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Alternative modernities and epistemic struggles for recognition in Turkish media: deconstructing Eurocentrism?

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ABSTRACT

The concept of modernity and its association with the West and secularism is being challenged with the rise of religious movements in the age of globalisation. This provides a fertile ground for alternative modernities, disconnected from the West and secularism, to surface. This paper provides a theoretical explanation for the emergence of alternative modernities by drawing on insights from epistemic injustice and recognition theory, through an analysis of Turkish media outlets. Turkey serves as an illustrative case to examine the emergence of alternative modernities due to its long-standing tradition of incorporating Western modernity and its complex liminal identity between the boundaries of the East and the West. This paper argues that the period from 2005 to 2020 presented a window of opportunity for an alternative modernities paradigm to engage in epistemic struggles for recognition, supported by the ideological context of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* or AKP) government. This period paved the way for questioning the superiority and uniqueness of Western modernity. However, it also indicates the birth of a new form of epistemic injustice as counter-narratives defending the superiority of Islamic civilisation emerged, seeking to establish epistemic hegemony for Islam and its association with modernity.

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Introduction

Although the concept of modernity is commonly associated with the West and framed within a secularist conception, the supposedly organic link between secularism and modernism has been challenged by a new paradigm which acknowledges the complex relationship between politics and religion (Norris and Inglehart 2004) and revisits the Enlightenment view on secularism and the role of religion in modern life (Asad 1999). The rise of religious movements in the age of globalisation creates different combinations of modernity, referred to as alternative modernities that are decentred from the West (Keyman 2007; Wachtel 2001), and presents a tendency towards desecularisation (Berger 1999, 7). The literature exploring the resurgence of religion and its impact on different societies, including both the Western

and non-Western parts of the world (Kepel 1994; Thomas 2005), highlights a departure from the classical modernisation logic that assumes modernism brings about secularism. While this body of literature underscores a shift in the modernisation paradigm towards a world-wide search for alternative modernities (Wachtel 2001), it has not been thoroughly explored theoretically. We seek to fill this gap by integrating insights from recognition theorists (Honneth 1995, 1996, 2007; Young 1990) and scholars of epistemic injustice such as Miranda Fricker (2007) and Jose Medina (2018).

According to Fricker (2007, 1), epistemic injustice is about 'distributive unfairness in respect to epistemic goods such as information or education'. Fricker argues that epistemic injustice can take the form of testimonial injustice, which occurs when certain communities are given lower credibility as knowers and are prevented from participating in knowledge production. It can also manifest as hermeneutical injustice, which happens when these communities lack the conceptual resources to communicate their experiences intelligibly to the dominant group. Recognition theory frames such injustices as recognition problems (McConkey 2004; Young 1990), either in the form of quantitative recognition deficits, where experiences of these communities are not given sufficient visibility, or as misrecognition, where their experiences are reported with distorted narratives and are wrongly recognised (Medina 2018). The tension between classical modernists and multiple/alternative modernists serves as an illustrative example of how recognition struggles emerge towards epistemic injustices. By reacting to Western-oriented classical modernism, alternative modernities claim that modernity is a 'cultural programme' rather than an institutional reality and different forms of modernities exist (Eisenstadt 2000). Related to this, Western/Eurocentric epistemology is blamed for giving low credibility to non-Western epistemology and for ignoring the contribution of non-Western civilisations to the evolution of international norms, including modernity. It constructs Western origins of modernity and perpetuates the concept of a 'barbaric other' (Clemens 2020; Grosfoguel 2013). Therefore, the emergence of alternative modernities can be seen as part of a global trend in which communities from the Global South challenge Eurocentric knowledge production patterns and struggle to decolonise knowledge systems.

In order to discuss how epistemic injustices around the issue of modernity are formed, how quantitative recognition deficits and misrecognition affect the issue of modernity, as well as how the agents of those modernities engage in an epistemic struggle for recognition, we examine the emergence of alternative modernities in the Turkish media. We believe that the Turkish media is illustrative because Turkey is marked by multiple identities, with the most profound one being both Western and Eastern, often finding itself in a liminal position between the two (Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2017). The former is associated with a secular identity and perception of modernity, while the latter is associated with Islamic tradition, resulting in a high probability of both modernities being represented in various forms within Turkish media (most likely case).

In the post-independence era, Turkish modernisation was led by Kemalist secular elites who considered the West as a reference point for modernity and a pathway towards reaching the standards of contemporary civilisations. Yet, after the Kemalist one-party rule until 1950, Turkey embraced alternative modernities, especially after the election of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* AKP). As the longest-ruling party in the history of Turkey, the AKP has had the opportunity to shape the national identity and vision of modernity of the country (Koyuncu 2014). Coming to power in 2002 with a landslide majority,

the AKP has roots in the Islamic-Nationalist View. Yet, it openly distinguished itself from the ideological line of its predecessors who had an antagonistic view towards the West and secularism, and defined itself as a 'conservative democratic party'. On the one hand, the AKP promised to work towards European Union (EU) membership and acted as a liberalising actor, especially between 2002 and 2005 by introducing reform packages in critical policy areas such as freedom of expression and association (Zihnioğlu 2020, 90-92). On the other hand, the AKP provided a significant legitimacy not only for its own government but also for the alternative modernities that its supporting political ideology fostered. However, in its second term, its commitment to EU membership was questioned due to retrenchment from EU-orientation (Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm 2019) along with the gradual rise of competitive authoritarianism in Turkey (Esen and Gumuscu 2016).

Acknowledging that the relationship between secularisation and modernisation is a contradictory and complex one, and building on our earlier frame analysis during the Syrian refugee crises (Gençkal Eroler and Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm 2021), we seek to shed light on epistemic struggles for recognition in the Turkish media concerning the role of the West/EU/Europe as a civilizational focal point (Eurocentrism) across six-month intervals of the Turkish media in three periods reflecting the different cycles of the EU-Turkey relations. These are (i) before the start of Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU in October 2005, the most likely case because the credibility of the EU membership was the highest, (ii) the peak of the Syrian refugee crisis between September 2015 and July 2016, the least likely case as the nationalist discourse of the government kicked off strongly, and (iii) the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic era from March to August 2020, a neutral era because both the EU and Turkey focussed on their own health security considerations. Our findings indicate that the narrative proclaiming the West as a unique civilisation gradually became distorted in the Turkish media between 2005 and 2020. This distortion coincided with the increasing visibility of an epistemic struggle against the dominance of Western-style modernisation in Turkey. The resurgence of a counter-narrative that associates Islam with modernity not only threatens the recognition of the Western type of modernity but also tends to create a new form of epistemic injustice or epistemic hegemony based on Islam.

Theoretical framework: epistemic injustice and recognition theory

Fricker (2007, 1) defines two types of epistemic injustices to explain how domination and marginalisation practices occur. The first, testimonial injustice occurs when a hearer gives low credibility to a group due to prejudice against this group, thereby assigning it low credibility as a knower and treating its knowledge as second class (Boni and Velasco 2020). This concept aligns with Bourdieu's term of 'social capital' which contributes to the dominant class' monopoly of different kinds of resources to preserve its position of dominance over subordinate classes. As such, the culture of the dominant classes is taught in schools as the universal culture, granting advantages to the children of the dominant class while perpetuating their social power and privileges (Bourdieu 1973).

By referring to the domination of the West's social capital over the subordinated 'non-Western' part of the world, testimonial injustices not only limit the participation of subordinate classes in the knowledge production process but also leads to hermeneutical injustice. This second type of epistemic injustice, according to Fricker's (2007) deprives these groups of the ability to ascribe meaning to their experiences and communicate them

intelligibly to others. According to Fricker, non-Western scientists' and peoples' exclusion from and limited participation in knowledge production hinder their ability to give meaning to their experiences and articulate them to others, as their experiences often fall into a conceptual blank gap. They are compelled to conceptualise their experiences using Western concepts that may not fully capture their realities.

Recognition theorists conceptualise epistemic injustices as problems of recognition and oppression, such as cultural imperialism, as they lead to misrepresentation of marginalised groups and misunderstanding of those groups' social identities while dominant groups' social product is regarded as valuable and universally acceptable (McConkey 2004; Young 1990). Likewise, Jose Medina (2018) argues that both testimonial and hermeneutical injustices are social pathologies of recognition as groups and subjects negatively impacted by their deficient recognition order will have the intelligibility and/or credibility of their contributions to epistemic life compromised. This leads marginalised groups to engage in an epistemic struggle for recognition (Cin et al. 2022; Congdon 2017; Giladi 2018). Social struggles are epistemic struggles if they are questioning our worldview and 'aiming to break down the hierarchies and exclusions related to the dominant representation of the real (Icaza and Vazquez 2013, 685). Yet, Jackson (2018) argues that overcoming epistemic injustice depends on an intersubjective process of mutual recognition, which is also a condition for self-realisation: 'one can count as the bearer of rights of some kind only if one is socially recognized as a member of community' (Honneth 1995, 109). Medina (2018) further notes that conceptualising epistemic injustices is the first step to developing proper diagnostics and corrective treatment for them and generating 'epistemic freedom' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021).

Medina (2018) differentiates between two types of recognition deficiencies. First is the 'quantitative recognition deficit', dealing with the degree to which one is recognised, such as being given scarce opportunities to speak or fewer opportunities than others under the same conditions to express their voices. The second type of recognition deficit, which Medina calls 'misrecognition', concerns how one is recognised or whether the manner of recognition is appropriate or not. Misrecognition results in credibility and intelligibility dysfunctions, that is, in testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. In other words, struggle for recognition can manifest in many forms, such as the struggle for more opportunities to be recognised or for increasing the amount of recognition one deserves, but also changing the terms of recognition and opening up new ways of making sense and appearing in the social world. Recognition deficiency can apply to the subject matter of the epistemic exchange (the topic of modernities) or the agent of communication (participant or group's perception of modernities) (Medina 2018, 4).

While quantitative recognition deficits can be corrected by providing more recognition, creating additional narratives and opportunities for marginalised voices, misrecognition requires a different approach. Misrecognition can arise from the selective use of distorted narratives that obscure the communicative agency of oppressed groups. Medina (2018) illustrates this with the example of protests against racial violence. When people of colour protesting against a repressive political system are reported with the narratives such as 'angry protestors' rather than 'rioters' in news coverage, it stigmatises them and undermines their political communicative agency. In cases of misrecognition, the corrective practice cannot simply involve more quantitative recognition such as increased news coverages. Instead, it necessitates a two-step process of changing the dynamics of recognition: 'undoing narrative retake' and 'enacting an alternative narrative retake'. The former necessitates

the unveiling and discrediting of the narrative framework or perspective that facilitates misrecognition. The latter involves the construction of alternative frameworks or perspectives that enable the rightful acknowledgement of the communicative agency possessed by the group in question (Gooding-Williams 2006; Medina 2018, 11). In the next two main sections, we apply this framework to explain the emergence of alternative modernities in the Turkish media.

Turkish modernisation: a cycle from epistemic injustices to epistemic struggles

Despite its claims to break away from it, the new Republic of Turkey, declared on the 29th of October 1923, carries important legacies from the Ottoman Empire in terms of administrative structure, political culture, as well as understanding of modernisation (Çagaptay 2006). The post-nineteenth century modernisation of the Ottoman Empire lagged behind the developments of its age and lacked a social basis. Rather, it was presented as a strategy to catch up with the advanced Western civilisations in order to save the empire from disintegration (Mardin 1962). This pragmatic understanding of modernity in the early Republican era led Kemalist elites to develop a utilitarian and unsettling attitude towards the West as they associated West and Westernisation with economic development. Yet, this pragmatism was not only a policy of the founding period. The modernisation approach of the right-wing thought, which advocated for selectively adopting Western material aspects while preserving the spiritual, has guided Turkey's political history. Gellner (1994, 117) expresses the pragmatic view of Kemalism on Westernisation as follows:

The West is secular and democratic. The West is strong. We must be strong, too. So, we must be secular and democratic too. That is, we must be democratic to be strong.

Therefore, Kemalist elites adopted a classical perspective of modernity which privileges Western cultural and moral dispositions and historical experiences and views non-Western cultures and traditions as incompatible with modernisation (Mirsepassi 2003, 1-2). To transform the Islam-oriented political culture of the Ottoman Empire into Western secularism and scientific rationality and to raise Turkey to the 'level of contemporary civilizations', they adopted a top-down imposition of a reform process (Kazancıgil and Özbudun 1981). Secularism has been considered by Kemalist elites as the most important ideological component of the nation-state and an indispensable tool to transform the Islamic, 'pre-modern' way of life into a Western one and create a modern Turkey (Köker 2012; Mardin 1962). Therefore, the secularisation reforms they initiated (1924-1929) were designed to exclude Islam, which has historically united the Anatolian Muslim Turks, from the public sphere. This instrumentalisation of secularism aimed to control religion. However, despite the Kemalist perception of modernisation rejecting the Ottoman cultural heritage based on Islam and idealising Western civilisation, the official historiography sees Turkey's modernity as superior to the West, emphasising the development of national self-confidence. This paradox is defined by Kadioğlu (1996, 188) as the 'cosmetic character' of the secularist ideology of Turkish modernisation, which elucidates the underlying reason why this ideology could not replace Islam in the lives of the people.

This Western-centric understanding of modernity that is associated with secularism is a form of testimonial injustice as it marginalises traditional conservative voices, denies their

participation in the understanding of modernity by constructing them as 'unmodern'. It also creates hermeneutical injustice as within the conservative/traditional group, different lifestyles cannot be communicated intelligibly, due to the association of modernity with secularism and Westernisation. The first signs of the epistemic struggle of alternative modernities based on Islam dates back to the Kemalist one-party rule under the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* CHP). Turkish modernisation, since the transition to the multi-party regime in 1950, has challenged Kemalist secular modernisation and struggled for recognition of the Islamic past and tradition. The goal of conservative nationalist intelligentsia, who feel excluded from the modernisation project of the Republic and think that they cannot benefit from the political and social power determined by this framework, has been the rebuilding of 'national culture' (Taşkın 2021). Contrary to the official ideology, this intelligentsia combined Turkishness and Islam in the definition of nation and induced the emergence of Turkish-Islamic Synthesis in the 1980s, which developed as a reaction to the West and ideologised Islam. Therefore, the new forms of nationalism put Muslim identity and culture before the ethnicity. The rise of Islamic networks not only challenged the Kemalist national identity but also started 'the cultural renaissance of Muslims'- as a result of the enrichment of religious Muslims both politically and economically (White 2014, 15-23).

The rise of the Islam-oriented Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* RP) in the 1980s can be seen as a direct challenge to established politics in Turkey (Yavuz 1997). In line with Hosten's (1999, 86) argument that Islamists' challenge to the Republic contributed to the general emancipation of civil society from a Jacobin mentality, the critics of Islam or conservative parties towards Kemalism since 1980 in Turkey have held a somehow liberating outlook. Relatedly, the concept of 'post-Kemalism' was introduced in the 1980s by prominent Turkish social scientists who believed that liberating Turkish society and politics from oppressive military domination required a holistic examination of recent history (1990s and 2000s). This argument gained popularity afterwards and garnered support from liberal, Islamist-conservative, and some leftist segments as well (Aytürk 2022, 24-27). AKP came to be the most important winner in this process and started its long incumbency in 2002, identifying itself as a 'conservative democrat party'. Despite its roots in the Islamist RP, AKP acted as a liberating actor by initiating extensive political reforms during its first term in office (2002-2007), adopting the serious initiative of 'democratic opening' to begin accession talks with the EU (Ulusoy 2011). This paved the way for religious conservative segments to engage in epistemic struggles for recognition of their alternative modernities paradigm, which involved voicing and mobilising for the lifting of the headscarf ban in education. AKP adopted rhetoric of 'a modernity that does not exclude tradition, a universality that accepts locality, a rationality that does not reject meaning, a change that is not fundamentalist' (Erdoğan 2004).

In the first years of its rule, AKP presented a moderate criticism of Western-oriented classical modernisation and advocated for an alternative modernity that incorporated Islam. The increasing references to 'our ancient values' and 'New Turkey' in the discourse of AKP, along with a strong emphasis on Sunni-Islamic practices in education (Gençkal Eroler 2019), can be regarded as an example of epistemic struggle for recognition. As its political ideology advocated a different version of secularism that it claimed to be more inclusive, AKP provided legitimacy for compensating the quantitative recognition deficits affecting the subject matter of alternative modernities. It positioned itself as a moderate Islamist party within the context of the post-September 11 global political agenda (Ulusoy 2011, 413).

The second term of the AKP, which started in 2007, was coupled with de-Europeanisation (Aydın-Düzgüt and Kaliber 2016) and an authoritarian shift characterised by the consolidation of power and the adoption of a majoritarian democracy approach, in contrast to its previously self-defined conservative democrat identity (Saatçioğlu 2016). As Dağı (2006, 100–103) argued, the EU accession process was instrumentalised to secure legitimacy against opponents, particularly the Kemalist/secularist centre, including the military and judiciary. Thus, after 2007, Kemalist symbols of authority were displaced and there was an intentional erosion of the rule of law to bring about a regime change. The government and its supporters refer to this process as the ‘New Turkey’, while others who prefer a more neutral approach term it as ‘Post-Kemalist Turkey’ (Dağı 2008). In pursuit of epistemic recognition and the construction of a pious Muslim Turkishness (White 2014), AKP openly opposed alternative lifestyles that were deemed incompatible with the conservative worldview and curtailed freedom of expression. At the same time, it supported the universal principles of human rights regarding the headscarf ban, often invoking concepts such as ‘the majoritarian conception of democracy’ or ‘electoral authoritarianism’, especially after 2007 (Kaya 2011).

Taşkın (2022, 418) argued that the intellectual knowledge of the post-Kemalist paradigm has lost credibility as the AKP drifted away from the discourse of ‘plural modernities’ towards essentialist civilisationism and religious nationalism. Therefore, as Germond-Duret (2016) indicated, the modernity/tradition dichotomy appears irrelevant, as neither the idealisation of modernity nor the idealisation of tradition accurately reflects reality. It is also notable that ‘identifying themselves as ‘traditional’ (and the utilisation of traditional practices, attire, language, etc) is sometimes a strategy employed by indigenous peoples to obtain rights and secure funding (Germond-Duret 2016, 10). Despite the efforts to repudiate Kemalism, due to its oppressive attitude towards the traditional, the power of post-Kemalism seems to have been at times at least as oppressive as Kemalism, which supports Göle’s (1991, 39) thesis that the rule of the oppressed can be just as oppressive.

Alternative modernities and struggles for recognition: analysis of the Turkish media

In order to understand the recognition of alternative modernities in the Turkish public space, we rely on an analysis of the Turkish media. This is because the media is a representative of the public opinion, a transmitter of information and a researcher that provides new information to the government and the public. It has a strategic value due to its potential to disseminate voices that may be considered marginalised and create public awareness (Motion and Weaver 2005). Hence, media not only shapes public opinion but also reflects a process in which participants shape their discourses to be reflected in the media. However, Motion and Weaver underline that ‘media coverage may also serve to legitimate the particular knowledge or views being promoted by advocacy and non-profit organisations’ (2005, 246). While the ability of these organisations to gain media coverage can be restrained by the lack of resources, supporting governmental ideology can compensate for such shortcomings, i.e. through restrictive measures against media. This is the case in Turkey, where press freedom changed gradually during the AKP rule, with considerable improvement in the 2002–2006 period, followed by a deterioration from 2007–2010 and a very dramatic decline from 2011–2015 (Yılmaz 2016). The shift towards competitive authoritarianism and ‘captured media’ after 2011 was facilitated by the emergence of the state as the largest

advertisement financier (Yanatma 2021). According to Yeşil (2022, 138), the deterioration in the Turkish media system, which had been beset by clientalism, conglomeration, and politicisation, started in the 1980s but was exacerbated during the AKP regime by the reshuffling of media ownership structures, imprisonment of an unusually high number of journalists, exploitation of broadcasts, the Internet, and press laws to silence oppositional voices, partisan appointments in state-run media outlets, and the imposition of stricter regulations on the internet. Additionally, the AKP provided supportive ideology for alternative modernities to flourish and engage in epistemic struggles for recognition.

Given that the fundamental premises underlying the conceptualisation of modernisation in Turkey are rooted in a Western/Europe-oriented classical modernisation paradigm, our analysis of the news media traces how modernity is associated with the West and Europe to investigate the emergence of alternative modernities. Our analysis is based on the discourse analysis of the newspapers extracted from the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) digital newspaper archive.¹ Coding is conducted to determine the news in which the concepts of 'civilised' and 'contemporary' are combined with 'Europe' and 'West'. This coding aims to show how Europe is associated with civilisation through the examination of the concepts of civil-West, civil-Europe, contemporary-Western, and contemporary-Europe and how the combination of these concepts came together. Importantly, instead of selecting certain newspapers reflecting different ideological camps, we followed an inductive approach to trace these keywords in all newspapers to capture all interpretations of modernity and reactions to an association of modernity to Europe/West. Our analysis is conducted in six months intervals of three periods: before the start of accession negotiations (May-October 2005), the peak period of the Syrian refugee crisis (September 2015- February 2016), and the closure period of Covid-19 (March - August 2020). These periods subsequently treated as most-likely, least-likely and neutral cases, respectively, for the association of modernity to Europe/West. A list of newspapers is provided in [Table 1](#).

2005 Period: start of accession negotiation

Our first period is six months before the start of Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU on 3 October 2005, when both the motivation of the AKP government towards the EU membership and the credibility of the EU membership perspective of Turkey was highest throughout the history of the EU-Turkey relations. In this positive atmosphere, we expected the EU's civilisational role to be unquestionable. Yet, our findings prove quite the opposite. Our basic quantitative assessment of the news coverage revealed more dominantly negative narratives on the EU's role as a civilising/modernising actor. During this period, we obtained a total of 89 news stories. From this number, we subtracted repetitive news and others, which do not include any judgement, leaving us with a total of 72 news articles to analyse. Within this total population, the number of news stories with negative judgement on Europe and the EU is 30 (42%). There are also 18 news stories (25%) that we coded as neutral which incorporate East-West distinction but no affirmation or negation. Finally, we came across 24 new stories (33%) that saw Europe and the EU as the reference point for civilisation.

The news stories that had a negative value judgement on the civilising role of the West (both the US and the EU/Europe) referred to it as 'imperialist', 'supporter of terrorism', 'colonialist' and 'exploiting Muslim countries'. The surfacing of such negative narratives during

Table 1. Results of media analysis (compiled by authors).

	Name of the Newspaper
April- September 2005	Tercüman
	Yeniçağ
	Zaman
	Hürriyet
	Türkiye
	Akşam
	Sabah
	Milliyet
	Cumhuriyet
	Star
	Radikal
	Yenişafak
	Milli Gazete
	Anayurt
	Vakit
	Ortadoğu
	Vatan
Birgün	
September 2015- February 2016	Yeni Akit
	Yurt Gazetesi
	Türkiye'de Yeni Çağ
	Milliyet
	Star
	Posta
	Hürriyet
	Aydınlık
	Diriliş Postası
	Milli Gazete
	Yeni Söz
	Takvim
	Yeni Şafak
	Son Söz
	Türkiye
	Sözcü
	Birgün
Yeni Mesaj	
Vahdet	
Sabah	
Bugün	
March- August 2020	Yeni Akit
	Diriliş Postası
	Aydınlık
	Sözcü

this period is highly surprising. In order to correct the misrecognition of Islam as a civilisation and eliminate distortions on modernity as a Western concept, the news stories were undoing the narrative retakes of 'West as a reference point of modernity' and 'Islam is conflicting with modernity' and introducing a counter-narrative that associates Islam with civilisation as is visible in the following news story:

While Western civilization oppresses people in the countries it occupies and brings blood, cruelty, and anarchy to them, Islamic civilization brought peace and tranquility wherever it went (Erbakan 2005).

Part of this counter-narrative constructs a Western-centric understanding of civilisation as an invention to exploit the world (3 news), harshly reacted to the framing of 'Turkey's integration with the EU as a test case for its civilisation and modernity' (Ünal 2005). Importantly, this

narrative also reacted to the AKP for facilitating West's realisation of its ambitions on Turkey, claiming that it is accepting the defeat and surrender in the face of Western civilisation (4 news), failing to implement a 'national foreign policy' but accepting the EU as a 'project of civilisation' and thus implementing a submissive satellite foreign policy (Demircan 2005). These are clear signs of evidence that non-Eurocentric understanding of modernity (or alternative modernities) engaging in epistemic struggles for recognition even at a time that we expected the EU/West would be the most credible reference point for modernity.

The news stories that we coded on the neutral axis (18 news) are further enlightening as they differentiate between Eastern and Western civilisation, identify the Western civilisation with Europe and Eastern with Islam albeit without any value judgements about them. 'Alliance of Civilisations' appeared as the most prominent theme (6 news), which claimed Turkey to be part of Islamic/Eastern civilisation and presented it as a model to the Muslim world as a moderate country at peace with the world (Aytaç and Uslu 2005) in line with the 'conservative democrat' discourse, that the AKP later abandoned. These news articles underline the contribution of Turks to the formation of European civilisations and stress that Turkish culture is not incompatible with Western civilisations. Yet, they made extensive references to Turkey's historical roots, Ottoman legacy, and Islam, all of which position them as supporters of Turkey's belonging to Islamic civilisation and struggle for epistemic recognition. Two of the news items in this category are about the search for alternative modernisation. It is striking that both reports belong to İbrahim Kalın (2005), who has been an advisor to President Erdoğan for many years. In his writings, Kalın argues that Turkey has been in a state of self-alienation for the last century – that is, since its foundation – due to the idea of the self being at odds with itself. Kalın evaluates 'Turkey's underdevelopment syndrome' by comparing itself with Western civilisation as distorted modernisation:

The state, acting with the syndrome of historical tardiness, tried to build a Western cultural identity unique to Turkey, instead of traditional culture, which it saw as an obstacle to progress.

Turkey's unique perception of modernity alienates it from the Middle East and the Islamic world, and indirectly from itself... The people of Turkey still feel closer to an Afghan, Egyptian, or Iranian rather than a German or Italian... We have to draw a new cultural map for ourselves.

Most importantly, even among the news stories that include positive judgement about the EU's role as a civilisational focal point (24 articles), there was discontent about the EU's double standards against Turkey. While 3 of them had a pragmatic approach treating the EU membership as a guarantee for security and development, 21 associated the EU with modernity, Turkey's recognition as a 'first-class country' and part of Western civilisation. As an example of this view, Ülsever (2005) indicated that 'Turkey had based its modernisation struggle on the Western model, and the equation of modernity with Western civilisation has settled in Turkey'. Yet, out of these 21 news stories, 6 of them incorporated nationalist reactions to issues such as the EU's recognition of Cyprus, its ignorance of serious reforms that Turkey had undertaken, and the position on the Armenian question. While they framed the Western civilisation as superior and a target, they also contributed consistently to undoing a narrative retake with statements such as the Western civilisation must be achieved 'for better or for worse', underlined the EU's eagerness to remain as a 'Christian club' (Hekimoğlu 2005), and acknowledged that the EU is acting in line with cultural prejudices rather than

universal and contemporary values. Moreover, 5 of the news stories in this category recognised the rise of alternative modernities. They underlined that the very election of the AKP means that Turkish people opted for the 'dark' and 'backward' path rather than the 'bright' and 'modern' West (Coşkun 2005). This dichotomy between 'developed West' and 'backward East' reflects the idea of classical modernisation. These news stories interpreted 'questioning of secularism triggered by the AKP as a clear sign of backlash' (Cumhuriyet 2005) and underlined that, due to the AKP government, 'there are Arab breezes instead of contemporary Western civilisation'. They demonstrated discontent that, even within the EU circles, Turkey's membership issue is debated as an admission of a Muslim country rather than a secular one. All of these are reflections of the nationalist-secular reactions that emerged in Turkey with the AKP coming into power, while also pointing towards the AKP's potential for facilitating the recognition of alternative modernities.

2015: Syrian refugee crisis

Our second period is the peak of the Syrian crisis between September 2015 and February 2016 when the efforts of the Syrian refugees to reach Europe *via* Turkey intensified; thus, implementing the Readmission Agreement, which came into force in 2014 and committed Turkey to accepting asylum seekers from the EU back to its borders, became essential. Academic studies underline this period as the weakening of the EU conditionality on Turkey due to its security concerns (Müftüler-Baç 2015), making the EU the least likely case to be perceived as a civilisational focal point in the Turkish media. Also, AKP consolidated its power, redesigned and dominated media, created a pro-government media bloc, and disciplined mainstream media through intimidation (Esen and Gumuscu 2016). During this period, we come across 182 news articles, which were reduced to 172 after repetitive ones are removed. Among the 172 pieces of news in total, 98 include value judgments on Europe and civilisation. Among these 77 are positive and 21 are negative. In line with our expectations, we came across 77 news stories (79%) in this period that are anti-EU and anti-Western and resist attributing a civilisational role to EU/Europe and the West while 21 (21%) news articles adopt a pro-EU and pro-Western discourse treating the EU and the West as a civilisational reference point for Turkey. Compared to the previous period, the recognition of the EU as a civilising agent diminished from 33% to 21%. Hence, quantitative recognition deficits affecting the issue of alternative modernities declined with more news coverage on the subject matter. The influx of Syrian asylum seekers to the EU's borders after the September 2015 migrant crisis led to the widespread recognition of the EU/Europe as not an actual but a 'so-called civilisation' (Takvim#1, 2015). A series of counter-narratives served to correct the misrecognition of modernity as exclusively Western.

Among the news stories that were coded on the negative axis, there were two counter-narratives: (i) Islamophobia and the hypocrisy of the West; (ii) the impoverishment of Western civilisation and the rise of Islamic civilisation. For the former, the Charlie Hedbo magazine incident, where 12 people including 9 journalists were killed, had massive coverage, underlining that the magazine insulted Islamic values and blamed the West for being 'disrespectful to beliefs' while reactions to the incident were labelled as 'pro-Western double standards' and differential treatment when a Westerner and a Muslim is killed. It created a strong discourse in the form of 'we Muslims' and 'others' and criticisms towards the Western

media for silencing the killings and arson against Muslims in Europe, narrating on Muslims as terrorists and lacking sensitivity when a Muslim is murdered. As such, they sought to create an alternative narrative retake treating the West as 'barbaric', 'brutal', 'cruel', and 'self-centric'. Similar to all binary oppositions that oversimplify the world, the existence of a binary dichotomy between the West and Islam in the news not only constructs Islam and the West as monolithic and homogenous units but also indicates a clear demarcation of Turkey from the West.

The news stories that focus on the Syrian refugee crisis primarily present a negative portrayal of the EU/Europe's role as a civilisational agent (32 news stories). In these articles, the EU countries' closing their borders to immigrants is presented as evidence of the West's 'so-called' values, rather than actual values such as democracy and human rights. By constructing Western civilisation as incompatible with Turkey's values, the media encouraged Turkey to return to its claimed 'core' which is presented as local and democratic. Therefore, the news stories sought to undo the narrative of the EU as civilised entity and instead construct a counternarrative that the EU is 'not civilised'; and that human values such as democracy and human rights are not limited to EU territories. For instance, *Yeni Söz* newspaper interpreted Hungary's closure of railways as European intolerance towards migrants' use of transportation and referred to it as 'contemporary civilisation fascism' (*Yeni Söz* 2015). When the widely covered story of 2-year-old baby Aylan, who lost his life when boats sank off the Aegean coast, emerged, *Yeni Akit* reported that the image of the West in the world is a 'mask of human rights and civilisation' while it is 'dirty and wild' (*Akit* 2015).

While the Western civilisation is criticised through these narrative retakes, comparisons between Turkey and Europe are frequently covered in the news. Turkey is presented as deserving a 'Medal of Honour' for taking humanitarian measures and teaching the world 'a great lesson in humanity' (*Takvim*#22 2015). Kurt (2015) provides a clear example of an epistemic struggle by trying to challenge the perception that the West is the centre of civilisation:

Turkish Nation, what a great and noble nation you are. With a population of 78 million, you have sheltered and provided for 2 million refugees for years. Civilized Europe, how stingy and lacking in humanity you appear. With a population of 780 million, you were unable to accept 200 thousand refugees into your countries. Where is your civilization? Where is your humanity?

Likewise, *Yahya Erkılıçoğlu* (2016) wrote in his column in *Türkiye* newspaper that while Turkey embraces 2.5 million Syrians, 'modern' Europe does not exhibit the same level of sensitivity. *Erkılıçoğlu* claimed that Germany even offered Syrian immigrants the option to change their religion in order to obtain a residence permit. These examples illustrate a reaction to the perceived 'superiority' of Western-centric modernity and civilisation, while considering Turkey as part of the Eastern/Islamic civilisation. Among these, 10 news stories underlined the impoverishment of Western civilisation and the rise of Islamic civilisation. Anti-Western media frequently uses the terms 'us' and 'Muslims', 'our common denominator is Islam', 'we Muslims', 'we as representatives of Islamic civilisation', which indicate a primary representation of the 'Muslim' identity during this period that had been rendered inferior during the Kemalist modernisation era, and thus misrecognised. These discourses can be interpreted as struggles to subvert the epistemic hegemony of the West, and correct the incomplete and misrecognition of Eastern civilisation. Additionally, 11 news stories criticised Kemalist ideology (11 news) for being 'addicted to the West' and its authoritarian approach in targeting Western civilisation. They

argued that the Kemalist ideology contradicted 'national and/or religious values' of the society, marginalised Islam and led to the decline of Islamic civilisation (Anapalı 2016). Hence, anti-EU/Western media frame the Kemalist period as epistemic oppression and testimonial injustice. This is in line with the discourse of the AKP elites, who criticise the Kemalist 'tutelage' and call for Turkey to return to its core through a new narrative retake that presents an alternative modernity paradigm as 'local, national, and democratic'.

While there were also news stories that referred to the West as a civilisational focal point, they declined from 33% to 21% in this period, which suggests that the Western modernity paradigm is facing quantitative recognition deficits. Yet, given the fact that this period is treated as the least likely case for recognition of the EU's role as a civilising agent, 21% positive news stories can be interpreted as positive EU perception that is unlikely to disappear in the court of public opinion in years to come. In the anti-Western media, Europe's approach to the refugee crisis was utilised by agents of alternative modernities, predominantly religious (Islamic) conservative parties, as a window of opportunity to attain epistemic recognition. However, pro-EU/Western media did not report on the refugee crisis in relation to the EU that we could interpret as a resistance towards the recognition of Islamic modernity. In the news stories of pro-EU/Western media, the EU/West is portrayed as the embodiment of contemporary civilisation, democracy, and rights and freedoms, 'for better or for worse' (Özdil 2015). They expressed concern that Turkey's 'break away from the West' and turn to Islamic countries (11 news) and blamed the AKP for deliberately turning Turkey's face away from 'modern values of Europe' and democracy to become an anti-democratic Islamic country and a part of 'Middle East swamp'. They expressed concern that Turkey is pushed deliberately to miss the 'civilisational train'. Civaoglu (2015) framed this as the 'erosion of mentality' that constructed a European identity and modernity.

In summary, the anti-Western media claims that the AKP's alternative understanding of modernisation aims to liberate the society by returning it to its 'essence', while the pro-Western media claims that the AKP government encourages deterioration in society by idealising Islam and refusing the Kemalist understanding of secular modernisation.

2020: Covid-19 pandemic

The third period that we analysed is the Covid-19 pandemic area which is considered to be a 'neutral' era that we do not expect a specific positive and negative association of the concept of modernity/civilisation to the West/EU/Europe as the virus spreading to the whole world and reaching the size of pandemic reveals the importance of global citizenship and solidarity. For that reason, we chose the period that the pandemic was most intense, the six months after March 2020 when the lockdown policies were implemented and we assume this period to be the one that a global security concern was highest. To the contrary, our findings illustrate that association of Europe with civilisation is lowest compared to the previous two periods and Europe is strongly coded as 'uncivilised'. We come across 19 news stories, those of 18 were negative news stories and only one story associated Europe with modernity. Two news reports were excluded from the analysis as they do not include value judgements about Europe.

The number of articles that link Europe and modernity/civilisation debate is concentrated in two newspapers, *Yeni Akit* and *Diriliş Postası*, both empowered by the ideological political atmosphere permitted by the AKP. Their news stories primarily focussed on Europe's failure to effectively handle the pandemic, highlighting the superiority of the Islamic civilisation

over the Western civilisation, whilst emphasising Turkey's superiority over Europe. While criticising Europe, some reports exalt Islamic civilisation, framing it as 'Covid-19 revealed the supremacy of Islam over the West'. Conversely, others applaud Turkey as being 'more successful in managing Covid-19 crisis than Europe'. The first seems to point towards alternative modernisation and the second to the nationalist, discourse, which is more in line with the AKP government's discourse. The praise of Islamic civilisation is also parallel to the discourse of the government, so nationalism and Islamism seem to be intertwined. In both cases, the authors seem to praise the government.

These news stories underlined the narrative of the 'so-called civilisation' to refer to the EU. AKP member Metin Gündoğdu stated that:

Our civilization is a civilization of mercy. We are in the first place among the countries that provide support and aid to the oppressed. There have been century wars in Europe in the past. In these wars, people cut each other down. Despite this, perceptions have been created lately that Europe is too civilized, too advanced. But in terms of civilization and compassion, Europe was never ahead. We act in the light of 'who sleeps while his neighbor is hungry is not one of us' (Gültekin 2020).

Faruk Arslan (2020) in the *Yeni Akit* newspaper reported that, the coronavirus pandemic has exposed Europe as not being civilised but wild. The report highlights how Western countries, which claim to be champions of human rights, have forsaken thousands of people who lacked financial means and allowed them to perish. Arslan further claimed that the West is now oppressing African people as guinea pigs for virus drugs. Also, in *Diriliş Postası*, it was reported that:

The so-called developed countries of Europe failed to provide health services to their citizens whilst Turkey extended a helping hand to its citizens abroad. The so-called civilized West prove to be incapable of serving its citizens during the Corona crisis, envied Turkey's success in crisis management (*Diriliş Postası*#2 2020).

The narrative of the 'fall of European civilisation' is seen frequently through the argument of 'West's abandonment of the elderly population to die' (*Diriliş Postası*#1 2020). For instance, in *Yeni Akit* newspaper, Rahim Er (2020) highlights a stark contrast: 'While the elderly were abandoned to their fate in the ostensibly civilised Europe, we, on the other hand, continued to hold our elders dear, treating them with love and respect.'

There is also an independent frame recounted by Halim Gençoğlu (2020), who reported on Nathri Efendi in *Aydınlık* newspaper, underlining that 'the notion of racism, of course, does not belong only to the African continent. When we look at the roots of systematic massacres and racism in Africa, we can find traces of that 'civilised' Europe in all of them'. This argument is consistent with the literature on epistemic injustice and decolonising knowledge from Eurocentrism.

In the news stories that exalt the supremacy of Islam over the West, references are made to Islamic practices such as ablution, using them as an illustration that Islamic civilisation is 1,5 centuries ahead of the West, which claims to be civilised (Özpelitoğlu 2020). Therefore, these news stories attempt to undo the narrative retake that the West and Europe are civilised and instead erect a counternarrative that Islamic civilisation is the true civilisation. Considering such news stories, it can be argued that the epistemic struggles surrounding alternative modernisation, which also had traces in the previous period, aimed to establish hegemony rather than correcting incomplete or wrong recognition.

Conclusion

The complex relationship between religion and modernity contains two opposite tendencies: the first is the decline of religion in the process of modernisation, and the second is the resurgence of religion, giving rise to anti-secularisation movements as forms of epistemic struggles for recognition. In the case of Turkey, the founding Kemalist ideology relegated the local, which is associated with Islamic tradition, 'as an enclave of backwardness left out of progress' (Dirlik 2005, 464), while the local has become the site of the emergence of alternative modernities which has come to the political centre during the AKP era. Media analysis of three periods in the 2000s that cover the differentiation of Turkish public's and political elites' perception concerning the role of the West/EU/Europe as a focal point of civilisation, reveals a profound struggle for the recognition of alternative modernities, most notably Islamic modernity.

Even in 2005, when Turkey was preparing to start accession negotiations with the EU, a significant degree of anti-European/Westernist views emerged about modernity. This indicates the rise of an alternative modernity based on Islam, which had been suppressed by the Kemalist perception of secularism. The analysis also indicates that the perception of Islamic modernity, which originally referred to an oppressed group with limited communicative and political agency, has transformed into the ideology of the oppressive ruling elites. Hence, the AKP government provided a ground for reducing quantitative recognition deficits, allowing the subject matter of alternative modernities to gain increased recognition in the Turkish media. However, our findings also indicate the emergence of epistemic hegemony and new misrecognitions through the discourse of superiority of Islamic modernity and the demonisation of Western civilisation, particularly from 2016 to 2020. This can be seen as a reflection of the AKP's mischaracterisation of progressive lifestyles by establishing associations between such lifestyles and immorality.

The AKP, therefore, can no longer be regarded as a liberating actor seeking epistemic justice. Instead, its efforts to construct a narrative of Islamic civilisation as the 'true' and 'superior' civilisation, by deconstructing the association of civilisation with the West and Europe, present a form of epistemic struggle that creates its own hegemony and perpetuates new forms of epistemic injustice. Therefore, the media's dismissive tone towards the West can be linked to AKP's authoritarian tendencies, especially in the post-2011 era, as the AKP increasingly employed authoritarian state apparatus in the service of nationalist Islamic social engineering (Sommer 2017, 1036).

The findings of this paper are not only relevant to Turkey and Turkish modernisation but also to the other countries that have undergone Western/Eurocentric modernity as a top-down process. These include but not limited to countries such as Japan, or liminal states that lack a clearly defined geopolitical identity, such as Russia, as well as formerly colonised societies that consume Eurocentric knowledge attributing the origins of modernity and democracy to the West/Eurocentric ideals. With the rise of religion and right-wing populism, more and more countries are resorting to nationalist narratives that prioritise religion and tradition. Therefore, as illustrated through the case of alternative modernities in the Turkish media, epistemic struggles for recognition can emerge in the form of postcolonial arguments of locality and indigeneity, which authoritarian governments exploit to further their dominance. In that sense, both the post-colonial and the post-Kemalist schools, which were once

crucial for their liberating potential, appear to be insufficient in explaining this new form of oppression: oppression of the oppressed.

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Note

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