

# SAID NURSI'S CRITIQUE OF HIS AGE

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## ABSTRACT

The life of Said Nursi is a life of struggle. He constantly criticized, Ottoman institutions, Muslim World, Europe and modern Turkey's system and mentality. Nursi has first criticized the main pillars of political structure, including Landlords, Sheiks and Pashas in the Eastern provinces. After his arrival to the capital city of Istanbul, he met with Ottoman Sultanate, Union and Progress Party, Madrasas, Clerics, and Ottoman intellectuals. He challenged the institutions, establishment and the political elites in Istanbul as well. After Istanbul, he travelled to the center of Muslim intellectuals at the time, Damascus, where he challenged the Muslim intellectuals and clerics, and proposed his solutions to the social problems that Muslim world faces at the time. During the World War One, he was taken as Prisoner of War by Russians and stated in Russian prisons for three years. During the prisoners camp he met with German and Austrian soldiers and generals and learned their worldview. After the establishment of new parliament in Ankara he was invited to Ankara and met with Ataturk and the members of the parliament. He, once again, challenge the authority of new regime, Ataturk and the members of the parliament. He wanted to influence the transformation of new Turkey, however, when he realized that he is unable to influence he went back to his home region Van.

**Keywords:** Said Nursi, Enlightenment, Ottoman society, Atatürk, Modern Turkey

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Said Nursi was an “Islamic scholar”, a member of scholarly class of the Ottoman Empire. Despite not receiving a classical style of education, he adopted ratifications and origins of the scholarly class and became a member of the Islamic Academy (Darü'l-Hikmet'il İslamiye). Meanwhile, Said Nursi had considerable amount of acquaintance with other physical and social sciences. It is noteworthy to portray him highlighting his capability on religious and human sciences. He was the man of science, faith and action. Said Nursi bisected his life as “The Old Said” and “The New Said”. There is not a specific time period on that sharp transition to the New Said from the Old Said, which dates back to period when he was exiled to Barla from Van. The Old Said period constitutes background of the Old Said period. Thereby, elements forming the New Said are reflected with the analysis of four political circles during the Old Said period. He was engaged in a conflict with the established order in the eastern provinces as early as in his childhood and analyzed harms of that order on the individual and social life and led a struggle to improve those harms. Nursi also witnessed the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The imitation of the West was considered as an essential solution for the fall and collapse not only by the intellectuals but also by the ulema. Difference between the intellectuals and the ulema stemmed from the ways of introducing westernization. Some of the intellectuals touched on adoption of all of elements of the West while the ulema was in favor of the harmony of Islam and Western Civilization. In fact, the ulema had already admitted a defeat by the West and was not capable of submitting permanent solutions for the problems in the society.

However, Said Nursi inclined towards to the long-standing problems of the society in a physician-like manner and showed ways of solutions, which can be found through education. With the project of “Madrasah al-Zahra”, he came up with humanitarian solutions for growing problems of humanity. The senses in his solution ideas were accepted but there was no opportunity to carry out them. After all, Said Nursi opted to such present humanitarian projects he developed steadily in a different form. That new presentation is called *Risale-i Nur*. Said Nursi criticized Western Civilization and its understanding of colony. As an Ottoman commissioned officer, he volunteered to fight against Russian and Armenian invasion with his students. He was injured and taken captured. Apart from that virtual struggle, he was also engaged in a struggle with western thought scientifically. He stated he had shaken the materialist foundations of the western thought. He also wrote some works, which highlights

metaphysics against materialism. He gave support to the National Struggle which was initiated in the Anatolia and tried to prevent movements, targeting him both in İstanbul and in the eastern Anatolia. Following the National Struggle, he was invited to Ankara where he visited the National Assembly and directed some criticism towards it. Nursi criticized political circles he encountered and submitted solution proposals for them. In response to those proposals, he was exposed to some sanctions. This analysis is like a summary of his life.

### A. DEFINITION OF PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Said Nursi developed solutions for a number of political, social and individual problems in his works. Although he kept his distance from the politics, he was accused of playing religion with politics and he was exposed to various sanctions. Analyzing whether his movement was political or not will be helpful for us to learn about him and the movement he established. Not related with up-to-date politics, political studies carried out by him gives clues about his political view. Thus his stance toward his political circle, political institutions and political events rendered his political view straight. This research is to find answer of this question: How is the historical and political environment, which formed background of his political view, and how was that historical environment and how did that environment influence his political view?

### B. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY

In our day Nurculuk, which is a proactive movement, is divided into a number of branches. Many of Nur communities regard works of Said Nursi as basic reference for them. Nur communities, which adopt a basic principle of staying away from politics, have had positive or negative relationships with the political parties. Each Nur community regards itself as the unique follower of Said Nursi. Nevertheless, a political movement supported by a Nur community can be objected by another one. This situation leads to confusion about political stance of Nurculuk. What is more significant, Nurculuk's relationship with the politics has become a matter of debate. Is Nurculuk a political movement or a religious movement? Or is Nurculuk is a political movement which has clear and confidential political goals? Answers of these questions are hidden in life of Said Nursi. Political events which influenced methods of Said Nursi's movement, his views and stance towards political events, sets light to large numbers of problems in our day.

## II. CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT IN KURDISTAN

Collapse process of the Ottoman Empire, which began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, gained speed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the disengagement of the independence and separatism movements in the outskirts. The Ottoman Empire weakened to a great extent due to sovereignty of eastern provinces on paper following centralization efforts of Sultan Mahmut II, Russia's temporary invasion of Erzurum during wars in 1828-1829, victory of Egyptian army, at the comma of İbrahim Pasha, son of Egypty Governor Mehmet Ali Pasha, over the Ottoman army. Kurdish tribes felt direct threats against their land with that loss of power.<sup>1</sup>

Political and social order destroyed by Sultan Mahmut II were tried to be improved by the administrators appointed from the center. Assigned from the center, those administrators were like external organ transplant and led to a histocompatibility. Social order of the eastern provinces was shattered.<sup>2</sup> With the collapse of Kurdish emirates, agaluks, the minor units of emirates, were established. This led to an increase in influences of the sheiks.<sup>3</sup>

Sultan Abdülhamid II desired to reestablish broken stability in the East caused by centralization efforts of Sultan Mahmud II. He aimed to boost influence of the Ottoman Empire in the East by reviving agaluk and sheikdom, two existing social structures in the East. He launched some projects to introduce a new troop in the region both to take measures against Russia's land claim and to prevent establishment of an Armenian state. With the Hamidiye Regiments, comprised of tribal forces, the central authority, which was destroyed in the eastern Anatolia, was restored and a political relationship was established between the Sultan and agas of the tribes. In the year of 1901, 65 regiments, majority of which were Kurdish people, were organized. These regiments were dispatched along the borders with Russia and Iran to maintain border security.<sup>4</sup>

On the one hand, governors were appointed from the center, on the other hand, the Sultan contacted with sheiks under his khalifa title and tried to fill deficiency caused by the collapse of Kurdish emirates with those sheikhs. In other words, the state recognized the sheikhs by receiving them. For instance, Sheikh Ubeydullah Nehri came to the fore, declared war against

Iran and gained power to proclaim independence of Kurdistan during this period.<sup>5</sup>

Said Nursi was born in 1878 during which political and social transformations took place in the eastern provinces.<sup>6</sup> Said Nursi was grown in a Kurdish zone, which was shaped and mobilized by the Sultan Abdülhamid II dependence of Kurdish people to the Ottoman Empire grew stronger thanks to clan leaders and sheikhs. Threats against the Ottoman Empire were felt more seriously by the Kurds. For instance, some dangers such as establishment of an Armenian state, Russian invasion or British intervention into the region meant harsher for the Kurds. Kurds needed the Ottoman Empire more than ever in order to protect their land from foreigners and non-Muslims. Thus, survival of the Ottoman Empire meant survival of the Kurds. Like the other Kurdish people, Said Nursi was also of the opinion that fate of Muslim world is closely related to the survival of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>7</sup>

### A. CRITIQUE OF SHEIKH, AGHA AND PASHA

Life circumstances in the eastern provinces played role in the formation of a determined character of Said Nursi during his childhood and youth. Hardships of living in an environment prevailed by mountainous and continental climate and a tense environment shaped by social devastation and conflicts influenced him to form a determined and critical character. An enthusiastic person, Said Nursi was involved in a struggle against the society and institutions even in his childhood. Hardship, struggle and conflict are the main elements in his personality.<sup>8</sup>

One of the first institutions Said Nursi dealt with was the sheikhdom. Being a part of established order in the East, the sheikhdom focused on increasing its influence or continuation their presence rather than fulfilling spiritual needs of the society. Even in his childhood, Said Nursi used to think sects and lodges were away from spirit and sense they should adopt. He criticized the local sheikhs, saying they seized money of the poor people. Said Nursi who witnessed the loss of reputation of the sheikhs, criticized sharply that madrasahs and lodges accept zakat, alms, gifts and wage in Bitlis province.<sup>9</sup>

He noted that he likes sheikhs in favor of himself and Islam but they do not fulfill their duties such as enlightenment of hearts, feeling virtues of Islam, commitment to Islamic patriotism, giving up earthly pleasures and personal benefits to attain ihlas, planting friendship

5 Olson, *Kürt Milliyetçiliğinin*, 23.

6 Alparslan Açıkgenç. "Said Nursi" *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 35, (İstanbul: TDV, 2008): 565.

7 Şerif Mardin. *Türkiye'de Din ve Siyaset* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998), 177.

8 *Ibid*, 181.

9 *Ibid*, 174.

1 Martin Van Bruinessen. *Ağa, Şeyh, Devlet* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2011), 269.

2 Bruinessen, *Ağa, Şehy*, 427.

3 Robert Olson. *Kürt Milliyetçiliğinin Kaynakları ve Şeyh Said İsyanı 1880-1925* (Ankara: Özge Yay, 1992), 22.

4 Cezmi Erarslan. "Hamidiye Alayları", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 25 (İstanbul: TDV, 1997): 462.

among societies and serving people for Islamic integrity.<sup>10</sup> In addition, he claimed that some sheikhs led to secession among societies with their roles in formation of some deviant parties.<sup>11</sup>

Said Nursi used to identify some of the problems in the eastern Anatolia before he came to İstanbul. He used to make some points on political, social and economic structures of the society. He put forward that madrasahs could not meet growing needs of the society, the education level began to drop, and sheikhs abused religious feelings of the people in the lodges and zawayahs; and clan leaders led to secession among people for the continuation of their power.<sup>12</sup>

Instead of destroyed structure of clan during the period of Sultan Mahmut II, Nursi was concerned about establishment of a structure similar to it and thought that ignorance, some habits and practices in the society would pave way for such a structure. It was reported that agaluk would revive under politeness, seniorship and nobility. Nursi was regarded as a person whose aim was to terminate agaluk and domination of leadership not to be revived anymore.<sup>13</sup>

In an effort to solve education problem in the East, he developed a university project he called Madrasah al-Zahra and he came to İstanbul to implement that project. He asked to establishment of that university in the provinces of Van, Erzurum, Bitlis, Siirt, Diyarbakır and Urfa. He attempted to have a meeting with the Sultan Abdülhamid II but that that was not realized. Later on, he met with the Sultan Mehmet Reşat and Mustafa Kemal with the aim of addressing problem of ignorance and poverty in the East but the project was not implemented.<sup>14</sup>

He was first engaged in a political relation with leader of Miran clan Mustafa Pasha. Said Nursi went to Tillo from Van Plateau to warn Mustafa Pasha who had a bad reputation due to his stern and oppressive personality. Nursi directed some warning to him.<sup>15</sup> That was the first political communication made by him. Nursi conflicted with Mustafa Pasha who gave up oppressions temporarily and restarted, and he had to leave Tillo and went to Mardin, which was an obligatory journey in a way.<sup>16</sup>

Said Nursi approaches to order, founded by the Hamidiye Regiments in two ways. The first one is that problems of secession caused by structures of clans of the Kurds through the

Hamidiye Regiment. Nursi was of the opinion that a military title moves ahead of other titles and can strengthen solidarity in the society. The second one is that the Hamidiye Regiments can help the Kurds majority of whom were unsettled and they could be civilized through education.<sup>17</sup> However Said Nursi changed his mind when he noticed that project was unusual. He depicted the Hamidiye Regiments as an order established by liars and grovelers playing up to the Palace. He noted that such an order could increase existing problems and lead to devastation of the society rather than developing solutions for the problems of the society.<sup>18</sup>

Apart from the ones on the circumstances of the East, the first political struggle waged by Said Nursi was against autocracy and he defended liberty. He had warned the public about those issues in Mardin. Mardin Governor Abdulgani Pasha, who was not pleased with that situation, handcuffed Nursi and sent him into exile in Bitlis. Thus, Said Nursi was on an exile, which would influence his whole life strongly when he was just 16 years old. Later on, the Old Said period, which he called "political to a certain extent" began in Mardin.<sup>19</sup>

He directed some harsh criticism towards Bitlis Governor Ömer Pasha due to his and his officers' adverse attitudes towards Islam. Pasha Ömer paid attention to the warnings of Nursi and allocated to him a room in the governor's mansion.<sup>20</sup> Nursi went to Van after Bitlis and began to stay at the mansion of Tahir Pasha. There were magazines both on the Ottoman Empire and the Europe in the rich library at the mansion. Those magazines provided considerable amount of information on the Europe and Islamic world. There were books both on the religious and positive sciences. For 15 years in Van, Said Nursi had benefited from those works. Under the auspices of Tahir Pasha the library in the mansion helped Said Nursi complete his education.<sup>21</sup>

In İstanbul, Said Nursi continued to maintain his political life in the East. Gaining a reputation among the Kurds, Said Nursi got in touch with Kurdish intellectuals and leaders both in the eastern Anatolia and İstanbul. Leader of the Kurdish Teali Cemiyet (Society for the Rise of Kurdistan) Seyyid Abdulkadir shared his intention to establish an independent Kurdistan with Said Nursi during the years of ceasefire but Nursi strongly objected to such an intention.<sup>22</sup>

10 Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'nin İlk Dönem Eserleri* (İstanbul: Söz Matbaacılık ve Yayıncılık, 2012), 497.

11 *Ibid*, 500.

12 Mardin, *Türkiye'de Din*, 174.

13 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 496-497.

14 Necmeddin Şahiner. *Bilinmeyen Taraflarıyla Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (İstanbul: Nesil Yayınları, 2013), 9-10.

15 Ahmet Akgündüz. *Arşiv Belgeleri Işığında Bediüzzaman Said Nursi ve İlmî Şahsiyeti* (İstanbul: Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 2013), 302.

16 *Ibid*, 308.

17 Said-i Kürdi. "Kürdler Neye Muhtaç?", *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi*, 12 Aralık 1908 (29 Teşrin-i Sani 1324), 13.

18 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 445.

19 Akgündüz, *Said Nursi*, 313.

20 Hayrat Vakfı İlmî Araştırma Heyeti. *İlk Defa Yayımlanan Orijinal Mektuplar Işığında Bediüzzaman Said Nursi ve Hayru'l-Halefi Ahmed Hüsrev Altınbaşak*, Vol. 1, 2, 3 (Isparta: Hayrat Neşriyat, 2014), 76.

21 Akgündüz, *Said Nursi*, 329.

22 Şahiner, *Said Nursi*, 189.

Kör Hüseyin Pasha, one of the Hamidiye pashas and a member of Azadi organization, met with Nursi and called him to rebellion they had planned. However, Nursi gave advice to him and made him cancel that plan. Following Kör Hüseyin Pasha, Sheikh Said sent a letter to Nursi to call him to rebellion. In his response, Nursi tried to persuade him to change his mind saying the people were in need of guidance.<sup>23</sup>

## B. CRITIQUE OF ARMENIANS IN KURDISTAN

Historically, Armenians and Kurds used to live together in the eastern provinces. Population density of Armenians was high in the north of Lake Van and population density of the Kurds was high in the southern of Lake Van.<sup>24</sup> Armenians used to live in the provinces and were busy with trade, art and handicraft. On the other hand, Kurds were seminomadic on the mountainous regions and they were busy with husbandry.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Kurds and Armenians used to meet their social needs. Majority of Armenians knew Kurdish which helped development of social relationships.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Kurds used to guard Armenians as they were under the administration of the Kurds. However, Kurdish-Armenian relations began to deteriorate in the late of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Kurdish clash which were more organized in the military forced Armenian villages to pay money. After the establishment of the Hamidiye Regiments and the fall of Sultan Abdülhamid II, Kurds and Armenians took actions against each other. Armenians were known as constitutionalists and Kurdish were known as Hamitic.<sup>27</sup>

Clashes between the Kurds and Armenians escalated in the eastern Anatolia with the collapse period of the Ottoman Empire. Dashnak Party founded by the Armenians step up efforts to establish an Armenian state in the East and gained support from Russia, France and England.<sup>28</sup> Armenians' effort to establish a state in the East worried the Kurds and they began to make plans to prevent that and not to leave the land to the Armenians when the Ottoman Empire collapsed.<sup>29</sup>

With that Armenian threat, Kurds lost confidence in Britons and Russians. The Kurds,

who were concerned about especially establishment of an Armenian state in the East, did not have faith in Britons their promises. The Kurds lost more confidence in Britons after the Armenian deportation.<sup>30</sup> Said Nursi used to explain how the relations with the Armenians should be during the meetings with the clans. He put forward some ideas, which can be considered modern even in our day. On the question if the Armenians can be deputies, he stated that an Armenian could be a deputy just as he can be a watchmaker. He tried to form a positive opinion on the Armenians saying that economy and politics are the main issues for deputies and Armenians are good at those areas so people can benefit from them.<sup>31</sup> Said Nursi stated that Kurds are at fault in clashes with the Armenians who could not preserve their rights. He regarded Armenians as the non-Muslim subject. He announced a sociological and historical truth loudly. Hostility towards Armenians, which has been ongoing since the time of Adam, led to a disadvantage mostly for the Kurds. It is necessary to live with the Armenians in peace. He said that "The future of our nation (Turks and Kurds) depends on close alliance and friendship with Armenians." Armenians, engaged in art, handicraft and trade, had an important role in the society in the Ottoman Empire. Apart from that there were some bureaucrats and even minister Armenians, which stemmed from their capabilities.<sup>32</sup>

According to Said Nursi, Armenians turned to civilization earlier than the Ottomans who were still inactive and Armenians had strong nationalism ties but there were some divisions among Ottomans. He said there was a similar division among the Kurds. Any action taken against the Armenians would result in surviving orphans. When he said that it was the year of 1910, Nursi estimated probable conflicts, which will take place later. He said the Armenians are the neighbors and what is necessary should be done for that relation. What's why forming alliance with the Armenians are essential. Our main enemies are ignorance, poverty and hostility, which are the reasons of hostility of the Armenians towards them, underlines Said Nursi.<sup>33</sup>

Nursi had to fight against Armenia allied with Russia in the World War I to protect land despite his positive views on the Armenians. While no one obeyed the war laws, Said Nursi protected Armenian children in the eastern Anatolia and saved them from slaughter. Pleased with that attitude of Said Nursi, Armenian soldiers decided not to kill Muslim children in the war.<sup>34</sup>

23 Şahiner, *Said Nursi*, 228.

24 Mehrdad R. İzadi. *Kürtler, Bir El Kitabı* (İstanbul: Doz Yayınları, 2011), 35.

25 Osman Turan. *Doğu Anadolu Türk Devletleri Tarihi* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1993), 237.

26 Bazil Nikitin. *Kürtler Sosyolojik ve Tarihi İnceleme*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: Özgürlük Yolu Yayınları, 1973), 88.

27 Garu Sasuni. *Kürt Ulusal Hareketleri ve 15. Yüzyıldan Günümüze Ermeni Kürt İlişkileri* (İstanbul: Med Yayınları, 1992), 215.

28 *Ibid*, 202.

29 Ekrem Cemil Paşa. *Muhtasar Hayatım – Kemalizm'e Karşı Kürt Aydın Hareketinden Bir Yaprak* (Ankara: Beybun Yayınları, 1992), 28.

30 David McDowall. *Kürtler (Uluslararası Azınlık Hakları Grubu Raporu)* (İstanbul: Avesta Yayınları, 1996), 50.

31 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 455.

32 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 470.

33 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 471.

34 Zeki Sarıtoprak. "Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's Paradigm of Islamic Nonviolence", in *Crescent and Dove, Peace*

### C. CRITIQUE ON MADRASAS AND THE UNIVERSITY PROJECT

Madrasas had been unique educational institutions, which affected science and thought, in the Ottoman Empire since their foundation until the Tanzimat (Reorganization) period. However, these institutions were subject to the reforms like the other institutions with the Ottoman Empire's decline. Although alternative solution seeking was established within the scope of these reforms, the madrasas could not modernize themselves in line with the terms of the age. Thus, attempts were made to prevent the decline and fall by implementing secular institutions. Some previous courses in the madrasas, started to be taught in the newly established institutions. Technical courses in the madrasas began to be taught in "Mühendishane-i Berri Humayun" (Faculty of Land Engineers) and "Mühendishane-i Bahri Humayun" (Faculty of Marine Engineers); medical courses began to be taught in Tıphanes (Faculties of Medicine); intellectual and administrative courses began to be taught in Mektep and Mülkiye. By this way, the madrasas converted into places, where only classical religious courses were taught. Although serious educational reforms were conducted in the periods of Sultan Mahmud II and Sultan Abdulhamid II, the madrasas were ignored. Because they believed that the reform of the madrasas was impossible. Later in the period of Committee of Union, madrasas began to be discussed and some reform initiatives were made, however the age of the Ottoman Empire could not suffice to see their results.<sup>35</sup>

The madrasas continued teaching old-fashioned education and could not answer the questions arising from science and philosophy. The reason for this was that the madrasas continued classical education methods and could not renew themselves.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the madrasas entered in a competition with the new education institutions such as schools and tekkes (public school). The result of this competition was the dissolution of the morality in the madrasas and the spread of that dissolved morality to the public.<sup>37</sup>

Russia defended the integrity of territory of the Ottoman Empire against the British until the '93 War. After the '93 War, namely the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, the British thought that it was not possible to keep the Ottoman Empire, known as "the sick man in Europe", alive and planned to share the territory of the Ottoman Empire. In addition, the British undertook the role of the protector of the non-Muslims, especially Armenians,

who lived in the territory of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>38</sup> A dream had increased Bediüzzaman's enthusiasm about the defense of the *Quran*, before he read an article in a newspaper, about that a minister from the British parliament wanted to destroy the *Quran*, the source of Islam. Bediüzzaman figured out that violent attacks were going to be done against the *Quran* in his era and the *Quran*'s miraculous nature would be a shield, which protected the *Quran*. He wrote his work named "İşaratü'l İ'caz" (Signs of Miraculousness) in the war front.<sup>39</sup>

According to Nursi, the *Quran* is a book that can satisfy material and spiritual needs of mankind of all times. The *Quran* referred to all kinds of science in substance. Understanding the *Quran* through a scientific way will provide man's happiness in the world and the hereafter. Taking the *Quran*, the key to man's perfection, from people's hands and deprivation people from the *Quran* make them incomplete and have the purpose of destroying their happiness.<sup>40</sup>

Definition of "human" by Said Nursi forms one of the main starting point of his political view. He describes human in a harmony. According to him, composition of human is not only about materials. There is a spiritual part of human. Apart from animal and material ways, there is also spirit in human. Training only animal and material part of human means negligence of heart and spiritual life of human. However, it is necessary for a person to reach level of heart and spiritual life.<sup>41</sup>

*Madrasah al-Zahra* project was a fundamental point for the people who defended attacks against *Quran* in the Old Said period. That idea of establishing a university is closely related with Nursi's movement. The most important movement which he called "Müspet Hareket" (positive movement) is a "constructive" movement based on its own truths. That is a movement which does not result in a negative attitude and it is proper for human nature and essential for faith and science.<sup>42</sup> That project has some goals for humanity, Islamic world and Kurdistan region.<sup>43</sup> Ignorance caused by not knowing about Allah is biggest problem of humanity and Nursi thinks all of other problems stem from that. Therefore, he was engaged in a struggle. He would fight against ignorance through education provided by that madrasah. He planned a curriculum based on three principals, which appeals to three respects of human. The humanities to the human mind, the human conscience to religious studies, scientific mysticism addresses to

38 Fahir Armaoğlu. *20. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi (1914-1980)* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1993), 45.

39 Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. *Kaynaklı-İndeksli-Lügatli Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, vol. 1, 2 (İstanbul: Nesil Yayınları, 2006), 1155.

40 *Ibid*, 1158.

41 *Ibid*, 655.

42 *Ibid*, 1912-1913.

43 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 510.

*nad Conflict Resolutaion in Islam*, ed. Qamarüül Huda (Washington: United Satates Institute of Peace Press, 2010), 97.

35 Mehmet İşpirli. "Medrese", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 28 (İstanbul: TDV, 2003): 332.

36 Ramazan Balcı. *İmam Bediüzzaman Hayatı, Davası ve Eserleri* (İstanbul: Şahdamar Yayınları, 2008), 82.

37 *Ibid*, 96.

human heart. The science of the schools in a way, was combined to the spiritual life with the madrasas of science and dervish lodges. Implemented for their ideal model to the, he offered his education model to all humanity through this university project. The main purpose was to educate excellent and balanced people. This aspect is relevant for all humanity.<sup>44</sup>

He developed a new method to educate perfect and balanced people. Said Nursi's training method is a training method edited by the "Multiple Intelligence Education". It aims to educate people by dividing them into nine classes. It is considered that nine of the intelligence group raised excellent people with an ideal education system. The project at his university also want to use this method. Three are major powers directing human, among faculties of the spirit. These are the feelings of sense, lust and wrath. They each has three sub-classes, which are overdoing, understatement and medium. One of these feelings moves ahead of the other feelings in each person. An education is provided for dominant feeling. The ones whose sense is dominant are given human sciences so that they can acquire wisdom. The ones who have a fierce character are provided with religious education so that they can act fairly. The ones whose lust is dominant are given education about Islamic Sufism which can help them to practice self-discipline to behave chastely. Naturally, each student will achieve success in the other areas while specialization in the one of them. In this way, they will reach truth with two wings.<sup>45</sup>

The person who is taken as an example in this education model is the Prophet Muhammad which is clear in his works. He had three aspects and each of them is reflected in an area. They are a perfect reflection of aforementioned three powers. From humanity aspect, wisdom occurs which is the reflection of power of sense. The school stems from his aspect of humanity. The madrasahs stem from his aspect of being a prophet. People who would perform Prophet Muhammad's mission of guidance and representation in that university.<sup>46</sup>

For the benefit of Islam world, such universities will put an end to disputes among school, madrasah and lodge and a new educational movement would emerge under the combination of those three aspects. In this way, Islamic world's distance to human sciences, which is the reason of underdevelopment against the Europe would disappear. In addition, unity and solidarity would be maintained in the society with the elimination of discrimination against school, madrasah and lodge.<sup>47</sup>

44 Balcı, *İmam Bediüzzaman*, 95.

45 Nursi, *Külliyat*, 1163-1164 ; *İlk Dönem*, 508-509.

46 Nursi, *Külliyat*, 91, 387, 610 ; Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 512.

47 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 511.

Said Nursi explains the reason why the location of these universities in the eastern provinces: Like al-Azhar University is a universal madrasah in Africa, however much larger Asia is than Africa, Asia should have a place of learning, an Islamic university which is that much bigger, so that negative racialism should not corrupt the Muslim peoples, for example, the nations of Arabia, India, Caucasia, Iran, Turkistan, and Kurdistan. And so that it may be the means to a total unfolding of Islamic nationhood, which is true, positive, and sacred nationhood, and of the fundamental rule of the Qur'an. Another reason was that peace between the Europe and Islamic civilizations is planned by combining positive science with religious sciences.<sup>48</sup>

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and rise of the nationalist movements some separatist views began to emerge among the Kurds. Nursi was of the opinion that those problems could only be overcome through education. He planned to provide education in Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish and combination of positive sciences with religious sciences in the university which would be opened. Thus, religious sentiments would grow stronger and people graduating from these universities would be able to make themselves heard in the Arabic countries with the introduction of Arabic in the courses. Receiving Turkish language education, the students would be able to work in Turkey and teaching Kurdish them would contribute to integration of Turks and Kurds. Providing Kurdish education would contribute development of Kurdish language.<sup>49</sup>

Determining that underdevelopment, Said Nursi tried to prevent that. He thought that the nations (probably he refers to Armenians) were more developed than the Kurds. According to him, Kurdish people were deprived from a systematic education which would provide positive and religious sciences together and the teachers did not know Kurdish. He asked for opening of three universities in the region claiming that some steps had been taken to cause separatism. Nursi thought the universities should be established in the provinces of Bitlis, Van and Diyarbakır to be close to large clans such as Ertuşi, Motkan, Belikan, Sipikan and Hayderan.<sup>50</sup>

According to him, expenses of training and education at Madrasah al-Zahra should be met from the income through foundations and zekat. This can be interpreted that he wanted the project to be completed by the society and to gain support of the people. It is seen that Said Nursi tried to create sense of belonging in the society.<sup>51</sup>

48 Nursi, *Külliyat*, 1904-1905.

49 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 508.

50 Balcı, *İmam Bediüzzaman*, 88-89.

51 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 510.

He carried out some studies for determination of the courses to be taught in the university. His work “*Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*” (The Epitomes of Light) is deemed to be utilized for university education. It can be understood from statements at the first part of the book, Nursi expected from students to analyze his works which was written at an academic level. He stated that if *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye* had been applied as a course, then Madrasah al-Zahra would have performed duty of *Risale-i Nur*. It is likely that *Risale-i Nur* was compiled since the university project had not been implemented.<sup>52</sup>

### III. CRITIQUE OF OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND SULTAN

The Kölemen lords, who acted with the principle of “Egypt is possessed by Egyptians” resulting from nationalist ideas spreading over Egypt by influence of the French Revolution, received most of the support from French while performing studies in order to separate from Ottoman Empire.<sup>53</sup> Being appointed to Egypt as a governor in 1804, Kavalalı Mehmet Ali Pasha consolidated his rule over the Egypt in a short period of time.<sup>54</sup> Mehmet Ali Pasha, who filled treasury by the help of the reforms carried out by him, came to Ottoman Empire’s rescue with the army reformed by him.<sup>55</sup> He took action against Ottoman Empire upon going back on the promised appointment to Syria and Damascus governorship which promised as a reward for his support.<sup>56</sup>

Mahmud II preferred to agree with Russia against İbrahim Pasha, the son of Mehmet Ali Pasha, who moved his army to Konya by passing through Syria, and he tried to explain this situation with the proverb: “A drowning man will catch at a straw”. Thereby, the Egypt conflict turned into a European matter.<sup>57</sup> Occupation of Syria by Mehmet Ali Pasha in 1831 and the agreement reached with Russia in order to put Ottoman Empire under the Russia’s care, caused concern among England and French as the countries strengthening their sovereignty over the Mediterranean region.<sup>58</sup> In order to keep Russia off İstanbul, Kütahya Agreement was signed

in 1833 by the intervene of England and France which urged Mehmet Ali Pasha for a peaceful settlement, and Mehmet Ali Pasha forces moved back to Egypt from Anatolian territory.<sup>59</sup>

After the Hünkâr İskelesi Agreement (1833) , strengthening authority of Russia over Ottoman Empire started to disturb England and France. Eventually, in 1840, England, Russia, and Austria reached an agreement on the matter that Mehmet Ali Pasha moves back ( /should move back). Finally in 1841, establishment of Mehmet Ali Pasha dynasty over Egypt was allowed. Ottoman State established a “Balance Policy” by taking the advantage of rivalry of global powers and continued its existence in this way. In terms of global powers, Ottoman State became hostage between power struggle and the balance had stroke upon the situation. This intervention of Europe ruined Ottoman’s institutional and cultural legacy.<sup>60</sup>

While these are happening in foreign policy, at the same time Ottoman State has already started its reform endeavor. By the government, so many military solutions were found to problems that discussed in detail along with the defeat against Western. But when the government continued to lose of territory, more radical steps were taken. The first radical step was “Tanzimat Fermanı” (1839) Even if there are so many reasons for Tanzimat Fermanı, it is true that the most important and closest one is the independent Greece in Balkans, the autonomous Serbians and in the issue of Egypt the intention to take the support of Europe against Mehmet Ali Paşa.<sup>61</sup> The second stage of Tanzimat is Islahat Fermanı(1856) was declared in order to take the support of West in Crimean War. These reforms caused significant changes in Ottoman social understanding. The fundamental change is the strike to the understanding of superiority of Islam. For the sake of unity in Ottoman society between several ethnic and religious identities and Muslims, Ottoman authorities changed the basic structures of society. From now on, Muslim and Christian societies had the same right within law.<sup>62</sup>

Traditional Islamic education, law and religious systems give way to secular institutions. After the closure of “Yeni Çeri Ocağı” and the reduction of the public effect, Westernized bureaucrats who graduated from secular schools and had chance to know Europe, took the opportunity of political power in Ottoman. Among them, Mustafa Reşit

52 Nursi, *Külliyat*, 1278.

53 Enver Ziya Karal. *Osmanlı Tarihi*, vol. 5 (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2011), 101.

54 *Ibid*, 127.

55 *Ibid*, 128.

56 *Ibid*, 129.

57 *Ibid*, 131.

58 *Ibid*, 135.

59 *Ibid*, 136.

60 Ira M. Lapidus. *Modernizme Geçiş Sürecinde İslam Dünyası* (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Vakfı Yayınları, 1996), 60-61.

61 Halil İnalçık. “Tanzimat Nedir?”, *Tanzimat, Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, ed. Halil İnalçık, Mehmet Seyitdanlıoğlu (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2014), 48.

62 *Ibid*, 49.



Paşa, Mehmet Âli Paşa and Mehmet Fuat Paşa who were grown up near the Mustafa Reşit Paşa, were the leading ones.<sup>63</sup>

The term of Abdülhamid II (1876-1909), there was acceleration of the collapse of Ottoman Empire in outside, and at the same time there was the revival of the life of idea inside. New Ottomans who are in favor of constitutional order, brought Abdülhamid II the head of government as a result of military coup. In 1876 Padişah, who declared First Constitutional Monarchy, after suspending the Parliament because of the '93 War, established an authoritarian and conservative regime.<sup>64</sup> In 1889 Istanbul Military School, five students who are against to Abdulhamit administration established a secret association, named "İttihad-ı Osmani Cemiyeti" with the initiatives of İbrahim Temo. These people were Albanian İbrahim Temo, Kurdish Abdullah Cevdet, İshak Sükuti from Diyarbakir, Cherkes Mehmet Reşid and Azeri Hüseyinzade Ali. This community was established on the basis of idea of New Ottomans movement<sup>65</sup> These people, known as Young Turks, as well as connected to the Ottoman dynasty, they demanded opening of Parliament and Constitution entry into force again.<sup>66</sup>

The Young Turks, by organizing in Military School and Faculty of Political Science, started to arrange secret meetings and make propaganda against Palace. Ottoman State, who realized this organization before long, arrested some of its members. Young Turks met Ahmet Rıza Bey, who has positivist thoughts, in Paris and they carried community to a new stage.<sup>67</sup> "Union of Ottoman" changed its name as "Committee of Union and Progress" after its establishment. In the fields of confidentiality and organization, Masons' methods and systems were adopted.<sup>68</sup>

Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), organized in Europe, Istanbul and Selanik in a short time, rebelled in Manastır in 3 July 1908 under the guidance of Kolağası Niyazi (from Resne) and wanted Sultan to put constitution into force and setting up parliamentary government.<sup>69</sup> As a result of this rebellion, started in Balkan territory, CUP decided to declare Constitutional Monarchy in 22 July. After the declaration of Constitutional Monarchy in

63 Lapidus, *İslam Dünyası*, 67.

64 Lapidus, *İslam Dünyası*, 69.

65 Mehmet Hacısalihioğlu. *Jön Türkler ve Makedonya Sorunu (1890-1918)* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2008), 54.

66 Lapidus, *İslam Dünyası*, 69.

67 Hacısalihioğlu, *Jön Türkler*, 55.

68 Enver Ziya Karal. *Osmanlı Tarihi*, vol. 8 (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2011), 514.

69 Feroz Ahmad. *İttihat ve Terakki 1908-1914* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1995), 21.

several cities of Macedonia, Abdülhamid II declared Constitutional Monarchy, too in 23/24 July 1908.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, CUP ruled the country and made reforms as they like between 1912 and 1918. Both as a reaction to Abdulhamid period and with the effect of their European style education, they started to make appropriate reforms for their Enlightenment ideology. They made several reforms to make courts, law and schools more secular. With a radical secularism and weakness of Ottomanism project, Unionists started to give importance to the thought of Turkism. Thus, the bases of secularism and nationalism, two wing of Western idea, were laid.<sup>71</sup>

New Intellectuals of Ottoman State, leaded by New Ottomans, actually caused to raise three important movements: Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism (islamcılık) and Turkism. Fundamentally, Westernism has two side. First of all, all of these movements of ideas emerged by imitating West. Then, all of these movements thinks that Western civilization should be imitated. Under these circumstances, these movements, thinking fight against West, only managed to imitate West and couldn't produce a unique project. This couldn't go beyond revenge but intensified the defeat. Western, secular movement, oriental appeared against and alternative to Islamic movement. Therefore, it prevent a real movement to be arise. What a Unionist understand from Westernization is to transfer West's military, political, social and cultural institutions. Their nearest and dearest institution and prescription of salvation become secularism.<sup>72</sup>

Said Nursi who noticed that Westernization movement affects other movements and its speed in spreading, told one of the prominent chairmen of Egypt-based Al-Azhar University that the Ottoman Empire is pregnant with a European state when he thought such an influence cannot be reversed.<sup>73</sup> It is understood that Nursi foresaw the fall of Ottoman Empire cannot be stopped and it will turn into a European country. Probably, he expressed such an opinion since he estimated influence of Enlightenment on Ottoman intellectuals, bureaucrats and soldiers namely "Jön Türkler" (The Young Turks). Therefore, he thought some problems encountered by Christianity can also be face by Islam and predicted some dangers that *Quran* would face. He was also aware intention of the Britain to establish a nation without *Quran*.<sup>74</sup>

Another issue was that some analysis on the underdevelopment of the Ottoman Empire

70 *Ibid*, 29.

71 Lapidus, *İslam Dünyası*, 70.

72 İdris Küçükömer. *Batılılaşma, Düzenin Yabancılaşması* (İstanbul: Sağlam Yayıncılık, 1994), 13-14.

73 Nursi, *Külliyat*, 2132.

74 *Ibid*, 2131.

and Muslims showed Islam and its source *Quran* as the leading reasons. From the issue of judicial decisions to reform in religion, novation and curriculum of madrasahs, all of the issues were referred to *Quran*, which put *Quran* to center of the argument. Intellectuals who adopted a way by taking the West as an example demanded a modern religion and even a rational Islam. Rationalism came to the fore when it came to positive sciences.<sup>75</sup>

Said Nursi undertook to defend *Quran* since the arguments and idea of Enlightenment targeted *Quran*, one of the main sources of Islam. He said he underwent “inkılâb-ı fikri” (revolution of ideas) in 1899 and he began to conduct scientific studies to protect *Quran* from some attacks and for understanding of *Quran*.<sup>76</sup> He made that decision in the mansion of Tahir Pasha and went to İstanbul with the aim of defending *Quran* with the facilities of the Ottoman Empire. He was of the opinion that the Ottoman Empire served for Islam and formed friendship ties among Muslims.<sup>77</sup> It is seen that Said Nursi was engaged in politics unavoidably since he thought the Ottoman Empire could overcome problems.<sup>78</sup>

Van Governor Tahir Pasha sent a letter to Sultan Abdülhamid II so that Said Nursi could have a meeting with him.<sup>79</sup> It was the period of autocracy when Nursi came to İstanbul. Due to his uncontrollable and suspicious behaviors, he stood on trial at the Yıldız Military Court as the bureaucracy reported about him. The court sent him to Toptaşı Psychiatric Hospital.<sup>80</sup> Same group, which was disturbed when Nursi was given a report which said he was genius, sent him to jail. However, reports by doctors and some connections of Said Nursi concerned the bureaucrats and tried to send him from İstanbul by putting him on salary. Rejecting the salary, Nursi was insistent to have a meeting with the Sultan. His jail term was prolonged due to his insistence. He was released from the prison before proclamation of constitutionalism, which can be understood from the rallies he held at that time.<sup>81</sup>

Said Nursi could not meet with the Sultan Abdülhamid II although he came to İstanbul for that aim, which was due to “liar and groveler” bureaucrats around the Sultan. He said the Sultan Abdülhamid II could not understand the people since he was surrounded by liars and grovelers. In other words, he did not want to understand people due to some groundless

fear and weakness of his heart. His overskeptical character prevented him to see the truths. Constitutionalism led by the Sultan Abdülhamid II influenced all parts and that spreading imitation affected the science.<sup>82</sup>

According to Said Nursi, constitutionalism is a regime which is open to abuse, which was the issue criticized by him in the Ottoman Empire most. The constitutionalism is a form of regime which is the basis of tyranny, arbitrary treatment, violence, one-man thought and oppression; destroys humanity by derogating Islam and is the source of hostility and malice. As it affect ideas negatively, it triggers occurrence of some oppressive ideas.<sup>83</sup>

Another criticism directed at the Sultan Abdülhamid II was the Yıldız Palace. Due to economic and political problems of the empire, Nursi opposed to construction of Yıldız Palace and its usage as the center of regime. He was of the opinion that the Yıldız Palace gained hatred of the people and the personnel of the palace turned into fiends torturing the people. Therefore, he suggested the Sultan turning the Yıldız Palace into a university which is full of scientists. He advised the Sultan Abdülhamid II to use his power and wealth to eliminate religious weakness and ignorance in the society.<sup>84</sup>

It is clear that Said Nursi criticized the Sultan Abdülhamid II during the Old Said period since he was the supporter of liberty and against the constitutionalism while he expressed some ideas in favor of the Sultan in the New Said period.<sup>85</sup> I think, some of the researchers came up with different approaches since they were in an endeavor to put Nursi and the Sultan Abdülhamid II in the same line.

When Said Nursi came to İstanbul for the second time after Damascus he met with the Sultan Mehmet Reşat V with the help of Enver Pasha which he called “my friend”. When the Sultan Mehmet Reşat V came to the throne on April 27, 1911i nationalist ideas had already spread among Muslim Balkan citizens, but the Albanians had not been influenced by nationalism movement yet. Thus, the Sultan Mehmet Reşat V paid a visit to Macedonian and Albania on June 5, 1911 in an effort to strengthen dominance of the Ottoman Empire and maintain control of Rumelia. Said Nursi joined that visit to represent eastern provinces, which enabled him to observe nationalism movement in Balkans and environment created by unionists.<sup>86</sup>

82 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 445.

83 *Ibid*, 443.

84 Badıllı, *Said Nursi*, 219.

85 *Ibid*, 227.

86 Akgündüz, *Said Nursi*, 791.

75 Mardin, *Türkiye’de Din*, 218, 232.

76 İhsan Kasım Salihi. *Kendi Dilinden Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (İstanbul: Şahdamar Yayınları, 2012), 92.

77 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 462.

78 Nursi, *Külliyyat*, 1580.

79 Hayrat Heyeti, *Said Nursi*, 91.

80 Bekir Berk. *Türkiye’de Nurculuk Davası* (İstanbul: Yeni Asya Yayınları, 1975), 677.

81 Abdülkadir Badıllı. *Bediüzzaman Said-i Nursi ve Tarihçe-i Hayatı* (İstanbul: İttihad Yayınları, 1998), 195-197.

## A. CRITIQUE OF OTTOMAN INTELLECTUALS

Said Nursi knew much about new movements of idea during the decline of Ottoman Empire. He also participated in some arguments about that ideas actively. We mentioned that Westernization was a dominant movement compared to other ones. That idea generally defended by Young Turks such as Ziya Gökalp and Abdullah Cevdet was tried to be applied by the Party of Union and Progress (İttihat Terakki Fırkası) government. Following the term of the Party of Union and Progress, although İstanbul was invaded by Britain during the term of The Freedom and Accord Party (Hürriyet ve İtilâf Fırkası), the idea of Westernization did not lose speed and got stronger on the contrary.<sup>87</sup>

Said Nursi did not criticize the Young Turks as a whole. He produced some ideas after analyzing their thoughts. According to him, 90 percent of the Young Turks were devout Muslims. There were plenty of strong supporters of Islam and nation among them. There were also scientists and sheikhs willing to serve for the religion among the Young Turks. On the other hand, there were also people who were Mason and served for Masonry, which were criticized by Said Nursi.<sup>88</sup>

He indicated that he shared some views with Enver Pasha and Niyazi Bey from the unionists. He stated that the ones with whom he disagreed are the people who did not represent ideas of progress (terakki). According to him they were alienated from religion and lost their benevolence.<sup>89</sup>

Said Nursi generally criticized mason members of the Young Turks. The main reason why he opposed to masons was that they took a hostile stance against spirit of Islam. He told the Young Turks “You have offended against religion, you have angered Allah, you have insulted the Shari’a; the consequences will be serious” reactively.<sup>90</sup> Nursi who fought against secular ideas of theologians,<sup>91</sup> complained that they played religion with paganism and present it as a way of civilization. Order in the Ottoman Empire was evolved to secularism by the unionists, which aimed to create a system without religion.<sup>92</sup>

Nursi said “I take refuge with Allah from Satan and politics” since he thought negative politics understanding which he called “politics of İstanbul” is a “satanic” politics in the last

period of the Ottoman Empire especially during the period of fight between the unionists and supporters of entente. According to Said Nursi, politics is satanic since it is materialist and it serves for aims of the West. He observed backstage of politics and thought it did not serve for a Muslim society. He opposed such a negative type of politics which he thought dangerous for life of individuals and society.<sup>93</sup> Thus he said “Politics Are a Satan in the World of Ideas; One Should Seek Refuge With God From Them!” He was of the opinion that politics has a feature which hurts thought movement and prevents emergence of direct and positive ideas.<sup>94</sup>

## B. CRITIQUE OF OTTOMAN ULEMA

Said Nursi was engaged in a struggle to realize some solutions he developed after analysis and evaluation. He was writing works to cure social illnesses. One of the characteristics of the first books written by him was that they appealed to Ottoman intellectuals rather than the public. Because, Nursi adopted a method which sought to solve problems of the society from top to the bottom. In a way, he thought to gain support of intellectuals and administrators by submitting them some solution offers. He was encouraged when the Ottoman Empire was open to such offers.<sup>95</sup>

- 1- Not paying regard to judgment of sharia
- 2- Interpretation of sharia at the will of some grovelers
- 3- Some ignorant Islamic scholars make outwardly decisions, their bigotry and obsession about scholastic marsh
- 4- Imitation of the ways about self-pleasure and entertainment of the Europe rather than the imitation of the education and civilization of the Europe.<sup>96</sup>

Like his Ottoman contemporaries, he put forward some ideas against the problems which would lead to collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman ulema, who analyzed the problems in era from the point of historicity, could not understand and support him; and they accused him of fancifulness. The grief due to loneliness of Said Nursi and his inability to prevent the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was one of the elements that led to transition into the New Said period. While the Ottoman intellectuals gave in decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire,

87 Mary Weld. *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, Entelektüel Biyografisi* (İstanbul: Etkileşim Yayınları, 2011), 231.

88 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 479.

89 Badıllı, *Said Nursi*, 204.

90 Nursi, *Külliyat*, 2132.

91 Balcı, *İmam Bediüzzaman*, 19.

92 Nursi, *Külliyat*, 1920.

93 Senai Demirci. “Siyaset, Sebeb, Şeytan, Şerr”, *Köprü Dergisi* 72 (2000): 52-33.

94 Nursi, *Külliyat*, 329.

95 *Ibid*, 1277.

96 Badıllı, *Said Nursi*, 210.

Said Nursi began to lay foundation of *Risale-i Nur*, which would be the establishment project of the future.<sup>97</sup>

#### IV. CRITIQUE OF THE EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION

“Foreigners are domineering with their weapons of science and industry.”<sup>98</sup>

European Civilization can be defined as a new civilization compared to any other civilization that existed before due to its reforms in “industry” and “democracy.” European Civilization increased its development gaps between itself and the world outside the Europe enormously with the industrial and democratic reforms. Due to this development gap, the views of democracy in Europe was being presented along with the psychological advantage that the industrial revolution brought to the continent. Another aspect of this European expansion was that it triggered a new cultural movement that had not existed until that day. This was an adventure of creating a cosmopolitan culture that would encompass the entire world. It can be said that the European Civilization presented this cosmopolitan culture as a model to the whole globe, or maybe imposed it.<sup>99</sup>

The European Civilization crowded its achievements in the fields of industry and democracy towards the end of 19th century with expanding its borders or occupying new lands. This situation created an atmosphere in which the European civilization was feeling more confident and arrogant towards the other civilizational basins in the world. In order to maintain this established system, the European Civilization needed to be turned to a valid ideology for the humanity. With this, the other civilizations was being turned to loyal basins that were trying to reach this utopia. The thought of Enlightenment which considerably contributed to the establishment of European Civilization was addressing mainly to the material aspect of the humanity by rejecting its religious, moral and spiritual aspects. The Europe was influencing other civilizations of the world by importing its ideologies that were products of philosophical thought. Three different kinds of reactions emerged against the European expansionism towards the Islamic world via its thinking, ideology and institutions:

97 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 483.

98 Bediüzzaman Said-i Kürdi. “Hakikat” *Volkan Gazetesi*, 26 February 1324, (10 March 1909), 3.

99 William H. McNeill. *Dünya Tarihi* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1998), 460-462.

- 1- To maintain the Islamic tradition as it was;
- 2- To adopt the European civilization as it was;
- 3- To review Islam according to the conditions of the age, but by preserving its core.

Except those reactions which carried the influence of the Europe, Said Nursi pointed out the problems of this civilization that became an alternative to the civilization of *Quran* and the consequences that those problems might have caused on people during a period in which people were hotly discussing the absolute supremacy of the Europe, and suggested some resolutions to those problems.<sup>100</sup>

Nursi understood that the vertical spread of Enlightenment ideas towards the Islamic world would attack the *Quran*, which is the main source of Islam, because the Christian scriptures were also exposed to the same attacks before. A news report that Said Nursi read while he was staying at the mansion of Van Governor Tahir Pasha confirmed his ideas. According to this report, a minister from the England Parliament attributed Turks’ so-called genocide of Armenians to Islam and *Quran*. He also said that the only way to civilize Ottomans was to take *Quran* from them. After this news report, Nursi decided to protect Islam’s holy book of *Quran* against possible attacks that might have directed at Islam.<sup>101</sup>

Attending the nation’s defense during the 1st World War, Said Nursi was injured and then was held captive by Russians. Being kept captive nearly for three years in Kostroma near Moscow, Nursi learnt about Russians closely and he was also informed about the direction of the political developments in Russia. During his years as captives, Nursi was able to maintain his contact with the Ottoman administration. He was able to inform Enver Pasha about the developments in Russia.<sup>102</sup> At the place where he was kept as captive, Nursi stayed with German and Austrian captives along with Ottoman captives. Said Nursi learnt about the political and social developments in other countries. Thus; the fact that he went to Germany through Petersburg, where he had never been before, alone when he escaped from his captivity shows that he received information about those regions. Staying in Germany for a while, Nursi came into contact with various officials and became informed about the political direction of Germany. He went to İstanbul from Germany through Vienna and Sofia.<sup>103</sup>

After the English occupied İstanbul, the Petrarch of the Anglican Church prepared six

100 Suat Yıldırım. “20. Asır İslam Düşünce ve Aksiyonunda Bediüzzaman Said Nursi’nin Yeri”, *Yeni Ümit Dergisi* 37 (1997).

101 Mardin, *Türkiye’de Din*, 180.

102 Balcı, *İmam Bediüzzaman*, 149.

103 Şahiner, *Said Nursi*, 148-151.

questions to be answered about Muslims and sent them to the Office of Islamic Meshikhat. The fact that the Petrarch underestimated Muslims and sent religious questions to the Office of Islamic Meshikhat angered Nursi. Nursi's this anger showed his reaction against the English Imperialism. Nursi did not even bother to answer those questions and just preferred to respond via "saliva." English occupation of İstanbul confirmed the rightfulness of Nursi's reaction against the European civilization.<sup>104</sup> Said Nursi thought that the reason for the poverty of the Islamic World as well as China and India was European oppressors' exploitation of riches in those regions via their plans and rules. The other criticism that Nursi brought to the European Civilization is its exploitation of Asia and Africa.<sup>105</sup>

Said Nursi said that the idea of Enlightenment that constructed the basis for the European civilization moved people from their real nature and dragged people into poverty and perversion. This understanding of life that is the product this idea broke people's ties with the eternity. As we saw earlier, there is no afterlife belief in deism and pantheism. Those ideas eliminate the afterlife belief, which balances the world life and which is the source of peace, meaning the hope for heaven after death. It is a blow to the peace of mind that people are mostly in need. He said that this idea promises a fake heaven and ruin the people's eternal life and make people experience a spiritual hell in the world. The European civilization fills a spiritual gap created due to the elimination of afterlife by the ideology of Enlightenment via games and satisfaction of body desires. However, Nursi thought that those games could not fill this spiritual gap and would lead the collapse of the European Civilization.<sup>106</sup>

According to Nursi, European philosophers observed the universe superficially and reached misleading results. They were not able to understand the real meaning of the nature and were not able to reach healthy results about its philosophy. Thus, the values that they created such as law and religion (Natural Religion and Natural Law) based on the nature were all wrong. This ideology is far away from making people happy. This reason for this is that this ideology observes the nature superficially without looking the nature in terms of its creator.<sup>107</sup>

Nursi says the European Civilization, which is based on the thinking of "life is a fight," regards the solidarity and cooperation between creatures in the universe as a fight. According to this idea named as natural selection only powerful creatures can survive, while the weak ones are being eliminated. Due to this thought, a person finds himself/herself in the middle

of a big struggle. This thinking that says a human is responsible for its life and struggles for its life, which exists in wild liberalism, drags people to a fight for life. According to them, the goal of the life is to have a good future an retirement. The capabilities of people are already sufficient to achieve this goal. However, there is cooperation rather than a struggle in the universe. All the creatures help each other. For instance, inanimate water and soil help plants, the plants help animals and these all eventually help the human life. This is not a struggle, it is cooperation. How can a human administer itself? A human does not have any authority on its own body let alone have this authority on its individual and social behaviors? Thus, the European civilization has one eyed genius, meaning that it can just see the world life and make evaluations according to this. It is blind to the afterlife. It forgets the creator that created it. God gives its vision to the nature and natural laws. Pantheist and deist belief's rational and natural religion give its vision to the nature and the natural laws. This sees the human as part of the nature and attributes lordship to the nature and believes the nature can order a human's life.<sup>108</sup>

Nursi points out that the human turns to a pharaoh according to the Enlightenment vision. However, this pharaoh is a poor one who prostrates himself before anything for the sake of his benefits. The only goal of this pharaoh is to satisfy his body's desires. Because his only concern is his body, he can sacrifice anything for the sake of his body's desires. He is a person who loves his body so much that he cannot love any thing else in real terms.<sup>109</sup>

Said Nursi attributes Islam's rejection of European civilization to five basic reasons. Because the European Civilization is based on power, it always violated the rights of others that are weaker. Because its main goal is to gain personal benefits, it easily violates the others' right. Its main instrument to gain those benefits is clash and struggle. It tries to establish ties based on racism, which is an inhuman value, between people. It shows unnecessary needs as though they are very necessary and encourage people to satisfy those unnecessary desires. Due to those reasons, Nursi is against this civilization. He also rejected the understanding western politics that is one of the components of the European Civilization.<sup>110</sup> Said Nursi also sees (real) Christianity as one of the reasons that construct the basis for the European civilization. He believes the original (unchanged) Christianity can be the source the science, justice and truth that will be beneficial for the social life in the European civilization. However

104 Weld, *Said Nursi*, 229.

105 Nursi, *Külliyat*, 647.

106 *Ibid*, 643.

107 *Ibid*, 69.

108 *Ibid*, 644.

109 *Ibid*, 645.

110 *Ibid*, 50.

that civilization disobeyed divine religions, impoverished people by increasing the needs, triggered feelings of greed and cupidity by elimination concepts such as economy and modesty and prompted people to haram and oppression<sup>111</sup>

## V. CRITIQUE OF ISLAMIC WORLD

Said Nursi was closely interested in the course of events in Islamic world some of it was within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. The days he spent in Mardin was the time of "First Political Life" as he said. He met with Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghan and got opportunity to learn his reformist ideas. The influences of Afghan's idea "There is no conflict between mind and *Quran*" would be reflected in the works written by Said Nursi. Another ideas of Afghan was İttihad-İ İslam (Islamic Union). During the time when he lived in İstanbul, Nursi heard an association was founded under the same named and became a member of it. The second person he met in Mardin was a man who was a member of the Senussi sect which was originated from the North Africa. Nursi got a deal of information about Islamic world out of the Ottoman Empire from that person.<sup>112</sup>

Bediüzzaman used to read newspaper while he was staying at the mansion of Tahir Pasha in Van. He read news and commentaries especially about Islam and Islamic world. Thus, he stood informed about the general situation of the Islamic world.<sup>113</sup>

According to him, one of the reasons of the illnesses over the Muslim world is (socially) stricken İstanbul as the center of caliphate and the heart of Muslim world. These (social) illnesses in İstanbul have spread all over the Muslim world. İslam, which constitutes a true civilization, is lagging behind the time and one of the main reason of this is autocracy. Perhaps, this is the spread of autocracy to the other institutions in Islam, like madrasah, school and dervish lodge. Autocracy in these institutions caused thoughts to differentiate and raised controversy among the members of these institutions.<sup>114</sup>

Following the March 31 Incident, Said Nursi returned to Van and visited Tbilisi which was under invasion of Russia. He got general idea about the situation there. Later, he visited

some eastern provinces and gave lectures about Constitutionalism.<sup>115</sup> He commented on colonization of Islamic world when he went to Tbilisi. "India is child of Islam which has a potential for the future. It receives education at British high school. Egypt is the intelligent child of Islam. It continues its education at British secondary school. Caucasia and Turkistan are the two strong children of Islam and they receive education at Russian military school. One day, these invaded countries will gain their independence from the countries they were invaded."<sup>116</sup>

After Nursi made that evaluation, he went to Damascus and gave sermon to a community of 10,000 people, including 100 Islamic scholars. In his sermon, He explained problems of the Islamic world and solutions. During his visit to Damascus, Nursi had opportunity to analyze general situation of Islamic World and to find solution offers. There are six elements which restrained Islamic world to the Middle Age while the Europeans developed.

- 1- Revival of hopelessness in life of individuals and society
- 2- Disappearance of truth in political life
- 3- Interest to hostile feelings
- 4- Ignorance of spiritual bond connecting Muslims to each other
- 5- Spread of oppression like a contagious disease
- 6- People who work for their personal interests and think only about that.<sup>117</sup>

Said Nursi developed some criticism on the problems of Islamic World, Ottoman Empire and Kurdistan, among the elements of eastern civilization. However, he could not find any basis that would respond to his criticism and help to implement his projects. As a result of failure in the solution of man-driven problems, the entire eastern world was under the hegemony of the West. Instead of the fallen Ottoman Empire new countries majority of which were colonies were established. However, only one country was established as the continuation of the Ottoman Empire. That was New Turkey.

### I.

115 Balcı, *İmam Bediüzzaman*, 120.

116 Nursi, *Külliyat*, 2054.

117 *İbid*, 1161, 1162.

111 Nursi, *İlk Dönem*, 610

112 Mardin, *Türkiye'de Din*, 178.

113 Nursi, *Külliyat*, 2130.

114 Badıllı, *Said Nursi*, 211.

## VI. CRITIQUE OF NEW TURKEY

Dürrizade Abdullah Efendi who was Shaykh-ul-Islam in the government of Damat Ferit Pasha in April 1920, collaborated with England against the National Struggle in Anatolia and gave a fatwa that the movement in Anatolia was rebellion against the Sultan and the Caliph. That fatwa would legitimize the action taken by Atatürk and his companions against religion and religious officers.<sup>118</sup> Said Nursi supported the National Struggle when İstanbul was under invasion of England. He published a booklet titled "Hutuvat-ı Sitte" (The Six Steps) in İstanbul with the help of Eşref Edip. Annoyed with that situation, Britons issued arrest warrant for him. Nursi continued his struggle in occupied İstanbul which he called the most dangerous front. Upon the fatwa given by Dürrizade Abdullah Efendi against the National Struggle and Atatürk, Said Nursi stated that was invalid since it was given under pressure and gave a fatwa on the support of the National Struggle.<sup>119</sup>

Following his activities and success of the National Struggle, Nursi was invited to the National Assembly. Accepting the invitation, he noticed the National Assembly was careless about the religion and their distance to Islam with the excuse of Westernization. Submitting a declaration to deputies, he asked them to be more serious in the issues of religion and salaah.<sup>120</sup> After the abolition of the sultanate, he came to Ankara. He urged spiritual dominance of the Caliphate should be taken over by the assembly just like spiritual dominance of sultanate. According to him that will cause people to interlock around the assembly. Because, it was time to form community. A community is limited with thought and power which is not based on its "şahsi-manevi" (personified collective spirituality). He said Caliphate which was deprived of such a power would remain incapable<sup>121</sup>

When Said Nursi went to Ankara in 1922, he noticed effects of the Enlightenment to the National Assembly. He saw that idea of religion was favored by the assembly under different names and titles, which he defined as "Ideas of Zındıka" (Atheistic Ideas). To refute that idea, he first published a risale in Arabic. However, it did not lead to a big effect since the number of people who knew Arabic was low. Upon the spread of deism and its transition into a system of

state under cover of secularism, Nursi had written *Tabiat Risalesi* (Booklet of Nature). In this work, he criticized main arguments of deism.<sup>122</sup>

Nursi also met with Mustafa Kemal when he was in Ankara since Ankara meant Atatürk. Not pleased with the course of events in Ankara, Nursi exchanged ideas with Atatürk. Mustafa Kemal launched initiatives about a new and modern religion. From that aspect, he planned to benefit ideas of Said Nursi as a prominent Islamic scholar. He thought of affiliating Nursi with the state by giving him by charging him. He offered him to serve as Muş deputy and general preacher of eastern provinces. Nursi rejected that offer and left Ankara.<sup>123</sup>

Abolishment of sultanate on November 1, 1922, Proclamation of the Republic on October 29, 1923 and abolishment of caliphate on March 24, 1924 determined the regime of the new Turkish State. Mustafa Kemal was against idea of Islamic state as the continuation of the Ottoman Empire. His aim was to found "a civilized state in the level of contemporary civilization". There are two main characteristics of that state. It would be a Kemalist state based on secularist and nation state principles. The concept of secularism was the product of idea of Western Enlightenment and the new Turkish Republic would be found the ideas of Enlightenment Period.<sup>124</sup>

Establishment of New Turkey was in a period during which authoritarian regimes were established and gained strength. Some authoritative systems were founded due to political developments in the Soviet Unions and Italy. It is clear that those authoritarian regimes affected Turkey. Under the influence of that political situation, a legal basis called "Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu" (The Law to Ensure Peace) was formed to found an authoritative system in Turkey. Although Sheikh Said Rebellion was given as the reason of enactment of Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu, it is seen that the rebellion was given as an excuse to establish an authoritarian regime. That incident gives the impression of a provocation designed by the government rather than a rebellion.<sup>125</sup>

Step for the establishment of an authoritarian regime in Turkey, were taken under the shadow of Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu. Elements which had potential of opposition against the newly-founded regime and Mustafa Kemal were eliminated due to that law. İstiklal Mahkemeleri (the Independence Tribunals) were opened in order to judge and kill Kurds,

122 *Ibid*, 677.

123 Hekimoğlu İsmail. *100 Soruda Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı ve Risale-i Nur Talebeleri* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2005), 47.

124 Feroz Ahmad. *Modern Türkiye'nin Oluşumu* (İstanbul: Sarmal Yayınevi, 1995), 80.

125 Mete Tunçay. *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek-Parti Yönetimi'nin Kurulması* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2012), 146.

118 Bernard Lewis. *Modern Türkiye'nin Doğuşu* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1993), 398.

119 Balcı, *İmam Bediüzzaman*, 185-186.

120 Nursi, *Külliyyat*, 2138.

121 *Ibid*, 1318.

Islamists and unionists, which were considered as opposition elements. In his work "Nutuk" (The Speech), Mustafa Kemal expressed convenience led by Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu.<sup>126</sup>

When Said Nursi was invited to Ankara, he met with Mustafa Kemal. Nursi spoke about Mustafa Kemal while bearing testimony at Eskişehir Court in 1935. He said he noticed mastermind of Atatürk and he understood that genius could be used for Islam. However, he tried to prevent him from serving against Islam by disturbing him and he withdrew from politics as Mustafa Kemal had secular ideas and he was opposed to Orthodox Islam.<sup>127</sup>

## VII. CONCLUSION

Said Nursi was influenced by his political environment: The Old Said period was the period during which he laid foundations of projects and prepared its schedule he aimed to carry out in the New Said period. For instance, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, written by him in 1910, is like a summary of *Risale-i Nur Collection*. Thus, *Risale-i Nur* is regarded as explanation and gloss of the *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*. The Old and the New Said periods should be analyzed on the basis of a collective mind. Nursi tried to do anything which was necessary in his time. According to the Old Said, ignorance, poverty and division were the most significant problems and he dealt with them, from top to the bottom, using possibilities of the state. The problems, from bottom to top, were dealt with by him during the New Said period. Because, it was impossible for the new government to allow projects shaped by his ideas. As the Ottoman Empire was acquainted with his ideas, Said Nursi looked for political ways for the improvement of the society and carried out political studies. As Turkish government was alienated from domestic ideas, the New Said inclined towards to improvement of individuals for the improvement of the society. From this aspect, it can be said that there is not conflict and contradiction between the Old and New Said, there is concord and harmony between the two. From another aspect, the works written in the first period called *Asar-ı Bediyye* touches on social and political issues, the Works written in the second period such as *Sözler*, *Mektubat*, *Lem'alar* and *Şualar* are about ways to explain facts on faith with wisdom. Materialist thought, which was influential during period of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish state, was the main motive which formed basis of Said Nursi's ideas. When materialist thoughts began to emerge and influence all of

the institutions in the society, he came up with metaphysics against materialism and defended *Quran* and sunnah which are considered as the basis of Islam. Writing *İşaratü'l İcaz* in the Old Said period, he proved *Quran* is a divine book showing metaphysic way of it. In the New Said period, he wrote *Mucizat-ı Ahmediye Booklet* to prove that prophecy is a truth. In addition, through his work *Tabiat Booklet*, he aimed to refute belief of deism which is based on philosophy of nature. The two events, observed by him in the Old Said period, led him to review all of his projects and to change his political method. Those two events are the March 31 Incident and Sheikh Said Rebellion. Common sides of them were to mobilizing the society benefiting from mass psychology, which is open to abuse, resorting to violence, imposing their wills upon the society and pointing out to Islamic references while doing so. All of those situations made Nursi believe in hardships of taking action with the Islamists and make a fresh start. Therefore, he did not object to his exile to western Anatolia.

126 Kemal Atatürk. *Nutuk*, vol, 1, 2, 3 (İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1996), 895.

127 Nursi, *Külliyat*, 2151.