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Three Generations, Three Perspectives: Islamists' Discussions on "Islamic Civilization" in Türkiye

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Abstract

This article examines the use of "Islamic civilization" by Muslim thinkers, undoubtedly, one of the most controversial concept for contemporary Islamic Thought in Türkiye. The main argument of the article is that the Islamic civilization discourse has evolved from an eclectic/defensive perception of civilization to an otherizing/exclusionist position, and from an otherizing political style to ontological awareness, over three generations of Muslim intellectuals in Türkiye. This process of change can be observed in the writings of first-generation Muslim intellectuals such as Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Şehbenderzade Filibeli Ahmet Hilmi; second-generation such as Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Nurettin Topçu, and especially Sezai Karakoç, and third-generation intellectuals such as İsmet Özel and Ali Bulaç. Thesis aims to make a small contribution to the roadmap of the concept of "Islamic civilization" in Türkiye, based on the writings of the abovementioned thinkers.

Keywords: Islamic civilization, Muslim intellectuals, contemporary Islamic thought, Islamism.

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Üç Nesil, Üç Perspektif: Türkiye'deki İslamcıların "İslam Medeniyeti" Üzerine Tartışmaları

Öz

Bu makale, Türkiye'deki çağdaş İslam düşüncesiyle bağlantılı olarak Müslüman düşünürler tarafından kullanılan "İslam medeniyeti" kavramını incelemektedir. Şüphesiz İslam Medeniyeti kavramı, Türkiye'de Çağdaş İslam Düşüncesi içindeki en tartışmalı kavramlardan biridir. Bu bağlamda makalenin temel argümanı, İslam medeniyeti söyleminin Türkiye'deki üç kuşak Müslüman aydınların söylemleri üzerinden eklektik/savunucu bir medeniyet algısından ötekileştirici/dışlayıcı bir konuma ve bu noktadan ontolojik farkındalığa doğru evrildiğidir. Çalışmada I. neslin İslam Medeniyeti kavramını savunmacı ve eklektik bir üslupla incelediği; II. neslin İslam Medeniyeti kavramını Batı'nın karşısına farklı ve bambaşka bir çözüm arayışı çerçevesinde ele aldığı, III. neslin ise kavramın sosyo-kültürel tutarlılıklara dikkat ederek bir açıklama getirme isteğinde oldukları savunulmuştur. Bu değişim süreci, Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Şehbenderzade Filibeli Ahmet Hilmi gibi ilk nesil; Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Nurettin Topçu ve özellikle Sezai Karakoç gibi ikinci nesil ve İsmet Özel ve Ali Bulaç gibi üçüncü nesil Müslüman aydınlar üzerinden incelenmiştir. Makale, yukarıda adı geçen düşünürlerin yazılarından hareketle Türkiye özelinde "İslam medeniyeti" kavramının yol haritasına küçük bir katkı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslam medeniyeti, müslüman entelektüeller, çağdaş İslam düşüncesi, medeniyet, İslamcılık.

1. Introduction

The importance of the 19th century, which represents "the longest century" (Ortaylı, 2012) for the whole world beyond the Ottoman Empire according to some scholars, stems not only from its being the central-institutional basis of Turkish modernization but also from the fact that it includes sociological-conceptual backgrounds of modern terms. Although the modernization processes of major terms such as progress, reclamation, freedom, equality, education, and civilization have been conceptualized in modern scholarship, it is still crucial to make an academic effort to unstitch the intricate, contradictory, and knotted yarn of the 19th and 20th centuries at both theoretical and practical levels to understand the historical-sociological courses of the abovementioned concepts and to follow the projections of this course in contemporary Turkish and contemporary Islamic thought (Kara, 2017, pp. 241-249).

Most studies on Muslim intellectuals¹ in Türkiye focus on the broader theological and political contexts of the authors, without paying attention to their uses of particular concepts such as civilization.² Due to this tendency, the scholarly lacuna in the study of Islamic civilization as a concept is significant. Remarkably, even basic conceptual studies in the field do not discuss the term "civilization" or "Islamic civilization."³ Certainly, concepts have their histories, and they come to be used in broader or narrower senses in time. However, this does not justify the unpopularity of the term "civilization" in scholarship on contemporary Islamic thought. Even though a term like "civilization" might be problematic and unpopular, it should not lead to academic indifference, since it can still be mobilized toward reaching significant historical-sociological perspectives. Hence this paper analyzes the concept of "civilization."

In the development of contemporary Islamic thought in Türkiye, the discourse of "Islamic civilization" represents a broad platform where ideological debates and articulations such as constitutionalism, nationalism, conservatism, and criticism of modernity can be studied in

¹ When discussing the subjects of the Islamic world, instead of the term "Islamist," which is frequently used by the observers, I used the term "Muslim intellectual." See the book chapter on this topic in (Tapper, 1991, pp. 261-299).

² Some of basic studies about this topic are; Gencer, 2015; Göle, 1997; Karasipahi, 2009; Mardin, 1994; Ögün, 1992; Silverstein, 2005; Tapper, 1991; Toprak, 1981; Toprak, 1987; Toprak, 1993.

³ For example see Adamec, 2009; Martin, 2004.

connection with concerns about "returning to true Islam" (Duran, 2005, p. 129). However, studies devoted to Türkiye are limited and far from being integrated, with a few exceptions.⁴ This article aims to look at the evolution of the concept of "Islamic civilization"⁵ that is specific to Türkiye through three generations of contemporary Islamic thought and to reveal the ideas of prominent thinkers, who were previously studied independently in different studies, about civilization as a whole.

The study of Islamic thought over generations is a methodological tool used in the classification of Muslim intellectuals based on the analyses of İsmail Kara and Bulaç (Bulaç, 2005; Kara, 2013). In this model, the first generation thinkers are defined as those active in the period from the second half of the 19th century until 1924, when the Ottoman caliphate was abolished. Second generation thinkers are those in the period from 1924 to the 1990s, and the third generation thinkers are the ones active in the period starting from the 1990s to the present day. Of course, different breaking points can be determined for these periods,⁶ or they can be studied under different subtitles.⁷ Despite the terminological and chronological restrictions, scholars agree that several characteristics differentiate these three time periods. The first generation of contemporary Islamic thought exhibits an eclectic-apologetical and pragmatist attitude, which I call "epistemic eclecticism." The apparent embracing of all the "Western" values brought forward during the confrontation of the Muslim world of the Ottoman Empire with the West has captured the first generation in a ceaseless argument during the 19th century's ideological atmosphere. The second generation, on the other hand, experienced the impact of the First-Generation eclecticism, and developed a reactionary rejection of the "West." They defended Islamic civilization against the Western civilization, which was considered an enemy. Scholars consider that the third generation had the goal of giving depth and consistency to the term "Islamic civilization." This awareness is what I refer to as "ontological awareness". In what follows, I explore each generation's understanding of "civilization" in depth.

Finally, it is necessary to explore the criteria on which the names in the three generations were selected. First, the methods Islamists use and the factions they adhere to have been classified in different ways. At the base of this classification lies the separation of Islamists into "modernists" and "conservatives" in terms of ideologies (Kara, 2011, p. 35). For example, Hilmi Ziya Ülken classifies Islamists in this way and identifies four categories: traditionists, modernists, those who are somewhere between the two, and anti-modernists (Ülken, 2013, pp. 396-397). Fazlurrahman, Erol Güngör, E. Ziya Karal, and some others⁸ have made similar classifications (Kara, 2011, pp. 35-36). Kara is correct in arguing that although such classifications seem appealing at first sight, they do not have many solid, accurate, or consistent aspects. One

⁴ Gürcan and Calabrò's studies can be referred as exceptions. See Gürcan, 2015; Calabrò, 2017.

⁵ Of course, the question of "what are the criteria for difference between generations regarding 'Islamic civilization'" is meaningful. This study primarily looks at how names mentioned in different generations define Islamic civilization as a concept. Along with it, it focuses on how the authors establish a relationship between Islam and civilization in parallel with the holistic socio-cultural meaning of civilization.

⁶ It can be said that there is almost a consensus that caliphate was a basic breaking point, but it is not easy to determine a breaking point for the subsequent process. For example, while the 1980 coup can be considered the touchstone as the starting date of the third generation, many different others such as the dissolution of the Soviets in the 1990s, the post-modern coup of 28 February 1997 or the establishment of the Justice and Development Party in 2001 can also be accepted.

⁷ For example, the first generation Islamists are divided into two as before and after 1908 based on the re-announcement of the Constitutional Monarchy in 1908. Similarly, the second generation can be divided into two as before and after the military coup in 1960. In his article above, Kara describes the first of these periods as nationalist-conservative, and the second as radical-intellectual.

⁸ For example, Hasan Şen, in his work, mentions that it is useful to think of Islamists as "political Islamist tradition" and "historicist tradition" (Şen, 2012).

agrees with Kara, considering that Islamists have displayed inconsistency, fickleness, and fragility in various pressing modern issues.

If so, based on what criteria have the names mentioned in the work been selected? As in most ideologies, including Islamism, there are names that are brought to the fore because of the quality and quantity of their writings, their life stories being established in communal memory, their impact on political and daily life, and the scholarly research about them. Of course, it is impossible to cover all of these prominent names. Moreover, since this work is about Islamic civilization, it is necessary to narrow down the Islamists to be analyzed based on the topics of their research and writings. For this, it can be argued that Sezai Karakoç and İsmet Özel represent the two opposite poles of a spectrum in the context of Islamic civilization. While Karakoç aimed to conduct a "deep civilization analysis" in most of his writings (Karakoç, 2015b; Karakoç, 2015d; Karakoç, 2016), Özel opposed the concept of civilization, especially in his famous book *Üç Mesele*. Starting from this point, this work's roadmap is based on these two Islamist poets' predecessors and successors. In terms of Islamism, it is obvious that M. Akif and N. Fazıl are the predecessors of Sezai Karakoç. The latter expressed this in his books.⁹ In a similar vein, I argue that İsmet Özel's ideas about civilization should be considered together with N. Topçu's ideas. It is also important to include Topçu in the current analysis because his writings demonstrate his opposition to Kısakürek and therefore enable the exploration of two ideological poles. Those first-generation authors mentioned together with M. Akif, and Ali Bulaç from the third generation, were selected to be included in this project because their writings directly address the issue of "Islamic civilization" and those writings have had a considerable impact on the formation of this concept. This work, despite being restricted in its scope, would greatly benefit from a more inclusive analysis.

2. First Generation: The Defenders of the "True" Civilization

It is uncertain when and by whom "Islamic civilization" was first used as a concept (Baykara, 2007). The modern connotations of progression, order, science, knowledge, education, and freedom, attributed to the concept of civilization¹⁰, were likely intellectual products of the Tanzimat-era. Such terms related to Islamic civilization were taken up in the discussions of the so-called "hard ideologization period" (1908-1924) on Islamism. In this period, reaching the "current level of contemporary civilization" seems to have been one of the main objectives of Muslim intellectuals, apart from a small minority (Karpas, 2013). In this strain of thought, "civilization" was understood to mean "the last point that humanity has reached or must reach." Later, however, new meanings were attributed to "civilization." The defensive style developed by the first generation islamists (1908-1924) during the debates about whether Islam prevented progression (*mani-i terakki*) offers important clues about the development of the concept in the minds of the prominent intellectuals of the period. Some thinkers attempted to show that Islam did not prevent progress by emphasizing that it potentially contained elements of European civilization (Kara, 2017, p. 244). This seems to have been a confrontation with intellectuals who perceived Islam as a burden (Kara, 2013, pp. 25-26; Kara, 2005, pp. 41-42). As a result, the concept of "true civilization" emerged in the context of these discussions. Mehmet Sadık, for example, stated that "civilization of truth is made of Islamic civilization" (Kara, 2013, pp. 25-26). Likewise, Said Nursî claimed that "there is no true beauty of civilization where Islam will not vouch for it or the more beautiful explicitly or tacitly or to the extent permitted" (Kara,

⁹ See Karakoç, 2015d; Karakoç, 2017a.

¹⁰ For historical background and very first usages of the concept of civilization see Elias, 2004; Görgün, 2003.

2013, pp. 25-26). Many others spent considerable effort attempting to show that Islam "commands progress" (*âmir-i terakki*) in the words of Shaikh al-Islam Musa Kazim Efendi (1858-1920), or "vouches progress" (*zâmin-i terakki*) in the words of M. Hamdi Yazır (1878-1942), and that it is not an obstacle to progress (Tunaya, 2007, pp. 17-18).

The development of the understanding of civilization as technology, science, and progress has pushed some Islamists towards a selective-eclectic path. The necessity of adapting the scientific, industrial, and technological "superiorities" of the West was frequently supported by a famous *hadith* report in which Muhammad says: "Wisdom is the lost property of the believer, he is more entitled to receive it wherever he finds it." As Akif said "The pitch belongs to the runner and the Creator has given the right to live to the strong." (Ersoy, 2007, p. 169) This point of view emphasizes that the moral and cultural characteristics of Islam should be added to technological advancements -which would later be criticized as an "idol for generations to come" (Kara, 2011, p. 22). Akif (Ersoy, 2007, p. 160) shows this principle in the following verses:

Get the knowledge of the West, get its art,
And give your labor full speed.
Because it's no longer possible to live without them,
Because only art and science have no nationality

Şehbenderzade, M. Hamdi Yazır, and many other intellectuals of the period agreed with Akif on this subject (Kara, 2011, pp. 92-97, 472-489). In parallel with Ziya Gökalp's distinction between civilization and culture, it was particularly emphasized in some contemporary works that civilization, defined through science and technology, did not belong to a certain religion or geography and that it was the common property of humanity. The culture, religion, and morality that belong to all nations, according to this thought, must be protected. The science and art that Akif suggests to be acquired were among the broader manifestations of the eclectic efforts of the previous generation on technological and commercial debates (Gencer, 2019, p. 320; Kara, 2012b, pp. 119-141). On the other hand, the belief that there was no nationality for art and science only underlined the necessity of being national/native in other matters such as morality and culture. Therefore, Kara determined that civilization, according to these intellectuals, belonged to the expansion aspect of Islamism, and culture to the conservative side (Kara, 2013, p. 40).

The replacement of devotion to and admiration for European civilization with hatred and hostility corresponds to the years of World War I (1914-1918) and the post-war period in the discussions of contemporary Islamic thought (Kara, 2014, p. 24). The proposition of confronting the "steel armor" on the horizon with a "breast full of faith" was a harbinger of a change of mind, while redefining the image of civilization as "shameless," "cruel," or a "single-tooth monster."¹¹ This does not mean, of course, that the epistemic eclecticism, which only proceeds through implementing Western technology or the separation of civilization and culture, was completely over. It is evident that the new philosophical, sociological, and historical insights were manifested by new and more discriminatory and exclusionary recognitions by the second generation of Islamism, to whom I now turn.

¹¹ The same change can be read via the "flood" analogy. Before the First World War, Akif compared humanity to a "gushing" flood, looking at the technical / scientific development level it had reached. After the war, he wrote that what was like a "roared flood" was the faithful self, who had lived free from all eternity.

3. Second Generation: The Decomposers of Eastern and Western Civilizations

In the thought world of the first generation, the concept of "civilization" was established in parallel to save the ailing Ottoman state. The continuity of the state, some thought, was possible by adding civilization, in its "technological" sense, to the body that had not lost its essence, that is, morality. "In the post-caliph conditions," (Aktay, 2005) civilization was the instrument for a utopian design of a new state and society. In other words, the thought of contemporary Islam, which was politicized by the first generation, became a utopian thought through the second generation (Gencer, 2017, p. 422). The main goal was to build the state as well as the society from scratch (Yavuz, 2005, p. 264; Bora, 2017, p. 424).¹² Kısakürek's "*Büyük Doğu*," Topçu's "*Hareket*," Karakoç's "*Diriliş*" idea, and Özel's "*Kalın Türk*" fell on the edge and sometimes the center of the debates about civilization that targeted both the state and the Ottoman society. In this context, for example, Islamic civilization as a concept found a relatively modest place in Kısakürek's writings. The "poet of pavements," who came to the fore in a reactionary period of Islamism against Kemalism, was a threshold for the shift of Islamist discourse from defense to attack (Bora, 2017, p. 442). Like all his ideas, the issue of civilization became meaningful for Kısakürek only with the ideal of "the Great East." He combined the notions of "birth" and the geographical "east" under the idea of the "birth of the Great East" (Kısakürek, 2016, p. 10). In this respect, he maintained the east-west polarization, one of the modern manifestations of the medieval distinctions of Islam versus blasphemy (Gencer, 2019, p. 300). The Great East, whose main purpose was to culminate in Islam "under the adjutancy of Islam," was defined as an ideology that "engraves faith bit by bit on the new human and the new world." (Kısakürek, 2016, pp. 10-12, 104) According to Kısakürek and others' conceptualization, Islam, which would give the materialist West its deprived spirit, and which would allow the spiritualist east to rule over matter, was the real civilization that would bring the earth to absolute healing (Barın, 2015, pp. 152-155).

In Kısakürek's writings, Islamic civilization is a means of marginalizing the West and presenting Islam as an alternative solution (Duran, 2005, pp. 149-150). But under this defense, there was an ossified view: in İbrahim Şinasi's words, "the matrimony of Asia's deep experience and Europe's untouched ideas" (Gencer, 2019, pp. 315-322). The eclectic idea, which proposed to merge the "mind of the West and the spirit of the East," was inherited from the Tanzimat thinkers (such as Şinasi, Namık Kemal, Ahmet Mithat) by the intellectuals of the constitutional monarchy (such as Akif, Elmalılı, and Şehbenderzade) also had a significant place in Kısakürek's writings. On the one hand, he talks about the need to say to ourselves and the Europeans: "I am who I am, and you are who you are." with regard to the roots of the entire history, religion, and civilization (Kısakürek, 2016, p. 78). On the other hand, he says: "We have no choice but to learn all the rights and institutions of the mind from the West, to fully digest and adopt it and

¹² Said Nursî's "old" and "new" periods are among the best examples of Islamists about this goal change. In a position to reach power, old Said considers changing the state / ruling level as a priority and sufficient for the improvement of society. New Said, deprived of power and almost all public rights, maintaining his ties with politics at a level close to zero at the beginning and at a passive level afterwards, prioritized his publications and aimed to protect/create Islamic consciousness and identity among individuals.

A similar emphasis on non-politics / sociality can be seen in Topçu who asked "A more bitter ignorance of determinism: many generations getting a place in politics no time flat to save the country and nation are also based on the same mistake [an unorganized/uncertain social life]. What is the benefit of changing the individuals sitting on the chairs if the soul and culture that we believe to be the saviour are not engrained in the generations?" and he underlined that the main thing to do was to educate generations rather than dealing with politics (Topçu, 1994, p. 59; 2012, p. 43). Also in Özel, it is also possible to see the emphasis that pushes the state into the background. He argues that for the state to be concerned, Muslims must have individually and collectively developed their quality of Islam and have passed many important examinations (Özel, 2013, p. 50).

to put it under our own souls' order" (Kısakürek, 2016, p. 164). Thus, he maintained the selective attitude of Islamism. He is a sense perceived and defended Islam as the "true civilization," but in his thought, Islam was primarily advocacy of ideology rather than an evolution of civilization (Duran, 2005, p. 150; Kısakürek, 2016, p. 99, 126). This situation, which played a foundational role in the formation of the second generation Islamism, seems to have pushed the discourse of "civilization" into the background of his writings.

The first serious criticism of the "civilization issue," which had mostly been advocated with an eclectic method since the Tanzimat period, came from Topçu. Although Topçu continued to see civilization as one of the ideal target utopias of social design (Topçu, 1994, p. 59; 2012, p. 13), he differed in method and content. In his criticisms, he sought the possibilities of "being a unique civilization" (Birgöl, 2013, p. 263) and "kneading our own national culture" (Topçu, 2012, p. 14). He primarily underlined that civilization could not be thought of separately from culture. For this reason, he considered Gökalp, who had seen culture and morality as national, and civilization and technique as international, and indeed the whole "Gökalp generation" as sociologically wrong (Öğün, 1992, p. 110; Topçu, 2012, p. 45).¹³ While the succeeding debates approached civilization with concepts such as technology, science, and progress, Topçu built the defense of civilization through the "spiritual powers of humanity" (Topçu, 2012, p. 134). This was primarily a revitalization of the Renaissance, which advocated a recognition starting from the external world to the individual themselves and came with its own Reform and Romanticism (Topçu, 2012, p. 65).¹⁴ According to Topçu, all great civilizations such as China, Asia, Mesopotamia, Islam, and Europe were founded upon and developed with spiritual power (Doğan, 2005, p. 442) and thus, on the occasion of their Renaissance, they brought new wisdom to humanity (Topçu, 1994, p. 36). However, "advances" that excelled over matter put morality in the background, and did not lead humans to their own selves, for lacking culture brought about the collapse of civilizations (Topçu, 1994, p. 134). In this understanding, a critique of materialism runs side by side with a critique of capitalism and reaches the limits of hostility toward technology.¹⁵ With the industrial revolution, the human/soul, which was exalted by the Renaissance, was replaced by machinery and matter. The era of pace also brought along anxiety.¹⁶ At the center of his critique of materialism Topçu placed technology, which he

¹³ Nevertheless, between some lines, Topçu seems to open the door to "acquiring good sides of Europe." He mentioned development projects (e.g. socialization of medical science) in European cities (e.g. England) as an example. He defines the ideal of morality as a "personality who has a national sacredness, who aims to raise his nation above all other nations and who is wanted by the modern civilization." However, it is clear that the "personality desired by modern civilization" will not emerge from Anatolia (Topçu, 1994, p. 176; 2012, pp. 67-69).

¹⁴ One of the concepts that Topçu emphasized most after "*Hareket*" was the *Renaissance*. Although similar emphasis has been in the writings of thinkers such as Kısakürek and Karakoç, Topçu commemorates the Renaissance together with Reform and Romanticism. As a person raised in the West and familiar with the maps of Western texts/concepts, his use of Romanticism is functional in terms of his criticism of all the dilemmas of modern industrial society such as urban life, workflow, mechanization and alienation. The emphasis on Reform, which he commemorates with "religious positivism" or "positivist followers of sharia" and which includes criticisms such as imitating the Prophet in bodily practices, kissing the beard behind the glass, sanctifying the cardigan, hoping for healing from human breath, seeking wisdom in the number of worry beads, is worth examining in terms of showing that his views sometimes approach a more modern, rational pattern (Topçu, 2008, p. 82). Parallel to a similar perspective, Kara, while analyzing Akif's views, says that, like many modern Muslim intellectuals, he speaks from the very center of secularism (Kara, 2012b, pp. 189-201).

¹⁵ Of course, Topçu's hostility toward technology does not mean that technology is ignored. His objection is to technology's restraint by national culture and human will. According to Topçu, technology should be used in the service of high ideals (Öğün, 1992, pp. 112, 114; Topçu, 2008, p. 205).

¹⁶ It is noteworthy that Topçu refers to mental illness when he talks about the problems of the time, because he placed morality at the centre of his own case and divine love / love at the center of morality. He defined three fundamental principles: reverence, compassion, and service, which are linked to Islamic morality, whose main origin is love, in his understanding. And all three of these principles can only manifest with love. Topçu also considered the feelings of anger/resentment/hate to be, the opposite of love, the destructive emotions of society. According to him, the reason that people who have been blinded by mechanization and who become alienated in every sense become mentally ill is that they lose this love (Topçu, 1974, pp. 73-92; 2012, p. 194).

referred to as “wild muffled wheezing of the machine and squeaking of choking moral hymns,” and as “the reason of humanity drifting into the abyss” (Öğün, 1992, p. 113; Şen, 2016, p. 63; Topçu, 2012, p. 20).

According to Topçu, technology means the application of knowledge to reach the truth. It is an undesirable result rather than a goal. He accepted technology as a reality of culture, not civilization. According to him, technology is inseparable from culture; (Topçu, 2012, p. 29) therefore, it must be born of one’s own culture (Topçu, 2012, p. 25). Topçu often used the concept of civilization, but stated that the “caravan of civilization is guided by education and culture” (Topçu, 1994, p. 186) and focused on the concept of culture instead of civilization. He defined civilization as “order,” (Topçu, 1994, p. 172) but in his understanding, it was far from the positivist constitutionalism or social determinism of the Tanzimat dignitaries. He emphasized a consciousness that would give humans the determination to use their souls in the first place (Topçu, 1994, p. 172). This consciousness, he stated, is where culture meets civilization. (Topçu, 2012, p. 26) Getting rid of the “crises that we live and will live in our existence” depends on acting in the direction of the national culture that Topçu called “our true soul,” joining forces with the “culture man,” and saving the culture (Topçu, 2012, pp. 26-29). Building civilization, he seems to have thought, was possible and necessary, but it could not be achieved without recovering the national culture.

The issue of civilization sometimes settled on the pendulum of an apology, such as “Islam is not an obstacle to progression,” and sometimes of an attack, such as “true civilization is only Islam.” The construction of Islamic civilization has been an important instrument of Islam’s sometimes ideological, sometimes national-cultural narratives, and of the gratitude of collective acknowledgment or total rejection of the thinkers which were essential to juggle. In this context, the foremost concept connect to contemporary Islamic thought has been “civilization.” Of the intellectuals analyzed thus far, Karakoç is the one who seems to have spent the most time on the issue of civilization. He seems to have strived to make a historical philosophy out of it through historical and sociological analysis and achieved this to a great extent. Thus, we should dwell more extensively on his understanding of civilization.

Karakoç argued that civilization, by definition, is a phenomenon of history that appeals to all humanity. According to him (Karakoç, 2015b, p. 9),

Civilization means all of the intentions and activities, theory and practice, designs and works, real and potential powers that arise, originate, and nurture from the efforts of human beings to realize their main purpose, their quest to reach it, their efforts to not lose if they found it, their embellishment of it and the desire to express their feelings and thoughts in that direction.

As seen in the above passage, the main purpose of humankind, according to Karakoç, lies in the essence of his definition of civilization, which is “the creature that God wants.” In his own words, “civilization is the human’s realization of this aim at the highest level, the activities performed to make it permanent and the act of monumentalizing, institutionalizing and perpetuating it.” (Karakoç, 2015b, pp. 7-11)

According to Karakoç, the ideology and purpose of humans are divine (Karakoç, 2015b, p. 10). Civilization finds its true meaning and source in revelation. For this reason, Karakoç uses the term “revelation/truth civilization” to distinguish it from other types of civilization. Other civilizations *ascend* to “Paradise Lost,” to the extent that they approach the civilization of truth, which has maintained its continuity since the first human being; and they prepare for their *decline* to the extent that they diverge from it (Karakoç, 2017b, pp. 139-140). Civilizations, Karakoç stated, were born from a single civilization, whose origin was a revelation and whose founders were the prophets (Karakoç, 2015b, p. 16). The term “Islamic civilization” appears

exactly at this point in his argument. Islam, which he says was a belief and civilization since the first person on earth, is the testator and heir of the chain of Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman civilizations. These civilizations are abaxial, degenerated, and corrupted versions of Islamic civilization, which the "civilization of truth" calls the most perfect and superior form (Karakoç, 2017b, p. 82). The thesis is that "the true civilization" basically exists with the torch of Islamic civilization despite some dusty periods of humanity. This understanding brings the concept of civilization, in Karakoç's idea, closer to the possibility of creating an original philosophy of history beyond being the subject of a particular sociopolitical period. This is the most important issue that makes his ideas about civilization unique. Almost all contemporary Islamic thinkers were subject to the opposite criticism of Özel (to whom we will return) by incarcerating Islamic civilization to a specific place and time. However, for Karakoç, civilization was both the fruit and the ground of an existence that is impossible to cast with historicity, and that has existed since the first human. It is the fruit because civilization is the result of a particular socio-cultural/political/economic process. When this result is achieved, it becomes a supportive ground for all physical or metaphysical struggles in human existence. As can be seen in the following passage, although he links civilization to the transcendent, Karakoç also underlines its sociological reality (Karakoç, 2015c, p. 64):

Every person, every society, and every civilization has to provide their own belief and trust. In this world, there is a competition between swearing and faith, between truth and lies, between beautiful and ugly, and between good and evil. Virtually on equal terms. This is a glory of the sincerity of the seriousness of war and competition. Man will protect even his faith with his own labor. Similarly, whatever society and civilization have, it will protect it with great effort. Thus, even if it is data or a gift at the beginning, it will be a sum of the values gained as it is protected by an effort and suffered a lot for this purpose.

Karakoç considered culture an element of civilization, stating that he thought differently from Gökalp within the framework of discussions on the distinction between civilization and culture. While he saw culture as the physiology of civilization, he saw civilization as a living organism beyond mere anatomy (Karakoç, 2015b, pp. 9-10). In his opinion, the "civilization organism" has three basic principles: beauty, truthfulness, and goodness. Of these, beauty generally covers artistic and aesthetic concerns, truth covers belief, philosophy/thought, and science; and goodness covers the field of ethics (Karakoç, 2015a, p. 83). The Resurrection, a concept Karakoç devoted his life to, is accomplished through the revival of Islamic civilization, and the revival of civilization is accomplished through the completion of the triad of aesthetics, philosophy, and ethics (Karakoç, 2015b, pp. 21-22).

4. Third Generation: Conceptional Conflicts and Efforts on Deepening

The period between 1980 and 2000 in Türkiye is characterized by the reverting rise of Islamism and the tensions resulting from the latter's intellectual stagnation (Bora, 2017, p. 468). In this context, the utopian civilization discourse of the second generation left its place to the adaptation of a harmonious, moderate civilization that was open to integration, notwithstanding some new differences in meaning following the Cold War. Since the 1990s in particular, concerns about socialism have found their way into the course of Islamism in Türkiye. This change happened partly in connection to the national expansion of the Kurdish-Alevi (Kara, 2012a, pp. 102-106; Tuğal, 2005, pp. 493-502; Şengül, 2005, pp. 525-543) and partly to international expansions such as the alliance of civilizations and interreligious dialogue (Kara, 2012a, pp. 90, 91, 151, 169). Undoubtedly, this emphasis on pluralism on a narrow and large scale was linked to the coming to power of Islamism rather than the individual efforts of

thinkers. For this reason, "whether the shirt was taken off or not," Justice and Development Party's rise to power in 2002 as an extension of the political vision of the National View ongoing since the 1970s (Çakır, 2013), took the Presidency of Religious Affairs one step further as a political actor in terms of the pursuit of the new pluralist discourse of contemporary Islamic thought. The presidency provided active participation "when appropriate," in events such as the *First Congress of Civilizations* in Hatay (2005) and the *Garden of Religions*, which "taught civilization" in Belek (2004). On other occasions the Presidency of Religious Affairs, by using a shallow discourse of civilization embellished with terms like "word civilization," and "aid civilization," could not step beyond the continuation of the mainstream civilization theses of the Third Generation. Let us focus on some of the third generation thinkers.

İsmet Özel is one of the most important thinkers of the third generation. He, as the most radical opponent of the idea of civilization in contemporary Islamic thought as a whole, he argued that technology and culture are not independent of civilization. While the cultural-technological association opened the door to the building of civilization for Topçu, Özel closes his doors to civilization with the belief that the same association interferes with "Muslim thinking." (Özel, 2013, p. 17) According to Özel, "the point that should be understood clearly and consciously is that the West is a whole with its belief, philosophy, science, and technology; and if it will be rejected, it must be rejected completely; and if it will be accepted, it must be accepted completely." (Özel, 2013, p. 50) Therefore, as a term born in the West, "civilization" meant Enlightenment humanism, which excluded God and placed man in the center of the universe throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. "By rooting the evolution of human society and the universality of development within itself, it became the name of a model valid for all humanity" (Özel, 2013, p. 112). For this reason, in Özel's understanding, the nerve endings of a modern image of the future, a universalism based on a progressive understanding of history, and Eurocentric ethnocentrism are firmly bound to the concept of civilization. Such a central and "high" ideal inevitably leads to imperialism and colonialism (Özel, 2013, p. 113). Therefore, Özel rejected the use of the term "civilization" in the context of Islamism.

According to Özel, "understanding the Islamic strife as a civilization struggle" creates two problems: one is for the object (civilization) and the other is for the subject (thinker). Firstly, Özel draws attention to the dangers that may arise from adopting the aspects of societies considered brilliant in terms of civilization as exemplars. If a society is both civilized and a foreigner to Islam - and according to many medieval and pre-modern thinkers, like Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), this is possible-¹⁷ naturally a non-Islamic lifestyle is practiced in that community. For this point, Özel uses the example of the Harun Rashid period (775-785), which, he said, was "a foreigner to Islam to the extent that it was civilized" (Özel, 2013, p. 124). The second problem, according to Özel, is related to the dilemmas of the Muslim intellectual mind that designs civilization. Özel argues that carrying the design of civilization in our minds to the future Islamic society brings along the danger of crushing our Islamic concerns under arbitrary insights (Özel, 2013, p. 125). While the utopia of a future-oriented civilization paves the way for the defence of the past (and morally problematic) civilizations, it imprisons Islam in the idea of evaluating it within the conditions of history, and thus reduces Islam to a historical category (Özel, 2013, p. 109). A utopia of civilization oriented towards the future chooses the first way when it comes to being able or moral (Özel, 2013, p. 172). For this reason, Özel seeks refuge in God from evil and civilization, as Said Nursî seeks refuge in God from evil and politics.

¹⁷ Unlike Islamic thinkers before him such as Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun states that a "civilized" life does not need to be founded on prophethood/religion. Rather than the revelation that established Medina or Umran, it is a political authority and *asabiyyah* that provides social ties (İbn-i Haldûn, 2004, pp. 69-82, 169-172).

Ali Bulaç leading figure of the third generation who participated in civilization debates. In defining Islamic civilization, he drew attention to the use of contemporary concepts based on the difference between civilization and urbanises, which was not emphasized by previous generations. Bulaç argues that civilization is a concept belonging to East/Islam and that Western "accumulation" should just be referred to as "urbanizes." With this distinction, he emphasizes the need for such a semantic intervention in language so that reality can be understood within its truth and existential situation. According to him, "becoming civilized or civilization is, in principle, a natural phenomenon that arises when every community begins to settle down, whether Muslim or not. In the life and history of the Muslim community, however, it is not a specific 'purpose', but a natural and necessary 'result'." (Bulaç, 2012, p. 156) Bulaç does not set a goal of "establishing Islamic civilization." He even considers it an illegitimate task for a Muslim to set out to establish civilization, because "a mind in which civilization is absolutized is a mind that has been separated from God and the Hereafter." "But," he says, "if a person tries to bring religion to life, and if he engages in the noble endeavor of giving embodiment to religion, and if, as a result of that endeavor, material shapes, forms, institutions, organizations emerge," civilization is the result and is legitimate. At this point, he does not approve of Özel's protesting attitude against civilization, nor does he approve of transforming of the defense of civilization into a flag in the name of Islam (Bulaç, 2012, pp. 158-159):

So, looking at a Western civilization which is the natural result of Western understanding, the Western metropolitan lifestyle, the way of living civilized which makes people so fond of the world and crazy pleasures obsessively, it is wrong to regard civilization, as the natural product of human history and human life, as totally negative and non-Islamic. It is just as wrong to come to the same conclusion from the false and illegitimate products of civilization in the name of Islam. Civilization is a natural consequence of the inhabited life of human beings and every world view, every belief system, and style of understanding the world has to reveal a different civilization structure.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

In the course of contemporary Islamic thought in Türkiye, the centrality of the concept of civilization is prominent. Whether dealt with in an apologetical style, an otherizing rejection, or an ontological conceptualization, the civilization debate has never been off the agenda for Muslim intellectuals in Türkiye. As I have shown in this study, the concept of Islamic civilization was sometimes completely rejected. When it was entertained as a legitimate concept, i.e. under Karakoç and Özel's hosting, it led in opposite directions. An in-depth analysis of the prominent intellectuals of the three generations demonstrates the intricacies and transformation routes of Islamic civilization discourse in Türkiye, from eclecticism to rejection, to ontological awareness.

This study paves the way for future research. First, other intellectuals, such as Cahit Zarifoğlu, Erdem Beyazıt, Rasim Özdenören, and Teoman Duralı should be incorporated into an analysis to attain a more holistic picture. I focused on those who had a more immediate impact on Muslim thinkers (like Kısakürek) and those who spent more time on Islamic civilization (like Karakoç and Özel). Undoubtedly, these un-examined names also have significant writings discussing Islamic civilization, and analyzing their writings is an important next step. Second, I did not include "right-wing" politicians like Turgut Özal, Necmettin Erbakan, Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu, Alparslan Türkeş, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in this analysis. Their treatises, party programs, and political manifestos also have important clues about their envisioning of "Islamic civilization." However, this kind of study on Islamic civilization must evaluate further socio-political parameters, that were beyond the scope of this analysis.

Concepts are keys to the world of thought. Without exploring these keys in depth, and without mapping them onto historical-sociological developments, it is impossible to carry out productive sociological analyses. The current study is a small step toward exploring the broader debates on Islamic civilization past and present.

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The author declares that this article complies with ethical standards and rules.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Yaklaşık iki asırlık bir tarihi ile İslam medeniyeti kavramı, Çağdaş İslam Düşüncesi’nin en tartışmalı ve üzerinde en çok konuşulan kavramlarından bir tanesidir. İslamcılığın genel manadaki savunmacı ve eklektik karakteri, kavramın 19. yüzyılın sonlarından başlayarak günümüze kadar gelen anlam haritasında da ana belirleyici olmuştur. Bu çalışma, İslamcılığın Türkiye seyrinde üç nesil belirleyerek bu nesillerin İslam medeniyeti kavramına yaklaşımlarını ele almıştır. Bu bağlamda I. nesilden Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır gibi düşünürlerin, II. nesilden N. Fazıl, N. Topçu ve Sezai Karakoç’un, III. Nesilden de İ. Özel ve A. Bulaç’ın fikirlerine yer verilmiştir.

İlk nesil İslamcıların İslam Medeniyeti kavramını genel manasıyla savunmacı ve eklektik bir üslupla incelediği görülmektedir. Bu bağlamda modern düşüncenin ilerlemeci damarı İslamcıların medeniyet söylemlerini de etkilemiş, İslam’ın ilerlemeye engel (mani-i terakki) değil, ilerlemeyi emreden (âmir-i terakki) ya da ilerlemeye kefil (zâmin-i terakki) olduğu savunulmuştur. Dönemin ana söylemi M. Sadık’ın “Medeniyet-i hakikiye medeniyet-i İslamiye’den ibarettir.” Söylemi bağlamında okunabilir. Gökalp’in Medeniyet-kültür ayrımı paralelinde, bilim ve teknoloji üzerinden tanımlanan medeniyetin belli bir dine ve coğrafyaya ait olmadığı, insanlığın ortak malı olduğu özellikle vurgulanmış ve bu sebeple taklit edilmesinde bir mahzur görülmemiştir. İslam medeniyetinin “gerçek medeniyet” olduğu söylemi bu neslin yazılarında yaklaşık I. Dünya Savaşı’nın sonlarına kadar devam etmiştir.

II. Nesil İslamcılar’ın ise ilk nesilden farklı olarak İslam Medeniyeti kavramını Batı’nın karşısında farklı ve bambaşka bir çözüm arayışı çerçevesinde ele aldığı görülmektedir. Şüphesiz bunda “Halife sonrası şartlar”ın İslamcıları yeni bir devlet ve toplum ütopyasına itmesinin büyük etkisi vardır. Medeniyet halen devleti ve toplumu “sıfırdan inşa” etmenin ana ütopyik söylemleri arasındadır. Bu bağlamda İslam Medeniyeti, Batı’yı ötekileştirerek İslam’ı başlı başına bir alternatif çözüm olarak sunmanın aracı konumundadır. Büyük Doğu, Hareket, Diriliş ya da Kalın Türk gibi dönemin önemli isimleri tarafından geliştirilen kavramsal çıkışlar, hem devleti hem de toplumu içine alan medeniyet tartışmalarının bazen kıyısına, bazen merkezine düşer. Her ne kadar İslam Medeniyeti’nin Batı Medeniyeti’nden farkları vurgulansa da, II. Neslin de birçok noktada savunmacı ve eklektik bir üslup ile dirsek temasında olduğu görülmektedir. Bu temasın en az hissedildiği kişi ise kanaatimizce Sezai Karakoç’tur. Şüphesiz bunda Türkiye bağlamında medeniyet meselesine en çok mesai harcayan düşünürlerden biri olmasının önemi büyüktür. Karakoç’un İslam Medeniyeti’nin farklılığını vurgularken kendine has bir usul ve üslup ile İslam Medeniyeti’nin sınırlarını çizerek içini doldurmaya çalıştığı ve bu çabadan kendine has bir tarih felsefesi ortaya koyduğu söylenebilir.

III. neslin İslam medeniyeti kavramının epistemolojik ve ontolojik anlam haritalarına yönelerek sosyo-kültürel tutarlılıklara dikkat eden bir açıklama getirme isteğinde oldukları savunulmuştur. Türkiye’de 1980’lerle başlayan yaklaşık yirmi yıllık dönem, İslamcılığın öze dönüşü yükselişi ile çoğulcu vurgusunun gerilimi üzerinden okunabilir. Bu minvalde II. neslin ütopyik medeniyet söylemi, soğuk savaşın sona erdiği yıllarla beraber yerini, farklılıkları korumakla beraber entegrasyona açık, uyumlu, ılımlı bir medeniyet kabulüne bırakmıştır. Bu ılımlı kabulün büyük istisnasını İsmet Özel temsil eder. Özel medeniyet kavramını doğrudan reddeder. Bu manada Karakoç’un ardılı olarak İslam Medeniyeti hakkındaki kanısı siyah beyaz ayrımı kadar olumsuzdur. Şüphesiz Özel, Batı düşüncesinin İslam coğrafyasına uymayan kavram haritası ile olan hesaplaşmasının liste başına teknik ve yabancılaşma ile beraber medeniyeti koyar. Geldiği noktada Medeniyetten Allah’a sığınmaktadır. Özel’den sonra Ali Bulaç ise Medeniyeti olumlu ve olumsuz anlamlarda bambaşka yerlere koyan Karakoç ve Özel arasındaki harmoniyi ve her ikisinin de haklı yönlerini vurgulayan bir orta yolu temsil eder.

Özetle I. nesilden III. nesle doğru gidildikçe kavramın genel manadaki kullanımının pozitivist-ilerlemeci yönü zayıflamış, ontolojik bir farkındalık ve dolayısıyla ayırım ise kendini daha net göstermeye başlamıştır. Elbette Çağdaş İslam Düşüncesi içerisinde bir kavramdan bahsederken tek yönlü bir hareketten söz etmek doğru değildir. Fakat tüm iniş çıkışlarıyla medeniyet meselesinin üzerine daha ciddi ve akademik eğilindiği ortadadır. Bu çizgi çalışma boyunca İslamcıların söylemleri üzerinden gösterilmeye çalışılmıştır. Çalışmanın yalnızca İslamcılık akımına değil, başta merkez-sağ partiler olmak üzere Türk siyasal hayatındaki medeniyet/İslam medeniyeti söylemlerinin anlam haritasını çıkarmakta da yararlı olacağı düşünülmektedir.