Global IR, Global Modernity and Civilization in Turkish Islamist Thought: A Critique of Culturalism in International Relations

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Abstract

This article responds to Acharya's call to integrate deep area studies knowledge and methods into a global IR by presenting the findings of an empirical enquiry into the concept of civilization in Turkish Islamist thought. It delves into primary and secondary sources, in English and Turkish, and in particular into the works of a number of emblematic Islamist thinkers in Republican (post-1923) Turkey, to show that their approach to 'Islamic civilization' is defined through nineteenth century, modern concepts, shared with so-called Western thinkers and contexts. The conclusions of the study constitute the basis for a critique of the culturalist perspective in IR which treats cultural and civilizational differences as foundational or even immutable. The article posits, instead, that a truly global IR can only be developed if it is underpinned by the concepts of global modernity and global history (as proposed by Buzan and Lawson, among other IR theorists and historians), across an imagined 'East' and 'West'.

Keywords

Global IR, Global Modernity, Turkey, Islamism, Civilization, Culturalism.

Introduction

Amitav Acharya's call for a research agenda in pursuit of a 'global IR' invited International Relations theorists to move away from what he sees as the 'monistic universalism' of the discipline towards a pluralist direction (Acharya 2014b: 649). Acharya posited that a global IR would transcend 'the distinction between West and non-West' (Acharya, 2014b: 649), 'eschew cultural exceptionalism and parochialism' and put forward a 'broad conception of agency' of non-Western actors (Acharya, 2014b: 651). Furthermore, a global IR would emphasize regional worlds and the inter-connectedness between them, examine how ideas and norms circulate between global and local levels and integrate deep area studies knowledge and methods into the discipline of IR (Acharya, 2014b: 654-655).

Acharya's call is laudable and a move towards 'global' IR is overdue. In exploring the concept of civilization in Turkish Islamic thought, the present article answers his call in that it seeks to eschew cultural parochialism, affirm the agency of non-Western actors, emphasize regional inter-connectedness and integrate deep area studies knowledge into IR concerns. But, in the process, the article also shows that there are limitations to how far Acharya's proposed IR is truly 'global'.

The final item on Acharya's list of elements of a global IR calls on IR theorists to 'explore and conceptualize the multiple and different ways in which civilizations encounter each other' (Acharya, 2014b: 656). With this statement, Acharya suggests that civilizations constitute meaningful entities which have a role to play in IR (as actors, foci of identity or drivers of

action) and imply that the desired pluralism towards which the discipline should be moving is, at least partly, a civilizational pluralism.

I argue in this article that Acharya's civilizational perspective of IR – also elaborated on in his other work (Acharya, 2013) - is emblematic of the discipline's shift in a 'culturalist' direction, which views culture as defining norms and values in a fashion and to a degree that renders them incommensurable. This trend is observable, as I show below, in recent developments in a number of theoretical areas of the discipline: some strands of constructivism, the English School and post-colonialism; civilizational approaches to IR; and in the 'multiple modernities' thesis, in so far as it has influenced IR.

My article constitutes a critique of this culturalist impulse in IR, of which Acharya is emblematic, by drawing on insights from theoretical debates that underpin global history and global modernity. It presents the findings of empirical research into Islamist thought on 'Islamic civilization' in Republican (post-1923) Turkey, a 'hard' case given the Islamists' self-definition as part of a civilization antagonistic to or, at least, distinct from 'Western' civilization. By delving into primary and secondary sources, in English and Turkish, I show that a *modern* concept of civilization frames and ultimately defines Turkish Islamist approaches towards civilization. This concept is shared between Islamists in Turkey and so-called Western thinkers and contexts, which means that, figuratively speaking, they are 'joined at the hip' despite being presented as split and at odds with one another.

I show that, rather than 'civilizations' going back in history, and dividing humanity in fundamental ways, as is often presumed, the very idea of 'civilization' – both in its universalist sense and interpreted as a discrete human collective entity – and, specifically, the idea of an

‘Islamic civilization’, originated in the nineteenth century, a period defined by the conceptual revolution of modernity, which entailed the objectification, or reification, of collective social phenomena. It thereafter shaped the conceptual framework of Europeans and people in other parts of the world, and is still with us today. The article outlines how the concept of civilization was adopted by generations of intellectuals in Republican Turkey, in conversation with and close intellectual proximity to ‘the West’ as well as ‘the East’. It thereby shows that Islamic thought in Turkey, even when it denounces ‘Western civilization’, shares with the West the modern concept of ‘civilization’. The article concludes by drawing on the implications of the empirical findings for a ‘global’ IR, underpinned by a global, shared modernity rather than a civilizational fragmented pluralism.

Culturalism in IR

IR has been in the throes of a ‘cultural turn’ since the 1990s. In its multiple and varied meanings, culture has become a growing concern in some of the sub-disciplines of IR, such as security (Katzenstein, 1996) and foreign policy (Hill, 2015), and of IR theory proper. The ‘cultural turn’ may refer simply to being open and curious about exploring collective identities and ways of behaviour and self-definition, and should not be necessarily equated with ‘culturalism’, which treats cultural and civilizational differences as foundational or even immutable. But the line between the two is a fine one and culturalism is becoming increasingly influential in IR.

The growing preoccupation with culture in IR has been intricately linked with the rise of constructivism in the post-Cold War period, initially as a response to realism’s dominance. The publication of definitive constructivist works, such as by Lapid and Kratochwil (1996) and

Katzenstein (1996), signalled the beginnings of this interest, which continues to intensify to this day. Reus-Smit is right in stating that one strand of constructivism takes a rather narrow definition of culture as 'norms' but also in claiming that another strand relies on a 'default' conception of culture as unitary and coherent, one that has long been overcome in anthropology and sociology (Reus-Smit, 2018: 119-54). Rather than the entire constructivist 'church', it is this latter strand in constructivism that is more susceptible to culturalist views, over and beyond a concern with culture.[1] Alongside this constructivist strand, a culturalist line within the English School, which goes back to Martin Wight's work and his idea that a cultural unity must underpin international society ('system' in his terminology) and international order if they are to emerge and survive, continues to endure (Reus-Smit, 2018: 84-118). Elements of this can be observed in Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan's recent work on Asia, China and Confucianism (Zhang and Buzan, 2012) and Buzan and Acharya's focus on regions and non-Western IR theory (Buzan and Acharya, 2010).[2]

Culturalist tendencies have also been strengthened by some post-colonial theorising. The critiques of the 'Eurocentric' or 'Western-centric' foundations of the IR discipline (Hobson, 2004; Hobson, 2012; Mazlish, 2005; Kayaoğlu 2010, Kuru 2016; Bowden, 2009) were inspired by Edward Said's thesis on Orientalism which aimed to counter essentialist approaches to culture. Postcolonial thinkers such as John Hobson have sought to demonstrate through historical analysis that the rise of the West owed to the East more than Eurocentric perspectives would allow for (Hobson, 2004). The book countered Eurocentrism's positing of a 'strict dividing line between the East and the West' which 'serves to represent the East and West as

[1] Many constructivist works deal with culture while avoiding the pitfalls of culturalism. One example is Bettiza's work, where he argues that, whilst cultural entities are 'imagined communities', they turn into 'social facts', powerful carriers of meaning and knowledge (Bettiza, 2015).

[2] The 'culturalist' hints in Buzan's works cited here – and they are only hints - sit uneasily alongside his book, co-authored with Lawson, on the nineteenth century global transformation (Buzan and Lawson, 2015). For an incisive and sympathetic critique, see Wilson, 2016.

not only separate but qualitatively different' (Hobson, 2004: 283).[3] Ironically, however, and despite such good intentions, the postcolonial critique of Eurocentrism has offered fertile ground for culturalist perspectives: this has occurred mainly by virtue of essentializing 'the West'. The suggestion that there exists a foundational separation between 'Western' and 'non-Western IR' in terms of knowledge, values and epistemologies has become a widespread – albeit not universal - post-colonial position, playing into an interpretation of cultural specificity which bolsters culturalist perspectives

Over and beyond constructivism, the English School and post-colonialism, within which culturalist views emerge only in certain instances, or sometimes by implication, there exist two areas in IR theory (broadly defined) where culturalist positions are explicit: 'civilizational analysis' and the 'multiple modernities' paradigm. With regards to the first, I am not referring to the much-criticized views of Samuel Huntington but to a broader category of thinkers who, while rejecting the idea of a clash between civilizations in favour of cooperation or dialogue, see civilizations as 'building blocs' or even actors in IR, meaningful entities around which international relations are organized and policies are formulated and executed. One example of such a thinker, already mentioned, is Amitav Acharya (2013, 2014a), whose starting point is civilizational even though he talks of 'inter-civilizational convergence'. Other authors who, while eschewing a crude essentialism, still take civilizational differences as foundational, are Johann Arnason (2003) and Fred Dallmayr (2002). Another example of the civilizational stance is Fabio Petito's work, which takes its cue from the tradition of 'dialogue of civilizations', a response to both the 'clash of civilizations' and the 'end of history' discourses of the 1990s

[3] A number of other postcolonial theorists also argue against culturalist positions. One example is Bhambra's work which highlights the connections between European and other civilizations at the origins of modernity and puts forward a case for 'connected histories' (Bhambra, 2007). Another is Chakrabarty who calls for an 'integrated human history' (Chakrabarty, 2007: 42-46).

(Petito, 2016: 79). Christopher Coker (2019) comes to civilizational analysis from a different perspective, focusing on the culturalist behaviour of 'civilizational states' such as Russia and China which arrogate onto themselves the right to defend particular civilizations (Coker, 2019).

Petito is right to describe the theoretical developments of civilizational politics and multiple modernities as interlocked (Petito, 2016: 83-84). Although not an IR theory as such, the multiple modernities paradigm has influenced the discipline in many ways. It accepts that modernization is a universal process but sees its results as non-uniform; positing the view that societies do not become 'alike' as they modernize. The main thesis here is that civilizations are historically discrete but are changed by the onslaught of modernization; as societies/cultures/civilizations engage with modernity, each produces its own version of it, not conforming to a uniform and universal, let alone Western, model (Eisenstadt, 2003). The multiple modernities paradigm contains many variants but at its core still 'presumes peoples' disparate experiences with modernity in different parts of the world' (Bilgin, 2016: 497); as such, it remains, ultimately, associated with 'pluralist civilizational analysis' (Wagner, 2012; see also Eisenstadt, 2003) .

Countering Culturalism: Insights from Global History and Global Modernity

Culturalist analyses within IR rest on the implicit assumption and, in turn, reinforce the view that discrete and incommensurable perspectives exist across societies and cultures. But is culturalism borne out by the facts? The answer to this question can only be historically specific and contextual. It must also rest on, or at least be informed by, empirical research which draws on deep area studies knowledge (to borrow Acharya's wording). I draw on such empirical research in what follows to demonstrate that, in at least one case (albeit a 'hard' one),

differences between cultures or civilizations are not as deep as is assumed or, indeed, proclaimed by the various proponents of the culturalist paradigm.

I frame the conceptual context of my empirical study by drawing on insights from the twin ideas of 'global history' and 'global modernity', ideas that are intrinsically anti-culturalist. I use the definition of 'global history' offered by Sebastian Conrad in contradistinction to 'world history' which he defines as the history of *separate* civilizations and the study of the links between them (Conrad, 2016: 62-63). Conrad maintains that the concept of 'global' refers necessarily to connections and is inherently relational. It points to the synchronicity of events; and causality on a global scale (Conrad, 2016; see also Drayton and Motadel, 2018; Bayly, 2004). The turn to 'global history' has impacted a number of more narrow areas of history. Global intellectual history seeks to highlight the transnational aspects of the circulation of global ideas, concepts and practices (Moyn and Sartori, 2013). Conceptual history has recently moved away from international and comparative history writing to global history or entangled histories (Pernau, 2012), and 'comparing concepts across cultural encounters' (Ifversen, 2015: 291; see also Wigen, 2018).

'Global history' is a broad category, often loosely or poorly defined, as is 'global modernity' – but they both have their usefulness and would have to be invented if they did not exist (Buzan and Lawson 2015b). Buzan and Lawson distinguish global modernity from multiple modernities and the colonial modernity of post-colonialists, emphasizing how modernity became a global process both in its origins and in its outcomes, through 'entangled histories' (Buzan and Lawson 2015b).

Buzan and Lawson's exposition and defence of global modernity is historical through and through. It rests on the depiction of the nineteenth century as the major turning point for contemporary international relations (Buzan and Lawson, 2015: 5). They use the term 'global modernity' to describe the sea-change which engulfed humanity since that turning point. The authors eschew the 'multiple modernities' thesis because the latter 'retains a sense of Europe as the original, definitive modern experience': instead of approaching modernity as 'a uniquely European development arising from endogenous, self-generating civilizational qualities' they see it as a global process, the result of 'entangled histories' that 'combined to vault Western states into a position of pre-eminence' (Buzan and Lawson, 2015: 7). They treat modernity as the product of fusion between the West and the non-West, a transformation in which the core and the then periphery were deeply intertwined (Buzan and Lawson, 2015: 127), and state that the transformation to modernity 'was global from the beginning and remains so today' (Buzan and Lawson, 2015: 172).

Buzan and Lawson focus on the material aspects of global modernity and see the transformation it entailed, from the nineteenth century onwards, in terms of 'industrialization, rational state-building and ideologies of progress' (Buzan and Lawson, 2015: 1). They treat the ideational transformation as equally comprehensive and dramatic (Buzan and Lawson, 2015: 313) – it has now 'permeated the whole planet' (Buzan and Lawson, 2015: 317) - but define it mostly in terms of the ideologies of progress that rose to prominence in the nineteenth century, namely liberalism, nationalism, socialism and 'scientific' racism (Buzan and Lawson, 2015: 3). My emphasis here, however, in contrast to Buzan and Lawson, is on the conceptual revolution which occurred in the nineteenth century, a revolution which constituted an equally important sea-change to the ideological one and forms the framework of my analysis for the concept of 'civilization' below.

‘Civilization’: A Nineteenth Century Concept

‘Civilization’, in its universalist sense of being a world-wide phenomenon defined by objective criteria of what is valuable and worthwhile, was a late eighteenth – early nineteenth century invention, even though the meaning of the term developed in somewhat diverse ways in France, Germany and Britain (Elias, 1994: 5-23; Al-Azmeh, 2001: 1903). There is no full consensus on this, but its first modern usage appears to have been in 1756, though François Guizot popularized the term (in France) in the 1830s (Yurdusev, 2003: 56-57; Reinhart, 2007: 268-269).

The word and concept of ‘civilization’ as a universal process entered the Ottoman language from French and English in the same decade, the 1830s, initially as ‘sivilizasyon’ or ‘sivilization’. The Ottoman vocabulary had hitherto been drawn from Ibn Khaldun who used ‘umran’, the word closest to ‘civilization’, to mean the totality of human habitation, consisting of ‘medeniyet’ (settled human habitation) and ‘bedeviyet’ (nomadism). Eventually ‘medeniyet’ replaced the English/French word ‘sivilizasyon’, signifying at first ‘that which pertains to the city’, ‘urbanity’ or ‘city culture’, a contrast to nomadism (Wigen, 2015a: 441-442; Reinhart, 2007: 272; Baykara, 1990; Karpat, 2001: 11). The term referred to fractures internal to Ottoman society: for example, whereas the typical Damascene was seen as a member of ‘the noble Arab people’, Syrian Bedouin or the highland Arabs of Mount Lebanon were seen as ‘vahşi’ (savage) (Hanioğlu, 2008: 88; see also Deringil, 1998; Makdisi, 2002: 779-780[4]). Increasingly, however, civilization in the late Ottoman period also became associated with European/Western civilization, linked to science, rationality and the Enlightenment (Zürcher,

[4] For a critique of these ideas on Ottoman Orientalism, see Palabıyık, 2010.

1993: 64). In subsequent decades, ‘medeniyet’ came to be used almost interchangeably with ‘uygarlık’, the latter word having etymological roots in Turkish in contrast to the Arabic formation of the former (Meriç, 1996).

The point to emphasize here is that the word ‘civilization’ began being employed almost concurrently in European and Ottoman contexts: the concept was new for Europe too, part and parcel of a transformed modern intellectual framework which reshaped approaches to the historical past, and between societies. It spread among the Ottoman intelligentsia in the 1830s at the same time as it did in French popular culture (Reinhart, 2007: 268-269) constituting, in other words, a ‘synchronic’ development.[5]

The idea of an Islamic civilization as one of the civilizations ‘in the plural’ came to the fore in the late nineteenth century in reaction to the idea of a universal, modern, European civilization. It came about alongside similar ideas in many other parts of the world, such as pan-Slavism, the pan-German movement, pan-Asianism, pan-Buddhism, Hindu universalism. From the 1860s ‘the Muslim world as a geographical civilizational entity, not simply denoting a shared religious identity, emerged … in relation to the evolution of the notion of the West’ (Aydin, 2007: 4). By the 1880s, after the loss of Ottoman territories in the Balkans and Eastern Anatolia, pan-Islamic solidarity developed also ‘as a geopolitical concept’; Ottoman intellectuals ‘began to perceive international relations as a global conflict between Christian Europe and the Muslim world’, thinking of ‘global cultures through the concept of “*Şark ve Garp*” (East and West)’ (Aydın, 2007: 59-60, 73).[6]

[5] For a discussion of the international political context in which the Ottomans started using the word ‘civilization’ in its universalist sense and an analysis of how the word ‘medeniyet’ travelled across settings, time and texts, see Wigen, 2015b. He is focusing on the civilizing of emotions.

[6] Most closely associated with the idea of an Islamic civilization was a group of intellectuals of the 1860s and 1870s, later labelled ‘Young Ottomans’; they are credited with inventing pan-Islamism, partly for the purpose of strengthening the empire (Mardin, 1962: 59-60).

The emergence of the modern concept of civilization engendered a re-negotiation between late Ottoman society and its past history and, in the tumultuous decades between the 1870s and the 1920s, different conceptions of 'civilization' were continually contested.[7] By the time of the establishment of the Republic however, the lines were clearly drawn: East[8] faced off West, an 'Islamic' civilization was juxtaposed to a 'Western' civilization (equated with civilization in its universal sense, in the eyes of many). The conflict in the history of Republican Turkey, between secularists and Islamists, has not been about how to define East and West but over which one represents the superior model.[9]

Civilization in Turkish Islamist Thought

Buzan and Lawson suggest that we are still living 'in a world defined predominantly by the downstream consequences of the nineteenth-century global transformation' (Buzan and

[7] Aydin notes that the abstraction called the Muslim world cuts Muslim societies off from their real history (Aydin, 2017).

[8] Note that, in the period after independence, the 'East' was also identified with anti-imperialism against the 'West' (Berkes, 1998: 437-439). This is just one of many definitions of 'the East' which have varied across geographical and historical contexts.

[9] The idea of a civilizational rivalry between 'East' and 'West', which became prevalent by the 1920s, defined the last phase of the intellectual trajectory of the Young Turks (who, loosely defined, dominate the Republic until 1950: Zürcher, 1993). With the arrival of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his circle, who led the war of independence (1919-23) and the newly established Republic, the 'Westernizer' branch of the Young Turks (*garbcılar*) became dominant. They saw European civilization as indivisible and wanted Turkey to adopt it wholesale. There was no attempt, as there had been by a thinker such as Ziya Gökalp, to differentiate between Turkish culture and European civilization because the Kemalists aimed to transform both 'high' Islamic civilization and 'low' popular culture. (Zürcher, 2010: 148-149). For Mustafa Kemal, secular reforms aimed to raise Turkey 'to the level of "contemporary civilisation"' (Davison, 1998: 147). He saw European civilization as the only civilization and, in his view, any nation was capable of 'modern civilization' as long as they were given the educational and material needs to achieve it (Mango, 2008: 163, 170). A fervent Turkish nationalism was the order of the day in the first formative years and decades after 1923 but it was seen as bringing Turkey in line with modernity and incorporating Turkey into Western 'civilization' while, at the same time, asserting the country's independent identity.

Lawson, 2015: 5) – and this becomes clear when we examine the conceptual framing of 'Islamic civilization' by Islamist thinkers in Turkey through the Republican period, until today.

In what follows, I focus on a number of canonical or emblematic Islamist intellectuals, from the early years of the Republic until the present day, to show how they appropriate the East-West dichotomy and use the concept of an 'Islamic civilization' in their pitch for authenticity (in the sense of a society needing to be 'true to itself' and to its past) against the West; while forgetting that the very concepts that they use against the West, 'civilization' and 'Islamic civilization', were products of a common experience in modernity which irrevocably binds them to the Western world. Furthermore, I show that their various Islamist interpretations of 'Islamic civilization', and the role of Turkey within it, have been, across the decades, intimately tied to Western and global intellectual trends, developments and conversations.[10]

Islamist (and, more broadly, Islamic) thought in Turkey was marginalized and suppressed in the years after 1923 but, with the introduction of multi-partyism in 1945 and the Democrat Party's electoral success in 1950, the parameters of intellectual debate began to alter.[11] Already in 1952, an 'Islamic revival' was being observed (Lewis, 1952: 41, 46-47). In that period, left-wing voices dominated cultural life and predominated among the intelligentsia but, by the 1970s, the right more than counter-balanced the left (Findley, 2010: 318). Islamic revival was stimulated by and in turn fuelled the popular religious orders, which had survived the Kemalist

[10] Vömel (2019) highlights the ways in which Turkish Islamist thought developed also in conversation with global Islamist thought.

[11] The effects of this shift must not be exaggerated: between the 1940s and the 1980s, Turkish politics was dominated by the conflict between right and left, with issues of civilizational/cultural belonging and the role of religion occupying a less central role even though they remained an element in political party ideology (Toprak, 1981: 124). This also partly applies to the period henceforth, up to the contemporary moment: it would be a mistake to see Turkish public life as exclusively dominated by questions of belonging and identity as opposed to material considerations. The two sets of issues, at the very least, are always inter-linked.

onslaught despite being formally banned; and it also began to permeate party politics although the different orders had divergent approaches to party political behaviour and action.[12]

It is within this broad context of Islamic revivalism that there emerged a first generation of Islamist intellectuals focusing more directly on the idea of 'Islamic civilization' and Turkey's role within it. The major figures of this new civilizational intellectual movement, which came into its own in the 1950s, were Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Nurettin Topçu and Sezai Karakoç. These thinkers were part and parcel of intellectual trends and developments beyond Turkey. When they started to gain prominence, in the inter-war period, the discourse of East-West civilization and 'a diagnosis regarding the conflict between the two' was becoming more widespread among non-Western intellectuals (including, incidentally, pro-Western liberals) in many other parts of the world (Aydın, 2007: 12). The 1930s were also a time when Islamic modernism was in decline in the Middle East, eclipsed by secular nationalism, socialism and fascism (Kurzman, 2002: 26). The first generation of Islamist intellectuals in Turkey were illustrative of this decline and the rise of more conservative thinking, often tinged with fascist undertones.

Kısakürek (1904-83), who by the 1960s and 1970s was viewed as the dominant conservative voice in Turkey,[13] saw Islam not strictly as a religion but also as a civilization and 'reinvented the Ottoman past as being the essence of Islamic civilization' (Yavuz, 2003: 114). Already from the 1940s and 1950s, he was promoting the idea of *Büyük Doğu* (Great East) which he

[12] Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1876-1960), the founder of the Nurcu-Nakşibendi order which constituted the most important Islamic revivalist movement in the mid-twentieth century at the popular level, had started in the 1920s to reject political engagement, relying on religious mobilization with a view that politics should be influenced indirectly. The Nakşibendi movement itself took a more directly political approach. One of its major leaders, Mehmet Zahid Kotku (1897-1980), transformed the Nakşibendi tradition along the lines of the political code of the Republic which meant a convergence of Islamism and nationalism.

[13] He was also embraced by the Nakşibendis (Mardin 2005: 155) – see note 12, above.

saw as a great civilization, confronting the West (Kısakürek 1968: 10). For Kısakürek, Turkish Muslims must not imitate the West as they have done in the past; and nationalism must serve Islam, not vice-versa. Islamism was an alternative to Kemalism, 'not a posture/attitude but rather a search for a coherent, systematic and totalistic ideology' (Duran, 2001: 11-12, 209). He recognized only two nations, Muslims and non-Muslims, and viewed *Türklük* (Turkishness) as inevitably linked to Islam.[14] He saw Islam as the 'real and universal civilization', immune to the shortcomings of Western civilization. Islamic civilization was 'ontologically and epistemologically different from the West' and superior to it because it was based on the sharia and on 'cooperation, right, justice and virtue whereas western one [sic] was based on might and interest'. Islam was an alternative to the Western tradition because it removes its injustices and emptiness (Duran, 2001: 321, 32, 94, 201).

In short, Kısakürek employed in his writings a conceptualization of civilization and, more particularly, Islamic civilization which had originated in the nineteenth century Ottoman context and which was shared by Europe, and later the West more broadly. Despite his promotion of an Islamic civilization as an alternative to the West, he shared with Western Orientalism an essentialization of 'West' and 'East' (Duran, 2001: 201).

This was partly because, notwithstanding the anti-Western animus which characterized his thinking, Kısakürek had been schooled in Western and particularly French thought (Findley, 2010: 339; Kısakürek, 1982: 7-93). He was typical of a broader trend discernible in the religious journals of the time, which used dominant Western concepts to restate Islamic values (Lewis, 1952: 44-45). Furthermore, despite his own emphasis on his traditional roots, his

[14] According to Kısakürek, only when Turkey returned to its former glory would the light shine upon the Muslim world once again. *Büyük Doğu* would be a land cleansed of Jews and *Dönme* (crypto-Jews who had converted publicly to Islam) (Guida, 2012: 119).

upbringing and education were Western; 'his criticism of the republican ideology was forged in a genuinely Western mode' and his work had the clear imprint of French models. In one view, Necip Fazıl's conservative thought showed a republican imprint through its 'imitation and adoption of Western *forms* of debate' (Kısakürek, 1982: 7-93; see also Mardin, 1994: 194-196).

The global economic crisis of the 1970s led, by the 1980s, to the questioning of modernisation, a surge in conservatism and the end of the 'ideological hegemony of nationalist-statist developmentalism' (Gülalp, 1997: 56). Following the 1980 military coup, and the political crushing of the left, the country shifted direction to the right and the military itself promoted the idea of the 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis'.[15] Other Islamist ideas increasingly permeated the political scene. The centre-right Motherland Party, which became dominant in the 1980s under the leadership of Turgut Özal, adopted some of the positions of Necmettin Erbakan's 'National Outlook' ideology[16] which had been previously promoted by the National Order Party (1970-71) and the National Salvation Party (1972-81).[17]

[15] The idea of Islamic civilization was also of considerable significance in this body of thought. In 1970, influential business, university and politics individuals founded the *Aydınlar Ocağı* ('Hearths of the Enlightened') to 'break the monopoly of left-wing intellectuals on the social, political and cultural debate'. The chief ideologue of this trend, İbrahim Kafesoğlu, proposed the 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis' asserting that 'Islam held a special attraction for the Turks because of a number of (supposedly) striking similarities between their pre-Islamic culture and Islamic civilization' and deemed that Turkish culture was built on a Turkish and an Islamic element (Zürcher, 1993: 302-303).

[16] The idea of 'Islamic civilization' was also significant in the thought of Necmettin Erbakan (1926-2011), the chief ideologue of the *Milli Görüş* (National Outlook) movement, which dominated Turkish Islamist politics from the 1970s onwards. *Milli Görüş* brought together aspects of Islam, Ottoman and Turkish norms and sought a cultural revival based on these norms (Erbakan, 1975). Erbakan propagated the idea of *Adil Düzen* (Just Order) which he described as the pinnacle of civilization, combining the truth of Islam with Western technical achievements (Erbakan, 1993: 9-11). For Erbakan, Turkey was 'the cultural centre of Islamic civilization in Europe', also because of its association with the Balkans (Yavuz, 2003: 236).

[17] One position that the Motherland Party adopted from *Milli Görüş* pertained to the relationship between Turkey and Western civilization. It was that the strength of the West lay in its industry, not its civilization, that technology can be separated from Western civilization and that development required faith, not the transformation of culture (Toprak, 1993: 241-242).

Partly as a result of the general crisis of secular ideologies and worldviews, and in the context of increasing prominence of Islamism politically, a second generation of Islamist intellectuals which included influential figures such as Ali Bulaç, İsmet Özel, Rasim Özdenören, İlhan Kutluer and Ersin Gürdoğan, proposed new standpoints on Islamic civilization and critiques of the West and 'universal' civilization. They refused to countenance the possibility of Islam and the West reaching accommodation and argued that science and technology, as practised in the West, are incompatible with Islam. They collectively 'rejected the grand narratives of the nineteenth century such as progress, science, reason, and civilization [in its universal sense] and [have] essentialized modernity by positioning it in contradistinction to Islam' (Duran, 2001: 10).

This generation of Islamist intellectuals rejected the glorification of the Ottoman past (Toprak, 1993: 246-249); they stressed the Koran and sunna, and the period of the first four rightly guided caliphs, vis-à-vis the historization of Islam within the framework of the Ottoman Empire (Yavuz, 2003: 118). They also rejected the West in 'civilizational terms' and saw the unquestioning acceptance of industrialization as a submission to imperialism. They criticized the notion of development wholesale and asserted the superiority of the spiritual values of Islam over the material wealth of the West (Gülalp, 1997: 57-61). They rebelled against science, technology, civilization and democracy and argued that science in the modern world serves as the new idol; they also rejected the market and saw technology as responsible for waste, destruction and pollution (Toprak, 1993: 246-252).

For all their denunciation of Western 'civilization', however, the discourses of the second Islamist generation thinkers in Turkey were firmly rooted in the idea of civilization, both in its universalist sense and in the particularist one of Islamic civilization, which had originated in

the nineteenth century. These discourses also echoed the rejection of modernization theories so widespread in the West during the same period; they have even been described as 'post-modern' (Yavuz, 2003: 117; Çınar and Kadıoğlu, 1999), similarly to Western critics of modernization. This should come as no surprise, as the second-generation Islamist intellectuals were well-versed in Western social and political thought, social sciences, languages and 'the structure of their discourse reflects the logical sequence of secular thought' (Toprak, 1993: 245). Sociologically, they were distinct from the traditional local religious leaders and felt at home in Istanbul, responding to the same problems and experiences as their secular counterparts (Meeker, 1994: 156). They had attended secular higher education establishments and spoke one or more European and Middle Eastern language; they had an interest in Western literature, philosophy, or social history; they wrote 'in a conceptual and semantic field that has considerable overlap with [his] secular counterparts'; and fell within 'the boundaries of the political and cultural discourse of the urban, educated Turkish elite' (Meeker, 1991: 190-193). Ali Bulaç (b.1951) in particular, formulated his thought 'according to the methodology of global contemporary academia and had to have a profound knowledge of the scholarly discourse in the West' (Guida, 2010: 350-351).[18] Partly as a result of this immersion, and similarly to the first generation of Islamists, this second generation accepted 'the Eurocentric assertion of an essential difference between the West and the East' and thereby reproduced Orientalism's essentialist assumptions (Gülalp, 1997: 57-61).

A partial exception to this line of thinking about civilization can be found in İsmet Özel (b. 1944), one of the intellectuals of the second generation but also in many ways a *sui generis*

[18] Bulaç is a prolific writer but none of his monographs is focused on civilization as such. For Bulaç religions enable people to live together and make them *medeni*, civilized: Çınar and Kadıoğlu (1999: 64-67). However, he criticized the notion of 'civilization' (in its universal sense) as such for originating in the West and being alien to an Islamic outlook: Meeker (1991: 200). In a published interview which highlighted the symbolic power of words, Bulaç distinguished between 'medeniyet' and 'uygarlık', arguing that the former belongs to the West and the latter to Islam: On5yirmi5 (2010).

figure. Özel is exceptional in recognizing that the term 'civilization' (in its universal sense) emerged relatively recently in history and is closely associated with modernity (İsmet Özel, personal communication, 2016).[19] It is an idea he is profoundly critical of. He posits Islam as the counter-point of a universal civilization but his approach to it, and to the question of Islamic civilization, is different from other members of the second generation. Islamic civilization, he claims, today is non-existent. Since the nineteenth century only Western civilization exists and dominates others (Guida, 2014: 124-125). Neither the time of Muhammad nor that which passed under the rule of the first four caliphs were 'civilized periods' (Özel, 2013: 95). The Muslim way of life is ['not] reflected in the civilization developed by Muslim states in the course of history. He thinks it is a mistake to confuse the Ottoman, Abbasid and Umayyad civilizations with the concept of Islamic society, as the West has done. The Ottoman past in particular must not be idealized. Islam itself is not a civilization (although it has the potential to engender one, which would be free of class differentiation and power hierarchy) (Meeker, 1991: 214-215).

Changes in the political situation and in the intellectual atmosphere in Turkey by the 1990s gave rise to a third generation of Islamist intellectuals and a new viewpoint on Islamic civilization. Islamist attempts to exclude human rights and democracy from their political thinking because they were 'Western' began to be abandoned as Islamists started embracing these very concepts to protect themselves against the Kemalist establishment. The European Union pressure for reform on Turkey seemed to offer to the Islamists the prospect of a legal shield and, by the late 1990s, some Islamist intellectuals had already become enthusiastic defenders of Turkey's EU integration. This resulted in a 'discursive shift from the West as *the*

[19] This view is shared by Gencer (2014). Özel's ideas on the subject are developed primarily in his work *Üç Mesele* (2013).

foe of Islamic identity to a friend' (Yavuz, 2003: 248), a shift that was epitomized in the changing views of Ali Bulaç who became supportive of Turkey's membership in the EU by the 2000s (Guida, 2010: 349).

The move from an anti-Western, defensive Islamist discourse to an Islamist – and Turkish – identity more open to the West was symbolized by the view that EU accession did not envisage a civilizational shift. Islamist parties, namely the Virtue party (1997-2001) and subsequently the Justice and Development Party (AKP), established in 2001, also changed their position on EU membership, abandoning the 'conventional Islamic stand' (Dağı, 2009: 45-56). For the first few years of the AKP government, which came to power in 2002, 'integration into the West and maintaining Islamic identity [were] no longer seen as mutually exclusive choices' (Dağı, 2006: 92) - though this changed in the 2010s.

Ahmet Davutoğlu was the key member of the third generation of Islamist intellectuals which emerged in the 2000s and 2010s[20] and we can observe, in his *oeuvre*, continuous references to the idea of an Islamic civilization, juxtaposed with a Western civilization: this was particularly so in his two major works on the subject, both published in 1994 (Davutoğlu 1994a, 1994b). Davutoğlu argued that Turkey can have a central role in this Islamic civilization. In his later work, the book entitled *Strategic Depth* (2001), he maintained that countries-bridges like Turkey, which contain many civilizational heritages, are an important source for a new civilizational opening. Instead of a Huntington-style clash, Davutoğlu saw signs of a synthesizing of a new civilization which will spread in the world (2001: 563, 840-841). Turkey could become strong by adopting a wide and consensual sense of belonging and make a

[20] Davutoğlu was also the main architect of the AKP foreign policy, foreign policy advisor to the AKP government, foreign minister and prime minister until his departure in 2016.

contribution to global civilization by attempting a new civilizational opening thereby cancelling the trap of her 'geocivilizational' rejection ('jeokültürel dışlanma') (Davutoğlu, 2001: 137).

Hidden behind this view about civilizational convergence around Turkey, however, persisted quite a conventional and rather rigid representation of 'Islamic civilization', contrasted to 'Western civilization'. 'East' versus 'West' continued as the starting point of Davutoğlu's thought, and he saw them as going back in history (even if he argued that conflict between them can be overcome).[21] Similarly to religiously conservative Turkish circles, Davutoğlu viewed the Ottoman Empire as the protector of Muslim peoples and Islamic civilization against the West. For him, Turkey's Republican pro-European orientation was a result of European hegemony and a temporary aberration and he promoted 'a culturally motivated Turkish identity, historically anchored by the centuries-long confrontational dispute with Europe' (Seufert, 2012: 13-15). All in all, in continuing to interpret it in essentialist terms, Davutoglu defined 'Islamic civilization' within the parameters of the concept as it had emerged in the nineteenth century.

Conclusion

This article responded to Acharya's call to integrate deep area studies knowledge and methods into a global IR by presenting the findings of an empirical study of the concept of civilization in Turkish Islamist thought. These findings, however, constitute a critique of other aspects of Acharya's call and, more broadly, of the culturalist perspective on civilizational differences

[21] Tellingly, when commenting on Western civilization and culture in its present form, Davutoğlu highlighted alcoholism and prostitution as its most prominent characteristics (Özkan, 2015).

which overemphasizes the fractures between civilizations and overlooks the view that the concept of civilization itself is a recent one. A truly global IR, my analysis suggests, can only be developed if it is underpinned by the concepts of a shared history and modernity, as developed by Buzan and Lawson, among others. These concepts, by emphasizing synchronicity in the spread of ideas and processes and the entanglement between societies and regions, better enable us to capture the diversity and complexity of the modern world, without disregarding the commonalities that bind societies together across an imagined 'East' and 'West'.

I grounded my argument in an examination of the emergence and trajectory of the concept of 'civilization' in its universal sense and in the particular sense of 'Islamic civilization' which showed that they were both nineteenth century constructions, even though they are conceived as going back in history. Islamist discourses about civilization in Turkey are rooted in a nineteenth century vocabulary which the empire shared with Europe, and which Turkish Islamists, until today, share with the West.

The article demonstrated its argument in some empirical detail. It showed that the concept of 'civilization' emerged in the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth century concurrently with Europe. Increasingly, a rift opened between the idea of civilization in the universal sense and the notion of particular civilizations and, by the late nineteenth century, the concept of an 'Islamic civilization' had gained traction. By the turn of the twentieth century, 'Islamic civilization' had become a declaration of identity against the West.

The Kemalist worldview which was rendered hegemonic with the creation of the Turkish Republic was challenged from the 1950s onwards by a series of Islamist intellectuals,

representing three generations or different schools of thought, each of which posited distinct, albeit inter-related notions of Islamic civilization and Turkey's role within it. The first generation, which centered on the figure of Kısakürek, depicted Islamic civilization as the antithesis of the West. The second generation, which included thinkers such as Bulaç and Özel, rejected historical Islamic civilizations, including the Ottoman one, and argued that Muslims must look back to the ideal time of the prophet Muhammad for inspiration and guidance. The third generation, among whom Davutoğlu stands out, did not necessarily identify a clash between East and West but held on to an essentializing discourse about Islamic civilization.

The view that there exist immutable differences between Eastern and Western civilizations runs through the history of Turkish Islamist thought in the Republican era. Yet, the framing of civilization and the interpretation of what the term itself means is shared between Islamist thinkers in Turkey and 'the West'. There exists, since the nineteenth century, a commonality in frames and concepts which indicates a shared modern experience across the imagined 'East' and 'West'.

Statement on conflict of interest:

The corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding:

The research for this article was partly funded by British Academy grant MD150005.

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