
From ‘Traditional Ulema’ to ‘Modern Ulema’: Political and Scientific Ideas of Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır Efendi



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Özet: Bu çalışmada, fazla detaylarına girmeden, geleneksel Ulema ve islamcı düşünürler arasındaki tarihi süreklilik ve farklılaşma ilişkisi irdelenmeye çalışılacaktır. Burada İslamcı ifadesi yerine, onların geleneksel Ulema ile benzerlik ve farklılıklarını daha iyi ifade edebileceği düşünülen modern Ulema tabiri tercih edildi. Çalışmanın başında bu konu üzerinde durulduktan ve metodolojik bir ayırım yapıldıktan sonra Osmanlı son dönem düşünce hayatının en önemli müfessir ve aktivistlerinden olan Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır'ın hayatı ve fikirleri üzerinde yoğunlaşıldı. Böylelikle, konu ile ilgili üretilmiş literatürden yola çıkarak, İslamcı yazarların geleneksel Ulema ile olan süreklilik ilişkisi kronojik devamlılık esasıyla irtibatlandırılmak suretiyle yeni bir perspektif getirilmeye çalışıldı.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Batılılaşma, Ulema, İslamcı, Elmalılı Hamdi, Tanzimat

Abstract: This study will examine similarities and differences between the ‘traditional Ulema’ and modern-day Islamist intellectuals, or ‘modern Ulema’. More specifically, distinctions will be made between the approaches of the modern Ulema and the traditional Ulema toward reforms. However, the study will concentrate on the approaches of Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır Efendi, whose life I shall introduce chronologically and opinions thematically, about certain Westernization policies of the Ottoman Empire. His deeds in both political and cultural fields convey and reflect the general attitudes of the Islamist intellectuals of the time about Westernization. Thus, considering the literature, a new perspective will be presented denoting the continuity between the traditional Ulema and the modern Ulema.

Key Words: Westernization, Ulema, Islamist, Elmalılı Hamdi, Tanzimat

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A Comparison Between ‘Traditional Ulema’ and ‘Modern Ulema’

Since the second half of the eighteenth century, Western domination over the countries of the Islamic world increased dramatically: “In 1774 the treaty of Kuchuk Kainarja was signed, in which Ottoman Turkey had to accept humiliating terms from Russia, and ceded to it many of its territories. In 1757, the battle of Plessey took place, as a result of which Bengal passed under British rule. In 1798, Napoleon invaded and conquered Egypt. In 1857 the whole of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent came under the British suzerainty.” (Siddiqi, 1993:2) As a result of this shift in the global balance of power, the Ottoman Empire sought military and educational reforms.

Intensive reforms were carried out. Reforms until 1829, such as the attempts of Ibrahim and Halil Hamid Pashas, were aimed at the reorganization of the military. However, military loses to Russia convinced Mahmud II that military reforms alone were not enough for the state’s survival and “more serious structural reforms” were needed. (Mardin, 2003:153-169) Thereafter, the edict of Gülhane was announced, declaring the official start of modern reforms and marking the beginning of a new period in Ottoman history. Tanzimat reforms, when compared to the previous attempts at reform, aimed to re-structure many aspects of the social life and bureaucratic institutions along the modern lines. (Shaw, 1997:55) Tanzimat fostered the formation and extension of particular ideological currents whose influence continued through the subsequent centuries and still persists in the 21st century of the modern Turkish Republic.

By these reforms, not only did the Ottoman administrative and military structures rapidly change, but so to did the social and intellectual traditions. New types of intellectuals were born apart from the traditional Ulema. Furthermore, the traditional Ulema were also transforming into a new form and adopting a new intellectual stance. They embraced new perspectives about concepts such as change and tradition, state and society, and Westernization. Indeed, their ambivalences and paradoxes were no different than those of intellectuals who belonged to other geographies and witnessed destructive changes in their states and societies.

In this paper, I will attempt to show the scope of transformation from the traditional Ulema to the modern Ulema. For this reason, I’ll give the historical situations that led to this tremendous transformation. However, it should be stated that by the

concept of Islamic Intellectual, I refer to those who supported the Islamism and offered remedies in view of the Western experience whether from social, political or from scientific perspectives. Therefore, I will use the expression of *Islamic intellectual* as interchangeable with *modern Ulema*, which is in some ways a continuation of the *traditional Ulema*. Elmalılı Hamdi Efendi will be the micro case of this study that shows both the transition and the mental stances of modern day Ulema.

Indeed, neither the traditional Ulema, nor the Islamist intellectuals, constituted absolute homogeneous categories within themselves. While Elmalılı Hamdi passionately supported the Kanûn-u Esâsî, a new constitution ordered by Abdülhamid II and applied in 1876, Said Halim Pasha argued against it. In addition to this, there are some categorizations in the historiography which denotes dissidences between the modern Ulema. T.Z. Tunaya distinguishes between Westernist Islamists such as M.Şemsettin, Doctor Abdullah Cevdet, Kılıçzade Hakkı and Islamist-Turkists such as Sheikh Muhsini Fani and Mehmet Akif (Tunaya, 1962:72-83). Fazlurrahman tended to distinguish between conservatives and liberal modernists. E.Ziya Karal distinguished between radical Islamist and moderate Islamists (Kara, 1986:37-38). Despite their internal diversifications, both the scope of their intellectual agenda and the manner of their engagement in political affairs are two criteria of distinguishing between the traditional Ulema and the modern Ulema.

There are outstanding differences between traditional *ulema* and the modern *ulema*. What *ulema* and Islamist intellectuals understood by Westernization, which can be seen as a nineteenth century phenomenon, might not have been the same. In my view, interpretation of Westernization from the point of view of civilizational transformation was the main duty of Islamist Intellectuals. Understanding and practicing Westernization as a social, political, economic, judicial and most importantly mental transformation of Islamic Civilization was criticized by the modern *ulema*. However, as the facts in following pages will illustrate, the traditional Ulema were involved in conjectural political necessities of the Ottoman Empire. Hence, their perceptions of Westernization and critiques of it had to diverge at some point.

When compared to the modern *ulema* (Islamist intellectuals) whose attitudes seemed to have been better thought and more intentional, the traditional *ulema* sometimes simply reacted against Westernization. The traditional *ulema* tended to be less critical in both accepting and rejecting Westernization, while Islamist intellectuals

were more flexible and constructive in responding to it. In this way, it is possible to analyze Islamicism as an important intellectual current during the late Tanzimat period of the Ottoman Empire, in the context of the confrontation of the Islamic civilization with modernity.

Traditional Ulema

Ulema and the State had been closely connected with each other. The *ulema* had been one of the immovable parts of the Empire throughout its long history. “The very existence of an elaborate edifice through which the Ottomans showed the Ulema ‘honor and respect’ played a crucial part in the claims of the dynasty. Without provision for the Ulema there could be no implementation of the law, and without the law there could be little hope of legitimacy for the plebeian-blooded Ottoman dynasty.” (Zilfi, 1988:27)

It has been also put forward by Heyd that Ulema had a balancing function between the State and society. However, since the end of the classical age, the situation had fundamentally changed. Ulema had deteriorated. In Heyd’s words, “while in olden times, people came to the *kadi* to complain of oppression by the governor and his subordinates, it was now the other way around. Instead of the Ulema restraining the government from infringing upon the holy law, the Sultan had to issue innumerable *fermans* warning the judges not to violate the *Shari’a*” (Heyd, 1961:78).

Historians agree that since the second half of the sixteenth century the Ottoman *il-miye* institution began to degenerate. Interestingly enough, Ottomans were aware of the content of this deterioration. Taşköprülüzade reported in the 1540s about the detachment of the Ulema in Medreses for teaching mathematics and theoretical sciences. Furthermore, they also left engaging in exegesis and interpretation of the Holy Qur’an (İnalçık, 2004:187). There are harsh critiques for the Ulema in *Asafname* of Lütü Pasha (d. 1564). According to İpşirli, it was Mustafa Ali who had the strongest criticism for the Ulema in the second half of the sixteenth century. Ali wrote in *Künh-ül Ahbâr* and *Nüshatü’s Selâtin* that none of the Ulema, except Ebussuud Efendi, had written any serious study for the meantime. Moreover, he mentioned the bribery and illegal actions of the Ulema as well as their disrespectful behaviors in their work in the *medreses*. Concurrently, Mustafa Selânikî explained in his book *Tarih-i Selânikî* the meaningless scramble of the Ulema for being in front of the protocols. (İpşirli, 1999:273-75).

In the seventeenth century, the famous bill (*lâyiâ*) of Koçi Bey mentioned the similar problems with the Ulema. In his view, dismissals and bribery overshadowed the reputability of this profession. Four other anonymous books of the seventeenth century written on the Ottoman administration analogously mentioned the Ulema's passion for luxury, their wastefulness and gratitude.¹ Views of the most notable erudite of the century, Katib Çelebi, are no different than his contemporaries. (İpşirli, 1999:276-77). Besides their unlawful and shameful activities, the perspective of the traditional Ulema was conservative about renewal and innovation. For instance, "when the books of Ali Pasha were seized in 1767, Sheikh el-Islam ordered a fatwa demanding that books related to philosophy, astronomy and history should not be allowed in libraries." (İnalçık, 2004:188) One of the most reformist sultans of the Ottoman Empire, Selim III, tried to make reforms in the *Ulema* organization. However, his attempts added no more than previous ones.

The reign of Mahmut II (1808-1839) was decisive for the role of the *Ulema* in the Ottoman Empire. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, both statues and the numbers of Ottoman bureaucrats began to increase at the expense of *Ulema*. A growing distance between the upper *Ulema* and the lower *Ulema* led to the alienation between these two groups. While the lower *Ulema* kept their contact with society and gained certain degree of reputation, the upper *Ulema* enjoyed the high administrative positions that also brought considerable incomes. Furthermore, the upper *Ulema* were substantially deteriorated and became ignorant about religious matters. (Mardin, 2003:160-61). The position of the *Ulema* was very much influenced by political events. The function of *Ulema* as the legitimator of Sultan's deeds became far more apparent when Sultan Mahmut ordered his Sheikh el-Islam Yasinci-zâde Abdülvehhab to write a book stating the necessity of obeying to the Sultan. (Mardin, 2003:168-69). Therefore, relations between the *Ulema* and the State were very close. According to Heyd "it is hardly surprising that Ottoman *Ulema*, especially the higher class, were deeply convinced that not only the fate of Islam but their own depended on the existence and stability of the Empire." (Heyd, 1961:87) The content of their changing and continuing relations throughout centuries had been an important issue.

¹ These works are Kitâb-ı Müstetâb, Kitâb-u Mesâlih-ul Müslimîn, Menâfii-l Mü'minîn, and Hirz-ül Mulûk. See İhsanoğlu, 1999:p 250-280

It was true that the Tanzimat reforms with their predecessors' applications constituted an alternative bureaucratic formation for the *Ulema*. In fact, reforms disturbed them. However, while the *Ulema* were rejecting the implementation of the Tanzimat in some ways, they were primarily considering the possible consequences of the practical application of reforms. According to Inalcık, "There were strong objections to and in many cases the rejection of the stipulations of the Tanzimat among the *Ulema*. Indeed, they were often not content just to express their defiance by siding with the reactionary *ağas* in the councils, but even went so far as to openly incite the population to rise up." (Inalcık, 1976:17)

The *Ulema* found ways of integrating into the newly emerging institutions after the Tanzimat. According to Hanioglu, the banishment of Janissaries brought about benefits to them. When the *Âsâkir-i Mansûre-i Muhammediyye* armies were being formed, numbers of *Imams*, who represent the lower level of *Ulema*, were appointed to each corp. In addition, those *Imams* were guaranteed the position of *kadi* in return for five years service. Therefore, although the abolishment of the Janissaries and the construction of the *Mansûre* corps loyal to the Sultan reduced the role of the *Ulema* as a political threat, they still found ways to integrate into State affairs. (Hanioglu, 1991:16-17)

After the Tanzimat, this situation continued. Moreover, the *Ulema* were involved with State affairs more than before. Some of them, by giving *fetvas* to the Sultan, justified the Western reforms that seemed to be important in keeping the stability and continuity of the Ottoman Empire. The matters that *fatwas* concerned were with were generally rooted in conjectural and pragmatic necessities. For instance, "while a resolution in 1826 legitimized the establishment of the *eşkinici* corps of the Janissaries, two *fetvas* given by the *Sheikh el-Islam*, asserting that "military training was a religious commandment and those who refused to meet the obligation were liable to severe punishment", reaffirmed the *Ulema's* role as ideological legitimators in the life of the state. Secondly, by including provisions for each company of the new army corps to have a resident *Imam* leading daily prayer services, members of the lower *Ulema* were given another avenue in which they could hold offices." (Hanioglu, 1991:2)

After the second half of the nineteenth century the *Ulema*, in its classical and traditional sense, had been losing the centuries-old ground to exist. After the 1908 re-

bellion, there remained few Ulema who represented the aforementioned age-old tradition of depending on the State, establishing *Ittihad-i Muhammedi Fırkası*. They tried to find a place in the State rather than appealing to social support. In another instance, Nusret Pasha wrote an introduction to a book that he translated from Arabic and presented it to Abdülhamid II. In the introduction, he mentioned that defending democracy is similar to rejecting God, thus in contradiction with the Islamic State tradition. It is not proper to limit the authority of the Sultan by an assembly. (Bulaç, 2004:58)

The traditional Ulema had been dominant since the foundations of the Ottoman Empire. In its history, they deeply involved in state affairs, but with their civil identity they also worked for the happiness of society through engaging in cultural and social activities. (Bulaç, 2004:51) They somehow continued to function, despite the aforementioned degeneration of the *ilmiye* institution. However, military defeats will have changed not only the political and economic structure but also the administrative institutions of the Empire, and *ilmiye* was no exception. A new type of Ulema began to emerge, both from inside the traditional Ulema and outside of it. They did not have a common geographical origin. However, they were the scholars who performed similar fates with each and offered remedies for the survival of the Ottoman state ,which meant the survival of Islamic societies. They are called as Muslim intellectuals, Islamist Activists, or as I will call it "Modern Ulema". As a modern phenomenon, most of them came from the traditional educational channels which the traditional Ulema had passed through, but were thinking in the Western scientific frames as naturally given facts.

Modern Ulema

Responding to modernity and modern ideas was one of the main motivations of the Modern Ulema. They had a mission that could be accomplished through Islamization. In order to return to Islam, they offered the necessity of turning their face to *real* Islam. They believed that only after the realization of this purpose could they fight against imperialism and Westernization. Some of them include Cemaleddin Afgani, Muhammed Abduh, Musa Carullah, Namık Kemal, Reşit Rıza, Ferit Kam, Said Nursi, Muhammed İkbāl, A. Hairi, Mirza Aga Khan, Talebof, etc.

This generation was well-educated in terms of intellectual formation. They were eminent in various sciences such as Qur'an, exegesis, hadith (the prophet Muham-

mad's sayings/deeds), Kalam, Law (Fıh), Siyer (Life of Prophet), sufism, and history. Their occupations were diverse, including some whom were writers, poets, teachers, muftis, journalists, politicians and even statesmen. (Bulaç, 2004:53-57) These were all thinkers whom we can put into the category of the modern Ulema. Many of them were parts of higher Ottoman intellectual elite.

According to Kara, Islamist intellectuals shared some common features. Keeping in mind the assumption that 'the West progressed and the Islamic world regressed', they all favored a relative Westernization regardless where they lived. They believed in the necessity of intellectual acculturation through adopting an eclectic method. For this end, they tended to separate between the good and evil sides of western culture. Paradoxical to the aforementioned assumption, they produced a defensive discourse. Many of those modern Ulema tried to respond to the Orientalist discourse that argued the Islamic world was stagnant and it had lost its historical dynamism. (Kara, 2004: 24)

There were basically three issues they dealt with. According to them, firstly, the Islamic world was in a state of fundamental regression in various aspects, and there was an underlying moral and intellectual ground for this. Secondly, the reason of regression was not Islam itself, but tradition, existing institutions, and external influences. Lastly, Sultanik rules were one of the reasons of this regression. (Bulaç, 2004:59)

It is accepted by many authors that Islamicism is a product of the modern conditions. Discussion of the questions of 'to what degree Islamist discourse belonged to the modern world, and to what degree it was apart from it' needs a high level of intellectual rigging. Paradoxically, although the discourse of Islamist intellectuals did not reproduce Western ideas, their frame of reference was deeply rooted in the basic assumptions of modernity while they tried to respond to Western challenge. The modern Ulema had already lost their belief in self-sufficiency of classical scientific tradition for renewal and resurgence of Islamic society. Therefore, they attached themselves very much to the idea of progress which was the product of the theory of evolution. This attachment detached them from the traditional outlook. (Kara, 2004:17-18) Hence, Islamism emerged in the axis of Westernization.

Islamists in their writings were rejecting the arguments against Islam. They were claiming that Islam as a revelation is not the reason of decline. Similarly, suppres-

sion of Muslims could not result from true Islam. They challenged their adversaries by reversing their arguments, arguing that Islam was the religion of reason, logic and science. But whether they were accepted or rejected, their arguments were shaped on the lines of Western ideas. This was the context of their relation with Western ideas. (Kara, 2004: 36) It is argued that their relation with "modern" ideas has brought into being a phenomenon that does not only belong to Islamic Civilization. Besides the question of whether everything should be reproduced according to its elder predecessor or not, some scholarly critiques drew pejorative ends for these approaches. For instance, the sharpest criticism directed towards the approach of Islamist intellectuals was to the idea of progress. The one dimensional idea of progress, which today lost its 'theoretical' ground among academics, seems to have been inherited by Islamist thinkers without necessary criticism and doubts.

Shortly, there are outstanding differences between historical Ulema and Islamist intellectuals in terms of communicating with the authority and understanding the West. The evident similarity between them is that both the traditional Ulema and modern Ulema accepted the State as the main agent. This state-centric thought led them to struggle for capturing the state offices in order to ensure the survival of the State and society. Indeed, the traditional Ulema had very close connections with the State and its affairs for centuries. Hence, when the State had to deal with a crisis, the remedies of the traditional Ulema were to assist the technical reforms seeking the stability of the empire. And they sometimes perceived the West as the right address of the technical reforms, while sometimes blindly rejecting any kind of innovation.²

When compared to the traditional Ulema, the modern Ulema enjoyed relative independence when dealing with State affairs. This independence enabled them to criticize the status of Sultan and also enabled them to be able to think about Westernization in a broader perspective, not just focusing on technical acculturation. Similarly, while the traditional Ulema were devoted to sections of the classical '*ilm*' tradition, Islamist Intellectuals found themselves confronted with modern ideas, sometimes reacting and responding to them, and sometimes adopting them.

² Here, we should distinguish Ahmet Cevdet Pasha from the other Ulema as a particular example.

The modern Ulema, like their traditional predecessors, were very much into the state affairs too. They supported the enactments of ‘*Kânûn-u Esâsî*’ and establishment of the National Assembly. Islamists were mostly writing for two journals: *Sırat al-Mustaqim* and *Sebil al-Reşad*. In these journals, they expressed their admiration and allegiance with the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). They were present in the National Assembly and members of political parties. For instance, Said Halim Pasha was the chairman of CUP. Mustafa Sabri became the Sheikh el-Islam and also member of CUP. Said Nursî was the founder of İttihâd-I Muhammedî Fırkası. Besides Musa Kazım, Elmalılı Hamdi, Mustafa Sabri, and Manastırlı İsmail Hakkı worked in the İlmiye section of CUP. (Kara, 2004:57)

Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır Efendi is one of the activists and intellectuals whom we can include in the category of the modern Ulema. One can easily grasp the depth of his intellect and his scope of knowledge in different areas of science while reading his articles and voluminous work of exegesis, *Hak Dini Kur’an Dili*. Focusing on his ideas will help us on better grasp some general characteristics of the discourse of Islamist intellectuals. The unique sides of his ideas will also be pointed out. Therefore, I shall focus on his intellectual ideas and political opinions after giving brief information about his life.

Hamdi Efendi’s Life: Education and Political Ideas

Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır Efendi was born in 1878 in Elmalılı, Antalya. His father was the *Başkatib* of *Elmalılı Şer’iyye Court*. His grandfathers Mehmed, Bekir, Hasan and Bedreddin belonged to the *ilmiyye* class. His mother Fatma Hanım was the daughter of Sarılarlı Mehmet Efendi. He received his primary education in Elmalılı. Besides his primary education he became a *hafız*. After that he went to the Istanbul with his uncle Mustafa Efendi. He received authorization from Kayserili Mahmut Hamdi Efendi. During his education, he also received an authorization of Ottoman calligraphy from Bakkal Arif Efendi and Sami Efendi who were the most prominent experts in the area. He began to study at Küçük Ayasofya Medresesi in 1895. (Yavuz, 1995:57; Kara, 2004:410-11)

Having completed his education at *medreses* in Antalya, Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır, in his own words, finished up with Islamic sciences. Henceforth, he took lessons in Islamic law (*Fiqh*) for fifteen years. Having comprehended the fundamental elements

of Western law, he attempted to make comparisons between Western and Islamic laws in terms of their moral and social aspects; and to this end, he learned French. While doing all this, a common knowledge of philosophy turned out to be a necessity for him and in turn he studied philosophy and *Kelam* for 3-4 years. Although he read French books, he expresses that the classification of English sciences were more convenient for his nature. (Hamdi Yazır, 1978:28) Indeed, logic constituted one of the significant parts of his scientific approach. Bearing the title of *Dar-ül Hılfa Medarisi* in the *Medrese of Süleymaniye*, he instructed on *Mantık-ı İstintacı ve İstikrai* by Alexander Bain and the books of Stuart Mill, all of which were translated by him. His intent was to compare the newly progressing ideas of logic and science with the logic and sciences of Islam. Carrying on his studies, he became convinced about the necessity of reading history of philosophy, whereon he translated Paul Janet's book; a book that he considered the most extensive and consistent, from French with the heading *Metalib ve Mezahip*. As he said, he translated this book for God's sake, for the progress of those scientists who did not know French. (Hamdi Yazır, 1978:29)

Although he is not well known by his artistic talents, he wrote poems in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. He learned music. But his success in calligraphy is far more outstanding when compared to those of other artistic interests. He had drawn tablets of calligraphy in the styles of *Sülüs*, *Nesih*, *Talik* and *Celî Sülüs*. It is accepted by some authorities that the dominant characteristics in the gestures and lines of his handwriting is the psychology of search. (Subaşı, 1993:319-29)

In active political life, he supported the constitutional movement (*meşrutiyet*). Instead of directly imitating the European style constitutional monarchy, he tried to set up a concept of constitutional monarchy based on the principles of *Shari'a*. For this reason he joined the *İlmiye* section of Commete of Union and Progress. He entered the first assembly of the second constitution as a representative of Antalya (Antioch). He actively resisted the rule of Abdülhamid II. Furthermore, Hamdi Efendi persuaded the Fetvâ Emni Nuri Efendi who was not willing to write the *fetva* which justified the abdication of Abdülhamid II, about the virtues of the second Constitution. Elmalılı Hamdi himself prepared the draft of this *fetva*. He also translated a chapter from Sheikh Veliyullah Dehlevi's work of *Hüccetullahil Baliğa* and published it with the title of *Siyaset-i Medine* (The Politics of City). This translation was meaningful at that time to accomplish an intellectual justification about the neces-

sity of constitutional rule in the political philosophy of Islam. In one of the paragraphs, an influential and decisive sentence was manifested as he put it: “among the society the ones who are distinguished by their intellect and talent should constitute an assembly; then, they should be obedient to a person who has majesty, and assistants around him.” (Hamdi Yazır, No: 6, 1326:16). He most clearly expressed his happiness because of the declaration of the Second Constitution in “Journal of Beyan-ül Hak” in 16 Ramadan 1326. He complained the Hamidian regime which had covered the thirty years of his life. He said that until this time, they had been crying, thus “*Ey ye’s-i elim-i millet, kaderi medid olan şeb-i yelda! Bize bak! Artık gerneştiğin yetişir. Artık açıl, açıl da sabah olsun. Mazi-i ümmete benzer bir gün görelim*” (Hamdi Yazır, No: 2, 1326:12)

After the victory of CUP, Elmalılı was given the post of Sheikh al-Islamlık Mektubi Kalemî. He educated students in fiqh at Mekteb-i Nüvvab and Mekteb-i Kudat; usul-ü fiqh at Medresetü-l Mütihazsiyîn; logic at Süleymaniye Medresesi; and lessons on the law of foundation. In the first and second governments of Damat Ferit Paşa he worked as the Minister of Mortmain Estates (Evkaf Nazır). After the declaration of Republic, he was sentenced to capital punishment because of his duties in Istanbul government. However, at the end of the judicial process, he was released because of his connection with CUP and resistance against the Hamidian regime. He returned to Istanbul and he confined himself to his home. By then, he had given himself to scholarly works. He wrote the nine volume exegesis of Qur’an in the meantime. His exegesis “Hak Dini Kur’an Dili” is accepted as one of the major works of exegesis produced in the 19th century. He was upset because of the Westernist policies of the republic, just as he was upset for being dishonored. (Yavuz, 1995:58)

Instead of accepting the direct copying of European institutions he tried to create an Islamic concept of constitutional regime. It seems that Elmalılı inherited this method from the predecessors of Tanzimat thinkers. (Yavuz, 1995:57) Young Turks put forth a number of political concepts which were going to determine the path of reform movements. In this way, a new-fangled terminology came on the scene. These new terms were generally the synonyms to their western forms and carried over by translation. (Karal, 1983:323) However, according to Mardin, Young Ottomans were trying rather to refer to the uncorrupted sources in the past, while bringing into play the terms produced by the intellectual heritage they took over such as *icma’*, *ümmet*, *itaat*, *meşveret*. In this context, Young Ottomans shared

the general characteristic approach of many modernist Islamic movements of the nineteenth century. (Mardin, 2003:96-97) No matter what their references were, Young Ottomans made use of these terms in areas that were in need of reform. As for Elmalılı, the fact that he regarded the assembly as a board of counseling might be understood with reference to the ideas he made use of. In this context, he could be seen as an intellectual continuation of Young Ottoman tradition. In addition, it can be argued, as an accepted interpretation, that his intent was to ensure the continuity of State and society via reforms.

Hamdi Efendi believed that leaders of the new term, which began since the declaration of the second Constitution, had important duties in many aspects of life including political responsibilities. He highlighted the importance of coming together for sharing the responsibilities in order to produce proper solutions. According to him these duties were sacred as long as they protect the values of humanity, the Islamic identity, the majesty of the Ottomans, and the happiness of life. Dealing with and defending the Islamic law and *Kanun-u Esasi*, that meant the derivation of Islamic Law, the Constitutional Monarchy, and an Islamic Caliphate. According to him, the problems faced by the State and society impose upon us sacred duties and a historical mission that every one of us must deal with in order to solve. (Hamdi Yazır, No: 2, 1326:13-14)

While Hamdi Efendi was writing academic and political articles in journals, the traditional social structures of Muslim societies were being attacked by many scholars and statesmen inside and outside. These people foresaw the salvation of the Ottoman Empire only through Westernization. For instance, Mustafa Reşit Pasha, who was appointed to the ambassadorships of Paris and London, believed that for the survival of the Ottoman Empire, it firstly had to be transplanted into Western Civilization, and secondly needed to adopt the European general law. (Karal, 1983:319) This is just the typical example of tens of similar offers suggested throughout "the longest century of the Empire"³. Westernists inside and orientalist outside were bitterly questioning the place of women in social life, the relations between State and religion in Islam; the veiling (*tesettür*)⁴ of women, the orders about

³ For the content of the frame please look at Ortaylı, 2005

⁴ *Tesettür* is the practice adopted by some Muslim women of covering their faces and wearing long, all-encompassing garments.

the status of male and female students in classes, etc. Islamist Intellectuals were trying to respond to these questions. But this was just a minor part of what they did in the process of Westernization. Their main concern was how to understand the West and how to reconstruct themselves from their ruins. In order to answer those questions they were generally presenting their ideas of varying scopes in journals such as *Beyan-ül Hak*, *Sırat-ı Müstakîm* and then *Sebilürreşad*. Elmalılı Hamdi was also one of the intellectuals who sent many articles to these journals. Musa Kazım, Said Halim Pasha, Elmalılı Hamdi, Mustafa Sabri Efendi and many other names were writing in these journals in order to respond to the attacks undertaken against Islamic ways of doing things. (Berkes, 2004:488)

Hamdi Efendi and His Intellectual Stance

The derivation of *Kanun-u Esasi* from Islamic Law brought about some questions to be answered. These questions were important to the Islamist intellectuals of the time. They included the following: “what would be the European reaction to the application of such a law?”, “will an Islamic Law protect the rights of non-Muslims or will it tend to infringe on their rights?”, and “will this law surpass the limits of traditional Islamic Law in order to solve the new circumstances we shall face in the course of time?”

Hamdi Efendi’s answers to the first couple of questions were political in nature, while his answer to the latter question gives some insight into his thinking about the West. The lengths of his answers to those questions differ. While he gave clear and short answers to the first and second questions in one or two sentences, his answer to the last question spans three or four pages, and that constitute the major part of the article. Indeed, in the time of Hamdi Efendi, many Intellectuals were concerned with the third question and its variations, which I shall deal with in the following pages.

The Political Attitude of Hamdi Efendi Regarding the Policies of the West towards the Ottoman Empire

Elmalılı Hamdi Efendi, in reply to the first question said that “what the Europeans expect from us is what we expect from ourselves”. In my opinion, Hamdi Efendi showed consideration and respect towards the French’s view of Ottoman Westernization like many other Intellectuals and Statesmen of the time. According to the

French, the only motivation behind Ottoman reforms was the enhancement of the welfare of all Ottoman subjects. According to Karal especially, Ottoman Statesmen were taking seriously this thesis due to its moderate approach to the Ottoman Empire. Young Ottomans absorbed this thesis, by purging it from external influences. (Karal, 1983:336) As an answer to the second question, he said “what is good for us that is good for them”. Here, he referred to the *zimmi* articles of the Kanun-u Esasi. In this way, he showed his all-embracing and internalizing attitude for all the Ottoman subjects.

Elmalılı Hamdi Efendi was a defender of the *Mecelle*. He polemically defended the *Mecelle* with Monsieur Mandelstam, the chief translator of the Russian Embassy in Istanbul. Mandelstam had advised the application of the French Civil Code in cases which Ottoman Commercial Law was silent on, as well as pointing out some deficiencies of the *Mecelle*. In reply to his arguments, Hamdi Efendi wrote a series of articles composed of nine chapters, published in short intervals.

First of all he began his article by congratulating Monsieur Mandelstam in an ironic manner. Mandelstam, as the representative of the State, which profoundly benefits from the capitulations, performed his duty in perfect manner. Mandelstam did not confine himself to his duty, but he went beyond it by giving advice to Ottoman Officials. Hamdi Efendi got angry at this point and did not tolerate the external intervention in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire. He interpreted Mandelstam's intention as an attempt to extend the scope of capitulations for the benefit of his country by offering changes in the *Mecelle*. He said, “If we apply what Mandelstam has advised to us about the judicial matters, in the course of ongoing relations we could become their direct colony”. (Hamdi Yazır, No: 48, 1328:31)

According to Hamdi Efendi, adopting the French Civil Code about the issues on which *Mecelle* has no comment paved the way for directly imitating it in any case. Hamdi Efendi's attitude is important in two respects; on the one hand, he assumed that there is an organic relation between the pieces and the whole of a civilization. On the other hand, he was quite conservative in political issues. Regarding the first argument, he believed that the direct adoption of Western law would not only cause the colonization of Ottoman state and society, but also would foster civilizational change and transformation. According to him, what we call “we” is composed of all of our assets such as laws, institutions, traditions, and beliefs. Adoption of fore-

ign laws first transforms the society and then transforms the “we”, which is in essence an abstract entity that surrounds all and makes possible the reproduction of society through accumulation and continuation. Hamdi Efendi believed that the needs of different societies are born out of themselves. Consequently, they should look for proper solutions to their internal dynamics. If “we” accept any foreign law without filtering with respect to our culture and civilization, he argues then, immediately conflicts begin between the practical and theoretical cases. (Hamdi Yazır, No: 48, 1328:33)

We can evaluate Hamdi Efendi’s idea of reforming laws with reference to their authentic sources in the context of the piece and whole relationship. However, it would be equally true to claim that behind his conservative attitude lay political considerations. There were both internal and external forces that tried to Westernize and colonize Ottoman Empire. For instance, the Russians had interests in protecting the Orthodox Christian subjects in the Ottoman Empire. When the Vienna Conference gathered to determine the terms between the Ottomans and the Russians after the Crimean War of 1855, the Ottomans rejected the Russian claims for a protectorate. In order to neutralize and overcome the Russian demands, English and French representatives urged the Turks to recognize equal political rights for both Muslims and Christians. As a result, *Islahat Fermanı* was announced. But, this concession yielded further concessions. Just three years after the Paris Treaty, when rebellions broke out at Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro, Crete, and Lebanon, Western States offered similar reforms with reference to autonomy and distribution of political authority. (Karal, 1983:332)

Opinions of Hamdi Efendi on the West

The intellectual opinions of Hamdi Efendi can be extracted from his answer to the third question concerning the relation of *Kanun-u Esasi* with Islamic Law. The question was “will this law go beyond or surpass the limits of traditional Islamic Law in order to solve the new circumstances that we shall face in the course of time?” His answer to this question is important in that it illustrates his trust in Islamic Civilization and its relation with Western Civilization.

First of all, he set the groundwork for his argument. To this purpose, he put forth one of the main characteristics of Islamic Law. “There are two categories of judgments in Islamic Law,” he writes. “While one category of judgments does not chan-

ge; the other category can change with the change of time and circumstances. The natural attraction of men towards women and the vice versa is an example of the first group of unchanging laws. These are what God has ordered in the nature of mankind. But, there is another category of rights that can change with time, space, and circumstances. However, there is a philosophy that determines the orbit of this change. This philosophy indicates the mechanics of reproducing and implementing judgments in new circumstances. This is a mechanism which can respond to the needs of the civilizations in the present and the future. Indeed, the legality of the various sects in Islamic Law shows this flexibility and ability of adaptation of Islamic Law to new circumstances and places." Additionally, he says, "if we built a society composed of professionals on all of the sources of Islamic Law, if we encourage non-Muslims to set up a delegation; and if we translate the Western law into Turkish in order to discuss it, then together we could have a chance to solve all of our problems" (Hamdi Yazır, No: 18, 1327:20-26). His trust in Islamic Law is very evident in his discourse: "if we found a problem that we could not solve in our laws at first glance, we should not directly copy Western Laws. We should rather appeal to the principle philosophy inherent in Islamic Laws" (Hamdi Yazır, No: 18, 1327:20-26). His approach shows how much trust he places in the paradigm of his civilization, while illustrating his awareness of Western Laws.

One of the most important topics of discussion among the intellectuals of the time was whether Western values are universal or not. This gained another dimension from the view of Hamdi Efendi. He accepted that Western Civilization has emerged as only one amongst thousands of possibilities in the course of human history. He does not view Western Civilization from the perspective of the discourse of "historical progress". According to him, Western Civilization and its values were not universal but local. Similarly, Westernization was not a unique way of salvation for both the Ottoman State and society. This line of argument runs counter to prevailing discussions in some intellectual circles of the time. He believed that Islam can produce more temperate responses to the challenges of modernity. Islam, he thought, with its universal scope, always conveys the answers to asked as well as unasked questions. Islamic Law can respond to the questions of modern civilization. Indeed, the assumption behind Elmalılı Hamdi's view was basically that Islamic Law is universal.

Elmalılı Hamdi Efendi had a comprehensive and comparative approach to the issues of law. He had a great degree of trust in Islamic Law. He compared Roman law

with that of Islamic Law in order to prove the superiority of Islamic Law. Trusting in this superiority, Hamdi Efendi argued for the applicability of Islamic Law to present situations. He said that until recent times there had been a strange case in the Roman law. This comparison turns out to be especially significant; when it is considered that the Roman law constitutes the basis of Western Law in most of the West. One article in Roman law related to human rights assumes that “the rights of humans are born and die with them”. According to Hamdi Efendi, such a proposition is a primitive interpretation of human rights as it ignores the rights and personality of a child yet in the womb. It makes abortion legal, he says, although it should be counted as illegal. In contrast, he argues, when we turn to Islamic law, we see that even the child in the womb has certain rights, such as the right to life. There is a three-stage distribution of rights to man from the very beginning of his life, including the phase in the womb. Hamdi Efendi explicates Islamic law in order to determine the rights of man. He says that there are three phases that a human passes through, and each stage contains certain rights. The first phase is the beginning of life in the womb of a mother; the second phase begins by having an independent body and physical appearance in the world; and the third phase begins with the onset of the age of reason (*akıl bâliğ*). Although the competences of rights differ from one phase to another, in fact a human is entitled to rights in every phase. Hamdi Efendi raises his call “Now we should act with Justice!” Thus he argues that this three-stage interpretation of human rights is more consistent in its logic and more ethical in its application. While Western Civilization has just recently updated this article, members of Islamic Civilization had been enjoying this privilege for centuries. Therefore, he holds that a glimpse into the past and a light effort for reinterpretation can bring about immense opportunities for future projects in Islamic Civilization. (Hamdi Yazır, No: 18, 1327: 26-29)

Therefore, Elmalılı Hamdi, in opposition to the claims of many of his contemporaries, believed that Western Civilization had not arrived at having universal values, which all other civilizations had to imitate. On the contrary, its only recent regulations had enabled it to come anywhere near the practices of Islamic Civilization. In short, Elmalılı disagreed with the dominant discourse, whether from Islamist Intellectuals or secular elites, that the West progressed and Islam regressed.

Civilization and the West

According to Hamdi Efendi, the main purpose of civilization is the spread of solidarity and sociability. For the realization of this purpose, social activities must be performed within limits allowed by rights. Since ancient times, those powerful enough had been able to protect their rights. The unique way to ensure justice within a society is therefore protecting the weak against the powerful and distributing rights equitably. Indeed, for Hamdi Efendi, the real purpose of civilization is the realization of justice and the elimination of disorder and quarrel.

Looking at Europe at the end of the 19th century, Hamdi Efendi claimed that the situation is quite opposite. In his view, at that time in Europe, might was right. The Civil Code served the powerful and contributed to the oppression of the weak. "Our understanding of justice with reference to our current laws is superior from that of the Western one" he argues. While European Laws are one dimensional and focus on interpersonal relations, Islamic Law has two dimensions: a contract must be exempt from corruption and dispute, and it should also be acceptable by both parties and agree with common sense (*medeniyet-i umumiyye*). According to Hamdi Efendi, the common sense here represents the moral aspect of laws. Morality is an objective frame of reference that makes it possible to differentiate between right and wrong, as well as just and unjust. (Hamdi Yazır, No: 49, 1328:38) If laws adjudicate social practices without having an objective frame of reference, like morality, injustices can be legalized and cause the confusion of concepts such as right and wrong. Consequently, right and wrong are determined according to the outcome of conflicts between the powerful and weak. Of course, those who are powerful overwhelm those who are weak.. In such a society, tyranny becomes dominant. Elmalılı Hamdi accepts such a society as a part of calamitous civilization (*musibet medeniyeti*). If the Civil Code attempts to prevent judicial and economic tyranny and monopoly, however other civilizations will appreciate it and its architects. (Hamdi Yazır, No: 48, 1328: 27)

According to Elmalılı Hamdi Efendi, every civilization and religion has its own historical course, which should not be confused with each other. In this context, Christianity has a different historical pattern than Islam. And their relations with the political authority are also different. Hamdi Efendi believes that remaining aloof from Christianity enabled the progress of Western governments. There are three reasons for this, he says, firstly Christianity does not have a unifying principle as *vahdet*, so

that it has always tended to diversification and ramification. Secondly, there are no decrees in the New Testament (*Ahd-i Cedid*), so that a Christian fiqh cannot be established based on the practices of Jesus. Although there are laws in the Old Testament (*Ahd-i Atik*). Christianity in essence focuses on spirituality and undermines worldly affairs. And thirdly, the clergy in Christianity does not share its authority with other people or institutions. This exclusive attitude causes the emergence of secular authorities as opposed to religious authorities. In this manner, the further the Western governments distance themselves from Christianity, the closer they get to human nature. The closer they get to human nature, the nearer they draw towards Islam. For Islam, he says, contains both a physical and a metaphysical dimension. It deals not only with the daily practices of Muslims or theological matters but also with political issues. For Elmalılı Efendi, Islam can not be used as a political tool of justification, for it is a supreme authority that checks the actions of government. (Hamdi Yazır, No: 21, 1327: 107-08)

Hamdi Efendi argues that Muslims should appreciate the Western sciences, which have offered new opportunities by their practicality. He expresses his belief that by the progress of sciences, the human capacity of perception increases. This progress in turn increases the quality and quantity of evidences regarding religious philosophy. That's why findings of other new civilizations, namely Western Civilization, are not in conflict with Islam. On the contrary, these sciences are expected to corroborate the authenticity of Islam, although it does not need such a support.

He denies however that the Western understanding of science is the only form of knowledge humanity can ever reach, or it being the product of a "perfect civilization". On the contrary, he argues that the Westerners' understanding of science draws humanity to the edge of abyss. Although the intellectuals of Western Civilization repeatedly underline the concepts like freedom, equality and justice, historical experiences illustrate that the powerful have always managed to protect their rights, and the weak have always been oppressed.⁵ Whereas, he says, Islamic laws have been reproduced in accordance with the needs of every era. That's why neither would the powerful have been able to oppress the weak, nor would the weak have caused social upheavals. (Hamdi Yazır, No: 48, 1328:71)

⁵ Although, we may suspect the accuracy of information and interpretation of what Hamdi Efendi said, we should concentrate only on what he says and how he perceives the West.

According to Elmalılı Efendi, by nature, the human being has endless wants and desires. However, his capability and life are limited. Consequently, an ontological paradox emerges. The only way out of this ontological paradox is to dedicate one's own self to a transcendent, sacred purpose.

For, the only source of the distress of humanity is the abandonment of sacred law and the acceptance of laws produced purely by human rationality. Similarly, accepting the temporal political realities like socialism and bolshevism as divine truth will draw the Westerners not only to blasphemy but also to social confusions and chaos. (Hamdi Yazır, No: 544-545, 1341:88)

Elmalılı Hamdi Efendi, like many of his contemporaries aimed to refute positivist and materialist ideologies. Indeed, it is a major point that Hamdi Efendi perceived the West as the source of secular and materialist ideologies. According to his view, those ideologies have dragged the modern epoch into an ontological crisis. Man's self deification has ironically drawn him to the maelstrom of incurability. The materialists claim that nature operates in accordance with its laws. Consequently, there is no place left for phenomena contrary to laws of nature, like miracles. The laws had never changed. In contrast for Hamdi Efendi, nature itself owes its existence to God. Therefore, God who created nature also has the will and power to change its mode of operation. Similarly, the belief of materialists that the theory of causality refutes the idea of existence of God is also problematic. The theory of causality, in contrast to this belief, leads to confession about the existence of God. This is because the continuous chain of causality has to come to an end. This point is the eternal existence of God. Otherwise, the theory of causality has to nullify itself. (Hamdi Yazır, No:622, 1343:176)

On the Authority of Sultan

As a general impression, the approaches of Islamists to the constitutional monarchy were very temperate. For instance al-Hac Ahmet Hamdi Efendi proposed the idea that since Shari'a is of primal importance, any arbitrary management should be checked and balanced by its rules. The constitutional monarchy is therefore more suitable for Islam. (Berkes, 2004:432) According to Berkes, the young generation of 'Ulema had thought the same. For instance, Mustafa Kazım, who became a Sheikh al-Islam afterwards, published an article in the journal of *Sırat al-*

Müstaqim with the title of “*Hürriyet ve Musavat*”. In this article, he argued that Islam has certain rules that regulate peoples’ lives in accordance with respect to both this world and the next. Furthermore, the rules of Shari’a are also binding for the political authority; and the State should be in the service of religion. (Berkes, 2004:433)

Hamdi Efendi was one of the most prominent supporters of the *Kanun-u Esasi*. According to Niyazi Berkes, the application of *Kanun-u Esasi* frustrated the process of Westernization, which continued for a century. It reversed the process that led towards the separation of state and religion. *Kanun-u Esasi* led to a unification of State and religion that was stronger than before. In this period, the currents of Westernism and nationalism lost their significance in face of Islamism. (Berkes, 2004:309) If we look at what Elmalılı Hamdi Efendi said about the relations between State and society, Berkes’ argument seems to be justified.

The idea that State and religion cannot be separated from each other was emphasized as a general policy of the influential Islamist Journal of *Sırat al- Müstaqim*. Two views about this issue were represented in this journal: in the first place, the Caliphate is not the same thing as the Papacy in Christianity. Secondly, based upon the first assumption, the Caliphate cannot be separated from the Sultanic Rule. (Berkes, 2004:434) According to Elmalılı Hamdi Efendi, the position of the Caliph in Islam is not the same as the position of the pope who only has a spiritual authority. The Qur’anic verse “There is no clergy in religion” indirectly illustrates the connection of religion and State. If there is need for an authority to direct the political matter and to supervise the implementation of Islamic Laws in the society, that authority must be the Imam or the Caliph of Islam. The Caliph does not have authority over the Muslims who live beyond the territories and under foreign rule, as he is the president of a constitutional government. However, Muslims who live under foreign rule can well sympathize and communicate with him in a bond of love. The Caliph can be overthrown by the society, if his actions infringe on the Islamic Law. Society has this right because the Caliph, unlike the Pope does not possess infallible authority. (Hamdi Yazır, No: 22, 1327:95)

Reception of the Ottoman Law cannot be confined to the reception of the natural law. Ottoman Law must also contain Islamic Law. Ottoman Government is limited by the Islamic Laws. Consequently despotic, autocratic and tyrannical rules can not be tolerated by Islamic Law. All the honor of reform belongs to this. (Hamdi Yazır, No: 20, 1327:103)

Hamdi Efendi developed practically efficient ideas on the co-existence of Grandvizir and Sheikh al-Islam on similar lines. He argued that the presence of Seyh-ül Islam in the assembly was unnecessary. For the assembly was made up of rational and reasonable persons; and Grandvizir acted as the representative of the Caliph. Since Sheikh al-Islam had no spiritual authority as in Christianity, his presence in the assembly became meaningless. What needed to be done was the merging of these two offices into one. (Hamdi Yazır, No: 22, 1327:97-98) By suggesting this, Hamdi Efendi tried to avert two things. He attempted to avert the secular approach, which encourages the separation between state and religion. He also tried to avert the possibility of internal political conflict, which could lead to disagreement amongst the holders of these two offices. In doing this, Hamdi Efendi based himself on the Qur'anic verse that "there is no clergy in Islam" and he stressed the unity of powers. The president of government was the same as the president of Islam, but, the use of power and authority had to be checked and balanced by an assembly that considered the Shari'a as the main reference.

In my opinion, Elmalılı Hamdi was striving to pre-empt a danger that Christian theology had faced for centuries, i.e. the separation of religion and state. Division between the spiritual and secular aspects of authority had been one of the outstanding sources of deviations in Christian theology. He attempted to overcome the dichotomy between state and religion found in the West. While the Lutheran venture led the concession of the right to determine the religion of the subjects to German princes⁶, modern experience had gone on to express the separation the state and religion from each other. Consequently, in the modern experience, the State had come to impose the particular understanding of religion that confined it to the conscience of individuals.

⁶ By the very famous phrase: "euis regio cuis religio"

Elmalılı Hamdi drew limits on Westernization. He was quite suspicious about the importation of every aspect of the Western Civilization to Islamic Civilization. If the dichotomy between state and religion was imitated as well, this would be a terrible mistake that could disrupt the political and civilizational unity of Ottoman state and society. For the Western practices had shown that conflict between state and religion could give rise to theological divergences in religion and political conflicts between sects. That's why Elmalılı Hamdi, who knew a lot about history, philosophy, and the laws of the West, strove to avert such a danger.

Conclusion

Since the late eighteenth century, Western domination over the countries of the Islamic world was becoming far more manifest and Muslim territories were beginning to be invaded by Christian, Western powers. Many scholars felt the necessity of responding to these defeats. Reforms would have been the cure. Indeed, it was not only actual Western power controlling the Muslim lands but also Western sciences changing Muslim minds. Dynamic events led to an important shift. When the historical continuity of Islamic civilization considered as a whole, this change was representing the shift from the traditional Ulema to the modern Ulema. A new type of intellectual began to born apart from the traditional men of sciences in both perceiving the tradition and understanding the other.

The modern Ulema were a group of people who believed in the progress of Western sciences and offered remedies for the survival of the State and society. Undoubtedly, they were the products of their particular milieu. Their endeavor coincided both with understanding the 'success' of Western sciences and producing counter-arguments to orientalists.

While they were a continuation of the same historical pattern. Their approaches to science and relations with the State were different. The perspective of the traditional Ulema towards reforms was conservative. Consequently, whenever the State had to deal with a crisis, the remedy of the 'Ulema consisted of assisting with the reforms in technical sense for ensuring the stability of the empire and repeating the

advice formulated as returning to 'the primordial laws' ("kânûn-u kâdîme dönme", "şer'-i şerîfe dönme"). In this connection, they had no reservations in perceiving the West as the locus of the reforms, as long as it provided sufficient materials. The modern Ulema were involved in state affairs more than the traditional Ulema, however, they were also far more independent from the burdens of authority. They generally remained aloof from the authority of Sultan and many of them rebelled against the rule of Abdülhamid II. This allowed them a relatively wider margin for criticizing the status of the Sultan, and the capacity for thinking about Westernization in a broader perspective. In my view, the modern Ulema suffered the paradoxes of modernity and could not escape from the handicaps of being a product of modernity. However, when compared to the traditional Ulema, the modern one was much more aware of the world around them, and they tried to understand the others. Furthermore, they attempted to benefit from the others. In other words, while the traditional Ulema could not insightfully grasp the West as a civilizational mental unit, Islamist discourse as a modern phenomenon was far more productive in dealing with modernity.

Elmalılı Hamdi Efendi was one of the highly knowledgeable modern Ulema. He received classical education. However, in the course of his career, he felt the necessity of learning Western sciences. He had the responsibility for his State and society as much as his contemporaries. He supported the constitutional movement against Hamidian regime. Like many of his contemporary colleagues he found the basis of constitutional monarchy in Islamic Law. For this reason, he actively participated in politics until he was disappointed. He thought that the salvation of Ottoman society could be possible only through the state apparatus. He gave a *fatwa* to people, asserting that Muslims could give their alms to the Ottoman Army (Hamdi Yazır, No: 88, 1328:127)

In his writings, there is a remarkable degree of confidence in Islamic Civilization. Hamdi Efendi saw Western Civilization as local, whereas he regarded the Islamic Civilization as universal. He disagreed with his contemporaries who believed that the Islamic world had fallen into stagnation. According to him, while science and technology progressed in terms of practical efficiency, the morality deteriorated in

the West. As far as morality was concerned, Islam was superior to the West, where moral deterioration gave rise to serious social and economic problems. Consequently,, Western materialistic science was drawing humanity into an ontological crisis. The only way for the world to get around this impasse was to understand Islam, the most suitable religion for human nature. It was the firm and sincere belief of Hamdi Yazır Efendi that understanding and implementing the opportunities and privileges Islam offered, would ensure the existence of a unified Ottoman state and society for the ages to come.

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