European cities through the eyes of late Ottoman intellectuals: Three cities, three cases

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Abstract

The modernization process confronted late Ottoman intellectuals with an ambivalent paradigm that positioned Western civilization as both an imperialist threat and a model to be emulated. This study examines the spatial projections of the Ottoman modernization mindset and the transformation of the perception of the West through the narratives of Namık Kemal, Ahmet Midhat Efendi, and Mehmed Akif Ersoy on European cities. The study examines London, which Namık Kemal's London, conceived as a utopia where the political order, constitutionalism, and justice mechanisms function flawlessly; Ahmet Midhat Efendi's Paris, approached with encyclopedic curiosity but reflecting the tension he experienced between technological progress and moral decay; and Mehmed Akif Ersoy's Berlin, read through the lens of discipline, hygiene, and the ideal of social solidarity under the conditions of the First World War. The comparative analysis conducted through articles, travelogues, and literary texts reveals that these intellectuals instrumentalized European cities not merely as geographical spaces, but as mirrors that diagnosed the institutional, social, and spatial deficiencies of the Ottoman Empire. Namık Kemal presented London as a romanticized political model, Ahmet Midhat portrayed Paris as a laboratory to be approached with caution, and Mehmed Akif depicted Berlin as a cautionary scene synthesizing material progress and spiritual resistance. The research findings show that all three thinkers internalized the material superiority and urban order of the West with admiration, while developing a selective modernization strategy aimed at preserving spiritual and cultural codes. In this context, European cities served as a rhetorical ground for Ottoman intellectuals to legitimize their own political and social projects.

Keywords
Ottoman Modernization, Perception of the West, European Cities, Spatial Representation, Ottoman Intellectuals

Introduction

Modernity, as a process in which the paradigm began to change on a universal scale, is a process in which the world became Westernized and Western countries established economic, political and cultural domination and hegemony over the world. Modernity describes a specific historical process and the state created by this process in the geography referred to as the West. This situation, on the one hand, reflects the market economy and society that emerged after capitalist accumulation and technological progress, characterized as a post-traditional structure. On the other hand, it describes the nation-state. The conditions that led to this state are based on the assumptions of rationality, progress, and secularization that began to emerge in the 16th century. The political discourse that emerged around the Ottoman Empire's desire to re-establish its order within its own historical context began to frame its problems in relation to the West with the advent of the period known as modernity. Colonial activities, technical progress and the rapid interaction processes created by capital have intensified relations between societies around the world. This intensity has also increased interaction and permeability between individuals, groups and classes. Modernity, therefore, is the name given to a period and a state in which the social and political consequences of transformations occurring in a specific geography become a test for the desires they create in the rest of the world. The intellectual impact of these transformations, which occurred over extended periods, led to a search for opportunities to follow the pioneers more closely, while also causing political and intellectual transformations to lag behind social transformations. After encountering modernity, although the intensity of its impact varied, every country was forced to engage with the West. Western politics, economics and the emerging world order influenced it. All societies confront modernity in one way or another. However, the moderation of

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modernity has manifested itself as the task of the elite. Inclusion in modern societies requires varying degrees of contact and integration with the capitalist system. Therefore, modernity is transmitted to countries that are not yet modern by individuals who have entered into relations with modern countries. These individuals, as they take steps towards modernity, also carry its symbols and consciousness. In that sense, modernity, which encompasses both universality and particularity, is, according to Jameson, not a concept but a narrative category and is therefore subjective (Jameson, 2002, p. 94). These subjective narratives position themselves as weak, backward, and inferior in relation to the idealized West, thereby emphasizing the progressive aspect of modernity. Western cities are presented as the most important examples of progress from this perspective.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were pivotal in the expansion of Western trade, which subsequently led to an increase in Western political domination over the rest of the world. As is the case in numerous other non-Western contexts, the Ottoman Empire also experienced a profound economic transformation (Göçek, 1996, p. 87). This transformation led to a notable change in Ottoman society and politics. Although Europe did not feature prominently in Ottoman writings, primarily historical or political ones, before the 18th century, it would be incorrect to say that there was no interest in it, according to Faroqhi. However, it was not until the 18th century that Ottoman diplomats and bureaucrats began to write about their experiences (Faroqhi, 2004, p. 6). The most important primary sources on Europe during this period are the sefaretnames, written by ambassadors. Sefaretnames are simply embassy reports, accounts of diplomatic missions and diplomatic travelogues. These texts describe the architecture, social life, technology, and forms of government of the cities visited by the ambassadors.

Kara Mehmet Paşa's *Viyana Sefaretnamesi* (1664-65), Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmet Efendi's *Paris Sefaretnamesi* (1721), Ahmed Resmi Efendi's *Viyana Sefaretnamesi* (1757) and *Berlin Sefaretnamesi* (1763), Ebubekir Ratib Efendi's *Büyük Sefaretname* (1791-92), Ahmed Vasıf Efendi's *İspanya Sefaretnamesi* (1787-88), Azmi Efendi's *Berlin Sefaretnamesi* (1790) are among the most essential examples of sefaretnames literature in the 18th century. Ambassadors traveling to European cities on duty do not visit places of their own choosing, like tourists, but instead go to places that the authorities of the country they are visiting wish to show them and participate in events. During these events, the ambassadors and their entourages, viewed through an Orientalist gaze, were centers of attraction, unlike the Ottomans, who could travel more freely in the 19th century.

Ottomans were a dynamically expanding state, which gave them the power to adapt the products of other societies they came into contact with and to shape what they adopted (Göçek, 1987, p. 80). According to Emrence, "the key to durable rule was the adaptation of the imperial state to local conditions"(Emrence, 2008, p. 289) During the Tulip Era in the 18th century, European forms became more visible, and adopting these forms became a status symbol. Similarly, in 18th- and 19th-century Europe, the Turquerie movement emerged as a trend that influenced art, fashion, architecture, and, in short, lifestyle among those who adopted Turkish forms (Avcıoğlu, 2011). Interaction between the West and the Ottoman Empire increased mutually in the 18th century compared to previous periods. As a result of this increased interaction, European forms, goods and understanding entered every sphere in the Ottoman Empire. Tekeli claims that city centers, in particular, have seen the emergence of establishments resulting from consumption patterns and lifestyles brought about by the shift towards Western culture and new economic relationships. Examples include luxury shops, theatres, entertainment venues and cafés (Tekeli, 1985, p. 881).

Looking back at the 19th century, described as the longest century of the Ottoman Empire, (Ortaylı, 1983) one witnesses rapid transformations both in the world and within the Empire. Located on the very edge of Europe, or even within it, the Ottoman Empire had little chance of remaining isolated from the rapidly changing world. The Ottomans began to view Europe not merely as a *battlefield*, but also as a geography that deserved recognition and should be emulated. The Ottoman Empire faced external pressure from various actors, as well as diverse resistance movements. The Ottomans were prompted to adopt rapid change due to several factors, including foreign intervention, control of trade, the need to counter Russian expansion, and the Balkan uprisings. The Ottoman Empire undertook various reform movements to maintain its former power and survive in the changing world order. The reform movements initiated during the reigns of Selim III and Mahmud II, particularly in the military and technical fields, but not limited to these areas, reached their peak with the Tanzimat.

In the 19th century, there was a significant increase in the number of Ottomans travelling to Europe, a period when contact with the West was most intense. While there were various reasons for this, one of the most important was to find a solution to the country's *backwardness* and *desperation* in the face of the West. Another reason was to oppose those in power. Ottoman bureaucrats, intellectuals, as well as the Sultan Abdülaziz, travelled to Europe in this context and made impressions about it. While these

trips were sometimes for official assignments or educational purposes, they were sometimes stories of compulsory exile and escape. On the other hand, a significant portion of the bureaucrats and thinkers of the Tanzimat period were either educated in Europe or trained in Western-style schools. For this reason, they had not only a geographical but also an intellectual and cultural relationship with Europe. In this relationship with Europe, Europe emerged, on the one hand, as a place of escape and, on the other, as an ideal to be admired. The place where this ideal was most clearly defined and depicted was in cities.

In the 19th century, the Ottoman view of Europe, especially among those who physically witnessed it, diverged from that of Ottoman envoys who had seen Europe in the 18th century. This divergence manifested as admiration for the progress of European cities and, conversely, overt or subtle criticism of Ottoman cities. On the other hand, European cities, often idealized as objects of comparison, become targets and reference points to be surpassed in the modernization process of Ottoman cities. Ottoman intellectuals turned their attention to analyzing the developmental dynamics of European cities, while simultaneously constructing a critical discourse on the Ottoman social and institutional structure. This critical accumulation laid the groundwork for the formation of hybrid ideologies, producing an intellectual orientation and strategic framework aimed at achieving similar modernization outcomes. The admiration for European cities primarily focuses on the ideal of general prosperity and order observed in these cities; poverty, class tensions, and crime phenomena brought about by urbanization are either ignored or not placed at the center of critical discourse.

The colonial activities and Orientalist thought carried out by the Western world after the advent of modernity paved the way for the emergence of progressive ideas, which were shaped around the axis of anti-Westernism and pro-Westernism in non-Western societies. The thinkers examined in this study were influenced by Europe's development process but adopted an anti-imperialist stance. Within the context of this article, the names to be discussed reveal a twofold distinction in Western perceptions. The first is a West that is perceived as threatening the Ottoman Empire, Islam, and the East in general; consequently, developing a defense against it is seen as imperative. The second is a West that serves as an example in certain aspects of modernization, from which lessons must be learned to overcome this threat. In this context, the West carries the quality of an *other* that is both positioned as an enemy and referenced in addressing its own shortcomings. In their search for an answer to the question, "How can we develop as much as the West?", European cities were idealized as concrete examples of the modernization ideal.

Mehmed Akif, influenced by the political conditions of his time, developed a discourse centered more on liberation; Namık Kemal and Ahmed Midhat Efendi, on the other hand, adopted a progressive and transformative stance. The political fragility of the Ottoman Empire and its urgent need for modernization led these thinkers, like many Ottoman intellectuals, to adopt a pragmatic approach. This pragmatism deepened the dichotomies established between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, while also facilitating the emergence of new ideals and categories of opposition. In this regard, the West, Europe, and certain European cities in particular, have taken center stage in the intellectual sphere as concrete examples and objects of comparison for modernization goals. Europe and European cities served as a benchmark and frame of reference for Ottoman intellectuals in determining their position and orientation toward modernization. The paradox created by Ottoman intellectuals during the modernization process, who coded the West as both an imperialist threat and a civilizational horizon to be attained, and the spatial representations of this dilemma, form the core problem of this study. In this context, the study adopts a comparative text analysis method centered on the narratives of Namık Kemal in London, Ahmet Midhat Efendi in Paris, and Mehmed Akif Ersoy in Berlin; it conducts its examination through the authors' articles, travelogues, novels, and other works. The research is significant in that it reveals how, during the modernization crisis that spanned the 19th and 20th centuries, European cities ceased to be abstract geographical spaces and instead functioned as mirrors and laboratories for diagnosing the institutional, social, and moral deficiencies of the Ottoman Empire. The main thesis of the study is that the intellectuals in question constructed their observations of European cities to legitimize a selective modernization strategy aimed at internalizing the material progress and urban order of the West while preserving their spiritual and cultural codes, and to instrumentalize them in line with their own political projects. This thesis is illustrated by Namık Kemal's admiration for the political order and justice system in London, Ahmet Midhat's ambivalence between technological progress and moral decay in Paris, and Mehmed Akif's spiritual resistance line, developed by interpreting the discipline in Berlin as a synthesis of mind and heart. In this respect, these urban spaces functioned as dynamic sites that both **molded and mirrored** the specific modernization paradigms envisioned by each intellectual.

Namık Kemal's London: Order and Progress

After the proclamation of the Republic, Namık Kemal was presented as the pioneer of patriotism in Turkey. In addition to his identities as a poet, writer, journalist, statesman, and intellectual, he was a figure who embodied many firsts in the intellectual sphere of Ottoman-Turkish modernization. One of the leading representatives of the Young Ottomans movement, Namık Kemal, was born in Tekirdağ in 1840. In the 1860s and 1870s, he developed a critical stance towards the administrative approach of Ali Pasha and Fuat Pasha, the defining figures of the Tanzimat. Coming from a family closely connected to the state bureaucracy, Namık Kemal had the opportunity to see different regions of the Ottoman Empire during his childhood, thus gaining a broad range of observations about the empire. His tenure at the Translation Office, a crucial institution in the dissemination of Western thought to the Ottoman Empire, (Kamay, 2012, p. 2) was one of the key experiences that shaped his intellectual orientation. Namık Kemal, who began writing for *Tasvir-i Efkâr* in 1862, went to Paris with Ziya Bey in 1867 due to increasing political pressure resulting from a letter written by Mustafa Fazıl Pasha to Sultan Abdülaziz. During Sultan Abdülaziz's visit to Paris, he was forced to move to London, where, with the support of Mustafa Fazıl Pasha, he and Ziya Bey began publishing the *Hürriyet* newspaper (Akün, 1972, p. 241) However, Mustafa Fazıl Pasha's reconciliation with the Sultan and withdrawal of his support strengthened Namık Kemal's decision to return home; he returned to Ottoman territory with Ali Pasha's permission. Considering the possibility of his pardon and return to Istanbul, he yielded to the pressure from the Ottoman government, of which Ali Pasha was the grand vizier, to leave *Hürriyet* (Tansel, 2013, p. 172). Namık Kemal, who also contributed to the drafting of the Constitution, moved away from journalism and opposition during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II and turned to literary work. Namık Kemal, who died at a relatively young age in 1888, overcame the tension between Islamic and Western concepts, creating a synthesis. In this respect, he influenced subsequent generations and made significant contributions to the formation of the conceptual framework of modern political thought in Turkey (Mardin, 2000, pp. 286–287).

As Mardin states, the Young Ottomans incorporated Enlightenment thought into the intellectual heritage of Turkish thought. Still, in doing so, they sought to establish a synthesis between Islam and this intellectual legacy (Mardin, 2000, p. 4) Although Namık Kemal's views on the West have multiple sources, it is possible to examine these sources in two periods. The first period encompasses the knowledge he acquired before traveling to Europe, through the Translation Office and various Western texts. The second period, which also includes his brief experience in Paris, is primarily informed by his observations and experiences in London. The literature examining Namık Kemal's relationship with the West, England, and London presents London as indispensable (Uçan, 2012, p. 77) yet exaggerated for him, (Uçan, 2012, p. 70) embodying a content that adorns his dreams (Kuntay, 2010a, p. 538) and is associated with his civilizationalism (Tanpınar, 2007, p. 389). This also incorporates a style that seeks to instill excitement in the reader. Namık Kemal describes himself as an Anglophile in a letter he wrote during his time in London (Kuntay, 2010b, p. 757).

London had several meanings for Namık Kemal. First, it was a kind of voluntary exile; it offered him an opportunity to distance himself by his own choice, as opposed to the actual exile imposed by the Ottoman government, which sent its opponents to remote posts. Second, London was the place where Namık Kemal engaged in intense intellectual activity. Here, he continued his opposition by publishing the *Hürriyet* newspaper with Ziya Pasha, while also taking private lessons in political philosophy, economics, and law from an intellectual named Fanton; these lessons eventually laid the groundwork for a friendly relationship between the two. The third and perhaps most defining significance of London for Namık Kemal was his admiration for the social order, public life, and institutional functioning he observed in the city; this was counterbalanced by the disappointment and, at the same time, the hope he felt when looking at the situation in his own country. Therefore, the years he spent in London were highly influential in shaping Namık Kemal's intellectual formation. Beyond Europe's visible prosperity and technological advances, the self-satisfaction that marked mid-Victorian culture made it even harder for the Young Ottomans to dismiss European—and especially English—superiority in progress and civilization (Çiçek, 2010, pp. 174–175). Namık Kemal's admiration for England, particularly exemplified in London, is fundamentally directed at the social order and the mindset that makes this order possible. He observes how public life practices, internalized by broad social segments, produce a social structure organized on the basis of rationality and functionality; he feels a deep admiration for the ideas of progress, order, and social harmony that flawlessly derive from this structure. According to Namık Kemal, this order is the reason why London is considered the most peaceful place in the world, as he expresses it as follows: "London is a country where those who have not seen it do not know the meaning of peace" (Tansel, 2013, p. 94).

One of the essential articles he published in the newspaper *İbret*, which he began publishing after returning to his country, is the aforementioned *Terakki* article. The *Terakki* article focuses on London,

examining the perfection of the order created in the superstructure (political and social) through the progress achieved by the structural (economic and technological) transformations of England. Namık Kemal approaches civilization and progress from a quantitative perspective, while also acknowledging humanity's capacity to dominate itself and nature. In this article, he describes London and addresses the Ottomans, expressing his admiration for the progress of London and England. However, he ultimately concludes by urging them to "wake up from their slumber of negligence" (Ülken, 1994, p. 104). The article in question, although brief, bases its discussion of England's order in London specifically on the prevailing mentality, the progress it has generated, and the institutions, city, and structures within the city that this progress has created. While envisioning London as an example of progress in the world, he emphasizes that there is no city or place more advanced than it and that it is perfect in every sense (Kul, 2014, p. 206). His admiration for England, particularly London, is not only about material progress but also the established order and the traditions upon which it is based. According to Menemencioğlu, even though Kemal had a strong aversion to the aristocracy, he recognized the importance of the freedom afforded by long-standing institutions (Menemencioğlu, 1967, p. 41).

In this vision of civilization, founded on a parliamentary system and an unwavering commitment to justice, the parliament, reflecting the will of the people, enacts laws necessary for progress through mature deliberations. Kemal first focuses on politics, drawing a metaphor based on the parliament building. According to him, a man in London, if he wishes to see the course of the principles of justice, will first of all encounter that great parliament which is the center of legislation and the birthplace of many of the political rules we see in the world. Just by looking at its grand building, one might suppose that public opinion has taken physical form against administrative oversight, and it seems as if that intimidating body has turned to stone, showing that any impact cannot easily destroy it (Kul, 2014, p. 207). At the same time, the courts apply these laws through a system that respects human rights, is impartial, and is supported by juries. In this environment, where justice and public order are so firmly established, security forces are busy monitoring daily order and traffic rather than fighting crime. Social development is not limited to law but is also reflected in education. A high-level intellectual climate has been created, supported by libraries housing millions of books and observatories studying the sky, where children grow up with the maturity of adults and young people acquire multilingual and in-depth scientific competence. City life, meanwhile, displays immense splendor and vitality through a free press that disseminates ideas worldwide, massive buildings reminiscent of Istanbul's palaces, magnificent bridges, and a transportation network that operates without interruption.

He then focuses on education, comparing it to education in the Ottoman Empire and arguing that education in England is far more advanced (Kul, 2014, p. 208). While discussing the large number of grand buildings and their high value, (Kul, 2014, p. 210) the sophistication of transportation routes and methods, and the abundance of vehicles, (Kul, 2014, p. 211) he emphasizes that progress is not merely a technological advancement but holds significance that completely transforms social and daily life. As he continues to give examples, he shares quantitative data and does not hesitate to exaggerate at this point. He mentions fifty thousand workers in a printing house, fifteen thousand horses pulling carts in a brewery, hotels that can accommodate three thousand people, and halls where four thousand people can eat (Kul, 2014, p. 212). Namık Kemal approaches civilization and progress from a quantitative perspective, while also not ignoring humanity's ability to master the human body and nature. For example, he claims that pears the size of watermelons can be grown (Kul, 2014, p. 213).

At the end of the article, it reiterates its initial purpose. It states that:

"Yes, we also know that it is not possible to transform Istanbul into London or Rumelia into France within a few years. However, since Europe has reached this state in just two centuries, and since they have been the inventors of the means of progress, we will find those means ready; if the matter is handled comprehensively, is there any doubt that we too can become counted among the most civilized countries—at least within two centuries—and wouldn't two centuries be but a blink of an eye relative to the life of a society?"(Kul, 2014, p. 215).

In another article in the same journal, which again describes and discusses the progress of London and its civilization. In this habitat where the mind is the creator and nature is the servant, London has become a center where wealth and happiness flow, which is what Namık Kemal also desired for his country and its capital, İstanbul (Namık Kemal, 2005, p. 566).

The rapid urbanization that followed the Industrial Revolution, along with the large structures built in cities, and the admiration for the harmonious continuation of urban order, directed attention both to London and to the functioning of industrial society. However, there is a narrative in which Namık Kemal either did not observe certain things, did not describe them in his writings even if he had seen them, or

emphasized them only as simple geographical features. For example, when he mentions London's poor air quality, he is not referring to the pollution emitted from factory chimneys, but rather to the constant rain and the absence of sunshine. He mentions this in a letter (Tansel, 2013, p. 106) he wrote and in his famous *Terakki* article, noting that even in August, it is cool, and the sun is rarely seen (Tansel, 2013, p. 113).

There is a reductionist approach that overlooks the social and economic problems that have emerged at the current stage of progress, particularly class antagonisms, and a depiction of London based on this approach. Referencing the level of civilization rather than the mechanisms of exploitation in production relations, the author considers the narrative that leaves behind the prominent class conflicts of the period and issues such as the city's severe air pollution to be sufficient. However, Namık Kemal's depiction makes no mention of the poverty, misery, environmental hazards, crime rates, and class tensions faced by the working class in London's suburbs during the same period.[2] Having lived in London for over three years and established various relationships with the local population, it is inconceivable that he was unaware of all these problems. Therefore, his depiction of London is more a romanticized idealization than a realistic observation and ultimately serves as an indirect criticism of the Ottoman Empire and its social structure.

Ahmet Midhat's Paris: Ambivalence and Civilization

Ahmet Midhat Efendi's exceptional productivity, described during his time as a *writing machine*, is closely linked to his socio-economic background. Being born into a Circassian immigrant family with modest means led him to internalize work not only as a survival strategy but also as a social ethos. This necessity gradually evolved into a desire for upward social mobility; this desire became the driving force that spurred the writer's insatiable curiosity and thirst for knowledge. Carter Findley conceptualizes the writer's multifaceted intellectual appetite and encyclopedic output with the term "jack of all trades" (Findley, 1998, p. 20). While the author's encyclopedic curiosity is open to all kinds of intellectual production of the period, the epistemological sources that nourish it are predominantly Western in origin. Ahmet Midhat learned French at a young age; this linguistic proficiency laid the foundation for his profound and enduring curiosity about the Western world. Ahmet Midhat's knowledge of the West was shaped by his trip to the Orientalists Congress, which he attended as Sultan Abdülhamid's delegate, and by his previous readings from various sources. Ahmet Midhat, who sought to increase the number of stops during his congressional trip, visited a wide geographical area, including Germany, France, Italy, and Austria in continental Europe, as well as various Scandinavian countries in the north, in two and a half months. The book he wrote about his trip to the Orientalists Congress, *Avrupa'da Bir Cevelan*, (Ahmet Midhat, 2015) is more than just a travelogue recounting the author's subjective experiences; it is a source containing sociological, political, cultural, economic, and historical analyses of the West. Although he was assigned to introduce the East and the Ottoman Empire at the Congress, he used this opportunity to gain a detailed understanding of the West. One of the places he stayed the longest during this trip was Paris, which is also the city he used most frequently as a setting in his own novels. In Midhat's view, the Paris and World's Fair is a place of comparison where the hierarchy between civilizations is interpreted through social Darwinist codes (Findley, 1998, p. 38). He associates man's domination over nature with scientific competence, (Ahmet Midhat, 2013, p. 13) observes that the sense of competition that may arise in the face of Western superiority contains a dialectic of *envy* and *jealousy* (Ahmet Midhat, 2000c, p. 126). Ahmet Midhat Efendi acknowledges the intrinsic link between European travel literature and the continent's political and economic hegemony; yet, he maintains that this entanglement with power does not compromise the universal validity of the knowledge produced through such endeavors (Herzog & Motika, 2000, p. 149). He criticizes the Ottomans on this matter (Sagaster, 2000, p. 14).

Scholarly discussions on the nature of East-West encounters often necessitate a critical re-evaluation of Edward Said's theoretical framework regarding discursive power. Carter Findley criticizes Said for his reading of Foucault. According to him, Said has attributed an absolute nature to discourse by ignoring the possibility of resistance that coexists with power in Foucault's discourse theory. While discourse may potentially be a strategy of power in the Foucauldian sense, it can also be the driving force behind resistance and counter-strategies. Findley argues that Ahmet Midhat was "an Ottoman thinker who could creatively engage with Europe and yet resist its cultural power that was not omnipotent" (Findley, 1998, p. 49). Ahmet Midhat's conception of the West can be read through Okay's conceptualization as a state of *being opposed to* (Okay, 1975). The term *opposite* here has an

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[2] There is significant literature on this subject. For instance: (Wise, 2009), (Whelan, 2009), (Winter, 2005) and (Daunton, 1991).

ambivalent structure that simultaneously implies an ontological defense reflex and an inevitable confrontation (Parla, 2006, p. 18). In this context, Ahmet Midhat's approach parallels Ahıska's definition of Occidentalism. For Ahıska, Occidentalism is not merely an internalized Orientalism or a reactive defense mechanism, but rather an attempt to create a discursive *common sky* in which *Eastern subjects* construct their own identities and differences (Ahıska, 2003, p. 365). Ahmet Midhat constructs the idea of the West as a discursive narrative, both in his novels and works centered on the West. This construction process is accompanied by his inexhaustible intellectual curiosity and a constant state of *wonder*. He conceptualizes the relationship established with Europe as one of necessary coexistence, in which the parties are foreign to each other but share an inevitable destiny. For him, who points to the existence of misjudgments stemming from mutual epistemological blindness, the real problem is the Ottoman subject's ability to comprehend the West in its factual reality (Okay, 1975, pp. 27–28). In his works, Ahmet Midhat Efendi adapted Western literary strategies to cultivate Ottoman subjectivity, using the novel not only to model citizenship but also to foster reader agency through the text itself (Ringer, 2020, p. 175). In his readings about foreign places, Ahmet Mithat consistently uses his own socio-cultural universe and local context as a reference point. When interpreting the outside world, he always builds his starting point on his own social habitus. When examining foreign places, Ahmet Mithat always determines his reference point based on his own sociocultural reality and value system (Esen & Köroğlu, 2006, p. 11).

Like Namık Kemal's positioning of London as the center of the modern world, Ahmet Midhat also considers Paris to be the center of progress and civilization (Ahmet Midhat, 2015, p. 19; 2003, p.13). But unlike Namık Kemal, Ahmet Midhat's style stands out for its observational realism and richness of detail. Midhat presents an encyclopedic wealth of information about Europe. This attention to this frequently repeated detail can be explained not so much by simple admiration, but rather by the travel writer's mission to bear witness and document the world. In contrast to Namık Kemal's concise, striking, and emotionally appealing rhetorical style, Ahmet Midhat adopts a comparative narrative strategy. This difference is reflected in the two writers' perceptions of architecture: Namık Kemal openly expresses his admiration for London's architecture, while Ahmet Midhat appreciates the aesthetics of Parisian buildings but also defends Ottoman architecture. According to Midhat, Ottoman architecture is not inferior to Western examples; therefore, any possible feeling of envy is unfounded and baseless (Ahmet Midhat, 2015, p. 660).

 In Ahmet Midhat Efendi's narrative realm, Paris is constructed as an ambivalent structure, one that transcends being merely a geographical location, as it serves as the ontological center of Western civilization and modernism. The comfort standards offered by urban life, the capacity of libraries, (Ahmet Midhat, 2000b, p. 138) advances in printing technology, and the efficiency of transportation networks are material elements of progress that profoundly influenced the author. In addition, examples of mechanization exhibited at the Fair (Exposition Universelle), (Ahmet Midhat, 2015, p. 659) as well as modern urban planning practices, such as clean streets free of mud, (Ahmet Midhat, 2015, p. 539) are other technological manifestations that reinforced the author's admiration. He presents Paris as both the pinnacle of scientific, technological, and architectural progress and the source of social and moral degeneration. In this context, Paris is depicted as a showcase of civilization dominated by material progress and rules of etiquette, yet with a chaotic world lurking in the background, ruled by ruthless social stratification, poverty, and debauchery. This city, presented from a comparative perspective with Istanbul, is both an aesthetic and intellectual ideal sought after by the Ottoman intellectuals struggling with the pains of modernization and a place of excessive freedom considered *dangerous*. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, while structuring his observations of Paris around livability standards and economic conditions, argues that Istanbul is in a more advantageous position in many respects. In his comparison, particularly regarding housing costs, the author asserts that living conditions in Istanbul are more economically rational and reasonable than those in Paris, which are characterized by high rental costs (Ahmet Midhat, 2015, p. 661).

In his works such as *Altın Aşıkları* and *Mesail-i Muğlaka*, Ahmet Midhat problematizes Paris as a center that embodies the allure of the West but is also a volatile and superficial place grappling with deep moral contradictions. The author's approach positions Paris as an admired example of material success while subjecting it to harsh criticism from a spiritual perspective. The author's critique of Paris is fundamentally rooted in a communitarian and puritanical work ethic derived from his own class origins and worldview. From this perspective, Europe is coded as the center of an economy of waste, ostentation, and detachment from national values rather than productivity. This moral dichotomy is also embodied in the author's character construction: Mustafa Kamerüddin in *Demir Bey* or the novel *İnkışaf-ı Esrar* represents an idealized typology endowed with the virtues of chastity and thrift, rejecting momentary pleasures; while the character Senai in the novel *Bahtiyarlık* becomes a symbol of moral

decline, falling victim to *the curse of gambling and sensual desires* in Paris, where he went for education (Ahmet Midhat, 2000a, p. 36). Consequently, for Ahmet Midhat Efendi, Paris is both a reference point for Westernization and modernization practices and a laboratory for cultural degeneration, his greatest fear.

In Ahmet Midhat's works, Paris is portrayed not only as a place of charm but also as an unsettling *testing ground* where the Ottoman subject must exercise caution. This dualistic narrative of Paris, constructed by the author, permeates both his personal travel notes and the experiences of his fictional characters. The dominant normative discourse in the texts idealizes a pragmatic stance that does not succumb to the city's morass of debauchery and corruption, but rather is free from hedonistic impulses, goal-oriented, and maintains moral integrity. Ahmet Midhat Efendi idealizes Paris as the center of industry and science, while simultaneously portraying it as a place of social decay, as seen in his novel *Paris'te Bir Türk*. Within this dichotomous structure, the author justifies moral decay, which has acquired a classless quality, through the destruction of human nature wrought by the accumulation of wealth and liberation, the dissolution of the family institution, and the deviations brought about by idle time. Therefore, Paris is represented as a paradoxical space harboring deep contradictions within itself rather than as a monolithic symbol of civilization. While affirming the city's intellectual and artistic richness, the text critically problematizes the moral deformations and corrupted aspects brought about by modernity and social freedom, adopting a realistic approach.

Ahmet Midhat demonstrates his meticulous style in his works not only through textual density and quantity, but also by making the mental effort required to achieve this proficiency visible through in-text references. The author legitimizes his narrative by emphasizing that this effort is appreciated even by foreign audiences. For example, although he wrote the novel *Paris'te Bir Türk* without ever seeing the city, he presents the reader with the astonishment of a Parisian university instructor at this descriptive power through an anecdote recounted by Teodor Kasap (Ahmet Midhat, 2015, pp. 90–91). Ahmet Midhat, who displays similar methodological rigor in his preparations before traveling, attempts to prove his mastery of the subject through systematic research on city plans, maps, and guidebooks (Ahmet Midhat, 2015, p. 94). While the details he provides sometimes contain dense technical information, Midhat also occasionally attempts to analyze the society living in Paris with a sociologist's approach. Ahmet Midhat made two separate visits to Paris during his European journey, one on the way there and one on the way back; he stayed longer in the city on his return trip. The author made productive use of this relatively limited time frame thanks to his detailed planning, carried out with the meticulousness of a conscious tourist. His primary goal during this process was to gain maximum insight into the city's cultural, economic, and social fabric, as well as its daily life practices, and to convey these observations to his readers. His mental map of Paris takes shape at the intersection of his travel notes and fictional works. Ahmet Midhat finds the opportunity to reevaluate and test the images of Paris he has created in his novels during his actual travels. This experience leads to the revision of some of his preconceptions. In particular, the fact that the architectural structures appear to lack the grandeur he had envisioned causes the image he had idealized to collide with the wall of reality (Ahmet Midhat, 2015, p. 95).

Mehmed Akif's Berlin: Order and Sorrow

Mehmed Akif, one of the founding figures of the Turkish-Islamic intellectual world and a spiritual architect of the National Struggle, was a multifaceted thinker and man of action who laid the intellectual groundwork for modern conservative thought through his works, particularly *Safahat*. The poet instrumentalized his literary production for social benefit, prioritizing pragmatic idealism over aesthetic concerns. In this vein, he practiced his art, constructed with a simple language and didactic style, with an activist attitude aimed at mobilizing the masses. Mehmed Akif, who took a stance against the rule of Sultan Abdülhamid and supported the re-establishment of the constitutional monarchy, played a decisive role in the intellectual life of the period, centered around the journal *Sırat-ı Müstakim* (later renamed *Sebilürreşad*). On the political front, Akif became a 'critical' member of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), on the condition that the oath text in the party's constitution be changed (Erişirgil, 2006, pp. 91–92). Akif withdrew his support as a result of the society's autocratic tendencies, and this membership did not constitute active party politics, as Düzdağ points out (Düzdağ, 1988, p. 17). Although Erişirgil views Akif's Unionism as limited to his lectures at the Science Club, (Erişirgil, 2006, p. 93) the author's role on behalf of the state in strategic missions such as Berlin and Arabia shows that he had a deeper relationship with political/bureaucratic mechanisms than is commonly believed.

Despite defining Western civilization as a morally and spiritually corrupt structure—in his own words, a *monster with only one tooth left*—Mehmed Akif adopted a selective modernization approach, seeing the recipe for national salvation in the transfer of Western science and technology. Akif embraces the examples of Japan and Germany, which achieved development by maintaining a critical distance from

the West, as ideal models in this context. Although the poet's perception of the West was shaped by his intellectual readings, his concrete observations of Berlin were based on the strategic assignment he undertook within the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa, which is an intelligence, paramilitary, and secret police organization, during World War I (Somel, 1987, p. 212). During this approximately four-month journey, Akif carried out propaganda activities targeting Muslim prisoners in the Allied forces and took charge of the Turkish edition of the *El Cihad* newspaper (Kon, 2012, p. 87). These trips to Berlin and Arabia, the most concrete manifestation of his relationship with the CUP government, served as a rehearsal for the poet's awareness-raising activities during the National Struggle period. Although Akif submitted an official report to Sheikh al-Islam Hayri Efendi upon his return from Berlin, due to the loss of this document, traces of the author's sociological observations and impressions of that period can only be found in the *Berlin Memories* (Berlin Hatıraları) section of *Safahat* (Köroğlu, 2007, p. 140).

Although he did not leave behind an autobiographical account of his trip to Berlin, other sources from the period confirm Mehmed Akif's moral stance and action-oriented identity during this assignment. In particular, his refusal to stay in a luxury hotel, whose expenses would be covered by the German authorities, and his choice of a more modest accommodation, (Kon, 2012, p. 89) demonstrate his principled attitude. During his approximately four-month assignment in Germany, he delivered sermons in mosques built for prisoners of war, wrote propaganda texts, and visited the front lines himself to address the soldiers (Köroğlu, 2007, p. 141). The texts Akif produced during this period have a mobilizing language aimed at prompting his audience to take immediate action. The poet seeks to create a shocking awareness by confronting the public with their inertia and utilizing the concept of *shame*, while simultaneously pursuing a dual rhetorical strategy that motivates the masses with a powerful message of hope.

For Akif, Berlin and Germany in general are positioned as a center where science, technology, and progress are embodied, and this level of development is viewed with admiration. Despite directing harsh anti-imperialist criticism toward Western civilization, Akif places Germany in an *exceptional* position, outside of this critical discourse. This selective attitude coincides with the political circumstances of the period, particularly the Germans' support for Pan-Islamism and the Germany-centered alliance strategies of the Committee of Union and Progress. In this context, Berlin presents an idealized picture of development, characterized by its prosperous structure, advanced transportation networks, urban hygiene, comfortable accommodation options, and a civilized human profile. He, like Namık Kemal and Ahmet Midhat, was fascinated by the order.

Berlin Memories, is built on the sharp dichotomy between the manifestations of modernity in Berlin and the social and spatial backwardness in the Ottoman geography. Using an ironic and sarcastic style, the poet directs harsh criticism at the disorder and misery in the Ottoman Empire through Berlin's urban planning, transportation networks, and accommodation facilities. Mehmed Akif begins his account of Berlin Memories with a spatial and cultural comparison between the atmosphere of a Berlin café and Istanbul. In this comparison, the stagnation and chaos symbolized by the image of the "neighborhood coffeehouse" in the Ottoman Empire contrast with Berlin's rational and systematic order. In the poem, places are treated not only as physical structures but also as a vision of civilization. Unlike the dilapidated inns of the Ottoman Empire, Berlin hotels are described as structures that are as well-maintained as palaces, providing peace of mind where every detail has been considered, from heating systems to the abundance of water, hygiene, and comfort (Ersoy, 2008, p. 286) A similar perfectionism is evident in public spaces; regardless of seasonal conditions, the streets are constantly clean and free of mud thanks to the will and discipline of "we will not allow it" (Ersoy, 2008, p. 288). Technology and the perception of time are also essential parts of this civilizational comparison. In the Ottoman Empire, the transportation system, which operated *as fate permitted* and was dominated by uncertainty, has been replaced in Berlin by a modern railway network that seems to fly through time and space, is punctual, and fully meets needs (Ersoy, 2008, p. 287). The poet's descriptions of Berlin's cafes are the pinnacle of his admiration; these places are even more imposing and magnificent than the *Düyûn-ı Umûmiyye* building, which symbolizes the Ottoman Empire's financial collapse (Ersoy, 2008, p. 289). The fact that the cafes are as bright as day is interpreted as a metaphorical reference to both the physical spaciousness of the place and the enlightenment of Western thought (Ersoy, 2008, p. 290). Ultimately, Akif presents Berlin as an impossible-to-fathom space and a utopia where technology thoroughly permeates life, emphasizing the distance between Ottoman reality and this ideal.

The text transcends a mere description of the city, serving as a comparative critique of civilization that examines the structural dynamics of German and Ottoman societies. Throughout most of the text, the poet explains Germany's scientific and demographic superiority during its fifty years of peace, which is rooted in the harmonious union of *brain* (mind/science) and *heart* (spirituality) (Ersoy, 2008, p. 297). In this German model idealized by Akif, the intellectual class rises without leaving the people behind; on

the contrary, science has become a social staple, and education, military life, and industry have gained an organic unity with the institution of the family (Ersoy, 2008, pp. 296–297). The Ottoman society, which presents a picture opposite to this integrated structure, is afflicted with division, ignorance, and disarray, rather than uniting around a common goal (Ersoy, 2008, pp. 297–298). Akif does not attribute this multifaceted backwardness in the Ottoman Empire solely to external forces; he also harshly criticizes the moral decay spreading and the social inertia that views historical heritage as an excuse for complacency.

The final part of *Berlin Memories* is almost entirely concerned with the Ottoman Empire. While observing the devastating effects of World War I from Berlin, Mehmed Akif compares the individual grief of a German family with the much more profound and collective tragedy experienced by the peoples of Asia and Africa, who were driven to the front lines by colonial powers. Viewing the Ottoman Empire from this perspective of global catastrophe, the picture is one of utter ruin: critical infrastructure such as railways fell under foreign capital control, the people became *captives* in their own homeland, and the institutional structure was in a state of physical and administrative destitution. The material collapse in the Ottoman Empire was accompanied by spiritual decay, caused by the dysfunction of science and literature that undermined social morality.

Conclusion

This study examines the perceptions of modernity and the image of the West constructed by late Ottoman intellectuals, including Namık Kemal, Ahmet Midhat Efendi, and Mehmed Akif Ersoy, through their visits to London, Paris, and Berlin, respectively. All three authors instrumentalized European cities not merely as geographical locations, but as mirrors reflecting the institutional, social, and spatial deficiencies of the Ottoman Empire, and as horizons of civilization to be attained. Namık Kemal focused on political order, parliament, and justice in London; Ahmet Midhat examined the ambivalence between technological progress and moral decay in Paris; and Mehmed Akif centered on discipline and national unity based on the unity of mind and heart in Berlin. The study reveals that while these intellectuals admired the material progress of the West, they developed a selective modernization strategy with a reflex to preserve their spiritual and cultural codes, using European cities as idealized rhetorical tools to legitimize their own political projects.

Namık Kemal, Ahmet Midhat Efendi, and Mehmed Akif Ersoy's accounts of European cities essentially share a common admiration for the material progress, urban order, and institutional functioning of Western civilization. For Namık Kemal, London is a symbol of order, described as the most peaceful place in the world, organized on the basis of rationality and functionality. Similarly, Mehmed Akif depicts Berlin as a vision of civilization where science and technology are embodied, and every detail, from transportation networks to urban hygiene, functions flawlessly. Ahmet Midhat, on the other hand, positions Paris as a center of progress with its libraries, printing technologies, and clean streets. All three authors used this material and institutional development in European cities as a mirror to compare with the backwardness, disorder, and inertia in the Ottoman Empire; they instrumentalized their observations to criticize their own societies and spur them into action.

Despite this shared admiration, there are clear methodological differences between the authors' approaches to cities and their styles. Namık Kemal adopts a rhetorical style that romanticizes London, ignoring negatives such as class conflicts or environmental pollution, and focuses on idealistic and political institutions (parliament, justice). In contrast, Ahmet Midhat, with his encyclopedic identity as someone who seeks to understand everything, approaches Paris with a more detailed, observational, and realistic approach. While describing the technological developments he admires, he does not shy away from making economic comparisons, such as rental costs, or defending Ottoman architecture. Mehmed Akif, on the other hand, uses an ironic and sarcastic language in his account of Berlin, aiming to create a shocking awareness in the reader by presenting a sharp dichotomy between Berlin's palace-like hotels and the Ottoman Empire's dilapidated inns, and between the Germans' punctual trains and the Ottoman Empire's uncertain transportation. The deepest point of divergence between the three names emerges in their interpretations of the moral and spiritual dimensions of European cities. Namık Kemal praises social harmony, viewing the order in London as the product of a mindset and understanding of justice that have been internalized by English society. Ahmet Midhat, on the other hand, displays an ambivalent attitude toward Paris, marked by contradiction; he portrays the city as both a center of progress and a swamp of debauchery, waste, and moral decay, warning the reader against this dangerous center of attraction. Mehmed Akif, while in Berlin during World War I, distinguishes German society from that of other Westerners, attributing their success to the unity of material and spiritual aspects.

The scope of the research is limited to the literary and intellectual texts containing the observations of the three intellectuals in question in the aforementioned cities, focusing on the representation in the intellectuals' mind rather than the degree to which these narratives correspond to historical reality. The fact that the texts were shaped by the authors' political positions and the circumstances of the period (e.g., World War I) is a fundamental factor limiting the objectivity of the narratives. Future studies comparing the European perceptions of these figures with the narratives of other Ottoman intellectuals belonging to different factions of the period, such as the Westernizers, will add depth to the literature. Furthermore, examining the impressions of European travelers who visited Istanbul during the same period, as well as the observations of Ottoman intellectuals on Europe from a reverse-gaze perspective, could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the East-West axis modernity debates and the construction of the *other* at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

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