

DYNAMO OF CIVILIZATION: INTELLECTUALISM

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ÖZET

Bu makalede; ekonomik, sosyal ve siyasal olmak üzere üst seviyeden bir yaşama biçimini ifade eden medeniyetlerin muharrik gücünün ne olup olmadığı sorgulanmakta ve Türk-İslâm medeniyetinin batı medeniyeti karşısında niçin geri kaldığına dair cevaplar aranmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Medeniyet, Entellektualizm, Aydınlanma, Demokratikleşme

ABSTRACT

This article questions what is and is not included in the provocative power of civilizations that stand for an upper form of living economic, social and political fields and seeks answers to the question why Turkish-Islamic civilization retrogressed as against the western civilization.

Key words: Civilization, Intellectualism, Enlightenment, Democratization

In this essay, I will try to find out what the motor power of civilizations is and is not, and to interrogate the word “underdevelopment” which is used for Islamic “*medeniyet*” (civilization) as a judgment of value. The title of the article consists of three words, none of which are Turkish-originated, which readers will probably find strange. But they will think that we are right after being explained the reasons for this.

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The equivalent of the concept of “*medeniyet*” (civilization), which is used in Turkish language to describe a high level way of life being politically, socially and economically perfected in most western languages, is “*civilization*”. This concept was used in western literature by *Marquis de Mirabeau* for the first time in 1756.¹ As it will be understood, this date is 18th century during which the basic dynamics or parameters of modernism, which is an unprecedented way of life started to be formed. Since the content of the concept “*medeniyet*” (civilization), which is in all non-western countries including our country used to express an upper way of life and the attainment of such a way of life is defined by the meaning contained in the concept of civilization which started to be used in the 18th century, I put such a title to my essay. At this point, some questions will rise: Why did the concept of “*civilization*” was invented in 18th century and not in another century? What are the features that distinguish the 18th century from other centuries? What kind of things that defined and determined before the *western* way of life tended to change in the 18th century? The answers to these questions will surely help us to understand the content of the civilization concept.

The concept of “*medeniyet*” (civilization), which is used to express an upper level way of life, is, of course, not related exclusively to western civilization and western way of life. Along with the western way of life, the concept of “*medeniyet*” (civilization) is also used in order to express Islamic, Indian, Chinese, Persian, Greek, Roman way of life. It is possible to mention different civilizations (*medeniyet*) since they have different understandings about existence, knowledge, value, human, politics, economy etc. which distinguish each of them from the others, and that they are founded upon different parameters. However western civilization has a feature which leads us put into a completely different category what we call western civilization and western way of life that started to be formed as of

¹Server Tanilli, *Uygurluk Tarihi*, Cem Yay., İstanbul, 1994, p.12.

the 18th century. This feature is that western civilization is founded upon a non-religious “*intellectualism*”. Although non-western civilizations differ from each other in respect of their political, social and economic reflections, it is a reality that contrary to western civilization, these civilizations they consider religious thought as the final determinant nearly in all kinds of structures. And that’s why the societies in which western civilization is lived are called modern societies, and the societies in which other civilizations are lived are called traditional societies. In other words, the most important feature that distinguishes western civilization from the others is that the religion factor is not considered as the final determinant in political, social and economic that is all kinds of structuralization concerning life. Although German sociologist *Max Weber* says that *Protestant* religious understanding is an important factor in the formation of civilization, he confesses that understanding is no more respected in the civilization that completed its formation process by saying that “capitalism which is founded on a mechanical basis no more needs this support”²

Similar to the concept of civilization, it is in the 18th century that religion is no more considered as a determinant element in the way of life. The intersection of these two events gives us necessary clues about both what civilization is and what the features of the 18th century, in which civilization process started are and also what changed in the western way of life in which this process started to be lived. Another name given to the 18th century is the “*Age of Enlightenment*”. Understanding the content of *Enlightenment*, after which the age was named will facilitate understand the content of civilization.

According to *Immanuel Kant*, German philosopher who is among the most prominent figures of the *Enlightenment Age*, enlightenment is “*to become independent from a state of non-maturity into which human being*

² Max Weber, *Protestan Ahlakı ve Kapitalizmin Ruhu*, tr. Z. Arıoba, Hil Yay., İstanbul, 1985, p.146.

has fallen by his crime. This state of non-maturity is the incapability of human to use his mind without referring to the guidance of the others. Human has fallen into that state of non-maturity by his own crime". The reason for this must be attributed not to the mind itself but to human being who does not dare use his mind without help and guidance from the others. The words "Dare use your mind by yourself" is the motto of Enlightenment."

"Although nature freed men from depending on an external direction, it is because of their cowardice and laziness that most of the people remain immature all their lives by their own will and it is again because of this reason that it is very easy for the others to govern or supervise these people. Because the state of non-maturity is so comfortable. I have to care for nothing if I have a book that thinks instead of me, a priest replacing my consciousness, and a doctor who is occupied with my diet and decides on my health. It is not so much important whether I think or not as long as I can spend money, since there are other people who would free me of this boring and tiring activity. Those who are in charge of inspection and governance of the others (guardian, governor) do all they can in order for the majority of people and also the second sex to find a step towards maturity challenging and even dangerous. Firstly, they bewilder the animals before them and then strictly forbid them to go out from where they are kept mistress and tell them the dangers they are likely to encounter should they go on their own. However such a danger is not, in fact, important, since those who dared do this will finally learn to go on their own after some falls. But such an example frightens man and keeps him from making new attempts from that time on. It means that it is very difficult to free from this state of non-maturity, which is a quasi-nature and a basic structure for each individual."... "However what is only needed for the enlightenment is

freedom, which is the least harmful freedom: the freedom to use mind with all its aspects before the masses without hesitation."³

As it will be clearly understood from what **Kant** says, what distinguishes and differentiates the 18th century from the others is that it is the Age of Enlightenment; that is use of mind freely with all its aspects before the masses without referring to the guidance of anything else. And that's what intellectualism, which we qualify as the dynamo of intellectualism is all about.

What had **Enlightenment** or **intellectualism** changed in the western world? The answer to this question will also give us the answer to what kind of way of life civilization is related. As you will probably guess what is meant here is the "meaning and order of human life", which is a typical phenomenon. If the values and forms that regulated the order of life in any time and place lose their vitality, the thoughts that will guide towards a new order are searched naturally. The enlightenment understanding of the 18th century is such a search for order. The problem of "existence of man and his part in the world", which was put forward in the **Renaissance** as a result of Middle-age church totalitarianism, was thoroughly treated in the 18th century with a search for response with rational criteria, the western way of life started to change certainly. The **French Revolution**, which broke out towards the end of the century is the first adaptation of these thoughts to political ad social fields.⁴

In the **Renaissance** period (16th century) in which the fundamentals of the philosophy of **Enlightenment** were put, although the human thought that followed nominal line which attributes the understanding of reality to

³I. Kant, *Seçilmiş Yazılar*, tr. Nejat Bozkurt, Remzi Kitabevi, İstanbul, 1984, pp 213-215.

⁴Macit Gökberk, *Felsefe Tarihi*, Remzi Kitabevi, İstanbul, 1980, p 325.

individual, will, experience, mind and concrete singular reality, tried to isolate itself from all kind of historical authority and to form its ideas concerning universe and human only with the truths provided by mind and experience, and to change the religious landscape of the *Middle Age* that determined life, it was able to do systematically what it tried to do only in the 18th century. The human being, who tried to understand universe and life with his own mind and experience, is, from that time on, an individual. He is not valuable because he is the “*pearl of creation*” but simply because he is a human being. The earth is not the temporary living place for the “pearls of creation” but it is a part of the endless *Solar System* and a ball of mysteries waiting to be dominated by he individuals. The way to understand the reality is not to orient towards the church doctrines but towards nature and mind. The individual who uses his own mind is not a hostage of the church and the monarchs, but he is the master of himself. The individual wants the paradise of the earth he will construct by himself, not the paradise of the church. Human history is not a process for one time that started when human fell because of the original sin and continued with the *Messiah* who paved the way of independence for man and that will end with the completion of this course (apocalypse), but a process that prepared the earthly paradise for the individual and that continues perpetually. Thus, this new stage of rational thought and way of life adapted by it was expressed with a new concept: “*Civilization*”.

To sum up, the concept of civilization started to be used as of the 18th century in order to express technical and social skills acquired by man who was based upon *enlightenment* or *intellectualist* thought and it expresses the external progress of human, his dominance over nature and non-religious progress.⁵ As for the political, social and economic reflections, the individual, who defends *rational natural law*, understood that the right to govern was not given by God to the monarchs. And the natural outcome

⁵*Encyclopedia Ana Britannica*, V.14, Entry “*Kültür*”.

of this is the transformation from monarchies to democracies, as it was observed with the *French Revolution*. The democratic structure, which is based on the equality of men, brought massive and official education, and the acquisition of social status was lied- wrongly or correctly- to the education of the individual. The individual, who aims at creating the paradise on the earth with his own endeavors and labor, started to have a *secular* vision over everything. Since everything is needed in the secular paradise in order to be able to taste everything, everything has to be invented and produced. Everything has to be produced so that it can be consumed. The individual is obliged to produce not to survive but to consume. Thus, when it comes to details, civilization, which expresses an upper-level way of life, can be of different interpretations, but basically it is a way of life that contains elements such as *democratization, individuality, secularization, and economic productivity*.

Departing from this point, let's have a look at the "*underdevelopment*" of Islamic civilization (*medeniyet*): the word "*underdevelopment*" here expresses undoubtedly a judgment of value. Such a judgment is clearly put forward as a result of a comparison. Everybody knows well that the civilization compared is western "*medeniyet*" that is *civilization*. The thing behind which one has lagged is the level of civilization that is believed to be advanced. However there raises an important question: Which meaning do those who mention the "*underdevelopment*" of Islamic civilization (*medeniyet*) give to this expression? Is it possible that they mean an ethical underdevelopment or progress? Although different answers can be provided to this question, it is certain the western civilization is much more advanced than Islamic world in respect of technologic, economic and military power. And in fact that's what those who belong to Islamic civilization mean when they talk about the underdevelopment of their own civilization. Although the reality concerning the intense violation of human rights in Islamic world can be evaluated as an ethical underdevelopment, it is also a reality that such violations happened

after getting into the *civilization* process. What's more, crises like drug, *AIDS* make it unnecessary to make an ethical comparison. It means that if one mentions the underdevelopment of Islamic civilization (*medeniyet*), technological, economic and military underdevelopment is meant. Such an underdevelopment definition would probably be subject to no objections.

At this intersection point of the issue, we come to the old question: "Why did *Islamic* world lag behind *West*?" The period during which this question was clearly asked and tried to be answered is, for Islamic world, 19th century. It would probably not be wrong to say that the question has not been answered clearly yet when we observe the issue towards the end of the 20th century. Of course, we will not claim to be able to answer this question at first step; what we want to do is to think whether it is necessary or not to ask this question in a different way or not. I believe that before this old question, another question should be asked: Does Islamic civilization (*medeniyet*) comply with the civilization? In other words, can there be a civilization of a way of life based on Islamic principles? Or the question can be asked like that: Couldn't Islamic civilization (*medeniyet*) have formed a technological, economic and military power according to its own parameters?

There is no doubt that the concepts of different languages are fruits of a different history, and a different framework of conception and sense, and that's why it is difficult and even impossible sometimes for these concepts to adapt when imported to a different socio-political environments.⁶ *Civilization* is one of those concepts. It would be nothing but a hallucination to import the concept of civilization, which is a fruit of a framework of conception and sense proper to the *Western* world, to Islamic world and to believe that it can adapt to the Islamic geography. This situation will be better understood if one keeps in mind that civilization

⁶M. A. Kılıçbay, *Felsefesiz Sanat Oyunsuz Tarih*, İmge Kitapevi, Ankara, 1996, p.183.

corresponds to a social, political and economic way of life based on non-religious fundamentals. It is obvious that *Islam*, which is a religion containing both social and political and economic principles wouldn't remain indifferent to this non-religious situation.

Unless non-religiousness can be interpreted as counter-religiousness – for example as with non-religious but not counter-religious propositions of the science that tries to answer the questions concerning existence – can Islam comply with some principles of civilization? For example, is Islam an obstacle to the comprehension of the reality of the universe and the life through the mind or decision of the order of life by the man through his of mind and experience or to the establishment of a political structure based on legal equality between people or to aim at economic productivity?

If the questions above are to be answered by considering that Islam is a doctrine based on uniqueness (*tevhid*) and in the framework of the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, it will be seen that Islamic civilization (medeniyet) complies with all of the principles of civilization except for the ones that come to being as counter-religiousness. Islam invites man to think, judge and compare through his mind for the comprehension of all kind of reality, be it concerning material or life. Many verses from the Quran (2/44, 6/32, 7/26 etc.) meaning that “*Wouldn't you use your mind?*” indicate this reality. Although one thinks that in religious doctrines, the source of legitimacy of thought is the religion itself, the basic feature that distinguishes Islam from other religions is that it assigns legitimacy also to mind and experience. The words in the *Quran* are clear evidence of this. What's more, this principle has always been conserved in the historical experience of *Islamic* thought except for “*tasavvuf*” (Islamic mysticism). This understanding concerning Islamic thought is completely different from the activity of rationalization of the *Middle-age Scholasticism*, since scholasticism tries to rationalize the irrational provision in the religious doctrine while the holy texts, which are the only source of Islam refer to mind and experience.

The situation is no different for the Islamic socio-political structure that should be based on the principles of ethics and justice. The verses from the Quran (4/58, 5/42 etc.) meaning “*There is no doubt that God orders you to deliver the trusts to the qualified, and to reign among people through justice*” show that individual merit and rule of law are principles of socio-political order. In the Quran, principles aiming at institutional structuring that will enable the realization of justice are also mentioned; these principles also give light to the way the politics should be: “...*many Gods or a unique omnipotent God, which one is better...God only reigns. God only orders us to obey him and that is the true religion. But many people don't realize this.*” (12/39-40). As it will be understood from these meanings, in Islamic political philosophy, the sovereignty belongs to God; however from these meanings one should also understand that the only being that has absolute wisdom and does everything as it should is God. Another reason why sovereignty is attributed exclusively to God is the aim to prevent people from considering things as God that are not capable to do things wisely and obeying them irrationally. It is as ridicule as expecting God even to make traffic rules to interpret the verse “*God only reigns*” as “*People can never make rules or judgments through their mind concerning the regulation of their lives*”. In the same way, it is ridicule to interpret the verse (10/68) “*Whatever there is in the heavens and on the Earth belongs to God.*” as “*property belongs only to God*”, and to infer from this verse that people cannot acquire properties. **Ebuzer-el Gifari**, a friend of the **Prophet Mohamed**, who objected to **Muaviye**, who enabled the transformation of caliphate to sovereignty, which was the first of the breaking points of the history of Islam, by saying that “*the law of God contains the law of servants of God clearly explains how sovereignty should be conceived.*”

Since the direct addressee of Islam is individual, the representation of the sovereignty belongs to society (**Islamic community**) consisting of individuals. The sort of realization of the representation is “*biat*” that is elections. (48/10, 60/12). The mission of the representation authority

(council-assembly- 42/38) is "to invite to the good, to order the renowned and to avoid the unlawful" (3/104). Although one can interrogate what the situation of non-Muslim people would be in an Islam centered political system, one will find out that this question is answered rationally when holy texts are examined. From the Islamic point of view, and religion in its social, political and practical meaning, "The true religion in the eye of God is Islam" (3/19) and "whomever looks for other religion than Islam is unacceptable" (3/85); but as for the relations with non-Muslim people, one is ordered to be equitable in the face of non-Muslim elements (5/42, 60/8) by saying that "there is no compellation in the religion" (/256) and this shows that people are equal in respect of fundamental rights and freedoms.

The answer to the question whether there are any obstacles to economic productivity in religious constants of *Islam* is no. The verse "As a matter of fact, for man there is nothing more than what he gets by working" (53/39) determines the basis of economy as "*labor*". The interdiction of interest (2/27) and the order of *alms* (2/43) aim at the circulation of capital and social equality. The words of the prophet such as "work for the world as if you would never die, and work for the other world as if you would die tomorrow" and "the giver is more precious than the taker" show that there are no obstacles to economic productivity from Islamic point of view provided that it is ethical.

In the light of what has already been said, it would not be incorrect to infer that it is not possible to establish a civilization that is similar to the Western civilization that expresses a non-religious progress by remaining loyal to Islamic parameters. The reason for this is Islam is already a religion having its own social, political and economic parameters. But it is quite possible to establish an upper level way of life equivalent to Western civilization in accordance with the own parameters of Islam; since *Islam* rejects neither mind nor experience; neither freedom and justice nor elections and assembly (*council*), nor economic productivity. On the contrary, it orders all these things.

At this point, the old question is re-encountered: If it was so, why didn't all these things happen and why did Islamic civilization lag behind the West? In my opinion this question can be answered like that by considering the historical experience of **Islam**: Because the people of Islamic world started to get far away from Islamic parameters before they entered wholly the process of establishing such a civilization; in that even after 30 years following the death of the *Prophet* the political system was transformed into authoritarian and totalitarian sovereignty by deviating from freedom, justice and merit. Totalitarian and authoritarian systems formalized the reality of life and universe, since they would not let reign realities of mind and experience. Of course the reality of life and universe could not have been explored in spite of the official reality. Or, the reality could have been searched in irrational fields remote from real life, as in "mystic" version of Islamic mysticism. What was searched out of the real life could not have constituted a basis for civilization. One must admit that a strong **Ottoman Islamic** civilization (*medeniyet*) was established in a certain period of history, but that's because totalitarian and authoritarian approaches were left aside, and justice, freedom and merit were appreciated during this period. Unfortunately, this period didn't last long, totalitarian and authoritarian features have taken place quickly and the desired things couldn't be realized again. On the other hand, ***civilization can flourish only if totalitarian and authoritarian approaches come to an end; insecurity and fear are overcome, and there is curiosity and criticism.***⁷ Totalitarian and authoritarian systems, which are based on physical force, would be beaten one day by experienced-based systems established by information (scientific and philosophic) ; and that is what happened to Islamic civilization (*medeniyet*).

⁷ Will Durant, *Medeniyetin Temelleri*, tr. Nejat Muallimoğlu, Birleşik Yay., İstanbul, 1996, p. 13.

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