçtihad*, no. 89, 16 Kânûn-i Sânî 1329. Excerpt first read in Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 359.

> My brothers, I am not offering the Turks a Kevser[144] of pleasure and delight; I am speaking, without eloquence or rhetorical flourish but in the language of sincere compassion, affection, and wholehearted devotion, to say that this is a bitter medicine, and whoever does not drink this bitter medicine will perish.[145]

There is no doubt that Abdullah Cevdet was one of the most faithful and daring believers in the religion of science within the Young Turk movement. He articulated, in the sharpest and most provocative terms, ideas that many Young Turks implied obliquely or shied away from confronting directly. His Social Darwinism, his biological materialism, his contempt for tradition, his certainty that European civilization was the only civilization were the logical conclusions of the epistemological framework that all Young Turks, to varying degrees, shared. In this respect, it can be argued that he was the most honest and logically consistent outcome of the positivist and elitist vein of the Young Turk mentality.

3.4. The Shared Ground

Despite the ferocity of their internal conflicts, the Young Turks shared a common epistemological ground that was more decisive than their disagreements. All of them, from Ahmed Rıza's positivist centralism to Sabahaddin's liberal individualism to Abdullah Cevdet's radical materialism operated within a framework in which European civilization set the terms of the debate. The categories through which they diagnosed Ottoman society, social organism, communitarian versus particularist, biological progress, scientific law, were all European categories. The standard of health against which they measured the Ottoman "disease" was European normality. The prescriptions they wrote, whether centralization, decentralization, or total civilizational adoption, were all addressed to the same question: how to become more like Europe. None of them proposed an alternative framework for evaluating civilizations that did not begin and end with the European experience.

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[144] Kevser (Ar. *Kawthar*) is a paradisiacal river mentioned in the Quran and in Islamic understanding, often used as a metaphor for abundance, delight, and divine favor.

[145] [*Kardeşlerim, Türklere Kevser-i zekv ü safâ sunmuyorum acı bir ʿilâc ve bu acı ʿilâcı içmeyenin helâk olacağını belâgatsiz, fesâhatsiz fakat samîmî bir şefkat ve muhabbetin, cândan bir fedakârlığın lisân-ı beyânıyla söylüyorum.*] Doktor Abdullah Cevdet, *İçtihad*, no. 96, 6 Mart 1330. This excerpt was read in Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 365.

The difference between the Hamidian regime and the Young Turks is therefore instructive. While Abdülhamid II viewed the "sick man" label as a political tool used against him by enemies and aimed to weaken the label using strategic performance, he refused to accept the diagnosis and therefore the Young Turks, in accepting the diagnosis, and agreeing that the Empire was indeed sick and that the sickness was structural, deep and potentially fatal, distinguished themselves from the regime based upon their sincerity. While the regime performed compliance to European standards for an external audience, the Young Turks sincerely believed that those standards accurately represented the truth about their own society. The regime's performance was mostly strategic, a deliberate performance for a hostile court, while the Young Turks' self-*Orientalism* was epistemological. Having accepted the court's verdict, they proceeded to perform the surgery that the court diagnosed as necessary.

The concepts introduced in the first chapter can now be applied to this material with more precision, and doing so shows how much of the Young Turk position was determined in advance by the framework it inherited. The diagnosis examined above is an exercise in what Fabian called the denial of coevalness, the operation by which a society that exists at the same moment as the observer is nonetheless assigned to an earlier point on a single developmental line. The Young Turks performed this operation upon themselves. When Abdullah Cevdet called the Ottoman mind Asiatic, he was not describing a place. He was describing a time, and he was consigning his own society to the past of a Europe he inhabited simultaneously. Chakrabarty's waiting room describes the same structure from the other side, as the antechamber in which a people is held until it has completed a preparation whose criteria it did not set. And the Europe against which the preparation was measured was the hyperreal Europe of the introduction, a composite assembled out of Comte, Büchner, Le Play, and Le Bon rather than out of any society these men had lived in, which is the more striking because several of them had lived in Paris for decades. The anxiety of backwardness, in its Young Turk register, is the felt experience of a society that has accepted this temporal architecture and can locate no exit from it.

The elitism deserves equal emphasis, because it is not an incidental feature of the Young Turk position but a direct consequence of its epistemology. If society is an organism governed by laws that only the trained can read, then the authority to

prescribe follows from the possession of knowledge, and the consent of the governed becomes an irrelevance at best and an obstruction at worst. The medical metaphor carries the whole of this argument in a single image, and it should be read as an argument rather than as a figure of speech. A physician does not put the diagnosis to a vote. Ahmed Rıza's positivist vanguard, Prince Sabahaddin's spirit of individual initiative to be instilled from above through a reformed system of education, and Abdullah Cevdet's bitter medicine to be administered whether or not the patient consents, are three versions of a single proposition, that the people are the object of salvation rather than its agent. The Hamidian regime had said the same thing in the vocabulary of dynastic paternalism. The Young Turks said it in the vocabulary of science, and the change of vocabulary concealed the continuity of the structure.

Similarly, elitism pervaded every aspect of the movement. The Young Turks, in general, envisioned themselves as an enlightened avant-garde, empowered by their scientific knowledge to effectuate profound changes in a society that was unaware of its own illness. The people's customs, traditions, beliefs, values were symptoms of disease that needed to be cured, rather than as possible perspectives for consideration.

One event in the middle of this period deserves to be registered here because it illuminates something about the structure of Young Turk thought that the purely intra-Ottoman analysis can miss. In May 1905, at the naval battle of Tsushima, the Japanese fleet destroyed the Russian Baltic squadron in a single engagement. News of the Japanese victory traveled with extraordinary speed across the continents, from Cairo to Calcutta, from İstanbul to Beijing, and produced what Cemil Aydın has called a global moment of Asian awakening.[146] For Ottoman reformist circles the event was transformative. Ahmed Rıza's *Meşveret* and the affiliated *Şûrâ-yı Ümmet* celebrated the Japanese triumph openly; Abdullah Cevdet in *İçtihâd* treated Japan as a model against both Hamidian autocracy and Russian expansion; speculations circulated in Muslim reformist journals about the possibility of Japanese conversion to Islam and about Tokyo as a future seat of the caliphate.[147]

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[146] Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 91.

[147] On the convergence of Young Turk and Islamist responses to the Japanese victory of 1905, including the speculation about a Japanese conversion to Islam and the relocation of the caliphate, see Enes Şamil

What makes this moment worth examining is the content of the enthusiasm rather than its existence. The Ottoman reformers who celebrated Tsushima were not celebrating a rejection of European modernity. Instead, they were celebrating its successful appropriation by a non-European people. Japan had won by adopting the most advanced European naval technology, training Japanese officers in European military academies, and applying European strategic doctrine with greater discipline than the Russians had mustered. Civilization, defined in European terms, was accessible to non-European peoples. The hierarchy that had placed Asia permanently below Europe was not fixed. Aydın's central insight in his analysis of this moment captures the paradox precisely stating that the Russo-Japanese War did not end the Eurocentric world order; it demonstrated that non-European peoples could operate successfully within its terms.[148]

In this context, Tsushima serves as a bridge to the material of the next chapter. The same event that excited Abdullah Cevdet's positivist circle also appeared, in a different vocabulary, in the Islamist circles of the same years. Mehmed Âkif gave Japan's combination of technical modernity and spiritual discipline as a template for Muslim revival.[149]

The Young Turk admiration for Japan and the Islamist admiration for Japan converged on the same object. The two movements rejected each other, and the bitterness of their mutual polemics was not performative. Beneath the polemics, however, ran a common set of reference points, a common vocabulary of civilizational comparison, and a common anxiety whose sources lay not in their opposition to each other but in the framework within which both operated. Like the Young Turks, the Islamists agreed that the empire faced a crisis and that it required immediate remedial action. Nevertheless, unlike both the regime's defensive pragmatism and scientific materialism, they proposed a moral diagnosis which located the root cause of decline in an abrogation of Islamic values. Whether this third way managed to escape the

Kiraz, "Becoming Russia or Becoming Japan? The Russo-Japanese War and Ottoman Public Opinion," *Turkish Historical Review* 16 (2025): 25-53.

[148] Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*, 91.

[149] Mehmed Âkif Ersoy, *Safahat*, ed. M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2008), 153.

Eurocentric framework that confined both the regime and the Young Turks, or whether it too operated within the same comparative matrix while claiming to transcend it, is the question to be addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

ISLAMISTS

Islamist intellectuals stepped into the late Ottoman public sphere with greater visibility in the closing years of Abdülhamid II's reign, and the constitutional restoration of 1908 widened the space available to them further. They came with a third proposal. Against the regime's autocratic pragmatism and the radical Westernization project of the Young Turks, they offered a morally grounded response to what this thesis has called the anxiety of backwardness. The two figures who gave this current one of its most articulate forms were Said Halim Paşa and Mehmed Âkif Bey, and the question that organized their thought can be stated in a single sentence: how does a Muslim society advance without losing the moral foundations that make it Muslim?

Most of the analytical moves and prescriptions in Islamist writing of the period proceeds from this question. Said Halim Paşa and Mehmed Âkif shared with the Young Turks a fierce critique of Abdülhamid II's despotism, which they held responsible for the dulling of critical thought and the passivity that had spread through Muslim political life.[150] The Young Turks' program, however, struck them as a deviation no less dangerous. The Islamists read the elevation of science into a new religion, the diagnosis of Ottoman society as a diseased body, and the search for salvation in an uprooted European borrowing as symptoms of an intellectual collapse that ignored the spiritual fabric of Ottoman society and treated it as a purely material

[150] For Said Halim Paşa's assertion that despotism paralyzes a nation by instilling fear, cowardice, and absolute submission, thereby destroying its ability to resist and think critically, see Prens Said Halim Paşa, *Buhranlarımız* (İstanbul: Şems Matbaası, 1335-1338), 28-46. Mehmed Âkif rendered the same indictment in poetic form, denouncing the Hamidian period as a "filthy era of despotism" (*mülevves devr-i istibdâd*) that had planted spies in every conscience, driven the nation's most courageous sons to despair, and silenced entire neighborhoods as the regime's men dragged people from their homes; see Mehmed Âkif Ersoy, *Safahat*, 73. On the convergence of Islamist and Young Turk rhetoric directed against the Hamidian regime as the "center of tyranny and despotism," see Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 142.

thing to be reorganized.[151] The opposition between material and spiritual that organized their critique was itself, however, a distinctively modern European inheritance, refined within the Romantic and post-Romantic traditions of Schelling, Coleridge, and the Russian Slavophiles, and the Islamist reception of it reproduced a structure that the conclusion of this chapter will return to.[152]

The position the Islamists occupied within the late Ottoman intellectual landscape can be specified by contrast. The Islamists proposed something different than the regime and the Young Turks, saying that the crisis was real, but it was moral rather than material, and especially the Young Turks' prescription was itself part of the disease. Where the Young Turks saw Ottoman tradition as the source of illness, the Islamists saw the abandonment of tradition as the source of the perceived backwardness. Where the Young Turks regarded European science as the cure, the Islamists regarded European cultural influence as the contagion. This inversion is what makes the Islamist case analytically interesting for the present study, because it raises a question that the preceding chapters have not yet had to address. Does an inversion of the diagnostic terms constitute a departure from the Eurocentric framework that has produced them, or does it reproduce that framework in reverse?

Naming Islamism as a movement is more difficult than naming the other two currents. Where the Hamidian state had a bureaucratic apparatus and the Young Turks had congresses and eventually a committee with a membership and a program, the Islamists worked through a looser fabric of thinkers, journals, and translators who shared a broad orientation and many specific concerns, who corresponded across the Ottoman-Arab intellectual geography, and who left a body of work substantial enough to be read as a current. The fabric nevertheless had an institutional center. From 1908

[151] For the Islamist critique of the materialist nature of Young Turk thought, see Said Halim Paşa, *Buhranlarımız*, 64-102. He asserts that the materialistic policies and their detachment from their own historical and moral roots delivered the final destructive blow to the Ottoman social fabric. Similarly, Mehmed Âkif criticized the secular thinkers of his era for offering to "sacrifice religion to save the state," arguing that a nation survives or perishes solely by its own moral fabric. See Mehmed Âkif Ersoy, *Safahat*, 193-194.

[152] The polarity between material and spiritual through which Islamist writers frame their critique of European modernity has a complex genealogy that runs through nineteenth-century European Romanticism and its Russian Slavophile heirs as much as through Islamic sources. Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 132-235.

the Ottoman Islamist current organized around the journal *Sırât-ı Müstakîm*, renamed *Sebîlürreşâd* in 1912, in whose pages Mehmed Âkif published most of the poems later collected in *Safahat* and through which the writing of Muhammad Abduh entered Ottoman Turkish. The boundary between the Islamists and the Young Turks, moreover, is analytically necessary but historically porous, and the porosity is part of what this thesis wants to show. The two currents were not formed in separate worlds. They emerged from the same institutions, the Mekteb-i Tıbbiye that produced Abdullah Cevdet and the Mülkiye and military academies that Hanioğlu has described as the seedbeds of the opposition, and they addressed an overlapping reading public through an overlapping press. Most Islamists welcomed the revolution of 1908 and cooperated with the Committee of Union and Progress in its aftermath. The separation maintained in this thesis is therefore a separation of intellectual position rather than of social formation. Their disagreements unfolded within a shared elite idiom rather than across incommensurable worlds.

The intellectual formation from which Said Halim Paşa and Mehmed Âkif emerged differed sharply from that of the Young Turks. Said Halim Paşa was an Ottoman prince born in Cairo into a family that placed him at the intersection of Egyptian and Ottoman political life, a location whose significance for the Islamist current will become clearer when his structural affinity with Muhammad Abduh is examined later in this chapter. He was educated extensively in Europe, fluent in French, and at home in the classical Islamic tradition of law and ethics. He knew European thought well enough to critique it from within, and he knew the Islamic tradition well enough to articulate it as a coherent alternative.[153] Mehmed Âkif's formation was quite different. A graduate of Halkalı Veterinary School, trained in the modern sciences, fluent in Arabic, Persian, and French, he was at the same time deeply immersed in classical Islamic poetry and Quranic studies.[154] He was, in a sense, the very figure that selective modernization

[153] For biographical info, see M. Hanefi Bostan, "Said Halim Paşa," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2008), accessed May 20, 2026, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/said-halim-pasa.

[154] For biographical info, see M. Orhan Okay and M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ, "Mehmed Âkif Ersoy," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2003), accessed May 20, 2026, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/mehmed-akif-ersoy.

claimed to produce, a man of science who remained a believer. The Islamist critique of Westernization gains a particular force from this.

4.1. The Moral Diagnosis

The sharpest edge of the Islamist diagnosis targeted specifically the Westernized intellectual class. Said Halim Paşa returned to this target repeatedly across his treatise, *Buhrânlarımız*:

> The necessity of seeking assistance from Western civilization in order to ensure the elevation and progress of our homeland has raised a new class of intellectuals among us. This educated class, which arose to satisfy this need, exerts an influence over the destiny of the nation that is entirely free from any form of oversight or competition. However, this enlightened group, having lost its own identity under the influence of Western civilization, is afflicted with an extreme worship of the West. They believe that national salvation can only be achieved by spreading this morbid affliction, with which they themselves are infected, to the entire country. In the name of progress and elevation, they generate all kinds of crises in consciences and minds, dragging the country toward dark unknowns.[155]

The treatise requires a word of situation, since its title conceals its form. *Buhrânlarımız* is not a single work composed at one sitting but a series of pamphlets written after the constitutional restoration of 1908 and gathered under that title in 1919, when Said Halim Paşa, having served as Grand Vizier from 1913 to 1917, wrote as a man whose own government had presided over the catastrophe he was diagnosing.[156] The target of the passage below is correspondingly specific. It is the administrative and intellectual class produced by the schools of the Tanzimat, the class charged with conducting the empire's engagement with Europe, and it is a class to which Said Halim himself, an Ottoman prince educated in Europe, unmistakably belonged.

The passage requires a closer reading. From the excerpt, it is understood Said Halim Paşa does not deny that the empire required engagement with European civilization,

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[155] [*Memleketimizin teʿâlî ve terakkîsini teʾmîn içün garb medeniyyetinden istiʿâne zarûreti bizde yeni bir sınıf-ı mütefekkir yetişdirdi. Bu ihtiyâcı tatmîn içün yetişen bu sınıf münevver milletin mukadderâtına her nevʿ murâkabe ve rekâbetden âzâde bir teʾsîr icrâ eylemekdedir. Hâlbuki bu zümre-yi münevvere medeniyyet-i garbiyyenin teʾsîrâtı altında şahsiyyetini gâʾib ederek müfrit bir garb perestişkâlığına mübtelâdır ki selâmet-i milliyeyi ancak kendisinin dûçâr olduğu bu ibtilâ-yı marazîyi memlekete sirâyet etdirmekde görüyor ve terakkî ve teʿâlî nâmına vicdân ve efkârda envâʿ-ı buhrânlar tevlîd ederek memleketi muzlim mechûlâta doğru sürükleyin götürüyor…*] Prens Said Halim Paşa, *Buhranlarımız*, 49.

[156] M. Hanefi Bostan, "Said Halim Paşa."

and he does not reject progress as such. The problem, for him, is the type of engagement itself, the formation of an administrative class that had absorbed European admiration so deeply that it could no longer perceive its own society from within. The diagnosis distinguishes Westernization, which Said Halim Paşa accepts as a necessity, from the Westernized intellectuals, whom he regards as a pathological figure.

The Islamist diagnosis also carried an internal counterpart that distinguished it from other conservative defenses. They made Muslims, namely themselves, another principal target of their critique. The fault did not lie with Islam, it lay with the way Muslims had come to understand and practice it.

> Consequently, the belief that our sharia [religious law] is the cause of our decline is one of those baseless, superficial, and flagrant superstitions. In no way whatsoever can it be used as proof of a lack of perfection in our religion.[157]

Said Halim Paşa carries this position with the greatest precision. For him, religion bears no responsibility for the decline of Ottoman society. The responsibility falls on those who failed to grasp religion properly and to act on its requirements. The argument has a structural counterpart in the famous Renan-Afghani exchange of 1883, to which this chapter will return, and the parallel is more than coincidental. His sharpest accusations are reserved for the administrators and intellectuals of the post-Tanzimat generations, whom he charges with having alienated themselves from their own society through an undisciplined imitation of Europe and with having hastened the collapse they claimed to forestall. The deepest disaster, in his account, was the abandonment of native moral foundations in the rush to copy European surfaces.

> In short, driven by the urge and desire to Westernize Ottoman social politics, a segment of our sociologists have become a different kind of nihilists. Incapable of bringing anything into existence, and furthermore devoid of any sense of conservatism, they have consequently become destructive vandals doomed to demolish everything.[158]

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[157] *[Binâʾen ʿalâ zalik şerîʿatımızın sebeb-i tedennîmiz olduğu yolundaki îmân, esâssız iʿtikâdât-ı sahîfe ve fâhişedendir. Ve hîç bir vechile dînimizin ʿadem-i kemâline hüccet olamaz.*] Prens Said Halim Paşa, *Buhranlarımız*, 111-112.

[158] [*...El-hâsıl heyʿet-i ʿOsmâniyeyi garblaşdırmak heves ve hᵛahişi ilcâsıyla ictimâʿiyyunumuzun bir takımı diğer bir nevʿ-i nihilist olmuşlardır. Hîçbir şey vücûda getirmekden ʿâciz hattâ her gûna hiss-i muhâfazakârîden mahrûm ve benâberîn her şeyʾi hedm etmeye mahkûm yıkıcı muhribler olmuşlardır...*] Said Halim Paşa, *Buhrânlarımız*, 42.

Said Halim Paşa saw the Westernized reformers, whom he defines as nihilists, as figures who had lost both the capacity to build and the capacity to preserve. They could not construct anything new because they had cut themselves off from the foundations on which any local construction could rest, and so they had become agents of pure destruction, removing what existed without any blueprint for what should follow.

Said Halim Paşa traces what he calls nihilism to its institutional source in the new educational system. The schools that had been established to train a generation capable of meeting the demands of a modern economy were built on the principle of scientific instruction. When these institutions were first being designed, he observed, "there was not a clear understanding of the difference between morality and knowledge, between upbringing and education."[159] The new pedagogy was built solely on an admiration for "what was presumed to be science and rationality, leaving the education and morals of the youth inevitably deficient,"[160] and the result was a generation that emerged technically competent and lacking moral grounding. These students, for Said Halim Paşa, were taught that only ideas grounded in reason and science deserved respect, and they came to regard customary practices, inherited authority, and inherited moral codes as without value. The social bonds that had held Ottoman society together for centuries dissolved within "only a few generations of students educated in this fashion."[161]

Said Halim Paşa's portrait of the disoriented intellectual is among the most precise and targeted diagnostic statements in late Ottoman thought:

> A Muslim who believes in the ethics of a Kant or a Spencer, and yet accepts the French way of thinking in sociology, and the British way in politics, no matter how deeply learned a scholar he may be, is nothing more than a person who does not know what he is doing.[162]

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[159] [*...tertîbinde ahlâkiyyat ile maʿlûmâtın, terbiye ile tahsîlin yekdiğerinden ayrı şeyler olduğu anlaşılamamış...*] Ibid, 68.

[160] [*...fünûn ve maʿkûlatdan zannolunan şeylerden başka bir şeyʾe riʿâyet etmemeğe alışdırılan gençlerin terbiye ve ahlâkiyâtı biʾz-zarûre pek nâkıs kaldı...*] Ibid, 69.

[161] [*...Bu sûretle tarz-ı maʿhûd tedrîsimizin yetişdirdiği tülâb, ʿasırlara mukâvemetle mütemâdiyen dûçâr olmakdan hâlî kalmadığı en şedîd mesâʾibe rağmen idâme-yi mevcûdiyyet edebilmiş olan heyʾet-i ictimâʿiyye-yi ʿOsmâniyeyi ihlâl ederek, zamânımıza mâzînin hâtırât ve teʾsîrâtından başka hîçbir şey intikâl etmedi…*] Ibid, 69.

[162] [*...Bir "Kant"ın yâhûd bir "Spencer"in ahlâkiyyâtına inanan, bununla berâber ictimâʿiyâtda Fransızın, siyâsiyâtda İngilizin tarz-ı telakkîsini kabûl eden bir Müslümân, ne kadar mütebahhir ʿâlim olursa olsun, ne yapdığını bilmeyen bir kimseden başka bir şey değildir…*] Ibid, 149.

The figure Said Halim Paşa describes is a person assembled from incompatible fragments, whose moral philosophy comes from one civilization, whose social conduct from another, and whose politics from a third, with no integrating principle holding the parts in a single coherent life. For Said Halim Paşa, such a figure represents a society that has lost the capacity to think from within its own foundations, and the loss is what defines the crisis. The formulation runs remarkably close to the call Dipesh Chakrabarty would make almost a century later for non-European intellectual traditions to find their own conceptual ground rather than borrow it piecemeal from the European canon, and the affinity between the two formulations, separated by ninety years, geographical distance and by very different theoretical idioms, deserves to be noted.

The horizon of Said Halim Paşa's critique of Western civilization extends beyond institutional matters into a broader claim about what civilization itself is. The Industrial Revolution, in his account, produced a form of social life that dissolved traditional bonds, isolated individuals from the relational fabric that had once given them meaning, and elevated the material interests of the individual above every claim of social solidarity. Civilization, for him, cannot be measured in stone, steel, or walls. The true measure lies in the quality of social relations, the depth of moral and spiritual development, and the durability of the bonds that hold a society together. The distinction parallels, without any evidence of direct influence, the differentiation between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* that Oswald Spengler would make canonical in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, published in 1918.[163] By that measure, the most fundamental cause of Ottoman decline was the gradual abandonment of spiritual foundations, and the path forward lay in their recovery. He continued to believe that a return to the older moral resources of Ottoman society could supply a serious alternative to the dissolution he saw at work in Western civilization itself.

While Prince Said Halim Paşa wrote about the analytical and philosophical matters defending a revival of Islamic values, Mehmed Âkif Bey, on the other hand, gave the

[163] Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, 2 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1918-1922). The distinction between *Kultur* as the living moral form of a civilization and *Zivilisation* as its material and technical husk runs through both volumes, the parallel with Said Halim Paşa's opposition between moral foundation and material achievement is structural and there is no evidence of direct influence in either direction.

late Ottoman Islamic thought its more emotional and literary weight. The seven books of *Safahat*, published between 1911 and 1933, are arguably among the most emotionally charged Ottoman-Turkish articulations of the anxiety of backwardness. Mehmed Âkif embodied the anxiety as fully as he wrote about it. He attributed the perceived "decline" of the Ottoman Empire and of the wider Muslim world to a withdrawal from Islam's commands regarding knowledge, labor, and unity, a withdrawal that had produced inertia, ignorance, sectarian division, and a fatalism that Islam itself does not authorize. Islam, in Mehmed Âkif's account, has never been an obstacle to progress; Muslims, however, have failed to follow Islam's call to seek the knowledge and the disciplines required by their age, and they have fallen into a helplessness.

> Your intellectuals have not understood religion at all;
> Their conception of the spirit of Islam is entirely mistaken.
> They think that it cannot endure progress,
> That it cannot develop along with the perfected works of the age.
> […]
> If we were to seek the Divine spirit called 'Islam,'
> How far removed it is from the mass of people who say, 'We are Muslims!'[164]

The distinction Mehmed Âkif draws here is fundamental to the Islamist position. There is Islam as divine revelation, complete in itself, containing the principles that any civilization needs in order to flourish. There is also the Islam that Muslims actually practice, debased through centuries of misunderstanding, reduced to empty ritual and passive fatalism. The gap between these two, between the ideal and the lived, is the location of his diagnosis. The dichotomy between an essential Islam and the practice of historical Muslims would become a constitutive feature of twentieth-century Islamic reformist and revivalist Islamic thought, running from Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida.[165] The distinction allowed the Islamists to defend Islam against secular critique while mounting a devastating internal critique of Muslim societies in the same

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[164] [*Mütefekkirleriniz dîni de hiç anlamamış / Rûh-i İslâmı telâkkîleri gâyet yanlış / Sanıyorlar ki: Terakkîye tahammül edemez / Asrın âsâr-ı kemâliyle tekâmül edemez / … / 'Müslümanlık' denilen rûh-i İlâhî, arasak / 'Müslümânız' diyen insan yığınından ne uzak*] Mehmed Âkif Ersoy, *Safahat*, 169.

[165] On the centrality of the distinction between an essential Islam and the historical practice of Muslims across modern Islamic reformist and revivalist thought, see Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 130-244; for the later trajectory through Mawdudi and Qutb, see Sayyid Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), and Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

breath. The argument cuts in two directions, and Mehmed Âkif deployed both edges. The maneuver carries a risk that Said Halim Paşa and Âkif themselves did not address in writing: if every failure of Muslim societies can be attributed to a falling away from the true Islam rather than to anything in the tradition itself, the argument becomes immune to internal correction, and the gap between ideal and actuality turns into a defensive mechanism rather than an analytical one.

In Safahat, Mehmed Âkif delivered his most searing portrait of the moral condition he perceived around him:

> While Islam consisted of pure conduct, alas
> We have sunk so deep in filth that we have not yet emerged
> Worshipping tyranny, kicking justice, paying no heed to right
> If one's own comfort is secure, not raising one's head though the world burn
> […]
> Islam has never seen such abasement before us
> Our state is that of a body in dissolution
> The spirit of our collapse is the collapse of our morals
> A single phrase, yet the most concise of wisdoms
> There is one possibility of salvation: our morality must rise[166]

The body in dissolution is a metaphor worth pausing on. The Young Turks had also described Ottoman society as a sick organism in need of scientific surgery; Mehmed Âkif describes it as a body whose disorder is moral rather than biological. However, the proposed therapy differs. His critique of imitation extended past institutions into the texture of daily life. In *Sebilürreşad*, the principal Islamist journal of the period, he wrote:

> Religion is imitation, worldly affairs are imitation, customs are imitation, dress is imitation, speech is imitation, in short, everything is imitation. The individuals of a nation in which everything is imitation are themselves imitations of human beings, and such a nation can never form a true social body; therefore it cannot survive.[167]

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[166] [*Müslümanlık pâk sîretten ibâretken, yazık / Öyle saplandık ki levsiyyâta: Hâlâ çıkmadık / Zulme tapmak, adli tepmek, hakka hiç aldırmamak / Kendi âsûdeyse, dünyâ yansa baş kaldırmamak / … / Müslümanlık bizden evvel böyle zillet görmedi / Hâlimiz bir inhilâl etmiş vücûdun hâlidir / Rûh-i izmihlâlimiz ahlâkın izmihlâlidir / Sâde bir sözdür fakat hikmetlerin en mücmeli / Bir halâs imkânı var: Ahlâkımız yükselmeli*] Mehmed Âkif Ersoy, *Safahat*, 274.

[167] As cited in İsmail Cem, *Türkiye'de Geri Kalmışlığın Tarihi*,308.

For Mehmed Âkif, a people that imitates in everything becomes an imitation of itself, and its members cease to be authentic persons and become copies. Copies, in his formulation, cannot constitute a living social organism, because they have no organic roots in the soil that produced them.

Ottoman Islamist intellectuals' diagnosis belonged to a transregional current of Islamic reformist thought whose principal Arab exponents were writing in Cairo during the same decades. Muhammad Abduh's *Risâletü't-Tevhîd*, completed in 1897, built its argument on a distinction that Said Halim Paşa and Mehmed Âkif would echo in structurally identical form. For him, too, the decline of Muslim societies resulted from no defect in Islam itself, which is pure revelation of Allah, but from the gradual loss of the capacity to distinguish the essential from the accretion.[168] The cure Muhammad Abduh prescribed combined a return to the essential with the reopening of ijtihad, the exercise of independent reasoning in Islamic law that had been gradually constrained over the centuries. Said Halim Paşa's framework is remarkably close in structure of thought, although the two thinkers operated within different scholarly traditions. Muhammad Abduh worked from the classical Sunni reformist current that would later be associated with the Salafism,[169] while Said Halim Paşa wrote from within an Ottoman-Hanafi formation whose attitude toward later jurisprudential commentary was, by training, less polemical. The problem, for both, is the Muslim communities that have misunderstood their own faith, therefore, the cure is a properly understood Islam, revived in its foundational principles and adapted through ijtihad to the

[168] Muḥammad ʿAbduh, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd* (Ḳahire: al-Maṭbaʿa al-ʿĀmira al-Khayriyya, 1324), 142-158.

[169] Salafism, from *salaf* meaning the predecessors of the earliest Muslim community, refers to a current that holds their understanding of Islam to be normative and resists the legitimacy of later doctrinal accretions. In its late nineteenth-century modernist iteration, represented by figures like Muhammad Abduh, it advocated a return to the Quran and the practice of the prophet and the reopening of the gate ijtihad. The classification of Abduh as a salafi belongs to this reformist sense of the term, which centred on recovering Islam's foundational sources and on the exercise of independent reasoning within them. It should be distinguished from the classical Hanbali-Taymiyyan tradition that supplied much of its lexicon, and more sharply from the politicised, in some cases jihadi, currents that took the same name in the second half of the twentieth century and now dominate the term's contemporary associations. See M. Sait Özervarlı, "Selefiyye," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2009), accessed May 20, 2026, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/selefiyye. Also see Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 161-192.

circumstances of the age.[170] The two thinkers reached this framework along independent trajectories, but the channels through which Abduh's writing reached Ottoman readers, and through which Said Halim Paşa's later work circulated in the Arab world, were not accidental. They ran through a specific print infrastructure whose central Ottoman node was the journal *Sırât-ı Müstakîm*, later renamed *Sebilürreşad*, and whose central figure was Mehmed Âkif himself. Between 1908 and 1910 Mehmed Âkif translated more than twenty articles by Muhammad Abduh for *Sırât-ı Müstakîm*, carrying the Islamist Cairo reformer's voice directly into the Ottoman reformist public.[171] As seen, the figure who would give Ottoman Islamism its most sustained poetic expression was simultaneously the principal translator of its most influential Arab intellectual source.

The genealogy of this convergence is also worth noting. The shared framework was produced in the nineteenth century itself, in response to European imperial expansion and to European intellectual criticism of Islam, rather than inherited from a premodern Islamic unity surviving intact into the period.[172] The most direct evidence of this production is the celebrated exchange between Ernest Renan and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in 1883. Renan had delivered a lecture at the Sorbonne arguing that Islam as such was incompatible with science, and that the intellectual achievements occasionally credited to Islamic civilization were in fact the work of Persians, Arabs, and other peoples who had preserved their pre-Islamic cultural foundations despite their conversion. Afghani replied with an argument that appeared to defend Islam, yet operated entirely within Renan's evolutionary schema.[173] Afghani conceded that Islam had at times obstructed scientific progress, so did Christianity. What Islam required was the same maturation that Christianity had undergone in Europe, the same gradual

[170] On the distinction between Abduh's formation in the classical Sunni reformist tradition that would later be associated with the Salafiyya and Said Halim Paşa's Ottoman-Hanafi background, see Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 161-192

[171] M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ, *Mehmed Âkif Ersoy* (İstanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2010), 157-159.

[172] Cemil Aydın, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, 3-5 and 99-132.

[173] Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 181-187. For a fuller account of how nineteenth-century evolutionary categories shaped Islamic reformist responses, including the Renan-Afghani exchange, see Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), esp. chs. 1-3.

separation of religious authority from intellectual inquiry, the same evolution of the civilizational body.

Said Halim Paşa's argument reproduces this structure with greater theoretical refinement but no fundamental change in orientation. His critique of European materialism and his defense of Islamic moral foundations were mounted within a framework of civilizational comparison whose deepest categories had been generated by the same European intellectual tradition he was contesting. A derivative discourse, in the sense Chatterjee gave the term, is a discourse that operates within categories it did not originate, and the term carries no implication of lesser quality. The Islamists of the Hamidian and second constitutional periods produced a sophisticated intellectual response to European modernity, however, the sophistication did not exempt them from the structural predicament inside which the response had to be mounted.[174]

4.2. The Roses and the Thorns

The way the Islamists diagnosed backwardness determined the way they encountered Western civilization. They occupied a middle ground built on the premise that European civilization could be disaggregated, that its useful elements could be extracted and that its poisons could be left behind. Civilization, in this view, was a composite of positive and negative parts that could be separated. The position resembled the regime's pragmatic selectivity in formal structure, although its content was different in kind. The same logic of selective borrowing structured the Meiji formula of "Japanese spirit, Western technique," and the late Qing modernization formula of "Chinese learning as essence, Western learning as function," as earlier chapters noted, and the Ottoman Islamist version is best understood as one node in a wider regional pattern rather than an isolated local invention.

Said Halim Paşa argued that the rigidity of late Ottoman religious scholarship had closed the gate of ijtihad, the method by which qualified scholars derive new rulings from the primary sources of Islamic law to address questions the tradition had not

[174] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 36-53. The concept of derivative discourse is the principal analytical instrument through which the present chapter, and the thesis as a whole, reads the Ottoman material; the Conclusion returns to it as the theoretical core of the argument.

previously faced.[175] Through this closure, the Muslim world had lost the dynamism that had once let it respond to the demands of a changing age. The solution to backwardness, for the Islamists, lay neither in abandoning Islam nor in mechanically defending the inherited corpus of jurisprudence, but in returning to the foundational sources and reopening ijtihad so that legal and ethical reasoning could meet the conditions of the present.

To reopen ijtihad, though, meant subjecting centuries of accumulated jurisprudential commentary and legal precedent to critical revision. In practice, it meant that the Islamic scholar authority, built on the custodianship of precisely that accumulated tradition, was no longer beyond question. Thus, it is arguable that the Islamists were fighting a war on two fronts. The reconstructive impulse, the desire to clear away the debris of centuries and return to a set of pristine foundational principles, was structurally similar to the Young Turks' revolutionary project. In this two-front fight, selectively taking the beneficial parts of the Western world was a pragmatic choice that would not contradict the essence of Islam.

> Take the knowledge of the West, take its art
> And give your work your utmost speed
> For it is no longer possible to live without them
> For only art and science have no nationality.[176]

This material aspect of the West, however, was for the Islamists only the rose of Western civilization. The thorn was a moral and spiritual decay they regarded as inseparable from the materialist philosophy, the individualism, the dissolution of social bonds, and above all the imperialist character that the same civilization carried into its encounters with the rest of the world. Mehmed Âkif's verses, while describing the Battle of Gallipoli, reads:

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[175] *İçtihâd* (Ar. *ijtihād*): the independent juristic reasoning exercised by a qualified scholar (*müctehid*) to derive rulings on new questions from the primary sources of Islamic law, namely the Qur'an, the Sunna, analogical reasoning (*qiyās*), and scholarly consensus (*ijmāʿ*). By the late Ottoman period, calls to reopen the "gate of ijtihad" (*bâb-ı ictihâd*) had become a central slogan of Islamic reformist thought. On the debate over whether this "gate" was in fact ever closed, see Wael B. Hallaq, "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 1 (1984): 3-41.

[176] [*...Alınız ilmini Garb'ın, alınız san'atini / Veriniz hem de mesaînize son sür'atini / Çünkü kâbil değil artık yaşamak bunlarsız / Çünkü milliyyeti yok san'atin, ilmin; yalnız...*] Mehmed Âkif Ersoy, *Safahat*, 170.

Ah, that infamous twentieth century! That supposedly noble creature,
Whatever darling favorites it has, are wretched in truth
It vomited for months, standing right across Mehmetçik[177]
It poured out the secrets in its belly, completely shamelessly
If its mask hadn't been torn, that face would still be a deception to us
The whore called "Civilization," in truth, is utterly shameless.[178]

In Mehmed Âkif's poetry, the West appears as "shameless imperialist" as well as a representation of moral collapse. The breakdown of family structures, the loosening of dress, the corrosion of sexual restraint figure as signs of spiritual ruin, and he warns his audience, namely the Ottoman Muslims, particularly men, about the moral corruption:

We have destroyed every existing thing, with an aimless idea
We left nothing unruined… Save for one thing: the Family
[...]
Whoever says, 'Let there be a revolution in the family!' will be driven to despair
He will gain absolutely nothing else, except becoming a cuckold
For the end of naked revolutions is nothing but disgrace
O vile arsonists, we have seen that trick of yours all too often![179]

Said Halim Paşa mounts the same critique on a more sociological foundation. He argues that the attempt to transplant European institutions and concepts wholesale, with no attention to the deep historical and social differences between Islamic and Christian societies, lies at the root of the existential crisis the empire was undergoing.

A deeper problem inside the roses and thorns formulation remained unaddressed by the Islamists thinkers themselves. The formula appears to refuse European civilization, or at least to refuse it partially. The very act of standing before that civilization, sorting through its products, deciding what to keep and what to discard very openly, reveals something fundamental about where they were standing. The anxiety of backwardness foreclosed that possibility before it could even be formulated. Since the fear of total

[177] *Mehmetçik* (literally "Little Mehmet") is an affectionate colloquial term used in both the Late Ottoman and Republican eras to refer to the soldiers of the army.

[178] [*...Ah o yirminci asır yok mu, o mahlûk-i asîl / Ne kadar gözdesi mevcûd ise hakkıyle sefîl / Kustu Mehmedçiğin aylarca durup karşısına / Döktü karnındaki esrârı hayâsızcasına / Maske yırtılmasa hâlâ bize âfetti o yüz / Medeniyyet denilen kahbe, hakîkat, yüzsüz…*] Mehmed Âkif Ersoy, *Safahat*, 385.

[179] [*...Biz ki her mevcûdu yıktık, gâyesiz bir fikr ile / Yıkmadık bir şey bıraktık... Sâde bir şey: Âile / … / 'Âilî bir inkılâb olsun!' diyen me'yûs olur / Başka hiçbir şey kazanmaz, sâde bir deyyus olur / Çünkü 'çıplak' inkılâbâtın rezâlettir sonu / Ey denî kundakçılar, biz sizde çok gördük onu…*] Mehmed Âkif Ersoy, *Safahat*, 194.

collapse is acute enough, the mental domain Islamist thinkers operated was again limited to the Western vocabulary and its concepts.

4.3. The Prescription

If the Islamist diagnosis was correct, meaning the problem was moral rather than material, the cure then had to be moral as well. The Islamist prescription followed directly from this logic. They prescribed morality, meaning in their mind a return to authentic Islamic values, and the reopening of the gate of ijtihad for salvation. The most systematic formulation of the Islamist prescription appears in Said Halim Paşa's concept of *İslamlaşmak*, which can be translated as Islamization as an opposing counterpart to modernization. For him, the only way to overcome the crises of the empire and keep it alive was a total commitment to Islamic values across every sphere of life. Said Halim Paşa imagined Islamization as a comprehensive reform program in which faith, ethics, law, politics, and education would all be reorganized around Islamic principles. The eternal principles of Islam were to be revived in a form that answered the questions of the present, rather than reinstated as a copy of the past centuries.

It is also important to note that Said Halim Paşa envisioned Islamization as more than a matter of individual or communal devotion. Rather than confining the project to personal ritual life and piousness, he projected it across the social fabric of the entire society. The scope of his program is comparable in ambition to the positivist revolution the Young Turks demanded. The Young Turks wanted to reorganize society according to scientific law. The Islamists, on the other hand, wanted to reorganize it according to Islamic principles. The commonality, however, is readable from the logic behind it. Both visions claimed universal applicability and required the transformation of education, law, governance, and the texture of social relations.

Mehmed Âkif's ideological background combined with his literary style is also telling about how he positioned the society. His sermonic style, his direct address to the Muslim community like a preacher addresses a congregation in a mosque,[180] all

[180] Indeed, Mehmed Âkif explicitly employs this sermonic structure in his poetry; two volumes of his *Safahat* are titled *Süleymaniye Kürsüsünde* (On the Pulpit of the Süleymaniye [Mosque]) and *Fatih*

express a particular hierarchical relationship between the one who possesses knowledge and those who have not yet received it. The structure parallels what we have already seen in the doctor and patient analogy of the Young Turks and in the enlightened sultan and his loyal subject understanding of the Hamidian regime. The substance of Mehmed Âkif's sermons reinforces this structure. In "*Süleymaniye Kürsüsünde,*" the reader follows a conversation between two friends walking through İstanbul, observing the decay of the city, the disrepair of its monuments, and the indifference of its inhabitants. The narrative builds toward the moment when the preacher ascends the pulpit and delivers the judgment that the rest of the poem dramatizes. The relationship between preacher and congregation differs in language and emotional register from the relationship between Young Turk physician and his patient, but the structural form here is easily recognizable.

The political and social vehicle Islamist modernization project was the unity of Muslims. As the late nineteenth century witnessed the rise of Serbian, Greek, and Bulgarian nationalism within the empire, followed by Turkish, Arab, and Albanian forms of the same impulse, the Islamists turned to the *ümmet*,[181] the community of believers, as the antidote to the centrifugal forces tearing the polity apart. Mehmed Âkif, being of Albanian descent, placed his Islamic identity above his ethnic one throughout his life, a stance whose biographical weight Mehmed Âkif himself appears to have understood as the personal victory of the *ümmet* ideal over the claims of blood. He treated nationalism itself as a curse, identified the idea with infidelity, and condemned it in some of the most uncompromising lines of *Hakkın Sesleri*:

> What does Albanianism mean? Does it have a place in Sharia?

Kürsüsünde (On the Pulpit of the Fatih [Mosque]), both of which are explicitly written with the intent of preaching.

[181] For the concept of *ummah*, see Halil İbrahim Bulut, "Ümmet," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2012), accessed May 15, 2026, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ummet. Although the concept of *ummah* initially emerged during the foundational period of Islam to encompass a small Muslim community characterized by different tribal origins and kinship ties, whether a unified consciousness of Muslim identity existed among Muslims scattered across various parts of the globe during the pre-modern period remains a subject of debate in historiography. In any case, the consciousness of *ummah* became a crucial concept that was constantly revisited and re-evaluated in the identity construction processes, particularly for a multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire like the Ottoman State. This pan-Islamic aspect of the topic is discussed in the second chapter. As also cited there, see Cemil Aydın, *The Idea of the Muslim World.*

It is infidelity, nothing else, to push your tribe forward.[182]

For Mehmed Âkif and Said Halim Paşa, the only cement capable of holding Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Albanians, and the other Muslim peoples of the empire together was ümmet consciousness. The unity of Muslims was both a spiritual ideal and the only available source of political and military power capable of resisting Western imperialism. The reestablishment of unity among the Muslim peoples of the empire on proper Islamic foundations therefore became the final and most consequential item on the Islamist agenda for escape from underdevelopment.

The Islamist call for Muslim unity was an answer, among other things, to the same question that haunted the other two currents: how to hold a multi-ethnic empire together in the age of nationalism. Abdülhamid II's answer was autocratic control radiating from the center, backed by the Caliphate as a unifying symbol, and Chapter 2 traced how Abdülhamid II turned the caliphal title into an operational instrument of pan-Islamic statecraft. The Young Turk centralists proposed Ottoman citizenship under a strong positivist state. The Islamists proposed the *ümmet*, the transnational community of believers, as the bond capable of transcending ethnic differences.

4.4. The Shared Ground

The Islamist intervention in the late Ottoman debate over the perceived backwardness made contributions that the regime and the Young Turks did not match. They insisted that civilization could not be measured by material progress alone and that the moral and ethical fabric of a society had to be counted in any assessment of its health. They argued that the wholesale adoption of European institutions produced cultural disintegration rather than progress.

The Islamists were unable, however, to step outside the framework they sought to escape. Europe set the terms of their program as well. Their selective method of borrowing depended on continuous comparison with what was being borrowed from.

[182] [*'Arnavutluk' ne demek? Var mı şeriatte yeri / Küfr olur, başka değil, kavmini sürmek ileri*] Mehmed Âkif Ersoy, *Safahat*, 184. The word "*Arnavutluk*," which literally denotes Albania or the state of being Albanian, is translated here as "Albanianism" to convey Mehmed Âkif's poetic double-meaning utilization of the term, specifically targeting ethno-nationalist fragmentation within the Muslim community.

Even when they argued that Islam possessed an inherent capacity for progress, the argument was formulated as a reply to the European charge that Islam was incompatible with modernity. They were always positioning themselves in relation to Europe, always comparing their own tradition to European achievements, always finding it necessary to argue that Islam is not the obstacle Europeans claim it to be. Here we find the expression of a phenomenon identified in the introduction, the obligation to mount a defense of one's own civilization before a tribunal whose authority one rejects. It is arguable that their selective modernization formula, in this regard, was comparable to that of Abdülhamid II.

Read against the vocabulary of the first chapter, the Islamist position is the clearest instance in this thesis of what Chatterjee called a derivative discourse, and the term should be applied with the care he himself urged. The claim is not that Islamist thought was unoriginal, and the preceding pages have tried to show that it was not. A discourse is derivative when it is obliged to conduct its argument within categories it did not establish, and the Islamist argument was so obliged at every point. To assert that Islam is compatible with progress is to have accepted progress as the criterion of judgment. To sort European civilization into a rose and a thorn is to have accepted that European civilization is the object that requires sorting. The Islamists occupied the waiting room while denying that the room existed, and the denial was itself conducted in the language of the room.

The elitism of the Islamist current is noticed less often than that of the other two, because its idiom is pastoral rather than clinical, but it is not on that account less pronounced. The preacher in the pulpit occupies the same structural position as the physician at the bedside and the sovereign in the palace. He possesses what the congregation lacks, he addresses them rather than consulting them, and the transformation he demands is one they are to undergo rather than to author. In all three formulations the people are what is to be saved. In none of them are they who saves.

The structure of the selective formula, take the science, leave the morals, deserves a closer look. The statement assumes a shared origin for both, and that origin is Europe. The entire evaluative procedure begins and ends with Europe. That being said, the sincerity of the Islamist refusal of European values, like the other two currents, should

not be underestimated. All currents examined in this thesis, in their own way of understanding, were responding to a genuine and real fear of falling behind.

When the three currents are read together, a convergence appears that none of them would probably have admitted. The Hamidian regime, the Young Turks, and the Islamists fought one another with genuine intensity over the diagnosis and the cure of the empire's perceived backwardness. Their disagreements were so powerful and fierce that the consequences of their struggle shaped the history of both the empire and the Republic that succeeded it. Beneath the disagreements, at the level of epistemic structure lay, however, they shared common ground of a Europe-centered comparative framework, an elitist conception of salvation, and an anxiety of backwardness that none of them could escape.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study is a humble endeavor with a single ambition. It set out to look at the political postures developed in the late Ottoman Empire around a felt condition I have called "the anxiety of backwardness," and to ask what those postures shared beneath the noise of their disagreement. By the late nineteenth century, the certainty that the empire was behind, that it was running out of time, that something fundamental had gone wrong, had become a shared premise across the political spectrum. Three intellectual currents that opposed each other in almost every other respect agreed on this premise, built their politics around it, and conducted their fiercest polemics over what it required of them. The argument I have advanced across the chapters is that this shared premise, far more than any of the particular programs it generated, is the part of the late Ottoman intellectual world that deserves examination in extent. Whether the empire was objectively behind the West on some measurable scale belongs to a different inquiry with different methods because the premise examined in this study operated independently of its accuracy.

The vocabulary I used throughout the study is also worth a concluding remark. *Orientalism* and self-*Orientalism* carry significant intellectual and political meanings that have accumulated around them since Said's foundational work. The disputes they continue to generate, inside and outside the academy, have in some hands turned them into instruments of political criticisms and accusations, which is not surprising considering the accusatory tone of Said's work itself. However, the function I have asked them to serve in this thesis is a more limited one. They work here as analytical tools for naming a position, and the position they help to name is that of an intellectual or statesman who has accepted, often without noticing the acceptance, the categories through which their own civilization has been classified from outside. To pursue the

question of whether Abdülhamid II, Ahmed Rıza, Abdullah Cevdet, Prince Sabahaddin, Mehmed Akif or Said Halim Paşa was, in some final reckoning, an *Orientalist* or a self-*Orientalist* would simply reproduce the practice of evaluation from outside that the categories were originally devised to expose. The vocabulary helps us see the shape of the anxiety and the political stances it produced. The destination of the argument is the anxiety itself, and what it did to the late Ottoman political imagination.

The thesis has worked through three currents and a substantial body of evidence drawn from periodicals, archival correspondence, treatises, and poetry, and the case I have been mounting across the preceding chapters can now be stated more openly. The Hamidian regime, the Young Turk opposition, and the Islamist intellectuals each developed a distinctive response to the conviction that the empire stood at the precipice. Beneath the conflict, there ran a convergence visible in retrospect. The three currents shared a comparative reference point that organized the questions through which they understood their situation, with Europe occupying the analytic center from which every diagnosis took its bearings. They shared an elitist conception of salvation that placed political agency in the hands of a small enlightened group and assigned the population the place of an object to be reformed, a body to be cured, or a congregation to be guided. The defendant in the courtroom, the physician in the consulting room, and the preacher on the pulpit were three different postures inside a single arena, and the arena was European in its terms of evidence. The significance of this convergence is that it operated beneath the level of stated ideology. Each of the three currents understood itself as doing authentic and self-directed work. They were, in fact, not in a vacuum and thinking in a broader world temporally and geographically.

The Hamidian period has been studied more thoroughly than perhaps many others in modern Ottoman history, and the second chapter of this thesis humbly added to a literature already considerable. What it tried to add was a specific reading of the regime's representational strategies, the exposition fronts, the press interventions, the cultivation of friendly voices in Western world as evidence of an anxiety whose force the regime carried more thoroughly than its own self-descriptions admitted. The regime's centralism and its intelligence apparatus are sometimes been treated as the signature features of Abdülhamid II's reign. However, each of these features belongs

to a longer arc. The bureaucratic trajectory of Ottoman governance can be traced back at least to Mahmud II. The impulse to manage the empire's external image through expositions and through press interventions has Ottoman precedent in the Abdülaziz period and arguably earlier. Abdülaziz's own visit to the 1867 Paris Exposition was, after all, the first occasion on which a sitting Ottoman sultan had travelled to Europe in any peacetime capacity, and the careful orchestration of his appearance, the gifts exchanged, the imperial decorations distributed, the press coverage cultivated through Ottoman embassies abroad, all of it prefigured the more elaborate Hamidian operations the second chapter examined in detail. The Tanzimat-era reformers had been engaged in versions of a comparable image management for decades before that. The Hamidian regime inherited both an anxiety of backwardness and the techniques for managing its perception abroad. What it added was intensity, and the intensity made the inherited practices much more visible. The choice to focus on the Hamidian period in this thesis was a choice imposed by the practical constraints of the project. A fuller account of the Ottoman administrative anxiety, one that traced the same impulses back through the early Tanzimat into the reorganizations of Mahmud II, even eighteen century's Ottoman administration, would extend the framework developed here into a longer story. That story remains to be told, and the kind of work it would require lies beyond the scope of the present study.

The Young Turks occupy a comparable position in historiography. They have been studied and debated for more than a century, sometimes as the heroic forerunners of constitutional government, sometimes as the architects of catastrophe, sometimes as both at once. The political weight they continue to carry in the Turkish political sphere makes it difficult to write about them while keeping distance from arguments whose origins lie outside the analytical matter at hand. The Young Turks hold a special place in late Ottoman intellectual history, and the third chapter tried to do justice to the seriousness of their analytical work. What the chapter also tried to show is that the anxiety they carried extended well beyond their own generation can be attributed to the modern educational institutions. The Young Ottomans, who preceded them by a generation, such as Namık Kemal, Ziya Paşa, and Ali Suavi, had already experienced and articulated a version of a comparible anxiety. The Young Turks transformed the vocabulary of their debate, replacing the Young Ottomans' constitutional Islamic register with a radical scientific one, while the underlying preoccupation continued

from one generation into the next. To treat the Young Turks as the moment at which the anxiety of backwardness first entered Ottoman political thought would flatten the very history that gives the period its depth.

The fourth chapter took Said Halim Paşa and Mehmed Akif as the two figures whose work could be examined in detail, and I read them inside the same framework I had applied to the other two currents. The reading has its limits, and it has a particular blind spot the framework of this study itself imposes. This thesis has examined the thought of actors who were, with rare exceptions, Muslim. Even those among them who held atheist convictions in private had been formed in a Muslim intellectual milieu, raised in its categories, and shaped by its assumptions about community, authority, and historical experience.

The Ottoman Empire, however, was a multi-religious polity. Substantial Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Assyrian, and Bulgarian populations had been integral to imperial life for centuries. Each of these communities was undergoing its own modernization debate during exactly the decades the present thesis has examined. The Armenian intelligentsia of İstanbul, the Greek mercantile elite of İzmir, and the Jewish reformists of Selanik, all confronted versions of the similar questions that animated their Muslim contemporaries: how to engage with European modernity, what to preserve from their own tradition, who should lead the engagement, and what salvation would look like. The silence of this thesis on those questions reflects a constraint of scope, and the questions themselves deserve sustained treatment in their own studies. The boundary between Muslim and non-Muslim political actors was, in any case, more permeable than it looks like. Ottoman ambassador Aleksandr Mavroyeni's Bey, who was mentioned in the chapter 2 was of Greek origin and it was no coincidence. Armenians were active in the Young Turk opposition from very early in its development, and the meetings of the Committee of Union and Progress in the years leading up to 1908 included Armenian, Jewish, and Greek participants whose contributions to the movement have been documented in scholarship that still awaits its proper integration into the analytical center of late Ottoman intellectual history. The First Ottoman Liberals Congress of 1902 in Paris, examined in the third chapter, was an explicitly multi-confessional event whose ambition was precisely to construct an opposition that

crossed the communal lines. That larger project lies ahead of the present one, and further studies of this kind are required for the convergence to come fully into view.

A further limitation deserves acknowledgment. Women are largely absent from these pages, and the responsibility for that absence is mostly mine. Part of the explanation lies in the material itself. The Hamidian regime, the Young Turks, and the Islamist intellectual networks operated as almost entirely male environments in their visible personnel, and the conversations recorded in their periodicals, treatises, and correspondence took place largely among men addressing other men. However, I must acknowledge the fact that a feminist methodology applied to the same period would open at least two avenues the present study has not pursued. The first is the recovery of the women who did write in the Ottoman press of these decades, whose voices appeared in journals dedicated to education, family life, and the public role of women, and whose work has been examined in a growing body of scholarship the framework developed here might productively engage. The second is an analysis of what the males of each three currents had to say about the women themselves, about their place in a modernizing society, about the kind of education they required, about the dress and conduct expected of them, about the citizenship they might be permitted. Each current produced extensive discourse on these matters. A study that read it through the lens of derivative discourse and elitist salvation would likely uncover a convergence as instructive as the one this thesis has tried to document. That work also belongs to other studies.

The Islamist current carries the blind spot against non-Muslims in a particularly acute form. A framework for imperial unity built exclusively on Muslim solidarity excluded, by definition, a substantial portion of the empire's population. Armenians, Greeks, Bulgarians, Assyrians, and Jews fell outside the cement the Islamists proposed, and the consequences for these communities, from the Hamidiye massacres of 1894 to 1896, to the Armenian Genocide and population exchanges continued in the following years, traced the brutal edge of an idea of unity defined by exclusion. Said Halim Paşa and Mehmed Âkif left this exclusion mostly unaddressed. The following decades exposed this blind spot in many ways. The very nationalism the Islamists dismissed as an imported Western disease proved far more durable than the *ümmet* ideal they offered in its place and Islamists in the following decades somehow aligned

themselves with the nationalistic worldviews they had been critical of. The Christian and Jewish communities of the empire, left outside the Islamic framework, as well as the Muslim Arabs of the Ottoman Empire pursued their own national projects, and the consequences shaped the political map of modern Western Asia and North Africa. A final biographical irony about Mehmed Âkif is worth mentioning here. The poet who declared tribal feeling incompatible with Islam, who placed his faith above his Albanian descent, who wrote that to push one's own people forward was apostasy, would be claimed as the national poet of a Turkish Republic whose founding principle was the very ethno-centric national imagination he had spent his career condemning. The *İstiklâl Marşı* he composed became the anthem of a nation-state founded by the very positivist cadres of the last Ottoman decade.

It is at this point that the theoretical apparatus introduced in the first chapter does its most consequential work, and the introduction promised that the conclusion would return to it. Partha Chatterjee's term derivative discourse names the structural condition I have been describing across these pages. The work the late Ottoman currents produced was original in its content, sometimes brilliantly so, and the framework within which that work was produced had been elaborated elsewhere, in European intellectual traditions whose categories had become the medium of thought before any of the actors examined here came to them. The discourse was derivative in its framework. Recognizing the derivation leaves the originality of what the actors did with the framework fully intact. It identifies the conditions under which they did it, and it explains why opposition mounted in derivative terms continues to operate inside the framework that opposition presupposes.

Around Chatterjee's concept the other theoretical instruments deployed in the first chapter take their proper places. Edward Said's analysis of *Orientalism* explains the construction of the framework and the institutional and discursive supports through which it acquired authority. Wael Hallaq's account of epistemic conquest names the moment at which an externally imposed framework becomes internalized as the self-understanding of the intellectual class on whom it has been imposed. Cemil Aydın's history of the idea of the Muslim world traces how the very category through which Islamist thinkers organized their solidarity was itself an artifact of nineteenth-century geopolitical reconfiguration, a product of the same modernity it was deployed to resist.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's hyperreal Europe specifies the figure against which the comparison was conducted, an idealized composite far more orderly, more consistent, and more rational than any actual European society of the period. Johannes Fabian's denial of coevalness names the temporal architecture that gave the comparison its asymmetry, the operation by which contemporaneous societies are placed at different points on a single developmental line. Each of these concepts illuminates a distinct facet of a single configuration in which the late Ottoman intellectual world inhabited.

The comparative horizon sketched in the first chapter remains another horizon which can be studied further. The Ottoman case has been my focus, and the comparative material I introduced, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and Mirza Malkum Khan's anticipation, the Egyptian Nahda from Tahtavi to Abduh, the Meiji modernization, the late Qing reforms and Zhang Zhidong's parallel slogans, the Renan-Afghani exchange that revealed the structure with painful clarity, served as a way of locating the Ottoman experience within a broader pattern of encounters between non-European civilizational orders and a modernity that arrived with cannons, warships and categories at the same time. Whether the framework developed here applies with the same force to the parts of the world I have set aside is a question that exceeds the present study. The South Asian, sub-Saharan African, and East African experiences of modernity took shape under conditions of formal colonization that the Ottoman experience escaped, at least formally, and the early modern timing of European arrival in some of those regions differs in important ways from the late nineteenth-century encounter analyzed here. The South Asian postcolonial tradition from which Chatterjee, Chakrabarty, and others have drawn the concepts I have used may hold for these other settings or may require modification when applied to settings whose colonial comparable encounter took shape several centuries before the Ottoman one. That question also belongs to other studies.

This longer horizon connects with a methodological task articulated by Dipesh Chakrabarty in his *Provincializing Europe*. The task he set was to write histories of non-European societies that treat European experience as one regional experience among others rather than as the universal template against which other histories become particular deviations. The difficulty he himself acknowledged is that the very tools of critical analysis, the categories of social science, the vocabularies of political

theory, the analytical grammar of history, had all been formed within the European experience they sought to relativize.

What the Ottoman case most directly supports is a modest claim about the provincializing project itself. It will be accomplished by no single study, including this one. It proceeds through the accumulation of work that reads non-European intellectual traditions with the care historically reserved for the European canon, and through the slow pressure such work exerts on the categories through which social and intellectual history are written. This thesis has tried to contribute to that accumulation by taking seriously the intellectual labor of late Ottoman thinkers across three opposed currents, and by following the anxiety of backwardness wherever it appeared, regardless of the ideological colors under which it traveled. Whether this counts as a step toward provincializing Europe, or toward some different relation between Ottoman history and the theoretical traditions through which it is interpreted, is a judgment that belongs to readers.

What the late Ottoman experience transmitted to the Republic of 1923 is another question that lies, technically, outside the scope this thesis announced for itself. The introduction promised that the conclusion would address the inheritance, and after working on the materials examined in the preceding chapter, it is now time to revisit that topic. The continuity of personnel between the Unionist milieu of the late empire and the Kemalist founding cadre of the Republic has been documented thoroughly by Erik Jan Zürcher and others as cited in relevant points throughout this study, and the biographical continuity carries an intellectual continuity with it. The men who designed the Republic's institutions had read the same European authors as the Young Turks, some debated in the same discussion circles, and absorbed the same positivist convictions in their modern schools, mostly military schools, that the third chapter examined. The Republic began with a particular settlement already in hand, carried forward from the debate the late Ottoman period had been conducting. That settlement resolved the long-running tension between adopting European science and rejecting European morality in favor of something close to Abdullah Cevdet's position. The self-representation strategy of the Hamidian regime was also inherited and became the state strategy of the Republic after 1923. The Republic's modernizing reforms were conceived and executed by a small cadre that operated, in Ahmed Rıza's favorite

formula, for the people and sometimes despite them. The population kept the place of the object of transformation and the conviction that the masses could be trusted with their own salvation only after they had been formed into something else by the educated minority that understood what their salvation required is the inheritance that has been most consequential and most persistent.

The settlement had, however, a theorist that no account of what the late Ottoman debate transmitted to the Republic can omit him. Ziya Gökalp's distinction between *hars* and *medeniyet*, between a culture that is national and particular and a civilization that is international and transferable, is the most refined statement of the selective formula this thesis has followed across all three currents.[183] It promises to import European civilization, its science, its technique, its method, while conserving and indeed recovering a Turkish culture, and it makes the promise in the voice of the sociologist-legislator who alone is qualified to supervise the operation. His programmatic slogan, *Türkleşmek, İslâmlaşmak, Muâsırlaşmak*, folded the three currents examined here into a single national-modernist package, and his position as the chief ideologue of the Committee of Union and Progress makes him the point at which the elitist-modernist arc of this study closes.[184] Andrew Davison has read Gökalp's project as an attempt at provincializing Europe before the term existed, an attempt that fails in precisely the manner this thesis has described: the distinction between a transferable civilization and an inviolable culture is itself drawn with instruments that the civilization in question supplied.[185] In Gökalp the anxiety of backwardness achieves its most systematic theoretical expression, and the Republic inherited his formula very nearly intact.

The triangular configuration of the late Ottoman intellectual sphere reappears in Republican politics in transformed but clearly recognizable forms. The Kemalist secular establishment that consolidated power after 1923 carried forward the Young Turks' conviction that scientific reason, universally valid laws of social development,

[183] Uriel Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp* (London: Luzac and Company and The Harvill Press, 1950).

[184] Ziya Gökalp, *The Principles of Turkism*, trans. Robert Devereux (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968).

[185] Andrew Davison, "Ziya Gökalp and Provincializing Europe," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 3 (2006): 377-390.

and an enlightened bureaucratic vanguard were the proper instruments of national salvation. The Islamist movement that re-emerged in Republican politics especially from the 1950s onward, gathering force across the second half of the twentieth century and acquiring governmental power by the early twenty-first, drew on intellectual genealogies running back through the late Ottoman Islamism this thesis examined. The authoritarian centralism that has resurfaced periodically across Republican politics, sometimes in military and sometimes in civilian guise, carries the impulse of the Hamidian conviction that the empire's survival required centralized control by those who understood what the empire needed, now displaced onto the survival of the nation-state and its borders. Each of these contemporary positions has been transformed by a century of additional history. Mass politics, war and economic transformation, democratic experiment and authoritarian reversal, global ideological reconfiguration, have all altered the substance of each position in significant ways. The Eurocentric reference point, joined in recent decades by an American axis and European Union, and more recently by an emerging Asian one, continues to organize the questions through which Turkish political life debates itself. The elitism, in various modulations, continues to organize the relations between political actors and the populations they claim to represent or to lead.

One further observation belongs here, and it can be made briefly. The quarrel this thesis has reconstructed did not end with the empire whose survival was its occasion. The defender of the imperial past and its critic remain in the room, and the terms on which they argue are recognizably continuous with the terms that the regime, the Young Turks, and the Islamists exchanged in the decades examined here. That continuity is the strongest evidence available for the claim that what these currents shared mattered more than what divided them.

The medical metaphor that runs through the late Ottoman material cited in this study carries a meaning beyond rhetorical convenience. The empire was diagnosed as sick by its contemporaries. It also came to think of itself as a patient. It produced an intellectual class that conceived itself as a body of physicians charged with the cure. Some of the physicians were defensive of the patient and contested the diagnosis. Some were impatient with the patient and wanted to operate at once. Some were furious with the patient for having allowed himself to fall ill in the first place. Some

were tender with the patient and tried to keep his dignity intact while preparing for the worst. They worked, all of them, on a body they understood to be dying. At the end of the day, the patient died, the empire dissolved. At this point in the argument, the conceptual vocabulary I have used throughout this thesis begins to feel insufficient for the following period. Anxiety, the central category that has done most of the analytical work in these pages, belongs to the time before a feared outcome arrives. It is the felt experience of waiting for a possible loss that has not yet occurred, watching for the signs of an illness one has been told to expect. The Republic that succeeded them lived inside a different condition, because the feared outcome about the empire had arrived and the Republic was a new-born. The work that remained was the work of constructing a new political life on the foundation of a loss whose magnitude the new state had reasons of its own to leave only partly acknowledged.

This thesis ends with a quiet observation. The three currents examined here did serious intellectual work under conditions of genuine existential threat. They saw parts of their situation correctly, missed other parts, and misjudged others, and they did all of this with seriousness and energy that I have wanted these chapters to honor even where they are criticized. The convergence beneath their conflicts has been the central finding of this study, and the convergence reveals an anxiety whose force has outlasted the empire that produced it. The Republic inherited the anxiety and turned it into something the late Ottoman intellectuals would have recognized in a transformed register that exceeded what they could have foreseen. What had been the fear of loss became, after the loss arrived, a grief that has remained without a settled language for the century since. The medical vocabulary of late Ottoman thought, the doctors and the patients and the cures, the symptoms read and misread, the remedies prescribed and resisted, persists in present-day Turkish political speech in forms whose continuity with the late nineteenth century is sometimes missed to be acknowledged and everywhere visible to anyone willing to look. The anxiety transformed into grief and mourning. While grief, like anxiety, is a category of human experience that a historian can approach only at a careful distance, I only dare to employ it here in a metaphorical sense. All in all, the mourning has been the work of the century that followed, and it looks far from finished.

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A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu tez, geç Osmanlı döneminde geri kalmışlık kaygısı olarak adlandırılan hal etrafında biçimlenen siyasî ve entelektüel tepkileri incelemektedir. Terim, imparatorluğun Avrupa modernitesinin kurduğu medeniyet hiyerarşisinde çepere itildiği ve bekasının bu hiyerarşiye ait olduğunu ispat edebilmesine bağlı hâle geldiği yolundaki yerleşik kanaati ifade etmektedir. Her ne kadar askerî yenilgiler ile toprak kayıpları devrin sabit gerçekleri olsa da bu çalışma, kaygının daha derinde yatan bir temeli olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Geç Osmanlı zihin dünyasında geri kalmışlık kaygısı epistemik bir mahiyet taşımakta ve dünya ile imparatorluğun onun içindeki yerinin nasıl görüleceğini, dolayısıyla neyin mesele sayılacağını, hangi çözümlerin düşünülebilir olacağını ve başarının hangi terazide tartılacağını belirlemektedir.

Çalışmanın merkezindeki iddia şudur: Hamidiye rejimi, Jön Türk muhalefeti ve İslamcı aydınlar, geri kalmışlığa dair birbirinden farklı teşhisler koymuş, birbirinden farklı reçeteler yazmışlardır. Rejim, Avrupa kamuoyunun gözü önünde titiz bir modernlik temsili sahnelemiştir. Jön Türkler imparatorluğu hasta bir beden olarak görmüş, hekimliğine kendilerini tayin etmişlerdir. İslamcı teşhise göre ise gerilemenin kaynağı, İslam'ın özünden uzaklaşılmış olmasıdır. Oysa bu çatışmaların altında üç akımın paylaştığı müşterek bir epistemik zemin vardır. Üçü de çoğu zaman farkına bile varmadan, Avrupa modernitesinin kendi medeniyetlerini dışarıdan tasnif ederken kullandığı kategorileri benimsemiş, halkı yönetilecek, tedavi edilecek yahut irşat edilecek bir nesne sayan elitist bir kurtuluş fikrini paylaşmıştır. Avrupa merkezcilik ile elitizmden örülü bu ortak zemin, geç Osmanlı döneminin Cumhuriyet'e devrettiği en belirleyici entelektüel miraslardan biridir.

Giriş bölümü, geri kalmışlığın içinde üretildiği epistemolojik düzlemi ele almaktadır. Geri kalmışlık bilinci, tabiatı gereği bir kıyas noktasına muhtaçtır. Bunun yanında modern dünya sistemi ise yapısal olarak eşitsiz gelişme üzerine kuruludur. Sanayileşme ve sömürgeci genişlemeyle birlikte Avrupa küresel piyasayı denetimi altına almış, muazzam bir serveti kendinde toplamış, geri kalan bölgeleri kendi

çeperine dönüştürmüştür. Bu maddî zemin tezde ayrıca temellendirilmektedir. On sekizinci yüzyılın ortasında, sonradan az gelişmiş sayılacak bölgeler dünya imalatının kabaca dörtte üçünü üretiyor ve 1830'da bu pay hâlâ tüm dünya üretiminin yarısından fazlasını teşkil ediyorken Birinci Dünya Savaşı arifesinde bu oranın onda birin altına düştüğü görülmektedir. Sanayileşme tek başına açıklayıcı olmadığından, ona eşlik eden iki süreçle birlikte okunması gerekir. İlk süreç açısından, Karl Polanyi on dokuzuncu yüzyılı, iktisadın onu kuşatan toplumsal ilişkilerden koparıldığı, piyasanın ise toplumun kendisini uydurmak zorunda kalacağı kendi kendini düzenleyen bir mekanizma hâline getirildiği çağ olarak tanımlamaktadır. İkinci veçhe ise sömürgeci yayılmadır. Immanuel Wallerstein'ın "dünya-sistemi" kavramı bu bileşimden doğan düzeni adlandırmaktadır.

Bu düzenin iki vasfı tezin argümanı bakımından önemlidir. İlk olarak, düzen tarihseldir, tabiî değildir. Kenneth Pomeranz, on sekizinci yüzyıl ortasında Çin'in ve Avrupa'nın en gelişmiş bölgelerinin hayat standardı ve piyasa gelişkinliği bakımından birbirine hayli yakın olduğunu, sonradan açılan makasın İngiliz sanayi havzalarına yakın kömür yataklarına ve sömürgelerden akan ürünlere çok şey borçlu bulunduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, kurulan bu düzen durağan değildir. Eric Hobsbawm'ın 1875 sonrası için tarif ettiği görülmemiş ölçekte sermaye ihracı, Afrika'nın paylaşımı ve sistemin dışında neredeyse hiçbir yer bırakmayan bir emperyal yayılış da diğer yandan bu düzenin kurucu unsurlarından sayılabilir. Osmanlı'nın geri kalmışlık tecrübesinin en keskinleştiği yıllar doğrudan bu zaman dilimine denk gelmektedir ve bu denk gelişin kazara bir tesadüften ziyade birbirinden etkilenen süreçler olduğunu söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Tezin konusu ise bu tarif edilen asimetrinin kendisinden ziyade onun entelektüel zeminde ürettiği geri kalmışlık söylemidir.

Bu hiyerarşinin sürmesi, kendisinden ayrı kapsamlı bir temsil rejimini de gerektirmektedir. Edward Said'in çözümlemesinde Şarkiyatçılık, Şark'ı inceleyen bir ihtisas alanı olmanın ötesinde onu yeniden kuran bir söylemdir. Doğuyu zamansız, durağan ve kendi başına gelişme kabiliyetinden yoksun bir gelenek coğrafyası olarak inşa eden bu söylem, onu tarihinden arındırmakta, coğrafî uzaklığının yanına kronolojik bir gerilik eklemektedir. Kavramsallaştırmanın en mühim neticesi, çeper toplumların kendi geriliklerine dair bu algıyı içselleştirmeleri, dışarıdan gelen hükmün zamanla içeriden konuşan bir öz şüpheye dönüşmesidir. Tez bu süreç için "self-

oryantalizm" tabirini kullanmayı tercih etmektedir. Wael Hallaq'ın tespitiyle, Batı modernitesinin Doğu toplumları tarafından kaçınılmaz, tarih üstü ve nihayetinde hayırlı bir şey olarak algılanmaya başlanması, epistemik fethin tamamlandığına delalet eder.

Tez bu yapının haritasını, postkolonyal gelenekten aldığı dört kavramla çıkarmaktadır. Dipesh Chakrabarty'nin tarihin bekleme odası, on dokuzuncu yüzyıl tarihselciliğinin modern siyasî hayata henüz ehil saymadığı toplumların kapatıldığı yerin adıdır. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu resmen hiçbir zaman sömürgeleştirilmemiş olsa da büyük güçlerin diplomatik dili, devrin milletlerarası hukukuna eşlik eden medeniyet ölçütleri ve nihayet Osmanlı devlet adamlarının bizzat benimsediği kavrayış eliyle bu odaya yerleştirildi. Johannes Fabian'ın çağdaşlığın inkârı kavramı aynı zamansal mimarinin işleyişini tarif eder Chakrabarty'nin hipergerçek Avrupa'sı, kıyasın kendisine göre yapıldığı figürün herhangi bir fiilî Avrupa toplumundan çok daha tutarlı, çok daha idealize bir kurgu Avrupa ideali olduğunu göstermektedir. Avrupa kendi içsel çatışma ve çelişkilerinden arındırılmış ideal ve gerçek dışı bir kimliğe büründürülerek mukayese bu hipergerçek Avrupa ideali üzerinden yapılır. Partha Chatterjee'nin türev söylem kavramı, Avrupa'ya muhalefetle tanımlanan hareketlerin bile kavram dağarcığını Aydınlanma sonrası Avrupa düşüncesinden devşirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Giriş bölümü Osmanlı tecrübesini karşılaştırmalı bir çerçeveye de oturtmaktadır. Hasta adam yakıştırması yalnız Osmanlı için icat edilmiş değildir. 1895'te Yan Fu, Tianjin'de çıkan bir yayın organı olan *Zhibao*'da kendi ülkesinin de bir hasta adam olup olmadığını sormuş, bu öz teşhis geç Qing sözlüğünde Doğu Asya'nın hasta adamı ifadesine dönüşmüştür. Zhang Zhidong'un 1898 tarihli "Çin öğrenimi öz, Batı öğrenimi işlev" şeklindeki formülü, Meiji Japonyası'nın buna paralel wakon yōsai düsturu ve Osmanlı İslamcılarının Batı'nın ilmini alıp ahlâkını reddetme teklifi, aynı yapısal meselenin farklı kültürel kodlardaki tezahürleridir. Mısır'da Rifâa Râfi et-Tahtâvî'nin Paris müşahedeleri, İran'da Mirza Malkum Han'ın seçmeci Batılılaşmanın tutarsızlığına dair ikazı, Japonya'da Fukuzawa Yukichi'nin Asya'dan çıkış çağrısı, aynı hiyerarşinin farklı köşelerinden verilmiş cevaplardır. Bu paralellikler bizzat devrin aktörlerince de görülmüştür. 1905'te Japon donanmasının Tsushima'da Rus filosunu yenmesini Abdullah Cevdet bilimsel düşüncenin ve

medeniyet meşalesinin bir zaferi olarak selamlamış, Çinli Liang Qichao Osmanlı ve Çin'i "Şark'ın hasta adamları" diye aynı kümede anmıştır. Bu tecrübeler elbette özdeş değildir ve kendi yerel kodlarını taşımaktadır. Bununla birlikte tezin iddiası, eşitsiz şartlar altında Avrupa modernitesiyle karşılaşan her medeniyetin benzer bir kaygı ürettiği yönündedir.

Yöntem bakımından çalışma, devrin başlıca akımlarının ürettiği temsil kabiliyeti yüksek metinler üzerinde bir söylem çözümlemesi yürütmektedir. Metinler, fikir taşıyıcısı olmalarının ötesinde, kaygının hangi şartlarda ve nasıl kurulduğunu ele veren belgeler olarak okunmuş, karşıt siyasî mevkiler arasında dolaşan ortak kelime dağarcığı ile ortak varsayımlar, görünürdeki ihtilaflardan daha belirleyici sayılmıştır. Kaynaklar arasında devrin süreli yayınları, risaleler, şiir ve Osmanlı arşivinden çıkarılan yazışmalar vardır.

Hamidiye rejimi bir şahıs yahut hareket olmaktan çok bir yönetim aygıtı olduğundan, ona bir zihniyet atfetmek ayrıca gerekçe ister. Tez bu gerekçeyi rejimin kendi hususiyetinde bulmaktadır. II. Abdülhamid devrinin olağanüstü merkeziyetçiliği, kayda değer hemen her diplomatik yazışmanın, gazete kupürünün ve kurumsal kararın Yıldız Sarayı'ndan geçtiği bir idare tarzı doğurmuştur. Bu durum, rejimin kendini nasıl anladığının gündelik işleyişinin bıraktığı kayıtlardan çıkarılabilmesine olanak tanımaktadır. İncelenen düşünürlerin seçimi de gerekçelendirilmiştir. Mevcut literatür, bilhassa Şükrü Hanioğlu'nun çalışmaları, bu üç ismi hareketin örnek kutupları olarak ele almaktadır: pozitivist merkeziyetçi, adem-i merkeziyetçi ve biyolojik materyalist. Osmanlı İslamcılığında ise Said Halim Paşa ile Mehmed Âkif, akımın sistematik nazariyecisi ve başlıca sesleri olarak alınmıştır.

İkinci bölüm, Hamidiye rejiminin devraldığı Tanzimat mirasıyla açılmaktadır. 1839 Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümâyunu imparatorluğun gerilemesini şeriattan uzaklaşmaya bağlar ve "kavânîn-i şerʿiyye tahtında idare olunmayan memâlikin pâyidâr" olamayacağını apaçık bir hakikat sayar. Buna karşılık aynı metnin reçetesi verginin yeniden tanzimi, düzenli askerlik ve din farkı gözetilmeksizin can ile mal emniyetidir. Burada, bir teşhisin İslami geleneğin sözcük dağarcığını kullanırken bir yandan reçete olarak Batı modernitesinin getirdiği devlet anlayışını göstermesinin örneğini görürüz.

Mirasın fikrî kanadını Genç Osmanlılar oluşturmaktadır. Geri kalmışlık algısını ilk defa bir siyasî programa tercüme eden bu hareket, Şerif Mardin'in çözümlediği üzere, Namık Kemal'in elinde vatan ve hürriyet kavramlarını yeniden kurmuş, Avrupa'nın anayasal biçimlerini ithal bir yenilik olarak değil, sahih bir İslamî-Osmanlı mirasın geri kazanılması olarak sunmayı mümkün kılan bir dil geliştirmiştir. Tezin izini sürdüğü üç hususiyet, yani Avrupa karşısında duyulan kaygı, öncü münevverler eliyle ıslah tasavvuru ve seçmeci modernleşme mantığı, Genç Osmanlılarda çoktan mevcuttur. Tezin odağında bulunan üç akım, içinde tartıştıkları epistemeyi devralmış, unsurlarını farklı biçimlerde yeniden dağıtmıştır.

II. Abdülhamid Batılılaşmayı pragmatik bir ayrımla yönetmiş, devleti güçlendireceğini düşündüğü teknolojiyi ve idarî usulleri almış, tehdit saydığı liberal siyasî fikirleri kapının dışında tutmayı tercih etmiştir. Bu şartlar altında Avrupa'nın hasta adam yakıştırması imparatorluğun taksimini meşrulaştıran başlıca araç hâline geldiğinden bu yakıştırmayı çürütmek, rejim için doğrudan doğruya devletin bekasına dair bir mesele olmuştur. İkinci bölüm bu mücadelenin üç cephesini takip etmektedir.

Savunmacı modernleşme projesinin kalbinde çözülmesi güç bir paradoks yatmaktadır. Batı'nın siyasî ve askerî nüfuzuna direnmek isteyen rejim, çareyi yine Batı'nın ürettiği araçlarda bulmuştur. Modern mektepler, telgraf hatları, demiryolları ve güçlendirilmiş bürokrasi çoğu zaman nötr aparatlarmış gibi anlaşılmakla birlikte mahiyetleri itibarıyla nötr sayılamaz. Sadık bir seçkin zümre yetiştirmek üzere kurulan Tıbbiye ile Mülkiye, tam da bu modern eğitimin usulleri sayesinde istibdadı sorgulayan bir kuşak çıkarmış ve 1908'de II. Abdülhamid'in saltanatına son verecek Jön Türk hareketinin kuluçkası olmuştur. Kendini aydınlanmış bir ıslahatçı sayan padişahın imparatorluğu tahkim için yürüttüğü siyasetlerin birçoğu böylece kendi aleyhine dönmüştür.

Tezde anılan birinci cephe dünya sergileridir. Osmanlı'nın bu sahneye çıkışı 1900'den çok eskidir. Ece Özçeri'nin çalışması Osmanlı devletinin bu etkinlikleri ticarî fuar olmanın ötesinde birer öz temsil sahası olarak kavradığını ve katılımını buna göre ayarladığını göstermektedir. 1900, bu sergilerden biridir. Rejimin bu cephedeki en dikkat çekici tavrı, kendisinden beklenen egzotizmi geri çevirmesidir. 1893 Chicago Sergisi'nde gösteri için görevlendirilen Bedevî süvariler, ortaya barbarlık sahnesi çıkmasın diye modern süvari zabitlerince eğitilmiş, semazenler ile geleneksel

dansçılar sergiden uzak tutulmuştur. 1900 Paris'te Osmanlı pavyonunun büyük devletlerin arasına yerleştirilmesi bir eşitlik beyanı olarak takdim edilmiş, sergi komiserinin saraya gönderdiği rapor bir hizmet vesikası gibi kaleme alınmıştır: Osmanlı şubesi beş büyük mükâfat ile on altın madalya kazanmış, memuriyeti hitama eren komiser padişaha hitaben yazdığı telgrafta Osmanlı'nın başarısını gölgelemek isteyen odaklara rağmen Osmanlı şubesinin başarılı olduğunu yazmıştır. Bu başarı, Sabah ve İkdam sütunları aracılığıyla iç meşruiyete de tahvil edilmiştir.

İkinci cephe Panislamist siyasettir. II. Abdülhamid hilafet unvanını, imparatorluğun hem tebaası hem dünya Müslümanları nezdindeki meşruiyetini pekiştiren bir araca dönüştürmüştür. Hicaz Demiryolu hac yolunu kısaltan bir hayır işi olduğu kadar, imparatorluğun teknik kudretini içeriye ve dışarıya gösteren bir vitrindir. Cemil Aydın'ın hatırlattığı gibi, bu siyasetin hitap ettiği Müslüman dünya mefhumunun kendisi moderndir ve Avrupa'nın ürettiği ırkî ve medenî tasnifler karşısında biçimlenmiştir. Rejim, kendisini dışlayan hiyerarşiye, o hiyerarşinin tedavüle soktuğu bir kategoriyle direnmektedir.

Üçüncü cephe basındır. Osmanlı diplomasi ağı Batı basınını sistemli biçimde takip etmiş, düşmanca gördüğü neşriyata müdahaleden geri durmamıştır. Tezde örnek vaka olarak, New York'ta çıkan *The Sun* gazetesinin 1889 tarihli yazıları verilmektedir. Bu yazılarda imparatorluğun can çekiştiği hakkında görüşler bulunmaktadır. Washington sefiri Aleksandr Mavroyeni Bey doğrudan polemiğe girmeyi sefaretin haysiyetiyle bağdaştıramamış, bunun yerine itibarlı aracılar üzerinden karşı sesleri seferber etmiştir. Örneğin, ABD'nin eski İstanbul sefiri Oscar Straus'un, Mavroyeni Bey'in ricası üzerine *The Sun*'a gönderdiği mektup, metinde sıkça metafor olarak kullanılan hayali mahkemede bir müdafaa vekilinin beyanı gibi okunabilir. Rejim bu münasebetleri taltif ve teşekkür yazılarıyla idare etmiştir. Havas-Reuter ajansıyla tasarlanan anlaşma ise tepkisel tekziplerden proaktif haber akışı idaresine geçme iddiasını taşımaktadır, ilgili yazışmada efkâr-ı umumiyenin büyük siyasî meselelerin sulh yoluyla hallinde neredeyse belirleyici bir kuvvet hâline geldiği ve onu kazanmanın başarının teminatı sayıldığı açıkça yazılıdır.

Bölüm yine bir mahkeme metaforuyla kapanmaktadır. En nihayetinde delil hazırlayan, avukatlarla anlaşan, müdafaa kaleme alan bir sanık, en temel düzeyde mahkemenin

salahiyetini kabul etmiş demektir. Jüriyi hor görebilir, hükmün baştan yazıldığını düşünebilir, ne var ki müdafaa fiilinin kendisi salahiyetin tanındığını ikrar eder. Rejimin savunmacı modernleşme projesi tam bu mantık içinde işlemiştir. Elitizm de bu bölümde çoktan biçimlenmiş hâldedir. Devletin kurtuluşu ancak Hamid yönetimi tarafından atılan adımların devleti korumasıyla mümkündür, burada halka düşen görev rejimin politikalarına tam bir sadakatle teslim olmaktır.

Üçüncü bölüm Jön Türk muhalefetini ele almaktadır. Tıbbiye, Mülkiye ve Harbiye gibi modern mekteplerde yetişen bu kuşak için bilimcilik ithal bir felsefe cereyanı olmaktan çıkmış, dinin yerini tutmaya aday mutlak bir hakikat kaynağı hâline gelmiştir. Döneme damgasını vuran şu slogan tutumu özetler: ilim havassın dinidir, din avamın ilmidir. Toplum, kâinat gibi, keşfedilebilir ve değişmez kanunlara tabi bir organizmadır.

Bölümün omurgasını üç sima oluşturur. Ahmed Rıza, Comte pozitivizmini benimsemiş ve yabancı müdahaleye kesin bir dille karşı çıkmış; *Meşveret*'te, "ecnebilerin memlekette hükûmet icra etmeleri şöyle dursun, işlere hariçten müdahale ve riyaset etmelerini bile namus ve haysiyet-i milliyeye bir âr" saydığını yazmıştır. Prens Sabahaddin, Le Play ile Demolins'in toplum bilimine yaslanarak Osmanlı toplumunu komüniter formasyonun tesiri altında teşhis etmiş, kurtuluşu adem-i merkeziyet ile teşebbüs-i şahsîde aramıştır. Abdullah Cevdet ise Büchner ve Le Bon tercümeleriyle biyolojik materyalizmi Osmanlı diline taşımış, kafatası ölçümlerinden ırkların kabiliyetine dair hükümler çıkarmıştır. Bu mevkiler arasındaki gerilim 1902 Kongresi'nde açık bir kopuşa varmış ve hareketin sonraki siyasî hattını çizmiştir.

Cevdet'in en keskin ifadeleri, Balkan Savaşı yenilgisinin ardından *İçtihad* çevresinde alevlenen tam ve kısmî Batılılaşma tartışmasına, bilhassa Celal Nuri ile giriştiği polemiğe aittir. "Bizi Avrupa'dan çıkaran bizim Asyaî kafamızdı" diye yazmaktadır. Aynı polemikte seçmeci formülü kökünden reddeder ve dönemin belki de en açık sözlü reçetesini sunar: ikinci bir medeniyet yoktur, medeniyet Avrupa medeniyetidir ve gülüyle dikeniyle birlikte alınmak zorundadır. Kendi reçetesini de bir hekimin diliyle sunmakta, Türklere kevser değil acı bir ilaç uzattığını, bu ilacı içmeyenin helâk olacağını söylemektedir.

Bu noktada, ilk bölümde anılan teorik kavramsal çerçeveyi anımsamakta fayda vardır. Abdullah Cevdet, Osmanlı zihnini Asyaî diye nitelerken bir mekândan ziyade bir zamanı tarif etmekte, kendi toplumunu içinde yaşadığı Avrupa'nın geçmişine havale etmektedir. Fabian'ın çağdaşlığın inkârı dediği işlem burada failin kendi üzerine çevrilmiştir. Elitizm ise bu epistemolojinin doğrudan neticesidir. Toplum ancak tahsillilerin okuyabileceği kanunlarla işleyen bir organizmaysa, reçete yazma yetkisi bilgiden doğar ve yönetilenlerin rızası bahis dışı kalır. Hekim, teşhisi oya sunmaz, icra edilmesi gereken tedavi ağır olsa da ve ilaç acı olsa da halka düşen bu ilacı alıp içmek olacaktır.

Dördüncü bölüm İslamcı cevaba ayrılmıştır. Bu akımı adlandırmak diğer ikisinden biraz daha güçtür. Hamidiye rejiminin bürokratik bir aygıtı, Jön Türklerin kongreleri ve nihayet üyeli, programlı bir cemiyeti varken İslamcılar daha gevşek dokunmuş bir mütefekkir, mecmua ve mütercim ağı içinde çalışmıştır. Yine de 1908'den itibaren *Sırât-ı Müstakîm*, 1912'den sonraki adıyla *Sebîlürreşâd* bu dokunun kurumsal bir merkezi olarak sayılabilir. Said Halim Paşa Kahire'de doğmuş, Avrupa'da okumuş, Fransızcaya hâkim bir Osmanlı prensidir. Avrupa düşüncesini içeriden eleştirecek kadar iyi bilir, İslamî geleneği tutarlı bir alternatif olarak dile getirecek kadar da onun içinde durur. Mehmed Âkif ise akımın, şiirlerini dahi cami kürsüsünden halka verilen vaazlar şeklinde kaleme alan şair sesidir.

İslamcı teşhis ahlakîdir. Said Halim'in *Buhranlarımız*'ı tek oturuşta yazılmış bir kitap olmayıp 1908 sonrasında kaleme alınan risalelerin bir araya getirilmiş hâlidir. Hedefinde, Tanzimat mekteplerinin yetiştirdiği ve Batı hayranlığı içinde kendi toplumunu içeriden görme kabiliyetini kaybettiğini iddia ettiği münevver zümre vardır. Eleştirinin ironisi, müellifin de esasen o zümreye mensup sayılabilecek olmasıdır. Mehmed Âkif aynı teşhisi şiirin diliyle koymaktadır: mütefekkirlerin dini hiç anlamadığını, İslam'ı terakkiye tahammülü olmayan bir din sandıklarını yazar; daha sert bir yerden, Müslümanlığın pâk sîretten ibaret olduğunu, oysa Müslümanların zulme tapıp adaleti tepecek kadar levsiyata saplandığını söyler. Teşhisin merkezinde, İslam'ın kendisi ile Müslümanların ameli arasındaki ayrım durmaktadır. Bu ayrım, Muhammed Abduh'ta da örneklerini gördüğümüz yirminci yüzyıl İslamî ıslah düşüncesinin kurucu vasfıdır. Tez, ayrımın taşıdığı riski de kaydetmektedir. Her

başarısızlık hakiki İslam'dan uzaklaşmayla izah edilirse, argüman kendi üzerine kapanır ve yanlışlanamaz hâle gelir.

Tez bu ortak çerçevenin soykütüğünü de çıkarmaktadır. Çerçeve, modern öncesi bir İslamî vahdetten tevarüs edilmiş değildir, on dokuzuncu yüzyılda, Avrupa'nın emperyal yayılışına ve İslam'a yönelttiği tenkide cevaben üretilmiştir. En dolaysız delil, Ernest Renan ile Cemaleddin Afgani arasındaki 1883 tarihli tartışmadır. Renan, Sorbonne konferansında İslam'ın bilimle bağdaşmadığını, İslam medeniyetine atfedilen fikrî başarıların aslında İslam öncesi kültür temellerini muhafaza etmiş Fars, Arap ve başka kavimlerin eseri olduğunu savunmuştur. Afgani'nin cevabı, görünüşte İslam'ı müdafaa ederken Renan'ın ölçütünü teslim eder, tartışma, bilimsel ilerleme kabiliyeti mihengi üzerinden ve Renan'ın kurduğu zeminde yürümektedir. İslamcı argümanın iskeleti bu tartışmada çıplak hâlde görünmektedir.

İslamcı reçete gül ve diken formülüdür. Âkif'in mısraları da bunu açıkça söyler: Garb'ın ilmi ve sanatı alınacak, mesaiye son sürat verilecektir, zira bunlarsız yaşamak artık mümkün değildir ve sanatın da ilmin de milliyeti yoktur. Batı'nın maddî başarısı alınacak, ahlakî ve manevî çürümüşlüğü reddedilecektir. Aynı Âkif, Çanakkale'yi anlatırken Batı'yı "medeniyet denilen kahpe" diye anar. Formülün kendisi ise tezin merkezî sorusunu doğurmaktadır. Avrupa medeniyetinin önünde durup mahsullerini ayıklamak, neyin alınıp neyin bırakılacağına karar vermek, ayıklayanın nerede durduğunu ele vermektedir. İslam'ın terakkiye mâni olmadığını savunmak, günün sonunda, terakkiyi ölçü kabul etmektir. Chatterjee'nin türev söylem kavramının bu tezdeki en berrak örneklerinden biri İslamcı akımdır.

Elitizm bu akımda daha üstü örtük bir kisveye büründüğü için daha zor fark edilmektedir. Oysa kürsüdeki vaiz, hasta başındaki hekim ve saraydaki hükümdarla aynı yapısal mevkii tutmaktadır. Bu konumlandırma, dönemin hemen hemen tüm aktörlerinde kendini gösteren hiyerarşik ve elitist yaklaşımın bir tezahürüdür.

Sonuç bölümü, üç akımın çatışmaları altındaki yakınsamayı toparlamaktadır. Mahkemedeki sanık, muayene odasındaki hekim ve kürsüdeki vaiz, fikrimce aynı geri kalmışlık teşhisine karşı çözüm arayan aynı halin üç farklı tezahürüdür. Ziya Gökalp'in yine aynı dönemlerde hars ile medeniyet arasında yaptığı ayrım, yani millî ve devredilemez kültür ile beynelmilel ve devredilebilir medeniyet ayrımı da seçmeci

modernleşme formülünün en rafine ifadelerinden biridir. Türkleşmek, İslâmlaşmak, Muâsırlaşmak düsturu, tezde ayrı ayrı incelenen üç akımı tek bir millî-modernist terkipte birleştirmektedir.

Cumhuriyet bu tartışmayı hazır bir mutabakatla devralmıştır. İttihatçı çevre ile Kemalist kurucu kadro arasındaki süreklilik, beraberinde bir zihniyet sürekliliği taşımıştır denilebilir. Halk dönüşümün nesnesi olarak kalmış, kitlelerin kendi kurtuluşlarına ancak tahsilli bir azınlık eliyle biçimlendirildikten sonra emanet edilebileceği kanaati, mirasın en kalıcı parçası olmuştur.

Çalışmanın literatüre katkısı, üç akımı aynı sorularla ve tek bir çerçevede okumasındadır. Geç Osmanlı düşünce tarihi yazımı bu akımları çoğunlukla kendi iç mantıkları içinde incelemektedir: Hamidiye rejimi üzerine çalışmalar meşruiyete ve sembolizme, Jön Türkler üzerine olanlar teşkilata ve ideolojiye, İslamcılık üzerine olanlar dinî ıslah düşüncesine eğilir. Tez ayrıca arşiv malzemesini entelektüel tarih malzemesiyle aynı düzlemde okumakta, Hariciye Nezâreti yazışmaları, sergi komiseri raporları ve elçilik telgrafları da bir zihniyetin vesikaları olarak çözümlenmektedir.

Çalışmanın hudutlarını da açıkça belirtmekte fayda vardır. Tez, pek az istisna dışında Müslüman aktörlerin düşüncesini incelemiştir. Oysa geri kalmışlık kaygısının dolaştığı imparatorluk, Rum, Ermeni, Yahudi ve öteki gayrimüslim cemaatlerin de imparatorluğudur. İstanbul'un Ermeni münevverleri, İzmir'in Rum tüccar seçkinleri, Selanik'in Yahudi ıslahatçıları, Müslüman çağdaşlarını meşgul eden soruların benzerleriyle uğraşmıştır. Üstelik incelenen üç akımın hiçbiri, Avrupa'nın medeniyet ölçütünü sorgularken kendi imparatorluklarının çeperindeki halkları benzer bir hiyerarşiye yerleştirmektedir. Makdisi'nin "Osmanlı Şarkiyatçılığı" dediği bu içeriden yeniden üretim, çalışmanın çerçevesi dışında bırakılmıştır.

Tez, geri kalmışlık kaygısının bu tarihin hem muharrik gücü hem çıkmazı olduğu tespitiyle kapanmaktadır. Üç akım da hakiki bir varoluş tehdidi altında ciddi bir düşünsel emeği harcamış, vaziyetlerinin bir kısmını doğru görmüş, bir kısmını gözden kaçırmış, bir kısmını yanlış tartmıştır. Çatışmalarının altındaki yakınsama, bu çalışmanın temel bulgusudur. Bu çalışma ile anlaşılan şey, kendisini doğuran imparatorluktan ve kendini deneyimleyen şahıslardan çok daha uzun yaşamış bir kaygıdır. Bu kaygı, geç Osmanlı döneminin sonraki dönemlere bıraktığı en somut

miraslardan birini teşkil eder ve tıpkı her akımın Genç Osmanlılardan kendi meşreplerince bazı fikirleri miras alması gibi, bu hareketin mirası da politik spektrumun çeşitli uçlarında kendine yer bulmaya devam etmektedir.

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Soyadı / Surname : Şebin
Adı / Name : Yunus Emre
Bölümü / Department : Tarih / History

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