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POSITIVISM, SAID NURSI AND THE KURDS

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ABSTRACT

Positivism arose under specific conditions in France during nineteenth century, greatly affecting the philosophical thought of many Ottoman intellectuals. Many of intellectuals lived in exile because of policies carried out by Sultan Abdulhamid and came into close contact with positivism in France. These intellectuals believed that positivism could solve the problems that Ottoman society faced. They tried to adapt positivism to the specific conditions of their own society. The Kurdish Muslim scholar, Said Nursi also, learned about and keep with the thoughts, both in his hometown Bitlis, and in İstanbul. This paper claims that Said Nursi was intrigued by positivism. In this context, he presumed that Kurdish people should move ahead in social order and progress through education, which would make increase their welfare and happiness.

Keywords: Positivism, Order and Progress, The Kurds, Said Nursi, The Committee of Union and Progress,

ÖZET

Positivism, Said Nursi ve Kürtler

Pozitivizm 19. yüzyılım özgül koşullarında Fransa' da doğup gelişen bir felsefe olarak büyük ölçüde Osmanlı entelektüellerinin düşüncelerini etkilemiştir. Bu entelektüellerin birçoğu Sultan Abdulhamid'in uyguladığı politikalarından dolayı sürgünde, özellikle de Fransa' da yaşamak zorunda kalmış ve pozitivist düşünceler ile burada tanışmışlardır. Bu entelektüeller pozitivist felsefenin Osmanlı toplumunun karşılaştığı sorunları çözebileceğini düşündüler ve bu felsefeyi kendi toplumsal koşullarına uyarlamaya çalıştılar. Müslüman bir Kürt alimi olan Said Nursi de hem memleketi Bitlis' te hem de İstanbul' da bu düşünceler ile tanışmıştır. Bu makale Said Nursi'nin pozitivistimden etkilendiğini iddia ediyor. Bu çerçevede o Kürtlerin toplumsal birlik ve düzen içerisinde eğitim aracılığıyla ilerlemesi gerektiğini ki bunun onların mutluluk ve refah düzeyini arttıracakını düşünüyordu.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Positivism, Düzen ve İlerleme, Kürtler, Said Nursi, İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti

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Introduction

The nineteenth century is one of the most important periods in the history of humanity because of the considerable progress and developments in Continental Europe. Many European countries had completed industrialization and began looking for raw materials, colonizing many lands from India to Latin America. Many Muslim peoples were also colonized by European countries and this brought about a new relationship between Muslims and Europeans. There were two general trends in European thought during this period. The first one was based on Ernest Renan's thoughts. He claimed that Islam and science were not compatible with each other, as Islam is the biggest obstacle to progress. The progress taking place among the Muslims in the Medieval Age were not due to Islam, but rather occurred despite Islam. European intellectuals besides Renan similarly thought that Islam was a primitive religion and saw Muslims as inferior to European peoples. Social Darwinism was dominant among these intellectuals during this period so the discourse then was generally patronizing against Muslims. The other trend was based on positivist thought. Positivist scholars did not use a harsh discourse against Muslims and sometimes were forced to defend Muslims against the humiliating discourse used by Social Darwinists (Aydın, 2017: 72).

At the same time, there were also two trends among Muslims. Some Muslim scholars took a definite stance against European colonialism and European thought. Others said that they were also against European Colonialism thought but could accept European thought and it fit into tenets of Islam. These scholars tried to show that Islam was not an obstacle for progress and modernization and said that concepts such as human rights, constitutionalism, and woman's rights were also acceptable in the way of Islam. One of the most influential figures among these scholars was Cemaleddin Efgani, who spent several years, living and publishing journals in Paris, where many intellectuals from Muslim countries also lived. He had discussions with Ernest Renan and unlike modernist scholars, he claimed that some hadiths were fabricated and this caused Muslims to fall behind. Muslim people could progress by getting rid of these hadiths and false consciousness. By arguing this, he tried to show that Islam is not an obstacle to progress (Hatiboğlu, 2012: 78)

Efgani influenced many Muslim intellectuals who were living in Paris, where Asian and Latin American intellectuals resided. These intellectuals met and discussed issues like, colonialism, racism, and imperialism. Many of them were critical of these concepts, contributing to anti-racist trends in Paris. Auguste Comte's Positivism was also very popular among both Brazilian elites and Muslim intellectuals of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, it can be said that The Committee of Union and Progress owed Comte a large intellectual debt (Aydın, 2017: 81) Ottoman intellectuals published many journals for disseminating their theories and ideas to all borders of the Ottoman Empire, arriving first in

Istanbul, which was a centre for the exchange of information and ideas. (Aydın, 2017: 67)

Amid all this intellectual discourse, Said Nursi, who is the influential Kurdish Muslim scholar, arrived in Istanbul and became influenced by ideas and philosophies based on positivism. For this reason, reading his works is very complicated in that he deals with many issues related to the Kurds in his old works, but only rarely discusses those issues in his new works. He himself divided his life into two periods: “Old Said”- “New Said”. Although those phases of his life do not completely contrast each other, there are many important distinctions. In his own opinion, Old Said was disobedient, proud, and dealt with philosophy. New Said, on the other hand, gave up considerably daily political discussions and turned towards issues of faith.(

Nursi, 2004b: 136). He does not explicitly say what kind of philosophy influenced him but Turkish sociologist Şerif Mardin (1992: 66) posits that he might have been influenced by Ottoman positivists from nineteenth century. At first glance, even if it appears that Said Nursi’s thoughts about social order and that of positivist philosophy contrast each other, I argue, in this study, that there are many common traits between his thoughts and positivism especially in his old term. By doing so, I try to show that he is neither an Islamist nor Kurdish intellectual as some people claim. In contrary to these claims, he utilizes notions such as freedom, progress and constitutionalism, all of which were improved on by Ottoman intellectuals under the influence of positivist philosophy. For these reasons, if he is to be labelled with any kind of identity or intellectual school such as Islamist, nationalist or Ottomanist, he should be identified as an Ottoman intellectual in his old term.

The Old Said was vigorously interested in politics and culture that Ottoman Empire was facing and saw some Ottoman intellectuals such as Namık Kemal, Cemaleddin-i Efgani, Muhammed Abduh, Hoca Tahsin, Sultan Selim and Ali Suavi as his predecessors(Nursî, 2004a: 163). Ali Suavi² and Namık Kemal were also important individuals that helped for forming the intellectual foundation for The Committee of Union and Progress(İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti). As I mentioned before above, this committee played an important role in disseminating positivism in the borders of Ottoman Empire. Mizancı Murat, Ahmed Rıza, Abdullah Cevdeti and Prince Sabahattin were four prominent leaders of the Committee. Mizancı Murat was a conservative and nationalist, who got into many arguments with Ahmed Rıza, finally reconciled with Abdulhamid and returning to Istanbul. Abdullah Cevdet was both a positivist

² Ali Suavi was very different from other intellectuals because he was born in a poor family and did not take a formal education but he was very qualified in sociology, literature and linguistics. Said Nursi is very similar to him. Ali Suavi was killed by Hasan Ağa who was the guard of Beşiktaş Patrol, trying to break into Çırağan palace for enthroning V. Murad instead of Abdulhamid. After the event, he was symbolised by the Jon turk as a national hero.

and a social Darwinist. In his Eskişehir court defences, Nursi(2004b: 243) says that he wrote some booklets against Abdullah Cevdet's unreligious attacks. In Nursi's perspective, Prince Sabahattin was relatively acceptable but his thoughts could be manipulated by vicious people. For this reason, he wrote a paper named "Prens Sabahaddin Bey' in Sû -i Telakki Olunan Güzel Fikrine Cevap" which means the answer to Prens Sabahattin' s Good Idea which can be manipulated. In the paper, he expressed that he did not support Sabahattin' s decentralisation idea as the idea could encourage some minorities living in the Empire to segregate and this was very hazardous for the Empire(Nursî, 2004a: 23). Like Said Nursî, Ahmed Rıza was also against Prince Sabahattin' s decentralisation idea (Hanioglu, 2001: 84-90). Although Nursi does not write extensively about Ahmed Rıza, he was probably affected by Ahmed Rıza as they approached issues such as education, social order, administrative system in similar. For example, both of them were opponents to the policies carried out by both Abdulhamid and the Committee, and objected to and the deportation of Armenians. Nursi generally thinks of the Committee as follows:

"Q. We have heard that " -Some Jon Turks are masons. They have harmed the religion." over the years.

A. Oppression imposed the suggestion for protecting itself. Some extremisms caused this suspicion but be sure, their intention is not to damage the religion, perhaps is to supply safety of the nation. However, some of them struggle cruelly with bigotry, which the religion do not deserve them. If you see someone who serves or accepts to constitutionalism as Jon Turk, some of them are the bodyguards of Islam and the others are the guards of happiness of the nation. Their purpose of life is union and progress and they have many Islamic scholars and sheikhs in as much as your tribe has"(Nursî, 2004a: 115).

"Second: Cursed English who are also Muslim's enemy have utilized excessively our negligence of the religion. I can also say that some people who utilise your negligence of the religion damage Islam as far as Greek. For the goodness of the Islam and happiness of the nation, you should not neglect this fact. Do not you see that unionists even caused determinedly and patiently rebirth of the Islam? They were exposed to hatred and invective by the nation for neglecting the religion but other Muslims out of the empire respected for them because they did not see their negligence of the religion"(Nursî, 2004b: 140).

As Nursi was speaking of unionists in this way, the Ottoman Empire was going through great cultural and political transformations. Ottoman intellectuals were trying to find solutions, that could hold together all nations living within the borders of the Empire in peace. Yusuf Akçura(1976) conceptualised these solutions as "Pan-Islamism, Ottomanism and Turkism." These discussions

intensified notably between “First Constitutionalist and Second Constitutionalist Periods. Ahmed Rıza, member and eponym of The Committee of Union and Progress gorgeously returned to Istanbul with the title “Ebu Ahrar”, meaning the Father of Freedom after the Second Constitutionalist Period had been declared. Before that, he spent a long period of his life in France and engaged with positivists including Pierre Lafitte, who was Comte’s student. For these reasons, he was influenced by positivist philosophy and became one of the most prominent figures among Ottoman intellectuals. He was the editor of journals like *Meşveret* and *Şuray-ı Ümmet* and had considerable influence on cultural and intellectual spheres in the Empire (Ebüzziya, 2004: 125-128). Şerif Mardin(2008: 15) says that he had no intellectual profundity but had intellectual consistency. This is largely true in that he never gave up his own philosophy and thought till the days he died. He was against both violence and oppression and also believed in social progress. He wanted to build a social order in which all ethnicities of the empire could live together in peace and in which the rules of law are dominant. This corresponds to Ottomanism. Ahmed Rıza Bey acted accordingly to his beliefs. For instance, many writers like Halil Ganem (Catholic Arab), Aristidi Paşa titled G. Ümit (Greek Orthodox), Albert Fua (Jewish), Anmekyan (Pierre Anmeghian) Efendi (Armenian) who are from different ethnicities and religious wrote some papers on the journal of *Meşveret* and this was representing the social structure of the Empire (Özcan, 2004: 397).

Said Nursî had close relationships with both Kurdish and Ottoman intellectuals during these times(Kutlay, 1992). Therefore, understanding Ahmed Rıza as a prominent figure of positivist philosophy in the Empire is also important for comprehending Said Nursî’s cultural and intellectual views. Accordingly, in this paper, primarily, it is tried to examine the social order which positivists wanted to build and then give the general Young Turks especially Ahmed Rıza Bey’s senses of the society since The Committee of Union and Progress left its founding philosophy, particularly freedom of discourse, and turned into tyranny later (Tunaya, 1989:304). Yet Ahmed Rıza Bey did not abandon his thoughts and he struggled against The Committee even during World War 1 (Tunaya, 1989:508).

That is why it can readily be seen that there is compatibility between Ahmed Rıza Bey and Said Nursî’s thoughts. In this study, I do not dwell on speculations whether Said Nursi is a member of the Committee or not, but rather focus on his intellectual connections with founding philosophy of the committee. As I mentioned above before, Nursi positively viewed unionists as someone who defended freedom, social order, progress, Ottomanism, and constitutionalism. He believed that all ethnicities should have lived together in the borders of the Empire. However, he thought that unionists had to reconcile to Islam and similarly deemed that the Kurdish people needed to abide by those same values. The Kurds should have been got rid of their broken- down

institutions and adapted themselves to the new constitutional order. In his opinion, the only way to achieve this was education. It can be deduced from the facts that he could be influenced by positivism like Ottoman intellectuals.

1. Positivism and Social Order

There were two dominant philosophies in the nineteenth century. One was “Idealism” based on Kant and Hegel’s views, and the other “Positivism” based on Comte’s views. There are important distinctions between them, although they have also many common traits. Both claim that they look for truth. While idealists were generally interested in metaphysical matters, positivists did not care about them. Positivists only take positive sciences as reference (Gökberg, 2003: 412). Comte, (2000: 28-29) the founder of positivism, finished “the Course on Positive Philosophy” in 1842. He claimed that he reached an important conclusion by analyzing every stage the human mind grows through. According to him, there were three stages in which the human mind improves.

1. Theological Stage
2. Metaphysical or Abstract Stage
3. Positive stage

Comte maintained that all communities had to undergo these stages in turn in order to reach to the Positive Stage, the most advanced stage of human mind. In this stage, the human mind realizes that there is no point in seeking truth in the way which idealists do. It is useless to be interested in the metaphysical matters, such as, what the universe is, what will happen to it, and so on. Social order proceeds along with the stages of human mind. To him, there are the five basic sciences: astronomy, physics, chemistry, physiology, social physics. The most complicated and subjective among them is social physics which directly affects human life. Some scientists make a crucial mistake by classifying social physics apart from others sciences. Positivism can also be performed to social physics as the others. Social physics is concerned with the needs of society. Positivist philosophy tries to understand society and makes efforts towards its progress, while old philosophy deals mainly with metaphysical subjects. It appears that the concept of progress was not incompatible with absolute reality and order which old philosophy of time posited. However, contrary to this, no political system survives without the idea of both order and progress. Although it seems that order and progress are incompatible, the main trait of social physics is to have these. Comte, (2000b: 116-119) says that these conditions can be built in all European communities in different level and times. If you want to analyse a situation in which a society is, firstly, you have to identify the reasons why those happen. If old order gets to be sufficiently degenerated, the new order will emerge, the transformation should be happen in peace. Of course, some people will resist the new order but will eventually fail.

Comte was born in a Catholic family, yet he did not analyze the society with the metaphysical notions used by Christianity such as God, the soul and the Devil. In his philosophy, human replaced God and this philosophy itself became almost like a new religion. This new religion had no god, rituals or dogmas like Christianity had and Comte called it “the Religion of Humanity” (Gökberg, 2003: 413) As a prophet of this new religion, Comte(2009) believed that it should be spread to all people across the world because he thought that it was the only way to rescue humanity. He conceptualized his philosophy in his work named *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, which consisted of dialogues between a woman and a priest on thirteen different subjects such as morality, monotheism and theocracy. He approached society scientifically in this work. According to Comte, social layers were depended on each other so politics should have been tackled scientifically. He established “Le Comite Occidental”, which consisted of sixty members across the world, for disseminating the new religion and sent letters to heads of state to promote their cause. He had good relationships with some Ottoman statesmen and even sent a letter to Sadrazam Reşid Pasha to invite him to the Religion of Humanity (Kabakçı, 2014: 31). This relationship between Ottoman intellectuals and positivists kept on growing stronger after he had died since Ahmed Rıza Bey and many Ottoman intellectuals were in exile in France.

2. Positivism and Ottomanism

Even though, it seems that positivism was opposed to religion, positivists deemed Islam as different religion because Comte (2009: 252) said that Islam was closer to positivism than Christianity. He claimed that Islam had no clergy like Christianity did and ironically thanked Muslims for protecting their religion against something like this. To him, Islam was a rational religion also dealt with worldly affairs and he spoke positively of Muslim’s contributions to humanity. In his opinion, the feudal system collapsed thanks to these contributions and to laid the foundations for developmet of positivist philosophy(Kabakçı, 2014: 34). Ottoman intellectuals received positivist philosophy well because of the discourse used by Comte and his encouraging views on Islam.

Positivism was the religion of humanity, as one of the most important tenets was to achive happiness in all nations. For Ottoman intellectuals, this state of mind was reasonable because the Ottoman Empire indeed hosted different nations within its borders and because it could combat the decadence that was hurting the empire. For these reasons, the Ottoman intellectuals accepted an Ottomanism that shared common traits with positivist philosophy, building a new political order. Ottomanism was the official ideology of the Committee of Union and Progress in its establishment phase, and it was absolutely against nationalist ideologies, even including Turkish nationalism. It had the characteristics of a

social contract that stipulates all nations should live together peacefully within the same empire.(Tunaya, 1989: 304-306).

2.1. The Old Order, Sultanate As A Political System

From the point of positivist philosophy, if the old social institutions do not meet the requirements of society, the needs for building a new social order comes into existence, which is the most important prerequisite for progress.

The Ottoman Empire was undergoing large social crises and lost territory against Europe in the nineteenth century. In addition to this, some nations like Serbia, Greece declared their independence. People of different religion and ethnic backgrounds such as Muslims, Christians, Armenian, Assyrians lived in the empire. Sultanate was an institution which could not cope with these issues. The new order which would restrict sultanate's authority and the people take part in the government had to be built immediately. Thus Ottoman intellectuals such as Şinasi ve Namık Kemal saw the Rescript of Gulhane and Ottoman Reform Edict of reform as a recipe of liberation. Their demands for liberation took on the form of an organized struggle against Sultan Abdulhamit's rule after the cases. The medical students in Istanbul established a new community named "the Committee of Union and Progress" by tweaking the motto of "Order et Progress" also contained in positivist philosophy. The community stated that a new order comprising all nations in the empire should be built. They considered that the Sultanate was the biggest challenge for progress(Sönmez, 2012: 63-76). Ahmed Riza spoke of Sultan Abdulhamit as follows:

"Firstly, Brutal sultan corrupted the people's moral by doing whatever he wanted... The bear who pick up his stick take to street for beating Armenian but no one move for saving his/her homeland, if required"(Sönmez, 2012: 1).

Riza and many Ottoman intellectuals believed that Sultanate's absolute authority was the largest obstacle to progress, and that they had to immediately restrict his authority find a way for people take part in government. A new order should be built.

2.2. New Order, Constitutionalism, Ottomanism

The new order established on the thought of the above intellectuals came to be Constitutionalism based on positivist philosophy. This was grounded upon Ottomanism, official ideology of the Community. According to the Community, it was only ideology which could hold together all ethnic and religious minorities living in the empire. Therefore, Ahmed Riza, president the of the new assembly, objected to Turkish nationalism:

"Our program and the sense of life is so clear...It is to hold together all our citizens such as the Turks, the Kurds, Bulgarian, Arabs, Armenians by means of fair order. This

country does not belong to the Turks or Bulgarian and Arabs, It is the property of all people who call themselves as Ottoman. Every citizen accepting and approving this substance is our countryman. All people who do not think so and try to segregate the country in piece and tribe are our enemy and opponent even if they are the Turks. Our community is not a nationalist faction protecting just its own nation's benefit like Muslim and Christianity peoples”(Sönmez, 2012: 116).

What Ahmet Rıza basically pointed out was that the new order should be based on rule of law, principle and voluntary togetherness. This could not be forcefully realized. The rule of law should be superior to everything and every people. As is seen, Ahmed Rıza's thoughts are very similar to how positivist philosophy propagates the religion of humanity. As follows,

“Who is the government of the Armenians and Greeks? It is our government again. I am forced to say much more in my expressions. Pasha if some Armenian gags attack the Turks, to capture, bring them into court, and carry out the law is the responsibility of the goverment. The goverment did not do this so it is guilty”(Sönmez, 2012: 127).

Ahmed Rıza believed that the new order should have been built by using peaceful means. He never accepted violence as a means and expressed always this. He objected to both Abdulhamit's oppression and also the plot to assassinate him. In the 31 March incident, in which one of basic demands of rebels was Ahmet Rıza's resignation, he stood up to what the unionist did to rebels and said as follows:

“Whatever happened in the past times is happening again. Today, there is oppression in the country as well, maybe much more.”

As is seen, he did not approve to use violence means even against his enemies(Kabakçı, 2012: 128). Another important question for this study is how Ahmet Rıza would build the new order through education as a means to advance society. For him, the only way for building a ideal society is to illuminate people through education. Ahmed Rıza worked as a teacher in Bursa before going to France an also believed that education could play a key role in solving many issues such as poverty and internal conflict.

“ The man who earns his bread by the sweat of his brow and not looks for his interest in someone else' s loss is not afraid of anyone and any goverment. Some feels like this can be evolved into nation just by the way of education. Education starts in the mother's bosom”(Sönmez, 2012: 74).

As is seen, he believed that education could be used as an important tool in destroying poverty and illiteracy and it is also a peaceful solution. Said Nursi approached largely to many cases like social order, education and administrative

system in similar way. He thought that the Kurds should also progress by building a new order through education.

3. Said Nursî and the Kurds

Said Nursî was born in a poor family in Bitlis in 1877 and lived with them up till he was 9 years. He took lessons from different scholars living in the region. Sometimes, he discussed with his scholars and had to leave his education incomplete but became famous in the region. He took madrasah education but also cared about cultural and policy issues because political crises of the Ottoman Empire were also being felt in Bitlis. The reforms that the rescript of Gulhane brought was not understood sufficiently by the Kurds. It can be said that these reforms constituted a problem for the Kurds and also that some Kurds underestimated their effect they created a new kind of relationship between the Kurds and the Ottoman Empire as a result of the modernization process (Mardin, 1992: 53). This new relationship brought about new problems. The Empire appointed governors in the place of the emirates that it destroyed.

These governors had many difficulties in solving local problems because large tribes were competing with each other to take place of the emirates. Under these conditions, sheikhdom emerged as an institution to solve the problems and found an opportunity to spread across the region. (Bruinessen, 2011: 341). In this respect, Bitlis was very important place as it had each madrasah, which had hundreds of students. These madrasah were mostly managed by sheikhs, but they could not respond to the social needs. For these reasons, Said Nursî (2004b: 260) supposed that madrasahs should be overhauled because students could graduate from madrasah by just memorising and repeating some books and also positive sciences were not taught in madrasahs. He believed that it was a waste of time. Having completed his education, he went to Istanbul and engaged with scholars there and draw attention to the Kurdish issue much more. He said that he read eight journals there daily. For understanding his worldview, his words after the declaration of the second constitutional era are important.

“Freedom! You call me so a wonderful but with lovely sound that wake a Kurd like me from unawareness bed. If you did not exist, all people and I would stay in enslavement. I am announcing good news to you with eternal life. If you make the rules of life, the origin of life and grow in that heaven, I am committing that this suffering nation will progress gradually when compared to the past. If it accepts you as a guide but not dirty with hatred and revenge” (Nursî, 2004: 58).

This passage shows that he believed that the declaration of the second constitutional era was very important for the Kurds as it would help them progress socially and also bring freedom to them. If we bear in mind that Ahmed Rıza returned to the country with the title “Ebu Ahrar” during this time, it can be understood why Nursî said something like this and how his ideas corresponded

to that of Ahmet Rıza. That is why he emphasized the importance of constitutionalism, as he traveled and spoke among Kurdish tribes. His following quote is very important for understanding his attitude towards progress, as related to positivist philosophy.

*“The old order is old, it is either the new order or revolution.”
(Nursî, 2004a: 99)*

3.1. Old Order, Aghas, and Sheikhs

The Kurds dealt with many issues in the time in which Said Nursi lived. They could not rule themselves and there were many bloody conflicts among Kurdish tribes. Some clan leaders were very famous for their cruelty. For example, Nursi wrote about a dream where he saw Sheikh Adulkadir Geylani, who told him:

“Mullah Said! Go to Mustafa Pasha who is the leader of the Miran clan and invite him to walk on the right path and advise him to go to pray to God and give up his cruelty. If he does not accept this, kill him.” (Nursî, 2004b: 43)

In addition to internal conflicts, the Kurds also had many other problems with both the central administration and with the Armenians. Nursi tried to understand the reasons why the Kurds were in disorder. In his speech titled “Kürtlere Edilen Telkinat”, which means “the suggestions to the Kurds,” he said that the Kurds have three basic problems

“First, poverty. That there were forty thousand proters here indicates to this. Second, illiteracy, that these forty thousand proters can not read a journal in the times of progress shows this. Thirdly, Chaos, now, even we have four hundred thousand brave warriors, they are ruined because of internal conflicts” (Nursî, 2004a: 25).

For him, the situation in which the Kurds live are not in accordance with the time of progress. He offered some solutions for the situation. He offered some solutions for the situation. As follows:

“Now, we need three diamond swords for protecting our three substances and for destroying our enemies.

The first one, national unity; the second one; human labour and the third; national love.” (Nursî, 2004a: 25).

He saw that the best solution for the Kurds is national unity, human labour and national love. However, what he means by national unity is not that the Kurds struggle against the other nations around them, but to the contrary, they have to be united without internal conflicts. Once they achieve that, they can address the imperfections of the government and its policy. The first condition of progress was to get rid of the old order and to substitute it with constitutionalism but this

was not so easy for the Kurds to accept. Nursi tried to persuade others while he was traveling among Kurdish tribes. As follows:

“Q. Constitutionalism destroyed our leaders yet some of them deserved this and they were in conflict each other without knowing anything about it but just its name. What is its account?”

A. Spiritually, every time has government. You think that it is an aga who turns the time machine. The government of the time of oppression was power, anyone who had a sharp sword and a cold-heart could progress but the spirit and aga of constitutionalism is justice, reason, skill, law and public opinion. Anyone who has intelligence and a pure heart will progress... Now the Kurds! If your aga and sheikhs have only a sharp sword and rule only through power, no doubt, they will go down and deserve it. If they use love as the basis instead of power, which is grounded on reason, maybe they will progress”(Nursî, 2004a: 88-89).

Nursi saw the Kurdish agas and sheikhs as the biggest obstacles to progress. As is seen above, he claimed that if these agas and sheikhs want to build a rule of tyranny over the Kurds, they will go down. They either will support social progress through reason or will be destroyed, and they will deserve it if it happens. In conclusion, Nursî offered the sense of order and progress based on positivist philosophy as a solution for the Kurds.

3.2. The Kurds and The New Order, “Constitutionalism and Ottomanism”

Nursi’s proposals are also related to the other nations living in the Empire. As said before, he wanted to disseminate Ottomanism based on positivism among the Kurds. In his opinion, the Kurds should have been united and lived with the other nations in peace (Mardin, 1992: 52). For example, in his speech, he speaks of the Turks in this way:

“In short: The Turks are our wisdom and also we are their force; both of us become totally good people. We will not be arrogant. We will be a model determinedly for the other ethnicities. Good boy becomes so and if we obeyed a little in the time of oppression, now we have to do this much more, which is an obligation because we will receive hidden opportunity”(Nursî, 2004: 26).

His views not only extended to the Turks but also other nations. He wrote in his work named “Münazarat”.

“Each these works are both the Kurds and the Turks also the Arabs so to say it is wearing a Kurdish cap, Turkish trousers and Arab aba”(Nursî, 2004a: 78). He thought that this new order could solve the problems of Muslims and also it was compatible to Islamic principles.

“According to Islam, Muslim’s the key of happiness of social life is legitimate consultation. This verse from the quran³ بِبَيْنْتُمْ شُورَى وَأَمْرُهُمْ stipulates it. Yes, consultation is exchange of ideas in the history of humanity for centuries and this is the basis of progress. The main reason why Asia stayed behind, which was the biggest continent, is not to make such a consultation. That is to say that as people consult each other, nations and even continents will do same thing, which this will open Muslim’s gyve(Nursî, 2004b: 101).”

As is said above, he thinks that the reasons why Muslims stayed behind is that they do not consult each other. If they do, they will progress in both social and cultural spheres. In addition to Muslims, he believed that Jews and Christians should have took part in the Parliament and that this arrangement would be suitable for Islam as well. Although, some people objected to this by quoting a verse from Quran that reads; “Do not make with friends Jews and Christians!” (Maide 51), he replied to them as follows.

“Firstly, in consultation, majority prevail and they are Muslims, more than sixty are scholars. A deputy is free and should not be under the influence. It means that Islam is dominant.

Secondly, craftsman’s votes like “Harco” or “Berham” are equal in some works like fixing a watch and using a machine. We should not refuse this kind of social peace and economic welfare in the parliament because sharia law also make the same thing. Implementations and preferences need consultation.” (Nursî, 2004a: 93)

Even against a lot of disagreement he said that it is suitable that for Jews and Christians to take part in the the parliament, this cannot be true as far as he claims because neither Jews nor Christians had attended in rule in the Ottoman Empire before. Historically, it had been seen among other Muslims before. This was a new thing for the Ottoman Empire so his listeners are not convinced and objected to him as follows:

“Q. “ There is a verse in Quran prohobiting liking Jews and Christians, despite this, how can you say that you should be friends?

A. A huge religious revolution happened in the time of happiness⁴. People liked or hated each other because of religious causes, because the human mind had turned to religion so likening non- Muslims could cause disunion. However the new revolution happening across the world is civilized and secular. What occupies all human minds is the civilization and progress of the world. Moreover, most of them

³ Their affairs is (determined by) consultation among themselves. (Ash shura: 38)

⁴ He means the times in which Prophet Muhammed live in.

do not care properly about their religion. Consequently, you do not have to be friends but you should accept their progress and civilization... this kind of friendship is not prohibited in Quran”(Nursî, 2004a: 109-110).

Nursi tried to interpret this verse in a new way. According to him, the human mind was occupied by religion in past times. Relationships between people such as love and hate had been based on religion but this verse should be now conceived in terms of the conditions in those times when major revolutions had taken place across the world and when humanity is focusing on civilization and progress. Thus to have relationships with Jews and Christians is not prohibited by Quran. These thoughts are very similar to those of Comte, as the human mind passes from the Theological Stage to the Positive Stage. In this stage, the most useful thing for Kurdish people is to live together with all ethnic and religious minorities in peace. Which means can be used for building this? Like Ahmed Rıza, Nursi considered that education was one of the most important means for building the new order. He was seeing the miserable situation of Kurdistan and believed that a new order should have been built, of course, for doing this, education was the most useful tool.

“I was seeing the miserable situation in which the Kurds live in Kurdistan. I realized that our happiness is dependent on science and new civilization. Madrasahs and scholars will be the uncorrupted source of that science and civilisation. Religious scholars will have close contact with science because the Kurds’ will is in their scholars’ hands. For this reason, I came to Dersaadet (Istanbul).” (Nursî, 2004a: 167).

He went to Istanbul for this reason and requested Abdulhamid to fund and promote education in Kurdistan but the Sultan did not answer his request and tried to silence by putting him on the payroll. Shefik Pasha, Zaptiah Minister made him another suggestion him.

Minister: “ Your request for disseminating education in Kurdistan was being discussed in the parliament.”

In reply: I wonder why you postpone education and put my the salary before that? Why do you prefer my own interest to the interest of the nation?” (Nursî, 2004a: 186).

Nursi dealt with the issue in detail his paper “Kürtler Yine Muhtaçtır,” “The Kurds are in Need Again.” In this paper, he once again emphasize that the time was the time of progress, that many schools opened in Kurdistan but only Turkish speaking children can attend to those schools. The schools are not useful to Kurdish children and this situation brought about the disturbances(Malmisanij, Lewendi, 1992: 29-32).

He considered that education was essential for Kurdish people and never gave up his aim, though he was never able to reach it. He requested the same thing

from Sultan Reshad after Abdullhmit was overthrown. A university (Dârülfünün) planned to be built in Kosovo could not be opened because of Balkan wars and Nursi requested the Sultan to transfer the money allocated to educational purposes in Kurdistan. The Sultan accepted his request. He laid the foundations of the University of the East(Şark Dârülfünü) off Van Lake but his plan was left half-finished after the World War I broke out(Nursî, 2004b: 106). In conclusion, he wanted the Kurds to progress through education and through this, become able to solve their own problems as well.

Conclusion

Positivist philosophy was the dominant philosophy at the beginning of the nineteenth century, greatly influencing many Ottoman intellectuals and even some Islamic scholars like Said Nursi, who saw it as a philosophy which could solve their problems. Nursi tried to promote the sense of order and progress, the basic motto of positivist philosophy, among the Kurds. In this study, I have not tried to show that Nursi was a positivist like Abdullah Cevdet and others. Rather, I tried to show how an Islamic scholar could be influenced by a philosophy which has been seen by many Islamic scholars as opposition to Islam and for this, Nursi is very good example. He tried to cultivate these thoughts among the Kurds while also making an effort to prove the compatability of his thoughts with Islam. In this way, he wanted to show that Islam and science do not inherently contradict each other.

He believed that social order founded by Ottoman positivism could also solve Kurdish people's problems and for this reason emphasized on the ideals such as Ottomanism, freedom, and constitutionalism. In his opinion, education was the most important thing for creating the new order and could solve many problems that the Kurds faced, such as poverty, illiteracy and internal conflicts. However, as an Islamic scholar, he wanted Kurdish children to learn not only positivist sciences but also the science of religion. He believed that the madrasahs should have been reformed in this way so the Kurds could progress as a society.

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