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Civilizationism in the Writings of Sezai Karakoç

Cemil Aydin and Burhanettin Duran

Studies on the formation of modern Islamist thought in Turkey often provide a long-term perspective, linking the Islamist political orientations with Pan-Islamist thought of the late Ottoman era. This continuity thesis, however, neglects the crucial transformations in Islamism in the post–World War II period, when the international politics of Cold War and decolonization struggles coincided with the boom of Islamist intellectual writings in secular Republican Turkey. This article concentrates on the crucial additions to and reinterpretations of Islamist thought in Turkey during the Cold War and post–Cold War period by focusing on the civilizationist worldview of Sezai Karakoç (1933–), whose influential writings on the civilizational resurrection (diriliş) of Islam have not received the scholarly attention they deserve. By deconstructing Karakoç’s ideas on civilizational Islam and putting them in relation to the writings and influence of British historian Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975), this article attempts to achieve several objectives: first, it tries to establish the connections between global intellectual history and Islamist thought in Cold War Turkey. Second, it traces the long-term impact of the civilizational theory of world history and politics during the Cold War period on the relations of contemporary Turkey with Europe as well as the Muslim-majority countries in the region. Finally, it aims to explain the resurfacing and popularity of civilizational theses promoted by post–Cold War theorists, be it in terms of “dialogue” or “clashes” among multiple civilizations.

Karakoç was born in the year of 1933, in the Eastern Anatolian town Ergani, at the peak of the Westernist cultural revolutions implemented by the Kemalist elite in Turkey. He was raised during the one-party authoritarian secularist rule of the Republican People’s Party in Turkey, when school children in Anatolia were taught the virtues of Western civilization, modernization, and Turkish nationalism. At the same time, as a student without financial means, Karakoç benefited from the free public education of the young republic, completing almost all of his education on government scholarship, including his university training in the prestigious Faculty of Political Science of Ankara University. Upon graduation from university in 1955, Karakoç worked for the Turkish Ministry of Finance in various capacities, partly to fulfill the compulsory public service condition of his government scholarship. Since his resignation from public service in 1973, Karakoç has been earning his living from the sale of his publications on political and cultural issues, as well as his poetry book.
The period of Sezai Karakoç’s youth coincided with the destruction of Europe in WWII, the emergence of Cold War global politics, and the postwar period of decolonization in Muslim-majority countries all over Asia and Africa. Karakoç started to express his political ideas in the 1950s, during the first multiparty political experiment of democratization in Turkey. In this Cold War context, Karakoç was deeply interested in independence struggles in Tunis and Algeria as well as the question of Palestine. Meanwhile, other Islamist writers like Necip Fazıl Kıskakürek and Nurettin Topçu, who were older than Karakoç and influenced him, were trying to redefine secular Turkish nationalism by identifying it with Islam on the intellectual level. By merging nationalism and Muslim faith, they were able to express Islamist ideas to criticize the secularism of Kemalist reforms. However, the close relationship that was established by these intellectuals between Islam and nationalism was reshaped by Karakoç in a more internationalist and civilizationist manner, employing Toynbee’s broader framework of world history. Thus, Karakoç became a representative figure in re-internationalizing Islamism in Turkey and connecting it with a new postcolonial third-worldlist political vision through the language of civilizationism.

Karakoç remained a kind of mystic intellectual, preferring to stay outside the mainstream organizations, parties, and movements. Thus, he cannot be considered an ideologue of any of the influential mass conservative democratic parties such as the Justice and Development Party (JDP). Yet, his critiques of Western civilization and his vision of a Muslim civilizational revival exerted significant influence on several generations of conservative intellectuals of Turkey, and they allow us to better understand the content and nature of Islamist political orientation in contemporary Turkey. Karakoç is known as a very talented poet, composing one of the most celebrated love poems, titled “Mona Rosa,” in modern Turkish literature. More important, as a bookish intellectual and an avid follower of world trends, he wrote important essays on the politics of civilizational identities and his vision of Islamic civilization’s revival that are influential today. When he was selected for the literature award by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2007, the documentary prepared in his honor by the Turkish Television and Radio Company featured testimonies from leading politicians and intellectuals in Turkey. At the age of eighty-two, he still attracts visits and praises by leading politicians, even though he remains critical of foreign and domestic policies in Turkey.

Karakoç’s current ascetic life did not prevent him from shaping the Islamist thought of two generations from the 1960s to the 1990s. When he was awarded Turkey’s presidential award for services to Turkish literature in 2011, Karakoç declined to appear in the ceremony in his honor at the presidential palace. Yet, when the presidential award was announced, Turkish newspapers noted that President Abdullah Gül himself was an avid reader of Karakoç’s poetry and essays during his youth. His vision of the civilizational revival of Islam became embraced by many politicians and ideologies of Turkish conservative Democrats. Part of Karakoç’s appeal and reputation comes from his detachment from power centers and his humble lifestyle. Yet, the main reason for his influence is the appeal of his civilizational framework for interpreting history, religious issues, and the politics of educated publics in Turkey and beyond. Therefore, Karakoç’s civilizationist worldview should be examined in order to better understand the global intellectual history and political implications of the discourse of civilization in relation to the Cold War, decolonization struggles, Westernization processes in Muslim societies, and the post–Cold War era rise of political Islam. Karakoç was an active witness to all of these processes and contributed to the general Muslim intellectual response to them.

1. For more information on Karakoç’s poetry, see Karataş, Doğu’nun Yedinci Öğlu, 211–19.
2. TRT Sezai Karakoç Belgeseli (the Turkish Radio Television Corporation documentary on Sezai Karakoç) was first broadcast on September 10, 2010. It was titled “Gün Doğmadan” (“Before the Dawn”) in reference to a poem by Karakoç.
3. Similarly, Sezai Karakoç earlier declined to appear in the ceremony when he was the recipient of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism Grand Award in 2007.
As a well-educated writer familiar with European intellectuals, especially Toynbee, Karakoç illustrated the importance of the circulation of ideas on a global scale.

**Toynbee as a Global Intellectual**

Before analyzing Karakoç’s civilizationism, it is important to examine the importance of Toynbee as a global intellectual whose world history model influenced Karakoç tremendously.

Toynbee was educated at Oxford and began teaching at Balliol College in 1912. He became a professor of modern Greek and Byzantine history at King’s College of London upon his graduation. During WWII, Toynbee worked for the Political Intelligence Department of the British Foreign Office and served in the British delegation to the Paris Peace Conference.

Toynbee also served as a director of research at the Royal Institute for International Affairs for thirty years, from 1925 to 1955. During WWII, Toynbee again worked for the British foreign office and attended the peace talks.

Throughout his active government service, Toynbee mobilized his analytical skills for the service of British imperial internationalism, and he wrote extensively on the politics of the Muslim world, the Ottoman Empire, and modern Turkey. During WWII, Toynbee did contribute to the anti-Ottoman propaganda of the British Empire, and while he was doing that, he had to reflect on the geopolitics of Islam and the West and the question of Pan-Islamism. When young Toynbee was defending the war efforts of the British Empire against the Ottoman call for jihad, the British Empire ruled over five times more Muslim populations than the Ottomans. Thus, he was deeply troubled by Indian Muslims’ pro-Ottoman sympathies and post–WWI Indian Khilafat movement in support of the Ottoman caliphate, for example, and recommended that the British colonial officers explain to their loyal Muslim subjects the true nature of Muslim political theory on both the caliphate and the Ottoman Empire. Yet, even when the British Empire ruled over more Muslims than Christians, Toynbee considered it a representative of Western civilization, while the Ottoman Empire ruling over Armenians, Greeks, and Jews was considered a representative of the Muslim world. Toynbee seemed relieved by the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and abolishment of the Ottoman Caliphate after WWI, and during the interwar years, Toynbee’s relationship with Turkey improved as he became supportive of the new Turkish Republic and praised its radical westernization program. As for the overall direction of the future of British international order during the interwar period, however, Toynbee put forward an analysis that attributed problems of world order to a general civilization crisis about the superior virtues of Hellenistic and Christian heritage. He was one of the influential aristocratic intellectuals of Britain’s “morbid age,” according to Richard Overy, convinced of the eventual civilization decline of the West in relation to ironically westernizing non-European civilizations.

Toynbee became an international celebrity for his monumental twelve-volume work of comparative world history (titled *A Study of History*, published from 1934 to 1965). It was the one-volume abridgment of the first ten volumes of Toynbee’s *A Study of History* by D. C. Somervell (in 1957), rather than the large multivolume project itself, that became an international best seller in multiple translations. To promote his books, Toynbee lectured in almost every major city in the world from the 1950s to the mid-1970s. While the US university campuses ranked at the top in terms of Toynbee’s public lectures and visiting professor appointments, Toynbee visited and lectured in various Muslim countries to crowded audiences from

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7. For his wartime reflections on British–Ottoman relations, see Toynbee, *Turkey*. For Toynbee’s anti-Ottoman propaganda writings, see Toynbee, *Armenian Atrocities*, and Toynbee, *The Murderous Tyranny*.

8. See Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, 399–404. Toynbee’s introduction to the book was written in February 1915, at the beginning of the war, before the Gallipoli campaigns. It does reflect the mood of early declaration of jihad by the Ottoman Empire and Indian Muslim public opinion.

9. The change in Toynbee’s attitude toward Turkey can be seen in his later writings. See, for example, Toynbee, *The Western Question*.

10. See Overy, *The Morbid Age*.
Cairo, Beirut, and Kabul to Tehran, Istanbul, and Islamabad. Toynbee’s intellectual influence peaked during the early Cold War, between 1950 and 1975, when, ironically, his main ideas seemed to be critical of and contradictory to the mainstream modernization theory, in both its US and Soviet versions. This raises an important question: How was Toynbee’s reception in countries where postcolonial forms of modernization were very powerful, such as Japan, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Egypt? In all of these Muslim countries, the elites were committed to modernizing and westernizing their countries rather than reviving their civilization. Some of Toynbee’s ideas, especially those critical of Western materialism, militarism, and the viability of its alternatives in other civilizations, are frequently quoted by intellectuals critical of westernization and modernization, especially those advocating Islamic, Confucian, or Buddhist revival.

Toynbee’s reproduction of the civilizationist reading of world history and world politics also seemed contradictory to dominant trends in historical scholarship and geopolitical discourses during the postcolonial Cold War period, when ideals of modernization and nationalism overshadowed the colonial-era discourses of civilizational hierarchies and comparisons. Toynbee’s civilizationism was always more than a comparative study of world cultures, and it had its own political implications for the British Empire’s international relations as well. Toynbee represents a generation of British imperial internationalists who had the chance to rethink the moral and philosophical foundations of the changing world order from the 1900s to the 1970s. Given Toynbee’s earlier commitment to the ideal of a British commonwealth, his belief in the superiority of Hellenistic Christian foundations of modern world order, and his earlier racial-geopolitical views about the superiority of the West, Toynbee’s internationalism and humanism after WWII demonstrate an impressive change of heart and mind. Toynbee was highly influenced by his Greek history professor, Alfred Zimmern, a founding figure of the future UNESCO, who made ancient Greece very relevant for the legitimacy crisis of the imperial world order and argued for a Third British Empire based on their imagined model of the Greek Commonwealth. For Zimmern, as well as young Toynbee, the new British Empire’s rule could be different than Rome’s imperialism. By the 1920s, both Zimmern and Toynbee moved away from the late nineteenth-century notions of white man’s racial superiority. Yet, they continued to hold on to a civilizational view of world history and international affairs, arguing for a dialogue of diverse global civilizations in a decolonizing world while keeping their belief in the relative superiority of the West. As Prasenjit Duara has noted, however, during the interwar period, civilizational discourse became a tool of anticolonial nationalism, empowering claims for equality and national liberation rather than justifying British imperial rule. From Tagore and Okakura Tenshin to Sun Yat-Sen and Jawaharlal Nehru, Asian intellectuals used the idea of their civilizational heritage and greatness to refute the claim of the civilizing mission of Western colonialism. As decolonization progressed, the intellectual circles who wanted to abandon a civilizational worldview in favor of a developmentalist one (proto-modernization theory) were becoming more vocal.

**Cold War Political Implications of Toynbee’s Civilizationism**

As a British imperial internationalist, Toynbee reflected a confident belief in the superiority of Hellenistic and Christian civilization to other existing civilizations in his early writings. But

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11. For the text of some of his speeches in the Middle East and Asia, see Toynbee, The Toynbee Lectures on the Middle East, and Toynbee, Four Lectures.

12. For modernization theory and Cold War connections, see Engerman et al., Staging Growth, and Gilman, Mandarins of the Future.

13. For a good example of how Toynbee’s ideas can be in conversation with Buddhist revival in Cold War-era Japan at the peak of its modernization, see Toynbee, Choose Life.

14. For this generation of British imperial internationalists, see Mazower, No Enchanted Palace, esp. 66–103.

15. For a good summary of Alfred Zimmern’s ideas on empire and world order, see ibid.


17. See Duara, “The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism.”

18. For the broader politics of the discourse of civilization, see Aydin, The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia.
something changed in this confidence as the British Empire retreated from the peak of its imperial hegemony, while Europe and the world witnessed two destructive world wars. By the 1950s, Toynbee no longer assumed or advocated the superiority of Western civilization. In fact, part of his positive reputation in Muslim countries derives from the fact that, as a Western historian celebrity, Toynbee wrote about the negative aspects of Western civiliza-
tion while saying good things about Islamic civiliza-
tion and its capacity to survive Western domi-
nation.23 This broader civilizational comparative view had its political aspects as well. Toynbee gen-
ergally said positive things about postcolonial na-
tionalism in Asia and Africa. When the news of the Suez Crisis of 1956 reached Toynbee, for example, he was in Japan. He vehemently opposed the British attack on Egypt, which obviously added to his prestige in the Arab world. On the trip back home, Toynbee visited Indonesia, Pakistan, and Iran and often expressed his critique of Western imperial-
ism. In Pakistan, he was hosted by then Prime Min-
der Ayub Khan. During his visit to Mashhad Uni-
versity in Iran, young Ali Shariati was a member of the student club that hosted him. Toynbee was also critical of Zionism and supportive of Palestin-
ian demands.20 When Hugh Trevor-Roper’s famous harsh critique of Toynbee was published in June 1957, Toynbee was in Beirut.21 In 1958, an Iraqi intel-
ceutal, Zaki Saleh, wrote a book in defense of Toynbee against Trevor-Roper’s critique.22

Because of Toynbee’s status as a global intel-
ceutal, as well as his critique of the West in an era of decolonization, his writings on Turkey, Islam, and the Middle East were translated into Turk-

ish.23 Toynbee’s model of world civilizations was especially welcomed by intellectuals such as Karakoç who advocated an Islamic revival as an alter-
native to both socialism and capitalism. Toynbee’s critique of the US and Soviet models of modern-
ization during the Cold War, as products of ma-
terialist and destructive Western Christian civil-
zation, was especially encouraging for Karakoç’s vision of reviving Islamic civilization as a cure to the crisis of the modern world. Beyond that, this association of modernity with Western civilization tied all the dark sides of modern times (colonial-
ism, destructive wars, and the corruption of third world political elites) to Western hegemony. In fact, the antimodernist implication of Toynbee’s critique of Western civilization was well under-
stood by Western commentators. Trevor-Roper wrote: “At the foundation of Toynbee’s version of the present crisis of the West was a profound anti-modernism—a rejection of the contemporary secular decadence and a call for a neo-medieval flight from this world. Karl Popper spoke for many critics when he disparaged this view as ‘apocalyptic irrationalism.’”24 According to the Islamist readers of Toynbee, one could escape from the decadence of the secular modernism of the contemporary West to the utopian vision of Islamic civilization. Their imagined solution to the problems of the modern world was to return to or to resurrect Is-

lamic civilization, the proposed alternative to the West. In this way, Islamist intellectuals embraced Toynbee’s civilizationism as evidence in their crit-
tiques of modernization theory of both the Ameri-
can and Soviet varieties.

Civilizational thinking in world politics was not a preferred ideology promoted by the United States or the Soviet Union, the superpowers of the Cold War period. This way of thinking was associated with old forms of empire before the Sec-
ond World War, as imperial rule had to be based on the legitimacy of the civilized mission. Both superpowers of the Cold War competition had to deal with the reality of the postimperial and nation-state-based world, as well as the agency of new nationalist elites. They offered, instead, a path of modernization that is open to any and every cul-
ture of the world, irrespective of their religious and civilizational background.25 In this context, however, the US version of liberal modernization

19. For an early example of his relatively posi-
tive assessment of the survival of Islamic civili-
zation despite the hegemony of the West, see “Islam, the West, and the Future,” in Toynbee, Civilization on Trial, 164–87.
21. See Trevor-Roper, “Arnold Toynbee’s Millen-

nium.”
23. For examples of Toynbee’s translation into Turkish, see Toynbee, Dünya ve Garp (The World and the West); Toynbee, Tarih Üzerine: İki Kon-

ferans (Civilization on Trial); Toynbee, Tarih Bil-

inci (A Study of History); and Toynbee, Medeni-
yet Yargılanıyor (Civilization on Trial).
24. Trevor-Roper, “Arnold Toynbee’s Millen-
nium,” 18.
25. For a good discussion of this topic, see Latham, Modernization as Ideology.
was able to reproduce civilizational dichotomy in new anthropological terminology by positing essential cultures of the East, West, Asia, or Islam. Thus, it should not be surprising that both Zimmern and Toynbee found a receptive audience in Cold War America, where modernization theory became a master narrative in the social sciences.\textsuperscript{26} One should not assume irreconcilable contradictions between US modernization theory and the British imperial internationalist civilizational worldview. While the new national leaders of the postcolonial world were struggling with issues of economic underdevelopment and developmental gap, culture and civilizational talk continued its appeal to both American and European intellectuals as well as to the educated elites of Asia and Africa. Thus, Toynbee’s writings on the history of world civilizations, their encounter, and their future viability did not seem completely obsolete, although there were clear tensions between this civilizational view and modernization theory. This tension was most obvious to socialists and to the Left, who expressed their objections to Toynbee’s civilizationalism, which they found antimodernist.

Both in the Muslim and non-Muslim intellectual circles of Asia and Africa, Toynbee did appeal to those who attempted to overcome Eurocentrism in world history perceptions. But in this context, Toynbee was just confirming what was already known and accepted. Civilizationism was a dominant anticolonial discourse in Pan-Islamism, Pan-Africanism, and Pan-Asianism, whereby nationalists, ranging from Tagore and Ghandi to Sun Yat-Sen and Mehmet Akif Ersoy, already challenged the idea of Western civilization’s supremacy by characterizing it as decadent, declined, and violent. Moreover, they depicted Islamic, Indian, Chinese, African, and Asian civilizations as spiritual and moral alternatives.\textsuperscript{27} With Toynbee, we see a prominent British internationalist confirming, in a new historical language, what anticolonial intellectuals have already been arguing for a century.

Civilizational paradigms were especially entrenched in Muslim intellectual discourses, and on a popular level, Toynbee struck a chord with Islamist internationalists in their belief in the continued survival and future resurrection of Islamic civilization against Western civilization. But, in these civilizational interpretations, Toynbee’s model made the modernization and westernization of Muslim societies seem like a cultural betrayal by relegating global modernity to an extension of Western civilization. Thus, a Toynbean model of world history would imply a critique of Kemalist westernization attempts in Turkey, as Eurocentric modernization would mean leaving behind the legacy of Muslim civilization in favor of an alien and rival Western civilization, which had many problems. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Muslim reformist elites tried to strengthen their societies and political structures to be more in tune with the paradigm of multiple modernities than the paradigm of Western modernity. Many did not see selective and creative adoptions from Europe as an insult to their religious and cultural heritage.

Thus, Toynbee’s main arguments about the incompatibility among encountering world civilizations must have seemed disorienting and patronizing, especially given that almost all the decolonized Muslim nations were undergoing rapid modernization projects during the 1950s and the 1960s. Yet, oppositional intellectuals who were critical of top-down state modernization projects or the downsides of modernization projects could find Toynbee’s framework of analysis useful and empowering. According to an Islamist interpretation of the Toynbean civilizational model, Ataturk, Abd an-Nasser, and Reza Shah would all look like culturally alienated traitors, and in fact, the assertive Islamism of the 1970s and the 1980s made that argument forcefully.\textsuperscript{28}

26. For Zimmern’s positive view of America as the leader of the Western civilization, see Zimmern, American Road to World Peace. Toynbee was featured on the cover of the influential Time magazine on March 17, 1947, with a caption reading, “Our civilization is not inevitably doomed.” The United States was the country in which Arnold Toynbee visited and lectured most.
27. For the usage of civilizationism in anticolonial discourses, see Hay, Asian Ideas of East and West, and Aydin, “Beyond Civilization.”
28. For an influential book that depicts all westernization and modernization movements in the late Ottoman and Republican periods in Turkey as alienation from one’s native civilization, see Doğan, Batılılaşma İhaneti.
Civilizationist Internationalism in Sezai Karakoç’s Islamism

Karakoç’s depiction of Islam as a civilizational alternative to the West was strikingly similar to Toynbee’s model of historical encounter among civilizations. Even though Karakoç read and often quoted Toynbee, it is less likely that he owes all of his ideas to Toynbee exclusively. As mentioned earlier, civilizationism already existed in late Ottoman thought as well as in broader anticolonial third world nationalism. Karakoç has presented a version of Islamism around the notion of “the resurrection of Islamic civilization,” which is regarded as superior to the Western ideologies of capitalism and communism. By proposing the idea of resurrection (diriliş), Karakoç develops a method of perceiving Islam as a totality from a historical and civilizational perspective. Seen from this perspective, Islam is a worldview, a manner of life and civilization with a particular view of state, society, culture, and economics.

In this view of Islamic civilization, Karakoç relies on but also departs from Toynbee: Karakoç was initially a third worldist internationalist, celebrating the awakening of the non-Western world and hoping that this process would ultimately end the global political hegemony of the West. According to Karakoç’s utopian alternative teleology, the decolonizing trends will culminate in the revival of the dignity of the Muslim world and the East, possibly giving birth to a new federation of Muslim states in the Middle East. Karakoç perceives this resurrection almost as revenge on the West, a sentiment that Toynbee would not share. Moreover, for Karakoç, Islamic civilization is the main alternative to the West, while for Toynbee, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese civilizations have their own merits and advantages, and no single civilization should necessarily dominate world politics after the decline of the West.

Karakoç perceives the history of humanity as the encounter and interaction of different civilizations, including Islamic and Western civilizations. It is important to note that this is not a conflict between the religious traditions and faiths of Islam and Christianity. Karakoç was not a theologian, and he never advocated a revival of religiosity that we see in Pakistan’s Jamaat-i Islami or Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood organizations.

Karakoç’s view that the idea of civilization is not peculiar to the West or Islam but is a feature of the history of human beings, and there have been multiple civilizations in world history, is very similar to a Toynbeean view of civilization. Yet, Karakoç takes it a step further and merges the notion of revelation in monotheistic religions with his vision of supranational civilizations. For him, there is an unchanging essential humanity, which people of the world could remember one day though they have forgotten: the civilization of truth or revelation.29 Once he situated divine knowledge as the basis of his vision of ideal civilization, Karakoç could avoid civilizational relativism in comparing one civilization to another. For him, there emerged an ideal civilization, namely Islamic civilization, which is most harmonious with revealed wisdom from God. Accordingly, Karakoç’s definition of civilization differs from the famous late Ottoman social theorist Ziya Gökalp’s view that a civilization is the sum total of common works created by a group of nations. Karakoç finds this description an over-objectification and materialization, which naturally makes industrialized Western civilization superior to all others.30 Instead, Karakoç gives a religiously based definition of civilization: “Human being[s] can exist only with God. From this point of view, the ideal and goal of [a] human being is divine in origin. This goal is to become a creature according to God’s wishes.”31

History is conceived by Karakoç as the story of the rise, decline, and resurrection of civilizations. In his view, the old, “declined” civilizations are the history of the human soul and should not be put aside. Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Islamic, and post-Renaissance Western civilizations evidence the self-realization of humanity throughout history.32 In the flow of these multiple civilizations, Karakoç delineates two lines that clash with each other. At this point, his civilizational reading of history is expressed in the form

29. See Karakoç, Çağ ve Ilham III, 117.
30. See Karakoç, Düşünceler I, 9–10.
31. Ibid., 10.
32. See Karakoç, İnsanlığın Dirilişi, 10.
of dichotomies: “Two civilizations have clashed with each other since the very beginning of humanity: civilization of good and civilization of evil, civilization of white and civilization of black . . . civilization of prophets and civilization of devils, eastern civilization and western civilization.”33 In these dichotomies, the term *East* is equal to Islamic civilization, while the birthplace of the “true” civilization is today’s Middle East. It is important to underline that, at the peak of Cold War conflicts, Karakoç still perceived an ongoing confrontation between European/Western civilization, as the representative of evil, and Islamic/Eastern civilization, as the representative of good.34

We see Karakoç’s adoption of Toynbee’s idea of multiple surviving civilizations in his critique of the Kemalist notion of civilization. Kemalism as the official ideology of the Turkish nation-state postulated that all civilizations other than the superior Western civilization are doomed to fade away. In his writings on the idea of civilization, Karakoç denies the positivist belief of Kemalist ideology of Turkish nationalism that there has been only one global civilization, namely Western civilization, because of its hegemonic position in modern history, science, and technology. In response, Karakoç argues that Islamic civilization will not disappear in the face of the detrimental effects of modern Western civilization, though the destructive effects of the West over other civilizations are definite. But, he writes, “The West could not kill the Islamic civilization. Islamic civilization, by taking a lesson from this life and death clash with the Western culture, is reviving as the most original civilization.”35 As we see with Karakoç’s use of Toynbee’s model to critique Kemalist notions of civilization, ideas in one British imperial internationalist context can take on new meanings in a different context, extending beyond the intentions of the original author.

Karakoç’s understanding of the laws of history is different than Toynbee’s analysis of the rise and fall of civilizations. Karakoç argues that Toynbee exaggerated the relation between states and civilizations. Civilization cannot be confined to the life of some particular states and nations. Karakoç makes a distinction between two concepts of civilization: the first speaks to and involves humanity as a whole; the second concerns specific, concrete civilizations in history. Karakoç’s insistence on the humanism and internationalism of a particular civilization illustrates his antinationalist concerns. For him, concrete civilizations like Islamic and Western civilizations belong to humanity, not to a nation.36

In *A Study of History*, Toynbee referred to civilizations as isolated spheres that can be understood in and of themselves, without reference to other areas of the world—spheres where the links in a causal sequence are contained within their own time and space.37 But in Karakoç’s formulation, civilizations are political units as well. We can perhaps see clear contradictions between Toynbee’s vision of postimperial British internationalism and Karakoç’s anticolonial Muslim internationalism. Despite Karakoç’s rejection of European and American hegemony in world politics, his evaluation of the achievements of Western civilization could be positive on many occasions. For him, the reality of an encounter between civilizations may result in some kind of Hegelian synthesis, a combination of the characteristics of each civilization. But he also speaks of the clash between Islam and the West, which is an extreme form of encounter between civilizations.38 In Karakoç’s intellectual vision, technology is regarded as something to be used for recognizing the positive differences of societies and even for preserving them. After all, technology can strengthen trends toward resemblance, unification, or friendship of societies. This positive statement is accompanied by Karakoç’s strong emphasis that, like the materialist positivist understanding of science, technology is not able to bring a new meaning or a new civilization to humanity.39 Technology seems to be confirming Karakoç’s vision of shared humanity and inter-

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34. See ibid.
nationalism as he speaks of the softening effect of technology over the distinction between East and West. The advances in technology have eradicated the walls between the East and the West, first against Eastern civilizations but today against Western civilization. By learning the achievements of old civilizations, Europeans have lost their belief that Europe is the only, absolute civilization on earth. Indeed, Karakoç finds in technological globalization the roots of the idea of world civilization, which had been the ideal of the prophets from the beginning of humanity.  

Resurrection (Diriliş) of Islamic Civilization

Resurrection is a central concept to Karakoç’s thought, and his analyses of politics, history, and philosophy are closely tied to this ideal. In his writings on diriliş, we can see the legacy of anti-social Darwinist arguments of late Ottoman era Muslim intellectuals. At the peak of Western imperial hegemony, many European intellectuals and Orientalists maintained the notion that Islamic civilization had declined permanently, with no hope of revival. The European public’s view of the Ottoman Empire as a “sick man” paralleled the harsh judgment about the impossibility of Muslim reform and renewal that appeared in the writings and speeches of figures such as Ernest Renan and Lord Cromer. In response, Muslim intellectuals conceded their relative backwardness but insisted that their decline was temporary and that Muslims had the historical potential to reawaken and revive. Karakoç reiterates this theme in Muslim modernism with an exaggerated emphasis: “Birth and death are two faces of the life but resurrection, which is born of the togetherness of birth and death, is the real life. If we say in a Hegelian dialectic, birth is thesis, death is antithesis and resurrection is synthesis.” Then, Karakoç elaborated extensively on how Muslims were able to revive their civilization despite the East’s imitative Westernist reforms. According to Karakoç, westernization movements of Eastern intellectuals who feel inferior to the West (like Kemalists) are products of Western attempts to prevent the resurrection of Islamic civilization.

Karakoç argues that the central issue for contemporary Muslims is the resurrection of Islam, an objective that begins with the purification of Muslims. When Muslims get rid of their “verbal muslimness” and become “real Muslim[s] in their souls,” they will reach the resurrection by embracing the goodness, beauty, and truth of both the East and the West. The resurrection of Islam means the resurrection of humanity or resurrection of the “truth civilization.” This is the revival of real humanism, or divine humanism, that will save humanity from capitalism. This revived Islam is then presented as an alternative to both capitalism and communism. Karakoç also reflects on details such as the right to own property; unlike the capitalist idolization of, and the communist antagonism toward, property, Islam will institutionalize it as a duty and responsibility, a tool for the perfection of society and humanity. He argues that Western ideologies of communism, capitalism, fascism, and Nazism are masks that cover the truth under the claim of universality.

Karakoç often talks about a crisis of Islamic civilization, which for him has emerged with the impact of Western civilization in Muslim lands. He perceives the encounter between Islam and the West as the last major civilizational encounter, which results in the war waged by Western colonialism against Muslims. Karakoç believes that Islamic civilization will triumph over the West, though the Islamic world has been wounded seriously by the West’s political power. In the ultimate stage, Islam will revive the civilization of humanity and consequently will give an end to the cruelty and barbarism of the West. Karakoç is not against intercivilizational learning, as he urges Muslims to be prepared to engage productively with other civilizations, enriching themselves through civilizational encounters, conflicts, and challenges.

40. See Karakoç, Çağ ve İlham II, 46–51.
41. Karakoç, Çağ ve İlham III, 133.
42. See Karakoç, Çağ ve İlham I, 38–39.
44. Karakoç, Çağ ve İlham III, 26.
45. See ibid., 28, 88–89.
46. See ibid., 26–28, and Karakoç, Çağ ve İlham I, 85.
47. See Karakoç, Günlük Yazılar IV: Gün Saati, 161–62.
48. See Karakoç, Fizik Ötesi Açısından Ufuklar ve Daha Ötesi I, 139.
On the other hand, Karakoç’s writings are full of passages trying to justify the superiority of Islam over other civilizations. One major reason for this superiority, for him, is Islamic civilization’s monotheistic roots, which are not similar to those of Buddhism of the East.

According to Karakoç, writing during the rivalries of the Cold War, the hope of humanity for a renaissance lies in the resurrection of Islamic civilization, not to the West, which has polluted nature and has been caught in the grips of false humanism. This is the revenge of Islam but not a crude vengeance, even though the West, under different names and under different periods, has often crusaded against Islam. The resurrection of Islam places the duty of developing a new model of state, culture, and country on the shoulders of Islamic countries. It is not possible to continue with the invented borders of the existing states in Muslim lands. The small nation-states of the current Muslim world, which are created by Europeans, cannot be regarded as states in real terms. In the near past, the only state in the Middle East was the Ottoman state. Following this line of thinking, Karakoç calls for the establishment of three Islamic federations: an Eastern Islamic Federation in Eastern Asia, a Middle Islamic Federation in the Middle East, and a Western Islamic Federation in Africa. Eventually these three federations will be part of the Great Federation of Islam.

Karakoç does not accept the argument that the Ottoman state declined while the West was on the rise. According to him, the Islamic world and the Ottoman state did not decline but progressed at a slow pace. However, Europe has taken great steps in material and technical fields at particular moments such as the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution. There was no decline in absolute terms. It is meaningless to divide Ottoman history into three periods of rise, stagnation, and decline. The Ottoman state had been in progress from its beginning to the early nineteenth century. Even societal life in the Ottoman state was very civilized until just before its end. Karakoç argues, by quoting Toynbee, that Ottoman civilization was not a dead civilization but an interrupted one, as a result of the intervention of external powers.

The reemergence of civilization consciousness among Islamists is directly related to disillusionment with the westernization movement. As such, Karakoç describes the Ottoman-Turkish modernization movement as a process of alienation of the East from its own civilization. There is a clear amnesia on the part of Karakoç about the Christian populations of the Ottoman Empire, which, until 1878, constituted almost 40 percent of the Ottoman population. Moreover, the Ottoman Empire ruled over Southeastern Europe. There is no mention of this Ottoman cosmopolitanism in Karakoç’s writings. He only talks about the Ottoman Empire as a Muslim empire, representing the Islamic civilization and the East. This erasure of the Armenian, Greek, and Jewish populations of the geographies of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic in narratives of civilizational history is true of other Islamist thinkers as well as the majority of secular nationalists throughout the Cold War.

The Westernist attempt at the civilizational conversion of Turkey from the Islamic civilization to the Western one is vehemently rejected by Karakoç on the grounds that civilization cannot be imitated. Westernization is the loss of one’s own civilization in the name of acquiring another civilization. It is in these sentiments and interpretations where one can clearly see the impact of Toynbee’s world historical model on Karakoç. According to this interpretation, the westernization reforms from the Ottoman Tanzimat to Republican Turkey have been seen as a failure. The Westernist intellectual who desires to be a part of the West is humiliated by his admiration of the West. In Karakoç’s eyes, these intellectuals are the casualties of the war between Islam and the West.

49. See, for example, Karakoç, Günlük Yazılar III: Sur, 29–30, and Karakoç, Çağ ve İlim IV, 23–29.
50. See Karakoç, Günlük Yazılar III: Sur, 43.
52. For details see Karakoç, Çağ ve İlim IV, 92–93; Karakoç, Yapı Taşları ve Kaderimizin Çağrısı I, 204–5; and Karakoç, Yapı Taşları ve Kaderimizin Çağrısı II, 163–64, 200.
54. See, for instance, Karakoç, Çağ ve İlim II, 96–97; Karakoç, Günlük Yazılar IV: Gün Saati, 50–51; and Karakoç, Sütun, 345.
55. See Karakoç, Dirilişin Çevresinde, 191.
56. See ibid., 53–54.
What the Islamic world needs for the resurrection of Islamic civilization and the salvage of humanity is the emergence of a Muslim intellectual who represents Islamic virtue and morality. 57

Karakoç’s Essentialism
The very identity of Western civilization in Karakoç’s eyes is intimately bound up with its self-righteous sense of superiority and exploitation of humanity, beginning with its Greco-Roman heritage and extending through the Renaissance to the modern West. By the term West, Karakoç refers mainly to Europe, not the United States, which for him is a derivate culture that could never depart from the destiny of Europe. 58

Modern European civilization is predicated on power and the exploitation of peoples in several parts of the world, and thus, Karakoç constructs a negative correlation between the supremacy of Europe and the resurrection of humanity: “Whenever Europe resurrects, humanity suffers pains and whenever there is an internal conflict within the West, humanity takes a breath.” 59

His anti-European rhetoric includes strong anticolonialist connotations: “By the words ‘human being’ in the documents that have been promulgated out of the French Revolution, the Russian revolution, and the movement of United Nations, Europeans intend just themselves; in fact, they do not accept non-Europeans as human.” 60

According to Karakoç’s historical account, the West is not able to escape from the Roman sense of superiority. Westerners/Romans are free citizens and masters; the rest are slaves. Karakoç added that Christianity, despite its monotheistic moral teachings, could not kill this Roman spirit in the hearts of the Westerners. 61

One major point that is central to Karakoç’s criticism of the West resonates with the critique made by the Islamists during the late Ottoman period. They depicted the West in terms of economic and military power and materialism. For Islamists, the problems of colonialism and exploitation are not features of Islamic civilization but are inevitable features of the corrupt Western civilization. At one level, the Islamist conceptualization of the West is similar to the Western Orientalist depictions of the imagined Muslim world, as they both believed in the essential difference between the civilizations of the religiously oriented traditional Orient and the materially superior modern Occident.

The Western man is characterized by Karakoç, above all, by commitment to nature, reason, senses, objects, and this world: “[The] outward-looking human see[s] himself as a force of nature. Like it, he is destructive, shocking, striking and even brutal. . . . Power is the right, or at least, right is nothing without material power. Reality means activism. This activism sometimes reaches . . . the level of aggression, but this situation does not hurt the feelings of the Western man. The end is important for him. Shock, movement, change are the practical outcomes of the [W]estern attitude.” 62

According to Karakoç’s historical account, the West is not able to escape from the Roman sense of superiority. Westerners/Romans are free citizens and masters; the rest are slaves. Karakoç added that Christianity, despite its monotheistic moral teachings, could not kill this Roman spirit in the hearts of the Westerners. 61

Karakoç respects Christianity’s spiritualism but does not think that it can save the West from materialism and greed. Religion in the modern West cannot be a source of civilizational resurrection. 63 European Christians are far from the essence of their religion and many of their intellectuals—like Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Bertrand Russell, Sigmund Freud, Auguste Comte, and André Gide—are against Christianity. Western imperialism has nothing to do with the Christian love of human beings. The church in the West, accord-
ing to Karakoç, is nothing more than a justification for committing sin. It continues to legitimize antireligious worldly changes in accordance with the commands of capitalism, while opposing the truth.65

Partly in contradiction to his general negative Islamist discourse on the rise of the West, Karakoç comes to underline the contributions of Islamic civilization to the formation of the West’s material supremacy. Although he reiterates the fact that Greek civilization was passed on to the Renaissance by Muslim scholars, unlike the Islamists of the late Ottoman period, he does not see this as confirmation of the commonality between the modern West and Islamic civilization. The West appropriated some ideas and methods from Andalusian Islamic civilization that were superior to Europe of the Middle Ages from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries. But this learning was limited to the appropriation of science. For Karakoç, the West could not penetrate the soul of Islamic civilization. Moreover, Europe could not admit that it had learned from Islam. Europe has established a civilization of objects, a high level of material achievement, by a materialist inspiration but has caused decline in humanity in terms of spirit and morality. Even the Renaissance was Christianity’s call for help from the ancient Western civilization against Islam. In other words, Christianity, the soul of the Middle Ages, asked assistance from antiquity to defend itself against Islam, the soul of the new age.66 In an attempt to explain the reasons for both the decline of Islam and the rise of the West, Karakoç provides us with a rather interesting argument. Europeans have appropriated the historical, geographical, technological, and commercial knowledge and experience produced by Muslims in order to develop industrialization and to establish their domination over the world. But why did Europeans succeed in areas where Muslims failed? Karakoç argues that Muslims benefited from the same heritage but did not need to make geographical discoveries because they were rich and civilized.67

Karakoç’s discourse on civilization entails an anticolonialist element that was not so apparent in other Islamists of the period such as Necip Fazıl Kıskakürek and Nurettin Topçu. Karakoç’s call for the establishment of the great Middle Eastern State (ortadoğu devleti), which could be realized if Western colonialism over the Muslim lands was defeated, was highly internationalist in Cold War Turkey. Karakoç noted that the anticolonial struggles must not utilize Western ideologies if they need to truly decolonize themselves. Racism, socialism, and humanism are produced by the West itself to meet and control the opposition coming from non-European countries. For non-Europeans, to oppose the West by the means of Western counterarguments, such as Marxism and socialism, is another way of westernization.68 In his analysis of contemporary ideologies, which are different faces of the West, he regards the resistance of fascism to capitalism and communism as a negative one, which delayed the real resistance of humanity.69 Expectedly, Karakoç has expressed several times his opinion that Turkey’s membership in the European Union is unacceptable only because of the essential difference between Islamic civilization and the West.70

Karakoç’s Islamist response to Western supremacy is not a call for a retreat into the mountains of Anatolia or into tradition and customs. As we see in his book of poetry, Tale (Masal), Karakoç describes a father whose seven sons have gone to the West. Six of them lost their identities by falling for the attractiveness of this civilization, and the last, seventh son, who has refused to be changed and to be converted, buried himself in a square of a Western city.71 This metaphor is partly his recognition of the fact that there is no escape from the colonial European experience and the only solution is to face the challenge of the West by resisting its attractiveness without being changed. The only point of

65. Karakoç, Dirilişin Çevresinde, 130–32.
68. See Karakoç, Günlik Yazılar II: Sur, 144.
69. See Karakoç, Çağ ve İlim III, 8.
convergence between the West and Islam, for him, is the idea of Mediterranean civilization. The Mediterranean is a place where major civilizations meet and have a dialogue. Yet, he believes that, unfortunately, Europe has rejected this Mediterranean option. Thus, in Karakoç’s view, the attempt of saving humanity and civilization could be realized only by Muslims, not by the arrogant Europeans, around the idea of Mediterranean civilization.\textsuperscript{72}

A Critique of the Islamist Discourse on Civilization

Sezai Karakoç’s essentialism of the West or his discourse on a pure Islamic civilization does not represent a continuity from late Ottoman era Pan-Islamism. Instead, it represents a search for an alternative beyond the Kemalist monocultural nationalism and Eurocentric modernity during the Cold War–era westernization of Turkey.

Karakoç’s Islamist civilizationism shows the complicity of Muslim intellectuals in the persistence and survival of Islam-West essentialism through the periods of decolonization and the Cold War. Islamist internationalism was so dependent on the late nineteenth-century civilizationist narrative of Islam versus the West that even after a century of international transformation that signaled the end of empires and rise of a nation-state world order, Islamism continued to rely on older frameworks of Islam and the West, giving new energy and life to its political appeal. Karakoç does not find nationalism and the nation-state formation sufficient for getting Muslim societies out of their colonial “humiliation.” He asks for both de-westernization and civilizational revival to complete this decolonization process.

Like the civilizational discourse of Orientalism and Eurocentric narratives of supremacy, Islamist discourse rests on the basic conviction that Islamic civilization is ontologically and epistemologically different from the West. It is clear that Islamist writers, in their understanding of the West, have been caught by the same essentialist logic present in the Orientalist tradition. Recently, there have been important scholarly attempts to overcome the almost two-centuries-long domination of civilizational discourses in the social sciences, humanities, history, and contemporary identity discourses. Similar historical reflections are gradually influencing the new cosmopolitan generations in Turkey and other Muslim societies as well. There are fresh attempts to rewrite world history as connected and entangled narratives. This new historical narrative is especially important for the pro–European Union public opinion in Turkey, which has to overcome the civilizational narratives of Islam versus the West. However, the legacy of centuries-long essentialist thinking, as seen in the writings of Toynbee and Karakoç, also coexist, often in tension with the actual lived experiences of Turkish and European societies and in contradiction of scholarly historical analysis. An intellectual project of civilizationist essentialism, produced first to justify Eurocentric colonial order and then to challenge it, did not fade away and be replaced by a view of national or global narratives of world cultures. On the contrary, it got further refined and revived during the Cold War era, and by new means such as Toynbee’s world history framework and Islamists writers such as Karakoç. The post–September 11 era revival of the clash of civilization theories and Islamophobia, as well as the new Pan-Islamic identity of Muslim intellectuals in the “alliance of civilizations” project, still relies on the conceptual heritage left by Cold War thinkers such as Toynbee and Karakoç. It is time to reflect on and overcome this essentialist discourse. \textsuperscript{111}

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\textsuperscript{72} See Karakoç, Günlük Yazılar III: Sur, 146–47.


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