



# Attilâ İlhan's Anti-Cosmopolitanism

## Attilâ İlhan'ın Kozmopolitanlık Karşıtlığı

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### ABSTRACT

Attilâ İlhan (1925-2005) was an active public intellectual and a prolific author who wrote poems, novels, essays, and screenplays. While his poetics are marked by his distinct romantic style, his novelistic writing follows a strong social realist line. With his enthusiasm for Atatürk's national revolution, his interest in the Ottoman culture, and his Marxist formation, he emphasises the importance of a "national culture synthesis" in his essays. He builds this idea of "national culture synthesis" in opposition to the so-called universal values of cosmopolitanism. This article discusses İlhan's anti-cosmopolitanism as such in the light of the current theories of critical cosmopolitanism. While İlhan argues against "compradorial cosmopolites" in his essays, his anti-cosmopolitanism is rather prominent in his novels as well. Set in major cities, the novels celebrate the diversity and dynamism of their cityscapes. However, his depiction of such diversity exposes the ambivalences underneath his anti-cosmopolitanism. The article first provides a parallel reading of two contemporaries, Attilâ İlhan and Frantz Fanon, on national consciousness and cosmopolitanism. Then it focuses on İlhan's *Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez* as a case study. Finally, it extrapolates upon the problems of his anti-cosmopolitanism within his broader literary oeuvre.

**Keywords:** Attilâ İlhan, Frantz Fanon, Anti-Cosmopolitanism, Postcolonial Criticism, *Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez* (Negroes Don't Look Alike), Aynanın İçindekiler (Those in the Mirror)

### ÖZET

Attilâ İlhan (1925-2005) şiiir, roman, senaryo, deneme ve gazete yazısı gibi birçok türde metne imza atmış bir yazar, oldukça aktif ve üretken bir entelektüeldir. Şiiirleri ona özgü bir romantik estetiğe sahiptir. Romanları ise kuvvetli bir toplumsal gerçekçi çizgiyi takip eder. Denemelerinde Atatürk'ün ulusal devrimine dair heyecanı, Osmanlı kültürüne ilgisi ve Marxist düşünsel formasyonuyla şekillenmiş bir "ulusal kültür sentezi" fikrini savunur ve bu fikri kozmopolitanlığın "sözde evrensel" değerlerine karşı olarak inşa eder. Bu makale İlhan'ın kozmopolitanlık karşıtlığını güncel eleştirel kozmopolitanlık teorileri ışığında tartışmaktadır.

Yazar gazete yazıları ve denemelerinde "komprador kozmopolitler"i şiddetle eleştirmektedir. Romanlarında da bu anti-kozmpolitan tutum oldukça sorunlu bir boyutta dikkat çekmektedir. Romanlarının çoğu büyük şehirlerde geçmekte ve kent kültürünün zenginliğini ve çeşitliliğini öne çıkarmaktadır. Fakat yazarın bu çeşitliliği kullanım şekli kozmopolitanlık karşıtı tutumunun altında yatan ilişkileri de ortaya dökmektedir. Bu makale önce iki çağdaş entelektüelin, Attilâ İlhan ve Frantz Fanon, ulusal bilinç ve kozmopolitanlık üzerine düşüncelerinin paralel okumasını sunmaktadır. Daha sonra İlhan'ın *Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez* romanını örnek olarak incelemektedir. Son olarak da yazarın kozmopolitanlık karşıtlığının problemleri yanlarını edebiyatının bütünlüğü içinde değerlendirmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Attilâ İlhan, Frantz Fanon, Anti-Kozmopolitanizm, Sömürgecilik-Sonrası Eleştiri, *Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez*, Aynanın İçindekiler

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Attilâ İlhan, a prolific writer who penned numerous essays on the topic of national consciousness, was highly critical of the ideas of universalism and cosmopolitanism. He argued that the so-called universalism is inherently local as it represents the value structures of the Judeo-Christian west and concepts such as universalism and cosmopolitanism help perpetuate the western hegemony over national cultures. In response, he constructed a particular idea of “national culture synthesis” for the Turkish context and he positioned himself specifically against western universalism and cosmopolitanism. Furthermore, his anti-cosmopolitanism manifests itself in his novelistic writing as well, but these works reveal a more ambivalent and evolving approach to the concept.

In terms of his starting point, İlhan's anti-cosmopolitanism is built on his Marxist theoretical perspective, whereby he proposes his national synthesis as a revolutionary ideal. In that sense, his associated anti-imperialism follows a similar line of argument with the anticolonial movements. His ideas parallel Frantz Fanon's similarly Marxist anti-colonialism and broadly resonate with postcolonial criticism. However, the two intellectuals diverge in their solutions for fighting against capitalism and imperialism. While Fanon argues for a new cosmopolitan humanism, İlhan promotes nationalism. In this context, one of the main issues about İlhan's anti-cosmopolitanism arises from the conflict between Marxist internationalism and the cultural nationalism that he advocates. As a link to contemporary times, the parallel reading of the ideas of Fanon and İlhan is complemented by some of the current discussions on critical cosmopolitanism as a response to new forms of diasporic experiences and emerging cosmopolitanisms.

İlhan's conflictual position between nationalism and internationalism is further complicated by the evident double standard in the ways in which he depicts cosmopolitanism abroad (in Paris) and at home (in Istanbul). His second novel, *Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez* is examined as a case study in point. In this early novel, İlhan romanticises a dark, gloomy but cosmopolitan Paris of the downtrodden. The protagonist Mehmed Ali's world is complex and ambivalent as befits the nature of the urban cosmopolitanism depicted in the novel. In that sense, *Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez* is a portrayal of cosmopolitanism that is truer to the nature of the concept than the novelist's later literary portrayals. In this work, the novelist also matches his Parisian cosmopolitanism with an analogous Istanbul one.

İlhan sets some of his later novels published in the 1970s and 1980s in Istanbul (Constantinople) as an Ottoman cosmopolitan city. For example, his “Aynanın İçindekiler” series is a meticulous social realist study of the modern Turkish history from 1919 to 1960. While the historical materialism in the various novels of the series is highly detailed and comprehensive, some of his characterisations are rather problematic in the way his anti-cosmopolitanism manifests. He utilises sexuality as a theme to explore cosmopolitan politics of the cityscape, whereby a strong moralism overtakes the characterisation for the sake of the author's political agenda.

İlhan depicts most of his cosmopolites, who are mainly non-Muslim women and “westernised” Turkish men, as degenerates.

Despite his own cosmopolitan personality and his earlier interest in the value of urban cosmopolitanism, İlhan’s nationalist inclination seems to take precedence in his desire to create a strong social realist literature with an agenda. The ideological problems resulting from İlhan’s anti-cosmopolitanism as they are represented in his literary works create serious fault lines in his otherwise valuable historical narratives.

## Attilâ İlhan's Anti-Cosmopolitanism<sup>1</sup>

Renowned primarily as a poet, Attilâ İlhan was a prolific author who penned novels and short stories, wrote for the television and cinema, and published numerous essay collections on a variety of subjects.<sup>2</sup> The range and volume of his works are the indications of his highly active intellectual life. His political interests in dialectical materialism, the question of national consciousness, and the idea of a cultural synthesis begin at home with discussions on national culture and extend as far as the Muslim national communism of Mirsaid Sultan-Galiyev.<sup>3</sup> As Nazan Kahraman summarises, “by the time he died in 2005, he left behind countless writings about a ‘national left’, the theory of which was formulated on Sultan Galiyev, its practice on Kemalism, its framework on ‘national culture synthesis’ and its foundation on all segments of society” (94).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Attilâ İlhan's strong political convictions did not only manifest in his non-fiction works. Most of his novels are also evident examples of his historical materialist approach with a strong nationalist inflection. They are shaped by his version of Freudo-Marxism with their focus on the personal and sexual worlds of the characters as complementary to their social and class positions. However, while his novelistic writing bears the marks of his political outlook, his complicated ideological synthesis is not without its problems and its success, whether in fiction or non-fiction, is arguable. Such complications become particularly perceptible through his anti-cosmopolitanism and the ambivalent way it manifests itself in his novels.

### INTRODUCTION

In *Ulusal Kültür Savaşı* (1986, National Culture War), which is his main collection of essays on the topic of national consciousness, Attilâ İlhan highlights the imperialism embedded within western cosmopolitanism as a threat to national culture. He dismantles some of the fundamental ideas and ideologies of western cultures and reveals the fault lines of the Turkish one due to its reliance on them. About the notion of universal culture that underlies the very ideas and ideals of the west, he writes:

What they call universal culture is their own culture –rooted in the Greco-Roman western culture that the Judaism/Christianity-based western imperialism has been trying to make the world accept by violence and ruse as being universal. Of course they will conceal this and present their cultural values as a system of values external to, even beyond the societal. In truth, the criteria (yardstick, measure) are those of

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- 1 The initial ideas of this article come from a workshop by the AHRC Research Network Ottoman Pasts, Present Cities: Cosmopolitanism and Transcultural Memories at Birkbeck College, University of London, 2014.
  - 2 For a detailed literary biography of Attilâ İlhan in English, see Burcu Alkan (2013) Attilâ İlhan, *Turkish Novelists Since 1960* (DLB 373), pp. 114-128.
  - 3 Attilâ İlhan (2000) *Sultan Galiyev: Avrasya'da Dolaşan Hayalet*. Ankara: Bilgi.
  - 4 All translations from Turkish are mine. Nazan Kahraman (2016), “Türkiye Solunda Bir Figür Olarak Attilâ İlhan,” *ilef dergisi* 3(1), 91-119. “2005 yılında öldüğünde teorisini Sultan Galiyev’in, pratiğini Kemalizm’in, çerçevesini “ulusal kültür sentezi”nin, tabanını tüm toplum kesimlerinin oluşturduğu bir ‘ulusal sol’ üzerine sayısız yazı bırakmıştır.”

their own culture. Other cultural systems that do not fall in line with these criteria are immediately rendered void. If this is not what we call ‘cultural imperialism’ than what is? In reality, it is passing on a local culture, the basis of which is a continuation of the religious, as being universal with the material power of a certain production technology! And completely levelling down anyone who doesn’t concur! (Attilâ İlhan, *Ulusal Kültür Savaşı*, 11)<sup>5</sup>

Written in his customarily assertive authorial voice, İlhan’s criticism shows a strong anti-imperialism. The “local culture” he targets is Europe and its Enlightenment values, while the “material power” and “production technology” refer to the engine of modernity fuelled by colonial resources. Coming from a Marxist critical foundation, İlhan’s position parallels one of the main arguments in postcolonial studies and is shared by many scholars in the field writing from different contexts.<sup>6</sup> His anti-imperialism thus shares the discourse of the anti-colonial movements and advocates a firm national foundation that resists western cultural hegemony disguised as secular universalism.<sup>7</sup> For instance, Frantz Fanon, one of the most powerful voices of the French anti-colonial movement, writes:

The colonialist bourgeoisie, in its narcissistic dialogue, expounded by the members of its universities, had in fact deeply implanted in the minds of the colonized intellectual that the essential qualities remain eternal in spite of all the blunders men may make: the essential qualities of the West, of course. The native intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas, and deep down in his brain you could always find a vigilant sentinel ready to defend the Greco-Latin pedestal. (Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 46)<sup>8</sup>

In the Manichean worldview of the coloniser, native values are “the very sign of that poverty of spirit and of their constitutional depravity” (42). Fanon observes the cultural hegemony of the coloniser behind their so-called universal values and analyses how these loaded values are internalised by the “native intellectual.” The training of Fanon’s “native intellectual” is

5 Attilâ İlhan (1986) *Ulusal Kültür Savaşı*. İstanbul: Özgür Yayın Dağıtım. “Onların evrensel kültür dedikleri, birkaç yüzyıldır, Yahudi/Hıristiyan tabanlı batılı emperyalizmin, dünyaya ‘evrensel’ diye, ‘cebren ve hile ile’ kabul ettirmeye uğraştığı, Yunan/Latin kökenli batı kültürü- kendi kültürü. O bunu elbette gizler, kültür değerlerini toplumsalın dışında, hatta üstünde bir değerler sistemiymiş gibi sunar. Halbuki kriter (kıstas, ölçüt) kendi uygarlığının kriteridir. Bu kritere uygun düşmeyen başka kültür sistemleri, o dakika geçersiz sayılıyor. ‘Kültür Emperyalizmi’ dediğimiz, bu değilse ne? Aşlında belirli bir üretim teknolojisinin sağladığı maddi güç üstünlüğüyle, tabanı dinselden ‘müdevver’ yöresel bir kültürü, evrensel diye yutturmak! Kabul etmek istemeyeni, hak ile yeksan etmek!”

6 For example, referring to Brazil’s encounters with European claims to universal values for a cosmopolitan world, Santiago, Edwards and Horta (2017) write “The multicultural action is the work of white men so that everyone, without exception, will be Europeanized in a disciplined way like them” (The Cosmopolitanism of the Poor, 30).

7 Recent scholarship on cosmopolitanism revisits the issue of “old” cosmopolitanism and its European/Christian foundations in order to reclaim its potential in plural new “cosmopolitanisms” for contemporary times, see Robbins and Horta (2017) *Cosmopolitanisms*.

8 Frantz Fanon (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

realised through the modernisation of the local values along the lines of European priorities and in return the intellectual reproduces both these values and the conditions that sustain them.

In his essays on national consciousness, İlhan uses a comparable language to talk about the Turkish case in terms of both the intellectuals and the middle classes. He determines the cosmopolitan inclination within the Empire, i.e. Ottomanism, as the reason behind the late emergence of Turkish nationalism. He argues that maintenance of working relationships with the non-Muslim populations, who held the capital in the Empire and thus formed its bourgeoisie, was essential for the imperial economy due to the lack of a national bourgeoisie (*Ulusal Kültür Savaşı*, 7-9). Accordingly, a class of “comprador intellectuals” are trained as “missionaries” and “collaborators” to serve the interests of the non-Muslim “comprador bourgeoisie” who are connected to western imperialism (13). He is equally weary of the traditional values and customs of the feudal order as pursued by the opponents of the Republican modernisers for being the relics of a past socio-economic model (19). Still, his national synthesis references to the Byzantine, Seljuk, and Ottoman cultures, alongside Persian and Arabic influences as a part of his “homeland” based national synthesis (83). This Anatolian version is another sense of cosmopolitanism, a palimpsest one that İlhan encourages. Yet, he differentiates between “national” and “Turk/İslam” syntheses and proposes the realisation of the former as an “original cultural synthesis”: a national culture synthesis that is secular, democratic, national, nationalist, and anti-imperialist. It does not reject the past but borrows from it. It observes other cultures but does not imitate (139). İlhan’s version of progress requires a restructuring of the economic base through land reforms and industrialisation which would then be followed, “according to the classical schema,” by the transformation of the superstructural elements as relevant to the unique contemporary needs and realities of the country (103).

Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) and Attilâ İlhan (1925-2005) are two public intellectuals of the same generation but from different geo-political contexts. Their authorial temperaments are not too dissimilar when it comes to the declaration of their positions. Even though their points of emphasis differ, they follow similar ideological paths that converge in their criticism of the Eurocentrism that forms the basis of universal and cosmopolitan ideals. They both come from a Marxist formation and are in battle against imperialism and capitalism in their varying manifestations. However, despite their similar starting points and converging lines of arguments, they diverge towards different ideological positions once they pinpoint the core issues.

İlhan strongly argues for the formation of a national bourgeoisie against the cosmopolite, westernised middle classes all through his *Ulusal Kültür Savaşı*. Fanon, however, warns against the pitfalls of national consciousness in his *Wretched of the Earth* as it can easily pass to “ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism” (156). Focusing on the practical processes and the aftermath of decolonisation, Fanon maintains how the economic structures established by the coloniser pitch the various colonised peoples against each other. They not only maintain racial inequality but also cause the black peoples to internalise racism to an extent that they use it against each other. On the contrary, although İlhan builds similar arguments in regards

to different nations, at the home front his proposal still focuses on tackling the internalised Eurocentrism and striving towards the foundation of a national culture synthesis. Both writers discuss the bourgeoisie’s responsibility in social and cultural matters, but they mistrust their ability to deliver unless they are themselves transformed. In the end, their solution for social change and true independence differ significantly.

Revolutionary nationalism is indeed a crucial element of anti-colonial movements, decolonisation processes, and postcolonial discussions. Despite the fact that the Turkish case does not fit the classical colonial scheme, the presence of a national independence war followed by a national revolution in all walks of life bring the Turkish experience close to the anti-colonial cases.<sup>9</sup> Positioning the Ottoman Empire as being “semi-colonised” in its western-orientation (*Ulusal Kültür Savaşı*, 224), Attilâ İlhan is speaking in an analogous revolutionary mode of national independence and liberation from cultural and political hegemonies. He advocates the pursuit of national determination in politics, national consciousness in society, national synthesis in culture, and the classical Marxist schema in economy.<sup>10</sup> He considers Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s (the founder of modern Turkey) national revolution the ideal ideological model. In his introduction to *Hangi Atatürk* (2008, Which Atatürk?), he points to three crucial aspects of Atatürk’s revolution, “independence war against imperialism, democratic revolution against the sultan, and the transformation of the society from the religious community [ummah] phase to the national community [nation] phase” (15). It is in such a context that he deems the “cosmopolite society” as being “compradorial” (*Ulusal Kültür Savaşı*, 70), that is, serving the maintenance and perpetuation of the western cultural hegemony against national interests.

In contrast, Frantz Fanon, who is writing directly within a colonial context exacerbated by racism, argues for a new humanism in tackling the problems of colonialism, imperialism, and Eurocentric universalism. In his 1952 book *Black Skin, White Masks* he battles against the racist structures of colonialism and argues that the pitfalls of nationalism as well as the so-called universalism need to be handled with caution in the path towards this “new humanism” (xi). He writes that both the whites and the blacks, the coloniser and the colonised “have to move away from the inhuman voices of their respective ancestors so that a genuine communication can be born” (206). The contrast between the tones of the earlier and later pages of the book

9 For an overview of modern Turkish history, see Feroz Ahmad (1993) *The Making of Modern Turkey*, London: Routledge and Erik J. Zürcher (2017) *Turkey: A Modern History*, London: I. B. Tauris.

10 The national question (i.e. national autonomy, cultural nationalism and other related topics) has been a subject of discussion since the beginning of Marxist thought. Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Rosa Luxemburg among many others wrote about it. For example, Lenin in his “theses on the national question” (1913) emphasises that the right to “self-determination” refers to “political autonomy.” He warns that “the slogan of national culture is incorrect and expresses only the limited bourgeois understanding of the national question” and it divides not unites (from the *Marxists Internet Archive*). The primary problem regarding the ambivalence in İlhan’s writing emerge from the fundamentally internationalist nature of Marxism. Despite the significance of national revolutions and decolonisation movements, Marxism and nationalism are essentially on two separate sides of the ideological spectrum and generally incompatible. Still, there have also been theoretical and practical reconciliations between them, as in the case of anti-colonial movements. See Shlomo Avineri (1991) who notes that “the complexities of Marx’s attitude to the question of nationalism left the socialist movement an ambiguous heritage” (643).

highlights the drive, passion, and true intention of Fanon's new humanist ideal. As Julian Go points out, Fanon's new humanism is a particular "postcolonial cosmopolitanism" that emerges "in the spaces that colonialism left behind" (221). He explains that Fanon's postcolonial cosmopolitanism is post-colonial,

in that it is a transcendent alternative to colonialism's exclusions, bifurcations, and exploitation. Emerging in the space of colonialism's contradictions, Fanon's postcolonial cosmopolitanism speaks of a shared inclusive humanity. As opposed to a hierarchy based on race or other identities, he envisions a global community of equals. In place of bifurcation, he proposes a unity and fruitful exchange; and in place of exploitation, he envisions a worldwide community that fulfills human needs and offers political, economic, and social rights to all. It is therefore post-colonial because it is post-European. While it emerges from earlier ideas of the Western Enlightenment, it is not a bland imitation. (219)

What Go highlights in Fanon's writing is a fusion of Marxist economics and postcolonial anti-racism that moves beyond his Freudo-Marxist foundations towards a highly idealised cosmopolitan humanism. Like any idealistic position, while such cosmopolitan humanism bears vulnerabilities due to the complexities of the issues involved, its strengths create a guide to follow in contemporary times.

It is not the point of this article to discuss in detail Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial and cosmopolitan new humanism. Instead, the parallel reading of İlhan and Fanon as pursued establishes some noteworthy connections between two dissimilar cultural contexts for modern cosmopolitanism. It also raises questions about how two public intellectuals with similar formations and temperaments reach two contrasting opinions on the relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. İlhan's criticism of Eurocentric universalism, his anti-imperialism, and his anti-cosmopolitanism bear the risk of paving the way to what Fanon calls the pitfalls of national consciousness.

### **Contextualising the Genealogy of Cosmopolitanism**

Although he does not flesh out what he means by cosmopolitanism beyond his criticism, İlhan maintains a rather specific usage of the term cosmopolite throughout his writing. The cosmopolite for him is western(ised), imperialist, foreign, not-native, not-national. In *Ulusal Kültür Savaşı* and *Hangi Batı?* (2001, Which West?), he uses it for the Levantine, non-Muslim populations of the Ottoman Empire whose loyalties are to the western imperial powers. The westernised Turkish people, including the intelligentsia, are also cosmopolites. As such, they are compradorial, that is, they are collaborators to the maintenance of western cultural hegemony (*Hangi Batı?*, 180). In *Aydınlar Savaşı* (1991, The Battle of the Intellectuals), he includes the phrase "foreign capitalist" alongside "cosmopolite" in reference to the liberal economy (176). It is also the basis for the cultural imperialism embedded within the national education founded upon westernisation (181). It becomes clear in *Sosyalizm Asıl Şimdi*

(2005c, Socialism, Especially Now) that considering it irreconcilably imbued with western imperialism, İlhan defines cosmopolitanism as antagonistic to national culture. He quotes from an article by “two French Marxists J. L. Lecerle and P. Albouy” in which it is argued that being against “cosmopolitanism” is crucial to protect a national culture against the domination of one or more foreign influences (*Sosyalizm Asıl Şimdi*, 112-113). It is a protection against imperialist powers that utilise it to impoverish national cultures by overpowering their essential character. Accordingly, being an anti-cosmopolite is necessary for national independence. These sentiments resonate with İlhan’s own throughout his writing.<sup>11</sup> In fact, İlhan’s Francophone intellectual background and his preference of the terms “cosmopolite” and “cosmopolitanism” already situate the negative inflection of his position. While the English “cosmopolitan” and “cosmopolitanism” are not necessarily invested with a specific political overtone regarding the associated qualities, the French terms are often used pejoratively in addition to their more general meanings.<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of its various socio-political connotations, the term cosmopolitan (and its equivalents) derives from the Greek “cosmos” (universe) and “polis” (city) and refers to a kind of “world citizenship,” i.e. a sense of belonging that transcends the particular towards a larger ethos of communal existence. This broad definition of the concept is formulated differently within various fields, gaining diverse layers of moral, social, and political meanings accordingly. The concept has also changed through time from its Greek origins and pre-modern versions (Lafi, 2013) to Kantian moralism and Enlightenment ideals (Brown, 2009), as well as in relation to growing nationalisms, Marxist internationalism and the anti-colonial movements. In contemporary times, it has been revitalised in the form of a “critical cosmopolitanism” (Schiller and Irving, 2017) in a vastly globalised world with its planetary social, economic, and environmental crises. Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta (2017) posit the change from the old to the new cosmopolitanism along the lines of a paradigm shift:

The old cosmopolitanism was a normative ideal. Less an ideal than a description, the new cosmopolitanism merely assumes that wherever and whenever history has set peoples in transnational motion, sometimes very forcibly, it is to be expected that many

11 Viewed from a different perspective, beginning with the seventeenth century there is a similar “national” discourse against Ottoman cosmopolitanism among the French officials in Constantinople. In “East of Enlightenment,” Ian Coller writes that “The ‘national’ nature of policy was here dictated by European cultural identity, and against the power of the Ottoman Empire. [...] in [Muslim] countries more than anywhere else the individual must be incorporated into the Nation, his existence depends on the force of his Patrie” (468). In Constantinople, where “a patchwork of European powers—Swedes, Hungarians, Russians, Poles, Ragusans, Scots, and a multiplicity of others—and these European subjects mingled with Latin Christians established in the city for generations; with Greek and Armenian Christians who were Ottoman subjects; with Jews from all parts; with Albanians, Wallachians, Souliotes, and Circassians from European lands under Ottoman rule; and with Muslim Ottomans from all parts of Anatolia, the Middle East, and North Africa, even from Persia, Afghanistan, India, and beyond” (451) coexist, the preservation of national priorities against the overpowering Ottoman cosmopolitanism is so important that the entire conduct of the French nationals are controlled and dictated centrally by the Kingdom of France.

12 For comparison, the etymology of *cosmopolite* / *cosmopolitan* in English - [https://www.etymonline.com/word/cosmopolite#etymonline\\_v\\_28927](https://www.etymonline.com/word/cosmopolite#etymonline_v_28927)

and the etymology of *cosmopolite* in French - <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/cosmopolite>

of them and their descendants will show signs of hybrid identity and interestingly divided loyalty. [...] The shift Hollinger described was from cosmopolitanism in the singular—an overriding loyalty to and concern with the welfare of humanity as a whole—to cosmopolitanisms, plural, which were now seen to be as various as the sociohistorical sites and situations of multiple membership from which they emerged and which were therefore the business of social sciences like anthropology, sociology, and history rather than a topic reserved for political theory and moral philosophy. (1)

For a revised model of postcolonial literary studies that speak and contribute to contemporary issues, Robert Spencer (2011) builds his “cosmopolitan criticism” on a progressive and proactive understanding of the term:

cosmopolitanism is both a disposition – one characterised by self-awareness, by a penetrating sensitivity to the world beyond one’s immediate milieu, and by an enlarged sense of moral and political responsibility to individuals and groups outside one’s local or national community – and, it is very important to add, a set of economic structures and political institutions that correspond to this enlarged sense of community. (4)

He makes an important distinction between cosmopolitanism and globalisation along the lines of the way diverse agents interact with each other culturally, economically, and politically. He maintains, “If globalisation seeks to homogenise the planet from above (economically and culturally), then cosmopolitanism is a reaction or counter to this process, one that seeks to make general not exploitation or culture but democracy, rights and the rule of law” (4). Defining “new cosmopolitanisms” for this age is not only a scholarly pursuit. It is also exigent for a better world in the face of planetary crises. The kind of distinction Spencer draws is also where the divergence between Fanon and İlhan is located in their understanding of cosmopolitanism’s potential. The same kind of distinction is what this article utilises as a methodological framework to analyse the ambivalences in Attilâ İlhan’s anti-cosmopolitanism along the lines of not only the contradictions in his intellectual position but also the complexities of the ideal of cosmopolitanism itself.

The genealogy of cosmopolitanism as used by İlhan can be traced back to its modern Kantian elaboration in its later post/colonial manifestation and it is often this genealogy of the term that shapes its current moral and political perceptions. As seen in the parallel reading of Fanon and İlhan, the Eurocentrism embedded within the modern understanding of cosmopolitanism is challenged from a context of multitudes and diversity. In a way, the criticism of this Enlightenment model cosmopolitanism seeks a truer cosmopolitanism in the ideal sense. However, as an earlier critic of the western cosmopolitan ideal, Attilâ İlhan’s concerns and priorities are geared towards laying bare and dismantling its hegemonic structures towards a stronger national consciousness. In this historical context, his strong commitment

to his convictions and societal change render his works particularly interesting. He devotes his novelistic writing to his cause and provides the readers with examples of a distinct literary praxis. He reconfigures Émile Zola's Naturalism with his nationalist Marxism whereby his novels become a laboratory to explore his political ideas and their historical foundations through a social realist approach.<sup>13</sup>

### **Case Study: Diasporic Cosmopolitanism in *Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez***

In "Diasporic Cosmopolitanism" Nina Glick Schiller proposes a new cosmopolitanism of the coexistence of migrant communities in urban contexts. She calls such coexistence of the different communities of otherness "diasporic cosmopolitanism" whereas "similarly displaced" immigrants create "locally and transnationally emplaced" urban cosmopolitanisms that challenge the traditional dichotomies of the term, i.e. self-other, host-stranger and the like (105). Different manifestations of this kind of urban coexistence and their concomitant cosmopolitanisms are ubiquitous in today's neoliberal global economy and transnational labour mobility. Born out of various crises and categorised under different labels, such as exiles, immigrants, and refugees, these diasporic cosmopolitans are brought together in their shared struggles and experiences. Their daily interconnectedness creates the kind of communities that go beyond multiculturalism and towards different kinds of diasporic cosmopolitanisms.

First published in 1957, Attilâ İlhan's second novel *Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez* (Negroes Don't Look Alike) tells the story of one such "diasporic cosmopolitan" community in the heart of Paris, the definitive cosmopolitan cityscape. It is set after the Second World War and develops through the narration of the protagonist Mehmed Ali's life, inner world, and interactions with other characters. As understood from the flashbacks in the narrative, Mehmed Ali comes from a poor family and struggles financially in his youth. A powerful sense of loneliness permeates his life in these early years and underlies the rest of his narrative, as well as colouring his dilemmas, uncertainties, and alienation in Paris. He meets and engages with the leftist communities in Istanbul and gains a different perspective on life, labour, and happiness. Although he eventually achieves a stable life with a good job and a fiancé, the earlier pervasive sense of loneliness and alienation remains, leading to his move to France. The novel follows the parallel timelines of his past life in Istanbul and the present life in Paris.

Travelling through Naples and Marseille like many others, Mehmed Ali arrives at a cheap hotel in Paris, aptly named "Hotel de L'Europe." He is befriended by a group of foreigners like himself whose diversity complement the diasporic cosmopolitan context of the novel. In addition to Mehmed Ali, Hotel de L'Europe is home to the Egyptian El-Barudi, the Yugoslavian Yankoviç, the Chinese Monsieur Çang and the German Hilde. The protagonist later meets the Spanish Hernandez and the (allegedly) Polish-American Marie-Te, as well as other Turkish

13 İlhan was an avid reader of French literature and he was particularly interested in Zola's Naturalism as a part of a broader social realism, see *Gerçekçilik Savaşı* (1980) and *Hangi Edebiyat?* (1993). His "Aynanın İçindekiler" novels parallel Zola's Rougon-Macquart series in style and form, see Burcu Alkan (2018) *Promethean Encounters*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

people. The common denominator of these cosmopolitans is their diasporic existence, which shape the way they relate to one another. For instance, as political refugees, the anti-communist Yankoviç and communist El-Barudi keep each other company despite their antagonistic views. All these characters from different “nations” are a part of a cosmopolitan diasporic community, sharing similar struggles to find jobs, find love, find a new sense of belonging in Paris. They thus drift through the city in a state of paralysing liminality, all the while pressured by financial and official troubles. Their diasporic cosmopolitanism is that of the “vernacular” whereby “individuals and groups of different origins are mixed together, often most intensely among the socioeconomically disadvantaged” (Coller, 447). Furthermore, even though its circumstances differ, a similar cosmopolitanism prevails in the Istanbul timeline of the narrative as well. Mehmed Ali's acquaintances, Mustafa, Ecvet, Niko, Kevork, Vartkes among others point to a multicultural setting that is a reminder of the past cosmopolitanism of the city<sup>14</sup> and complements the portrayal of the diasporic one in Paris.

These two cities, Istanbul and Paris, which are İlhan's two choice novelistic settings, maintain the diverse possibilities of different cosmopolitanisms as depicted in his literary works. In fact, despite his strong anti-cosmopolitanism in his essays, İlhan's portrayals of Paris and Istanbul reveal a less stringent engagement with the subject in his fiction as he portrays them from a darkly romantic perspective. The depictions of both cities are fraught with projections of ambivalent sentiments ranging from passionate attachment to equally passionate aversion and this ambivalence pervades their cosmopolitanism as well.<sup>15</sup> Through his particular attendance to diversity in the settings of Istanbul and Paris, İlhan establishes a context of comparison for different cosmopolitanisms in *Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez*. Written after his first stay in Paris in the early 1950s, his depictions bring together the experience of the diasporic cosmopolitan and the knowledge of the imperial one, revealing the basis for his ambivalence.

In the novel, Mehmed Ali constantly questions whether just being in Paris is worth leading a wretched life as they do. He is beaten up by some people looking for Yankoviç who is himself later murdered at his hotel room. El-Barudi is arrested by the police during a riot. Marie-Te's life is so miserable that she believes in her own lies of a better, less lonely life elsewhere. Yet, Hilde in her youth and promises of an untainted love keeps a hold on Mehmed Ali's imagination. Paris is a “dream” and they “flock” there “helter-skelter” driven by the promises of possibilities (223). Even not doing anything in Paris but just spending time by the Seine or the Eiffel is doing something (211). However dark its portrayals might be, an undeniable sense of longing and attachment underlies İlhan's Parisian urban cosmopolitanism, which, to some extent, contradicts his political anti-cosmopolitanism. In this context, Mehmed Ali's split

14 Set directly in Istanbul, another version of a once cosmopolitan urbanism can be seen in İlhan's first novel, *Sokaktaki Adam* (1953, *The Man on the Street*), in which people from different backgrounds come together around a fur-smuggling plot. Armenians, Jews, Greeks and Turks from various regions coexist in the dark alleys, brothels, and alcohol dens of Istanbul. See Nora Fisher Onar (2009) for a historical overview of Ottoman cosmopolitanism in its relation to competing ideologies.

15 The writer's poetry is also marked by such ambivalent yet strong sentiments towards both cities but particularly Istanbul. For example, his “İstanbul Ağrısı” (*Aching for Istanbul*) epitomises such a mood.

mental state that becomes manifest in his reference to himself in the first person plural matches a similar split in the novelist's perception of cosmopolitanism. The ambivalence in Mehmed Ali's vacillations can be seen as symbolic of the inconsistency in the novelist's thought process in conceiving cosmopolitanism at home and abroad. At home imperial cosmopolitanism is a threat to national consciousness, but abroad, overlooking the implications of the reversed perspective, the ethnic diversity is the foundation of the very cosmopolitanism that is gloomily romanticised.

The title of the novel is also quite telling in this context. "Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez" -Negroes Don't Look Alike- simultaneously underlines sameness and difference. "Viewed at a distance," the characters are all "negroes" (218) in their marginalisation and struggles whether political, financial or psychological. Yet, they are different in that they come from different backgrounds burdened by their different baggage. Their difference becomes sameness in the context of their diasporic existence. As the outsiders in the city, they find refuge in each other's company and in each other's otherness. These are the kind of people whose coexistence makes the city of Paris what it is for the novelist, that is, cosmopolitan, dark, and desirable.<sup>16</sup> Mehmed Ali thinks that "Each negro is a world. Each Negro is a universe" (219). Each separate component of the cosmopolitan is unique and significant, even if it might essentially be the same in its distress and misery. His protagonist does not mind the fact that "negroes don't look alike. On the contrary it makes him happy, curious." There is no reference to any drawbacks to cosmopolitanism in Paris. In these early years, for İlhan, cosmopolitan Paris does not draw the same kind of attention that Istanbul does later on. So, he seems to have changed his perspective based on the context and displays a certain kind of ideological ambivalence. Even though cosmopolitanism is what it is in its operation, that is, "cosmopolitan," İlhan seems to utilise two different definitions for the concept. In a way, the Paris and Istanbul cosmopolitanisms are simultaneously different and the same in İlhan's oeuvre, matching the allusions of the title "negroes don't look alike."

The anti-cosmopolitanism in Attilâ İlhan's political essays contrasts the cosmopolitan urbanism in the Paris of *Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez*. In his desire to depict the intensity of Parisian life with an emphasis on the coexistence of the metaphorical "negroes" from different nations, he romanticises both the city and the characters in his signature style. Such cosmopolitan portraits, including their ambivalences, are prevalent in most of his novels. Despite his criticism of the concept, İlhan is clearly preoccupied with the idea of cosmopolitanism beyond a simple antagonism. Still, from his first two novels (1950s) to his later ones (1970s-1980s), an evolution towards a harder line of anti-cosmopolitanism can be seen in his writing. Through the decades, his novels shift and parallel his essays in their negative tone in the way cosmopolitanism is viewed and presented. He makes his novelistic writing speak for his political agenda. While

16 In contemporary times, the integration of the diasporic communities among themselves is what makes Paris cosmopolitan. However, as Christina Horvath (2011) notes, in terms of the official self-definition, Paris is multicultural, not necessarily cosmopolitan, encouraging the idea of different but together as a form of mosaic diversity and coexistence under the French national republic.

the meticulousness and comprehensiveness of his historical materialism and social realism are unmatched, the ways in which his ideas of national synthesis and anti-imperialism pan out are problematic in the way they become manifest in issues regarding sex, gender, and ethnicity. For example, written in the manner of Zola's Rougon-Macquart series with its interconnected narratives and network of characters, his seven-novel "Aynanın İçindekiler" (Those in the Mirror) series is where he tests out his literary political praxis on the affairs of the body and the country.<sup>17</sup>

### Moralist Anti-Cosmopolitanism

In the various novels of the "Aynanın İçindekiler" series that are set in different historical moments, the writer's anti-cosmopolitanism particularly shows through his portrayal of sexuality. Most of the Turkish characters who are westernised and cosmopolitan find their place both literally and metaphorically alongside the amoral and/or sexually libertarian non-Muslim characters. Raşel Mizrahi, a Jewish character who appears in *O Karanlıkta Biz* (1988, Us in that Darkness) and *Bıçağın Ucu* (1973, The Tip of the Knife), is an epitome of such problematic portrayal. The contrast between the sexually liberal non-Muslim woman and the traditional, sensitive Turkish one is a theme that İlhan uses often. In this kind of context, cosmopolitanism is a form of moral degeneration. Likewise, in *Dersaadet'te Sabah Ezanları* (1981, Morning Calls-for-Prayer in Dersaadet) İlhan tells the story of Neveser Hanım, a young, naïve girl who marries Abdi Bey, whose westernised manners render him an attractive suitor. However, he turns out to be a sexual libertarian. Neveser, having rejected Münif Sabri, a better suitor with strong "native" values, is deeply affected by the many "perversions" of her husband. The only strong exception to the sexually liberal and amoral female cosmopolitan type is Ümid from *Kurtlar Sofrası* (1963 & 1964, 2.vol. Dining with the Wolves) and *Yaraya Tuz Basmak* (1978, Rubbing Salt into the Wound). Ümid is Turkish. She is self-confident, sexually liberal, and fluidly queer. She is a journalist and she is actively involved in the country's political matters. She is cosmopolitan with inflections of French urbanism. Yet, even she is not without her faults. She is so cosmopolitan that she is like a foreigner in her own country, disconnected from the common people.

In her doctoral dissertation, Duygu Köksal (1996) writes that sexual ambiguities and non-conformities in İlhan's works parallel his particular version of national identity based on homeland rather than ethnicity. She posits:

The androgenous or sexually 'in-between' characteristics of individuals helps complement a simultaneous ambivalence in national identity. Those figures who are

17 The "Aynanın İçindekiler" series comprises of seven novels that arch over the history of Turkey from 1919 to 1960. Their various characters are related to one another and reappear in the different novels. Moreover, other works, such as *Kurtlar Sofrası*, are also connected to the series even though they are not officially a part of it. For a detailed outline of the "Aynanın İçindekiler" series and the interrelationships between its novels and their characters, see Alkan (2018) *Promethean Encounters* and Gönülden Esemeli Söker (2002) *Attilâ İlhan'da Kültür Sorunsalı*, Ankara: Bilgi.

able to move between Eastern and Western roles most radically also carry sexual ambiguities. Thus gender is another central sphere through which the monolithic and authoritarian nature of the official nationalism is challenged. (240)

Köksal points to an important element of İlhan's writing. He is indeed very bold in regards to sexuality in both his essays (1976, *Hangi Seks?* [Which Sex?]) and his novelistic representations (1980, *Fena Halde Leman* [Desperately Leman]; 1984, *Haco Hanım Vay* [Oh My Haco Hanım]), especially in the context of the 1970s and 1980s Turkey. In fact, such a liberal attitude towards sexuality is a key component of his Freudo-Marxism in the "Aynanın İçindekiler" series. However, the moralism that underlies the "sexual perversions of a westernised suitor" against the "ideal suitor with strong native values" casts doubt on what Köksal sees as a match to an equally ambivalent attitude towards the "national(ist)." This moralism that presents the Turkish "westernised, cosmopolite" as corrupt not only follows in the footsteps of earlier modern Turkish literature of "bad westernisation" but also underscores the novelist's essayistic arguments against cosmopolitanism.<sup>18</sup> Combined with the cosmopolitan characterisation of non-Muslim peoples of the Ottoman Empire in a similarly negative light, İlhan's ambiguous sexualities point to a less ambiguous representation of who and what the idealised national identity includes (or does not).

Various characters from Raşel and Roza Mizrahi (1974, *Sırtlan Payı* [Share of the Hyena]; *Dersaadet'te Sabah Ezanları*) to Abdi Bey and Gülistan Satvet (*Dersaadet'te Sabah Ezanları*), the so-called modern, western, cosmopolitan people in İlhan's oeuvre, are posed as being degenerate against idealistic characters like Münif Sabri and Ahmed Ziya (*Dersaadet'te Sabah Ezanları*, *O Karanlıkta Biz*). If the issue was that of moral conservatism, the anti-cosmopolitan element could be overlooked to some extent. However, in his non-fiction writing, İlhan encourages diversity in cultures and experiences, as well as a sense of individual liberty when it comes to sexuality. Therefore, the problem arises not from conservatism in regards to sexuality but due to the contradictions in the literary depictions of cultural diversity and national identity. That moral degeneration is almost always attached to the cosmopolitan, non-Turkish or Westernised-Turkish subjects highlights the writer's anti-cosmopolitanism. This problematic discriminatory moralism in the private sphere in İlhan's novels is complemented by a similarly discriminatory position in the portrayals the Ottoman cosmopolitan social life. In *Dersaadet'te Sabah Ezanları*, for instance, the elements of Ottoman cosmopolitanism, i.e. social parties, taverns and the like are presented as breeding grounds for disloyalty. In İlhan's Ottoman-set novels, the cosmopolitan urban environment is darkly colourful but ultimately unreliable and untrustworthy.

18 One novel outside the "Aynanın İçindekiler" series, *Haco Hanım Vay!* in particular is an epitome of this representation of the cosmopolitan degeneration. Set primarily in Damascus and İzmir, the main character of the novel, young Haco Hanım is depicted as being forced into homosexual relationship with the second wife of an Ottoman bourgeois man, Emrullah Raci Bey. She is "saved" from her demise by the military doctor Feridun Hakkı, an upright, patriotic and idealist Ottoman official.

## CONCLUSION

In the context of his life and writerly output, Attilâ İlhan, a well-read and cosmopolitan intellectual himself, seems to appreciate the diversity of cosmopolitanism. Yet, ideologically, his national(ist) politics take precedence. In his attempts at balancing but not necessarily reconciling these two poles of his ideational world, his works suffer from the consequences of his ideological demarcations. Cosmopolitanism proves to be too complex an idea to be simply posed as an antagonist to nationalism. In the end, Frantz Fanon's new humanist cosmopolitanism may not be as unambiguously defined a path as a nationalist cultural revolution, but despite its fragile idealism, it can still compete as an alternative to İlhan's anti-cosmopolitanism.

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