Transcending The Imperial Concept of "Civilization": Recalling the Concept of al-ʿUmrān

Haldun
KARAHANLI *

Abstract: The concept of "civilization" is extremely problematic, confusing, and misleading. First, the concept of "civilization" is very problematic because it originated as part of the imperial process in which the West invaded, controlled and looted the rest of the world. Furthermore, the concept cannot be isolated from its imperialist function, because its normative baggage is always present either explicitly or implicitly. Second, the concept of "civilization" is so confusing because of its many conceptualizations across space and time that are treated as if standalone, mutually exclusive, and categorically exhaustive. Third, the concept of "civilization" is ultimately misleading because it is subjective and it is used in many different ways, even in its origin countries, leading to an unsolvable oscillation in meanings and semantic fields. Therefore, it is imperative to transcend this distorted, or even dead, concept. This paper argues that the concept of "*al-ʿumrān*" may be a very possible alternative. However, it faces many challenges to be viable.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Civilization; Al-ʿumrān; Civilization Theories; Imperialism; Ibn Khaldun

Emperyalizmin "Medeniyet" Kavramını Aşmak İçin Umran Kavramına Yeniden Yönelmek

Öz: "Medeniyet" sorunlu, kafa karıştırıcı ve yanlış anlaşılmalara yol açabilen bir kavramdır. Öncelikle, "medeniyet" kavramı, Batı'nın geri kalan coğrafyaları işgal ve yağmaya tabi tuttuğu sömürgecilik asrına dayanan kökeni itibariyle sorunludur. Bu bağlamda mevzubahis kavram ister doğrudan isterse de dolaylı olarak telkin ettiği normatif yargılarla geçmiş devirlerde hizmet etmiş olduğu emperyalizmden ayrı düşünülemez. İkinci olarak "medeniyet" kavramı çok farklı zaman ve mekanlarda birbirine bazen zıt bazen ise benzer anlamlarla kullanılagelmiş olması hasebiyle kafa karıştırıcıdır. Üçüncü olaraksa "medeniyet" kavramının, meydana çıktığı ülkelerde dahi öznel tanımlarla çok farklı anlam alanlarında kullanımı neticesinde yanlış anlaşılmalara neden olabilen bir kavram olduğu göz önüne alınmalıdır. Bu sorunlara binaen, bu çarpık -ve hatta ölü- kavramın aşılmasının bir gereklilik olduğu görülecektir. Bu makale "umran" kavramını medeniyetten çok daha elverişli bir alternatif olarak teklif eder; ancak teklif olunan değişimin gerçekleşmesinin birçok şartın zorlanmasına bağlı olduğunu teslim etmektedir.

Keywords: Medeniyet; Umran; Medeniyet Teorileri; Emperyalizm; İbn-i Haldun.

* Doktora Öğrencisi. İbn Haldun Üniversitesi, Medeniyetler İttifakı Enstitüsü. E-Posta: haldun.karahanli@ibnhaldun.edu.tr ORCID ID: https://www.orcid.org/0000-0002-9807-4088

1. Introduction

Concepts create thought. Concepts construct imaginations. Concepts actually change the world. Words are not merely letters, but they constitute sentences that convey meanings and express thought. One of the key concepts in the political and social scholarship, discourse, and practice in the last centuries has been the concept of civilization. And like all key concepts it has been essentially contested. Yet beyond all these contestations and semantics there is an intrinsic issue about the concept of civilization. For the concept of "civilization" is extremely problematic, confusing, and misleading. Hence, it needs to be transcended. First, the concept of "civilization" is very problematic because it originated as part of the imperial process in which the West invaded, controlled and looted the rest of the world. Furthermore, the concept cannot be isolated from its imperialist function, because its normative baggage is always present either explicitly or implicitly. Second, the concept of "civilization" is so confusing because of its many conceptualizations across space and time that are treated as if standalone, mutually exclusive, and categorically exhaustive. Third, the concept of "civilization" is ultimately misleading because it is subjective and it is used in many different ways, even in its origin countries, leading to an unsolvable oscillation in meanings and semantic fields. Therefore, it is imperative to transcend this distorted, or even dead, concept. This paper argues that the concept of "al-ʿumrān" may be a very possible alternative. However, it is facing many challenges to be viable.

2. The Concept of "Civilization" As A Euro-Centric Colonial Ideology and An Imperial Idea

The first intrinsic problem of the concept of "civilization" is its normative imperialist baggage, which is generally overlooked by the wholesale approaches. "Civilization" originated as part of the imperial process in which the West invaded, controlled and looted the rest of the world. For imperialism to be possible, it was mandatory to create a hierarchy: the civilized and the uncivilized, hence "the civilizing mission" of the civilized would be "natural", legitimizing any action deemed necessary by the civilized people to civilize the uncivilized other people. Thus, "civilization" is not only a concept, but also a structure, a discourse, and an ideology. So, the concept evolved to be a colonial ideology masquerading as "civilization", while in essence, "civilization" was rather an expression of the self-consciousness of Europe and the West.

Therefore, the concept of "civilization" is almost always celebrated or condemned in a parochial way, reducing intellectual enlightenment into mediocracy than prohibits real understanding. Solving this mediocracy requires contextualizing the root concepts within the context of power, power relations, and power centers. When viewed as a system of representation, the concept of "civilization" internalizes a process of recreating, representing the colonialized vanquished by the colonial vanquisher and subjugating the former to the latter's power.

As a concept, "civilization" appeared as an Enlightenment neologism, distancing Europe and othering the rest of the world, staging Europe as Modernity, and turning the East and the West into mutually exclusive categories that would develop into a hierarchical binary. For this Western conceptualization of "civilization" defined human beings and societies in terms of fixated and immobile binaries: the developed vs. the underdeveloped, the civil vs. the barbarian, and the modern vs. the primitive…, etc. This epistemological vision was meticulously transformed into a political project, justifying and legitimizing European imperialism and plundering of the whole world.

The Western idea of "civilization", as Brett Bowden[1] and Bruce Mazlish[2] thoroughly studied, evolved as a savage colonial ideology and an imperial idea, that developed from the West's self-consciousness and national feeling, as Norbert Elias demonstrated[3]. Thus, "civilization" evolved to be a colonial ideology masquerading as "civilization", while in essence, "civilization" was rather an expression of the self-consciousness of Europe and the West. "Civilization" as a concept, a discourse, an ideology, and structures intrinsically reflects the imperial, global dominance relations, and the global political and economic imbalance present since the Roman Empire. Where a few minority is the only really free ones, and has the right to property and production. This few minority controls, oppresses, and terrorizes the majority (with different degrees)[4].

---

1   Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of An Imperial Idea*, (University of Chicago Press, 2009). See also: Mark Mazower, "Paved Intentions: Civilization and Imperialism," *World Affairs* 171, no. 2 (2008): 72-84.

2   Bruce Mazlish, *Civilization And İts Contents*, (Stanford University Press, 2004).

3   Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

4   See more: A. Negri and M. Hardt, *Empire,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 2001).

Hence, scholars, like Brett Bowden in *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution Of An Imperial Idea*[5], Bruce Mazlish in *Civilization And Its Contents*[6], Silvia Federici in *Enduring Western Civilization*[7], and Thomas Patterson in *Inventing Western Civilization*[8] for example, argue that the concept of "civilization" has a heavy normative baggage with it, reflecting that hierarchical structure. In which "civilization" becomes a method to favor some people at the expense of the others.

"Civilization" is rather a paradigmatic example of one of the greatest tricks of the imperial power, which is monumentality. The concept of "civilization" reveals how the imperial power acts intellectually just as its acts spatially, for example: Hitler's architectural directions were always to "leave attractive and/or terrifying ruins"[9]. Intellectually and mentally the imperial power does act in a similar manner in order to terrorize the vanquished people. Thus, the imperial intelligentsia construct and maintain monumental concepts "so invested in power magic that they totally enclose the thinker in quasi-eternal temporal horizons, foreclosing rebellion and resistance"[10]. Monty Neill argues that "'Western Civilization' is the name of the most monumental concept constructed by European and US imperial intellectuals in the twentieth century"[11].

Vadettin Işık[12] wonders if the both celebrated/condemned "civilizational" tendency is a result of reducing thought to a standard mediocre level. To solve this mediocracy, Işık argues, the root concepts of every paradigm must be contextualized in relation to "centers of power", in order to clearly understand them. By "centers of power" Işık means "centers of the modern Western system of thought"[13]. The global regime within which we live is the outcome of "Europe's re-structuring of the world", that is when Western modernity went global, all other non-Western societies were brutally forced into "a hierarchical relationship with the West". The

---

5   Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization*.

6   Mazlish, *Civilization And İts Contents*.

7   Silvia Federici, *Enduring Western Civilization*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995).

8   Thomas C. Patterson, *Inventing Western Civilization*, (NYU Press, 1997).

9   Monty Neill, "Western Civilization Invented, Constructed, And Desecrated," *Science as Culture* 8, no. 2 (1999): 231-238, p. 231.

10   Monty, *Western Civilization Invented*.

11   Monty, *Western Civilization Invented.*, p. 232.

12   Vahdettin Işık. "The Vision Of Order And Al-'Umran As An Explanatory Concept In The Debates On Civilization," (2017).

13   Işık, *The Vision Of Order*, p. 118.

word "civilization" is very Euro-centric. In the 19th century, the fancy concepts of "civilization" and "being civilized" were used in a Eurocentric context, and the measure of "civilization" was rather generally defined as "vulgar Westernization"[14].

Edward Said's analysis of "systems of representation" is useful in this context. Simply put, representation, or systems of representation are what help us make sense of the world around us, and every system of representation has an agenda behind it. Edward Said concluded that a system of representation is basically the mechanism through which events do appear in one discourse or more. This mechanism operates as part of the process of subjugation to power and its instructions through imposing a certain formula at certain times. According to this formula, power comprehensively dictates a series of cultural changes correspondent to that discursive context. Hence, the strategies, and systems, of representation control events and how they are conveyed[15]. In other words, what meanings are given to which words? And who owns the words?

The concept of "civilization" internalizes a process of recreating and representing the colonialized vanquished by the colonial vanquisher who assumes that the vanquished cannot represent themselves by themselves, and therefore needs to be represented by the vanquisher, the vanquisher does this job instead of the vanquished, and Orientalism represents the apex of this process of representation. Thus, one cannot be so hopeful when wondering if the concept of "civilization" can be successfully isolated from its imperialist function and normative baggage that is always present either explicitly or implicitly. Rather on the contrary, the question is to what extend is "civilization" part of the "epistemological violence" and the "hermeneutical injustice"[16]. As Spivak in her *Can the Subaltern Speak?*[17], addressed the problem of "epistemological violence", namely: how imperialist powers created structures of knowledge which silenced actual experience of colonized people, reinterpreted it in case of open confrontation ("mutinies," "riots"), and imposed their meanings which facilitated colonial exploitation.

14   Ibrahim Kalin, "Dünya Görüşü, Varlık Tasavvuru ve Düzen Fikri: Medeniyet Kavramına Giriş," *Dîvân: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 29 (2010): 1-61, pp. 13-14.

15   Edward Said, *Orientalism,* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

16   Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing*. (Oxford University Press, 2007).

17   Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can The Subaltern Speak?," *Can The Subaltern Speak? Reflections On The History Of An Idea* (1988): 21-78.

3. The Obscurity and Ambivalence of The Concept Of "Civilization"

The second intrinsic problem of the concept of "civilization" is its sustained obscurity and ambivalence. Away from the superficial definitions of the encyclopedias, there is actually no minimum theoretical agreement on what "civilization" is or how it is to be studied. Furthermore, the attitudes towards how to conceive "civilization" are mostly to treat it as a picklock-concept that explains everything in itself, reducing all explanations to one single concept. This obscurity and ambivalence is very ostensibly obvious when we question what does "civilization" mean for the "civilizationists"? and how did they approach it? In the coming paragraphs I present some conclusions and highlights of ten different conceptualizations and theorizations of "civilization".

François Guizot, Jacob Burckhardt, and Henry Thomas Buckle pursued the historical process that created civilization, their understanding of civilization was limited to the West. On the other hand, Sigmund Freud discerned the psychoanalytic dimension about man and civilization. While Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee sought a grand explanation and a sweeping generalization. Yet, Norbert Elias synthesized history, sociology, and psychoanalysis traditions and developed a processual understanding of civilization, viewing it as a process in itself not as a hypostatized construct or end. Instead, Fernand Braudel adopted a historical methodology focusing on "la longue durée" that synthesizes all social sciences. Finally, Ahmet Davutoğlu and Ibrahim Kalın drove their attention towards weltanschauungs, worldviews, and how they relate to man, time, and space.

First, the French historian and statesman François Guizot (1787-1874) perceived "civilization" is progress, the eternal march for the better. "Civilization" is a dialectic relationship between the inner man (ideas, sentiments, faculties, …etc.) and the external conditions (political, economic, and social structures). So, "civilization" is both: the intellectual development of the individual plus the social development (physical welfare) of the society at large[18]. The pressing theme that Guizot asserted was the characteristic unity of the ancient "civilizations" vs. the characteristic variety of the modern Western "civilization"[19].

---

18 Francois Guizot, *History Of Civilization In Europe*, (Colonial Press, 1899).

19 Bryan Turner provided some insights addressing the relationship between Guizot's concept of "civilization" and Ibn Khaldun's concept of "*al-ʿumrān*": Bryan S. Turner, Ahmet Demirhan (Çevirmen), *Oryantalizm, Kapitalizm ve İslam*, (İnsan Yayınlari, 1997); Bryan S. Turner, and Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir, eds. *The Sociology of Islam: Collected Essays of Bryan S. Turner*. (Routledge, 2016).

Second, the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897) is unique in many ways. "Civilization" for Burckhardt is the development of the spirit to freedom. Not in an Hegelian manner, nor in the Nietzschen sense of the super human. Beside all that he hated most (standardization, vulgarization, mere size), Burckhardt most dreaded the worship of power. He believed power had a corrosive action on humanity, and it never yet improved man. Thus, he goes against Guizot and argues that progress is an ephermal ideal based rather on wishful thinking than on actuality, hence he wanted to save the spirit. Burckhardt feared that the spiritual and aesthetic human values were doomed to submersion by the rise of industrial democracy[20].

Third, the British historian Henry Thomas Buckle (1821-1862) was a very Comteian positivist and Euro-centric who came from within the liberal tradition. By "civilization" he meant intellectual development in an egalitarian manner. Buckle maintained that "civilization" is a product of both natural laws and mental laws. He explained the rise of the West by claiming that only in the West man has subdued nature to his service. So, the advance of the European "civilization" is characterized by a continually diminishing influence of physical laws, and continually increasing influence of mental laws. In the "civilizations" exterior to Europe all nature conspired to increase the authority of the imaginative faculties, and weaken the authority of reasoning ones. Whereas in Europe exactly the inverse took place. Based on this, Buckle establishes the superiority of European "civilization": only in Europe could humans reach higher levels of "civilization"[21].

Fourth, the Austrian psychoanalytic Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) viewed "civilization" as very paradoxical, on one hand the basic instincts leads to "civilization", yet to protect "civilization" from man's instincts it inhibits them, thus it leads to the inevitable unhappiness of the civilized people. People come together driven by *Ananke* (the necessity instincts), and *Eros* (the love instincts). Anyway, the raison d'être of "civilization" is to protect man against nature. Yet to maintain "civ-

---

20   Jacob Burckhardt, *Reflections On History,* (1943); Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization Of The Renaissance In Italy*, (Albert & Charles Boni, 1935). See also: John Roderick Hinde, *Jacob Burckhardt And The Crisis Of Modernity*, (McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2000); Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion And The Rise Of Historicism: WML De Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, And The Theological Origins Of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

21   Henry Thomas Buckle, *History Of Civilization In England*, (Appleton, 1906). See also: Alfred Henry Huth, *The Life And Writings Of Henry Thomas Buckle*, (Appleton, 1880); R. Baldwin, *Henry Thomas Buckle: a Re-evaluation*, (New York University, 1967).

ilization" *Thanatos* (the aggression and death instincts) must be controlled. That is through law and order, humans thus need to sublime their instincts to other forms of high culture. So if you ask Freud what is "civilization" he may coarsely answer: "civilization" is not to kill your father, and sleep with your mother. Or he may use some manners and say: "civilization" is law and order[22].

Fifth, for the German historian Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) "civilization" is a bit complicated. Because his unit of analysis is the high culture which is a living organism. Culture is the most significant unit for world history, and the essence of history is to trace the rise and fall of major Cultures. So Spengler sets out to do this job. A Culture is a living organism that goes through a phase of birth then growth and living: the phase of Culture, until it reaches the apex, and then it degrades into the phase of decline and dying: the phase of "civilization"[23].

Sixth, the British historian and statesman Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) considered "civilizations" as the most appropriate unit of analysis in trying to make sense of history and politics in the longer term. Toynbee treated "civilizations" as societies, they are the field of action common to a number of human beings who are the source of action, a society is a system of relations between individuals. Toynbee maintained "civilizations" follow a recurrent pattern of genesis, growth, breakdown, and disintegration, yet he didn't consider them an organism (as Spengler did). For Toynbee, the main mechanism of change and development is challenge and response, reflecting the creative power a society enjoys. Creative power leads to regeneration, while the absence of creative power leads to degeneration[24].

---

22   Sigmund Freud, *Civilization And Its Discontents*, (Hogarth Press, 1963). See also: Herbert Marcuse, *Eros And Civilization: A Philosophical İnquiry Into Freud*, (Beacon Press, 2015); Carl E. Schorske, "Freud: The Psychoarcheology Of Civilizations," *The Cambridge Companion To Freud* (1991): 8-24; Douglas Kirsner, "Freud, Civilization, Religion, And Stoicism," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 23, no. 2 (2006): 354.

23   Oswald Spengler, *The Decline Of The West*, (Oxford University Press, USA, 1991). See also: H. Stuart Hughes, *Oswald Spengler*, (Transaction Publishers, 1991); Keith Stimely, "Oswald Spengler: An İntroduction To His Life And İdeas," *The Journal of Historical Review* 17, no. 2 (1998); David Engels, "Oswald Spengler And The Decline Of The West," In *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right*, pp. 3-21, (Oxford University Press, 2019).

24   A. Toynbee, *A Study Of History*. abridged by Dc Somerville, (Oxford Paperbacks, 1957). See also: William H. McNeill , *Arnold J. Toynbee: A Life*, (Oxford University Press, 1989); Cornelia Navari, "Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975): Prophecy and Civilization," *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 2 (2000): 289-301; Krishan Kumar, "The Return of Civilization—and of Arnold Toynbee?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 4 (2014): 815-843; Jürgen Osterhammel. "Arnold Toynbee And The Problems Of Today." *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 60 (2017): 69-87.

Seventh, unlike Guizot, Burckhardt, and Buckle who pursued the historical process that created "civilization" (in the West). And unlike Spengler and Toynbee who sought a grand explanation and a sweeping generalization. Building upon the traditions of history (Huizinga), sociology (Weber), and psychoanalysis (Freud), the German sociologist Norbert Elias (1897-1990) studied "civilization" as a process in itself not as a hypostatized construct or end. For Elias, "civilization" is modes of behavior, and a historical development. A civilizing process is the relation between behavior structures and power structures, between individual discipline and social organization, and it consists of the formation and transformation of "regimes".[25].

Eighth, the French historian Fernand Braudel (1902-1985) considered history as three-layered, where "civilizations" only comprise one of its layers not all of it as Guizot claimed. History can be measured on three levels: [1] "civilizations": the quasi-immobile time of structures and traditions. A history of constant repetition, and ever recurring cycles. All change is slow (like a change in our physical environment, e.g.: change in the mountains). And the passage of this history is almost imperceptible. [2] Periods: the intermediate level of conjunctures, rarely longer than a few generations. Slow but perceptible rhythms. This is social history, the history of groups and groupings. [3] Events: the rapid level of events, the recent or traditional history. It is history on the scale of individual men. Braudel viewed "civilizations" as many things: they are societies, economies, cultural zones, ways of thought (psychologies), geographical areas, and above all they are historical continuities. Thus, to define and study "civilization", one, first, needs all social sciences, and second, must use "la longue durée"[26].

Ninth, for the Turkish Academic and statesman Ahmet Davutoğlu (1959-   ) the inclusive or exclusive manner of a "civilization" is due not just to its science[27], but to something deeper and more comprehensive: its self-understanding (*ben-idraki*). A "civilization's" self-understanding is a weltanschauung that exist in a "civilization" and defines the existence of the self. Every "civilization" could

25   Elias, *The Civilizing Process*. See also: Robert Van Krieken, *Norbert Elias*, (Routledge, 2005); Stephen Mennell, *Norbert Elias*, (Routledge, 2020); Jonathan Fletcher, *Violence and Civilization: An İntroduction To The Work Of Norbert Elias*, (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

26   Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilizations*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1995). See also: William H. McNeill, "Fernand Braudel, Historian," *The Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 1 (2001): 133-146; Robert W. Cox, "Thinking About Civilizations," *Review of International Studies* 26 (2000): 217-234.

27   Recep Şentürk, "Unity In Multiplexity: Islam As An Open Civilization," (2011).

be lived as long as its people can make its self-understanding alive and practice it in their daily lives. Thus to Davutoğlu, "civilization" is a historical institution rather than an ideology. It is in the very encounters and interactions between different "civilizations" that we can determine if a "civilization" is growing or breaking down[28].

Tenth, similarly, for the Turkish Academic and statesman Ibrahim Kalın (1971-), "civilization" is a weltanschauung manifested and objectified in time and space. It includes a certain understanding of epistemology, ontology, and cosmology. "Civilization" is about being (*vücüt*) and morality (*ahlak*), the first is descriptive and the second is prescriptive. And it is in the very tension between the two elements where "civilization" lies. For Kalın, the core problem of "civilization" is that it is self-referential: it places the subject as the substance and essence of everything: "man is the master". Yet paradoxically enough, "civilization" is the disciplining and domestication of human subjects as animals[29].

Thus, if there is something clear about "civilization", it is its obscurity and ambivalence. There is actually no reasonable universal agreement on what "civilization" is or how it is to be studied. Besides, many important names have been left out of this analysis, like: the Muslim philosopher, judge, and statesman Al-Mawardi (972-1058); the Japanese author, writer, teacher, translator, entrepreneur and journalist Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901); the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917); the German thinker, sociologist, and political economist Max Weber (1864-1920); the French sociologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950); the Czech lawyer and politician Jaroslav Krejčí (1892-1956); the Russian American sociologist Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968); the Austrian writer and publicist Franz Borkenau (1900-1957); the Algerian thinker and philosopher Malik Bennabi (1905-1973); the American sociologist Benjamin Nelson (1911-1977); the Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt (1923-2010); the Iranian philosopher and cultural theorist Dariush Shayegan (1935-2018); the Icelandic sociologist Jóhann Árnason (1940-), just to mention few.

---

28   Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Medeniyetlerin Ben-İdraki," *Dîvân: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 3 (1997): 1-53. See also: Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Bunalımdan Dönüşüme Batı Medeniyeti Ve Hristiyanlık," *Dîvân: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 9 (2000): 1-74; Ahmet Davutoğlu et al., *Civilizations And World Order: Geopolitics And Cultural Difference*. (Lexington Books, 2014); Ahmet Davutoglu, *Alternative Paradigms: The İmpact Of Islamic And Western Weltanschauungs On Political Theory*. (Univ. Press of America, 1994).

29   Kalin, *Dünya Görüşü*.

4. The Concept Of "Civilization" Is Vague And Misleading

The concept of "civilization" is extremely vague and misleading. One reason is that the different and contrary conceptualizations of "civilization" are treated as standalone, mutually exclusive. Moreover, the root problem of the concept of "civilization" is that it is insolvably a subjective concept. Furthermore, not only does "civilization" mean contrary things and suffer from conflicting usages, the word itself originated in different ways at different countries. Not to mention that the concept of "civilization" is fundamentally full of paradoxes, confusions, and ambiguities.

Arguably, almost all the different and contrary conceptualizations of "civilization" are due, valid, and true only if they are considered part of the whole complex picture, and they are not so if treated as standalone, mutually exclusive, and categorically exhaustive. Marshall Hodgson argued that in civilization studies, civilization is a primary unit of reference, and its specifications are a function of the inquirer's purposes. For example, the philologists define a civilization as "what is carried in the literature of a single language or of a single group of culturally related languages"[30]. However, this does not solve the problem of the concept of "civilization" yet it explains why there is even a problem. The root problem of the concept of "civilization" is that it is a subjective concept, and it can hardly be objective because it is subject to, as Hodgson conveyed, "the inquirer's purposes".

Furthermore, not only does "civilization" mean contrary things and suffer from conflicting usages[31], the word itself means different things even in its origin countries. Norbert Elias[32] used England, France and Germany as examples. For the English and French, "civilization" is reflected in their pride of their achievements. "Civil" encompasses everything and it has no concrete product. But, on the other side, for the German, "civilization" is something useful but of secondary importance, something superficial. The German strictly separate between "civilization" and culture and their areas of influence. "Civilization" includes politics, economics, and social issues, whereas culture encompasses intellectual work, art, and religion. For the Germans, culture focuses on the personal product of a

---

30   Marshall GS. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays On Europe, Islam And World History*, (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 82.

31   Tahsin Görgün, Medeniyet: Modern Tartışmalar, (TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, 2003), 298-301.

32   Elias, *The Civilizing Process*.

being. That is why there is a difference between the German adjective *"kulturell"* and the English adjective "cultivated" or "cultured". *"Kulturell"* has a meaning that is not limited only to the internal value of a human being, but also incorporates the value and character of his product. "Cultured" and "cultivated" can be equated with the meaning "civilized" which does not have any concrete cultural product.

According to Elias, "civilization" is only one, an overall process that is constantly moving forward (even though it can sometimes start regressing for a while). Being as it is, it has tendencies towards expansion and colonization. Culture on the other hand has many directions in which it can develop, and it is represented in many art pieces, books, religious and philosophical systems. "Civilization" has a more global character while culture is something more national, it has the character of a people or a nation.

The French society developed "civilization" as the hallmark of the royal court, which distinguishes them from the lower strata. Lower classes had to adopt the "civilization" of the higher levels to be admitted into their circles (the important thing here though is that the lower classes had access to the court). However, the higher circles are constantly changing what is a civilized behavior in order to constantly differentiate between themselves from the lower people. The only people who have the time to be "civilized" are the nobles who do not have to work ("civilized" behavior is at the center of their existence).

On the other hand, in the German society the court was more French than German, it spoke French and is "civilized" according to the French standards. On the contrary, the middle class intelligentsia spoke German and was developing culture (as a spiritual product) because they were never admitted into the higher society and did not have access to the political courts (Intellectual, scientific, and artistic production was in the center). Hence, Kant maintained that culture is something introvert, based on deep feelings, deeply rooted in the books, and "civilization" is a superficiality, mere ceremonial, and formal conversations-courtesy. For the German, "civilization" is something unnatural, it is artificial. The two terms "civilization" and culture acquire a national tone from the two nations.

Furthermore, the concept of "civilization" is fundamentally full of paradoxes. One early and striking example is the relationship between civilization and religion. "Civilization", as a concept, was first coined by Victor Riqueti Mirabeau in 1756. According to Mirabeau "Religion is without doubt humanity's first and most use-

ful constraint; it is the mainspring of civilizaţion" ("La religion est sans contredit le premier et le plus utile frein de l'humanite: c'est le premier ressort de la civilisation")[33]. Few years later, the nature of this relationship between civilization and religion drastically changed with the writing of the new French Encyclopedia considering religion is naturally against civilization. Moreover, the concept of "civilization" is full of confusions and ambiguities. One emphatic example is the culture-civilization confusion that has been lasting for more than two hundred fifty years[34]. Additionally, the concept of "civilization" has been suffering various problems in different cultural contexts, e.g.: The French[35], the Dutch[36], or the Islamicate[37]. Besides, any attempt to operationalize "civilization" further cultivates the normative imperial baggage of the concept: the Euro-centric colonial ideology and imperial idea.

The concept of "civilization" cannot be fixed. Edward Taylor, for example, tried to fix the problems of the concept yet ended up to the same complications he had initially set out to fix in the first place, any attempt at an holistic definition or redefinition leads to further confusion[38]. Moreover, the concept of "civilization" can easily be misused and employed for contradictory purposes. Just like how Huntington[39], who for political and ideological reasons, appropriated the term "civilization" and misused it, similar to a naïve master's degree student who violates the habitat of terms. Actually what Huntington talked about was not a clash of "civilizations" but rather an ideologically-justified political conflict.

As a matter of fact, the problems of the concept of "civilization" are unsolvable. Hence, the concept of "civilization" should never be taken for granted. On the contrary, it is always imperative to critically deconstruct it, and to be aware of

---

33   Mazlish, *Civilization And İts Contents*, p. 5.

34   Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, "What is the Difference Between Culture and Civilization?: Two Hundred Fifty Years of Confusion," *Comparative Civilizations Review* 66, no. 66 (2012): 4.

35   Raymonde Monnier, "The Concept Of Civilisation From Enlightenment To Revolution: An Ambiguous Transfer," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 4, no. 1 (2008): 106-136.

36   Pim Den Boer, "Towards a Comparative History of Concepts: Civilisation and beschaving," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 3, no. 2 (2007): 207-233.

37   Badran Benlahcene, The Term "Civilization" In The Muslim Intellectual Traditions. *International Journal for Innovation Education and Research*, 5(4), 44-49. (2017).

38   Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization*.

39   Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash Of Civilizations?," In *Culture and politics*, pp. 99-118. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

the dangerous ramifications its entails. One rather even wonder if the concept of "civilization" is still useful and meaningful. For, I argue that the continuance and persistence of the concept of "civilization" although all its flaws and problems is rather ideological and political not scientific. Thus, due to the incongruity of the concept of "civilization", and its explanatory weakness and imperial baggage, we should intrinsically wonder if "civilization" as a concept is even still alive. Isn't "civilization" as a theoretical construct and a concept to explain social and historical phenomena really dead? Doesn't it burden rather than help one's theoretical logic as it assumes so many things without justification? Isn't "civilization" historically anachronistic, sociologically obsolete, and politically opaque?

5. Ibn Khaldun And The Concept Of *Al-ʿumrān*

Ibn Khaldun was an Arab Muslim scholar who lived in the fourteenth century between (1332-1406). Ibn Khaldun was a polymath with unique expertise in Islamic studies, "social sciences" and history, whose contributions has led him to be described as the father of modern historiography, sociology, economics, and other disciplines. In his main work *The Muqaddimah* (Prolegomena)*,* Ibn Khaldun's main contribution was presenting the new concept of "*al-ʿumrān*", which meant "the human society in its totality". Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun described the objective of his work as to present a new "science": the science of *al-ʿumrān* (the science of the human society in its entirety). However Ibn Khaldun's main contribution, namely the concept of "*al-ʿumrān*", has been almost always misused and overlooked.

The concept of *al-ʿumrān* has been "lost in translation". Simply put, the concept of *al-ʿumrān* was mistranslated and misunderstood as "civilization". This mistranslation not only rid the concept of *al-ʿumrān* of its core, that is comprehensively addressing the human society in its totality, but much more. The Khaldunian concept of the human society (*al-ʿumrān*) embraced two senses in dealing with the human phenomena. First, the empirical sense, symbolized in the question: what is happening? And second, the teleological sense, symbolized in the question: what should happen? Furthermore, the concept of *al-ʿumrān* didn't allocate any moral superiority to any form of the human existence (e.g.: the pastoralist vs. the urban). But rather, viewed them in an interconnected and even processual manner.

Ibn Khaldun presented a theory of circulation of dynasties, states, and circles of 'umrān (not civilizations) based on conflict, change and power[40]. In Ibn Khaldun's glossary, the word "civilization" does not exist. For this Arab Muslim philosopher, historian, scholar, judge, and statesman Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), there is just one human existence that includes different yet interconnected and interdependent modes or types. Such as pastoralism and urbanism for example. This entirety of human existence is what Ibn Khaldun calls al-'umrān, in other words al-'umrān means the human society in its totality. Furthermore, for Ibn Khaldun, being "civil" is a natural and necessary state attained by any mode of human existence by definition. Thus, being "civil" is not a target to be hit or a goal to be reached unlike the modern concept of "civilization"[41].

Al-'umrān is simply an interplay of geography, religion, and group feeling that bond humans together, Ibn Khaldun called this group feeling: "al-'assabiyya". Humans bond together forming a power that changes geography. I would like to specially shed light over four aspects of Ibn Khaldun's concept of al-'umrān that are generally overlooked. First, its richness and complexity, as it encompasses all the essential accidents [a'rad] and states [ahwal] of the human condition. Second, its realism (at the very heart of the concept of al-'umrān lies the phenomenon of power, for all the accidents [a'rad] and states [ahwal] related to al-'umrān are undoubtedly a practice of power in essence). Third, its dynamism, meaning its ability to sense transformation, follow its reasons, hold its reins, and hence rationalize change. And forth, its moral responsibility, as it involves a principal attitude concerning the responsibility for saving the world [ta'mir al-'alam wa hifdh al-'umrān]).

First, the concept of al-'umrān is so rich and complex, because it encompasses all the essential accidents [a'rad] and states [ahwal] of the human society. Analytically, studying al-'umrān means discerning all the essential attributes of the human society. Such study includes the historical accidents and states (e.g.: the past, the present, the future), the political accidents and states (e.g.: group feeling or al-'assabiyya, power, hegemony), the economic accidents and states (e.g.: living [معاش], sciences, vocations), and social accidents and states (e.g.: rise and decline). Thus, the concept of al-'umrān enables us to synthesize the various aspects of the human phenomena.

---

40 عبد الرحمن بن خلدون، عبد السلام شدادي تحقيق، (المقدمة)، (الدار البيضاء: بيت الفنون والعلوم والآداب، ٢٠٠٥).

41 See more: Vahdettin, *The Vision of Order*.

Second, the concept of *al-ʿumrān* is a realist concept. At the very heart of the concept of *al-ʿumrān* lies the phenomenon of power. It was always "power" Ibn Khaldun was tracing and studying. For, the essence of *al-ʿumrān* (the human society) is conflict and social power (التغلب والقهر). By social power Ibn Khaldun meant the power to organize human life (إنما الملك على الحقيقة لمن لا يكون فوق يده يد قاهرة). To be powerful is to have the upper hand and the final saying. Ibn Khaldun maintained that all the various attributes of the human society, and all the accidents [a ʿrad] and states [ahwal] related to *al-ʿumrān* are undoubtedly a practice and a manifestation of power in essence. Hence, our study of all the attributes of the human society would have a clear cut orientation guiding us to reach higher levels of insights and wisdom.

Through his brand-new conceptualization of *al-ʿumrān* with power at its core, Ibn Khaldun proposed a comprehensive and dynamic understanding of both the (general) Nomos (the whole world) and the (particular) nomoses within it (different societies in the world). Moreover, Ibn Khaldun referred to the utmost dilemma of the Nomos, that everyone before him almost missed or overlooked. The utmost dilemma of the Nomos is that the state is more powerful than the social order (*al-ʿumrān* and its philosophy) and it is capable of distorting it, but at the same time the state is ultimately subject to the cycle of history, as history defeats it[42].

Third, the concept of *al-ʿumrān* is dynamic, it is designed to sense transformation, and rationalize change. Based upon an empirical study of his time, Ibn Khaldun concluded that *al-ʿumrān* has two poles: the sedentary and the pastoralist, and the interaction-tension between the two is what actually provides the macro dynamism of change, and change is cyclical and constant. Because every human group passes basically through three phases: the pastoralist, the invasive, and then the sedentary. Ibn Khaldun called the third sedentary phase *hadara*, which is vey mistakenly translated as "civilization"[43]. Yet, by "*hadara*" Ibn

---

42   هبة رءوف عزت، نحو عمران جديد، (بيروت: الشبكة العربية للأبحاث والنشر، ٢٠١٥) p. 155.

43   It is mandatory here not to confuse the Arabic word (*hadara*) "حضارة" with "civilization". For "civilization" is a very modern invention (first used in 1756), while the word "*hadara*" has been used at least since (130 H./748 CT.) basically meaning urban dwelling. The Doha Historical Dictionary of Arabic documents the first use of the word (*hadara*) by the poet al-Qatami al-Taghlobi (القطامي التغلبي) in his line of poetry (dohadictionary.org):
ومن تكن الحضارة أعجبته فأي أناس بادية ترانا
On the other hand, "civilization" was coined 1012 years later in France by Victor Riqueti Mirabeau in 1756.

Khaldun meant urbanism characterized by extravagant affluence and opulence "الحضارة هي التفنن في مذاهب الترف"

One can easily sense Ibn Khaldun's negative view towards urbanism as a stage in the cycle of human modes of existence, as urbanism in his understanding leads to the corrosion of the social order, namely the breakdown of the group feeling (or al-ʿassabiyya) and the demise of the state. Ibn Khaldun considered the main mechanism of change is al-ʿassabiyya which is a vital group feeling that allows for human bonding and solidarity (الالتحام بالنسب أو ما في معناه). And this group feeling (or al-ʿassabiyya) is the core change mechanism which affects, and is affected at the same time, by a multitude of factors, e.g: religion, the virtuous moral qualities (what he called "Khilal-ul-khair"), extravagance (Al-taraf)…etc.

And forth, the concept of al-ʿumrān is entails a moral responsibility, as it involves a principal attitude concerning the responsibility for saving the world and maintaining the balance of the human existence [taʿmir al-ʿalam wa hifdh al-ʿumrān]). In other words, the Khaldunian concept of the human society (al-ʿumrān) embraced two senses in dealing with the human phenomena. First, the empirical sense, directed by the question: what is happening? And second, the teleological sense, oriented by the question: what should happen?

Teleologically, al-ʿumrān is the movement from the peoples to the people: the one nation of humanity (from al-tawahhush to taʾnus, in Ibn Khaldun's words). Thus, al-ʿumrān is basically a process rather than a static state of affairs. It also entails a deep moral responsibility towards the world. From this perspective, the modern concept of "civilization" partly intersects with the Khaldunian concept of al-ʿumrān in its empirical meaning, but not in its teleological meaning: the responsibility to transformation from the state of human beings being apart from each other [al-tawahhush التوحش] to getting humans closer [al-taʾnus التأنس].

6. Recalling The Concept Of Al-ʿumrān

So, the question now is how to how to deal with the concept of "civilization"? Some scholars argue that the concept of "civilization" should not be rejected altogether but rather accepted as part of humanity's common heritage. Yet, this position very problematic. The concept of "civilization" is a dead concept and its problems are unsolvable, thus we should opt for a new concept to replace it. Until such a new concept is developed, the concept of "civilization" if must be used then

should be used very cautiously and critically. On the other hand, the concept of "*al-ʿumrān*" is potentially a very viable alternative instead of the concept of "civilization". However, although its many advantages it suffers many challenges.

Due to the many intrinsic problems the concept of "civilization" suffer, arises the question: how to deal now with this very problematic concept of "civilization"? Halil Halid[44] for example argues we shouldn't fully reject it, in spite of us being aware of its reality as [1] a problematic concept embedding a European colonial ideology and an imperial idea; [2] a confusing concept full of obscurity and ambivalence; [3] a misleading subjective concept. Halid maintains that we accept the word "civilization", adopt it and understand it as the "common heritage of humanity". I find this position very problematic and I don't agree with Halil Halid. The concept of "civilization" needs to be totally transcended.

Another approach seeking a remedy to the problems of the concept of "civilization" is trying to differentiate between two usages of the word. First, "civilization" as a colonial ideology, an imperial idea, and a Euro-centric word, alluding to the Enlightenment and to Europe as the sole model the whole world has to follow in its footsteps and copy its achievements, all presented as an abstract good. As presented explicitly in François Guizot's theorization on civilization, or implicitly in Samuel Huntington's appropriation of the concept. Second, "civilization" as a unit of analysis alluding to the quasi-immobile time of structures and traditions. The history of constant repetition, and ever recurring cycles. Where all change is slow and the passage of this history is almost imperceptible, As in Fernand Braudel's method.

However, such a differentiation further complicates any usage of the concept of "civilization" in any debate. Furthermore, the concept of "civilization" is always burdened with its intrinsic problems and overshadowed by them. Hence, it doesn't provide a sustained analytical prowess, and can be normatively appropriated by anyone for subjective reasons. Thus, we should totally refrain from using "civilization" in the aforementioned first manner and the second as well. Additionally, the concept of "civilization" always provides a normative base allowing for its uncritical usage, especially in a pure political or ideological sense. The civilizational discourse has been used for a very long time by contrary parties and contradictory reasons and justifications, internationally and locally.

---

44   Halid, 2008, c.a.: Işık, *The Vision of Order*.

However, there is still no any ready alternative to the concept of "civilization". Until there is a working alternative, using "civilization" seems sometimes inevitable. Yet at least we should always be critical while using it. Thus, we always have to qualify "civilization" in all terms possible, so instead of speaking of "civilization" in the vaguely manner, we should contextualize it as much as we could, geographically, historically, etc. That is why the word "civilization" should always be put within quotation marks to alarm us to the need of being critical while dealing with such a dead concept. Meanwhile, we have to work on new alternatives.

Indeed, the concept of *al-ʿumrān* is a very possible alternative. Nevertheless, the concept of *al-ʿumrān* faces numerous challenges for it to be a really working alternative instead of the concept of "civilization". First, the concept of "civilization" is still widely used in all contexts. For, the concept of "civilization" enjoys wide prevalence and obvious easiness to be used, which makes it a barrier that complicates and makes it hard to use the concept of *al-ʿumrān* instead. Second, the common translation mistake equating *al-ʿumrān* to "civilization discussed before. Hence, instead of employing the concept of *al-ʿumrān* as a solution to the problems embedded in the problematic concept of "civilization", the concept of "civilization" itself appropriates the concept of *al-ʿumrān*. Third, although being almost 600 years old, the concept of *al-ʿumrān* is not developed enough nor ready to be used in today's complex world.

Accordingly, for the concept of *al-ʿumrān* to be useful, it needs to be much further developed, theorized, and conceptualized. Since Ibn Khladun died in the 15th century, the concept of *al-ʿumrān* has either been misused, by equating it to "civilization" for example, or kept idle and frozen, a mere utterance without leveraging its conceptual and analytical powers. Unlike the general tendency to give short definitions, Heba Raouf Ezzat defines *al-ʿumrān* in a complex and extended way:

> *Al-ʿumrān* is a perception of the maps of daily life in its historical accumulation and the resulting human transformations. It is not a perception of architecture that is separated from the right to land and housing, and the arrangement of spaces and boundaries between the private and the public, and sociology, politics and economy. And it is our bodies in the formulas of their interaction with space. It is a perception of the world, a location in it, and spaces of emptiness and horizons of communication. *Al-ʿumrān* is respect for the histories of places and people when they tra-

vel and when they settle, and it is contiguous times that give life layers of rituals and rites and aesthetics that are difficult to separate, it is the structure of knowledge and spaces of ornaments. And *al-ʿumrān* is cities that provide human security and a decent life, not markets that allow only consumption. *Al-ʿumrān* is mankind drawing its dreams, and it is its search for the various forms of manifestations in time and space and its interaction with universes, colors and sounds, it is a logic of power based on care and achieving efficiency, and it is the imprint of "civilization" on the soul before it is its effects in the houses. *Al-ʿumrān* is circles of justice and yards of spaciousness, it is a body social that expands and rejuvenates, it is lessons and insights and contemplation and virtues[45].

As much colorful it is the picture Ezzat drew about the concept of *al-ʿumrān*, she failed to differentiate it from "civilization". Thus, I totally agree with Vadettin Işık that "we need an independent discipline of *ʿilm al-ʿumrān* (the science of *al-ʿumrān*)"[46]. Unfortunately, since Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) founded and developed the concept of *al-ʿumrān*, no one has essentially built upon his efforts and really discovered the revolutionary potential of the concept of *al-ʿumrān*. However there are some works that contributed to that pursuit, even if in some degree, it utilized Ibn Khaldun yet didn't develop or basically contribute to the study of *al-ʿumrān*. For example, trying to demonstrate the possibility of the existence of "a social system other than the one that imposes a singular way of life defined by the modern West", Vadettin Işık utilizes Ibn Khaldun's approach in *Al-Muqaddimah* to discover a pluralist alternative system[47].

To practically alleviate the present tension and contradiction between the two concepts of *al-ʿumrān* and civilization. I suggest to use a new term "a circle of *ʿumrān*" which, on one hand, resonates with the concept of civilization, referring to a part of the human society and its attributes. While giving more space for an understanding of the interconnectedness of the various "circles of *al-ʿumrān*" ("civilizations" if you may) instead of approaching them as pristine and standalone. Thus, such an understanding would enable us to flexibly move between the microcosm and the macrocosm of the human society (*al-ʿumrān*) without

---

45   Emphasis by Haldun p. 70.
هبة رءوف عزت، نحو عمران جديد، (بيروت: الشبكة العربية للأبحاث والنشر، ٢٠١٥).

46   Işık, *The Vision of Order*, p. 119.

47   Işık, *The Vision of Order*.

losing any thing "in translation". Furthermore, this understanding helps appreciate all forms of human existence without adhering to any ideological claim about the moral superiority of one form over another.

Indeed, Ibn Khaldun's true accomplishment is not only his very early attention to treat historical events methodologically and searching for causality, but rather that he has invented a whole new field of social existence[48]. Al-ʿumrān is essentially "a social metaphysics" that studies the realm of events as a social realm of existence[49]. However, still the Khaldunian concept of al-ʿumrān alone does not help us penetrate and transcend the statist and internationalist concepts and imaginations. There is a need for a new conceptualization, that has the power to explain and imagine, not only the past yet also the future.

7. From "Civilization" To "Al-ʿumrān"

Achieving the long-needed transition from "civilization" to "al-ʿumrān" means acknowledging the distinct essence of the latter, which includes, first, addressing the human society in its totality. Second, combining an empirical and a teleological sense. And third, considering all forms and modes of human existence as equal without allocating moral superiority to any of them. And forth, all acknowledging that while there are various modes and types of human existence, they are all interconnected and interdependent and that they altogether represent the totality of the human society mentioned earlier. Fifth, realizing that any human existence is civil by nature, thus there is no place for "a civilizing mission" in the context of "al-ʿumrān" but instead there is the deep moral responsibility of saving the world and maintaining balance on earth. Sixth, synthesizing the many aspects of the human phenomena.

The concept of al-ʿumrān provides us with many advantages that fixes the intrinsic problems of the concept of "civilization". First, the concept of al-ʿumrān doesn't adhere to any normative or ideological claims concerning the moral superiority of one people over another, or one mode of human existence over one other. Second, the concept of al-ʿumrān is a clear-cut analytical concept concerned with every attribute and aspect of the human society in a synthesizing

---

48   See more: Işık, *The Vision of Order*.

49   Tahsin Görgün, "İbn Haldun'un Görüşleri", TDV *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 19, pp. 543-55. (Istanbul: TDV, 1999), c.a.: Işık, *The Vision of Order*.

manner that connects the microcosm to the macrocosm. Third, the concept of *al-ʿumrān* encourages an objective realist study oriented towards power and change dynamics, and it is more capable of engaging us with the intricacies of the human phenomenon due to its simultaneous comprehensiveness and meticulousness.

Such a transition from "civilization" to "*al-ʿumrān*" requires a discussion of culture and imperialism. "Civilization" as a concept represents the empire, the West, and its imperial culture. "Civilization" is "part of the general European effort to rule distant lands and peoples … as well as to Europe's special ways of representing the[m]"[50]. On the other hand, While "*al-ʿumrān*" can be said to represent a culture of resistance, even if not fully utilized or activated yet. There is an emphatically massive discrepancy between the two concepts in terms of its development into a culture, "civilization" was transformed into a full-fledged, active culture, while "*al-ʿumrān*" remains as a petrified word. Edward Said defines a culture as two things in particular:

> First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure. Included, of course, are both the popular stock of lore about distant parts of the world and specialized knowledge available in such learned disciplines as ethnography, historiography, philology, sociology, and literary history … immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences … Second, and almost imperceptibly, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought … culture palliates, if it does not altogether neutralize, the ravages of a modern, aggressive, mercantile, and brutalizing urban existence[51].

This lagging-behind reality of "*al-ʿumrān*" is so clear in the fact that "*al-ʿumrān*" was rarely, even almost never, transformed into a story or a narrative. Which is crucial for the confrontation between a resistant culture and imperialism. Said explains:

---

50   Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. (Vintage, 2012), p. xi.
51   Said, *Ibid*, p. xii-xiii.

> The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future--these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. As one critic has suggested, nations themselves are narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them[52].

Edward Said gives us yet another substantive reason to work on transcending the concept of "civilization", especially through new, indigenous narrations. A return to "*al-ʿumrān*" should firmly, and may be even aggressively, achieve a rupture with "civilization". Associations are needed to be made to differentiate between the imperial and the resistant culture. Centering a resistant culture on "*al-ʿumrān*" can make it a source of identity, even a combative one, as opposed to the liberal philosophies of multiculturalism and hybridity.

The claimed superiority of the West, Western civilization, and Western culture makes it almost impossible for a cultural hybridity between the two concepts: "civilization" and "*al-ʿumrān*" on the basis of the former. For the simple reason that the assumed or imposed hierarchy wouldn't allow or entertain difference. Using Homi K. Bhabha's words, an "interstitial passage"[53] is not possible in this case. Such a hybridity between these imagined communities can not be achieved on the grounds of the dominant Western paradigm, as this paradigm is structurally against cultural equality, hybridity on such grounds allows only some cultural segments of other cultures "within" the dominant, superior Western culture: "When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychic survival"[54]. Hybridity as an in-between third space that synthesizes cultural differences is only possible on the ground of cultural equality.

However, basing hybridity on the concept of "*al-ʿumrān*" can allow us to hybridize both concepts, and turn "*al-ʿumrān*" into a mainstream discourse that includes yet transcends the concept of "civilization". Hence, hybridity can be "the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities….the

---

52   Said, *Ibid*, p. xiii.

53   Homi K. Bhabha, *The location of Culture*, (Routledge, 2012), p. 5.

54   Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 18.

strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal"[55]. An interstitial passage here is possible through entertaining "difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy"[56].

8. Conclusion:

This paper addressed the concept of "civilization" arguing it is extremely problematic, confusing, and misleading. First, the concept of "civilization" is very problematic because of its imperial baggage and imperialist function. Second, the concept of "civilization" is so confusing because it has been conceptualized in different and sometimes contradicting ways across time and space. Third, the concept of "civilization" is ultimately misleading because of its subjectivity and its various usages leading to an unsolvable oscillation in meanings and semantic fields. Therefore, there is a pressing need to transcend this distorted, or even dead, concept. This paper presents the concept of "*al-ʿumrān*" as a very possible alternative. Nevertheless, in order to be viable the concept of *al-ʿumrān* needs further development and structuring.

Bibliography:

Baldwin, R. Henry Thomas Buckle: a Re-evaluation. New York University, 1967.

Benlahcene, Badran. The Term "Civilization" In The Muslim Intellectual Traditions. International Journal for Innovation Education and Research, 5(4), 44-49. (2017).

Bhabha, Homi K. The location of Culture. Routledge, 2012.

Boer, Pim Den. "Towards a Comparative History of Concepts: Civilisation and beschaving." Contributions to the History of Concepts 3, no. 2 (2007): 207-233.

Botz-Bornstein, Thorsten. "What is the Difference Between Culture and Civilization?: Two Hundred Fifty Years of Confusion." Comparative Civilizations Review 66, no. 66 (2012).

Bowden, Brett, The Empire Of Civilization: The Evolution Of An Imperial Idea. University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Braudel, Fernand. A History of Civilizations. (New York: Penguin Books, 1995).

Buckle, Henry Thomas. History Of Civilization In England. Appleton, 1906.

Burckhardt, Jacob. Reflections On History. 1943.

Burckhardt, Jacob. The Civilization Of The Renaissance In Italy. Albert & Charles Boni, 1935.

Cox, Robert W. "Thinking About Civilizations," Review of International Studies 26 (2000): 217-234.

---

55   Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 159.
56   Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 4.

Davutoğlu, Ahmet et al. Civilizations And World Order: Geopolitics And Cultural Difference. Lexington Books, 2014.

Davutoğlu, Ahmet. "Medeniyetlerin Ben-İdraki." Dîvân: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi 3 (1997): 1-53.

Davutoğlu, Ahmet. "Bunalımdan Dönüşüme Batı Medeniyeti Ve Hristiyanlık." Dîvân: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi 9 (2000): 1-74.

Davutoglu, Ahmet. Alternative Paradigms: The İmpact Of Islamic And Western Weltanschauungs On Political Theory. Univ. Press of America, 1994.

Elias, Norbert. The Civilizing Process. trans. Edmund Jephcott, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

Engels, David. "Oswald Spengler And The Decline Of The West," In Key Thinkers of the Radical Right, pp. 3-21. Oxford University Press, 2019.

Federici, Silvia. Enduring Western Civilization. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995.

Fletcher, Jonathan. Violence and Civilization: An İntroduction To The Work Of Norbert Elias. John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

Freud, Sigmund. Civilization And Its Discontents. Hogarth Press, 1963.

Fricker, Miranda. Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Görgün, Tahsin. "İbn Haldun'un Görüşleri", TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, vol. 19, pp. 543-55. Istanbul: TDV, 1999.

Görgün, Tahsin. Medeniyet: Modern Tartışmalar. TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, 2003, 298-301.

Guizot, Francois. History Of Civilization In Europe. Colonial Press, 1899.

Hinde, John Roderick. Jacob Burckhardt And The Crisis Of Modernity. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2000.

Hodgson, Marshall GS. Rethinking World History: Essays On Europe, Islam And World History. Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Howard, Thomas Albert. Religion And The Rise Of Historicism: WML De Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, And The Theological Origins Of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Hughes, H. Stuart. Oswald Spengler. Transaction Publishers, 1991.

Huntington, Samuel P. "The Clash Of Civilizations?," In Culture and politics, pp. 99-118. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

Huth, Alfred Henry. The Life And Writings Of Henry Thomas Buckle. Appleton, 1880.

Işık, Vahdettin. "The Vision Of Order And Al-'Umran As An Explanatory Concept In The Debates On Civilization." 2017.

Kalin, Ibrahim. "Dünya Görüşü, Varlık Tasavvuru Ve Düzen Fikri: Medeniyet Kavramına Giriş." Dîvân: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi 29 (2010): 1-61.

Kirsner, Douglas. "Freud, Civilization, Religion, And Stoicism." Psychoanalytic Psychology 23, no. 2 (2006): 354.

Krieken, Robert Van. Norbert Elias. (Routledge, 2005).

Kumar, Krishan. "The Return of Civilization—and of Arnold Toynbee?." Comparative Studies in Society and History 56, no. 4 (2014): 815-843.

Marcuse, Herbert. Eros And Civilization: A Philosophical İnquiry Into Freud. (Beacon Press, 2015).

Mazlish, Bruce. Civilization And İts Contents. Stanford University Press, 2004.

Mazower, Mark. "Paved Intentions: Civilization And Imperialism." World Affairs 171, no. 2 (2008): 72-84.

McNeill, William H. "Fernand Braudel, Historian," The Journal of Modern History 73, no. 1 (2001): 133-146.

McNeill, William H. Arnold J. Toynbee: A Life. Oxford University Press, 1989.

Mennell, Stephen. Norbert Elias. (Routledge, 2020).

Monnier, Raymonde. "The Concept Of Civilisation From Enlightenment To Revolution: An Ambiguous Transfer." Contributions to the History of Concepts 4, no. 1 (2008): 106-136.

Navari, Cornelia. "Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975): Prophecy and Civilization." Review of International Studies 26, no. 2 (2000): 289-301.

Negri, A., and Hardt, M. Empire. Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 2001.

Neill, Monty. "Western Civilization Invented, Constructed, And Desecrated." Science as Culture 8, no. 2 (1999): 231-238.

Osterhammel, Jürgen. "Arnold Toynbee And The Problems Of Today." Bulletin of the German Historical Institute 60 (2017): 69-87.

Patterson, Thomas C. Inventing Western Civilization. NYU Press, 1997.

Said, Edward W. Culture and Imperialism. Vintage, 2012.

Said, Edward. Orientalism. New York: Vintage, 1979.

Schorske, Carl E. "Freud: The Psychoarcheology Of Civilizations," The Cambridge Companion To Freud (1991): 8-24.

Şentürk, Recep. "Unity In Multiplexity: Islam As An Open Civilization." 2011.

Spengler, Oswald. The Decline Of The West. Oxford University Press, USA, 1991.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can The Subaltern Speak?," Can The Subaltern Speak? Reflections On The History Of An Idea (1988): 21-78.

Stimely, Keith. "Oswald Spengler: An İntroduction To His Life And Ideas." The Journal of Historical Review 17, no. 2 (1998).

Toynbee, A. A Study Of History. abridged by Dc Somerville. Oxford Paperbacks, 1957.

Turner, Bryan S. Ahmet Demirhan (Çevirmen). Oryantalizm, Kapitalizm ve İslam, İnsan Yayinlari, 1997.

Turner, Bryan S., and Nasir, Kamaludeen Mohamed, eds. The Sociology of Islam: Collected Essays of Bryan S. Turner. Routledge, 2016.

بن خلدون، عبد الرحمن. عبد السلام شدادي (تحقيق). المقدمة. الدار البيضاء: بيت الفنون والعلوم والآداب، ٢٠٠٥.

عزت، هبة رءوف. نحو عمران جديد. بيروت: الشبكة العربية للأبحاث والنشر، ٢٠١٥.