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Yazar(lar) / Author(s)

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ali Kaya 🆔

İstanbul Üniversitesi, Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü, İstanbul- Türkiye

e-posta: alikaya1@istanbul.edu.tr.

(Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding author)

The Critique of Eurocentrism, The Dislocation of Kemalism and Opening up New Political Spaces After the 1980s

Abstract

In this article, I examine the relationship between the fall of Kemalism and the rise of critical thinking about Orientalism and Eurocentrism after the 1980s in Türkiye. I argue that this critical thinking along with the development of a postcolonial perspective has had a substantial impact on the questioning of fundamental Kemalist ideas. The main assertions of Kemalism are westernization, laicite, and the construction of a historical narrative on pre-Islamic Turkishness that ignores the Seljuk and Ottoman periods. In this sense, the critical approaches and post-colonial studies have primarily challenged the most vital tenet of Kemalism, which is the reduction of modernity exclusively to the western experience. The critique has demonstrated the possibility of non-western modernities, and the importance of non-western agency in the formation of their peculiarities. By questioning total westernization and challenging the idea that modernity is identical to western experience, it has led to the weakening of Kemalist laicite and historiography; consequently, two significant events have taken place. These are the emergence of "civil" Kemalism and the rise of Islamism. These two events have made visible the contingent and political nature of Kemalism, thus undermining its claim as a "scientific, neutral and objective" project.

Keywords: Eurocentrism, Post-colonialism, Kemalism, Islamism, Non-western Modernity.

1980'ler Sonrası Avrupamerkezcilik Eleştirisi, Kemalizm'in Yerinden Edilmesi ve Yeni Siyasal Zeminlerin Ortaya Çıkışı

Öz

Bu makalede, Türkiye'de 1980'lerden sonra Kemalizm'in gerileyişi ile Oryantalizm ve Avrupamerkezcilik ile ilgili eleştirel düşüncenin yükselişi arasındaki ilişkiyi inceliyorum. Bu eleştirel düşüncenin, postkolonyal perspektifin gelişmesiyle birlikte, temel Kemalist fikirlerin sorgulanmasında önemli bir etkiye sahip olduğunu savunuyorum. Kemalizm'in temel iddiaları; batılılaşma ve laikliğin yanı sıra Selçuklu ve Osmanlı dönemlerini görmezden gelen İslam öncesi Türk kimliğine dair tarihsel bir anlatının inşasıdır. Bu anlamda eleştirel yaklaşımlar ve postkolonyal çalışmalar, Kemalizm'in en hayati ilkesini, yani modernliği yalnızca batı deneyimine indirgemeyi öncelikle sorgulamıştır. Bu eleştiri, Batı dışı modernliklerin olasılığını ve bunların kendine özgü özelliklerinin oluşumunda Batı dışı aktörlerin önemini ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca topyekûn bir batılılaşmayı sorgulayarak ve modernliğin batı deneyimiyle özdeş olduğu fikrine meydan okuyarak Kemalist laiklik ve tarih yazımının zayıflamasına yol açmıştır; sonuç olarak, iki önemli olay meydana gelmiştir. Bunlar, "sivil" Kemalizm'in ortaya çıkışı ve İslamcılığın yükselişidir. Bu iki olay, Kemalizm'in olumsal ve politik doğasını görünür kılmış, böylece "bilimsel, tarafsız ve objektif" bir proje olduğu iddiasını zayıflatmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupamerkezcilik, Post-kolonyalizm, Kemalizm, İslamcılık, Batı-dışı Modernlik.

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1. Introduction

After the 1980s, Kemalism started to lose its hegemonic power in Turkish political life (Mahcupyan, 1994, 1999; Köker, 1996; Çelik ,1996, 2001; Sayyid, 1997; Yavuz, 2000a; Erdoğan, 2001), as it came to be perceived as one of several political discourses. Its political and contingent nature rather than its assumed "scientific or neutral" status came to the fore, and its power to manage social and political relations became moot. Critiques of Kemalism lodged from Islamist, liberal, socialist feminist, and liberal-left perspectives appeared in the Turkish political and intellectual context.

In this article, I focus on the main reasons behind the decline of Kemalism. The most significant factor leading to the fall of Kemalism has been the rise of the critique of Orientalism, Eurocentrism, and the emergence of postcolonial political and intellectual discourse both in the Turkish context and in a global context (Sayyid, 1997). These critical perspectives have brought different ideologies and identities to the interrogation of Kemalism's key ideas. Firstly, the critical accounts note that Kemalism reduces modernization to Westernization. For Kemalism, the West is the only path "to access contemporary civilization" (Ataturk, 2019). However, with the emergence of critical perspectives, this equation has lost its power. Even some secular intellectuals have questioned this idea and suggested the concept of "multiple modernities" (Göle, 1996), which implies that Western modernity is only one of the destinations of modernity. Secondly, Kemalism is based on a radical rupture from the Islamic and Ottoman heritage. Kemalist histography is based on pre-Islamic heritage, and maintains that Islam is an obstacle to progress, rationality, science, technology; therefore, it can be omitted from history. Thirdly, Kemalist laicite inspired by French secularity aims to marginalize and restrict Muslims' public presence and political agency. However, with the rise of critical perspectives, this strict understanding of laicite has been challenged. The critique has culminated in two events that highlight the contingent nature of Kemalism, and, as I argue, made visible its political nature. One is the emergence of "civil Kemalism", and another one is the rise of Islamism.

I will develop these claims as follows. Firstly, I will elaborate the hegemonic crisis by addressing the literature on Kemalism. Secondy, I will outline the fundamental assertions of Kemalism. Thirdly, I will discuss the rise of critical perspectives (the critique of Eurocentrism, Orientalism, and the development of post-colonial perspective) in Turkish intellectual and academic circles. Finally, I will analyze the impact of the critiques in deconstructing the main premises of Kemalism, and thus precipitating the decline of its hegemony.

2. Literature Review: Hegemonic Crisis of Kemalism

There is almost a consensus on the crisis of Kemalism after the 1980s in the literature (Mahcupyan, 1994, 1999; Köker, 1996; Çelik, 1996, 1998; Sayyid, 1997; Yavuz, 2000a; Erdoğan, 2001). However, the reasons behind the hegemonic crisis of Kemalism are not the same for the scholars studying Kemalism in the spite of having some commonalities. For example, Mahcupyan (1994) argues that the Kemalism has primarily aided to create a secular and homogenous society through state-centered policies and actions. Köker (1996) agrees with Mahcupyan's comment, but he especially elaborates fundamental challenges to this Kemalist project. Köker (1996) emphasizes the rise of Kurdish and Islamist identities in the 1990s challenging Kemalist's idea of a homogenous society. According to Köker (1996), the demands for cultural diversity and multiculturalism by these identities have led to the decline

of Kemalist legacy (p. 150-151). Likewise, Yavuz (2000a: 34) portrays Kemalism as an authoritarian modernization project that it could not respond to the demands of multicultural identities. According to him (2000a: 34), Kemalism has three difficulties:

> "At the core of the contemporary crisis in Turkey lies three sociopolitical consequences of Kemalism: its uncritical modernization ideology prevents the open discussion that would lead to a new and inclusive social contract that recognizes the cultural diversity of Turkey; it does not tolerate the articulation of different identities and lifestyles in the public sphere since they undermine the Kemalistvision of an ideal society; and it treats politics as a process of guiding political development and engineering a new society."

Çelik (2001: 91) claims that towards the end of the 1970s political antagonism and the field of struggles as a result of political radicalism weakened the hegemonic power of Kemalism. According to her (2001: 91), Kemalism has lost its capacity to construct "secular-modern Turkissnes" at this period. Çelik (2001) argues (like Sayyid 1997) that the failure of Kemalism has opened the way for the articulation of Islam. The attempt to erase the public appearance of Islam by Kemalism has led to the politicization of Islam (Çelik, 2001: 91). However, Çelik (2001) does not elaborate why Islamism has been rising rather than any other political projects and identities in the wake of the decline of Kemalist hegemony. On the other hand, Sayyid (1997) offers a comprehensive account of the relationship between the rise of Islamism and the decline of Kemalism. Since the details of Sayyid's argument are discussed in the following parts, here it is enough to say that the main reason behind the rise of Islamism in tandem with the decline of Kemalism is that the contingent relationship between the West and modernity has been visible by the critique of Eurocentrism, Orientalism, and the development of post-colonial perspective.

Erdoğan (2001) also agrees with the idea that Kemalism has lost its hegemonic power since the 1980s. However, he elaborates on two different responses to this crisis developed by Kemalism. The first one is that Kemalism has used state power to restore its hegemony (Erdoğan, 2001: 584-585). A typical example of this one was the post-modern coup which took place on February 28, 1997. This coup was an attempt to erase the public appearance of Muslim identity markers like headscarves and religious public schools. According to Erdoğan, such a response to the crisis is not new, and a well-known practice of authoritarian Kemalism. Erdoğan (2001: 585) especially emphasizes another response which is named "civil" Kemalism by him. This response is relatively new in the history of Kemalism. I will elaborate on this point later to show the contingent nature of Kemalism.

3. The Fundamental Ideas of Kemalism

Although the roots of Kemalism go back to late Ottoman intellectual and political discussions (Zürcher, 2013), its main ideological and intellectual tenets, which legitimated the radical changes of this period, were constructed after the proclamation of the Turkish Republic (1923).

From its beginning to the decline of its hegemonic power, Kemalism has been based on three main interrelated claims. According to the first and foremost idea, the West is the only destination for modernization, and "we" can become a member of the modern world by following the Western way of life, specifically Western political, juridical, economical, and social structures, and values. The second is that laicite or laicism is the pre-requisite for the Republic,

democracy, civilization, and politics. The third is Kemalism's construction of a new historical narrative or histography based on Pre-Islamic Turkishness.

Firstly, Kemalism initiated a different path from partial modernization advocated by the Ottomans. Abdullah Cevdet, who was one of the leading figures of the Young Turks,[1] declared in the 1890s that "total Westernization"[2] was the only solution for the Ottoman state (Berkes 2013: 358). This idea became influential in the formation of Kemalist ideology. Total westernization implies that to access the civilizational level of Western, "we" need to follow all aspects of Western life from replicating its economic, social, political, and judicial structures to imbibing its cultural and everyday life experiences and practices. It is possible to observe the extent of changes inspired by total Westernization after the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, which spanned across the spheres of law, education and dress, etc. The existing laws based on Islam were replaced by European laws. For example, while civil law and law of obligations were taken from Switzerland in 1926, and criminal law (the laws on crimes) was taken from Italy in 1926. Ottoman educational structure and Islamic schools, (madrasas) were abolished, and a national and monist educational structure was adopted in 1924. Clothing such as fez and imamah were banned as the markers of Ottoman and Islamic heritage, and wearing modern hats became compulsory in 1925. It is possible to multiply such examples during this period. All the changes carried out at this juncture aimed to create a new social, political, and cultural order.

The second fundamental assumption of Kemalism is that laicite/laicism is the foundational and essential element of political and social order. Kemalist understanding of laicite is heavily under the impact of French version of laicite which is based on the strict separation between the private and public sphere. The abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 was the most crucial step for commencing the implementation of laicite. It led to the Republic's separation from its Ottoman heritage, in which Caliph had been a very influential figure, and made it easier to carry out revolutionary reforms (Aktay, 2005). In the constitution of 1921 and 1924, Islam was denoted as the official religion of the state. However, in 1928, this expression was removed from the constitution, and in 1937, the principle of laicite was inserted into the constitution (Kara, 2016).

The Kemalist understanding of laicite is based on three interconnected premises. The first one is that Kemalism aims to efface the appearance of Islam in the public sphere (Yavuz, 2000b; Cagaptay, 2006; Gözaydın, 2008: 217). In this regard, Kemalism surpasses the simple meaning of laicite, namely the separation of state and religious affairs. The ban on dervish lodges, zawiyas, madrasas, learning and memorizing the Koran, Muslim garments, and the abolition of civil law based on Islamic valuescan be read as the restriction on Islamic public role. Kemalist laicite is also premised on the nationalization of Islam (Sayyid, 1997). Turkish prayers and azaan (the call to prayer) were typical examples of this policy in the early 1930s. Another important part of the idea of laicite is about trying to change the way Islam is understood. The definition focuses on the relationship between the individual and Allah, while disregarding other aspects, including social, economic, political and judicial elements (Turkmen 2009).

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[1] Young Turks became influential in Ottoman political and intellectual life after the 1890s. They were advocates of a complete modernization of the Ottoman State under the considerable effect of positivist ideas. They can be accepted as early ideologists of Kemalism.
[2] According to Cevdet, "There is only one civilization, and that is European civilization. Therefore, we must borrow western civilization with both its rose and thorn..." (Hanioglu, 1995: 17).

The third crucial element of Kemalism is its construction of a new historical narrative based on Turkishness that excludes the deep impact of Islam on Turkish history. According to this idea, Ottoman heritage, which is based on Islam, is an obstacle to modernity, science, and civilization (Çolak, 2006: 590); therefore, it must be ignored or marginalized from Turkish history. Hence, Kemalist historiography often refers to pre-Islamic Turkish history during its construction of Turkish identity (Akturk, 2010: 634). Since Islam is an essential component of the Ottoman and Seljuk past, it is omitted from the official Turkish history narrative.

At the beginning of the 1930s, Kemalist elites founded two institutions in order to realize their new historical narrative. One was The Turkish Historical Society and another The Turkish Language Society. Turkish Historical Society aimed to write a new Turkish history based on the "pure Turk" and pre-Islamic Turkish heritage. In this regard, the civilisations of the Huns, Hittites, Sumerians and Etruscans were often highlighted in order to create a pre-Islamic Turkish identity. Then, The Turkish Language Society was founded to purify the Turkish Language. The purification, in this context, meant the erasing of Ottoman, Arabic, and Persian words and concepts from the Turkish language (Mardin, 1981: 211). These attempts were articulated and justified in the name of progress.

Kemalism imposes all these fundamental principles as neutral and scientific premises, not political decisions In this way, it attempts to neutralise the political roots of its discourse. According to Kemalism, following these premises rigorously is necessary to reach the status of a civilized society typified by the West. This belief reflects Kemalism's roots in positivism (Irem, 2002), which contends that social and political relationships are constructed through science and rationality.

The fundamental assumptions of Kemalism were not questioned intellectually and substantively until the 1980s. Although there had been sporadic criticism directed at some of its practices, it was only from this period that it encountered a robust challenge when the critique of Orientalism, Eurocentrism, and the rise of post-colonial perspective reshaped the Turkish intellectual environment. These critical perspectives set the ground in which substantial critiques became possible.

4. The Rise of the Critical Perspectives in the Turkish Intellectual Circle After the 1980s

Now I would like to focus on the emergence of critical perspectives after the 1980s. One of the useful ways to show this process is to look at the books and articles translated into Turkish or written by Turkish scholars and researchers about Orientalism, Eurocentrism, and Post-colonialism.

Edward Said's book *Orientalism*[3] was translated into Turkish and published in 1982. The publication of this groundbreaking book sparked a stream of other works on the issue. In 1984, Bryan Turner's book called *Marx and The End of Orientalism* was translated into Turkish, and followed by other translations as well as by studies conducted in Turkish. For example, in 1985, Jale Parla, a leading literary commentator in Türkiye, wrote the book called *Mastership, Orientalism, and Slavery*. The book examines 19th-century romantic movement's (Goethe, Hugo, Baudelaire) eastern mythos and its relationship with colonialism. In 1989, Semra

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[3] The book was firstly published in 1978 in New York: Pantheon Books.

Germaner and Zeynep İnankur co-wrote *Orientalism and Turkey*, which critically scrutinizes pictures of orientalist painters about Istanbul.

In 1996, Nilufer Göle, a well-known sociologist, wrote *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and The Veiling*. The book analyses the experiences of Islamists on modernity, and it was notable for initiating a debate on non-western modernities in the Turkish intellectual environment. In 1993, Abdullah Topcuoglu and distinguished sociologist Yasin Aktay edited the most comprehensive book about orientalism in Türkiye entitled *Postmodernism and Islam: Globalization and Orientalism*. In 2000, Yücel Bulut, a sociologist at İstanbul University, wrote the first Ph.D. dissertation on the subject. In 2000, Salman Sayyid's book, *A Fundamental Fear*: *Eurocentrism and The Emergence of Islamism* was translated and published by Vadi Publishers. In this book, Sayyid highlighted the relational logics of different political discourses, and argued that the decline of Eurocentrism opened up space for the articulation of Islamism.

The significance of these and many other publications at this juncture was to initiate a public debate on critical issues. One of the most vital merits of the critical stance toward Eurocentrism and Orientalism was its challenge to the entrenched belief in the universalism of western modernity. This critique countered the assumption that there is only one way to modernity or that western modernity is the only destination of modernity, and instead, it shed light on the agency of non-western societies in deciding their own destiny. This critique was often expressed in the Turkish context through some of the texts mentioned above.

One of the leading debates on non-western modernity in Turkish intellectual and scholarly circles during this period was triggered by the sociologist Nilufer Göle. According to Göle (1996: 6-7):

> "Theories of modernization have forced us to seek, and find, symmetrical and linear lines of development that occur almost independently of historical and geographical context. Today the epistemological pendulum is swinging from evolutionary reasoning and methodological positivism to the question of agency and the subsequent analysis of particularistic, context- bound interpretations of modernity and self. Such a shift has an undeniably liberating potential on the study of "non-Western" countries. The distancing from the universalistic master-narratives of modernization and emancipation opens up the space for the examination of subjective constructions of meanings, cultural identities, and social conflicts; in short, itenables the examination of the specific articulations between modernity and the local fabric."

Göle (1996) underlines the possibility of non-western modernity. She (1996) argues that this can be only possible by considering the agency of non-western people, and the context in which they live. Göle avoids cultural essentialism by focusing on the linkages between the particularity of the local and universal process without reducing the local to an authentic and closed entity. In this regard, she (1996: 7) suggests devising a new social science language that coniders the relationship between locality and universality without using a linear and master narrative of modernization to examine the local context. Thus, she (1996: 8) explains that the aim of the *Forbidden Modern* is to "highlight and interpret local constructions of self and modernity, hybrid conjunctions, and asymmetrical social realities as forms of social practice and not as deviations from the evolutionary trajectory predicted by modernization theories...".

Göle (1996) also opposes the reduction of the modernity to the western experience (from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment to industrialization and currently to the Information Age). According to Göle (1996: 12), such an idea creates the perception that non-western societies have no place in this "progressive" historical chain of narrative so that they can not generate their own form of modernity; therefore, they have no choice but have to follow Western modernity. This contention ignores their agency and their long experience regarding modernization. In contrast, Göle (1996: 8) suggests that the Turkish experience of modernity is shaped through historical experience, public narratives, social settings, and the identity of actors. Thus, for her, it is imperative to examine local constructions of modernity.

In this context, another challenge against the reduction of modernity to western experience has been advanced by decolonial political theorist Salman Sayyid. In his influential book entitled *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and The Emergence of Islamism* (1997), Sayyid (1997: 98) names Kemalism as an example of the reduction of modernity to western experience in Muslim worlds. In other words, Kemalism is a general term that captures political projects within the Muslim world that construe modernization as identical to westernization. Moreover, Sayyid (1997: 98) argues that Islamism has an anti-western rather than an anti-modern character and it stands as a counter to the Kemalist co-articulation of modernization with westernization. Sayyid (1997: 97-98) also claims that due to the strong opposition of Islamism to westernization, it carriesthe possibility of being a real alternative to Kemalism in the Muslim world rather than liberalism or socialism. In this context, Sayyid (1997: 95-99) also criticizes the literature on Islamism as equating modernization with westernization. According to him, one of the typical examples of this approach is Sami Zubaida's account of Islamism. On the one hand, Zubaida evaluates Islamism as a modern social and political movement. On the other hand, Zubaida implicitly or explicitly reduces modernization to the western experience (Sayyid, 1997: 98). This implies that Islamism is a pro-western and modern phenomenon. According to Sayyid (1997: 98-99), this approach completely ignores the anti-western character of Islamism

The Impact of the Critical Account on the Decline of Kemalist Hegemony

Now I would like to focus on how the critique of Eurocentrism, Orientalism as well as postcolonial perspectives in general set the ground for challenging the main premises of Kemalism. Besides, I will argue that it is possible to show the political nature of Kemalism after this critical account.

I will discuss how these critical perspectives have challenged the total Westernization of Kemalism. Firstly and primarily, the critical perspectives have problematised the identification of modernity with the West by Kemalism. As noted, Göle's work brought the possibility of non-western and multiple modernities to the agenda of Turkish intellectual circles after the 1990s. Emphasising the sui generis characteristics of Turkish modernity, Göle (1996) has questioned the conventional Kemalist dualities like modernity-Islam, and civilization-Islam. According to her (1996), Islamists have had also their own way of modernization. This was of course different from what Kemalists meant for modernity and modernization.

Göle's and others' critical studies (like Sayyid's) have primarily demonstrated that Türkiye's local, historical, cultural and religious elements have influenced its modernization process. That means that Kemalist modernization has failed because it reduced modernization only to the following of the West for whole aspects of life. The debate on the possibility of non-western

modernities has offered us the perspective to take into consideration the agency of Turkish peculiarities in its modernization process. In this regard, this critical and intellectual account of Kemalism has challenged Kemalism's core idea of modernization project that it is not possible to be "modern" without the following western experience of modernity.

Secondly, critical studies have undermined the Kemalist duality between progressives and reactionaries in the Turkish public sphere. The rise of critical studies in Turkish intellectual and academic life has also impacted significantly on challenging of Kemalist understanding of laicite based on the French version which mentioned in the second assumption of Kemalism. In this period, one of the merits of critical perspectives was to show the heterogeneous structure of the West. At this juncture, discussions of the Anglo-Saxon version of laicite also entered the agenda in Turkish intellectual circles This version was conceived as more tolerant and open to religious appearances in the public sphere. Islamism and the appearance of Muslim identity in public sphere has been constrained by the strict understanding of Kemalist laicite, however some liberal and Islamist thinkers and scholars (Bulaç, 1994; Göle, 1997; Çandar, 2000; Selçuk, 2000) inspring from the Anglo-Saxon model have intelectually questioned this Kemalist version of laicite. At this conjuncture, Ali Bulaç (1994, 2000), an Islamist thinker, suggested the *Medina Contract*. The contract aimed to establish a multi-religious and multi-judicial political and social order. In this way, Bulaç (1994, 2000) opposed both the strict understandings of Kemalist laicite and the mono-judicial nation-state order. Although Kemalist understanding of laicite has been still valid in the official field (state, bureaucracy etc.) in this period, this critical endeavor in the intellectual and academic circle rising against Kemalist laicite has shown the possibility of alternative public sphere tolerating religious identity in the public sphere.

The third factor is the critique of the Kemalist historical narrative. Kemalist and orientalist histography share similar ideas about the Ottoman state (Eldem, 2010), representing it as the antithesis of science and rationality. In another typically orientalist reading, the Ottoman State is deemed to have built its political and sovereign authority solely through war (let's say by "blood and sword"). This historical reading has been questioned since the 1990s through the studies (Mardin, 1988; Abou-El-Haj, 1991; Ersanlı, 2002; Faroqhi, 2010; Tezcan, 2010) that explored the intellectual, scientific, technological, architectural life of the Ottoman state, and to that end, aimed to deconstruct Kemalist and orientalist perceptions.

Although all these critical questions on the tenets of Kemalism are very significant, it is still possible to ask if they enough to show the contingency of Kemalism. In other words, how is it possible to recognize Kemalism as a political project rather than a "scientific, neutral, objective" discourse? The latter representation has weakened under the impact of the critique, and led Kemalism to confront the prospect that it is one of several competing political discourses. Hence, in order to convince and mobilize people, it will need to gain moral and intellectual superiority. In other words, following such a critical assessment, Kemalism realised that it needed to demonstrate its superiority over other political and intellectual projects. I argue that in this context there are two events that demonstrate the political nature of Kemalism following the advance of critical stances towards it. One is the emergence of "Civil or Neo- Kemalism" towards the end of the 1980s. The second one is the rise of Islamism in both Türkiye and the Muslim World as Kemalism lost its hegemonic power.

The literature on Kemalism reveals a near-consensus about its decline after the 1980s (Mahcupyan, 1994; Köker, 1996; Çelik, 2001; Erdoğan, 2001). Subsequently, Kemalism

searched for alternative paths to regain its legitimacy and hegemonic power in this period. Erdoğan (2011: 584) named this attempt "civil" Kemalism or "Neo-Kemalism". He argues that Kemalism, after losing its hegemonic status, has questioned its conventional, top-down mechanisms of controlling people, and recognized the importance of public mobilization through consent. "Civil" Kemalism has triggered some "civil" attempts to regain popular-public support. One of these attempts was seen in the establishment of prominent associations as The Ataturkist Thought Association (1989) and Association For Supporting Contemporary Life (1989) (Erdoğan 2001: 583). These associations undertook various initiatives such as organizing public meetings to maintain secular education programs, increasing women's literacy on a national level, running nationalist campaigns and providing scholarships for high school and university students. The ultimate goal of all these activities was to consolidate the Kemalist establishment in the civil and popular field. According to them, the inheritance of the Kemalist Republic could be maintained only through "civil society organizations", and raising a high level of citizenship consciousness through civil society mobilizations (Erdoğan 2001: 587-588).

The fundamental motivations behind such "civil" mobilizations were to boost Kemalist nationalism, laicism, and civility in the people's hearts and minds. It was an urgent requirement because conventional actors (the state and Kemalist parties) failed to preserve the Kemalist ideas and ideals against Islamism, neo-liberal social democracy, and Kurdish political activism (Çelik 2001: 99). In this sense, "civil" Kemalism has become the candidate to compensate for the failures of the prevalent top-down Kemalist modalities. However, this does not mean that the 'civil' approach opposed all top-down policies inspired by the Kemalist heritage. Rather, its adherents argued that top-down mechanisms were not sufficient to maintain Kemalist hegemony, and must be complemented through civil society mobilizations. In this context, "civil" Kemalism supported the February 28th military coup in 1997, the main target of which was to overthrow the Welfare (Refah) Party from power. The Welfare Party's policies were labeled as a challenge to the Kemalist, secular order and to the regime by the Kemalist establishment. "Civil" Kemalists supporting the coup acted to mobilize the people against the Islamists through their "civil" society organizations. However, in the last instance, "civil" Kemalism emerged out of the failure of Kemalist hegemony, and underlined the recognition that Kemalism, like other political projects, requires public consent rather than and can no longer rely on its status as "a scientific, neutral, and objective" discourse.

Another way of the showing the contingent and political nature of Kemalists is the focus on the rise of Islamism at the end of the 1980s, and at the beginning of the 1990s. As noted earlier, Sayyid (1997) argues that the rise of Islamism is coincident with the decline of Eurocentrism in 1980s and 1990s. This argument is valid for our case since the decline of Kemalism, as a subtype of Eurocentrism, has been accompanied by the rise of Islamism in Türkiye and across the Muslim World (Iran, Algeria, Sudan, Afghanistan amongst other states) (Kaya and Mercan, 2016; Sakarya, 2025). In this context, Sayyid also asks why is it that the Islamism achieved popular mobilization rather than liberalism, or socialism? As mentioned before, Sayyid (1997) argues that Islamism has a strong anti-western sentiment; it refuses the reduction of modernity to the western experience. This argument is resonant in the Turkish context because Islamism in Türkiye has challenged the fundamental assumptions of Kemalism in a comprehensive manner. The fall of Kemalist hegemony has made alternative political and intellectual discourse available. Islamism has become more prominent than others in this context primarily because

it has challenged all the main assumptions of Kemalism, and has obtained the potential of becoming a counter-hegemonic discourse. The emergence of "civil Kemalism" and the rise of Islamism have taken place in the same period. It is difficult to think of a cause-effect relationship between the emergence of "civil Kemalism" and Islamism because both of them emerged afterward the crisis of Kemalism. In other words, both events can be read as the markers of the weakness of Kemalism to mobilize the people. These two events have made visible the contingency of Kemalism and its political nature rather than a scientific, objective and neutral project.

It is then possible to observe the rise of Islamism in Türkiye in terms of intellectual, political, and popular mobilization. For example, one of the leading popular and political movements of Islamism in this period was the National Outlook Movement (Millî Görüş Hareketi). The National Outlook Movement, having different organization and institutions ranging from youth organizations to social aid foundations, founded a political party, called Welfare Party, in 1983. The Welfare Party, became the second biggest party in the municipal elections in 1994. The party won the opportunity to govern metropolitan cities such as Istanbul and Ankara, and it also became the biggest party in the general elections of 1995. Necmetttin Erbakan, the charismatic leader of the party, and of the movement, became the prime minister in the coalition government in 1996. The National Outlook Movement adopted a critical stance towards the fundamental principles of Kemalism. It challenged the Kemalist understanding of Kemalism, labelling it repressive (Arslan, 2019). The National Outlook Movement also criticised the top-down nature of Kemalist modernisation, as well as Kemalist historiography, which it saw as an attempt to construct a pre-Islamic Turkish history.

It is also possible to observe the intellectual rise of Islamists in this period, which came to be known as the "golden time" for Islamic publishers. Publishing houses such as Pinar, Vadi, and Iz became leading names in these times, while a range of Islamist journals and periodicals appeared such as *Haksoz*, *Umran*, *Iktibas*, and *Tezkire*. Independent intellectual and academic centers also emerged during this time, such as The Foundation for Sciences and Arts (Bisav), The Foundation for Research and Culture (AKV), Scientific Studies Association (ILEM) and Akabe were the leading intellectual centres of Islamists. All these intellectual activities have a significant amount of followers and have made a considerable impact on the public debate.

All these efforts have led to the discussion of such crucial issues as the critique of Eurocentrism and Orientalism, the possibility of Islamic science and in particular Islamic social sciences, reconsideration of Ottoman heritage through challenging the assumptions of Kemalist histography regarding Ottoman history, the possibility of post-colonial and post-modern studies to question Eurocentric perspective on the strict hieararchies between such dualities as modern-traditional, secular-religious, progressives and reactionaries. These Islamist circles and organizations have attracted many young university students as well as post-graduate students through seminars and publications on these issues.

5. Conclusion

In this study, I argued that the critique of Eurocentrism, Orientalism, and the development of the post-colonial perspective had a considerable impact on the decline of Kemalism in Türkiye, but also across the Muslim World. I focused on the Turkish context to highlight the fall of Kemalism, explaining how the critique gained currency in Turkish political and intellectual

circles after the 1980s and challenged the fundamental ideas of Kemalist discourse. In the wake of this critical endeavor, Kemalism lost its hegemonic power. The critical account was notable in questioning the universality of western modernity given that the reduction of modernity to westernization is the core of the Kemalist project. I tried to show the possibility of non-western modernity by referring to Göle's and Sayyid's texts within this critical perspective. Subsequently, I argued that the critical perspectives revealed the contingent nature of Kemalism, and I explored two remarkable moments that demonstrated its contingency, namely the emergence of "civil" Kemalism and the rise of Islamism.

It is also a crucial task to reexamine Kemalism with new developments like the rise of Ak Party (from 2002 to now). This is definitely required further studies and articles to show how Kemalism is reframed with the rise of Ak Party. However, it is possible to say that Ak Party has risen on the ground where Kemalism has lost its hegemonic power. Nevertheless, this necessarily does not mean that Kemalism has lost its power forever. It is always possible that Kemalism may remobilize the people with new rearticulations within the appropriate conditions like the fall of critique of Eurocentrism, Orientalism, and Post-colonial perspective or the failure of alternative political projects.

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