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A *Dergâh* for the Nation: Spiritual Identity and Cultural Continuity in Occupied Istanbul (1918–1923)

Millet İçin Bir Dergâh: İstanbul'un İşgali Yıllarında (1918–1923) Mânevî Kimlik ve Kültürel Süreklilik

Adile Sedef DÖNMEZ*

Abstract

This article examines how *Dergâh* Journal articulated a vision of spiritual nationalism, framing national identity as a continuity from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, grounded in cultural inheritance, artistic expression shaped by Ottoman-Sufi traditions, and a deep historical consciousness. Published during the Allied occupation of Istanbul between 1921 and 1923, *Dergâh* positioned itself outside the dominant nationalist paradigms of its time: on one side, militant resistance; on the other, rigid positivist modernization. Instead, it sought an alternative path to reimagine Turkish nationalism. The journal's contributors contended that the true foundation of a nation lies not only in political structures but in the ability to preserve and reinterpret its spiritual, cultural, and artistic heritage. Rejecting both passive Western imitation and reactionary nostalgia, *Dergâh* pursued a dynamic synthesis of past and present, asserting that literature, art, music, and language must evolve organically while remaining anchored in their cultural and spiritual roots. Drawing inspiration from Henri Bergson's (d. 1941) concepts of intuition (*intuition*) and duration (*durée*), the journal envisioned national identity as a living, ever-evolving force. Through its engagement with themes such as linguistic fragmentation, artistic mimicry, and the erosion of historical temporality, *Dergâh* sought to reclaim national consciousness by reviving a cultural and spiritual sensibility deeply rooted in Ottoman-Sufi traditions, envisioning art and thought as living continuities rather than borrowed imitations. This study situates *Dergâh* within the broader debates on nationalism and modernization, highlighting its distinctive attempt to reconcile spiritual depth and artistic vitality with the challenges of shaping modern Turkish identity.

* **ORCID:** 0009-0003-1961-0976. PhD Candidate, Koç University Department of History,
E-mail: addonmez20@ku.edu.tr

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Özet

Bu makale, *Dergâh Mecmuası*'nın (1921-1923) milli kimliği kültürel süreklilik, köklerine bağlı sanatsal ifade ve tarih bilinci üzerinden kavrayan mânevî milliyetçilik anlayışını nasıl şekillendirdiğini ele almaktadır. İstanbul'un müttefik güçler tarafından işgal altında olduğu 1921-1923 yılları arasında yayımlanan *Dergâh*, dönemin hâkim anlatılarından—militan direnişe yaslanan bir milliyetçilik ya da katı bir pozitivist modernleşme anlayışı—farklı bir çizgide durarak Türk milliyetçiliğini yeniden düşünmenin yollarını aramaktadır. Dergiye katkıda bulunan dönemin en yetkin entelektüelleri bu bağlamda, bir milleti ayakta tutan bağlayıcı öğelerin yalnızca siyâsî kurumlar değil, aynı zamanda onun mânevî, kültürel ve sanatsal mirasını koruma ve yeniden yorumlama kabiliyeti olduğunu öne sürer. Batı karşısında edilgen bir taklitçiliği de, geçmişe sıkışıp kalan tepkisel bir nostaljiyi de eleştiren *Dergâh*, geçmiş ile bugünü dinamik bir senteze oturtarak edebiyatın, sanatın, müziğin ve dilin organik bir şekilde gelişmesi gerektiğini, fakat bunun kendi mânevî ve kültürel kökleriyle bağını koparmadan yapılmasının elzem olduğunu vurgular. Henri Bergson'un (ö. 1941) sezgi (*intuition*) ve süre (*durée*) kavramlarından esinlenen dergi yazarları, milli kimliği durağan bir miras olarak değil, yaşayan ve değişen bir varlık olarak ele alır. Dilin parçalanması, sanatın taklitçiliğe saplanması ve tarihsel zaman duygusunun kaybı gibi meseleleri tartışarak, estetik ve entelektüel incelik yoluyla milli bilinci yeniden inşa etmeye çalışır. Bu çalışma, *Dergâh*'ı milliyetçilik ekseninde süregelen daha geniş tartışmalar bağlamına yerleştirerek, mânevî derinliği modern Türk kimliği inşa sürecinin zorluklarıyla uzlaştırma çabasını incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mânevî milliyetçilik, kültürel süreklilik, sanatsal ifade, tarihsel farkındalık, Henri Bergson, *Dergâh Mecmuası*

Introduction

Dergâh is one of the most celebrated periodicals in Turkey's national literary history.[1] Published biweekly between April 10, 1921, and January 5, 1923, for a total of 42 issues, it emerged as a crucial intellectual and cultural platform during the final years of the Ottoman Empire.[2] Its significance is amplified by the context of its publication—amidst the turmoil of the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923) and under Allied occupation (1918-1923) in Istanbul.[3] While occupying forces sought to suppress nationalist sentiment through an extensive censorship apparatus, *Dergâh* subtly but persistently signaled its support for the independence movement.[4] However, its nationalism was not

1 Abdullah Uçman, "Dergâh," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1994, IX: 172-174.

2 Ekrem Karadişoğulları, "Dergâh Mecmuası'nın Türk Edebiyatı ile Milli Mücadeledeki Yeri," *A.Ü. Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi* 11, 27 (2005): 219-226.

3 The Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923) was a nationalist struggle led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (d. 1938) against the occupying Allied forces following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I. It resulted in the abolition of the Ottoman Sultanate, the expulsion of foreign powers, and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, marking a decisive break from imperial rule and the beginning of a new national sovereignty. See Edward J. Erickson, *The Turkish War of Independence: A Military History, 1919-1923* (Santa Barbara: Bloomsbury Publication, 2021), 1-54. For more information on the Occupation of Istanbul please see, Daniel-Joseph MacArthur-Seal and Gizem Tongo, "Representing Occupied Istanbul: Documents, Objects and Memory," *YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies*, 4 (2022): 91-98.

4 "Sunuş," *Dergâh: Giriş-Çeviriyazı-Dizin Vol. I,* eds. Arslan Tekin and Ahmet Zeki İzgöer (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014).

a mere reactionary response to occupation; rather, it was a carefully crafted intellectual project that intertwined cultural revivalism, spiritual depth, and literary innovation.

This paper argues that the contributors of *Dergâh* articulated a threefold nationalistic discourse. First, the primacy of tradition and cultural heritage as the foundation of national identity. Second, a conscious reclamation of Turkish history, customs, and language as defining elements of collective consciousness. Third, the pursuit of nationalizing literature and the arts as a means of fostering an independent intellectual sphere. Through close readings and content analysis of selected *Dergâh* articles, this study examines how these three interwoven dimensions shaped the Journal's vision of Turkish nationalism. Rather than being framed as a rigid ideological construct, *Dergâh*'s nationalism was fluid, adaptive, and intellectually engaged with contemporary debates, including the tension between positivism and religious traditions.

The Journal's very title, *Dergâh*, derived from Persian, carries profound symbolic resonance, drawing directly from the Sufi tradition (*tasavvuf*) in which the *dergâh* (Sufi lodge) functioned as a sacred space for spiritual guidance, intellectual exchange, and cultural creativity. More than a place of worship, the Sufi lodge was a vibrant community of learning where seekers (*dervishes*) cultivated their moral and aesthetic sensibilities, contributing to literary, philosophical, and artistic life alongside their spiritual practice.[5] Through this semantic choice, the Journal positioned itself as a religious sanctuary, much like its Sufi counterpart, fostering a form of spiritual nationalism that intertwined historical consciousness with mystical, aesthetic, and cultural renewal.[6] Furthermore, it reflected an attempt to reclaim and revitalize the spiritual and cultural ethos of the Eastern world, which its contributors saw as imperiled by the encroachment of materialist and positivist modernity.[7]

Among *Dergâh*'s key contributors were prominent literary and intellectual figures, including Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (d. 1958), Ahmed Hâşim (d. 1933), Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (d. 1974), and İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu (d. 1978), among others.[8] These writers were part of a new generation of intellectuals—many of whom were affiliated with Dârülfünûn's Faculty of Letters—who sought to redefine Turkish cultural identity by integrating historical consciousness, aesthetic refinement, and spiritual sensibility.[9] While some contributors, such as Yahya Kemal, drew upon classical Ottoman and Islamic traditions to construct a vision of cultural continuity, others, like Ahmed Hâşim, approached national identity through a more symbolist and impressionist lens, emphasizing intuition and aesthetic experience.[10] İsmail Hakkı

5 Mustafa Kara, "Tekke," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi,* XL, 2011: 368-370.

6 For an examination of how *Dergâh*'s contributors invoked "spiritualism" as a source of inner strength in the face of Western dominance and the pressures of modernization, see Şeyma Afacan, "Searching for the Soul in Shades of Grey: Modern Psychology's Spiritual Past in the Late Ottoman Empire," *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 32 (2021): 13-14.

7 Uçman, "Dergâh", 172-174; Abdullah Uçman, "Dergiler Arasında: Dergâh, Hayat, Ma'lûmât ve Bilgi Mecmuaları," *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, 4 (2016): 519-532.

8 Cemal Melik Dıvarcı, "Müstear İsimleri ve Önde Gelen Yazarları ile Dergâh (1921-1923) Mecmuası," *Folklor Akademi Dergisi* 7, 1 (2024): 340-350.

9 For more information on how *Darülfünûn* functioned as an important educational arena for the transmission of Bergon's ideas, see Nazım İrem, "Undercurrent of European Modernity and the Foundations of Modern Turkish Conservatism: Bergsonism in Retrospect," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, 4 (2004): 79-112.

10 See Gökberk Yücel, "The Reflection of Romanticism in Dergâh Journal: Yahya Kemal's Discussions (1921-1923)," *Milliyetçilik Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4, 2 (2022): 71-107; Yordanka Bibina, "Ahmed Hâşim and Symbolism," *Etudes Balkaniques*, 2 (1994): 59-72.

Baltacıoğlu, a reformist thinker and pedagogue, brought a more explicit engagement with cultural philosophy, arguing that Turkish national identity had to be grounded in both an appreciation of its past and an openness to intellectual evolution.[11] What united these figures was their rejection of the rigid rationalism and materialist determinism associated with the dominant sociological paradigm of the time.

The intellectual climate in which *Dergâh* operated was marked by a significant philosophical schism: on one side stood the Durkheimian positivists, led by Ziya Gökalp (d. 1924), who sought to construct a national identity through sociological principles, emphasizing the role of collective consciousness, scientific progress, and institutional modernization.[12] On the other side, a growing number of Turkish intellectuals—many associated with *Dergâh*—were drawn to the ideas of Henri Bergson (d. 1941), whose philosophy of intuitionism, creative evolution, and metaphysical realism offered an alternative framework for understanding national and cultural identity.[13] Unlike the rigid, secularist nationalism advanced by Ziya Gökalp's (d. 1924) Durkheimian sociology, *Dergâh*'s intellectuals were deeply influenced by the Bergsonian perspective and sought to construct a national identity that was deeply infused with mysticism, metaphysical realism, and cultural romanticism.

Bergson's philosophy, which had gained traction among European intellectuals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, presented a direct challenge to the deterministic models of positivist sociology.[14] Central to his thought was the concept of *élan vital*—a dynamic life force that defied mechanistic explanations of human existence.[15] For Bergson, intuition (*intélligence intuitive*) was a more authentic means of grasping reality than analytical reason, as it allowed for a deeper, more organic connection to time, memory, and consciousness. These ideas resonated deeply with Turkish intellectuals who sought to articulate a national consciousness that was not confined to rigid structuralist frameworks but was instead rooted in the fluid, evolving continuity of cultural and spiritual traditions.[16]

In the context of early 20th-century Turkey, Bergson's ideas became particularly appealing as a response to the prevailing scientism and secular modernization efforts that sought to sever ties with the Ottoman past.[17] The *Dergâh* intellectuals approached Turkish cultural identity as something that could not be reduced to a set of sociological categories or institutional reforms; rather, it was an organic, lived experience shaped by historical memory, aesthetic sensibility, and spiritual depth. This Bergsonian influence allowed *Dergâh* to position itself as a counterpoint to

11 İsmail Güllü, "Durkheimci bir Sosyolog: İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu'nın Din ve Toplum Görüşleri," *Ekev Akademi Dergisi* 9, 62 (2015): 205-228.

12 M. Sair Özervarlı, "Reading Durkheim Through Ottoman Lenses: Interpretations of Customary Law, Religion and Society by the School of Gökalp," *Modern Intellectual History*, 14 (2017): 393-419; for critics against Gökalp and Durkheim in *Dergâh* see Efe Arık, "Ambiguous Plays of Light (Ziya): The Critics against Ziya Gokalp and Durkheim's Sociology throughout the National Struggle in Turkey and the Journal of Dergâh," *Turkish Journal of Sociology* 3, 28 (2014): 139-170.

13 Efe Arık, "Türk Milliyetçiliğinde Spiritüalist Yaklaşım: Dergâh Dergisi (1921-1923)," (PhD Thesis, Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi, 2011), 7.

14 Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 1-13.

15 Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison, (New York: Dover Publications, 2010), 88.

16 Mustafa Aslan, "Competing Intellectual Currents within Modern Turkish Conservatism: The Bergsonian Connection," *DİYÂR* 2, 2 (2021): 232-253.

17 Nazım İrem, "Bergson and Politics: Ottoman-Turkish Encounters with Innovation," *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* 16, 7 (2011): 873-882.

both the radical secularism of the emerging Republican ideology and the dogmatic traditionalism of religious orthodoxy. Instead of advocating for a wholesale rejection of the past or a blind embrace of modernity, the Journal's contributors sought to construct a nationalism that was rooted in cultural continuity, spiritual renewal, and creative evolution.

1. Occupation and Resistance: The Historical Context of *Dergâh*

The publication of *Dergâh* coincided with one of the most turbulent periods in Ottoman history. While the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923) was ongoing on multiple fronts across Anatolia, the Caucasus, and the Aegean; Istanbul, the imperial capital, remained under Allied occupation. The occupation transformed the city into a contested space of foreign domination, political fragmentation, and intellectual resistance.[18] These years were not only pivotal for the military struggle to establish a new Turkish state but also critical for the ideological and cultural articulation of Turkish nationalism. In Istanbul, the position of the Sultan remained ambiguous, as the imperial administration, aligned with the Allied forces, condemned Mustafa Kemal Pasha (d. 1938) and the nationalist movement in Anatolia as adversaries of Islam.[19] Following the full-scale occupation of Istanbul in March 1920, the Ottoman parliament was effectively incapacitated, operating under heavy Allied restrictions. In response, Mustafa Kemal convened the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara, which soon emerged as the sole legitimate governing authority in the country.

The Ottoman Empire's sovereignty was increasingly dismantled under the terms of the Mudros Armistice (1918).[20] As the war drew to a close, Allied forces swiftly moved into Istanbul, marking the beginning of a prolonged occupation that would deepen societal rifts and redefine political allegiances. The first phase of the occupation, initiated in 1918, saw British, French, Italian, and Greek forces strategically securing key military and administrative points while allowing the Ottoman government to function under surveillance. However, by 1920, the occupation escalated into a full-fledged takeover of the imperial administration, marking the effective dissolution of Ottoman authority in its own capital.[21] The arrival of Allied forces was a spectacle of military dominance, signaling the empire's submission to Western imperial powers.[22] Within weeks of the Mudros Armistice, a formidable flotilla of 55 warships sailed through the Bosporus, anchoring in full view of the city's residents.[23] This overwhelming show of force was followed by a systematic division of Istanbul into occupation zones: the Italians took control of Üsküdar, the French occupied the Old City and western suburbs, while the British secured Pera, Galata, and

18 Erickson, *The Turkish War of Independence*, 1-58; For a detailed bibliographical information on the period, Daniel-Joseph Macarthur-Seal and Gizem Tongo, *A Bibliography of Armistice-Era Istanbul, 1918-1923* (London: British Institute at Ankara, 2022).

19 Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), 50; Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 86-128.

20 David Fromkin, *The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2009), 371-373.

21 Hakan Özoğlu, "Living Conditions of Ottoman Istanbul under Occupation at the End of World War I", *Osmanlı İstanbul'u III*, eds. Feridun Emecen and Ali Akıldız (İstanbul: 29 Mayıs Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015), 365.

22 Bilge Criss, *Istanbul Under Allied Occupation: 1918-1923* (Leiden: BRILL, 1999), 2.

23 Ryan Gingeras, *Fall of the Sultanate: The Great War and the End of the Ottoman Empire 1908-1922 (The Greater War)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 249.

Şişli.[24] The once-unified imperial capital was now a fractured city, its streets patrolled by foreign soldiers enforcing the new order.

The occupation was not a passive military presence—it was a force of suppression that sought to dismantle nationalist resistance and curb political dissent. The Allied administration closely monitored press activity, imposed censorship, and orchestrated arrests of intellectuals and political figures who were suspected of supporting the nationalist movement in Anatolia. The occupation reached its most repressive phase in 1920 when Allied forces stormed the Ottoman parliament, arresting and exiling deputies, while some fled to Ankara to join Mustafa Kemal Pasha's resistance. The Ministry of War was seized and placed under British command, with General Shuttleworth assuming direct control. For the city's intellectuals, writers, and university circles, the occupation was both a direct threat and an ideological battleground. The fear of surveillance, imprisonment, or exile loomed over the literati of Istanbul, many of whom were affiliated with *Darülfünûn* (later Istanbul University). In his memoirs, İsmail Hakkı Sunata (d. 1988), a faculty member at *Darülfünûn*, captured the escalating violence and repression that intellectuals faced:

> March 17, 1920. The British searches continue. The occupation of the Ministry of War is ongoing. Two squads of British soldiers patrol the streets from Beyazıt Square to Saraçhanebaşı. The ophthalmologist Esat Bey was killed for resisting the British. Mrs. Halide (Adıvar) has been arrested. They have detained all members of the National Education and Training Society. Hamdullah Suphi (Tanrıöver), Çürüksulu Mahmut Pasha, Müşir İzzet Pasha— all arrested. The number of those imprisoned is estimated between 1,500 and 4,000.[25]

The occupation thus transformed Istanbul into a city of paradoxes—on the one hand, a hub of foreign rule and suppression, and on the other, a space of intellectual defiance and cultural negotiation. It was within this volatile environment that *Dergâh* emerged, offering an alternative intellectual refuge where nationalism, tradition, and mysticism converged as a form of resistance against both colonial control and the erasure of Ottoman cultural heritage. The occupation profoundly disrupted the lives of Istanbul's inhabitants, deepening social divisions and sparking intense debates within intellectual circles. While many viewed the presence of the Allied forces as an unwelcome assertion of foreign control, some segments of the local and foreign Christian communities, particularly those who had historical grievances against Ottoman rule, initially welcomed the Entente powers. In certain districts with higher non-Muslim populations, Allied flags—especially those of Greece—were prominently displayed as symbols of shifting power dynamics.[26] Between 1918 and 1923, as Britain and its allies consolidated their hold over the city, they reinstated their consular courts and introduced new legal mechanisms, including mixed tribunals and court-martial.[27] These institutions were designed both to protect expatriate civilians and Allied soldiers and to suppress individuals or groups deemed a threat to the occupation regime.[28]

One of the most profound transformations reflected in *Dergâh* was the shift in Istanbul's

24 Pınar Şenışık, "The Allied Occupation of Istanbul and the Construction of Turkish National Identity in the Early Twentieth Century", *Nationalities Papers* 46, 3 (2018): 501-513.

25 İsmail Hakkı Sunata, *İstanbul'da İşgal Yılları* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2006), 79.

26 Daniel-Joseph MacArthur-Seal, "Resurrecting Legal Extraterritoriality in Occupied Istanbul 1918-1923," *Middle Eastern Studies* 54, 5 (2018): 796-787.

27 Ibid. 769.

28 Ibid.

socio-cultural landscape under the Allied occupation. The city's demographic and cultural composition evolved dramatically as prolonged interaction with European imperial forces introduced new moral and social values. The physical presence of Allied soldiers—stationed in military barracks and encampments—reshaped urban life, leading to the militarization of public spaces where civilian and military domains increasingly overlapped.[29] According to Pınar Şenışık, Allied control altered patterns of time and space usage, influencing daily routines, leisure activities, and the city's nocturnal life. Istanbulites found themselves in a state of cultural 'in-betweenness,' oscillating between tradition and modernity, East and West, past and present.[30]

During the Allied occupation of Istanbul (1918–1923), the presence of foreign forces was most visible within the historic walls of the city (*suriçi*/*intra muros*), particularly around key sites like Topkapı Palace, which held immense military, political, and cultural significance. The visibility of Allied troops and their activities in intramural Istanbul, especially in prominent areas such as Sultanahmet, Sirkeci, and Beyazıt, reinforced the sense of foreign dominance in the heart of the imperial capital, leading to heightened anxieties about cultural displacement and sovereignty among both Ottoman authorities in Istanbul and the nationalist movement in Ankara.[31] As students and faculty members of *Darülfünûn* (Istanbul University), *Dergâh*'s intellectuals primarily lived and worked in the historical core of the city, where the Allied presence was highly visible and deeply felt. Unlike certain factions within Ottoman society that accepted or even welcomed foreign intervention, *Dergâh*'s contributors rejected both the occupation and any proposed form of mandate rule. The experience of living under foreign control instilled in them a profound sense of displacement, which manifested as a longing for a lost past—one that they sought to reclaim through cultural and literary nationalism.[32] This nostalgia, however, was not merely sentimental; it became a powerful intellectual force, shaping their vision of Turkish identity through an emphasis on tradition, history, and spiritual heritage.

Beyond these socio-cultural shifts, the occupation also fostered an intense period of political expression through print media.[33] The upheaval and the deep divisions within society created fertile ground for the proliferation of periodicals, particularly newspapers and literary journals. Censorship, negotiations with local authorities, and struggles against military restrictions shaped the press landscape, leading to the emergence of both pro- and anti-resistance publications. Between 1919 and 1923, an estimated 746 periodicals were published in Istanbul, 539 in Turkish, and 225 in other languages, reflecting the city's contested and vocal nature during this period.[34]

29 Daniel-Joseph MacArthur Seal, "Intoxication and Imperialism: Nightlife in Occupied Istanbul, 1918-1923," *Conparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, (2017): 299-313.

30 Şenışık, "The Allied Occupation of Istanbul and the Construction of Turkish National Identity," 506.

31 Nilay Özlü, "Under the Shadow of Occupation: Cultural, Archaeological, and Military Activities at Topkapı Palace During the Armistice Period, 1918–1923," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 71 (2024): 83–113.

32 Özen Nergis Dolcerocca, *Comparative Modernism and Poetics of Time: Bergson, Tanpınar, Benjamin, and Walser* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 93-94.

33 Aysun Akan and Uygur Kocabaşoğlu, *Mütarake ile Milli Mücadele Basını: Direniş ile Teslimiyetin Sözcüleri ve "Mahşer"in 100 Atlısı (*İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2019), 131.

34 Ibid.

2. Fragmented Loyalties: Intellectual Debates in Occupied Istanbul

The occupation of Istanbul (1918–1923) has a pivotal, yet often underexamined, place in the intellectual and cultural history of modern Turkey.[35] Rather than serving merely as a transitional moment between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic, this period crystallized many of the ideological tensions that would shape the Turkish nation-state. As Erdağ Göknar observes, Istanbul under occupation became "the unstable nexus of European colonialism and national modernity," a city where conflicting imperial legacies and emergent nationalist visions collided.[36] Contrary to mainstream Turkish historiography, which tends to subsume this era under the categories of "Armistice Period" or "Emergence of Modern Turkey," the occupation years constituted the very crucible in which Turkishness was being socially and culturally constructed.[37] Şenışık similarly emphasizes that national identity during this time was not a post-war creation but an evolving response to the humiliations of foreign control and the complex socio-political realignments of the moment.[38]

For intellectuals in both Istanbul and Anatolia, the years of national independence were marked by confusion, disorientation, and a profound sense of crisis.[39] Orhan Koloğlu refers to this period as the "years of depression" for Ottoman intellectuals, capturing their existential dilemma in the face of imperial disintegration and foreign occupation.[40] Two distinct factions had clearly crystallized: first were those who supported military resistance and aligned with the Kemalist nationalist movement.[41] The second consisted of lobbyists who believed that Turkey's best path forward was through an American or British mandate, arguing that foreign guidance could ensure stability and modernization.[42] In this fragmented milieu, print culture flourished as an important medium for intellectuals to put forward their ideological stances: newspapers and periodicals proliferated, some fervently supporting the nationalist cause, while others—pejoratively labeled as "mütareke journalism"—sided with the occupiers or advocated for cautious diplomacy. Yet, the intellectual scene was far from binary.[43] Debates were multifaceted, branching into complex discussions over modernization, Westernization, nationalism, Ottomanism, Bolshevism, Anatolianism (*Anadoluculuk*), monarchism, and even proposals for foreign mandates.[44] Intellectual life was as fragmented as the political arena, which saw tensions between the Ankara and Istanbul governments, wars against Greece and Armenia, and the ever-looming shadow of the Allied occupation.

35 Erdağ Göknar, "Reading Occupied Istanbul: Turkish Subject Formation from Historical Trauma to Literary Trope", *Culture, Theory and* Critique 55, 3 (2014): 321-341.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Şenışık, "The Allied Occupation of Istanbul and the Construction of Turkish National Identity", 506.

39 Bilge Criss, *Istanbul Under Allied Occupation: 1918-1923* (Leiden: BRILL, 1999), 51.

40 Orhan Koloğlu, *Aydınlarımızın Bunalım Yılı-1918* (İstanbul: Boyut Yayın Grubu, 2000), 2.

41 Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (d. 1974) invented the term Kemalism to represent the principles and ideals of the new republic's economic, social, political, and cultural transformations on June 28, 1929. Kemalism broadly implied the six arrows: Republicanism, Populism, Nationalism, Secularism, Statism and Reformism. For more information, see Nazım İrem, "Turkish Conservative Modernism: Birth of a Nationalist Quest for Cultural Renewal", *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 34 (2002): 87-112.

42 Criss, *Istanbul Under Allied Occupation*, 51.

43 For an extensive disccusion on press during the occupation of Istanbul, Erol A. F. Baykal, *The Ottoman Press (1908-1923)* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 222-227.

44 Mustafa Özdemir, "Mütareke Dönemindeki Siyasal Akımların Türk Basınına Yansımaları," *ÇTTAD* 7, 16 (2008): 203-226.

With the Allied occupation of Istanbul, these latent doubts crystallized into overt disillusionment: the same powers once admired as models of progress now stood revealed as agents of subjugation and cultural erosion. This rupture intensified a growing skepticism among intellectuals towards the West as a model and increasingly discussed progress as a selective and critical process grounded in one's own traditions and historical consciousness.[45] The Turkish novel, in particular, became a powerful medium for exploring these dilemmas. The literary landscape became a central participant in nation-building. Fiction served as a mirror to society, offering reflections on the tensions between East and West, modernity and tradition, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism.

In a sharp tone, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's (d. 1974) *Sodom ve Gomore* (1928) frames the occupation as a moral and spiritual crisis, portraying the decay of societal values under foreign domination.[46] These literary works did not merely depict the times—they participated in shaping the contours of national consciousness, dramatizing the cultural dislocation that many Turks experienced. Halide Edip Adıvar's (d. 1964) *Ateşten Gömlek* (1922) offers a powerful narrative of national awakening through the lens of personal sacrifice and collective struggle.[47] Set against the backdrop of Istanbul's occupation and the Anatolian resistance, the novel illustrates how the trauma of foreign domination galvanized a search for national dignity and moral renewal.[48] Complementing these portrayals, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's (d. 1962) *Sahnenin Dışındakiler* (1950) evokes the shifting social dynamics of the occupied city, depicting Istanbulites who, seduced by theaters and operas, increasingly felt alienated from their cultural roots.[49] Yet beneath this veneer of Westernized entertainment, Tanpınar reveals an undercurrent of resistance, a growing unease towards the occupiers, and a reassessment of the Istanbul government's legitimacy.

The intensifying debates on nationalism in occupied Istanbul were, in essence, the outcome of divergent positions and intellectual factions that had already emerged prominently within the vibrant intellectual climate following the Young Turk Revolution. In the wake of 1908, Ottoman intellectuals were preoccupied with a pressing and existential question: *How could the Ottoman state be sustained?*[50] This inquiry dominated the political and intellectual landscape of the late empire, giving rise to competing visions of modernization, governance, and collective identity. Erik Jan Zürcher identifies two central dilemmas that framed this debate: first, determining the appropriate path for

45 Alp Eren Topal and Einar Wigen, "Ottoman Conceptual History," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 14, 1 (2019): 93–114.

46 Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, *Sodom ve Gomore* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1966); Göknar, "Reading Occupied Istanbul", 323.

47 Even within the nationalist camp, ideological fractures ran deep. Halide Edip Adıvar (d. 1964) was one of the most passionate and influential supporters of the independence movement. Despite her fervent advocacy for Turkish sovereignty, she was also a vocal proponent of an American mandate, believing it to be a pragmatic solution for ensuring Turkey's survival. For a recent study on Halide Edip Adıvar's political stance and identity through the analysis of her novels, Erdağ Göknar, "Turkish-Islamic Feminism Confronts National Patriarchy: Halide Edib's Divided Self," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 9, 2 (2013): 32-57. Also see, Hacı Murat Arabacı, "The Activities of Halide Edip Adıvar During the Prepator Stage of The National Struggle and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk," *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 19 (2007): 271-294.

48 Halide Edip Adıvar, *Ateşten Gömlek* (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 2019).

49 Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Sahnenin Dışındakiler* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2024).

50 Erik Jan Zürcher, "Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists: Identity Politics 1908-1938," in *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey*, ed. Şevket Pamuk, (London: BRILL, 2000), 152.

modernization, and second, identifying the binding force that could unify the state in its moment of crisis. Yusuf Akçura, in his seminal *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Three Types of Policy) of 1904, had already outlined the contours of this ideological contestation, positing Ottomanism, Islamism, and Turkism as three alternative solutions to the empire's fragmentation.[51]

Ottomanism, the ideological pillar of the 1876 Constitution, championed a pluralist imperial order grounded in legal equality and parliamentary representation for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.[52] Islamism, by contrast, envisioned a pan-Islamic unity under the aegis of the sultan-caliph, rallying the empire's diverse Muslim communities around a shared religious identity. Turkism, the third current, increasingly gained ground in the late Ottoman period, particularly under the policies of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP).[53] While early iterations of Pan-Turkism aspired to unify Turkic peoples across the Ottoman and Russian empires, by the early twentieth century, as Zürcher observes, nationalist thought shifted inward, idealizing the Anatolian peasantry as the authentic repository of Turkish identity.[54]

Dergâh's contributors reflected this intellectual turn, reframing Turkishness through cultural and historical continuity rather than narrow ethnic or racial determinism.

This ideological realignment unfolded alongside a profound reimagining of space, community, and belonging. Behlül Özkan compellingly argues that the collapse of the Ottoman imperial system necessitated the reconstitution of collective identity around the concept of the *vatan*—the national homeland.[55] Replacing the transregional identity of the *ümmet*, the *vatan* was not merely a geographic entity but a symbolic and political space imbued with narratives of sacrifice, historical destiny, and communal belonging. Özkan's observation that "space, which seems homogenous, which seems to be completely objective in its pure form … is a social product"[56] captures the ideological work required to transform the Ottoman imperial landscape into a national homeland. For *Dergâh*, this spatial imagination manifested in an effort to anchor Turkish identity within the cultural and spiritual geographies of Istanbul and Anatolia, treating space itself as an active agent in the shaping of national consciousness.

Yet this intellectual reorientation was far from uniform or uncontested. Umut Uzer underscores the dynamic tension within Turkish nationalism, caught between an ethnic conception of nationhood and a cultural-religious identity deeply interwoven with Islam.[57] Rather than presenting these positions as mutually exclusive, Uzer highlights

51 Originally published in Cairo, 1904: Yusuf Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset*, (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1995).

52 Ottomanism, a vision conceptualized as an effort to unify the multiethnic and multireligious Ottoman Empire under a unifying identity. There is a vast amount of literature that discusses the significance of the Ottomanist ideology within late Ottoman historiography. See Alp Eren Topal, "Ottomanism in History and Historiography: Fortunes of a Concept," in *Narrated Empires: Perceptions of Late Habsburg and Ottoman Multinationalism,* ed. by Johanna Chovanec and Olof Heilo (London: Palgrave, 2021), 77-98; Stefano Taglia, "Ottomanism Then and Now: Historical and Contemporary Meanings: An Introduction," *Die Welt des Islams*, 56 (2016): 279-289.

53 Sina Akşin, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi* (İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), 243.

54 Zürcher, "Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists," 154.

55 Behlül Özkan, *From the Abode of Islam to the Turkish Vatan: The Making of a National Homeland in Turkey* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 13-56.

56 Ibid. 8.

57 Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2016), 17.

how intellectuals navigated between Ottoman pluralism and the homogenizing demands of nation-building. *Dergâh*'s writings exemplify this negotiation: its contributors sought to harmonize the spiritual unity of Islam with a distinctively Turkish cultural ethos. Earlier, Hakan Kayalı also mapped these ideological currents, particularly the complex entanglements of Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism within the Young Turk era.[58] These debates provided the backdrop against which the contributors of *Dergâh* operated, grappling with the loss of imperial cosmopolitanism while attempting to craft a cultural nationalism that did not entirely sever ties with its Islamic and Ottoman past. By engaging with these tensions, *Dergâh* advanced a vision of nationalism that transcended rigid ethnic definitions, embracing instead a synthesis of spiritual heritage and cultural authenticity.

The subsequent defeats of the Ottoman Empire and the traumas of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) and World War I intensified the urgency of these nationalist debates. According to Peyami Safa (d. 1961), support for Turkish nationalism and the demand for independence surged in the wake of these catastrophes.[59] The CUP's increasing emphasis on Turkish identity, the prominence of Turkish language and history in print culture, and the galvanizing effect of the War of Independence (1919–1923) all coalesced to consolidate nationalist sentiment.[60] Vedat Gürbüz identifies the Balkan Wars as a critical inflection point, crystallizing nationalist consciousness and catalyzing a revival of intellectual engagement with Turkish identity.[61] It was within this context that foundational texts such as Akçura's *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* were republished in 1911, and Ziya Gökalp (d. 1924) emerged as the principal architect of Turkish nationalist ideology.

Gökalp's theoretical contributions were pivotal in defining the parameters of Turkish nationalism.[62] Rejecting racial and ethnic reductionism, he conceptualized the nation as a cultural and sociopolitical community unified by shared language, values, and historical consciousness.[63] Crucially, he distinguished national belonging from religious identity, arguing that the nation must be conceived independently of the Islamic *ümmet*. Gökalp's famous distinction between *hars* (culture) and *medeniyet* (civilization) further refined this vision. While culture formed the unique and authentic identity of the nation, civilization represented the universal achievements of humanity that Turkey could adopt selectively and pragmatically.[64] This synthesis of cultural nationalism and pragmatic modernism became a cornerstone of early Republican ideology.

Complementing this perspective, Uzer further emphasizes that Turkish nationalism emerged not in opposition to ethnicity *per se*, but as a response to the dual legacies of Ottomanism and Islam, culminating in a form of territorial nationalism that valorized *vatan* and *yurtseverlik* (patriotism).[65] Ahmet Ağaoğlu, writing in *Türk Yurdu* in 1912, poignantly captured

58 Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1-16.

59 Peyami Safa, *Türk İnkılabına Bakışlar* (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2016), 65.

60 Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, 17.

61 M. Vedat Gürbüz, "Genesis of Turkish Nationalism," *Belleten*, 67 (2003): 495-518.

62 Niyazi Berkes, "Ziya Gökalp: His Contribution to Turkish Nationalism," *Middle East Journal* 8 (1954): 375-390.

63 Ibid. 387.

64 Yücel Bulut, "A Thinker Stuck Between Social and Political: Ziya Gökalp and His Theory of Culture and Civilization," *İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Dergisi* 36, 2 (2016): 79-110.

65 Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, 23.

this synthesis: "Islam is not only a religion for the Turk; it is the ethnic and national religion."[66] As Nazım İrem has argued, the intellectuals of the Second Constitutional Period endeavored the Turkification of religion and language grounded in national ethics, integrating Islamic spiritual heritage into the framework of cultural nationalism.[67] Though reflective of only one strand within Turkish nationalist thought, this integration of cultural identity and spiritual heritage resonated strongly with *Dergâh*'s contributors. Throughout the journal's writings, we find an intellectual pursuit of nationalism that eschews both rigid ethnic essentialism and narrow religious orthodoxy, favoring instead a model grounded in cultural authenticity and historical continuity. In this way, *Dergâh* articulated a vision of Turkish identity that harmonized spiritual depth with cultural resilience, offering an alternative pathway amid the fractured ideological landscape of the early twentieth century.

The intellectual debates that had developed in the late Ottoman public sphere—over the fate of the empire, the role of Islam, the meanings of homeland, and the contours of cultural identity—had already shaped the deeper currents of nationalist thought that would intensify under the Allied occupation of Istanbul. Far from dissipating with the occupation, the intellectual turmoil of the Young Turk era crystallized under the weight of foreign domination and internal upheaval, finding renewed expression in literature, journalism, and political discourse. *Dergâh* emerged from the heart of this vibrant yet fractured landscape as its contributors struggled with the unresolved cultural and philosophical dilemmas left in the wake of imperial disintegration and the trauma of war. Yet, unlike the overtly political or state-centered articulations of nationalism that gained prominence in the same period, *Dergâh* advanced a more contemplative and spiritually infused vision—one that wove together historical memory, aesthetic sensibility, and cultural continuity to shape a distinctly Turkish identity. What *Dergâh* offered was both an intellectual response to the crisis of the nation and also an attempt to reimagine belonging and nationhood itself, grounded in the lived experience of time, tradition, and the enduring spirit of place.

3. Spiritual Nationalism in *Dergâh*: A Bergsonian Approach to Turkish Identity

The years during which *Dergâh* was published (1921–1923) were shaped by decades of intellectual debates about how to salvage, reform, or replace the declining Ottoman Empire. The journal emerged at a moment when various ideological movements—Ottomanism, Islamism, Turkism, and Westernization—had already competed for dominance. Rather than wholly aligning with any of these factions, *Dergâh* formulated a synthesis of nationalism that maintained deep cultural and spiritual ties to the past, rejecting both the strict secularism of Westernization and the rigid positivism of Gökalp's sociological nationalism.[68]

The influence of Bergsonian thought provided *Dergâh* with a distinct framework for conceptualizing spiritual nationalism, setting it apart from the dominant nationalist discourses of the time. Unlike the rigidly positivist and secularist nationalism associated with Ziya Gökalp and later Kemalist ideology, *Dergâh*'s contributors sought to infuse nationalism with a spiritual, cultural, and

66 Mehmet Kaan Çalen, "The Relationship between Islam and Nationalism in Ahmet Ağaoğlu," *Journal of Nationalism Studies*, 2 (2020): 27-46.

67 İrem, "Turkish Conservative Modernism," 97.

68 Arık, *Türk Milliyetçiliğinde "Spiritüalist" Yaklaşım*, 4.

metaphysical dimension, viewing national identity as an organic, evolving force rather than a construct defined solely by political and institutional frameworks. *Dergâh*'s contributors aimed to imbue politics, art, society, and philosophy with a spiritual outlook, forging a connection between what they described as the national spirit (*milli ruh*) and the key elements of nationalization, civilization, and religion. This perspective positioned *Dergâh* at a unique crossroads, embracing modernity and national consciousness while refusing to sever ties with the traditions, cultural heritage, and spiritual depth that had shaped Ottoman-Turkish identity for centuries.

Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, one of the leading ideologues of early Republican nationalism and a key figure in the development of Kemalist thought, recognized the intellectual and ideological significance of *Dergâh* in shaping nationalist discourse. Reflecting on its role, he stated:

> The nationalist feeling and nationalist excitement reached its epitome in *Dergâh*; nationalist consciousness developed in this journal, and while these sentiments were being actualized in Anatolia [through the Turkish War of Independence], they reached their best theoretical version in *Dergâh*.[69]

This statement underscores how *Dergâh* served as an intellectual incubator for Turkish nationalism at a time when the movement was being defined both in the battlefield and in the realm of ideas. While Turkish nationalism was often discussed in pragmatic or institutional terms—centered on military struggle, state-building, and language reforms—*Dergâh*'s contributors emphasized its philosophical, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions, drawing from both Bergsonian intuitionism and Sufi-influenced mysticism to construct an alternative vision of national identity.

At the heart of *Dergâh*'s distinct nationalist vision was a rejection of positivist nationalism, which had been strongly advocated by Ziya Gökalp and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Gökalp's formulation of nationalism rested on the idea that modern Turkish identity should be defined through institutions, language reforms, and a strictly secularized collective consciousness.[70] By contrast, *Dergâh*'s contributors sought to preserve the organic, intuitive, and historically rooted aspects of national identity. Heavily influenced by Bergson's philosophy of intuition and creative evolution, they believed that nationalism was not a project that could be imposed by sociological models but rather a spiritual and cultural process that had to emerge from within the collective consciousness of the people.

This emphasis on historical continuity also distinguished *Dergâh* from other nationalist movements. While radical Turkism sought to define Turkishness in purely ethnic terms and Kemalism later attempted to sever historical ties with the Ottoman past, *Dergâh* envisioned national identity as something culturally inherited rather than politically engineered. The contributors saw Turkish nationalism as a movement that did not need to break from the empire's literary, artistic, and philosophical traditions but could instead reinterpret and revive them in a way that would ensure national survival. Literature, poetry, and historical memory played a central role in this formulation, as *Dergâh*'s intellectuals turned to the cultural aesthetics of the past to shape the national consciousness of the present.

A critical aspect of *Dergâh*'s nationalism was its spiritual and mystical dimension.

69 Metin Çınar, "Anadoluculuk Hareketinin Gelişimi ve Anadolucular ile Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi Arasındaki İlişkiler (1943-1950)", (PhD Thesis, Ankara Üniversitesi, 2007), 57.

70 Ziya Gökalp, *Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayıncılık, 2010), 19-28.

Unlike the rigidly secular stance that later came to define Turkish nationalism, *Dergâh* attempted to forge Islam and Ottoman-Sufi tradition with national identity, as many of its contributors were drawn to Sufism, seeing it as an essential part of Turkish cultural heritage.[71] This inclination aligned closely with Bergson's emphasis on intuition and the non-rational aspects of human experience, which resonated with Sufi ideas of divine knowledge (*ma'rifa*) and the transcendent unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). While the contributors did not advocate for an explicitly religious nationalism, they saw spirituality as a necessary counterbalance to materialist and bureaucratic definitions of identity.

Perhaps the most defining characteristic of *Dergâh*'s nationalism was its deep sense of nostalgia. While many nationalist movements of the time were forward-looking, focusing on creating a new political order, *Dergâh* was deeply invested in remembering, preserving, and mourning the past. The trauma of war, occupation, and the impending dissolution of the empire created an intellectual environment where nostalgia became a powerful undercurrent in nationalist discourse. For *Dergâh*, nationalism was not only about constructing the future but also about safeguarding the memory of a world that was disappearing. This perspective led the journal's contributors to craft a nationalism that was at once modern and deeply rooted in historical consciousness, cultural refinement, and spiritual longing.

3.1. In Search of Lost Time: Nostalgia, Tradition, and Longing

Nostalgia is a modern phenomenon shaped by the disjunction between past and present, a longing for a home that no longer exists or perhaps never truly did. It emerges from an idealized past fixed in the present, revealing a temporal rupture that the nostalgic mind seeks to mend. At its core, nostalgia is not just about place but about time—an attempt to recover lost duration, to reinhabit a past that has been fragmented by the forward thrust of history. The term itself, derived from the Greek *nostos* (return home) and *algos* (pain), was first coined by Johannes Hofer in the seventeenth century, originally describing pathological homesickness.[72] Yet, nostalgia extends beyond spatial longing—it underscores a temporal void, a yearning for continuity where time and place converge.[73] In a Bergsonian sense, nostalgia resists the spatialization of time, rejecting the idea that the past is a closed chapter, instead viewing it as a lived, evolving force that lingers in memory and material traces.[74] Objects and monuments become vessels of temporal experience, embodying the tension between permanence and decay. Even in ruin, they retain an affective charge, not as static relics but as sites of temporal retrieval, where the past is reactivated in the present. Bergson's

71 Dilek Tığlıoğlu Kapıcı, "Şeyh ve Feylesof: Modern Mistisizmin Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemindeki Yansımaları ve Rıza Tevfik," *Kutadgubilig Felsefe-Bilim Araştırmaları*, 43 (2021): 95-113.

72 Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, Jamie Arndt and Clay Routledge, "Nostalgia: Past, Present, Future," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17, 5 (2008): 304-307.

73 Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 54.

74 Bergson's philosophy of *durée* (duration) presents time as qualitative, fluid, and continuously unfolding, opposing the rigid, mechanistic segmentation of phenomena into discrete, measurable units. His rejection of the spatialization of thought—where reality is artificially divided, categorized, and controlled—leads to an understanding of culture as an ongoing, lived process rather than a static system of fixed meanings. Central to this is *élan vital*, the creative force that drives improvisation rather than rigid organization, emphasizing movement, transformation, and embodied experience over structural determinism. See Stephen Linstead and John Mullarkey, "Time, Creativity and Culture: Introducing Bergson," *Culture and Organization* 9, 1 (2003): 3-13.

durée—time as qualitative, continuous, and indivisible—offers a framework for understanding nostalgia not as a mere longing for the past but as an intuitive engagement with memory, a movement through time rather than a fixation on it.

Ahmed Hâşim (d. 1933), one of the most influential Turkish poets of the early 20th century, offers in "The Muslim Clock" (*Müslüman Saati*) an elegy for a lost world—one in which time itself was once intimately woven into the rhythms of tradition, religion, and daily life.[75] One of the most prominent figures in Turkish symbolist and impressionist poetry, Hâşim was known for his evocative imagery and his focus on aesthetic experience over ideological concerns. His poetry, deeply influenced by French literary movements, emphasized personal perception, color, and atmosphere, often reflecting a dreamlike nostalgia.[76] In addition to his poetry, Hâşim contributed to literary criticism and cultural commentary. Hâşim's article does not merely mourn the occupation of Istanbul in political terms; rather, he presents the imposition of foreign time as the deepest and most transformative aspect of colonial domination. For Hâşim, the Allied presence in Istanbul is not just a matter of foreign soldiers patrolling the streets; it is an existential rupture, a violent reordering of time and, by extension, of lived experience itself.

At the heart of Hâşim's critique lies the idea that time is not a neutral, universal measure but a culturally specific experience shaped by religious and historical traditions. He opens with a striking declaration: "By clock, we mean not the instrument that measures time, but time itself. In the past, we had our 'hours' and days according to our style of life, just as we had our own way of living, thinking, dressing, and a taste based on religion, race, and tradition."[77]

This passage immediately sets "The Muslim Clock" apart from other nationalist discourses of the period, which were primarily concerned with political sovereignty or territorial integrity. Hâşim's nationalism is, instead, rooted in the concept of temporal sovereignty—the idea that a nation must experience time in accordance with its own traditions, rather than through the artificial imposition of foreign systems. The shift from Ottoman-Islamic timekeeping to the twenty-four-hour European clock becomes, in Hâşim's analysis, an act of epistemic violence, severing Istanbulites from their past and forcing them into an alien temporality.[78] Hâşim's reflections on time resonate deeply with Henri Bergson's philosophy of time (duration), which distinguishes between lived time (fluid, qualitative, experienced subjectively) and mechanized time (quantitative, segmented, imposed by external systems).[79] Bergson argues that real time is not something that can be measured mechanically but is something that flows, shaped by human consciousness and perception. Hâşim's lament for *Muslim time* versus *Western time* reflects this same concern: the loss of Ottoman-Islamic timekeeping is not just a technical change but a rupture in cultural consciousness itself.

For Hâşim, the imposition of European time on Istanbul is akin to the imposition

75 Ahmed Hâşim, "Müslüman Saati," *Dergâh: Giriş-Çeviriyazı-Dizin Vol. 1*, eds. Arslan Tekin and Ahmet Zeki İzgöer (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), 121-123; Alim Gür, "Dergâh Mecmuası ve Ahmed Hâşim," *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 3, 10 (2010): 316-331; M. Orhan Okay, "Ahmed Hâşim," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1989, II: 88-89.

76 Bibina, "Ahmed Hâşim and Symbolism," 59-72.

77 Hâşim, "Müslüman Saati," 316-317.

78 For the changing politics of time see Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 151-152.

79 Mullarkey, "Time, Creativity and Culture: Introducing Bergson," 3-13.

of Western thought, aesthetics, and governance—it restructures life on a fundamental level, divorcing people from the natural, intuitive experience of time that had shaped their daily existence for centuries.[80] This echoes Bergson's critique of modernity's reliance on rational, clock-based structures at the expense of organic, lived experience. Hâşim's reflection on time reveals a deeper critique of Western-imposed temporal regimes, which he sees as fundamentally altering the lived experience of Istanbul's inhabitants. He does not simply mourn the loss of Ottoman sovereignty but highlights the displacement of indigenous temporalities—the rhythms, structures, and perceptions of time that once shaped everyday life. As he laments: "The new measure, like an earthquake, destroyed all the barriers of the old day by sweeping up the landscapes of time around us, and by adding the night to the day, it brought into being a new day with little happiness and a lot of hardship, with a long blurry color."[81]

Here, Hâşim describes the transition from Ottoman time to Western time as a violent rupture, akin to an earthquake—a sudden and irreversible transformation that has shattered the continuity of temporal experience. The phrase "adding the night to the day" underscores the erasure of natural, organic time—a temporal order once structured by prayer, celestial movements, and the rhythms of daily life—and its replacement with an artificial, continuous temporality dictated by Western rationalism, industry, and standardization.[82] This critique is more than nostalgia for a bygone era; it is a profound observation of colonial modernity's power to reorder not just space, but time itself. Western hegemony, Hâşim suggests, extends beyond military occupation and political domination to the restructuring of perception, knowledge, and experience, imposing a linear, mechanistic temporality that alienates individuals from their own historical and cultural sense of self. As a result, time is no longer something experienced intuitively, but something externally imposed, transforming life into a blur of indistinct days, devoid of clear boundaries between work, rest, and spiritual fulfillment. Hâşim's lament, therefore, is not simply for the loss of an empire but for the loss of a world in which time was intimately connected to identity, meaning, and belonging.

Hâşim's portrayal of the new order of time as an earthquake serves as a profound nationalist critique, one that extends beyond political rhetoric to question the ontological consequences of foreign occupation, a disorienting experience of time, disrupting the spiritual and cultural coherence of Turkish identity. His nostalgia is not just a sentimental longing but also a political assertion, positioning the lost Muslim day—one of clarity and harmony—against the "bitter and endless day of great civilizations,"[83] a phrase that encapsulates his view of modernity as an unnatural, imposed force that measures, structures, and ultimately disempowers. Hâşim's rejection of Western temporality is, at its core, a call for national and cultural independence, one that seeks to reclaim the rhythms of daily life, the continuity of tradition, and the organic flow of time that modernity has fragmented. His concluding words—"Like those who strayed in the desert, we are now lost in time"[84]—capture this existential rupture, evoking both

80 For a study of the everyday experiences of Istanbulites through a Sufi lens, see Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya, "Sufi Practices and Urban Spaces: Everyday Experiences of Sheikh Ken'ân Rifâî (1867–1950) in Late Ottoman Istanbul," *Osmanlı Mirası Araştırmaları Dergisi* 12, 32 (2025): 21-47.

81 Hâşim, "Müslüman Saati," 316.

82 Özen Nergis Dolcerocca, "Free Spirited Clocks: Modernism, Temporality and The Time Regulation Institute," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20, 2 (2017): 177-197.

83 Hâşim, "Müslüman Saati," 318.

84 Ibid.

Islamic themes of exodus and Bergson's idea of disrupted duration, where time no longer unfolds intuitively but is instead externally imposed and alien.[85]

In a similar but less poetic tone, Falih Rıfkı Atay's (d. 1971) article "Disclaim to Be from the Same City" (*Hemşehrilikten Feragat*) is a powerful lament for what he perceives as the growing estrangement of Istanbul's Turkish population from their own cultural and historical identity. The occupation of the city, in his view, has not only resulted in political subjugation but has also eroded the social and cultural fabric of Istanbul, turning its Turkish inhabitants into passive spectators rather than active participants in their own homeland. He is particularly critical of how Istanbulites have adapted to this new reality, adopting foreign habits and lifestyles rather than asserting their own traditions.

Atay describes how Turks now walk through Beyoğlu—the westernized heart of the city—like embarrassed travelers, detached from their own heritage. He sees this as a fundamental crisis of identity, where Istanbulites have internalized a sense of alienation, gradually forgetting that the city is, at its core, Turkish. This detachment manifests not just in the political sphere but in daily habits, tastes, and aesthetic sensibilities. The once-familiar rhythms of the city have changed, replaced by a culture that no longer feels like home:

> The most obvious proof of this is that the Turks have gradually forgotten how much of a Turkish city Istanbul is over the last two years. Even in the streets of Beyoğlu, there are Turks walking like embarrassed travelers who lost their manners and lost their traditions. The Turks find all the beauties and flavors of their capitals *alaturqa*.[86]

The most visible sign of this transformation, according to Atay, is the way Turks now regard their own traditions as outdated, labeling them *alaturka*, while embracing foreign lifestyles as the new standard. He is not merely lamenting a shift in preferences—he is diagnosing a deeper cultural rupture, where the loss of customs and traditions signals a weakening of national consciousness itself. The occupation is not only a political event; it is also, in Atay's eyes, a form of cultural colonization. He is particularly disturbed by the way Istanbul's public spaces—its streets, its cafés, its shores—have become sites of Western social norms, where foreign customs dictate how people should interact and move within the city. One of the most striking examples he provides is the increasing visibility of mixed-gender leisure in Florya and Maltepe, where Turks, Greeks, and Armenians are seen sunbathing and swimming together:

> Russians and foreigners have invented a new Istanbul for two years. These guest foreigners swimming in Florya and frying their skins on the shores of Maltepe are now guides and examples to us, to those who have descended from generations in this city since the conquest.[87]

85 In Islam, the Exodus (Arabic: *al-Khurūj*) refers to the departure of Prophet Musa (Moses) and the Israelites from the tyranny of Pharaoh, as recounted in the Qur'ān. See Babak Rahimi, "The Exodus in Islam: Citationality and Redemption,"in *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective*, eds. Thomas Levy, Thomas Schneider and William Propp (New York: Springer, 2015), 377-385.

86 Falih Rıfkı Atay, "Hemşehrilikten Feragat I," *Dergâh: Giriş-Çeviriyazı-Dizin, Vol. 1*, eds. Arslan Tekin and Ahmet Zeki İzgöer (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), 479-481; For discussions regarding the identity of Istanbul following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Ramazan Erhan Güllü, "Identity Disputes in Occupied Istanbul: Was Istanbul to Become a Turkish City or Remain a Turkish City," *Middle Eastern Studies* 60, 1 (2024): 65-79.

87 Falih Rıfkı Atay, "Hemşehrilikten Feragat I," 479. In the early 1920s, Istanbul saw a significant influx of Russian migrants fleeing the Russian Civil War (1918–1922). By the peak of this migration, the city hosted up to 190,000 Russian refugees, who quickly became a visible presence in its economic, social,

To Atay, this shift represents more than just a change in social habits; it symbolizes the extent to which Istanbulites are no longer in control of their own cultural spaces. The once-private, Ottoman-era engagement with nature—through gardens, *hamams*, and courtyards—has now been replaced by an imposed Western practice, turning the act of enjoying the city's landscape into something foreign. His frustration reaches a peak when he states that foreigners are now teaching Turks how to live in their own city: "They don't teach us the city, they make us forget."[88] This line encapsulates the depth of his anxiety—not that foreigners are present in Istanbul, but that Turks themselves have abandoned their own cultural agency.

He is not railing against Western influence *per se* but against the idea that Istanbulites are simply absorbing these new customs rather than shaping them into something uniquely their own. For Atay, the erosion of these traditions is not just a sign of cultural change but of national weakness. His critique, however, is not purely reactionary. It is not a call for isolationism or for rejecting all foreign influence. Rather, it is an appeal for cultural and national self-awareness, a call for Istanbul's Turkish population to reclaim their own city before it is transformed beyond recognition. His nationalism is not framed in military or expansionist terms but in cultural ones—his concern is not about territorial sovereignty but about aesthetic and historical continuity.

Atay's nationalism, therefore, is fundamentally different from the more aggressive, exclusionary forms of nationalism that were dominant in the early 20th century. His is a nationalism rooted in memory, tradition, and a poetic sense of belonging. When he nostalgically recalls a past where young people in Istanbul took pride in knowing and loving Turkish Istanbul—contrasting it with the new generation, which admires foreign travelers more than their own heritage: "At that time, there was a love of Istanbul among young people, a love of knowing and loving Turkish Istanbul. Today's generation knows behind the Russians, loves behind the French, and admires the reputation of Anglo-Saxon travelers."[89]

He is thus articulating a vision of national identity that is deeply intertwined with cultural memory. His concern is not that Istanbulites are engaging with Western influences but that they are doing so without grounding themselves in their own history. This sense of loss is not merely sentimental; it is existential. The past, in Atay's view, was not just a different time—it was a different way of experiencing the world, one that was organic, intuitive, and uniquely Turkish. Now, under occupation, time itself has been disrupted, and Istanbulites find themselves caught in a city that no longer belongs to them. His nationalism is not about reclaiming political dominance but about *reviving a lost way of life*. Atay's reflections in *Dergâh* align closely with the Journal's broader intellectual project: the belief that nationalism should not be reduced to political or military action but should be rooted in cultural and spiritual depth. For Atay, the ultimate act of patriotism is not simply defending one's homeland in a military sense but ensuring that its traditions, language, and customs are preserved as living, evolving elements of identity. His

and cultural landscape. While many sought to leave for Europe due to harsh economic conditions, those with financial means established restaurants, cafés, clubs, and entertainment venues, leaving a lasting imprint on Istanbul's socio-cultural life. In addition to civilian refugees, organized Russian military units were also present in the city, further shaping the dynamics of this migratory wave. For more information: Yelena Lykova, "Russian Emigration to Turkey in the 1920's: A Case Study," *H. Ü İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 25 (2007): 332-335.

88 Atay, "Hemşehrilikten Feragat I," 480.

89 Ibid.

work represents *Dergâh*'s unique nationalist vision—one that is neither militant nor reactionary but one that sees cultural preservation as the foundation of national sovereignty.

3.2. Rethinking Nationalism: Aesthetic and Spiritual Patriotism in *Dergâh*

In his article "Beautiful Patriotism" (*Güzel Vatanperverlik*) Falih Rıfkı Atay (d. 1971) articulates a longing for a gentler, more refined form of nationalism, one that is neither aggressive nor performative but instead rooted in culture, literature, and spiritual depth.[90] Atay's critique emerges in response to the militant nationalist movements that had taken shape in the Balkans, ultimately leading to the disintegration of the Ottoman presence in the region. He expresses concern that the national sentiment of the Turkish people has been shaped by the legacy of violent revolutionaries from Rumelia, who, through their radical separatist movements, contributed to the empire's fragmentation.[91] The memory of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) looms large in his reflections, as these conflicts had been instrumental in fomenting Turkish nationalism while simultaneously marking one of the most devastating losses in Ottoman history.[92]

Atay presents a fundamental distinction between two forms of nationalism: one that is aggressive, exclusionary, and rooted in external symbols, and another that is aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritually conscious. He is critical of those who reduce nationalism to mere gestures—waving flags, idolizing heroes, or attaching symbolic meaning to geographic landmarks—arguing that such expressions fail to cultivate a deeper, more enduring national consciousness. Instead, he champions poetry, music, and artistic heritage as the true mediums through which national identity can be nurtured. By emphasizing cultural production over political slogans, Atay aligns his vision of patriotism with *Dergâh*'s broader intellectual project: a nationalism that is cultivated through literature and the arts rather than through militarized fervor.

Atay's critique extends beyond Turkish nationalism to the Greek community in Istanbul, whom he reproaches for their overt and provocative displays of allegiance to the Allied occupation.[93] He observes that since the arrival of foreign forces, Greek nationalists have flooded the city with their flags, draping Istanbul in blue and white. His reaction must be understood within the broader context of 1918–1923, a time when certain segments of the Greek population welcomed the Allied presence, seeing it as a potential step toward the realization of *Megali Idea*, the dream of a Greater Greece that included 'Constantinople'. While Atay critiques these nationalistic excesses, he does not advocate for an oppositional, retaliatory nationalism. Instead, he reflects on the arbitrary nature of national symbols, poetically stating:

> More and more, red is the color that the Greeks detest, and blue is a color that the Turks abhor. Blue is the color of the sea, and red is the color of blood. How can we separate from these colors, both of which are in nature?[94]

90 Falih Rıfkı Atay, "Güzel Vatanperverlik," *Dergâh: Giriş-Çeviriyazı-Dizin, Vol. 1*, eds. Arslan Tekin and Ahmet Zeki İzgöer (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), 240-241.

91 M. Hakan Yavuz, "Warfare and Nationalism: The Balkan Wars as a Catalyst for Homogenization," in *War&Nationalism: The Balkan Wars, 1912-1912 and Their Sociopolitical Implications*, eds. Hakan Yavuz and Isa Blumi (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2013), 31; Atay, "Güzel Vatanperverlik," 240.

92 Bilge Kaan Topçu, "Impacts of Balkan Wars on the Birth of Turkish Nationalism: Examples from Nazım Hikmest's Youthful Poems (1913-1930)," *Journal of Balkan Research Institute* 7, 2 (2018): 391-410.

93 Atay, "Güzel Vatanpervelik," 241.

94 Ibid.

Here, Atay rejects the rigidity of nationalist binaries, pointing out the absurdity of defining identity through arbitrary symbols. His nationalism is not about opposition or exclusion but about cultural and spiritual depth, which he sees as the only viable alternative to the divisive nationalisms that fueled the Balkan Wars. Atay's vision of an elevated, intellectual form of nationalism is further evident in his assertion that true patriotism can only be cultivated by the educated elite of Istanbul, particularly those associated with *Darülfünûn* and, by extension, the contributors of *Dergâh*. He writes:

> Wide, free, tasteful, and fuss-free patriotism; and as free as it is, as wide as such a tasteful nationalism—who can replace the old narrow, suffocating nationality and homeland air with this noble and windy air, which refreshes the hearts, other than someone from *Darülfünûn*?[95]

Atay's use of spatial metaphors here—contrasting the "narrow and suffocating" nationalism of the past with a "wide and noble air"—is revealing. He suggests that nationalism should not be rigid, confined, or exclusionary, but rather expansive and rejuvenating, capable of breathing new life into the national spirit. This conceptualization of nationalism is deeply aligned with Bergsonian thought, which emphasizes fluidity, intuition, and organic evolution over rigid, mechanistic structures.

However, there is also a class dimension to Atay's argument. By identifying the intellectuals of Istanbul as the vanguards of this refined nationalism, he implicitly distances *Dergâh*'s vision from the more populist or grassroots iterations of nationalism emerging elsewhere in Anatolia. The Journal's contributors were mostly urban, educated elites who did not have direct ties to rural communities and whose world was largely centered around the cultural and intellectual milieu of Istanbul. While *Dergâh* positioned itself as an alternative to radical nationalism, its conception of Turkish identity remained intellectually exclusive, emphasizing aesthetic cultivation over mass mobilization.

Atay's article is emblematic of *Dergâh*'s broader attempt to redefine nationalism as a cultural and spiritual project rather than a militaristic or purely political movement. His rejection of performative nationalism, his critique of binary oppositions, and his insistence on literature and the arts as the foundation of national identity all align with *Dergâh*'s commitment to a refined Bergsonian vision of Turkish nationalism. Yet, the article also reflects the inherent contradictions in *Dergâh*'s nationalism—while advocating for a gentler, more inclusive national identity, Atay's emphasis on the role of the Istanbul intellectual elite suggests a limited accessibility to this vision. Nevertheless, his work remains an essential articulation of how *Dergâh* sought to carve out a new, distinctly Turkish nationalism, one that was rooted in history, culture, and aesthetics rather than in aggression and exclusion.

3.3. Constructing a National Consciousness through Literary and Artistic Expression

One of the central intellectual projects of *Dergâh* was the nationalization of cultural elements that had been adopted from the West, a process that extended beyond political and social realms into the fields of art, literature, and music. For the contributors of *Dergâh*, national identity was not merely a matter of political sovereignty but was deeply tied to the aesthetic and creative expressions of the Turkish people. Artistic production, therefore, was not seen as a passive reflec-

95 Ibid.

tion of cultural identity but as an active site of national construction, one that required conscious engagement with tradition, reinterpretation, and creative renewal. This vision was deeply Bergsonian in the sense that it rejected rigid, mechanistic imitation in favor of organic, evolving expressions of cultural identity.

The *Dergâh* intellectuals were critical of unquestioned imitation, particularly in the realm of visual arts. Cavide Hayri Hanım (d. ?), an Ottoman-Turkish composer and vocalist, in her correspondence with Çallı İbrahim (d. 1960)—one of the most renowned painters of the late Ottoman and early Republican period—records a striking critique of Turkish artists' reliance on Western artistic traditions.[96] İbrahim, himself trained in Paris and well-versed in European academic painting, expresses his disappointment with an exhibition they attended, stating that Turkish painters were working in a way that was entirely adopted from the West, without adding anything of their own: "Only when we take our subjects from our own land, our monuments, our life, and our sorrows, do we truly create art."[97] His frustration was not with the use of Western techniques—after all, İbrahim had been part of the 1914 Generation, a group of Turkish artists sent to Europe to master oil painting and Impressionist methods—but with the lack of creative synthesis. He lamented that Turkish artists, rather than engaging in a dialogue with their own traditions, were merely replicating European styles without embedding their work in the historical and cultural memory of their own land.

For Çallı İbrahim, art was more than a mere adaptation of foreign techniques; it was a means of expressing a people's consciousness, lived experience, and deep connection to history. His concerns aligned closely with *Dergâh*'s intellectual project—if Turkish art was to possess a distinct identity, it could not remain a passive reflection of European aesthetics. This perspective is particularly evident in his *Mevleviler Serisi* (1920), where he closely observed the Mevlevis and dervish lodges, approaching them not as exoticized Orientalist motifs but as integral subjects within Turkish artistic expression.[98] By incorporating their rituals, presence, and spiritual depth into his work, Çallı reclaimed Mevlevi imagery from Western stereotyping, grounding it instead in the cultural and artistic lexicon of Turkey. His vision paralleled *Dergâh*'s broader mission—to construct a national identity that was not imposed from above but emerged organically from Anatolia's historical, cultural, and mystical traditions. Just as the Journal's literary and philosophical contributors sought to establish a spiritually and historically rooted nationalism, Çallı's artistic approach sought to infuse Turkish painting with an authentic aesthetic language, shaped by local experience rather than external artistic conventions.

This same concern extended to literature and music, both of which were key arenas for the nationalization of artistic expression. Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (d. 1958), one of the founders

96 Cavide Hayri Hanım, "Ressamlar Diyorlar Ki," *Dergâh: Giriş-Çeviriyazı-Dizin, Vol. 1*, eds. Arslan Tekin and Ahmet Zeki İzgöer (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), 493-498; Şemseddin Dağlı, "Türk Resminde Bir Sanat Dehası: İbrahim Çallı," *Güzel Sanatlar Enstitüsü Dergisi* 27, 47 (2021): 489-497. Also, see Sefa Yüce, "Dergâh Mecmua'sında Resim Teması," *Söylem: Filoloji Dergisi* 5, 2 (2020): 395-404.

97 Cavide Hayri Hanım, "Ressamlar Diyorlar Ki," 493.

98 İlkay Canan Okkalı and İlona Baytar, "Gelenekten Beslenen Modernlik; İbrahim Çallı ve Mevleviler Serisi," *Güzel Sanatlar Enstitüsü Dergisi* 26, 44 (2020): 126-137; For the impact of *Mevleviyye* on Turkish artistic tradition see Ünal Bastaban and Savaş Sarıhan, "The Effects of Mevlana's Philosophy on Aesthetics and Art: Innovative Interpretations Inspired by the Past," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Art and Education*, 5 (2024): 39-50.

of *Dergâh* and a towering figure in Turkish poetry, wrote extensively on the values that Turkish society had lost and the necessity of reconnecting with tradition to create a national aesthetic.[99] A leading Turkish poet, writer, and intellectual, Beyatlı was instrumental in shaping modern Turkish poetry through his synthesis of classical Ottoman and modern poetic sensibilities.[100] He was deeply concerned with cultural continuity and the aesthetic foundations of nationalism, advocating for the preservation of Ottoman literary traditions while integrating them into a refined, modern Turkish expression. In his article "Sade Bir Görüş," he argues that literature and art, when entirely borrowed from a foreign source without adaptation, become lifeless, rootless, and ultimately alien to the society that produces them.

Kemal's assertion that art must be rooted in national consciousness was not merely an aesthetic preference—it was a cultural philosophy. His poetic project, much like *Dergâh*'s broader intellectual mission, was one of reconstruction, of reinterpreting the past in order to shape the future. He was deeply engaged in the idea that a nation's artistic production must be connected to its historical and spiritual traditions, lest it become a shallow mimicry of foreign trends. This was not a rejection of modernization but rather a Bergsonian view of cultural evolution, where the past was not discarded but reintegrated into an organic, living present.

Kemal's insistence on grounding Turkish literature and music in native traditions aligned with the larger debate on Westernization in the arts that was taking place in Istanbul's intellectual circles during this period. The question of how to engage with Western modernity while maintaining a distinct national identity was not unique to *Dergâh*—it was a central issue in literary and artistic movements throughout the late Ottoman and early Republican era.[101] However, what set *Dergâh* apart was its insistence that nationalism was not just a political movement but a cultural and philosophical one. National identity, in their view, was something that had to be continuously cultivated through literature, art, and music, rather than something that could be dictated through laws or political rhetoric alone.

Yahya Kemal's vision of language was deeply intertwined with his understanding of national identity and artistic expression. For him, language was not merely a tool of communication but the lifeblood of a civilization, the repository of its cultural memory, and the vessel through which its aesthetic and intellectual heritage was transmitted. His reflections in *Dergâh* were part of a broader effort to rescue Turkish poetry and literature from what he saw as decay, fragmentation, and the disorienting effects of cultural rupture. Rather than embracing the revolutionary linguistic reforms that sought to sever ties with Ottoman Turkish, he believed in a gradual evolution of language, one that preserved historical depth while allowing for renewal. His stance reflected a fundamentally Bergsonian approach to cultural continuity, in which the past was not discarded but carried forward in an organic, intuitive manner. In his article "Sade Bir Görüş," Yahya Kemal presents a striking metaphor for the decline of Turkish poetry and language, likening it to the slow decomposition of a corpse:

99 Mesut Koçak, "Yahya Kemal Estetiğinin Sınırları ya da Alternatif Modernlik: Dergâh Mecmuası Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme," *Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları*, 27 (2023): 291-17.

100 Beşir Ayvazoğlu, *Yahya Kemal: Eve Dönen Adam* (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 1996), 72.

101 Orhan Koçak, "'Westernisation against the West': Cultural Politics in the Early Turkish Republic," in *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity*, eds. Celia Kerslake, Kerem Öktem and Philip Robins (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 305-322.

> Just as a corpse gradually fades, decays, and disintegrates piece by piece until only a skeletal frame remains, so too did Turkish poetry: first, its soul was drained, then slowly its language rotted, its meter was distorted, its harmony became convoluted. In the end, only a dry skeleton remained. For years, even the most skilled artists have been unable to revive this skeleton. This is the primary hallmark of periods of decline: when literature dies, lexicography, meter, syntax, and grammar obsessions spread everywhere; literary theories multiply; novelty becomes an addiction, and as poetry itself perishes, thousands of poets emerge—just like how a corpse, once a living body when it had a soul, turns into a swarm of worms after it decays.[102]

This passage encapsulates Yahya Kemal's profound sense of loss, cultural mourning, and frustration with modernist literary movements that, in his view, had abandoned the organic soul of Turkish poetry in favor of artificial innovations. His critique is directed at the disruption of continuity, a rupture that resulted in the loss of poetic harmony (*âhenk*), linguistic beauty, and the rich rhythmic structures (*vezin*) that had once defined Ottoman-Turkish literature. Instead of an intuitive evolution of poetic language, he observed a process of disintegration, where poets were more concerned with theoretical debates on language reform than with the essence of poetry itself.

Yahya Kemal's reflections align closely with *Dergâh*'s broader intellectual project, which sought to reclaim Turkish literature, music, and art as essential components of national consciousness. He saw language as a living entity, one that carried the soul of a people, and he believed that a true national literature could not be built on a rejection of tradition, but on its careful reinterpretation. His critique of literary modernism was not simply an aesthetic one; it was a deeply philosophical concern about memory, heritage, and the integrity of cultural transmission.

At its core, Yahya Kemal's vision of language was Bergsonian in nature—he saw it as something that should evolve intuitively, rather than being forcefully restructured through abrupt breaks and mechanistic reforms. Just as Bergson argued that time and consciousness could not be artificially segmented into rational units, Yahya Kemal believed that language could not be revitalized by sheer theoretical innovation alone. He viewed poetry as an organic manifestation of national consciousness, and if poetry were to be revived, it had to come from a return to intuitive, historical rhythms, not through abstract experimentation divorced from the past.[103]

This concern with historical continuity and linguistic beauty was also reflected in his broader approach to nationalism. Yahya Kemal was not interested in a reactionary return to the past but in a thoughtful synthesis of past and present.[104] His ideal vision of Turkish literature was one that honored the depth and richness of Ottoman literary traditions while embracing a refined, modern Turkish expression. This approach was radically different from the purist linguistic nationalism that sought to purge Turkish of its Arabic and Persian influences; instead, he advocated for a harmonized evolution, where the essence of the past was preserved, even as language adapted to the needs of a new era.[105]

102 Yahya Kemal, "Sade Bir Görüş," *Dergâh: Giriş-Çeviriyazı-Dizin, Vol. 1*, eds. Arslan Tekin and Ahmet Zeki İzgöer (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), 55-59.

103 Orhan Koçak, "Our Master, the Novice: On the Catastrophic Births of Modern Turkish Poetry," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, 2 (2003): 567-598.

104 Ayvazoğlu, *Yahya Kemal*, 72.

105 For a comprehensive study exploring the stages and historical roots of language reform and simpli-

Yahya Kemal's reflections on language and poetry were deeply intertwined with *Dergâh*'s mission to shape Turkish nationalism through artistic and intellectual refinement. He believed that a nation's cultural identity could not thrive on fragmentation, imitation, or enforced modernization; instead, it required a coherent, living continuity where language, literature, and artistic expression seamlessly connect the past to the present, fostering an evolving national consciousness. His critique of poetry, using the metaphor of a decaying corpse, served as a caution against severing ties with linguistic and artistic heritage, emphasizing that genuine artistic expression must originate from within rather than being externally imposed. This perspective resonated with *Dergâh*'s spiritual nationalism, which viewed art as an organic manifestation of a people's collective memory, history, and spirit. In this context, *Dergâh*'s intellectual endeavor stood as a cultural counterpoint to the emerging state-driven nationalism of the post-Ottoman era. While state institutions sought to define Turkish identity through language reforms, historical reinterpretations, and educational policies, *Dergâh* approached nationalism as a philosophical and artistic pursuit, advocating for a profound engagement with the past and resurrection of cultural authenticity rooted in centuries-old cultural and religious values rather than a complete rupture from it.[106] Emphasizing artistic expression as a means to construct national consciousness was not merely a cultural preference but a political stance, rejecting the notion that modernization necessitated erasing history. Instead, it declared that authentic national identity arises from a conscious reconciliation of past and present.

This was an inherently Bergsonian vision of cultural identity—one that saw national consciousness as something evolving through intuition, memory, and creative expression, rather than something that could be imposed through rigid ideological frameworks.[107] By positioning literature, painting, and music as central to the formation of Turkish nationalism, *Dergâh*'s contributors were making a profound argument: that a nation is not simply defined by political borders or military victories but by the continuity of its artistic and cultural expression. This was a nationalism of aesthetics, of feeling, of spirit—a vision that set *Dergâh* apart from many of its contemporaries and remains one of its most significant contributions to the intellectual history of modern Turkey.

Conclusion

The intellectual vision of *Dergâh* was grounded in a distinct form of spiritual nationalism—an understanding of national identity that transcended the boundaries of political sovereignty to embrace cultural continuity, historical depth, and aesthetic sensibility. At a moment when Turkish nationalism was being shaped by competing ideologies—ranging from ethnocentric essentialism to positivist modernization—*Dergâh* offered a distinct alternative. It proposed a vision that merged historical memory with intuition, and artistic creativity with cultural rootedness. The nationalism articulated in its pages was not militant or exclusionary, but introspective, fluid, and deeply connected to the spiritual and intellectual traditions of Ottoman and Anatolian life. For the contributors of *Dergâh*,

fication discussion in the late Ottoman Empire to Turkish Republic, Agâh Sırrı Levend, *Türk Dilinde Gelişme ve Sadeleşme Evreleri* (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 1972), 178-263.

106 For discussions surrounding language reform and literary landscape, Jale Parla, "The Wounded Tongue: Turkey's Language Reform and the Canonicity of the Novel," *Modern Language Association* 23, 1 (2008): 27-40.

107 İrem, "Turkish Conservative Modernism," 87-112.

a nation could not be sustained by political institutions and territorial boundaries alone. It required the cultivation of a living cultural tradition—expressed through language, literature, and the arts—that carried the moral and imaginative fabric of a people across time. In rejecting both mechanical Westernization and nostalgic traditionalism, *Dergâh* envisioned a dynamic continuity between past and present. The past was neither a relic to be preserved in amber nor a burden to be discarded in the name of progress; it was a generative force—organic, evolving, and essential to the shaping of modern Turkish identity.

Underlying this project was a profound anxiety over cultural alienation. The experience of occupation, rapid social transformation, and accelerated Westernization created a sense of temporal dislocation and the erosion of traditional rhythms. In response, *Dergâh*'s contributors turned to language and literature as key vessels for restoring a sense of national belonging. Language, they believed, was not a mere instrument of communication but the spiritual embodiment of a civilization's soul. The fragmentation of Turkish poetry and the decline of literary coherence were seen as symptoms of a deeper cultural rupture—one that could only be healed through a conscious return to the aesthetic and philosophical sensibilities embedded in Ottoman and Anatolian traditions. Artistic expression was equally central to this vision. The Journal's contributors criticized the passive imitation of Western forms, not for their techniques, but for their failure to resonate with the historical and spiritual texture of Turkish life. True national art, they argued, must be born of an intuitive engagement with one's own tradition—an insight deeply informed by Henri Bergson's philosophy of *durée* and creative evolution. Art, like identity, was not static but a living process shaped by memory, intuition, and time.

In this way, *Dergâh* articulated a holistic model of nationalism—one rooted not in state policy but in cultural sovereignty. It argued that true independence required more than political autonomy; it demanded the power to live by one's own rhythms, to speak in one's own language, and to create from one's own traditions. Through its synthesis of spiritual heritage and artistic expression, *Dergâh* offered a compelling vision of Turkish identity that sought not to erase the past, but to carry it forward—transformed, yet intact—into the uncertain landscape of the modern world.

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