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Seventh Son of the East: Sezai Karakoç and His Doctrine of Revival

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ABSTRACT *Although Sezai Karakoç has been a prominent figure in the Turkish intellectual life for almost five decades, nothing scholarly has appeared so far to introduce him to the Western academia. Aside from his being considered to be one of the greatest Turkish poets in the twentieth century, for many, he is also an influential intellectual who has put his mark on Turkish Islamism and affected the Islamic community as deep as Mehmet Akif Ersoy and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek. Mainly because of his deliberate choice of being low profile and his distanced attitude towards media, he is not a widely known figure in the popular political arena. His ideas, however, have influenced many politicians in the contemporary Turkish Politics, particularly the elite cadres of currently running the Justice and Development Party (JDP). It is appealing to notice that a great number of policies he formulated in 1980s and 1990s have been developed and implemented by the JDP government. To elucidate Sezai Karakoç's intellectual depth and cultural vision, this study, first, introduces him, then opens up his conceptualization of civilization the grasp of which seems to constitute a fertile ground for the JDP's political rhetoric both for domestic and regional audiences, and lastly reveals his "doctrine of revival."*

Westerners!

I am the seventh son of a father whom you
Without knowing
Swallowed his six sons.

I want to be buried here unchanged
My father died with his grief of my elder brothers
I do not want to sadden the soul of my father
Please bury me before making me changed.

I want to die as Easterner.

(Sezai Karakoç from his famous poem titled "Fable")

Introduction

Sezai Karakoç has attained his place in Turkey's popular political agenda upon the public reading of his poem titled "From the Land of Exile to the Capital of Capitals

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(*Sürgünler Ülkesinden Başkentler Başkentine*)” by the Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan during the Fourth Regular Convention of Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, JDP) on September 30, 2012.¹ Though most people were unaware of the author’s standing in the literary spheres at that point, Karakoç had already become a prominent intellectual figure in the Turkey’s for almost five decades. For some, for some, he has been one of the greatest poets in the twentieth century and the leading representative of the Second New (*İkinci Yeni*)² movement.³ One of the most significant representatives of the Second New, Cemal Süreyya, cannot refrain from telling the characteristics of this “Muslim” poet; “Such a Muslim who knows both Marx and Nietzsche. Also knows Rimbaud. Also likes Salvador Dali. Also reads *Nazım*.”⁴ On the other hand, for some, he has been an influential intellectual who has put his mark on Turkish Islamism and affected the Islamic community in Turkey as much as Mehmet Akif Ersoy and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek.⁵ According to some, however, Karakoç is a “third worldist figure” with a socialist side of excessive anti-imperialist rhetoric.⁶

It would be interesting to note that Karakoç has been the leader of a political movement since the 1990s. He founded first the Revival Again Party (*Yeniden Diriliş Partisi*) in 1997, and later the Sovereign Revival Party (*Yüce Diriliş Partisi*)⁷ in 2007, a fact which makes him an active politician. Leaving aside Karakoç’s literary career that has been analyzed deeply by scholars, this study aims to unveil his political identity in the Western academic literature, suggesting that his intellectual depth and cultural vision have a direct and comprehensive impact on the emergence and evolution of the political ideas of the current political elites with Islamist background. Mainly because of his deliberate choice of keeping low profile and distanced attitude towards the media, he is not a widely known figure in the popular intellectual arena. It is almost impossible to see his photography in any publication. The title of the sole comprehensive book that mostly addresses his literary identity, *A Man with No Shadow in Turkey* (*Yoktur Gölgesi Türkiye’de*), focuses on his deliberate choice of low-visibility in Turkey.⁸

Having a colorful personality but not even a shadow to trace, Sezai Karakoç, indeed, has deeply influenced today’s political elites. It is known that Karakoç regularly gets in touch with President Tayyip Erdoğan, Mehmet Ali Şahin, Besir Atalay and Numan Kurtulmuş, who all took part in Istanbul organizations of Welfare (Refah) and Virtue (Fazilet) parties between 1990 and 1997. He has also worked with academicians in Istanbul including the current Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu.⁹ It is not hyperbole to assert that Sezai Karakoç is still a source of inspiration for these critical players within the JDP. For example, Beşir Atalay states that the founding father of “Kurdish opening” is Sezai Karakoç.¹⁰ Similarly it was Ahmet Davutoğlu who received the award of Sezai Karakoç in lieu of him at the summit of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in Baku, only to hand it in to him personally upon his return.¹¹ Once again, both Ahmet Davutoglu and Ertugrul Gunay were honorary speakers at the International Symposium of Sezai Karakoç, organized by the Ministry of Culture and Dicle University and held in June 2012 in Karakoç’s hometown in Diyarbakir.

The primary purpose in studying Karakoç should be the excessive relevance of the Revival Again Party program, written by the author himself in 1999. The clauses, which still prevail in political debates in Turkey, are very closely linked with the JDP's political agenda. He, for instance, has been the leading figure in the Islamist circles actively advocating the implementation of a presidential system since early 1990s. He has always prioritized this issue in the program of the *Diriliş* Party and recommended it to the JDP leaders several times.¹² Again, it is appealing to notice his suggestions in resolving the Kurdish problematique in Turkey. These include the formation of "national Wise Man Council" to play mediator role and the mobilization of the common identity of Muslimhood to "cement" the relationship between Turks and Kurds.

Since being a study that endeavors to introduce Sezai Karakoç to the Western academia, this study takes his intellectual depth under focus in the following sections: in the first section, a short biography is provided to better grasp the temporal and spatial "hinterland" that has shaped Karakoç's ideas; and in the second section, first, Karakoç's famous poem named "Fable" is presented to better elucidate the theme of East–West dichotomy that sits at the core of his conceptualization of civilization and then the "white" and "black" civilizations, the typologies he has proposed to categorize the concept of civilization are provided. All this is followed by the presentation of his doctrine of "Revival" that constitutes the core of his ideas.

Sezai Karakoç's Life

Sezai Karakoç was born in the village of Ergani in Diyarbakır on January 22, 1933 to a well-known family. His grandfathers were prominent figures both in the village and its vicinity. His paternal grandfather was a well-known officer who took part in the Plevne War, and received the appreciation of *Gazi Osman Pasha*, the famous Ottoman commander in charge. Sezai Karakoç, spent his childhood in Maden and Dicle towns in southeastern Anatolia and finished primary school in 1944 in Ergani.

Ergani, in those years, was a culturally and ethnically diversified province in which all Muslims, regardless of their ethnic and sectarian affiliations, lived together peacefully under a single banner of Islam.¹³ This multicultural environment influenced Karakoç's life to such an extent that, when asked about his hometown, his answer was:

My hometown is the Tigris River, the upper branches of which have been fed by Istanbul, the main body of which includes Diyarbakir, and that gets bigger with the inclusion of Baghdad. Then the Tigris unites with the Euphrates near Basra and meets with the Persian Gulf. So, I am from Istanbul, Diyarbakir, Baghdad, Basra and Persian Gulf.¹⁴

Accordingly, as being the son of the Tigris River and through the bridging role of Tigris, Karakoç proposed "Taha" as his ideal type of youth. In his poem *Before Sunset* published in Taha's Book, Karakoç wrote:

The Taha's change has become like this,
He sucked and sucked the Tigris River
As if a child sucking his mother's breast.

After graduating from Gaziantep High School in 1950, he went to Istanbul since he wanted to study philosophy. When he realized that he could not finance his education, he took the examination of Faculty of Political Sciences for free of charge boarding students. Upon his acceptance into the program at Ankara University, he soon transferred to the Department of Finance within the same institution. In 1950, Karakoç wrote his poem *Monna Roza* at the age of 19 that soon endowed him significant recognition.

Mona Rosa, the black roses, the whites.
Roses of Geyve and the white bed.
Mercy, the broken bird wants.
Ah, because of you messes with blood shred.
Mona Rosa, the black roses, the whites.

Lilies on the lands of loneliness.
And honour every flower has
Behind the candle a wind motionless.
Gives my soul a trembling pass.
Oh, lilies on the lands of loneliness.

After graduation, Karakoç took the financial inspectorship examination and started working as an assistant inspector on January 11, 1956. Due to his assignments, he traveled a lot in Anatolia and had the opportunity to familiarize himself with many provinces and counties. Upon finishing his mandatory military service as a reserve officer, he resumed his work in Istanbul in 1961. He resigned numerous times between 1965 and 1973 and has not taken any governmental duty since 1973. It is worth mentioning that, although Karakoç is of Kurdish ethnic origin, he has never emphasized his Kurdishness in his writings and speeches, and deliberately has kept himself at distance from Kurdish movements¹⁵ since he believed that the Kurds and Turks shared a deep sense of brotherhood shaped by the Muslim identity and shared history.¹⁶

In 1960, he started publishing *Diriliş* (Revival) Magazine and included translations from Soren Kierkegaard, T. S. Eliot, Rainer Maria Rilke, Ezra Pound and John Perse. Throughout the 1960s, the *Diriliş* Magazine became a great source for Turkey's Islamists because it provided them a chance to read translated Western philosophical texts on modernity, postmodernity and critiques of positivism. Several prominent figures such as Erdem Bayezit, Rasim Özdenören, İsmet Özel and Cahit Zarifoğlu gained reputation among intellectual circles in the Turkish right with their articles in this journal and in this sense, Karakoç could be defined as the "grandmaster" of the contemporary Islamist intellectuals. In 1990, Karakoç establishes the *Diriliş* Party (DİRİ-P) with the emblem of "Rosewood of Blossoming Roses." He served

as its president for seven years before it was closed down on March 19, 1997 for not participating in two general elections.

Karakoç was selected for the special award of Ministry of Culture in 2006. Yet he notified the Ministry stating that he was not going to accept the monetary prize. He wrote in a letter to the officials, explaining that his ideas were not for sale. Following this recognition, Karakoç established the *Yüce Diriliş* (Sovereign Revival) Party in 2007 and still works as the president of this party. It is worth reminding that Karakoç was also given the Presidential Literature Award of 2011; however, he again refused to attend the ceremony.

When examines reviews Karakoç's writings, the similarity between his rhetoric and JDP's political agenda immediately becomes apparent. In 1991, for instance, he proposed the establishment of an African Common Market, ushered the rise of Africa and indicated that Africa would again play a role in the stage of history.¹⁷ It is known that he has been disseminating his deep "faith" in the rise of Africa, and Turkey's destiny to play a crucial role.¹⁸ Indeed, in Karakoç's thinking, Africa had a great mission. In one of his significant poem books titled *Before Sunset (Gün Doğmadan)*, Karakoç talked at length about an interesting childhood play. In this play, Karakoç was Asia (please note his preference of "Asia" as his name), his friend Ali was Europe, his other friend was Australia, another was America and his last friend Umar was Africa. Karakoç stated, "In all games, Umar always beats all of us. At the end of the day, he is always the winner of the game."¹⁹ Karakoç's presentation of Umar (Africa) as the ceaseless winner shows the extent of importance Karakoç attached to the rise of Africa. This rise, for Karakoç, was a crucial step in the revival of Islam. Indeed, he has been the leading advocate of Turkey's recognition of "cultural hinterland" in Africa, and thus, since the 1970s, he has noted that Turkey should tailor her foreign policy according her "pre-destined mission."²⁰

To better elucidate the core of his political vision, it would be appropriate to shed light on Karakoç's two fundamental conceptions: that of civilization and typologies to categorize his concept of civilization; and his doctrine of Revival.

Sezai Karakoç's Conception of Civilization

Karakoç's poem titled *Fable* written in 1960 talks about the "tragic story of an Eastern father," that, in fact, reflects the East–West dilemma of Turkish intellectuals. Although this dichotomy is an old theme in Turkish literature, Karakoç's handling of it in this poem is new. The poem, as a whole, reveals the story of an Eastern father and his seven sons, who go to the West. This is, in fact, the story of the "noble stance" of the seventh son against the West, whose elder brothers are deceived/charmed by the West and then wiped out.²¹

As seen in the poem, in the Karakoç's thinking, "East" and "West" are as different from each other as "white" and "black," "good" and "bad," "honey" and "poison," "tuba" and "Oleander." Over the course of history, for him, there has been a constant tension between East and West. The figure of father in the poem represents the authority, or the Ottoman Empire. In the last period of the Empire, the Ottoman

intellectuals went to the West to get acquainted with Western ideas. Each son in the poem marks a point of deviance that is rooted from human weaknesses. These pave the way of infiltration into the souls of people in the East. All sons experience a shift from the genuine Eastern values face this deviance. Here it is understood that, according to Karakoç, the most basic requirement for survival is strict adherence to one's values. The seventh son, a man of revival, both grasps the essence of the East and is aware of the insidious aspects of the West's attitude. He knows the tricks played by Westerners.

As one may notice in the poem, according to Karakoç, there are two types of civilizations: white civilization (*Ak medeniyet*) and black civilization (*Kara medeniyet*).²² These two civilizations have been in an everlasting struggle since the existence of the humanity. For him, this is a struggle between civilization of the good and the civilization of the bad, civilizations of the right and the wrong, beautiful and ugly, "honey and the venom."²³

Because black civilization has also been organized, armed with power and has also succeeded in setting the philosophy of justifying itself as being right. Black civilization has risen materially against soul, ragged against divine, trouble against peace chaos against harmony... More precisely, the bad assures flaring out of the good, the attack of the bad is necessary for the good to recognize itself and set itself continuously. Bad works for good's attainment of its own consciousness.²⁴

According to Karakoç, Western civilizations represent the black civilization. The Renaissance, which gave birth to modern western civilization is not new, in fact it is a renewal; that is, a return to the "antiquity." Karakoç suggests that there are two inherently existing deficiencies in the Renaissance. The first is that the Renaissance lacks the original "essence" that must take place in all new beings. The other is that the Renaissance's ignorance towards Islam causes a metaphysical weakness.²⁵ Interestingly, Karakoç asserts that with the emergence and expansion of Renaissance, indeed, Christianity was probably saved from disappearing. If there had been no Renaissance, Christianity would have disappeared within Islam.²⁶

For Karakoç, when Renaissance essence became unable to hold humanity more in the contemporary world, the foundational structure of Western civilization began to shake. Therefore, the humanity started criticizing the Renaissance and what has emerged out of it. Now, for Karakoç, humanity started to awaken and call what is "Western" into question. Although for some, this awakening had been erroneously defined as the process of Westernization, for Karakoç, this is an attempt of achieving equal power to confront the West. Karakoç then continues that lay out his critique of Western civilization, and notes that while Western civilization could change the material setting with scientific discoveries, industrialization and finally the space discoveries but could not change the soul. In Karakoç's conceptualization, civilization is not merely changing the material setting but it should also provide a universal and collective self-actualization that is expected to eventually change the "spiritual

essence” of humanity.²⁷ When taking this criterion into account, for Karakoç, the Western civilization, which has changed the material setting and has dominated the world with the “illusion” of materialistic values, is in a chronic depression since it could not solve the problem related with the soul and the essence.²⁸

In fact, this is an “existence depression.”²⁹ The only advancement since Renaissance has been in the field of science and technology. Karakoç also reminds that the origins of the Western civilization are based on research and scientific methodology that have been encouraged in Islam first. Although, according to Karakoç, by playing a bridge role, Islamic civilization connected West to the antiquity, Western civilization intentionally underemphasized Islam’s bridge role, and preferred to combat Islam openly or covertly for centuries. By not surrendering to Islam, Western civilization did not only betray history, but also denied its own destiny. This resulted in the human egoism wishing to raise “prodigy” against “revelation.” West, as it is understood, is in the predicament of not remunerating the “archaic,” turning its back to the “perpetual revelation” by idolizing the “moment, but disregarding past and future.”³⁰

According to Karakoç, the idea of western philosophy commenced with the schools of *Ibn-Rüşd* and *Ibn-Sina* where Islamic philosophic idea were combined with Greek philosophy in a “healthy” manner. The Western enlightenment, however, started with believing the “absolute power of mind” with Descartes, tended towards experience with Roger Bacon and David Hume, and gave birth to positivism. In this critique, Karakoç attacks the assumption that the truth can only be produced with rigorous sets of logical relations and laws that describe relations between empirical observations/descriptions. With his essentialist vision, Karakoç severely challenges empiricism that dictates a “deterministic and empirical” epistemological positioning in the knowledge as well.

Karakoç then continues to suggest that the Western civilization has gotten away from searching for the essence of existence when intending to find the source of scientific knowledge. He asserts that while Leibniz was trying to find meaning for the parts and the whole of the existence, Spinoza tried to settle the ethics of this new philosophy. Later, Kant closed the way of ontology (and thus gate to the revelation) by opening the way of “man’s limited epistemology” with his work named *Criticism of Pure Mind*.³¹ Later on, Hegelian dialectic enabled the establishment of a dialectic conception allowing the meaning of historical process of human and humanistic talents and the position and effectiveness of knowledge in this being. Marxism and positivism led by Auguste Comte became fairly the denial of philosophy. Bergsonism put senses near to the mind and tried to define the life rather within the evolution. Edmond Husserl, in this case, attached importance to instant essence that forms the union of nature and time like other Renaissance trends, without leaning to the essence of human. But all these trends without metaphysics brought along their own apocalypses and could not wipe out the emphasis on revelation.³² After the positivist wave, for Karakoç, Western world this time turn to other philosophical traditions to attach new meanings to the human soul. Neither the rebellion of Nietzsche, however, that tried to deny both Christianity and the West simultaneously

nor the “pessimistic world idea” of Schopenhauer; Martin Heidegger and Sartre could not provide solution for the “soul depression” of the western world. Karakoç then turns to Kierkegaard, an important representative of Christian existentialist thought. For Karakoç, in his works, Kierkegaard started to criticize all these above-mentioned thinkers and the methodological approaches that all put “mind” or “sense” or “intuition” before “divine revelation.” Kierkegaard’s effort, however, for Karakoç, is a “half-baked” one that is good in diagnosis but not in treatment. While Kierkegaard proposes appropriate answers to the “whys” of the collapse of Western positivist and post-positivist thinking, when coming to the “hows” of the dilemma, Kierkegaard’s prescription falls short since it does not include Islamic references.³³

Sezai Karakoç’s Conception of White (Ideal) Civilization

According to Karakoç, the birthplace of civilization rooted on divine revelation is the Middle East.³⁴ The only contemporary sustaining agent and the mere inheritor of that ideal civilization is Islamic civilization. It is a mistake to base Islamic civilization, on a language, on a race or on a particular community of interest. The Islamic civilization, for Karakoç, that represents the Eastern metaphysics, the divine truth and the prophets is the enliven form of a soul from the beginning to the end.³⁵ The rivalry between the Western civilization and the Islamic civilization is nothing else than the continuation of the struggle that started with the birth of the first human and one that lasted until today.³⁶

The white civilization, or the Islamic civilization of Karakoç, is the sole contemporary, undistorted representative of the Revelation and the Truth. It starts with the Prophet Adam. In the way the divine revelation, or the true essence, commencing with Prophet Adam improved and educated the humanity and took its contemporary form as the last religion of Islam. This divine revelation has improved and been presented to the humanity as Civilization of Islam.³⁷

According to Karakoç, “the ideal civilization” is the period during which *Qur’an*, or the divine message, was delivered to the Prophet Muhammad and the succeeding rules of the four Caliphs. In this ideal civilization at that age, *Qur’an* was actually implemented, and right and wrong were determined according to it. Karakoç asserts “the Golden Age of Prophet Muhammad and first four caliphs was the direct realization of revelation and true civilization.”³⁸ For Karakoç, however, this was not a frozen and stationary civilization in the sense that the world witnessed some variations of it in different periods and different geographies. While, for instance, the Medinah Civilization would be the base and the starting point, later, according to Karakoç, the civilization pounces of residences of Damascus and Baghdad come. The Andalusia Civilization is a branch on its own within the Civilization of Islam. Seljuk Civilization, Ottoman Civilization and Transoxiana Civilization are variations. There is also the soul of Islam, which weaves and brings about these civilizations. The Islamic soul thus will continuously revive with enlivenment.³⁹

Karakoç then continues to suggest that it is necessary to understand this civilization in compliance with its salvation. Every civilization should test itself through a comparison with this ideal civilization. The civilization's being in the right track is determined by this way. The essence manifested from this ideal civilization should neither be completely buried in the past nor completely surrender to the conditions of the modern world, ignoring the past.⁴⁰

Karakoç then proposes the concept of "actual civilization" which is rooted from the ideal civilization, but moving away from it continuously. Actual one is a civilization which both possess the essence of the ideal civilization and carries the traces of its time and geography overwhelmingly. The *Omayyad* Civilization, for instance, or the civilization settled by Abbasid, and finally, the Ottoman Civilization are amongst the actual civilizations. That is, the ones to settle a new civilization cannot take those actual ones as examples. They should solely focus on the examples of the ideal civilization while benefiting from the experience of the reel civilizations. While extracting lessons from the experiences of reel civilizations is helpful, imitating them exactly the same way would be a mistake. The examples are *Qur'an* and the sayings and practices of Prophet (*Sunnah*).

In Karakoç's conceptualization, civilization is a view of life that embraces all fields of life from architecture to poetry, from law to philosophy, from positive sciences to social sciences. He admits that the internal differences and small deviations within a civilization themselves as blessings that yield to "plurality" on the condition that these differences do not contradict with one another and exclude each other.

Karakoç is not against sectarian divisions and religious sects (*tarikats*), but is clearly against the misdirection that might come about due to those different approaches. He states:

In my opinion, Muslims are a single nation, a single community and a single congregation. If people have religious orders and specific communities, I do not consider it to be correct to render them a reason of exaggerated separation way in an extend of bigotry, and looking down on the others from the other congregation and religious order, or accuse the ones not in your own congregation. Therefore I did not join such congregations and religious orders.⁴¹

One might then suggest that Karakoç theoretically accepts the existence of religious orders and perceives them as richness while he does not accept becoming a member of one.

Sezai Karakoç's ideas on Ottoman Empire are also important. For Karakoç, Ottomans surely served the ideal civilization and justified it. His method of engagement with the Ottoman Empire, nonetheless, could be critical, which is, in fact, a significant difference that puts him in a different stage among Islamist intellectuals. Justifying Ottomans, for him, cannot be an obstacle in appreciating its mistakes.⁴² There are numerous parts in his writings where he overly advocates Ottomans or exaggerates the realities of the Ottoman period. For Karakoç, Ottomans were the last defenders of Islam, standing against Western Civilization. Therefore, he repeatedly states that

what the Ottomans did for Islam and the Muslims cannot be denied. Since Karakoç's ultimate ambition is to manifest a new civilization after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire with his doctrine of revival, he engages in its analysis with a "realistic" stance, not a pointless nostalgia.

In Karakoç's thinking, being the last representative of Islamic Civilization, the Ottoman Empire is not a racial justification; it is an Islamic justification of the white civilization. According to him, Ottoman Empire is simply a "reflection" in the continuation of the Civilization of Islam. In this conceptualization, the principal everlasting referent object is not this Empire or that state; it is the essence in Islamic civilization.

In Karakoç's thinking, in contrast to the Western civilization, which is a repressive, profit-maximizing kind that has reached its peak through the use of "wild power," the Islamic civilization has risen and reached its peak status with culture, tolerance to the others, human values and divine compassion.⁴³ Being effective in the world is not just related with material power. In this sense, Karakoç refuses the Weberian definition of the state that portrays state as the utmost political entity in a given territory that possesses monopoly over the use of violence. If material capabilities that constitute the source of wild power and arch of the state are used in a "cruel" way, and if rulers legitimize their act of ruling through the use of wild power, then one would suggest that "blessing" of the state is at risk.⁴⁴ Blessing of a state and the existence of a state are very different things. Sezai Karakoç considers Islamic state to be necessary, but does not recognize everything to be merely consisting of the state. In this conceptualization, state, for Karakoç, is not end itself, but only a mere means to serve to the people for the achievement of the divine blessing and compassion. Nonetheless, since the sustainability of state is primarily dependent on its own material capacity, "the blessed state" in Karakoç's thinking should be capable of defending its material (security of its territory and people) and moral existence (the idea of state). According to Karakoç, declaration of political reforms in the Ottoman State and irreversibly adopting western way of life were not enough to protect the country from the western attacks. Karakoç then suggests "perhaps first reason for the collapse of Ottoman is this. That is not renewing its civilization's material capacities."⁴⁵ Karakoç then notes that the second reason for the collapse is "Westernization, which is only way we found for securing the last homeland territory, but unfortunately has put us away from our essence."⁴⁶ He then continues, "Our civilization in this age, must have a technique, a statement of art and aesthetic, dynamism of thought, a science network so that we can struggle with the Western Civilization and preserve our identity."⁴⁷ He has even some suggestions for salvage. "The Truth Civilization in our age will be able to be preserved by the heavy industry."⁴⁸ He, on the other hand, is sure that "a state which has lost its enliven and 'revival-er soul of religion' collapses."⁴⁹

In all of Karakoç's works, one may easily notice that he is not pessimistic; that is, he always believes that the Civilization of Islam will rise again. He contends that:

In fact our civilization was greatly wounded and entered into a period of significant depression. But it has not sunk. The thing keeping all the communities in the Islamic world straight up is still the Civilization of Islam and the Islamic life. Even the ones supposing that they have detached from it are still benefiting its boons.⁵⁰

Karakoç is, indeed, not pessimistic since he has full faith on his doctrine of revival. “Revival” is a doctrine, for Karakoç, not a concept since, in his words “revival is an action, a practice that has already surpassed the stage of conceptualization. It is implementation, full implementation for the resurrection.”⁵¹ Then, what is his doctrine of revival?

Sezai Karakoç’s the Doctrine of Revival

All essentialist thinkers, all men of struggle have an ideal generation. They hold concern about by what/whom the struggle they are after will be sustained. They form “imagined” generations for realizing their ideals. Some put their idealizations into actual practice to achieve it. Some, on the other hand, only conceptualize it and then leave it to the history. In the Turkish intellectual tradition, there are examples of both kinds in the history. Mehmet Akif Ersoy, for instance, has his “generation of *Asım*,” or Tefik Fikret has his “Haluk” and Karakoç has his “generation of *Taha*” which is destined to implement his doctrine of revival.

“Revival of the soul” is the principal concept in the Karakoç’s revival. Later on, within an order, first the revival of the society, and finally, the revival of the civilization take place.⁵² Karakoç, for instance, tells the anecdotes of the revivals of Prophet Abraham against Nimrod, Moses against Pharaoh, Jesus against Rome and the people of ignorance (*jahiliya*) period before Mohammed. He deduces lessons from these examples. According to him, the West cannot ensure the revival of the soul since it is already a “positivist” and materialist civilization. The metaphysical aspect of the revival is based on “revival after death” (*vel basu’l badel mevt*) that is the general provision of Islam.⁵³ Karakoç’s *Taha* struggles with darkness, oppression, denial of God’s existence, ignorance, philosophy, modernity attempting to spoil the religion, the materialists denying the soul. This attempt, with this perspective, is revival after death.

According to Karakoç, revival is the revival of Muslim societies. Both an original and a modern expression of change on which the idea of Islam should base itself is the concept of “Revival.” This concept Sezai Karakoç proposes is original, in principle it is deduced from the essentials of the holy text of Islam and the historical implementations. It is modern, because it is in strife with the capitalism and socialism, two movements that have put their mark on the twentieth century. This is revival because, for Karakoç, “Islam itself had not introduced a truth for the first time. It came for reviving originally the messages before it. It bases its internal mentality on revival.”⁵⁴ With his doctrine of revival, Sezai Karakoç has established a distinctive discourse. The system of thoughts forming the fundamental dynamics of this

discourse is Islam. However, he introduced a new interpretation – he tried to tune the age to Islam, conceptualized religion as being the source of existence, as a worldview and named it Revival. This word has been identified with Sezai Karakoç since the year 1960. Sezai Karakoç has become remembered wherever the word “Revival” is mentioned and revival has become remembered wherever Sezai Karakoç’s name is mentioned. Revival is, for him, “believing again, thinking again, and hearing again. It is giving meaning to life again. It is the change the human has entered in for salvation. Revival is reviving of human with Islam, salvation of him with Islam.”⁵⁵

The “revival soldiers who are warriors for uplifting the name of *Allah*,”⁵⁶ will use every way to achieve their aim. Therefore,

The Muslim who has submitted his soul to Allah is the heavy and qualified crew of worship as well as the passenger of the heavy culture whose one side turned to society and history and heavy employee and worker of the economy which is the expression of industry and agriculture, as being the rapid faces of matter and nature, with the language of numbers and money.⁵⁷

The people of revival, for Karakoç, are “balanced, know how to operationalize spirit and materiality together.” He then continues:

I try to recognize and know the visible scholar and structural side of Islam as well as its internal spiritual structural side. The ones denying or over-narrowing the spiritual structure will be faced with the danger of sticking into Materialism one day. In the same way, the ones not obeying the rules of Islam about order of society and life of individual or the ones denying those with their claim they are the sacrosanct (holy and blessed) or with the pretense of loyalty to someone will not be able to save themselves from falling into the scrape that the sacrosanct-ship fell. We need to keep our souls without slanting in these two extremisms.⁵⁸

The soldier of revival has awareness about community. Muslims, in Karakoç’s vision, have to unite histories and geographies to converge into a single culture. Contributing to the re-revival of Civilization of Islam is the duty of all Muslims. The unity idea of the Muslims will take its place in the heart of every young man increasingly. Running towards political union is a matter of life or death. It is the modern ideal of revival soldier. The contemporary geographic situation is very convenient for this reviving unison. The Islam countries are adjacent and attached to each other. They extend from one end of Africa to Philippine Islands without discontinuity. Karakoç then asserts that:

The borders and separations between Muslims are political, and thus artificially constructed. The region they call Middle East, being the center, core; the ideal of single country is the expression of ideal of territory and homeland of the revival soldiers. We identify the word as country which is (*Dâru’l-İslam*) in

Islam terminology. The history union is present because of having established great Islam states in the past. But, it has been a hundred years that this union is continuously detaching. If the cultural union is established, the historical union will be established by itself. In this case, the second aspect of the ideal of the soldier of revival, that is the revival ideal, is cultural union. The ideals of kernel country and cultural union will cause the formation of nation ideals. The basis of revival ideal is this nation ideal. When the nation is born, the revival of the Civilization of Islam which means the Truth Civilization will have been achieved.⁵⁹

The revival generation is an Islam warrior, the one fighting consistent with the requirements of this era, and in this respect, Karakoç can be called a modern man of struggle and a warrior. He warns:

We [Muslims] should try to be modern continuously with the ideal Islam. We should not contend ourselves with admiring to the past Islam life, we should consider it to be a duty to realize that life today also. We should consider it to be a necessity of Islam and being a Muslim not to reconcile being an official or actual slave of the others with ourselves and fighting for freedom until death. We should consider it not as a reason of pride belonging to our souls but as an inevitable necessity of being regarded as a Muslim which is the position we are in.⁶⁰

Revival, for Karakoç, is a continuous struggle that is immune to temporal and spatial struggles. He suggests:

The Islamic World will not revive until revival happens. We will talk about this truth continuously. We will tell this truth. We will create works for this revival with our full efforts. We will put all of our spiritual power for realization of revival in all the sides. The revival will not end up with us as it did not start with us. Revival means return of Islamic spirit to humanity again, the continuous return. The thought without that spirit, the action without that spirit starts to dry out after a short time.⁶¹

Specifically, in his work titled *The Lost Heaven (Yitik Cennet)*, he underlines the fundamentals of revival and emphasizes that the prophets engaged in this kind of ultimate struggle for the sake of divine revelation. In this book, in which he presents the quests of all prominent prophets, he underlines the significance of a territory, an Islamic Site, a kind of place in which the doctrine of revival may be realized and put into practice. This is “the homeland, the idea of the state that includes ‘a little bit ideal, a little bit dream, a little bit wish,’ but an ideal that includes an applicable conception.”⁶² In Karakoç’s ideal Islamic site, “the borders drawn for the living style of every person, the given standard creates a more or less equality of consumption by itself. Luxury is illicit. Extravagance and ostentation are forbidden.”⁶³ In this ideal site,

The earnings without work are blocked in principle with the banning of interest. Earnings are based on labor. The obligation to give alms ensures flow of the capital accumulating despite everything, from rich to poor continuously as a flow of economical value in an extent which does not contradict with the working instinct of human. This state does not interfere with the economical convention and therefore it is not a state guarding the rich and it is not as well a state like the one in a communist regime which does any action on human and material since it captures everybody's property, and in which the hands and arms of the people are tied since there is no material or spiritual power against the state.⁶⁴

In the revival thought, there is a bridge between morality and action. It is politics, for Karakoç, that constitutes this bridge between morality and action. Political party, starting from this thinking, is not solely an organization seeking for more votes, it is instead a school, "revival school" that has contribution to education of all people of revival rose up until now or rising up at the moment.⁶⁵

It is worth reminding that the doctrine of revival was first conceptualized and then disseminated by Sezai Karakoç in the early 1960s, a period in which the idea that the Civilization of Islam would revive again might presumably a "utopia" for many in the Turkish Islamist tradition. Karakoç's vision of revival, however, as an "incremental" yet unyielding, has inspired many, including the contemporary Islamists in Turkey. More importantly, Karakoç's persistent stance to disseminate this idea and "live" it with his rhetoric and actions still motivates many around him.

Conclusion

When one takes into account the fact that some prominent political figures of the JDP have been deeply influenced by Karakoç's thinking, it is easy to recognize that Karakoç, a controversial intellectual, is one who has had significant impact on the contemporary discourse of Turkish political Islamists.

To begin with, "contextualization" is an essential point in explaining the evolution of Karakoç's thinking. It is hard to understand Karakoç without taking into account the period he lived in and the geography that has shaped his worldview. When assessing a person who was born in Ergani in 1933, one needs to note that he bears all traces of the sociopolitical disasters experienced since that time. One should also take into account the poverty in war-torn Anatolia and the incessant attempt of the newly founded Republic to bind the periphery to Ankara.

Trying to understand Karakoç is also connected with understanding that period. A Sezai Karakoç conception without history and geography remains deficient. Space and time both have an important role in the making of Karakoç. His full refusal to join the ruling central bureaucracy, fluctuations in his career and his desertion from capital Ankara to Istanbul might be rooted from his being the son of the "remote periphery." In his writings, his explicit antipathy towards elitist approaches and state-centered modernization efforts, his inherently existing reaction towards anything

modern, his uprising against capitalism, his rejection of the middle way Islam and West, his full embracement of bottom-up revival doctrine that seeks to modernize all Muslims in the world through the remembering of what is forgotten and fixing what is broken are those indicators of his “untamable” and “disobedient” character.

Turning to his Islamist lineages, it is interesting to observe that while Islam is not in the front lines in Karakoç’s literary personality; Islam comes forward in his politician personality. In this respect, he reserves no room for his Islamist rhetoric in his literary personality. It is not hyperbole to suggest that Karakoç intentionally keeps his *poetika* and Islam apart as if he does not want to “contaminate” his *poetika* with his religious rhetoric. Whereas he has poems that include themes from his conservative character, he has not a single poem in which he puts Islamic themes. In this sense, the Islamist personality of Karakoç finds an opportunity to turn into practice on the stage of politics. Politics has always been a tool of telling his Islamist personality to the society for him; owing to that, he managed to keep his literary personality nonpolitical. In this sense, while it is hard to pinpoint Karakoç’s Islamic lineages in his poems, his books addressing his political ideas such as *Dirilis Mustusu*, *Islam’in Dirilisi*, *Diriliş Neslinin Amentüsü*, *Cikis Yolu*, *Insanlığın Dirilisi*, include excessive (to some extent revolutionary) Islamist rhetoric. It is, then, likely to assert that since 1960s, Karakoç has a deliberate attempt to keep his literary personality *apolitical*, while disseminating his Islamist discourse through his political identity.

He is a man of contradiction as well. His duality when addressing the material and spiritual development of Islamic world would be a good example to show the contradictions in his thinking. On the one hand, Sezai Karakoç, for instance, has written articles carrying qualifications of an answer to the Necmettin Erbakan’s developmental discourse throughout the 1980s. According to him, “The development literature has conditioned the political publishing life in materialistic vision and in the form of a word inflation” and

not the Erbakan’s development concept that seeks solely material development of Islamic world while disregarding spiritual development, but the revival concept that first endeavor to develop Islamic world spiritually coincides with the system which will revive Islamic world, will keep Muslims straight up as being them.⁶⁶

On the other hand, in his political speeches, he has always emphasized the significance of material development. And thus, he incessantly asserts in his political rhetoric that the material development of Islamic World is the prime antecedent condition that yields to the independency of Islamic world.

In Karakoç’s discourse, it is impossible to find any conception that refers to ethnicity or nationalism. Fully embracing the Islamic conception of “Ummah” in his thinking, Karakoç conceptualizes a unity of all Muslims of the world. It is this notion of *ummah* that causes his excessive sensitivity towards what is happening in the global Islamic community. This vision of global Islamic community, in this sense, would be

suggested as the primary driver of his interest towards what is happening in Africa, South Asia, Euroasia and Balkans.

The dichotomy of ends vs. means when conceptualizing democracy in Karakoç's thinking is visible. Karakoç upholds democracy and democratic values and tends to define democracy as an end in itself in the short term. He, on the other hand, is inclined to conceptualize democracy as a means for higher good. Higher good, for Karakoç, is surely a "unified and enlightened Islamic world" in the long run.

His incessant emphasis of "Golden Age" lived by the Prophet Muhammad and his associates (*Sahabe*) as the ultimate point of perfection in the course of human history posits him close to the *Salafi* thinking. His attempt of embracing some Western achievements, however, such as the concept of democracy, rule of law and material development in his revival doctrine, his abhorrence to the use of violence as means for political agenda, his preference of "words" instead of political mobilizations may be suggested as indicators that separate his thinking from other *Salafi* movements such as Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, *Jemaat-i Islamiyye* and *Hizbut Tahrir* in Pakistan, and Ayman-al Zawahiri discourse in Saudi Arabia.

His critical engagement with Western civilization and his radical tone towards anything Western, however, should not be ignored. Karakoç's initial assumption that sits at the core of his conceptualization is the existence of a rivalry between Islam and the West. His construction of Western World as the "other" or rival for Islamic civilization, his ideal-typic conceptualization of what is western as "black" and what is Islamic as "white" are the consequences of this assumption. In this sense, between these two ideal-types, there is no diffusion; putting differently, there is no tone of gray in Karakoç's canvas. This conceptualization is particularly similar to Ahmet Davutoglu's Civilizational Self-Perceptions (*Medeniyetlerin Ben Idraki*).⁶⁷ Their proposal of an ideal-typic depiction of civilizations, their omission to the possibility of interactions between civilization of Islam and Western civilization, their assumption of the existence of clear-cut and impermeable borders between these two are excessively similar points that capture one's attention. This ideal-typic mode of thinking when generating typologies yields to a determinative categorization that is mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive on the basis of uniformed categorization of principles. In scholarly terms, this is a dangerous methodological approach that could cause the manifestation of "the reality" instead of recognizing the possibility of the existence of "multiple realities" in the human life. The reality for Karakoç is surely the divine revelation, and currently, the civilization of Islam is the sole flag-carrier of the reality. The Western civilization has sought to steal, distort, disregard, or degenerate the reality, the essence or the divine revelation. Thanks to the civilization of Islam, this has not happened so far.

For the achievement of "ultimate good," Karakoç proposes to enact "the truth" and "politics" in an assemblage. For him, under the roof of Allah's oneness (*tevhid*), it is impossible to run into any reality other than revelation. Singularity is therefore the destiny and multiplicity is a mistake, or a deviation. Politics is a means to educate Muslims for the construction of awareness to enact the truth, or the revelation. It is then likely to assert that politics, for Karakoç, is an education for the revival and political party is a kind of school through which the political ideas are disseminated.

Yet, being a controversial (or for some to some extent radical) intellectual who is hard both to describe and get along with, Sezai Karakoç has surely been a source of inspiration for many in Turkish intellectual life. His political vision and rhetoric seem to perfectly match with the JDP's political discourse. That is why he would be described as an extremely valuable "ideological toolbox" for JDP's elites first to bend their discourse from Erbakan's "National View" to Karakoç's doctrine of Revival and then to promote Karakoç's doctrine of Revival both domestically and internationally for their practical political needs. In Karakoç's doctrine of Revival, for the JDP's elites, there is enough room for third worldism, independency in foreign affairs, generation of supranational *Ummah*-based identity among world Muslims, democracy and rule of law, emphasis to the Islamic geography, the "otherification" of Western civilization and most importantly the generation of civilization-based meta-rhetoric to sell their ideas to the Muslim masses for both domestic and regional political consumption. Because, as one may easily notice in Karakoç's discourse, the civilization-level explanations are exceptionally powerful and unusually simple for anyone to comprehend at his own will.

Disclosure statement

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Notes

1. Please have a look for the full text of the Erdogan's speech at the JDP's 4th Grand Congress. <http://www.JDParti.org.tr/site/haberler/basbakan-erdoganin-ak-parti-4.-olagan-buyuk-kongresi-konusmasin-in-tam-metni/31771> (accessed December 12, 2012).
2. The İkinci Yeni movement reached its peak during the 1950s and 1960s as a response to the Garip movement and the Social Realist poetry of the 1940s. Along with the leading poets of the movement—Edip Cansever, Sezai Karakoç, İlhan Berk, Cemal Süreya, Turgut Uyar and Ece Ayhan—many other established poets of the time were also carried by the tidal waves of the İkinci Yeni and began writing poems inspired by this movement.
3. Doğan, "Pioneer of Second New Discourse," 731–44.
4. Tufan, "Sadece kongrelerden tanıyanlar ve hiç bilmeyenler için Sezai Karakoç."
5. Kaplan, "Bir Tefekkür Yolculuğu Olarak İslamcılık."
6. Adlı and Tokay, "Bitmeyen Tartışma: İslam-cı-lık." Please see for the full text: <http://www.aksiyon.com.tr/aksiyon/haber-33425-bitmeyen-tartisma-isl%C3%A2m-ci-lik.html> (accessed December 14, 2012).
7. Please see for the official website of the Yüce Diriliş Partisi: <http://yucedirilis.org.tr/> (accessed December 7, 2012).
8. Akbayır, *Yoktur Gölgesi Türkiye'de*.
9. From the interview with lawyer İbrahim İmamoglu, a close associate of Sezai Karakoç, that held in November 14, 2012.
10. Please have a look at Beşir Atalay's speech at the ceremony of documentary titled "Gün Doğmadan" that is about Sezai Karakoç's life and thinking. <http://www.timeturk.com/tr/2010/01/16/acilim-in-onusu-sezai-Karakoç.html> (accessed December 27, 2012).
11. "Sezai Karakoç'a verilen ödülü Davutoğlu aldı" (Davutoğlu has got the award extended to Sezai Karakoç). *Yenisafak*, October 16, 2012. Please see <http://yenisafak.com.tr/kultur-sanat-haber/sezai-Karakoça-verilen-odulu-davutoglu-aldi-16.10.2012-416041> (accessed December 12, 2012).

12. Please see for the full text of the party program: <http://yucedirilis.org.tr/program.html> (accessed December 27, 2012).
13. Yasar, "Sezai Karakoç'un Şiir Evreninde Memleket Algısı veya "O"Ülke," 2611–33.
14. İbrahim İmamoglu interview.
15. Yusuf, "Sezai Karakoç'tan Kürt Sorununa Müdahale."
16. Karakoç, "İslam Birleştiricidir." Please see <http://www.haber5.com/siviltoplum/sezai-Karakoç-islam-birlestiricidir> (accessed June 22, 2013).
17. Karakoç, *Çıkış Yolu*, 152.
18. İbrahim İmamoglu interview.
19. Karakoç, *Gün Doğmadan*, 168.
20. Ibid.
21. Please see for the full version of the poem titled Fable: https://www.academia.edu/11670764/Sezai_Karakocs_FABLE
22. Karakoç, *İnsanlığın Dirilişi*, 122.
23. Ibid., 123.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 19.
26. Ibid., 21.
27. Ibid., 122.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 15.
30. Ibid., 32.
31. Ibid., 98.
32. Ibid., 100.
33. Ibid., 135.
34. Karakoç, *Çıkış Yolu*, 11.
35. Ibid., 11.
36. Ibid., 13.
37. Karakoç, *Günlük Yazılar II Sütun*, 185.
38. Karakoç, *Çağ ve İlham*, 335–6.
39. Karakoç, *Sütun*, 285.
40. Karakoç, *Yitik Cennet*, 9.
41. Karakoç, *Hatıralar*, 111–12.
42. Ibid., 113.
43. Karakoç, *İslamın Dirilişi*, 12.
44. Karakoç, *Çıkış Yolu*, 101.
45. Karakoç, *Diriliş Neslinin Amentüsü*, 30.
46. Ibid., 30.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 50.
49. Karakoç, *Yitik Cennet*, 50.
50. Karakoç, *Diriliş Neslinin Amentüsü*, 45.
51. Ibid., 45.
52. Karakoç, *Çıkış Yolu*, 35.
53. Karakoç, *İslam*, 11.
54. Karakoç, *Diriliş Mustusu*, 35.
55. Karakoç, *İnsanlığın Dirilişi*, 155.
56. Karakoç, *Diriliş Neslinin Amentüsü*, 8.
57. Ibid., 8–9.
58. Karakoç, *Diriliş Neslinin Amentüsü*, 9–10.
59. Ibid., 53.
60. Karakoç, *Çıkış Yolu-II*, 46.

61. Ibid., 48.
62. Karakoç, *Yitik Cennet*, 94.
63. Karakoç, *Diriliş Neslinin Amentüsü*, 42–3.
64. Please see for the official party program in the website of the Yüce Diriliş Partisi: <http://yucedirilis.org.tr/> (accessed December 7, 2012).
65. Ibid.
66. Karakoç, *Günlük Yazılar 3*, 35.
67. Davutoglu, “Medeniyetlerin Ben İdraki,” 1.

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