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DEVİRİMCİ VE ÖZGÜRLÜKÇÜ İSLAM: MODERNLİK ÜZERİNE MUHALİF BİR İSLAMİ PERSPEKTİF

Öz

“Anti-kapitalist Müslümanlar” adlı toplumsal hareket 2013 yılında Gezi Parkı protestolarına katılmış ve birkaç yıl boyunca medyadan ilgi görmüřtür. Hareket, AK Parti (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) hükümetine muhalefetiyle tanınan İslami bir düşünür olan İhsan Eliaçık’ın fikirlerinden ilham almıştır. Hareketin ve düşünürün yolları son yıllarda ayrılmış olsa da, Eliaçık halen Türkiye’deki İslami siyasi muhalefetin içerisindeki bilinen bir isimdir. Bu çalışma İslam ve modernlik ilişkisini ele alan çeşitli teorilerden birkaçını Eliaçık’ın ortaya koyduğu İslami perspektifin ışığında yeniden değerlendirmektedir. Çalışmanın savına göre; her ne kadar Türkiye’deki İslamcılık Batı siyasal düşüncesinden derinden etkilenmiş olsa da, Eliaçık gibi İslami düşünürler aynı zamanda Batılı fikirleri İslami değerlerle kaynaştırma süreci içindedirler ve bunun sonucunda ortaya Batı modelinden bir ölçüde ayrışan melez bir modernlik vizyonu çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: İhsan Eliaçık, Devrimci ve Özgürlükçü İslam, Batılılaşma, çoklu modernlikler, Avrupa-merkezcilik.

REVOLUTIONARY AND LIBERTARIAN ISLAM: A DIVERGENT ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON MODERNITY

Abstract

A social movement called the “Anti-Capitalist Muslims” joined the 2013 Gezi Park protests and attracted attention from the media for several years. The movement was inspired by the ideas of İhsan Eliaçık, an Islamic thinker known for his opposition to the AK Party (Justice and Development Party) administration. Though the movement and the thinker have parted ways in recent years, Eliaçık remains a notable figure within the Islamic political opposition in Turkey. This study critically reviews several predominant theories about Islam and modernity in light of the Islamic perspective put forward by Eliaçık. It is argued that even though Islamism in Turkey has been profoundly influenced by the Western political thought, Islamic thinkers such as Eliaçık are also in the process of mixing Western ideas and Islamic values together – which results in a hybrid vision of modernity that, to some extent, diverges from the Western model.

Keywords: İhsan Eliaçık, Revolutionary and Libertarian Islam, Westernization, multiple modernities, Eurocentrism.

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Introduction

The idea of liberation has long been associated with Western modernity (Masud et al. 2009; Sayyid 2014; Yavuz 2013; Atasoy 2009), scholars commonly equating it with secularization, liberal democracy and/or free-market capitalism – namely the main characteristics of social, economic and political life in contemporary Western societies such as Britain, France and Germany:

Modernity is based most firmly on the idea of freedom and autonomy... The discourse of liberation stood at the very origins of modern times. It goes back to the quest for autonomy for scientific pursuits during the so-called scientific revolution, to the demand for self-determination in the political revolutions—the model cases of which were the American and French ones—and to the liberation of economic activities from the supervision and regulation of an absolutist state. In each of these cases freedom was seen as a basic—“unalienable”, “self-evident” human right. But it was also argued for with the collective outcome of liberations in mind, namely the enhancement of the striving for truth, the building of a polity to whose rules everybody had contributed and in which, thus, violence was no longer a legitimate means of action, and the increase of “the wealth of nations” (Wagner 1994, p. 5).

Among all the phenomena the idea of liberation has been associated with, one of the most commonly used is *political freedom* which is commonly defined as the formation of a democrat-

ic polity (Wagner 1994). While liberation/democratization has been a taken-for-granted norm of modern life in Western political thought since the late 19th century, it has also become commonplace to perceive non-western societies, particularly predominantly Muslim ones, as incapable of developing similar modes of political thought and practice *without refashioning themselves via westernization*.¹ This view, generated by the established Eurocentric intellectual tradition of many social science disciplines, has been very influential in shaping mainstream discourses on the relationship between Islam and modernity. Two understandings in particular, the so-called “Secularization Thesis” and the more recent “Islamic Calvinism”, have applied this approach in various prominent studies on the subject.² This article critically reviews these perspectives, compare them with an alternative approach referred to as the “Multiple Modernities” and argue that the latter is a more effective paradigm for comprehending contingent forms of *Islamisms* that are emerging in contemporary Turkey.

The main question I focus on here is whether Islamic thinkers are capable of developing their own conception of modernity based on liberation – derived from readings of Western ideas such as libertarianism and socialism as well as Islamic sources such as the holy *Qur’an*. And if so, to what extent these alternative modernity models converge towards or diverge from the contemporary Western modernity largely characterized by capitalism, secularism and liberal democracy? In this context, this article examines the political thought of Islamic scholar İhsan Eliaçık whose ideas have strongly influenced the “Anti-Capitalist Muslims” of Turkey.³ This work critically re-evaluates the merits of various discourses on the Islam-modernity link, utilizing the Islamism of Eliaçık as a case in this regard. As such, it is argued that the Multiple Modernities approach is a more appropriate framework to account for the nuances of contemporary Islamism which can no longer be studied in isolation from the ever-intensifying intellectual engagement between Islamic ideologues and Western modernity which is transforming the Islamic visions of worldly order. The main sources of analysis in this article are the various works and public statements of Eliaçık.

For many years, İhsan Eliaçık has studied ideas of revolution, democracy and social justice, arguing that the liberation of Muslim societies lies in revolting against the capitalist/consumerist modernity and the authoritarianism of their governments. Influenced by Eliaçık’s worldview based on what he terms the “revolutionary and libertarian Islam” (*devrimci ve özgürlükçü İslam*), the Anti-Capitalist Muslims joined the 2013 Gezi Park protests. The popularity of this movement and Eliaçık himself has followed a similar trajectory with that of the Gezi protests, rapidly rising in the summer of 2013 and gradually declining ever since. Nevertheless, the study of this fringe Islamic thinker would contribute to the scholarly literature because Eliaçık put forward a highly unconventional understanding of Islamism and modernity that highlight the potential variety of forms Islamism could possibly obtain in our age.

¹For a detailed study of the Eurocentrism of Western governments and institutions, see Borg (2016); Salt (2012); Azeez (2014); Hollis (2012). For a detailed study of the Eurocentrism of Western mainstream media outlets such as *The Economist*, *Foreign Affairs* and *The Guardian*, see Salaita (2012); Shihade et al. (2012); Malak and Salem (2015).

²For the Secularization Thesis, see for example Berkes (1964); Apter (1965); Lerner (1958). For the idea of Islamic Calvinism, see for example Atasoy (2009); Göle (2000); Yavuz (2013).

³It is important to note that there is an ongoing dispute between İhsan Eliaçık and the Anti-Capitalist Muslims. The movement publicly accuses Eliaçık of “cooperating with the capitalist class for personal fame and self-enrichment” and “becoming a capitalist himself”. On the other hand, Eliaçık denounces them for supposedly “betraying the values of Anti-Capitalist Islam”. Therefore, Eliaçık should not be seen as the leader of the movement, but merely as its intellectual originator. For more details, see *Time Turk* (2013).

The media coverage Eliaçık attracted during Gezi has not resulted in detailed studies of his thought in the context of social theory – apart from a limited number of articles⁴ that focus on his political discourse. The analysis of the case of Eliaçık in this study offers us an opportunity to comparatively assess his Islamic worldview which radically contrasts with other Islamic groups in Turkey, in particular with the AK Party (Justice and Development Party) that adopted free-market capitalism and has become its most ardent defender since the party came to power in 2002. While the AK Party administration and its conservative supporters depicted the Gezi Park demonstrations as “an anti-systemic movement bent on destabilizing Turkey via creating anarchy” as well as “resurrecting the aggressive Kemalist secularism” of the late 1990s, Eliaçık perceived Gezi as an opportunity to showcase his divergent approach to liberation – which differs from all other Islamic groups of Turkey – and enthusiastically positioned himself as one of the vanguards of street protests (Yinanç 2013).

As one of the few Islamic thinkers that actively participated to Gezi and interpreted it through the lens of a libertarian discourse shaped by Western ideas, the world-vision of Eliaçık exemplify an emerging phenomenon in predominantly Muslim societies such as Turkey: the globalizing Western political thought and its predominant lexicon – which expresses itself via concepts such as liberation, social justice, democratization and human rights – have managed to influence the non-western world, yet this influence has fused with Islamic values and is now beginning to produce hybrid variants of modernity that diverge from the mainstream capitalist Western model. In the following section, the article summarizes the hypotheses of three competing discourses on Islam and modernity. Then, the validity of these discourses is assessed in light of Eliaçık’s Islamic paradigm.

Discourses on Islam, Liberation and Modernity

Until the late 1990s and the 2000s, the dominant discourses within the scholarly literature on Islam and modernity had been the Secularization Thesis and the idea of Islamic Calvinism (Göksel 2016).⁵ The conceptual framework of Multiple Modernities/Islamisms has challenged both in recent years, producing a growing number of alternative perspectives (Wagner 1994, 2012; Eisenstadt 2000; Göle 2000; Çınar 2005; Özyürek 2006). Max Weber (1930) has proved to be the most prominent scholar in terms of inspiring the Secularization Thesis as well as its rival – the so-called Islamic Calvinism. According to him, the widespread adoption of “rationality” as the basis of public life would gradually lead to the formation of a modern society. During the 18th century, the period many have now come to refer to as the Enlightenment, Western European countries such as Britain and France witnessed to the rise of a way of thinking that promoted “human reason” as the main source of political, social and economic organization. In effect, Weber suggests that the critique of many hitherto established social traditions and religious values by Enlightenment thinkers was a precondition for the modernization process of Europe as well as that of the whole humanity. The rise of rationality, as conceptualized by Weber (1930), is largely equated with secularization which itself is defined in Positivist/Comtian fashion as the supposed “defeat of religious beliefs by modern scientific methods that solely

⁴One notable exception is the study of Erdem Damar (2014) who uses a highly original theoretical perspective. See also Abbas and Yiğit (2015); Öncü (2013).

⁵This section of the article on the competing discourses on Islam and modernity is partially based on the following work: Göksel (2015). The intellectual origins of the Secularization Thesis can be traced to “the classical modernization theory”, while the Islamic Calvinism is largely a product of the “neo-modernization theory”. For more details, see Göksel (2016).

acknowledge observable evidence”. In this view, rationality is presented as the first step towards the birth of a collective consciousness of liberation (Sayyid 2014, pp. 4-10).

Mainstream Weberian thought is based on the assumption that religion, tradition and mysticism in so-called traditional societies would gradually be eliminated by rationality as countries adopt secularization programs (Volpi 2010, pp. 69-75). Nevertheless, it is important to note that Weber neither perceives all religious beliefs across the world as identical nor solely as the defunct myths of a bygone era. Actually, one of Weber’s (1930) most widely known arguments is that Protestantism is a particularly “helpful religious belief system” for accelerating the pace of industrialization in a modernizing pro-capitalist society. Influenced by Weber, the proponents of the Secularization Thesis categorize the world religions into two: those that are beneficial for modernization (e.g. Northern European Protestantism, Chinese Confucianism and Japanese Shinto) and those that supposedly cannot be reconciled with modern values such as rationality, human rights and liberation. Distinguished Secularization theorists such as Daniel Lerner (1958), Niyazi Berkes (1964), David Apter (1965) and Bernard Lewis (2002) have long placed Islam in the latter category. In this context, Ernest Renan has been influential on forming the hypotheses of the Secularization Thesis as he argues that the nature of Islam – both as a religious doctrine and as political philosophy – is different from that of “more worldly” religions such as Protestantism and Shinto which are supposedly more compatible with rationality (Masud et al. 2009, p. 4).

When studying the role of Islam in modernizing predominantly Muslim societies, adherents of the Secularization Thesis define the concept of liberation as the “emancipation of Muslim societies via secularization and democratization” (Kedourie 1992). The Secularization Thesis, which has deeply shaped public discourses across the Western world, portrays predominantly Muslim societies and Islam in particular as “static” – unable to experience a profound transformation process from within, the likes of which had been historically experienced by Western societies via the Enlightenment, the American and French Revolutions and the Industrial Revolution:

Dramatic events have focused public attention on the potential tensions between the Muslim world and the modern West. Are such tensions rooted in real differences or in perceived distortions? Compared to the other world religions, Islam appears either more resistant to internal development, with less prospect of change or, in spite of all efforts at reform, inherently pre-modern. Islam, it is frequently claimed, has experienced neither a major reformation, as has Christianity, nor been touched by the Enlightenment (Masud et al. 2009, p. VI).

According to the narrative offered by the Secularization Thesis, the intellectual influence of Islamic values (e.g. unquestioning obedience to an almighty higher power) over a society prevents such a community from forming the consciousness of personal individualism and political liberation (Lewis 2002; Saeed 1994). Many observers claim that Islam is an “authoritarian” belief system that over-emphasizes collective values and well-being (i.e. that of the *ummah*) while repressing individual desires and personal divergences from the values of the Muslim majority (Huntington 1984; Lewis 2002). Therefore, it is argued that political liberation in the form of democratization cannot possibly occur in a predominantly Muslim social context. The Secularization Thesis concludes that only after thoroughly transforming the social life through a comprehensive secularization program may a predominantly Muslim society move towards constructing a liberal democratic polity which could genuinely ensure liberation.

Even though the Secularization Thesis-oriented understanding of Islam and liberation has long dominated public and scholarly discourse, it has been strongly criticized and scrutinized by many scholars in the last three decades (e.g. Kansu 1995; Kaya 2004; Çınar 2005; Özyürek 2006; White 2013; Yavuz 2013). It is clear that such reductionist views about Islam and Islamic political thought can no longer be as easily voiced as in the past – at least within academic publications. However, the decline of the Secularization Thesis should not be taken for granted as its followers have not yet completely lost their ability to influence public opinion. In fact, it can be argued that the narratives of mainstream Western media outlets are still largely shaped by ethnocentric biases, and occasionally by outright Orientalism (Salaita 2012; Shihade et al. 2012; Malak and Salem 2015). Also, the recent rise of *Daesh* (ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and its terrorist attacks at various European cities such as Paris, Brussels, Hamburg and London have resulted in an intensifying Islamophobia across the Western world, producing numerous commentaries suggesting that Islam cannot possibly be considered modern because it is allegedly a “violent religion” (*The Economist* 2015). It is clear that the hegemony of the Secularization Thesis is still strong within Western media and governments; therefore, the need to deconstruct its Eurocentric framework still remains as a major gap at the present.

The Islamic Calvinism framework has been main opponent of the Secularization Thesis-oriented approach to Islam and modernity since the 1980s (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Nasr 2010; White 2013; Yavuz 2013; Çakmak 2014). Not unlike their intellectual rivals, the proponents of the Islamic Calvinism discourse⁶ have heavily drawn from the writings of Weber. However, while the Secularization theorists place Islam in the Weberian category of “anti-modern belief systems”, the Islamic Calvinism theorists draw parallels between the features of Islam and Weber’s so-called “pro-modern belief systems” such as Protestantism and Confucianism. As such, the scholars (Turner 1984; Luhmann 1984; Yavuz 2013) who adhere to Islamic Calvinism attempt to completely overturn the Secularization Thesis by claiming that Islam is actually a religion that promotes the values of the global capitalist modernity of our time such as commercialism.

Accordingly, the *Qur’an* is not anti-modern, authoritarian and anti-capitalist as the Secularization Thesis claims; but it is in essence a holy book that praises the public service of merchants such as the Prophet himself (Ülgener 1984; Güngör 1991). It is not only possible for merchants and capitalists to be virtuous believers, but the commercial activities of such people are supposedly essential for building a prosperous Muslim society (Güngör 1991; Yavuz 2013). Hence, the Islamic Calvinism discourse reframes Islam as a “pro-capitalist religion” whose values are highly suitable for the speedy modernization of the Muslim world via mass industrialization. The Islamic Calvinism discourse concludes that once a Muslim society develops economically and so-called conservative/Islamic capitalist classes emerge, then that society would be ready for liberation, namely to become democratic and gain more political freedom. Liberation, in this context, is understood as *the product of the construction of a free-market capitalist system within a Muslim society*.

Unlike the Secularization Thesis, the Islamic Calvinism discourse acknowledges the possibility that predominantly Muslim societies could possibly create their own forms of modernity with-

⁶For a discussion of the Islamic Calvinism discourse in the context of the political economic changes in Turkey in recent years, see Çakmak (2014). Not unlike the proponents of Islamic Calvinism, Çakmak (2014, pp. 101-105) suggests that the post-1980 capitalist development in the country has “tamed” the revolutionary tendencies of Islamists and resulted in the “internalisation” of the values of the global secular modernity.

out necessarily following the Western experience of secularization step by step (Göksel 2016). However, the idea of the necessity of secularization is now replaced with the prerequisite of capitalist development. Both the Secularization Thesis and the Islamic Calvinism discourses are Eurocentric, because both approaches unquestioningly accept the idea of “diffusionism”, namely the belief that *modern life* historically emerged in Western Europe and that this advanced socio-economic and political organization would gradually expand outwards to the so-called “less-developed peripheries” (i.e. the non-western parts of the world). Ultimately, the spread of Western values would supposedly create a unified global civilization modeled on the examples of Western Europe and Northern America.

While the Secularization Thesis expects the Muslim world to *modernize* via comprehensive secularization packages (e.g. the Kemalist modernization program in Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s), the Islamic Calvinism discourse brand any social movement and political economic system that is not pro-capitalist as “pre-modern” or “reactionary”. In order to prove their affinity for liberation and modernity, Muslim societies are expected to demonstrate their loyalty to capitalist values. To understand the complexity of hybrid forms of Islamism – such as the one offered by İhsan Eliaçık – in our age, then, the Islamic Calvinism discourse is just as problematic as Secularization Thesis.

Today, an effective challenge to the conceptualizations of Islamism by the two dominant understandings is put forward by the Multiple Modernities paradigm which argues that neither secularization nor capitalism are necessarily prerequisites to modernity (Wagner 2012). The Multiple Modernities paradigm refuses to understand the concepts of modernization and modernity solely in light of the Western historical experience until our present time. The content of modernity may display similarities in terms of political institutions and economic development levels across the world; however, it is normal and indeed even natural for modernity to differ according to cultural and religious values across societies (Eisenstadt 2000). While undergoing complex institutional, social, economic and political changes on the long road to modernity (i.e. during modernization programs), societies develop quite dissimilar features and divergent understandings of modernity – albeit they incessantly interact with and learn from each other. Shmuel Eisenstadt (2000) notes that in order to comprehend the nature of modernity in the present day, one should regard it as “a story of continual reformation” and as “an ongoing interaction between a multiplicity of cultural programs”.

If there are as many different “modernities” as there are different cultures and religions as the Multiple Modernities paradigm contends, then there must also be various understandings of Islamism within and beyond the Muslim world. Thus, the paradigm implies that the socio-economic and political contexts of each Muslim country as well as the differing interpretations of Islamic sources of such as the *Qur’an* constitute the main reasons behind the emergence of many competing Islamic schools of thought and Islamist social/political movements (Kaya 2004; Wagner 2012). As such, it has even been suggested that though there is only Islam, there are “multiple Islamisms” – defined simply as different understandings of Islam (Göksel 2016).

While the Secularization Thesis and the Islamic Calvinism mistakenly study the belief systems and socio-political values of various predominantly Muslim countries as if they constitute “a united homogenous Muslim world”, the nuances of Islamic interpretations across and within boundaries are badly overlooked. Actually, the *ummah* have – both historically and in our present time – been massively divided into sects (e.g. Sunni and Shi’a), orders, fraternities and

schools of thought in terms of the way in which the Islamic scripture have been conceptualized and practiced. In this context, a notable contribution of the Multiple Modernities/Islamisms paradigm is that Islam as a whole is not forcefully super-imposed into over-simplified Weberian categories of pro-modern/anti-modern belief systems. The meaning of Islamic sources such as the *Qur'an* is clearly of utmost importance for truly comprehending the nature of Islam as a religion. Nevertheless, it is also clear that the mind-set of particular Islamic movements or scholars can only be evaluated through detailed studies of their *own unique interpretation* and without presupposing any particular characteristics about Islam as a whole.

As mentioned above, the hitherto dominant understandings of the Islam-modernity relationship offered by the Secularization Thesis and the Islamic Calvinism framework cannot avoid being ethnocentric and reductionist. As such, there is a need for a non-Eurocentric approach to studying modernity and liberation in predominantly Muslim societies.⁷ The deconstruction of these earlier approaches and their replacement with the Multiple Modernities paradigm could enable us to utilize a more nuanced framework to understand the modernization experience of non-western societies in general – and the role of Islam in contemporary Turkey in particular. The following sections of the article briefly introduce the Anti-Capitalist Muslims, and then study the works of Eliaçık in detail to explain his world-view. Afterwards, the explanatory power of the three aforementioned discourses on Islam, liberation and modernization is comparatively evaluated in light of Eliaçık's thought.

İhsan Eliaçık's Islamic Perspective

The Anti-Capitalist Muslims, which consists only of a few hundred regular activists and a few thousand sympathizers that occasionally join them in their demonstrations, is a fringe social movement in Turkey, yet one that has exerted a disproportionate influence on public discourse with their participation to the Gezi Park protests (Akyol 2013). The majority of the members and spokespeople of the group are young university students, mostly studying in Istanbul and other cosmopolitan urban centers of Turkey such as Kocaeli, Ankara and Eskişehir though it is important to note that they have established many local branches across the country after the Gezi Park protests (Birelma 2013). The group was founded in 2011, actively participating in the 1st May International Workers' Day demonstrations, organizing mass *iftars* (fast-breaking dinner) during Ramadan times and most prominently, participating to the Gezi Park protests in 2013. For the Anti-Capitalist Muslims and İhsan Eliaçık, a lifestyle guided by values of Islam is the anti-thesis of capitalism and its main characteristics such as the hoarding of wealth, private property, greed, boundless consumerism and income inequality (*Antikapitalist Müslümanlar* 2012; Eliaçık 2013, 2014). Thus, it was only natural for them to join the Gezi Park protests against the AK Party administration which is the Turkish flag-bearer of a neo-liberal capitalist modernity in their view:

The AK Party implemented capitalism by covering it with Islam; it has used religion to legitimize capitalism. It has no alternative economic approach; on the political side; it has not changed the state's fundamental reflexes; it has only made some changes to the details. Its own conservative reflexes have become the state itself... It has a conservative interpretation of Islam. It has a backward understanding of Islam; it talks about alcohol, abortion; there is no

⁷For the growing need to develop a non-Eurocentric approach to study contentious issues such as the link between Islam and modernity, see also Matin (2013); Dalacoura (2007).

need to deal with these issues. Islam does not ask you to deal with these issues, it asks you to get rid of the gap between rich and poor (Yinanç 2013).

Above all, Eliaçık and the movement seek to challenge the capitalist modernity of our age and replace it with a new order they refer to as “the social justice state” which would ensure human rights, political freedom, pluralism and respect to the rights of the believer as well as the non-believer. Accordingly, Islam and its main source, the holy *Qur’an*, already contain all these universal values of humanity and the Muslim civilization does not need to learn them from Western societies. Nevertheless, the Anti-Capitalist Muslims may ally with non-Muslim Anti-Capitalist groups across the world in order to launch a collective global revolution against the “tyranny of capitalist modernity” (*Antikapitalist Müslümanlar* 2012).⁸ The establishment of a socio-economic and political order truly based on the *Qur’an* would ensure the values of the social justice state to be universally applied to Muslims as well as non-Muslims, because the worldly rights of the latter are also guaranteed by God – as stated in the *Qur’an*. Thus, the ultimate aim of the group and Eliaçık is not limited to overthrowing the existing political and socio-economic order in Turkey or the Muslim world, but to transform the entire world.

The heavy emphasis on concepts such as salvation and social justice as well as their belief in triggering a social transformation via political revolution has led many to brand the Anti-Capitalist Muslims and Eliaçık as “socialist Muslims” (Akyol 2013). The socio-political vision of the movement have indeed been heavily influenced by socialist conceptions – which lends, to some extent, credibility to the argument that the Anti-Capitalist Muslims and Eliaçık represent the Turkish Islamic variant of an emergent global anti-capitalist movement (Tuğal 2013). The similarities and differences between the Anti-Capitalist Muslims and the Western-style socialist/anti-capitalist movements are studied in detail in the next section of the article.

As one notable commentator notes, the Anti-Capitalist Muslims can be evaluated as the “brain-child” of the Islamic scholar İhsan Eliaçık who has published numerous books over the last two decades to express his approach to Islam (Akyol 2013). It is important to note that there is a growing feud between Eliaçık and the Anti-Capitalist Muslims, so it would be a misconception to see Eliaçık as the leader or the public speaker of the group. However, the ideology of the group, as stated in their manifesto and elsewhere by its members, have been fully in-line with the Islamic paradigm – the so-called “revolutionary and libertarian Islam” – propagated by Eliaçık. Despite their recent public rivalry, the profound role Eliaçık’s ideas have played in shaping the world-vision of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims is still acknowledged by members of the movement (Birelma 2013; *Time Turk* 2013). The conflict between the movement and the scholar appears to have been caused by the strong opposition of influential movement members to the existence of a “charismatic leader figure” as well as differences over the methods to be used to spread the message of the revolutionary and libertarian Islam paradigm. Recently, tensions have escalated to the point that the official website of the movement issued a declaration overtly accusing Eliaçık of exploiting Islamic values for his own benefit (*Antikapitalist Müslümanlar* 2015). Nevertheless, their ideological affinity means that in spite of the ongoing feud, Eliaçık can still be regarded as the originator of this authentic Islamic paradigm in Turkey.

⁸Of course Eliaçık is not the only Islamic scholar who discusses the relationship between Islamic values, capitalism and the issue of “labour exploitation”. For a succinct study of the various Islamic approaches to capitalism and the concept of labour, see Sırım (2016).

The Islamic perspective of Eliaçık is characterized by a reformist stance as he argues that the *Qur'an* should be re-interpreted in light of the “modern age”, namely the needs and conditions of the contemporary times (Eliaçık 2011, 2013, 2014). Eliaçık defines liberation as *freedom from capitalist exploitation*, a just socio-economic order based on equitable income distribution and a pluralistic political order based on consent, tolerance and mutual respect (Eliaçık 2014, p. 14). He puts forward the paradigm of revolutionary and libertarian Islam to encapsulate various elements of this vision: Islam, in its essence, is *social, revolutionary, anti-capitalist* and *democratic*. Revolutionary Islam indicates the method to bring about systemic change, social Islam refers to a collaborationist/welfare-oriented social policy, anti-capitalist Islam denotes a political economic model and democratic Islam means a pluralistic political life (Eliaçık 2014).

The revolutionary and libertarian Islamic paradigm is based on three authentic Islamic sources according to Eliaçık (2014, pp. 21-42):

- I) The *Qur'an surats* (chapters) – in particular the following: 42. Ash-Shura (Consultation), 53. An-Naim (the Star) and 17. Al-Isra (the Night Journey)
- II) The Farewell Sermon of the Prophet – a widely accepted *hadith*
- III) The Medina Charter⁹ (622 CE)

The common feature of these sources is a very strong dedication to social justice, basic human rights such as the right to live, equality (gender, racial and religious) and public good. In order to fully express the nature of his Islamic paradigm, Eliaçık devotes a considerable portion of his works to interpreting these key sources and focuses on the Medina Charter in particular to explain the idea of a libertarian political order. The Charter can be thought of as the “constitution” of the early Islamic State and its objective was to maintain peace, foster cooperation among all religious and ethnic groups in Media and fashion all of them into a political union. The Charter theoretically envisages a pluralistic socio-political order because it ensured the freedom of religious beliefs and practices of all citizens of the Islamic State, also assuring that representatives of all Muslim and non-Muslim communities should be present when consultation over judicial and political issues occur or in cases of negotiations with foreign states (Eliaçık 2014, p. 12).

Eliaçık suggests that an ideal political/economic/social order should take *universal values* as its basis – which are listed in the aforementioned verses of the *Qur'an* – rather than ones that solely apply to Muslim believers (Eliaçık 2011, 2014). It is argued that Islam originally developed modes of co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims within a universally applicable governance framework that provides equal rights to all. According to Eliaçık’s interpretation of the *Qur'an*, there are only four sins that should be dealt with in this world and not in the afterlife – in other words, that are punishable crimes in the eyes of a state: murder, thievery, false accusation and adultery (Eliaçık 2014, p. 13). The political order should only take measures to punish citizens who engage in these acts, for other sins cannot be evaluated as “crimes” and that they should be kept between God and the individual. Thus, consumption of alcohol, refusal to fast during the Ramadan month, refusal to cover the head (by a woman), refusal to pray five times a day and many other acts may be sins but they cannot be crimes since they are only obligatory for Muslims but not for non-Muslims. The four sins, on the other hand, are universally applica-

⁹The Medina Charter was drafted by the Prophet in 622 CE. The charter constituted an agreement between various Muslim, Jewish, pagan, and Christian groups in Medina, declaring them as part of the *ummah*, and forming the basis of a multi-religious Islamic state centered in Medina.

ble to all human communities beyond religious preference. Eliaçık's dedication to utilizing the concept of universality (*evrensellik* in Turkish) in order to design and justify an idealized legal system is noteworthy, because it fully reveals the large extent to which he is influenced by a Western-style non-religious understanding of law.

Another significant subject that Eliaçık deals with in a recent work is the question of modernization/democratization in the Muslim world and the encounter with Western modernity. He argues that problems of predominantly Muslim societies did not suddenly emerge when they historically encountered Western modernity (Eliaçık 2013). Muslim political entities such as the Ottoman Empire, Iran and the Mughal Empire were already weak from within due to two main reasons: "the sultanate cult" and "the misinterpretation and deformation of Islam". The exploitation of Muslim economic and human resources by Western imperialism only accelerated the political, social and economic collapse of the Muslim world. The Muslim answer to the penetration of their countries by Western modernity should not be to completely adopt Western culture and mind-set, but it should not also be to entirely denounce it and attempt to sustain an anti-technological existence such as the Amish communities (Eliaçık 2013, pp. 199-221). Instead, the encounter with Western modernity should be evaluated as a "wake-up call", or a "blessing in disguise" to re-discover true Islam, namely its original interpretation which is of course the revolutionary and libertarian Islam paradigm according to Eliaçık (2014, pp. 63-65).

Eliaçık strongly criticizes the rigid-totalitarian understanding or what he calls as misinterpretation of Islam which produces Taliban, al-Qaeda, Daesh, various Salafi movements and the Saudi Arabian regime – all representing utterly deformed understandings of Islam that constrain individual freedom, exploit labor and violate many basic human rights (Eliaçık 2014, pp. 179-199). Accordingly, the misguided adherence of many Muslims to "the sultanate cult" lies behind these violations of the "true nature" of Islam:

The Sultanate, the absolute rule of a single man, is not seen as an obscenity [by Muslims] but "democracy" is. But actually what should be seen as an obscenity is the sultanate in which a mortal human being rules unquestioned as if emulating the God Almighty. Democracy irritates people because it was produced by the Western civilization which invaded Muslim lands, but actually the Sultanate was also Western as the Caliph Muawiye emulated the Byzantine Emperorship to build his first sultanate in the Islamic State of old. Hence, the contemporary interpretations are the products of a distorted political order that continued for centuries rather than being the natural products of Islam itself... Democracy is fully compatible with the undistorted, true nature of Islam which is based on five principles in the Qur'an: adalet, emanet, ehliyet, meşveret and maslahat (Eliaçık 2014, pp 15-16).

These five principles can be roughly translated as "justice", "custody", "qualification", "consultation" and "public good". They refer to the following principles of Eliaçık's Islamic paradigm: those who govern should be just, ruling is the custody of the people to the policy-makers, the policy-makers should be qualified for their positions, decision-making should be done in consultation with those whose lives would be affected and finally, decision-making should ensure public good. In effect, these principles describe a highly democratic political order that closely resembles the characteristics of Western liberal democracies. Eliaçık concludes that long before these concepts ever existed in a Western society, the Muslim civilization produced such a libertarian vision of a political order (Yinanç 2013). However, the misinterpretation of the *Qur'an*

and other sources such as the Medina Charter has meant that the revolutionary and libertarian Islamic paradigm could not be realized yet.

Revolutionary and Libertarian Islam: A Hybrid Case of Multiple Modernities

The significance of Eliaçık's Islamic paradigm cannot be evaluated solely in terms of its ideological influence over the formation and rise of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims in Turkey. Beyond the realm of Turkish politics and society, this Islamic perspective shows that one does not have to solely rely on direct adoptions of Western modernity such as secularism, free-market capitalism and liberal democracy in order to have a reformist approach to Islam which could produce its own libertarian understanding of a worldly order oriented towards political freedom and social justice. Revolutionary and libertarian Islam proves that Islamism is truly multi-dimensional even within a single predominantly Muslim society as its understanding fully contrasts with the social conservative and pro-capitalist ideology of other Turkish Islamic actors such as the AK Party. As such, the case of Eliaçık constitutes a challenge to monolithic depictions of Islam by Eurocentric social theories.

Mainstream scholarly narratives, which long dominated public discourses on Islam, modernity and liberation, have been based on a Manichean dichotomy – “good (acceptable) Muslim” versus “bad (unacceptable) Muslim”. The former is associated with qualities that are imagined to be part of Western modernity such as a *progressive, secular* and/or *pro-capitalist* Muslim whereas the latter is depicted as a *traditional, reactionary, radical, extremist, fundamentalist* and *fanatic* Muslim (Sayyid 2014, pp. 4-5). While the Secularization Thesis perceives Islam as incapable of being democratic without secularizing/westernizing and overlooks its ability to create its own libertarian models based on authentic Islamic texts, the Islamic Calvinism discourse is willing to acknowledge Islam's susceptibility for social change and liberation only after considerable capitalist development and the rise of Islamic capitalist classes. However, the philosophical justification for the libertarian model of Eliaçık and the Anti-Capitalist Muslims is derived from readings of Islamic sources rather than secular texts. In addition, this model aims to overthrow the very existence of capitalism rather than representing capitalist groups or reflecting their visions of politics. As the earlier theories fail to comprehend the nature of the revolutionary and libertarian Islam paradigm, it is clear that we need to re-conceptualize the meaning of *modernity* and *its link with liberation and Islam*.

Eliaçık's Islamic paradigm can be considered “modern” in the non-Eurocentric sense that Anthony Giddens (1990, pp. 169-175) uses this term: firstly, they offer a *progressive* vision of society, economy and polity that seeks to enhance collective good rather than the interests of a certain religious group, social class or nation. Secondly, they engage with the globalized Western modernity in order to critically evaluate its characteristics and aspire to develop a worldly order that claims to possess *universal* values for humanity. Until the emergence of the Multiple Modernities paradigm, both of these principles of modernity – namely the claims to progressiveness and universality – had been exclusively associated with Western modernity, the earlier approaches overlooking the potential of non-western societies for developing their own modern political organizations and socio-economic order. This alternative definition of modernity is compatible with the framework of Multiple Modernities as scholars of this theory such as Peter Wagner (2012) have long sought to separate the concept of modernity from the values of Western civilization and recognize the possibility of non-western modernities beyond the conventional Western path characterized by free-market capitalist, secularism and liberal democracy.

With its aspiration to universality, willingness to link with a global collective consciousness (i.e. the anti-capitalist movements across the world) and pro-democratic yet anti-capitalist vision, the revolutionary and libertarian Islam paradigm provides one such case of non-western modernity.

Nevertheless, the divergence of this non-western modernity from the free-market capitalist system of the Western model and its authenticity does not mean that the revolutionary and libertarian Islam paradigm has not been influenced by ideas stemming from Western modernity. In fact, Eliaçık notes the affinity between the Western libertarianism/liberal democracy (e.g. freedom of speech, minority rights and political freedom) and the principles of his Islamic paradigm (Yinanç 2013). According to Eliaçık, these similarities do not show that his paradigm is the product of westernization in Turkey; it instead implies that authentic Islamic sources and the Western libertarian discourse share some universally desirable values of humanity (Eliaçık 2015). Even though the sources Eliaçık uses to form his world-vision are early Islamic texts, he acknowledges that engagement with ideas of the Western civilization may have helped Muslims such as himself to re-discover “the universal truth” that had already existed within the *Qur’an* prior to the encounter with Western modernity (Eliaçık 2014, pp. 24-42).

Eliaçık offer strong criticisms of what he refers to as “degenerate pseudo-Islamists” such as the pro-capitalist AK Party as well as socialist Turkish political movements (Yinanç 2013). Socialists – mainly because of their emphasis on secularism and/or non-religiosity – are accused of failing to respect the established values (i.e. Islam) of Turkish society. Eliaçık and members of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims have repeatedly rejected suggestions that the intellectual origins of their Islamic paradigm could be traced to ideas of Karl Marx or other notable Marxist thinkers (Eliaçık 2015; Birelma 2013). Instead, Eliaçık have consistently stated that he has been inspired by writings of Ali Shariati and Mahmoud Taleghani (Eliaçık 2015, p. 10). This can be evaluated as a pragmatic attempt by Eliaçık as he wishes to be perceived by Turkish society as a “genuine Islamist” who solely relies on Islamic sources and ideas of other Muslims such as Taleghani, because the uncritical adoption of Western concepts has been argued by Eliaçık himself to be a rather problematic characteristic of Turkish socialist/secular movements.

There is a major difference between the revolutionary and libertarian Islam paradigm of Eliaçık and the Western-style socialism on the theoretical level as the former base its world-view on purely Islamic sources rather than Marx’s *Capital*, or the works of distinguished Marxists such as Antonio Gramsci, Rosa Luxembourge and Louis Althusser. Nevertheless, there are many clear similarities as well. All the strands of mainstream Turkish Islamism – particularly the *Milli Görüş* movement and its offshoots such as the AK Party - have gradually been integrated into the global neo-liberal economic order, becoming pro-capitalist over time (Tuğal 2002). Moreover, the evolution of the so-called “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” from the 1970s onwards has meant that Islamism has established itself in the right of Turkey’s ideological spectrum, strongly adopting Turkish nationalism alongside a traditionalist social conservatism (Bora 2012). In contrast to the AK Party and other conventional Islamic movements, Eliaçık preach a highly internationalist and multi-cultural ideology which seeks social justice for the entire humanity (including non-Muslims) rather than limiting themselves to the Turkish national context. Eliaçık, at least on a discursive level, also appear to be very receptive to the political demands of ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey such as the Alevi and Kurds, which further distances his thought from nationalist Islamism while constituting a common ground with the Turkish and Kurdish left-wing movements of the country such as the HDP (Peoples’ Democratic Party) (Eliaçık 2015).

The stance of Eliaçık strongly resembles the global outlook of socialist critiques of capitalist world order which has manifested in recent years with movements such as the 2011 *Occupy Wall Street* in the USA, the 2011 Spanish anti-austerity uprisings that took place around the *Puerta del Sol Square* and the 2013 “June Journeys” movement in Brazil (Kutlu 2017).¹⁰ Anti-Capitalism first attracted the attention of mainstream media with a mass protest against large-scale corporations and an international organization that was perceived as their voice (i.e. the World Trade Organization): the so-called “Battle of Seattle” in Seattle, USA in 1999 (Harman 2000). Akin to the Seattle protestors, Eliaçık condemns the role of corporations in the contemporary political economic system, accusing them of exploiting the poor on a global scale and monopolizing wealth across the world (Eliaçık 2015). During the Gezi protests, the Anti-Capitalist Muslims and Eliaçık carried placards saying “down with corporations” and “property belong to Allah not businessmen”. In this regard, it can be argued that Eliaçık and the Anti-Capitalist Muslims represent the same line of thought with notable Marxist anti-capitalist thinkers such as Naomi Klein (2000).

“In order to build a heaven on earth”, all property would be collectivized in the political system propagated by Eliaçık. The adopted method of revolution and the ultimate objectives (social justice, wealth distribution and the creation of a classless and equal society) of the revolutionary and libertarian Islam paradigm are entirely the same with that of contemporary Marxist movements in Europe and the USA. Hence, apart from differences on which intellectual sources their visions are based on, the world-visions of anti-capitalist Marxists and the revolutionary and libertarian Islam paradigm are closely aligned in practice. Even if Eliaçık has developed his understanding of revolution and Islamism entirely from Taleghani and Shariati – without being inspired by Western readings of Marxism – it is known that these two anti-capitalist Islamist thinkers themselves were influenced by Marxist concepts (Çiftçi 2015; Şengül 2015).

Much like Eliaçık, Taleghani and Shariati had also refused to be known as being shaped by Marxism and presented their frameworks as authentic models for Islamic governance. However, it is clear that such claims are made purely out of pragmatism – because Marxism has negative connotations among largely pious Muslim audiences – and that understandings of Islamism by Islamist thinkers themselves are also molded by Western conceptions of politics, society and economy. Therefore, the Islamic vision put forward by Eliaçık and the Anti-Capitalist Muslims are not entirely “authentic”, yet they also do not represent a full-scale adoption of Western modernity. It is in effect a hybrid case of multiple modernities that emerge out of the intellectual engagement between the West and the non-west (Eisenstadt 2003).

Apart from ideological influence and similarities, the etymology of the so-called “revolutionary” (*devrimci*) and “libertarian” (*özgürlükçü*) Islam in their original in Turkish language can be seen as evidence of the interaction between Eliaçık’s paradigm and the lexicon of Marxism. This is because the utilization of both of these terms have long been fashionable among various secular socialist groups of Turkey, while no Islamist movement – except the Anti-Capitalist Muslims – have so far adopted them as Islamists traditionally prefer words with Arabic origin. The first term, *devrimci*, is exclusively used by Marxist political movements such as the TDKP (Revolutionary Communist Party of Turkey) and the DİP (Revolutionary Workers’ Party). The second term, *özgürlükçü*, is commonly seen in the manifestos of social democrat political par-

¹⁰For a comprehensive study of global anti-capitalism, anti-globalization and contemporary Marxist movements, see Alexander (2010); McNally (2002); Burbach (2001).

ties such as the ÖDP (Freedom and Solidarity Party) and the HDP. Thus, the concepts Eliaçık has found for his Islamic paradigm is indicative of an attempt to identify with “global” leftist movements instead of a narrow local/national Islamist agenda.

The usage of secular/socialist labels to brand an Islamic vision while relying on early Islamic texts to formulate a universal libertarian program for humanity may appear paradoxical, yet the complexity and inner contradictions of the revolutionary and libertarian Muslim paradigm offer ample evidence to those searching for hybrid forms of non-western modernities: clearly influenced by ideas of global Western modernity, yet still possessing a rather different form instead of being the mirror image of the West in a non-western realm.

Conclusion

The case of İhsan Eliaçık’s Islamic paradigm defies various established discourses on Islam and modernity. Predominantly Muslim societies such as Turkey have been profoundly transformed over the years, experiencing substantial changes in all spheres of life – economy, politics, social and religious interpretation. This transformation process occurred both as a result of interaction with Western modernity and as a response to the penetration of its ideals and lexicon. Today, the outcome of this process is not the emergence of fully westernized modes of existence in the Muslim world but highly reformist and innovative re-formulations of Islamic norms and texts such as the revolutionary and libertarian Islam.

In sum, this case exemplifies how synthetic forms Islamism could possibly adopt in our age: an eclectic mix of an anti-capitalist/socialist economic outlook, a social liberal understanding of politics, a dedication to social justice and the utilization of the universal aspects of established Islamic values to appeal to not just Muslim believers but also non-believers. The hybrid world-view of Eliaçık can be seen as a creation of globalization and interaction with Western modernity while it is simultaneously the product of the contingent historical modernization experience and Islamic values of the predominantly Muslim Turkish society itself.

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