



Ahmed Paul Keeler, *İslam'ı ve Batı'yı Yeniden Düşünmek, Krizler Çağı İçin Yeni Bir Anlatı (Rethinking Islam and The West: A New Narrative for The Age of Crises)*, Translated by Mustafa Metin Başbay. İstanbul: İbn Haldun University Press, 2021, 192 pages

Reviewer: Şahin Yeşilyurt

The author, Ahmed Paul Keeler, was born in England in 1942 and was brought up in a conservative Christian family. One of the turning points in Keeler's life was meeting a music master from India. The author started to show discernable interest in Islam in the following years, which later led to his conversion in the 1970s. Then, in 1976, he organized the World of Islam Festival, which was opened by Queen Elizabeth II. This organization has been labelled as the most comprehensive exhibition on Islamic culture held in the West. Focusing on Islamic culture since then, Keeler has spent his life on Islamic culture and the history of Islam. The author has been a visiting fellow at the Center of Islamic Studies, The University of Cambridge since 2016, and became a distinguished fellow at the Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia in 2016. The author, whose life has been briefly discussed, is thought to have profound sentiments on the discussion of Islam and Western civilization, especially since he was born in a Christian family and then became a Muslim. Having a strong grasp of both worlds is one of his most eminent traits. Approaching the relevant work from this perspective will allow readers to better understand his works, some of which are *Reflections of an English Muslim* (2016) and *Rethinking Islam and The West: A New Narrative for The Age of Crises* (2019).

@ Asst. Prof., Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, syesilyurt@ybu.edu.tr, 0000-0002-2193-8052

Yeşilyurt, Ş. (2022). Book review [Review of the book *İslam'ı ve Batı'yı Yeniden Düşünmek, Krizler Çağı İçin Yeni Bir Anlatı (Rethinking Islam and The West: A New Narrative for The Age of Crises)*]. *Turkish Journal of Islamic Economics*, 9(2), 145-148.



© Research Center for Islamic Economics
DOI: 10.26414/BR3820
TUJISE, 9(2), 2022, 145-148
tujise.org



Today, one of the questions that economic historians are trying to find an answer to is the issue of the enrichment or impoverishment of countries. Several theories have been proposed to answer this question: the ignorance hypothesis, the culture hypothesis, the geography hypothesis, and inclusive and extractive institutions. Among these theories, the culture hypothesis argues that the factor behind the backwardness of people living in regions where Muslims are concentrated, especially in the Middle East, is Islam itself. Unfortunately, this view has been adopted by some circles living in this region, claiming that Islamic law indeed plays a major role in the economic underdevelopment of the Middle East. As such, the studies on the field of Islamic economics have been viewed negatively. On the other hand, the rich, or, to be more precise, western states, are used as a benchmark in studies on the origins of wealth. This contrast can be readily seen in the titles of the works in the literature. For instance, the phenomenon of *The West and the Rest* is a frequently used title in the literature.

In these comparisons made between the West and the rest, the development of a society can be seen to have been measured by the GDP of that society. Moreover, from the Industrial Revolution to the present day, great compliments have been made on economic growth without considering the morality of the source of wealth. Thus, the idea of progress as a result of economic growth is widely blessed in the literature. In this sense, the arguments against economic growth and the notion of progress, which is a key outcome of growth, are subject to great criticism. Putting it differently, economic growth around the world has become taboo; therefore, many researchers even hesitate to be critical about it.

So how humane is this economic growth perspective? Ahmed Paul Keeler's seminal work, *Rethinking Islam and The West: A New Narrative for The Age of Crises*, addresses this question and discusses the problematic aspects of such a dichotomous perspective. It is because Keeler points out, all the crises we experience today are the basic results of this blessed economic growth and progressive view. To him, problems such as industrial capitalism, colonialism, the excesses that nature is exposed to, and global warming are the destructions that this economic-growthist view has brought about today. Humanity has lost its way amid these destructions. According to Keeler, Islam is the only source that can lead humanity back to the right path from its current condition of being lost.

The book decisively and sincerely rejects the dominant orthodox view of economic growth today, using historical examples. The book adopts the perception that humanity needs not a blessed economic-growthist view but a concept of balance or *Mizan*, which is one of the fundamental aspects of Islam. This state of

balance is a situation that should be followed in all channels of the economy as well as in other aspects of life. In other words, this balance should be observed not only in the economy but also in many other areas, ranging from social life to the administration system. Otherwise, it is impossible for humanity to get back on the right track.

The study consists of 7 main chapters, including the Translator's Preface, Preface to Turkish Translation, Preface, Introduction (The Power of The Present Narrative), Conclusion, and Dictionary. Sovereignty, Civilisation, Knowledge, Commerce, Art & the Environment, Conquest & Expansion, the Age of Crises are respectively the titles of each of these chapters. The above-mentioned issues, also discussed in these chapters, have been evaluated from the perspective of Islam and the West, noting the deep divergence between them. In this context, first, the aforementioned issues have been dealt with in terms of Islam; then the perspective of the West has been put forward. This order has been systematically followed throughout the book.

Especially, in the seventh chapter of the study, the issues that threaten humanity in the period that the author describes as the age of crises are approached from a historical perspective. The author places a remarkable emphasis on the difference of mindset between Islam and the West in this section. In this emphasis, the concept of *Mizan*, to which Islam attaches great importance, and was emphasized throughout the book, also plays a crucial role here. To the author, the issue of extremism originating from the West is the root of all the negativities experienced today. As for the solution to these problems, the phenomenon of *Mizan* stands before us as an indisputable option. Keeler explains the balance as follows: "*it is an Arabic term which can be translated as balance, justice, measure, harmony or weighing scales*" (p. 183). When we look at the issue of *Mizan* in the axis of these definitions and from the perspective of economic history, the importance of this concept emerges once again. Therefore, economic historians and theorists, I believe, should consider this notion in detail.

According to Keeler, we are currently living in an age of crises, and "Islamic Terrorism" is fiercely being discussed in today's world. However, this world is the product of the one, formed after the Reformation, Renaissance, and Industrial Revolution. In this respect, everything from global warming to wild capitalism has been shaped around the desires of the Western world. These crises are the result of the historical process mentioned above. When the "extremism" supported by the Westerners and the other harms we are currently experiencing are put together, one conclusion becomes clear: the prevalence of the perception that Islam leaves

societies should not be discussed. Instead, the future that the West has destroyed, and the extremism experienced in every part of our lives should be the topic of discussion. Here are two essential questions to answer: where is today's economy taking us and what will Islam, which is said to have caused backwardness, bring us? This book offers an important and different perspective on these issues. I believe that this perspective the book provides is ground-breaking in that it forces readers to investigate such issues from a different angle.

However, the study has some negative aspects, as well. To illustrate, the study is open to criticism regarding two points: the lack of a bibliography and in-depth discussions on a wide range of topics included in the study. In a study of such importance, the author is expected to cite from credible sources. Although the author evaluates this book as a result of his experiences, supporting the study with different works would carry it to a more remarkable point. Moreover, as stated above, many subjects from sovereignty to trade have been discussed comparatively in the study. However, as it is clear from the volume of the book, no detail has been given on these issues. I presume that the discussions on these subjects, particularly regarding the evaluations of the West, could have been more eloquent. However, I trust that the prospective studies to be done on these issues will compensate for the lack of articulation of the book.

In conclusion, the book describes and presents the root of the problems we are profoundly experiencing today with a new narrative in an impressive way, by addressing the differences between the history of Islam and the West. For this reason, it would seem that the book will provide an important perspective to those working and interested in the field of Islamic economics and economic history to understand the driving forces behind the problems facing us today. That this book has been translated into Turkish is also an important achievement.