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**A Genealogy of the Concept of Civilization (*Medeniyet*) in Ottoman Political Thought: A Homegrown Perception?**

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# A Genealogy of the Concept of Civilization (Medeniyet) in Ottoman Political Thought: A Homegrown Perception?

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## Abstract

*Since the first translation of the concept of civilization into Turkish as "medeniyet" in 1837 by Sadık Rıfat Pasha, the then Ottoman Ambassador to Vienna, this coinage has turned out to be an essential component of Turkish modernization. This paper aims to establish a genealogy of the concept of "medeniyet" to demonstrate the divergences of Ottoman perceptions in different periods throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It argues that civilization was first perceived by a group of Ottoman intellectuals as a tool to reach an ideal state of being (c. 1840-1860). The next generation of Ottoman intellectuals (c. 1860-1890) defined civilization as "the" ideal state of being, yet they had different views on the concept, particularly concerning the distinction between material and moral elements of civilization. Finally, the third generation of Ottoman intellectuals (c. 1890-1920), whose thoughts were more or less crystallized under three broad political currents labeled as Westernism, Islamism, and Turkism, had different and sometimes contradicting perceptions of civilization based on their political outlooks. By referring to the writings of these intellectuals, the paper will discuss central debates on civilization in the late Ottoman Empire, such as the singularity/plurality of civilization(s), the existence of Islamic civilization as an alternative to European civilization, the degree of importing from European civilization, and the distinction between culture and civilization. Moreover, it argues that the Turkish perception of "medeniyet" is different from the European perception of "civilization"; in other words, while the Ottoman perception of the concept of civilization is not homeborn, it is homegrown. Accordingly, Ottoman intellectuals not only divided the material and moral elements of civilization and opted for importing the former, but they also questioned the singularity and supremacy of European civilization by referring to "Islamic civilization" either as an extinct yet once-present form of civilization or as a potential rival to European civilization.*

## 1. Introduction

The word 'civilization,' which had emerged in Europe in the mid-18th century as an ideal to elevate humanity to a higher stage of being, reached Ottoman bureaucratic/intellectual circles in the 1830s. While translating and transmitting this concept, Ottoman bureaucrats/ intellectuals did not simply emulate the European definition. They questioned the assertive

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connotations of the concept of civilization that degraded non-European societies by establishing a civilizational classification, and they redefined the concept by distinguishing between the material and moral elements of civilization, blending the European conceptualizations with Ottoman/Islamic notions and perceptions.

An analysis of the emergence and evolution of the concept of civilization in Europe and the Ottoman Empire is therefore essential to understanding how this concept dominated Ottoman intellectual debates as a homegrown, if not homeborn, concept. The debate on civilization was neither new nor genuine to the Ottomans. Recognition of European military superiority by the 18th century had already forced Ottoman intellectuals to think about the reasons for Ottoman decadence, and they began to associate recent European achievements with peculiar developments in the continent. This growing interest was evident in the ambassadorial reports of Ottoman envoys as well as in 18th-century Ottoman political writing. In other words, the Ottomans were aware of the 'civility' in Europe – if not the 'civilization' of Europe – before they had coined the word *medeniyet*. Moreover, similar discussions about European civilization were also evident in semi-independent states in the non-European world, including Persia, Siam, China, and Japan.[1] Their encounters with European colonial powers and the unequal treaty systems distorting their legal structure forced the intellectuals of these countries to consider the reasons for European supremacy, leading them to conclude that civilization, as a catchword, was useful in understanding how the Europeans began to dominate the world and how they could survive in this volatile environment. While Deringil labeled this Ottoman effort of translating and incorporating the concept of civilization into the Turkish political lexicon as a "survival tactic," Blumi argued that the Ottoman ruling elite extended this concept to develop a quasi-Orientalist account of the Ottoman periphery, as well as to use this concept as an intellectual bulwark against European imperialist/expansionist discourses.[2] In other words, the Ottomans utilized the concept of civilization for defining themselves vis-à-vis their constructed "others," both European and non-European.

This article considers civilization as a homegrown concept in Ottoman intellectual circles during "the longest century of the Empire."[3] It argues that the Ottoman perception of *medeniyet* was closely interrelated with the European conception of civilization; however, Ottoman intellectuals had different perceptions of various aspects of European civilization, including its definition as a practice or an idea, its universality, and its totality. The first debate on the concept of civilization was on the very nature of the concept, specifically whether it was a practice to reach an ideal condition, or if it embodied the very ideal condition itself. The second debate scrutinized the universality of the concept of civilization. The proponents of this debate not only questioned the European-ness of this concept but also asked whether there had been, and therefore would be, alternatives to current civilization. Finally, the third debate was the genuine contribution of Ottoman intellectuals to the conceptualization of civilization. Although European intellectuals tended to construct the notion of civilization as an all-encompassing concept covering all aspects of life, most Ottoman intellectuals preferred

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[1]     Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, "The Sultan, the Shah and the King in Europe: The Practice of Ottoman, Persian and Siamese Royal Travel and Travel Writing," *Journal of Asian History* 50, no. 2 (2016): 201–34; Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, "Osmanlı ve Japon entelektüellerinin modernleşme ve medeniyet algılarının mukayesesi," in *Ortadoğu barışı için Türk-Japon işbirliği*, ed. Masanori Naito, İdris Danışmaz, Bahadır Pehlivantürk, Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık (Kyoto: Doshisha Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015), 10–23.

[2]     Ozan Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798-1864* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 183.

[3]     This expression belongs to İlber Ortaylı, İmparatorluğun en uzun yüzyılı (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2017).

to distinguish between the material and moral elements of civilization. They recognized the necessity to adopt the material elements of civilization while replacing the moral elements with the morality of their own religion (i.e., Islam) or culture (i.e., Turkish culture). This article aims to explore these three debates on civilization to demonstrate the evolution of this concept in Ottoman intellectual circles and to underline the Ottoman contribution to the conceptualization of civilization.

Any search for a genealogy of civilization in the Ottoman Empire would not be immune to some generalizations. Yet, it is evident that the perception of civilization not only evolved but also diverged based on the ideological perspective of the intellectual writing on this concept. While generalizing the conceptualization of civilization to some extent by focusing on the debates on civilization, this article also noted that each debate had been popular at a particular period, and each debate had produced different views based on the ideological inclinations of the Ottoman intellectuals, although these ideological inclinations were crystallized as late as the first two decades of the 20th century. In other words, each debate was more visible in a particular historical/social context. As Duncan Bell reiterated in his critical account of the functions of intellectual history, concepts like civilization must be situated within the linguistic contexts in which they were born. In other words, texts were not enough to understand the emergence and evolution of the concepts; the contexts that these texts were written in should be taken into consideration as well.[4] While each debate on civilization in this article has been presented as dominant in a particular period, in the end, it is concluded that an eclectic approach combining material elements of European civilization and moral elements of Islamic/Turkic culture turned out to be the dominant discourse on civilization in the late Ottoman Empire.

## 2. Evolution of the Concept of Civilization in Europe

Although the concept of civilization was first coined in the mid-18th century, the words 'to civilize' and 'civility' had been used from the 16th century onwards. Encounters with native peoples of the American and African continents resulted in a sense of European superiority based first on religion (i.e., Christianity vs. paganism) and then, with the Enlightenment, on reason.[5] Civility, which had already been used to define the individual courteous behavior of the aristocracy, was later expanded to label the behaviors of the bourgeoisie, who had adopted such refined manners from the aristocracy.[6] In other words, just before the Enlightenment, the words 'to civilize' and 'civility' had already acquired a social connotation both vertically (i.e., bourgeoisie adopting the courteous behavior of the aristocracy) and horizontally (i.e., the European/Christian sense of superiority over non-European/savage communities).

Although the idea of civilization can be traced back to the early modern period, the word 'civilization' first appeared in 1756 in Marquis de Mirabeau's *L'Ami des Hommes*. This book not only underlined the role of religion in the development of a more civilized society but also established the age-old dichotomy of civilization vs. barbarism.[7] Although Mirabeau perceived religion as the 'mainspring of civilization,' his followers developed a more secular

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[4]    Duncan Bell, "Political Theory and the Functions of Intellectual History: A Response to Emmanuel Navon," *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 1 (2003): 152–54.

[5]    Thomas Patterson, *Inventing Western Civilization* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), 30; Bruce Mazlish, *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 8.

[6]    Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (London: Blackwell, 2000), 10.

[7]    Emile Benveniste, *Problemes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 337–38.

understanding in which civilization replaced religion as the source of European superiority vis-à-vis the non-European world. As Pim den Boer writes, "European feelings of superiority were based on a conglomeration of ideas proceeding from the Enlightenment which, in turn, came to be associated with the notion of civilization."[8]

The concept of civilization created its 'others.' Although the idea of classifying people according to their level of civilization was not new, the emergence of the three categories of savagery, barbarism, and civilization, and the establishment of a progressive relationship among them, was crystallized in the 18th century. Again, this classification was both vertical (in time) and horizontal (in space). The verticality rested on the idea that each step made progress from a more primitive way of life to a more advanced one, and all of humanity experienced this transformation, albeit in different periods. Accordingly, barbarism – despite its negative connotation – corresponded to an advanced level compared to savagery, and civilization corresponded to the ideal destination of human progress.[9]

The horizontality of this classification, on the other hand, rested on the idea that humankind was also contemporarily divided into three types of being: savages, barbarians, and the civilized. At the bottom of this hierarchy, there was the savage, defined under two categories: the *ignoble* savage, violent to any kind of human being, whether civilized or uncivilized, and the *noble* savage, whose innate good nature was appreciated vis-à-vis the nature of the contemporary man 'corrupted' by civilization. The savage, in both forms, was perceived as a childish human being who could be educated to mimic European manners, either peacefully (for the noble savage) or through force (for the ignoble savage).[10] Between the savage and the civilized man, the category of barbarian resided. The barbarian referred to a more advanced level compared to the savage; however, unlike the savage, he was perceived as irredeemable and dangerous. Thus, the barbarian could not be educated and continued to present a threat to the civilized.[11]

Civilization had emerged as a universal concept attainable by any human being or society. Yet, in time, it began to be associated with a particular continent, namely Europe. The European colonial expansion towards the non-European world and the scientific/technological achievements of the Industrial Revolution narrowed this universal definition; the concept of civilization was then used to distinguish between 'the achievers' and 'the under-achievers.'[12] Particularly, in the early 19th century, the French historian François Guizot popularized the association of civilization with the particular achievements of Europeans, hence the concept of 'European civilization' emerged.[13] From the mid-19th century onwards, with the impact of Social Evolutionism and Social Darwinism, the concept of 'race' was incorporated into the idea of civilization. It was the French philosopher Arthur de Gobineau who engaged in a hierarchical classification of peoples based on their races. According to Gobineau, it was race that determined the degree of civilization of different communities. He argued that civilizations were created by pure races and degenerated by the mixing of blood.[14]

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[8]   Pim den Boer, "Europe to 1914: The Making of An Idea," in *The History of the Idea of Europe,* ed. Kevin Wilson and Jan van der Dussen (London: Routledge/The Open University, 1995), 38.

[9]   Patterson, *Inventing Western Civilization*, 32.

[10]   Mark Salter, *Barbarians and Civilization in International Relations* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 20–1.

[11]   Salter, *Barbarians and Civilization*, 22.

[12]   Julie Reeves, *Culture and International Relations: Narratives, Natives and Tourists* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 16.

[13]   Marcello Verga, "European Civilization and the 'Emulation of the Nations': Histories of Europe from the Enlightenment to Guizot," *History of European Ideas* 34, no. 4 (2008): 359.

[14]   Mazlish, *Civilization and Its Discontents,* 59.

Moreover, Gobineau classified races under three categories: "[…] the brutal, sensual, and cowardly black race; the weak, materialistic, and mediocre yellow race; and the intelligent, energetic, and courageous white race."[15] In sum, in line with the increasing European sense of superiority stemming from the intensification of European penetration into the non-European world, the universal conceptualization of civilization first transformed into a geographical one by defining a certain 'European civilization,' and then into a narrower one by associating civilization with a particular race (i.e., the white race).

The transformation of the idea of civilization produced two more debates. The first debate was on the singularity vs. plurality of civilization. This debate questioned whether civilization is a singular concept denoting an ideal condition/process or a plural one allowing for the establishment of various civilization*s*. While some argued that there was only one civilization, i.e., the current 'European civilization,' others claimed that there had been multiple civilizations that had coexisted in history, and this meant that other civilizations might coexist with the European civilization in the future.[16]

The second debate was on the distinction between culture and civilization. According to Elias, while the Anglo-French conception of civilization underlined the singularity of the European civilization as the progress of not only the West but also of humankind, the German conception preferred to utilize *Kultur* instead of *Zivilisation* to denote what the Anglo-French conception meant. *Zivilisation* was of secondary importance for the Germans, referring to "only the outer appearance of human beings, the surface of human existence."[17] Elias further argued that while the Anglo-French conception of civilization evaluated the political, economic, religious, technical, moral, and social facts holistically, the German conception of *Kultur* distinguished between the intellectual, artistic, and religious attributes on the one hand, and political, economic and social attributes on the other. Moreover, while the Anglo-French conception ignored national differences between peoples and emphasized the commonalities of all humankind, the German conception placed special emphasis on national differences and particular identities of social groups.[18] In other words, the universalizing tendency of the Anglo-French understanding of civilization contradicted the more particular German conception of *Kultur*.

In sum, during the 19th century, there were three major debates concerning the concept of civilization. The first debate concerned whether civilization was a practical process attained by peoples/societies or an ideal condition that was the ultimate aim of human existence. The second debate had two dimensions; the first dimension was about the universality of civilization. It questioned whether civilization was an attribute to all humankind or a product of a certain region (i.e., Europe) or a certain race (i.e., the white race). The second dimension, on the other hand, was about the singularity or plurality of civilization. It discussed whether (European) civilization was something unique with no alternative or whether there had been – and therefore would later be – other civilization*s*. Finally, the third debate focused on the totality of civilization; it scrutinized whether the material (technical/scientific) and moral (political/social) elements of civilization were distinguishable or not. All these debates had somehow been referred to by Ottoman intellectuals in their conceptualization of civilization

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[15]   Paul A. Fortier, "Gobineau and German Racism," *Comparative Literature* 19, no. 4 (1967): 342.
[16]   Roger Wescott, "The Enumeration of Civilizations," *History and Theory* 9, no. 1 (1970): 59.
[17]   Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 6.
[18]   Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 6–7.

in different historical/social contexts. Yet, it was the third debate that had attracted their attention the most. That debate resulted in the intellectuals questioning what and how to import from European civilization, producing two alternative discourses: one for the total adoption of European civilization and a second for its partial adoption by separating and admitting the material elements while rejecting the moral ones.

## 3. The First Debate: Civilization as a Practice vs. Civilization as an Ideal Condition

The late 18th to the early 19th century was a period of reform in the Ottoman Empire meant to cure an almost century-long time of military decadence associated with internal political and economic disturbances. European military superiority vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire resulted in a period of questioning the reasons for this decay. Ottoman intellectuals generally considered that deviation from 'the ancient codes' (*kanûn-i kadîm*) of the Empire, which had once made the Empire experience its golden age, was the principal reason for this decay. Yet, from the late 18th century onwards, they began to think that the changing circumstances required not a return to the ancient codes, but the establishment of 'a new order' (*nizâm-ı cedîd*) inspired by recent European achievements. As Cemil Aydın mentions, "[…] it was only during the 1830s that Ottoman Muslim elites began to conceptualize a holistic image of Europe as a model for reform and as the potential future of the Ottoman polity."[19] Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the word 'civilization' was first mentioned by three young Ottoman diplomats, Mustafa Reşid Paşa, Mehmet Sadık Rıfat Paşa, and Mustafa Sami Efendi, who were born at the turn of the 19th century and became prominent Ottoman bureaucrats/diplomats towards the 1830s.

The Turkish pronunciation of the word 'civilization' was first mentioned by Mustafa Reşid Paşa, the then Ottoman ambassador to Paris, in 1834. In one of his dispatches written during his diplomatic efforts to avert French support towards the rebellious governor of the Empire in Egypt, Kavalalı Mehmed Ali Paşa, and to protest the French occupation of Algeria in 1830, Mustafa Reşid Paşa indicated that the then Ottoman Sultan, Mahmud II, paid significant attention to the "practice of civilization, in other words, the issues of decency of people and enforcement of laws" (*sivilizasyon usûlüne, yani terbiye-i nâs ve icrâ-yi nizamât husûslarına*).[20] As Özavcı aptly argued, Mustafa Reşid was probably aware of the Europeanization of the concept of civilization by Guizot in his lectures delivered at the Sorbonne and also utilized this concept to define Egypt as an Ottoman periphery embodied in the personality of its untrustworthy and unsteady governor.[21] Hence, a quasi-Orientalist account of the Ottoman periphery emerged almost simultaneously with the introduction of the concept of civilization in the Ottoman political lexicon.[22]

Following this first usage, the word was translated into Turkish by another Ottoman diplomat, Mehmed Sadık Rıfat Paşa, in *A Treatise on the Conditions of Europe* (*Avrupa Ahvaline Dair Bir Risale*), written in 1837.[23] In this treatise, Sadık Rıfat Paşa described contemporary European achievements as being a result of "the practice of sociable familiarity

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[19]   Cemil Aydın, *Politics of Anti-Westernism: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 15.

[20]   Cavid Baysun, "Mustafa Reşid Paşa'nın Paris ve Londra sefaretleri esnasındaki siyasi yazıları," *Tarih Vesikaları* 1, no. 4 (1941): 287.

[21]   Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 184.

[22]   Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 186.

[23]   Tuncer Baykara, *Osmanlılarda medeniyet kavramı ve ondokuzuncu yüzyıla dair araştırmalar* (İzmir: Akademi Kitabevi, 1999), 31.

and civilization" (*usûl-ü me'nûsiyet ve medeniyet*) in this continent.[24] It should be noted that both the French and the Turkish versions of the word 'civilization' were derived from the same root, namely 'city' (*civitas* in Latin and *madina* in Arabic), making *medeniyet* an excellent translation of 'civilization.'[25]

The word *medeniyet* remained in official dispatches or treatises until Mustafa Sami Efendi, a diplomat who had served in the Ottoman embassy in Paris, published his *Avrupa Risalesi* (*A Treatise on Europe*) in 1840. This treatise turned out to be a popular text consolidating the use of the word *medeniyet* in Ottoman literary circles. In the preface of this treatise, Mustafa Sami Efendi stated that his aim in writing this piece was to discuss the achievements of the Europeans as a result of their 'practice of civilization' (*usûl-i medeniyet*).[26] According to Aydın, Mustafa Sami Efendi was among the first Ottoman intellectuals to offer "a holistic assessment of the excellence of Europe and its superiority, connecting all the positive characteristics of European institutions and practices in a civilizational unity."[27] Despite this holistic assessment, similar to Mustafa Reşid Paşa and Sadık Rıfat Paşa, Mustafa Sami Efendi perceived civilization not as an ideal condition to be reached, but as a practice to reach that ideal condition. This practical element was also evident in their political instrumentalization of the concept of civilization. As Wigen writes:

*Medeniyet* and *sivilizasyon* were used primarily in relation to the conduct of states and statesmen, and the honing of an individual's character was the road to a particular institutionalization of relationships between ruler and ruled. These terms were used in arguing for equitable treatment of the Sultan's subjects on the domestic arena, and to adhere to a certain order between rulers in external relations.[28]

The concept of civilization was introduced in the Ottoman political lexicon during the 1830s, when the Ottoman Empire was simultaneously experiencing a period of upheaval/disintegration and a period of reordering/renewal. The concurrence of the Kavalalı revolt and the proclamation of the Edict of *Tanzimat* was quite timely for this very word.[29] Although initial usages underlined civilization as a practice rather than an ideal condition, İbrahim Şinasi, the eminent poet, journalist, and playwright, reversed this formula in the 1850s and 1860s and presented civilization as the ideal condition. As a symbolic man of letters of the *Tanzimat* era, he was one of the best representatives of the dualism central to the Ottoman social system during and after this period. His writings efficiently demonstrated the opposition between various categories, between the old and new, the *alla turca* and *alla franca*, the Ottoman Empire and Europe, and the East and the West. According to Tanpınar, it was Şinasi who sanctified the concept of civilization as something like religion and crystallized 'civilizationism' (*medeniyetçilik*) as the first ideology of the *Tanzimat* period.[30] This sanctification was evident in his poems dedicated to Mustafa Reşid Paşa. Şinasi was courageous enough to label him as the 'prophet of civilization' (*medeniyet resûlü*).[31] In

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[24]  Mehmed Sadık Rıfat Pasa, *Avrupa'nın ahvaline dair bir risale* (İstanbul: Takvimhane-i Amire, 1275 [1858]), 9.

[25]  Einer Wigen, "The Education of Ottoman Man and the Practice of Orderliness" in *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe*, ed. Margaret Pernau et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 110.

[26]  Mustafa Sami Efendi, *Avrupa risalesi* (İstanbul: Takvim-i Vekayi Matbaası, 1256 [1840]), 3–4.

[27]  Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism*, 17.

[28]  Einar Wigen, *State of Translation: Turkey in Interlingual Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 88.

[29]  For a detailed account of the impact of Tanzimat on the conception of civilization by the Ottoman intellectuals see, Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Kalemiye'den Mülkiye'ye Tanzimat zihniyeti," in *Modern Türkiye'de siyasal düşünce 1: Tanzimatın birikimi ve Meşrutiyet*, ed. Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekingil (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), 55–8.

[30]  Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *19. Asır Türk edebiyatı tarihi* (İstanbul: Çağlayan Kitabevi, 1988), 152.

[31]  İbrahim Şinasi, *Müntehâbât-ı Eş'ar*, trans. Kemal Bek (İstanbul: Bordo Siyah Yayınları, 2004), 56.

another poem, he characterized the Edict of *Tanzimat* as a European idol (*Avrupalı büt*), which inspired splendor and dignity (*revnâk-ü şân*) to transform the Ottoman realm into a land envied even by the Europeans.[32]

Şinasi's newspaper articles were equally important in the dissemination of the concept of civilization to a wider audience. In these articles, unlike his predecessors, he used the expression of 'the condition of civilization' (*hâl-i medeniyet*) instead of 'the practice of civilization' (*usûl-i medeniyet*). This conceptual transformation revealed that Ottoman intellectuals began to gain awareness of the centrality of civilization, instead of its practicality. In other words, civilization was no more perceived as a practice but as the condition itself.[33]

Once civilization had been idealized in the mid-19th century, Ottoman intellectuals began to emphasize its centrality and inevitability. For instance, Münif Paşa, a prominent bureaucrat and intellectual in the Hamidian period, perceived civilization as an ideal condition and the ultimate destination of humanity. He defined civilization as "a reflection of the progress in science and industry" (*ulûm ve sanayîde terakkînin bir tezâhürü*) and considered it an unavoidable process.[34] Similarly, Namık Kemal, an eminent poet, journalist, and novelist, perceived civilization as "a natural requisite of human life" (*hayât-ı beşer için levâzım-ı tabiiyeden*) and underlined the inevitability of the civilizing process.[35] He once wrote that the Ottomans finally recognized the excellence of civilization and the impossibility of standing against it.[36] According to Şemseddin Sami, the linguist and author of the first modern novel in Turkish literature, civilization was not only inevitable but also indestructible. He argued that civilization had expanded to such a level that nothing could prevent its further advancement and nothing could destroy it. For him, civilization could not be destroyed even with the destruction of the entirety of Europe, let alone only Paris and London.[37]

The centrality of civilization for Ottoman intellectuals directed them to reproduce first the dyadic conceptualization of civilized vs. uncivilized and then the tripartite categorization of savagery/barbarism/civilization. They perceived civilization as a source of domination; civilized nations would inevitably dominate the non-civilized ones. Şinasi clearly distinguished between "the civilized and non-civilized nations" (*milel-i mütemeddine ve milel-i gayr-i mütemeddine*), the former being more prosperous, more peaceful, and more political, whereas the latter lacked these qualities.[38] Similarly, Münif Paşa associated science and technology with civilized societies and ignorance with uncivilized societies.[39] In other words, for Ottoman intellectuals, civilization turned out to be a catchword to avert the ultimate destruction of the Empire; the Empire could only survive if she adopted civilization to cure her basic deficiencies.

The tripartite categorization of savagery/barbarism/civilization was not novel for Ottoman intellectuals. Following Ibn Haldun's distinction between savagery, nomadism, and civilization (*vahşiyet, bedeviyet,* and *hadariyet*), they were already aware of the progressive evolution of humankind. The difference between European and Haldunian classifications was the former's emphasis on barbarism as a threat to civilization and the latter's association of

32   Şinasi, *Müntehâbât-ı Eş'ar*, 48.
33   Abdullah Kaygı, *Türk düşüncesinde çağdaşlaşma* (Ankara: Gündoğan Yayınları, 1992), 57.
34   Münif Paşa, "Mukayese-i İlm-ü Cehl," *Mecmua-i Fünûn* 1 (1279 [1862]): 21
35   Namık Kemal, "Medeniyet," *İbret*, Zilkade 16, 1289 [January 15, 1873].
36   Namık Kemal, "İttihad-ı İslam," *İbret*, Rebiyülahir 21, 1289 [June 28, 1872].
37   Zeynep Süslü and İsmail Kara, "Şemseddin Sami'nin 'medeniyet'e dair dört makalesi," *Kutadgubilig* 4 (2003): 276.
38   Kaygı, *Türk düşüncesinde çağdaşlaşma*, 57
39   Münif Paşa, "Mukayese-i ilm-ü cehl," 22–3.

civilization with the notion of settlement.[40] Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, a bureaucrat and intellectual who had completed the translation of Ibn Haldun's *Al-Muqaddimah* in Turkish, was very much influenced by the Haldunian notion of civilization.[41] Considering the taxation and security problems associated with the nomadic people of Anatolia and his inspection visits to the Province of Bosnia for settling nomadic tribes in the region, Ahmed Cevdet Paşa even argued that the Empire should end 'the state of savagery and nomadism' (*hâl-i vahşet ve bedâvet*) by establishing 'a military/colonial administration' (*koloni militer usûlü*) in these provinces.[42]

The distinction between civilization as a practice and civilization as an ideal was the first debate among Ottoman intellectuals. The initial definition of civilization as a practice revealed that Ottoman intellectuals still believed that the adoption of this 'practice' would remedy the internal problems of the Empire. Yet, they soon learned that civilization was not only a practical approach for socio-political reform, but indeed it was the ideal condition to be reached by adopting various practices of advanced European countries. This idealization resulted in a firm belief in the inevitability and unavoidability of civilization. The Ottomans understood that the ultimate fate of the non-civilized was subordination by the civilized, yet most of them were still not convinced about the European-ness of civilization and the impossibility of any alternatives to the European civilization.

## 4. The Second Debate: Is Civilization Something Universal or European? Are There Civilizations other than European Civilization?

In the early 19th century, positivist international law began to replace natural international law. This transformation was very significant because while the latter argued that people had natural rights by birth that cannot be challenged, the former claimed that rights and responsibilities were defined by states, meaning that international law was not natural but rather state-made. Natural international law was something universal, whereas positivist international law is the law created by the European international system. For the Ottomans, whose membership in the European family of nations was contestable, the universal conceptualization was preferable compared to the European one. Therefore, it is not surprising that the first international law treatise translated into Turkish was Emerich de Vattel's *Droit des Gens*, a proponent of natural international law, instead of the then-popular Henry Wheaton's *Elements of International Law*, a purely positivist text.[43] Similarly, most Ottoman intellectuals questioned whether the concept of civilization was something universal or European, and they believed that adopting a universal conceptualization instead of the European one would be relatively easier since dyadic conceptions of Europe vs. the Ottoman Empire, West vs. East, and civilization vs. barbarism placed the Europeans and the Ottomans in opposing categories, which was a source of discontent for the Ottomans.

Two trends emerged in Ottoman political writing in answer to the question regarding the universality of civilization. The first trend argued for the universality of civilization despite its attribution to the European continent. In other words, some Ottoman intellectuals thought that although it was most visible in Europe, civilization was not bound strictly to

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[40]  Wigen, *State of Translation*, 84–5.
[41]  Ercümend Kuran, *Türkiye'nin batılılaşması ve milli meseleler* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1994), 142–43.
[42]  Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *Tezakir*, 4 Volumes, trans. Cavid Baysun (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1991), Vol. 3, 34–5.
[43]  Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, "The Emergence of the Idea of 'International Law' in the Ottoman Empire before the Treaty of Paris (1856)," *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 2 (2014): 242–44.

that continent. According to Aydın, most of the early *Tanzimat* intellectuals, such as Şinasi, believed that "[…] civilization was the common heritage of humanity, not an exclusively European ideal."[44] Moreover, the association of civilization with Europe might also imply the association of this concept with Christianity. As Wigen argued, the dominant discourse in Europe had already associated Christianity with civilization and Islam with barbarism; therefore, Ottoman intellectuals had to adopt an alternative understanding.[45] Münif Paşa's perception of civilization as a universal achievement and a quality envisaged by Islam led him to define 'the true Muslim' as a civilized man.[46] The eclectic and even paradoxical stance of perceiving civilization as a universal phenomenon despite its emergence in Europe was also visible in the writings of Şemseddin Sami. He argued that the concept of civilization was a product of the intellectuals of 18th-century Europe, such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Dalembert, and Diderot. He mentioned that the works of these philosophers were the by-products of "the scientific innovations and philosophical ideas and perceptions" (*keşfiyât-ı fenniye ve efkâr-ı mütalaat-ı hikemiye*) of their predecessors: Descartes, Newton, Herschel, Kant, and Bacon.[47] On the other hand, Şemseddin Sami also criticized the hesitance of some Ottomans in adopting civilization due to their misperception of this concept as a product of Christianity. According to him, despite its European origins, civilization was a universal phenomenon that could be adopted by anyone who employed reason for reaching an advanced level of living.[48] Quite similarly, towards the end of the Empire, Ziya Gökalp, an esteemed sociologist known for being a pioneer of Turkish nationalism, also perceived civilization as a rational process, the creation of humankind's conscious actions; therefore, civilization could be transferred from nation to nation, and it did not belong to a certain region or people. Rather, it was a product of all of humanity.[49]

Once the universality of the concept of civilization was recognized, the second trend argued that historically different regions of the world had once represented civilization. In other words, even if one admitted that civilization was generally attributed to the European continent, before European ascendancy, it was represented by other parts of the world. Therefore, one should not speak of the European civilization as an everlasting civilization; as it had its predecessors, it might have its successors as well. Rejecting the singularity of European civilization did not only serve to convince the Ottomans to adopt the elements of this civilization but it also allowed the Ottoman intellectuals to discuss the existence of an alternative, albeit a historical one; namely, the Islamic civilization. Hence, more conservative Ottoman intellectuals who had concerns about the association of civilization with Christian Europe brought forward Islamic civilization as an alternative to European civilization.

Gökhan Çetinsaya wrote that earlier *Tanzimat* intellectuals did not perceive themselves as inheritors of a civilization other than European civilization. In their writings, clear-cut divisions between the Islamic and European civilizations were hardly visible.[50] However, later on, some Ottoman intellectuals, the most notable of which was Ahmet Cevdet Paşa,

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[44]   Aydın, *Politics of Anti-Westernism*, 20.

[45]   Wigen, *State of Translation*, 80.

[46]   Ali Budak, *Batılılaşma sürecinde çok yönlü bir Osmanlı aydını: Münif Paşa* (İstanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2004), 271.

[47]   Süslü and Kara, "Şemseddin Sami'nin 'Medeniyet'e dair dört makalesi," 274.

[48]   Süslü and Kara, "Şemseddin Sami'nin 'Medeniyet'e dair dört makalesi," 272.

[49]   Ziya Gökalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization: Selected Essays of Ziya Gökalp*, comp. and trans. Niyazi Berkes (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1959), 104–6.

[50]   Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Kalemiye'den Mülkiye'ye Tanzimat zihniyeti," in *Modern Türkiye'de siyasal düşünce 1: Tanzimatın birikimi ve Meşrutiyet,* ed. Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekingil (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), 57.

questioned the argument of the singularity of European civilization. According to Ümit Meriç, he rather perceived the Islamic civilization as one of the greatest civilizations of world history, which was backward in his time but had the potential to be an alternative to Western civilization.[51] Later conservative/Islamist Ottoman intellectuals also followed his path. They rejected the singularity of European civilization; despite acknowledging the superiority of the West vis-à-vis the Islamic world, they argued that this was only a material superiority. The West was morally corrupted; its material achievements did not suffice to perceive it as the singular civilization of the contemporary world. Thus, the Islamists not only accepted the existence of Islamic civilization but also perceived it as an alternative to Western civilization. They firmly believed in the glory of the Islamic civilization as the source of Western achievements. According to Berkes, in 1886, a series of articles entitled "The Islamic Civilization" appeared in the *Tarîk* journal, which aimed to "[…] show the achievements of the Arabs […] in science, technology (fen), literature and historiography; and, second, to prove that all of these were taken over by the Europeans." This was followed by the Akyiğitzade Musa's book entitled *Avrupa Medeniyetine Bir Nazar* (*A Glance to the European Civilization*), published in 1897, whose opening sentence is as follows: "The bases of contemporary civilization are nothing but the actions and traditions of Muhammad."[52] In sum, as Musa Kazım Efendi defined it, the Islamic civilization was "the genuine civilization" (*sahîh medeniyet*) and there was no other way for Muslims to survive and prosper but to turn to this civilization.[53]

Unlike Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, while recognizing that the Islamic civilization had contributed to the scientific and intellectual development of humanity in the past, Şemseddin Sami admitted that civilization had been spreading to the world from Europe. He argued that while the recognition of Islamic civilization's contributions to the then current civilization of Europe was useful in easing reactions from the ignorant masses against civilization, it also seemed to produce some kind of ungrounded pride that deterred the masses from accepting European achievements. He added that "[…] we can neither use telegraph nor carry out steamship and railway locomotive by the chemistry of Cahiz and philosophy of Ibn Rüşd, just as we cannot cure malaria with the medicine of Ibn Sina." [54] Therefore, he advised intellectuals to leave the study of earlier Islamic civilization to the scholars of history and antiquities, and to adopt European science and technology to become civilized. Later on, more Western-oriented Ottoman intellectuals even denied the existence of any alternatives to European civilization. Abdullah Cevdet, an ardent defender of Westernization, wrote in one of his articles as such: "We have to understand one thing – there are not two civilizations, there is only one to which to turn, and that is Western civilization, which we must take into our hands, whether it be rosy or thorny."[55]

To conclude, concerning the universality and singularity of the concept of civilization, Ottoman intellectuals were divided between a more radical view recognizing European civilization as 'the civilization' and a more balanced view recognizing the European origins of contemporary civilization, yet perceiving it as a universal phenomenon based on reason.

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[51] Ümit Meriç, *Cevdet Paşa'nın cemiyet ve devlet görüşü* (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 1979), 31.

[52] Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst&Company, 1964), 263.

[53] İsmail Kara, *Türkiye'de İslamcılık düşüncesi: metinler/kişiler*, 3 Volumes, (İstanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 1997), Vol. 1, 130–31.

[54] Süslü and Kara, "Şemseddin Sami'nin 'Medeniyet'e dair dört makalesi," 279.

[55] Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 358.

This second and more balanced view had two strands as well. The first and more Western-oriented strand argued that though Islamic civilization had once been a strong civilization, it was the Europeans who were the carriers of current civilization. Hence, Islamic civilization was only a matter of history. The second and more Islamic-oriented strand argued that Islamic civilization might have been a glorious civilization and now it might be in decay; however, this did not preclude labeling it as 'the genuine civilization.'

## 5. The Third Debate: Totality of the European Civilization: What and How to Take?

When Ottoman intellectuals recognized European supremacy over the non-European world and perceived the concept of civilization as a catchword to understand the reasons for this supremacy, they began to think about what to transfer from the European civilization and how to do so. There were three responses. The first one negated any transfer from European civilization, yet proponents of this view remained quite marginal considering that most of the Ottoman intellectuals firmly believed in the inevitability and unavoidability of adopting civilization. Still, total rejection of European civilization due to its association with Christianity resulted in the view that the adoption of even the smallest elements of this civilization might be enough to diverge from 'the true path of Islam.' According to Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, some of the Ottoman *ulama* even "[…] declared those, who diverged to such *alla franca* ideas, as infidels."[56]

On the other margin, some Ottoman intellectuals had been arguing that European civilization should be adopted totally to ensure the survival of the Empire. One of the Ottoman ministers of education, Saffet Paşa, wrote in one of his letters that "[…] unless Turkey […] accepts the civilization of Europe in its entirety – in short, proves herself to be a reformed and civilized state – she will never free herself from the European intervention and tutelage [.]"[57] Several decades later, pro-Western Ottoman intellectuals shared similar views. The aforementioned quotation from Abdullah Cevdet arguing for the total adoption of Western civilization together with its strengths and weaknesses ("*rosy and thorny*") also demonstrated that European civilization was perceived as a whole. To modernize society, the adoption of material achievements did not suffice; a more radical moral and mental transformation was necessary.

Between these two antithetical discourses of a total adoption/rejection of European civilization, the most widely-accepted discourse concerning the level of adoption argued that at least some parts of this civilization could and should be imported. Accordingly, most Ottoman intellectuals argued that the European civilization had two dimensions: one being material and the other, moral. All agreed that the adoption of material elements of civilization would pose no socio-political problems for Ottoman society, whereas they questioned the adoption of moral elements. First of all, these intellectuals criticized the adoption of European civilization's moral elements. Perceiving that the administrative (*umûr-u mülkiye*), financial (*umûr-u mâliye*), and military (*umûr-u askeriye*) achievements of Europe were the real reasons behind the welfare of the continent, Ahmet Cevdet Paşa argued that the adoption of European regulations in these fields could contribute to the revitalization of the Ottoman Empire, provided that these regulations conformed to Islamic law and the customs of the Empire. In other words, in principle, Ahmet Cevdet Paşa was not against importing some

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56   Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Tezâkir*, Vol. 1, 63.
57   Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 185.

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elements of European civilization; however, these elements were required to fit into the basic principles of Ottoman-Islamic tradition. This meant that he was against the imitation (*taklîd*) and superficial application of European practices rather than the practices themselves.[58] The reason for his reaction to imitation was his firm belief in the peculiarity of the Ottoman/Islamic culture and the contradiction between the European and Islamic civilizations: "We have some peculiar characteristics; therefore, what is beneficial for other states will be detrimental for us. What is an urgent treatment for them, is a fatal poison for us."[59] Namık Kemal similarly argued that the Ottomans did not need to imitate European civilization as a whole: "We are not compelled to imitate the dance and wedding practices of Europeans just as we are not compelled to derive the habit of eating snails from the Chinese."[60] As a popular journalist and novelist known by the nickname of 'eminent scholar' (*hâce-i evvel*), Ahmed Midhat's dislike of revolutionary change and his preference for a more cautious modernization resulted in his distinction between the material and moral aspects of civilization, which he preferred to label as the distinction between 'technique' and 'idea.' On the one hand, he was aware that the Ottoman Empire fell behind Europe in the technical sense; therefore, the material elements of civilization had to be adopted immediately and without questioning. On the other hand, he perceived Western ideas, such as liberty, republicanism, representative democracy, and laicism, as the 'poisons' of Western civilization, which should be avoided to prevent the total disintegration of the Empire.[61] Moreover, he also criticized superficial Europeanization. The main theme of his novels is, therefore, the adoption of the wrong side of European civilization. There are generally two protagonists: one representing the super-westernized, ignorant, and morally corrupted Ottomans (i.e., Felatun Bey), and the other representing the Ottomans who preserved their religious and cultural values while educating themselves about the material European achievements (i.e., Rakım Efendi).[62] The oppositional representation of these characters, the self-defeat of the former, and the achievements of the latter at the end of the book establish a typical Ahmed Midhat novel.

Unlike the pro-Western intellectuals, the Islamist intellectuals of the late Ottoman Empire were quite firm in the distinction between the material and moral elements of civilization and the adoption of the former. For example, the prominent Islamist thinker Mehmed Akif once wrote in one of his poems: "Take the science and technology of the West, take it / Give, also, your efforts on this way its utmost speed / Because it is impossible to live without these / Because only the science and technology has no nationality."[63] Similarly, according to Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, a conciliatory approach was necessary, which could both embrace the material achievements of the West and the moral principles of Islam; therefore, there was no sounder way except "the adoption of the way of eclecticism" (*iktitaf mesleğini ihtiyardan daha eslem tarîk yoktur*).[64] According to the Islamists, the ultimate distinction between the Islamic and Western civilizations resulted in the impossibility of incorporating moral elements of the latter into the former. According to Said Halim Paşa, the Ottoman statesman and Grand Vizier between 1913 and 1917, the reason for this impossibility was

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[58]  Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *Tezâkir*, Vol. 4, 220.
[59]  Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *Tezâkir*, Vol. 4, 221.
[60]  Kemal, "Medeniyet".
[61]  Orhan Okay, *Batı medeniyeti karşısında Ahmed Midhat Efendi* (Ankara: Atatürk Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1975), 10.
[62]  Ahmed Midhat Efendi, *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2018).
[63]  Mehmed Akif Ersoy, *Safahat*, ed. Ertuğrul Düzdağ (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 1991), 176.
[64]  Kara, *Türkiye'de İslamcılık düşüncesi*, 23–4.

that the entire social order of Islam was based on the fundamental principle of the absolute sovereignty of the *shariah*. In other words, the moral elements of Western civilization and Islam were not compatible with each other, and any attempt at reconciliation were thought to have fatal consequences for the Islamic world.[65]

Turkish nationalists were more comfortable in answering the question of what to import from European civilization because, mirroring the German distinction between *Zivilisation* and *Kultur*, they associated the distinction between the material and moral elements of civilization with the distinction between civilization (*medeniyet*) and culture (*hars*). According to Ziya Gökalp, while civilization was international, culture was national. He wrote that culture was "composed of the integrated system of religious, moral, legal, intellectual, aesthetic, linguistic, economic and technological spheres of life of a certain nation," whereas civilization was "the sum of total of social institutions shared in common by several nations that have attained the same level of development."[66] Moreover, he argued that while culture was composed mainly of emotional elements, civilization was composed of universal ideas applicable to all humankind regardless of their ethnicity or religion. Therefore, while a nation could not imitate the religious, moral, or aesthetic feelings of another nation, i.e., culture, it could adopt universal ideas, i.e., civilization.[67]

The partial adoptionist discourse, in sum, argued for a distinction between material/ universal and moral/national elements of civilization; they opted for adoption of the former and rejection of the latter. To complement the material elements of civilization, the optimal synthesis was to add moral elements of a religious/national culture. This was laconically reflected by Şinasi, who defined the ideal combination for the Ottoman Empire as "marrying the virgin ideas of Europe and ancient wisdom of Asia" (*Avrupa'nın bikr-i fikrini Asya'nın akl-ı pîrânesiyle izdivâc ettirmek*).[68] The Islamists offered the preservation of Islamic morality since Islamic civilization was the "real civilization," yet they were not against importing the material elements of European civilization. Some Islamists even argued that some of the moral elements of European civilizations were indeed quite Islamic. As Ahmed Naim stated, "the principles that Europe seems to present as new inventions and as samples for all societies of the world, such as liberty, justice, equality, and solidarity, are among the fundamental principles of Islam."[69] The synthesis of the Turkists, on the other hand, was the creation of a new identity merging European civilization with Turkish culture. As Ziya Gökalp wrote, while the European civilization was dominating the world, quite naturally "the Ottoman civilization, which was part of the Eastern civilization, would fall and leave its place to Turkish culture with the religion of Islam on the one hand, and Western civilization, on the other."[70] In other words, what the Turkists offered was a blend of European civilization and Turkish culture.

## 6. Conclusion

The concept of civilization was imported to the Ottoman lexicon during the 1830s by a group of young diplomats who had become acquainted with the concept during their service in

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[65] Ahmet Şeyhun, *Said Halim Paşa: Ottoman Statesmen, Islamist Thinker (1865-1921)* (İstanbul: ISIS Press, 2003), 130.

[66] Ziya Gökalp, *Principles of Turkism,* trans. Robert Devereux (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 22-24.

[67] For a detailed account of Ziya Gökalp's distinction between civilization and culture see, Alp Eren Topal, "Against Influence: Ziya Gökalp in Context and Tradition," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 28, no. 3 (2017): 293–302.

[68] İbrahim Şinasi, "İstanbul Sokaklarının Tenvir ve Tathiri," *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, Zilkade 28, 1280 [April 29, 1864].

[69] Ahmed Naim, "İslamiyet'in esasları, mazisi ve hali," *Sebilü'r Reşad*, Kanun-ı Sani 30, 1329 [February 12, 1914].

[70] Gökalp, *Principles of Turkism*, 33.

European capitals. In these years, the concept of civilization had already been consolidated in Europe; however, it had not yet lost its universal and universalizing meaning. Civilization was thus perceived not as a phenomenon bound to a particular group of people, but as a characteristic attainable by all human beings. Based on the Enlightenment notion of reason, the idea of civilization offered a refined, wealthier, and happier life to its adherents.

Indeed, it was this universal nature of the concept of civilization that had attracted the attention of the Ottomans. The diplomats admired the order, well-being, and magnificence of the European capitals in which they had served, and they learned that a similar level of development could be attained in the Ottoman Empire via the 'practice of civilization.' In other words, the initial Ottoman perception of civilization differed from the European view in the sense that civilization was not the end, but the means to reach an ideal end.

From the 1820s to the 1850s, the degree of universality of civilization declined considerably in Europe; or rather, civilization had begun to be perceived as a strictly European phenomenon. This did not necessarily mean that the concept had lost the sense of universality entirely. European intellectuals began to emphasize that their level of civilization was the outcome of several developments experienced in Europe. Therefore, they argued, non-European societies could be civilized, but only if they followed the prescriptions provided by Europeans. Guizot's studies on European and French civilizations were quite popular among French intellectuals of the time, by whom Ottoman intellectuals were influenced to a considerable degree.

This transformation of the concept of civilization from a universal to a strictly European one had dramatic implications for Ottoman intellectuals, and thereby for the Ottoman perception of the concept. For the Ottomans, it was easier to adopt a universal phenomenon since it did not have a cultural/religious base. However, the centuries-long association of Europe with Christianity created significant tensions among Ottoman intellectuals. In particular, there was a concern that any imports from European civilization might not suit the Islamic identity of Ottoman society.

The Ottoman intellectuals of the *Tanzimat* era tried to overcome this dilemma in two ways. First of all, they argued that although contemporary civilization had reached its utmost development in the European continent, this did not necessarily mean that civilization was a European phenomenon. In other words, adopting European civilizational achievements indeed meant adopting what was best for the entirety of humankind, including the Ottomans. Intellectuals like Şinasi and Münif Paşa followed such an understanding. The second attempt to overcome the dilemma, on the other hand, was to distinguish between the material and moral elements of civilization. The material elements of civilization, such as scientific and technological inventions, were not peculiar to the Europeans. Rather, they could be perceived as the universal inheritance of mankind. In other words, there was no problem in adopting such material achievements, which would serve only to increase the well-being of Ottoman citizens and to provide the survival of the state vis-à-vis its adversaries. Since these inventions excelled in Europe, there was no reason to seek an alternative. Their immediate adoption was even deemed extremely necessary.

The moral elements of civilization, on the other hand, were to be treated more carefully. Some of these moral elements, such as social justice, laboring for the fatherland, and modern education, were already tenets of Islam, and as such, these were Islamic principles that every Muslim had to obey. Other moral elements peculiar only to the Europeans due to

their cultural and religious background threatened to conflict with the cultural and religious structure of the Ottoman Empire. In case of such a conflict, the Ottomans wished to preserve their peculiarities and strictly avoid adopting such moral elements of European civilization, as what was useful for the Europeans might have had fatal implications for Ottoman society. In sum, the distinction between material and moral elements of civilization, the unconditional and immediate adoption of the former, and the rejection of the latter turned out to be the basic Ottoman understanding of civilization from the *Tanzimat* period until the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

The rise of Social Darwinism in Europe combined with the Ottoman disappointment in the West, particularly from 1876 onwards, consolidated the Ottoman distinction between the material and moral elements of civilization. Particularly from 1908 onwards, Ottoman political movements sought a synthesis combining European material developments and Eastern (i.e., Islamic or Turkic) morality. Indeed, it was this synthesis that established the originality of the Ottoman perception of civilization. In other words, in distinguishing the material and moral elements of civilization, the Ottomans sought to create a merger between the modern developments experienced in the West and the existing moral structures of the East. Ottoman intellectuals were more or less unified on the first part of this formula, namely the adoption of Western material modernity. However, they differed on the second part of the formula. The Westernists generally rejected the distinction between material and moral elements of civilization and perceived civilization as a totality. They did not deny the Islamic character of Ottoman society; however, they wanted to transform Islam from an all-encompassing socio/political phenomenon to a matter of personal conscience that did not resist modernization. Contrarily, the Islamists tried to preserve the Islamic identity of the Empire. They were confident in Islam as a source of civilization, yet some Muslims had diverged from the true path of Islam. Adoption of the material elements of civilization while sticking to the true path of Islam was thought to be the optimum solution for the Empire as well as the Islamic *ummah*. Finally, the Turkists tried to link the material modernity of civilization with Turco-Islamic cultural traditions. Their distinction between civilization and culture based on the association of the former with material developments and the perception of the latter as the moral basis of society allowed them not to deny but to redefine civilization.

All in all, the ambivalence that Ottoman intellectuals felt during the 19th century between the East and the West led them to seek a synthesis between these two. They were aware that they could not survive without adopting the requirements of their age, yet they were also aware that they could not survive without preserving their Eastern characteristics. Therefore, the only solution was the most difficult option, namely, to conciliate the East and the West. In an age emphasizing the inherent distinction of these two entities and the impossibility of their consolidation, their task was extremely burdensome. However, they at least attempted to achieve this. The ideal once put forward by Şinasi as the "marriage of the mature reason of Asia with the virgin ideas of Europe" became the ideal of 19th-century Ottoman intellectuals, which produced the home-grown Ottoman understanding of civilization.

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